

Reformation Day
October 31, 2008

To the congregation of New Hope CRC

The document before you is a summary of the life of Martin Luther. It begins with a narration of the setting in Europe immediately prior Luther and ends with his captivity and safe keeping in the Wartburg Castle in 1521.

The views are not my own, nor is the structure of document one that I organized. Each page of this document represents one chapter from *The History of the Reformation* by Merle D'Aubigne. Since the source is hard to find and somewhat difficult to read, I decided to try to make the information available for those who would like to learn a few more details about Luther's experiences besides the famous 95 theses nailed to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. This is not a paraphrase, nor is it a digest or condensed book; it is simply a summary of D'Aubigne's content.

So, it might be asked, "why should I bother with summaries of a boring old book?" Good question! First, this is our family history. Second, there are several themes in this early period of reformation that are worth discovery for the sake of strengthening the Church today. Third, there are some key events that come to light that are not well known or discussed. For example, I had never read much about the Leipsic Disputation found in book five and yet, that debate may have driven the wedge between Rome and Luther as deeply as anything. Finally, I have included several extended quotes as eye witness testimony to the period. Most have never read Tetzels sermon on indulgences, so, following D'Aubigne's example, I included it for you to read. Once again, I reduced the quotes to a single page, but it is sufficient to get a good idea of his intent. Quotes and my editorial comments are marked by brackets and the word [Aside] to clearly indicate their distinction from the summaries. And, I should add as a warning or notice that I followed D'Aubigne's spelling so some of the names are different than we are used to seeing. But most search engines will give the correct spelling if you care to do more study.

Lastly, I would like to thank Kathy and Randy and Judy German. They read the early chapters and expressed interest in continuing to read and learn. They must have made a couple of positive comments here and there because other requests for copies started coming to me. To honor those requests and give a window into the reading that filled my days during the recovery from my illness this summer I decided to make the summaries accessible. By placing this in the forum section of our website, we may interact with the data and one another by sharing comments and asking questions for other readers to answer. If this attempt is successful we may consider other options to increase dialogue and learn together through the medium of the internet.

Pastor Perry

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne

Preface

The *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* is laid before its readers as a challenge to see this recording of history as a current day proclamation of the Gospel. All events, lists, records and accounts are illumined by the proclamation such that each moment of the reader's life is seen as the fruit of the hand of God in the daily activities of ancestral generations. Thus, God as creator and provider is discerned and illumined in the basic affairs of the very people that God formed to fill the earth and subdue it. In the final analysis, the author intends for the reader to see God and recognize that every moment of his or her life rests on the sovereign foundation shaped by God.

Secondly, the *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* is presented as a "revolution," not in the contemporary sense of "revolt" but in the liberating classical manner of illumining change, specifically the change that makes a new era for each day. D'Aubigne does not speak of revolution as that of Protestantism or even of Christianity, but he addresses it as the revolution of God refusing to allow the growth of structural or institutional humanity to snuff the influence of His Word upon life.

Finally, the preface reminds us that it is futile to try to make something new out of old, declaring that the reformation was not a mere correction or return but it was God in life recreating the Church. In a similar way we are invited not to return to reformation roots but to learn and appropriate the value of God's Word and Work in Christ as the vessel of life given anew for our day. The tracing of God's work among different nations keeps the emphasis on the same truths bringing the same results because the same God intends the same revelation of truth and life each day. Thus the *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* looks back at the facts of the past, but its intent is not to communicate ancient history. Its intent is to develop the recognition of God in life that produces anticipation.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter I

As the eyes of the world were beholding the might and influence of the Roman Empire, Almighty God laid the cornerstone and completed His sovereign foundation upon which He would build a new house of living stones that would out last and out perform the awe inspiring power of the Roman Legion and Republic. As the might of Rome united the western world, she created a religious void. The gods of the nations did not travel well and the gods of Rome did not take root apart from its influence by the sword, as a result a void was created that the *Pax and Vide Romana* could not fill. In that void the Sovereign God took on human flesh and came to earth to serve and save.

The blessing of Immanuel launched a new community marked by the distinction of its ministers and its doctrines. The ministers served Christ and the new community while the doctrines shattered the human convention that salvation lied with man. The gift of new life was presented as a blessing of the grace of the God who came to earth to establish its enduring effect. The new community, though attacked unmercifully by Rome, came to dominate even Rome and all it stood for – for a time. Then the essence of Rome crept into the Church. The old historic Roman logic implied that Rome was the chief city of the Empire so the new application of that logic dictated that the visible Church of Rome and its prefect must be the chief city and the primary leader of the Church. As a result, the heart of service was lost and the power of human nature that had been so integral to the essence of ancient Rome took root and produced a spirit of domination in the Church. The very lines of distinction that gave the Church its power were now being blurred and the Church increasingly resembled society. [Aside – and D'Aubigne's proclamation of Gospel speaks a word of warning to each successive generation.]

Unable or unwilling to shake the influence of the culture of Rome, the Roman pontiffs continued to extend and expand the power of their reach. Church militias were formed, Church rules were enforced by might, and the Church decreed a power for itself that would reach even beyond the grave. The early distinctions of ministers and doctrines had been lost. The climate for the revolution of God that would become known as “The Reformation” had been blown in by papal storm.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter II

At the same time that the distinction of the ministers of the Church was slipping to resemble the heart of humanity so was its distinction of doctrine. Three errors redirected the life of the Church. First, faith was redefined. The early church affirmed that the Apostles taught that faith was the appropriation of grace in understanding, heart and will. But the resurging rebellion of human nature had reduced faith to a simple causative act of understanding. Second, faith was stripped of its practical and unique character when works were redefined as a meritorious parallel to faith instead of a response of gratitude to the God who gave faith. Third, the very character of faith was changed because the need for God's grace was minimized by exalting the nature of mankind and the life, ability and value of the human will. An early champion of these new ideas, Pelagius was condemned by Rome; but the encouragement and empowering of natural ability provided fertilizer for the human will to exalt itself and its influence.

The error of Pelagianism in all of its expressions and under all its *faux* nomenclature was twofold. First, there was a redefinition of the need for grace. Second, there was the exaltation of the will and ability of man. Even though the Church had condemned the teaching of Pelagius those two tenets took hold. The Church soon implemented the very heart of those teachings as illustrated by embracing and elevating the rites of penance. Shortly thereafter, the Church took the next step of exalting penance and declared that salvation was not only the gift of God by grace, but it could also be obtained for self or kin by the proclamation of the institutional church. In D'Aubigne's summarization, "the hand that lowered grace, exalted the Church."

In all of this, however, the Church was still the Church. Even as she became distorted and fallen, she is the best friend to man and new servants of Christ in the darkest and remotest places of the Church's empire began to show the truth of the reformation generations before its time.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter III

With its uniqueness and distinction being lost, a spirit of profanity had invaded the Church. It was not that the sacred had become evil personified but rather, that which had been set apart as holy was becoming increasingly common. The Church was looking more and more like the world. Grace and faith had been dethroned as the Church's principle foci and the new values of love and meditation had taken their place.

The sufferings of Christ were reduced to equality with Homer and the cross of Christ had more significance in its production of slivers for relics than for the singularity of atonement. Doctrine continued to erode. Immorality swept into the Church. The early principle of ministers set apart as servants of Christ was replaced by individuals serving their own interests and passions. The teaching of the Word took a back seat to the popular interest in the quick security of selling of indulgences. Thus a new standard for qualification and training for ministry emerged. Clergy congratulated themselves on their lack of time spent learning the Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. The theological faculty of Paris declared to parliament, "Religion is ruined, if you permit the study of Greek and Hebrew." The standard for new Bible translations was set by the acceptability of the people and not the accuracy of the text. [Aside – and the Church is reminded to take note!]

As the doctrines of the Church lost their hold and ministers lost their place, Christianity lost its light and life as the essence of the right religion of God. A nearly lifeless body lay spread across the Roman Empire. Rather than being a standard of hope and life, Martin Luther looked back upon this time and noted that the Church's clergy created a loathing in the minds of the people.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter IV

The rise of the might of human nature had put the Church at risk. Her charm was dwindling and her title of distinction was that she "has become one of us." Thus far had the Holy Catholic Church sunk. She was no longer holy and she was less and less Church. But she still was catholic as she covered nation upon nation, but toward what end? Yet the very identity of the Church refused to allow the hostile power of the human will to overwhelm it. Although the Church had become common and was swayed by the winds that blow all human religions, the Church would not and could not be broken for it was and is the very work of God who upholds all that He creates.

As at the very time of its inception, and after it was purified by persecution, the Church stood on the same regenerative power that gave it birth. The Church was prepared over the ages for its emergence at the time of God's own pleasure and God employed the same tools in the sixteenth century as He employed in the first. As the *Pax Romana* provided the opportunity for the launching of the Church an internal peace gave the illusion of calm. Councils had stilled the agitation of the Waldensians and the Hussites and their kind. But, God was working from afar preparing for a new work. For example, in seeming isolation, Frederick of Saxony was shaped to provide the shelter for the seed so truth that would reclaim the Church by the power of God's Word.

Frederick himself had fallen under the power of God's word. He discerned the emptiness of the majority of preaching. He embraced the proclamation of the Word that cut through the defenses of the will to stir the heart and mind as God alone can. The twilight of dawn began.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter V

In great wisdom, just as God had prepared Frederick the Wise to be the protector of the seeds of the Reformation, He simultaneously prepared the fertile soil of the populace that would keep the seedling from being toppled or eradicated. Many of the population saw through the regalia of Rome and discerned that the Pope, too, was but a man. Ironically, although Rome thought she was providing the greatest of ministers it was the growth of the inconsistency of emphasis upon contemporary life that turned people hearts sour and exposed the mortality of the Pontiff and his bishops.

Thirteen small republics from the host of Rome, Italy itself, to England in the northwest all seemed primed in some fashion for the reclamation of the church but none seemingly so prepared as Germany at the center. It was Germany that had felt most severely the servitude of Rome and it was Germany that faced the hunger of sacraments and church rites withheld from them for twenty-eight years. It was this slavery and hunger that fueled the liberation of the reformation as God used the small common things to prepare the way to accomplish His plan.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter VI

With the political guardian prepared in Frederick, the deeper movement fueled by the rediscovery of the fundamental truth of Justification by faith was just being uncovered. Rome had imposed a hierarchical system that had hidden this essential truth of Gospel. She had added to the basis of Gospel and disregarded the beauty and simplicity of the message of God's mercy in salvation. In short, in Rome's attempt to make itself more, it actually became less and she distanced herself from her Lord.

Many noticed the changing climate at Rome and they sought to address wrongs and correct actions. However, their attempts fell short for one simple reason: they did not have a clear notion of the justification by faith. For example, the Waldensians formed long lines to the truth but fell short on the concept of justification. Similarly, John Huss, while serving as the "John the Baptist" of the reformation chose to press his attack upon the scandalous lives of the clergy more than upon the doctrinal errors of the Church. Huss anticipated the response when he foretold not only the cooking of his goose as a play on his name, but he also prepared the way for the reformation by proclaiming the day of the eagle that would be called out by truth.

At the same time that Wicliffe [sic] and Huss were setting the tone as major instruments on the stage, God was also stirring the hearts of humble Monks and friars like Arnoldi, Jerome of Savanarola, John Vittrarius and secret professions of faith were penned and hidden in abbey walls such as Martin the Carthusians testimony of simple faith and complete trust in the hand of God for His salvation and defense.

Three notable scholars (all named John; Lallier, Wesalia and Wessel) added learned opinion to the expressions of faith of monks, friars and populace showing the range of humanity that was growing in unrest and hunger for the purity of the doctrine of justification by faith.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter VII

With the political protector established and a popular unrest already stirring, the sovereign hand of God was at work in the new passion for antiquity and learning exalted by the humanists. The Church of Rome had tried to limit learning in order to control human opinion. But the act of elevating itself above that of the people created an unrest and hunger. Similarly, Mahomet's [sic] capture of Constantinople in 1453 exiled learned men to Italy and there the human mind began to soar.

Dante and Petrarch received the credit for reviving the practice of the ancient poets, but they also placed the Bible above the doctors of the Church. Dante soon drew attention to the "true faith that renders us citizens of heaven," and the "faith according to the Gospel that is the principle of life," while lamenting at the same time the heavy burden of the old bark of the Church that has become so heavily laden.

But it was in Germany that God again focused the attention by providentially raising up John Reuchlin, Count Palatine. Reuchlin's training began in Paris in 1473 where he studied Latin and Greek and perhaps most significantly, also discovered the writings of John Wessel and his emphasis upon the single atoning work of Christ that negated both Papal indulgence and Purgatory.

After Paris Reuchlin returned to Germany and took residence at Wurtemberg where he prepared a Latin dictionary, a Greek grammar and published the first Hebrew grammar and dictionary in the German language. The academic path had been paved for Luther. Reuchlin is best known however, not for his personal accomplishments but through the extraordinary merits of his cousin, Schwarzerd, whom he took to disciple as his own son. History knows this lad by the Greek translation of his German name, Melancthon.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter VIII

All of the preparatory work that God had done in laying the foundation for the Reformation still paled in comparison to that which we turn next in drawing attention to Erasmus of Rotterdam who in the language of John Le Clerc, laid the egg of the Reformation that Luther hatched.

Born as the illegitimate child of Gerard of Gouda and Margaret, a physician's daughter and sent to school at age four, Erasmus showed himself to be superior to his peers in his thirteenth year. In his study of the ancients he discovered a correctness of understanding and an elegance of style that placed him far above the most eminent scholars of Paris. This overachieving excellence, however, never showed itself in Erasmus the Reformer. In fact, he could not be a reformer. He shrank from the study of theology lest he discover errors and be labeled a heretic. When he finally did discern errors in the church he resorted to sarcastic satire and not direct opposition in his creation of *Moria* and the "Praise of Folly." It may have been a passive approach but the appeal was very popular producing twenty seven editions in Erasmus' own lifetime while being translated into every European language. Through *Moria* the question was posed, "Can there be greater enemies to the Church than these unholy pontiffs, who by their silence allow Jesus Christ to be forgotten?"

Thus, the seeds were further sown, but this is not the seed for which Erasmus is best known. He went yet a step further in advancing the study of the Bible in its original languages. Erasmus argued that theology should not be studied from Scotus or Aquinas or even from the Latin Vulgate and he rendered his greatest service by producing a credible Greek New Testament. Thus Erasmus did for the NT what Reuchlin had already done for the OT.

But, he did still more, Erasmus' goal for philosophical studies was to encourage students

to obtain “a knowledge of the pure and simple Christianity of the Bible.” This he insisted upon while criticizing the churches for “scarcely ever thinking of explaining the Bible.”

So, why isn't Erasmus considered a great reformer? Martin Luther addressed the issue in this manner. “Erasmus is very capable of exposing error,” said Luther, “but he knows not how to teach the truth.” [Aside – as evidenced by Erasmus' horrendously liberal allegories that discredited him as a credible Biblical scholar] D'Aubigne's own conclusion however, is that Erasmus was too much a slave of vanity filled with a desire to acquire influence over his age to be a credible reformer of the Church. In time his teaching and his demeanor brought Erasmus and Luther into conflict and D'Aubigne believes that Erasmus rued the day and regretted his action in leading toward a reformation. “A disadvantaged peace,” Erasmus used to say, “is better than the most righteous war.” [Aside – CRCNA post 2000] Thus, he trembled at the tempest that he had helped create, but the dike had broken and no one could arrest the flood that was to cleanse and fertilize the world.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book One: The State of Europe Before the Reformation

Chapter IX

The story of regeneration prior to the Reformation was nearly complete. The account of political leaders like Frederick and scholars like Erasmus is also told in the lives of three German Knights and one humble cobbler.

Ulrich of Hütten, the Demosthenes of Germany was as distinguished by his letters as his sword. After the siege of Padua in 1513, Ulrich returned to Germany and wrote, "The Roman Trinity," in critique of the papal court he encountered at Rome. While emphasizing the number three Ulrich pointed out the three things one usually takes from Rome: a bad conscience, a disordered stomach and an empty purse; the three things Rome does not believe: the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead and hell; and the three things Rome traffics: the grace of Christ, ecclesiastical dignities and women. While Hütten promoted the truth, his later work, "The Letters of an Obscure Man," showed him to be rude and satirical to the degree that he was condemned by Luther even though he pointed to truth in Rome.

Francis of Sickingen though rash in manner declaring war on the Archbishop of Treves to the angst of Luther, showed himself to be friend of the Reformation by housing reformation leaders in his castle and befriending Hütten and Frederick the Elector.

The third knight, Harmut of Cronenberg endeavored to win Leo X's approval through letters and appeals. Yet, Harmut's pen was not without a bite equal to the sword as he wrote, "Our heavenly doctor, the Holy Ghost, can, whenever he pleases teach in one hour more of the faith that is in Christ Jesus, than could be learnt at the university of Paris in ten years."

From the power and castles of the Knights also comes the story of the song writing cobbler Hans Sachs. A single trip to Rome pointed out the lusts of life and created in him a desire for the light of truth. He was not alone. The world was prepared for Martin Luther.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter I

All was ready, the time had come and God used an apparent law of creation using the least to effect the greatest. Just as Christ chose the apostles from the humblest of occupations so He called Zwingli from a shepherds hut, Melancthon from the home of a metal fabricator and Luther from the home of a wood cutter and miner.

It is in the particulars of Luther's beginning that we see the composite of the reformation contained, starting small and slow but gaining by each new blessing of God. Thus it began when God gave a baby boy to a wood cutter and his primary transport partner in Eislaben, Germany, November 10, 1483. The devout parents took their son to dedicated to God in baptism on the next day and gave him the name, Martin.

Luther's early years were marked by poverty and journey. His parents moved to Mansfeldt when he was only six months old and they sent him to fend for himself at a Franciscan School in Magdeburg at age fourteen. Sustaining himself by caroling door-to-door with classmates Martin completed his first year and then was moved again by his parents to Eisenach, in the hope that extended family would care for their young teen. Yet it was caroling and not family that again provided daily bread. Until the day Martin providential knocked on the door of Conrad Cotta and was pitied by his wife Ursula to the degree that the Cotta's took Luther into their home and secured his tenure at school.

Life with the Cotta's was a formative time. There Martin was exposed to literature and science. There, he learned to play the flute and mandolin like lute. Free from the daily worry for bread Luther's persona took on a lighter nature and he became cheerful and expressive composing the first of many poems and songs.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter II

Having tasted the sweetness of literature, in his 18th year young Luther moved to Erfurth to enroll in the university in 1501. From the philosophy and theology of the middle ages to the ancient authors of Cicero, Vergil and Plautus, Martin Luther distinguished himself in such fashion that Melanchthon wrote that the entire university admired his genius. With the scarcity of personal books, the library became the treasury for Luther's hungry intellect and there he happened upon the rarest of books. He has never seen one before and didn't even know such a thing existed, until one day while simply reading tables of contents to discern the names of authors Martin Luther discovered a Bible. He had seen and read fragments but never had he heard or imagined one single book with one single theme. In a seeming, but yet unknown, prophetic declaration, Martin opened the book and read the story of Hannah and her son Samuel, a poor beggar set among princes who would restore order to the people of God.

Luther the lawyer seemed to have a nice ring to it – until the murder of Alexis and the thunderstorm that changed everything that is. The search to verify the rumor of the death of his closest friend eventually took Martin to the family home in Mansfeldt. The details of that respite at home are clouded by the thunderheads that met Luther on the road as he left home. Wind and lightning brought such fright that Martin feared his death to the end that he threw himself on the ground and vowed to become a holy man.

Zeal for holiness consumed him. And where should one turn to discover a life of holiness than a monastic order. So, abandoning the university and law, Martin Luther joined the hermits of St Augustine, August 17, 1505 at the seasoned age of 21.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter III

Joining the hermitage was a private decision, yet Luther did not exclude family and friends bidding them farewell while sending letters, clothing and his Master of Arts ring to friends, family and university. Astonishment and outrage characterized the reaction as friends and family urged Martin to retrace his steps. John Luther wrote an angry letter to his son imploring him with deep contempt to return to the university or risk being disinherited.

Not long after however, John's temperament softened when a plague took two of his sons and a rumor reached him that Martin too had been lost. Upon the advice of family, John with bruised heart acquiesced to Luther's stay in the Augustinian order.

The setting was being designed around Luther but the internal character was not yet prepared. Luther still looked to himself for salvation. He valued human works and observances and he was oblivious to the fact that salvation came wholly by God.

Life with the monks provided ample opportunity for Luther to gain merit by works. The monks treated him harshly and gave him the most menial of tasks as if to say that no learned scholar was to be given a higher standard than others of the order. After a short retreat to the solace of books, Luther was again driven to the streets to beg for daily bread. This severe apprenticeship ended sooner than Luther feared due to the intervention of the prior of the convent and the intercession of the university such that Luther was permitted to return to his studies.

The Church Fathers and Psalms filled his days anew, but he still found nothing to quiet his soul. There was no assurance of salvation that penetrated deep. What works, thought Luther, can come from a heart like mine that would satisfy the holy judge. Finally, Luther was ready.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter IV

There are few stories of Martin Luther's life that are more moving or memorable than that of his encounter with John Staupitz. Here is the inner kin and elder brother that Martin had been unknowingly pining. Staupitz had travel the path of works. As a youth he too had a love for knowledge and virtue – and he too came away empty until he found peace in his soul through faith in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of election by grace had taken strong hold of his mind.

The evidence of the hand of God in this association is unmistakable. Staupitz identified with the trouble in Luther's soul and he interceded with the prior to treat Martin with mildness. Staupitz provided the echo to Luther's longing. Staupitz showed the kindness that broke through the timid spirit created by a life of harsh treatment. And, John Staupitz had been befriended by Frederick the wise and commissioned to found the university of Wittemberg!

“It is in vain,” said Luther to Staupitz, “that I make promises to God, sin is ever the strongest.” Looking back on his own experience the vicar-general shared the lesson of a thousand experiences of swearing obedience and breaking the vow. The remedy that he passed on as advice to a troubled soul was to look to the wounds of Christ and the blood He shed for there the grace of God will appear. Still again, Staupitz encouraged to look to the wounds of Christ and there see God's counsel to man. The lesson hammered upon Luther again and again, was that God had determined to save even the most dejected of sinners through the wounds of Christ.

But the work was not yet finished, so Staupitz took Luther to the Apostle's Creed to recall and repeat the simple words, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Peace at last!

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter V

In 1502 Frederick established the University of Wittemberg [*sic*] with St Augustine as its patron and Staupitz as the mentor. Martin Luther was recruited as a professor in 1508 and he settled into a simple cell at the Augustinian convent. Physics and dialectics were the two subjects assigned to the new scholar which brought him back to the study of Aristotle in divine preparation for understanding human thought and basic debating skills.

The study of Aristotle did not satisfy Luther and he zealously applied himself to the study of Greek and Hebrew which he soon put to use every afternoon at 1:00 lecturing on the Bible as a newly awarded Bachelor of Divinity. Psalms and Romans were the daily topics, which brought Luther on one occasion to the quote from the prophet Habakkuk in Romans 1:17, *the just shall live by faith*. At last the explanation for his new inner peace had come clear: the just have a different life from other men; and this life is the gift of faith from God. Years later in a variety of situations Luther still heard the words ringing *the just shall live by faith* and it quieted his soul.

Now the distinction of the new lecturer grew more significant. Luther spoke not as a practiced rhetorician but as a Christian who had felt the power of revealed truth. Staupitz, still the instrument of God to develop Luther's skill encouraged Martin to preach in the church of Augustine, a 20 by 30 foot chapel with propped up walls and plank board pulpit. At first Luther refused but soon relented under unyielding pressure. Here the preaching of the reformation began. Other exhorters of Luther's day sought to amuse and appeal, but Luther made his focus that which would convert. Soon the little chapel could not hold the hearers who crowded in and the council of Wittemberg nominated Luther as city chaplain in invited him to preach in the city church. Thus, the servant was in place and message of God was sounded with new energy.

Chapter VI

After one eventful year Luther was sent by order of the convent to represent their cause in Rome and again, the hand of God was charting the course. Luther's first stop at the lavish Benedictine convent on the Po river in Lombardy provided the first of a litany of shocking experiences. There he struggled with the opulence and lavish lifestyle of the Italian monks. But this was only a beginning of the struggle. In Rome itself, Luther was appalled by the run down church buildings and the mockeries of liturgy by the priests provided a major stumbling-block for him. Practices were rushed such that seven masses were said at the neighboring altar to Luther's one prompting the ridicule of him to "send the lady back her son quickly," emphasizing the transubstantiation theology of the church.

Almost as amazing as the external situation in Rome, so too is the surprising behavior Luther displayed almost blindly playing the part while in Rome participating in the activities of the church, even lamenting that his parents were still living so that he couldn't purchase indulgences for them. [Aside – and we are warned to not blithely follow patterns without discernment]

Yet it was in this practice of being a churchman of Rome that the incongruity hit Martin again. While climbing the staircase of Pilate, Luther was simultaneously hit by the foolishness of his action and the reoccurring refrain, *the just shall live by faith*. He shuddered. He was ashamed. He fled far from his folly. But it was there in Rome, that God gave Martin Luther clarity in his view on the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter VII

Luther's sorrow and disgust for the pontifical city renewed his vigor for the Word of God upon his return to Wittemberg. In the Holy Scriptures he found the hope and promise for the world that was lacking in the Holy See. Staupitz and Frederick did not lose sight of that which was happening in Luther and they urged him to become Doctor of the Holy Scriptures. The title took a matter of days, since Luther became a Licentiate in Divinity on October 18, 1512 and was granted the honor of Doctor of Divinity the next day, but the fulfillment of his vow was a matter to which he devoted the rest of his life.

Upon oath Luther promised to preach the Scriptures faithfully, to teach them with purity, to study them all his life and defend them so far as God should give him ability. This vow D'Aubigne calls the third epoch of Luther's development; the first being the cloister experience, the second being his discovery of justification by faith; and finally, this vow to put the Word of God before all tasks and people.

While his contemporaries devoted their preaching to amusing their listeners or teaching fables and traditions Luther devoted himself to the Word of Life as the sole source for effecting spiritual regeneration. Luther fulfilled the latter part of his vow first by attacking the teaching of the schoolmen of the church; then he addressed the errors of Aristotle; and finally, after siding with Erasmus against philosophy, Luther acknowledged that Erasmus daily lost credit with him. In Luther's mind, Erasmus did not render service to the doctrine of Jesus Christ (chapter 8).

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter VIII

Teaching now consumed Martin Luther and he diffused a new light. People were astonished that they had not earlier acknowledged the truths that appeared so evident in his mouth. Luther rekindled the teaching from the Word that self-justification is the cause of the distress of the heart. He focused attention upon faith as a divine work that renewed the heart. It was faith in Christ, said he, "that takes away from you all trust in your own wisdom, righteousness and strength."

All focus was now put upon Christ. He is the righteousness of the just, He is the means of our becoming what we by nature are not. If labor or affliction or will should give peace with God, why then, he reasoned, should Christ have died. Two truths became evident and they were the truths that Luther sought to re-establish in the church; and they are the helplessness of man and the omnipotence of God.

As the fame of Luther the teacher grew, Martin the student was still becoming enlightened in degrees and growing in consistency in his message. In him every action of his life corresponded with his words. He was the model of minister and doctrine that had been lost from public eye.

Chapter IX

Luther's teaching continued to bear fruit and many felt themselves to be disciples to a newly discovered truth. As a natural result this process brought Luther into conflict with the established Roman church and the need to publicize the points of disputes became evident. So, Luther published his first attack on what he called the dominion of the sophists and papacy in 1516.

The attack, such as it was, came in two forms; first, Luther published a list of propositions and then, he intensified his accusations in his teaching. In the propositions Luther brought out the contrast between the old Adam and Christ. The old Adam is vanity and flesh and should be chaste but cannot because he is not born of God. As a result "the will of man without grace is not free but is enslaved," thus it is superstitious to seek help in man's will or in the saints. Our help is in God through Christ alone.

In his teaching Luther implored people to not bind themselves to Aristotle or philosophies but to study the Word of God with diligence. "Peace, peace," said Luther, "you seek peace, but it is the peace of the world and not the peace of Christ that you seek." And Luther pressed the fundamental truth that Holy Scripture alone shows the way to heaven.

To the lament of Rome, many a cloister became a nursery for the reformation as monks, especially those of the Augustinian order, turned to the Gospel. This awakening of drowsy souls through the publication and teaching of Luther gave rise to 1516 as the morning star of the reformation.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Two: The Youth, Conversion and Early Labors of Luther

Chapter X

In chapter IX we reached a highpoint at the dawn of the reformation. Chapter X on the other hand adds almost nothing other than an illustration of conflict from small to great and points in between.

Luther disagreed with Frederick on relics. In his view, the many things that pleased the prince were displeasing to God and though he was a visionary prince, concerning relics Luther thought him to be proven to be seven-fold blind. Frederick's character is noted in his charitable response of thanks for an honest opinion and the finest cloth for a new robe.

Serving as intermediary in the debate between scholar and prince provided the court chaplain, Spalatin the opportunity to seek Luther's advice on the possibility of translating something that would be pleasing to people and God. Luther's first reply was to seek to please Christ for there is nothing more salutary than that. However, he also recommended that Spalatin translate the works of the Dominican Tauler, whom he called the soundest in theology.

Good Prince Frederick's character was sharply contrasted with his cousin Duke George of Saxony. The house of Saxony was divided between two rulers. Elector Frederick represented the Ernestine branch and Duke George the Albertine's. George was born for the reformation. The priests said that he "imbibed it with his mother's milk" since she followed the teachings of John Huss. However, George had nothing but ridicule for Luther after inviting him to preach at the royal court. Luther contrasted the lack of wisdom on the part of the sons of Zebedee with the humility of the faith of the true disciples, elected to eternal life. He proceeded into a treatise of gratuitous election and concluded with an allegory of three virgins which divided the royal court. Most notably George was offended and summarized the event as an evening he would have paid money to avoid.

Chapter XI

From the debacle of the court dinner, Luther returned to Wittenberg zealous for work. The need before him was the preparation of six or seven young theologians for a licentiate exam. Their promotion was in his mind a discredit to Aristotelian logic. Free will was the great subject to be treated. Although he had touched upon it previously, he now delved into the question.

In summary, the issue is one of true liberty. The philosopher affirmed this as a gift for all while Luther maintained that true liberty was only a gift from God created by the Gospel. "It is not in the power of Man's will to choose or reject what is offered to it," said Luther in one of his articles. "Man cannot of his own nature will God to be God. He would prefer himself to be God and that God were not God," he continued.

Scholasticism had exalted reason as well as will and Luther protested that God ascribed to man all the good that man can do, such that "we do not become righteous by doing what is righteous; but having become righteous we now do what is righteous." In this manner God is praised as the giver of life and all good things.

Surprisingly however, Luther held some semi-Pelagian tendencies. In his eighth thesis he proclaimed, "It does not hence follow that the will is naturally depraved..." He believed that man's nature was essentially good and that its glorious origin still remained; and is capable of recovering its origin by the power of God. To recover this origin, said he, is the very business of Christianity.

Luther shared his opinions with colleagues at Erfurth who were greatly displeased, however John Meyer, known by the place of his birth as Dr Eck, affirmed Luther's teachings at his post in the university of Ingolstadt in Bavaria, creating a personal friendship and a promotion of the teachings beyond the region of Saxony.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter I

In rural America the county fair is one of the highlights of the year, so too was the market of salvation in 16th century Germany that was ushered in by the monks selling indulgences. The dealers traveled the country in handsome carriages and lived in great state while spending freely at each stop. Music and bells and dramatic presentations summoned the citizens from far and wide to hear the message of “the grace of God and the Holy Father that is at your gates.”

One person in particular attracted the attention of the spectators was the son of a goldsmith, John Tetzel. He carried a red cross while robed in Dominican dress. With a sonorous booming voice he summoned the crowd with an air of arrogance fulfilling the office held since 1502. “Indulgences,” said he, “are the most precious and most noble of God’s gifts...this cross (pointing to the red cross) has as much efficacy as the very cross of Jesus Christ.”

In great irony Tetzel affirmed that “the Lord our God no longer reigns, he has assigned all power to the pope,” while Pope Leo did not have the means of “sheltering the bodies of St Peter and St Paul,” thus he needed the help of the masses. Four graces were promised to all who should aid in the building of the new basilica: a full pardon of every sin, the right of choosing a confessor at the hour of death, a participation in the works, blessings and merits of the Catholic Church and the redemption of souls from purgatory should they be named on the indulgence itself.

To obtain these graces one had to purchase an indulgence based upon the assessment of the vendor and the pay scale that he sought to enforce. Kings and their kind paid twenty five ducats for an individual indulgence, while those of a low station in life might only pay a half a ducat. For particular sins a particular tax could also be paid covering sins mentioned by D'Aubigne as including, polygamy, sacrilege, murder, witchcraft and infanticide.

[Aside – Tetzel’s Sermon on Indulgences, p 86]

Indulgences are the most precious and most noble of God’s gifts...

This cross (pointing to the red cross) has as much efficacy as the very cross of Jesus Christ.

Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned...I would not change my privileges for those of St Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons.

There can be no sin so great that an indulgence cannot remit; and even if one (which is doubtless impossible) had offered violence to the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of God, let him pay – only let him pay well, and all will be forgiven him.

Reflect then, that for every mortal sin you must, after confession and contrition, do penance for seven years, either in this life or in purgatory; now, how many mortal sins are there not committed in a day, how many in a week, how many in a month, how many in a year, how many in a whole life! Alas! These sins are almost infinite, and they entail an infinite penalty in the fires of purgatory. And now, by means of these letters of indulgence, you can once in your life, in every case except four, which are reserved for the apostolic see, and afterwards in the article of death, obtain a plenary remission of all your penalties and all your sins! ...

But more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living but for the dead. For that, repentance is not even necessary. Priest! Noble! Merchant! Wife! Youth! Maiden! Do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the bottom of the abyss: ‘We are suffering horrible torments! A trifling alms would deliver us; you can give it and you will not!’

At the very instant that the money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies liberated to heaven. O stupid and brutish people, who do not understand the grace so richly offered! Now heaven is everywhere opened! Do you refuse to enter now? When, then, will you enter? Now you can ransom so many souls...stiff necked and thoughtless man,...

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter II

After introducing the pomp and shame of the indulgence processional D'Aubigne turns his attention to the scenes of life in the German towns showing some common responses in towns in which the seeds of indulgence were sown.

In Magdeburg, Tetzel demanded a 100 florin advance from a rich lady who refused. She preferred to follow the advice of her Franciscan confessor who taught that "God grants the remission of sins gratuitously and He does not sell it." In rebuttal Tetzel declared that such a confessor should be banished or burned.

The city of Hagenau provided the setting for another conflict in 1517 when a wife died and her husband chose to not commission a mass for the repose of her soul on the basis of an indulgence that she had purchased against his will. The local priest charged him with contempt of religion and brought him to the magistrate. At court the humble shoemaker testified that he had indeed buried his wife and commended her to God for she entered heaven at the moment of her death. "But how do you know?" came the reply. "Here is the proof," he said as he pulled out the indulgence. "My wife has been deceived by the holy Father or the priest is deceiving me," he continued; thus proving by the plain sense of the people the fraud of the times.

At Annaberg, Tetzel proclaimed that there was no salvation apart from the satisfaction of works which is impossible for man, he therefore can only purchase it from the Roman pontiff. A youthful student named Myconius heard the appeal and beseeched the commissaries as a poor sinner in need of a gratuitous pardon. After continually dropping the price Myconius replied that he was still not worth so great a value, so a priest offered to loan him the money which he refused upon the ground that he sought a gratuitous pardon based upon the love of God alone. In

parting Myconius expressed sadness at being sent away unpitied, but he felt a strange quiet deep in his soul and he burst into tears and begged for God to be a father to him.

Thus the Germans wearied with the scandalous traffic that was carried on in the midst of them. No one however dared to oppose those D'Aubigne calls the "master-cheats of Rome" and ones of "quackery and fraud." People of the cities asked if God would raise up a mighty man for the work, but none appeared.

[Aside – Addendum: Myconius' conversion, pp 90-91]

I will have no bought indulgences. If I desired to buy them, I should only have to sell one of my schoolbooks. I desire a gratuitous pardon, and for the love of God alone. You will render an account to God for having allowed a soul to be lost for six deniers...

I was very sad at being thus sent away unpitied. But I felt, however, a comforter within me, who said that there was a God in heaven who pardons repentant souls without money and without price, for the love of His Son Jesus Christ. As I took leave of these folks, the Holy Spirit touched my heart. I burst into tears and prayed to the Lord with anguish: 'Oh God,' cried I, 'since these men have refused to remit my sins, because I wanted money to pay them, do thou, Lord, have pity on me, and pardon them of thy pure grace.'..

I cannot describe to you what I experienced. I begged God to be a father to me, and to do with me whatever he pleased. I felt my nature changed, converted, transformed. What had delighted me before, now became an object of disgust. To live with God and to please Him was my earnest, my sole desire.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter III

Pope Leo X of the famous Medici family was a clever and sincere man. He was a friend of arts and science and Leo loved magnificence. Sparring no expense he sponsored festivals, sports, theaters and festivals. Leo required large sums of money. To defray the costs of his taste for life as pope he published a new papal bull announcing a general indulgence (in contrast to the particular and economic level indulgences previously commissioned) for the building of St Peter's cathedral.

Germany had their own Leo X of sorts in Albert of Mentz. This young man had been appointed archbishop and elector of Mentz and Magdeburg at the age of twenty four. Two years later he was promoted to cardinal. Albert's court was one of the most magnificent in the empire and it appeared that he was ready to sacrifice the truth that may have penetrated his heart for the sake of pleasure and greatness. Nevertheless, even to the last, Albert demonstrated moderation and equity in judgments rendered.

However, Albert, like Leo, needed money. Although he held high title, Albert had no means of paying for his *pallium*, an ornament of white wool sprinkled with black crosses and blessed by the pope, which was sent to the archbishops as a symbol of their dignity. To raise money, Albert determined to solicit the farming of indulgences – or as they said in Rome – the farming of the sins of the Germans.

Thus Albert and Leo despoiled Germany, the only question that remained was who should handle the spoils. The task was first offered to the Franciscans because of personal ties with Albert, but these monks discerned and odor with the people concerning indulgences and would have nothing to do with it. The Augustinians cared even less than the Franciscans about joining this cause. But the Dominicans led by Tetzels himself were zealous for the task.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter IV

Due to the influence of Staupitz's bending of Frederick the Elector's ear Tetzl was not permitted in Saxony. The princes there were indignant at the disgraceful traffic of indulgences. However, under the protection of his patron Albert, Archbishop of Magdeburg Tetzl established himself at Juterboch, a mere four miles from Wittemberg. There Martin Luther first heard the direct appeals of Tetzl and first commented that he would with God's help, "put a hole in his drum." Later, Luther lamented the presence of the "great purse thresher" who was threshing bravely in the country so that money began to leap and drop tinkling into the box as people flocked from Wittemberg to Juterboch.

But the worst was yet to come for Luther when he realized that people were coming for confession without any intention of leaving their sin because of the protection that the indulgence provided them. Luther counseled people to have nothing to do with the papers and to realize that they needed to repent or perish but that still did not seem to be enough. Finally realizing the he was bound to the Word of God Luther determined that it was his duty to resist. It was necessary for him to confess aloud the doctrine to which he owed his happiness so Luther preached and printed a compelling sermon advising that no one should purchase indulgences.

As the festival of All-Saints was approaching Frederick the Elector had a dream on the evening of October 31, 1517, which he related to his brother Duke John who was his coregent. In his dream a monk called the true son of the Apostle Paul accompanied by all the saints asked for permission to write something on the chapel door. The pen they used was so long that it reached to Rome and pierced the ears of a lion which lay there and shook the triple crown on the pope's head. Waking a moment and drifting to sleep again, Frederick dreamt that the quill for the pen was one hundred years old and belonged to a Bohemian goose. [Aside – Huss!]

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter V

As a pastor in confessionals Luther spoke against the indulgences. As a preacher he had uttered a warning cry from the pulpit. Now, the time had come for him to speak as a theologian! It was not the church or the pope that Luther was attacking, for in his mind, he was defending the pole against "these bare faced monks." Thus, at noon on October 31, 1517 Luther walked boldly among the milling pilgrims and posted ninety-five theses upon the door of the Wittemberg Chapel. To Luther, the theses were not conclusions but they were propositions in which he solicited the opinion of the learned residents and travelers. However, no one appeared the next day as invited to discuss the posted proposition.

In theses one Luther declared, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says repent, he means that the whole life of believers upon earth should be a constant and perpetual repentance." On the importance of indulgences Luther said in thesis forty-five, "We should teach Christians that whoever sees his neighbor in want, and yet buys an indulgence, does not buy the pope's indulgence, but incurs God's wrath." Specific articles aside, for the first time, the doctrine of a free and gratuitous remission of sin was publically professed. Everything is pushed back to the Word which "the pope has taken from us and falsified."

Luther's desire was for the Church to awaken and resolve to put an end to the evils that were laying it waste. However Albert made no reply, the Bishop of Brandenburg reflected that Luther was attacking and harming the Church. But the theses spread like lightning among the common people. Contemporary historians report that they were known in just four weeks by all men. They were translated into Dutch and Spanish and even sold in Jerusalem. Many pious monks too delighted at the simple and striking confession of the truth and they heartily desired that Luther continue the work that he had begun.

[Aside – Addendum: D’Aubigne’s Editorial Paragraph to His Own Day, p 98]

In our days, too, we have forgotten this main doctrine of justification by faith, although in a sense opposed to that of our fathers. “In the time of Luther,” observes one of our contemporaries, “the remission of sins cost money at least; but in our days, each man supplies himself gratis.” There is a great similarity between these two errors. There is perhaps more forgetfulness of God in ours, than in that of the 16th century. The principle of justification by the grace of God, which brought the Church out of so much darkness at the period of the Reformation, can alone renew our generation, put an end to its doubts and waverings, destroy the selfishness that prevails among the nations, and, in short, reunite the world to God from whom it has been severed.

[And in our day, I dare say, the common man contributes even more of himself in salvation than in the 16th century or the 19th century of D’Aubigne. Might we not need the Reformation truths more today than ever before?]

Chapter VI

Luther's propositions created quite a storm and the aftermath produced a variety of responses. John Reuchlin, who had paved the way for the study of Scripture in Hebrew received the theses with thanks to God for he was growing weary in his combat against the monks. Erasmus was more cautious. He received them internally but publically encouraged Luther to greater moderation and prudence. The Elector of Saxony, Frederick, summed up the reaction accurately saying that he was not surprised for Luther had "attacked the pope's tiara and the monks' bellies."

Doctor Flek, prior of the monastery of Steinlausitz, who had long discontinued the reading of the mass could hardly contain his joy exclaiming, "Ah! Ah! He whom have so long expected has come at last and he will show you monks a trick or two." Even Emperor Maximilian, predecessor of Charles V read and admired the theses of Luther and exhorted Frederick to "take great care of the monk Luther, for the time may come when we shall have need of him." [Aside – quite a far cry from the response of Charles V!]

The Bishop of Brandenburg grieved at the violent quarrel that would break out. He tried to resolve the issue through the Abbot of Lenin who appealed for moderation, seeing nothing opposed to Catholic truth but condemned them for their disruption and urged Luther to discontinue his writing for the sake of "love and peace." [Aside – how often isn't this the appeal against opposition or even against the call to Biblical teachings and patterns?]

Even in his own cloister the monks feared the outcry of Tetzal and appealed to Luther to do nothing further to disgrace their order. If Luther had been urged solely by personal passions his fears would have sunk him, but God's time had come. The uniqueness of Christ and His merit alone as the means of salvation needed to be restored. Luther was divinely fortified.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter VII

While the silence of his friends had discouraged him, the attacks of his enemies produced a different effect and Martin Luther was emboldened in his defense. Tetzel remained the main adversary attacking both the sermon on indulgences, which had stirred the people, and the ninety five theses, which had stirred the learned.

Luther replied without naming Tetzel and implored great logic in pressing his point. "The penance imposed by the holy father cannot be that required by Christ; for what the holy father imposes he can dispense with; and if these two penances were one and the same thing, it would follow that the pope takes away what Christ imposes, and destroys the command of God." Regarding Tetzel himself Luther covenanted to pray for him as a friend, but said he, "I cannot suffer him to treat the Holy Scriptures...as a sow treats a sack of oats."

During the trial of this conflict Luther drew great comfort from the timid, though faithful friendship of Spalatin who continually devoted himself to betterment through Luther's advice. On one occasion Spalatin asked Luther to advise him concerning the best method for studying Scripture. "It is very certain that we cannot attain the understanding of Scripture either by study or by the intellect," Luther replied. "Your first duty is to begin by prayer...there is no other interpreter of the Word than the author himself," he continued. In this way, Luther continued to press the point that God would teach His Word to each person in deep contrast to the published replies of Tetzel narrowing interpretation exclusively to that of the pontiff of the Roman Church.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter VIII

Tetzel continued to oppose Luther and sought an ally in Conrad Wimpina, an eloquent man and one of the most distinguished theologians of the day. Wimpina answered Luther with two lists of antitheses, the first defending the doctrine of indulgences and the second, defending the authority of the pope.

With these lists in hand, Tetzel pressed his attack by convening a conference of three hundred monks, before whom he argued, “whoever says that the soul does not escape out of purgatory so soon as the money tinkles in the chest is in error.” Regarding the pope he said, “we should teach Christians that the pope is above the whole universal Church, and superior to the councils, and that we should implicitly obey his decrees.” Or even more distinctively in the list of defenses, number six says, “We should teach Christians that, in matters of faith, we should rely and repose more on the pope’s sentiments, as made known by his decisions, than on the opinions of all the learned, which are derived merely from Scripture.” [Aside – thus we see by direct quote that the 16th century church had indeed devalued Scripture and was in critical need of reform]

The climax of Tetzel’s action involved a solemn procession to a specially prepared scaffold where he gave vent to all manner of violence from the pulpit stating that Luther deserved to be burned at the stake. He then placed a copy of the ninety five theses upon the scaffold and burned them.

Similarly, the Bishop of Brandenburg exclaimed, “I will not lay my head down in peace until I have thrown Martin into the fire like this brand,” and he cast a brand into the campfire in testimony to those seated with him. So it came to be that Christ’s prophecy came to pass, “Men will revile you, persecute you and say all manner of evil against you.”

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter IX

Leo X offered what may have been Rome's best advice when he commented that the "best way is not to meddle with it." Had Rome listened the reaction may have been different. However the Roman censor officer, Prierio, thought otherwise. Prierio was also the prior-general of the Dominicans determined not only perhaps, to defend Tetzel and the Dominican order, but to decide for all Christendom what they should profess. He published a reply to Luther which he dedicated to Leo X in which Prierio spoke contemptuously of Luther and he attacked the theses by ridicule, insult and general menace. So it came to be a battle between the Augustinian of Wittenburg and the Dominican of Rome.

The very question of the debate was one of the turning principles of the Reformation: "What is the sole infallible authority for Christians?" Both agreed that that Spirit of God must give understanding for the comprehension of the Word. But they differed on the availability of the Holy Spirit. Prierio and Rome argued that the Spirit was a monopoly granted to the church or to certain classes or cities. The Reformation however, gave fruit that the assemblies of the Church had now taken dwelling with the simple common folk and the humble priests.

In reply to the published accusations of Rome Luther determined to follow Prierio's example and lay down two principles in rebuttal. First, Luther appealed to the Apostle Paul's declaration that no angel or man should preach a different doctrine than the Apostle preached lest he be cursed. Second, affirmed the canonical books of the Bible alone. Thus the essential principle of the Reformation was laid down: "the Word of God, the whole Word of God, nothing but the Word of God." "If you understand these points," Luther directed to Prierio, "you will understand that your whole dialogue is overturned by them."

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Three: The Indulgences and the Theses

Chapter X

With these struggles the one known as the champion of the Word of God defended attacks and continued that pastoral ministry entrusted to him. During this contentious period Luther published his *Sermon's on the Ten Commandments* and his *Explanation of the Lord's Prayer*.

From every other pulpit, so it seemed, the Dominicans condemned the infamous heretic. Luther, in response, speaking to the largest crowds that had gathered at Wittenburg, began his response in a sermon to become one of the most celebrated. The task he undertook was to establish the doctrine of repentance for all in his hearing. He began by contrasting the pardon of men with the pardon of heaven, which is a contrast between remission of penalty and remission of sin. Secondly, Luther moved to his principle point: the Church had been set in the place of God and His Word. "The remission of the sin is in the power neither of the pope, nor bishops, nor priests, but reposes solely on the Word of Christ, and on your own faith," declared Luther. Thirdly, Luther attacked the hierarchy of the church affirming that no pope or officer had more authority than another concerning the remission of sin. "If a simple Christian says to you, 'God pardons sin in the name of Jesus Christ' and you receive this word in faith...you are absolved," declared Luther.

Now it became clear. All the scaffolding that the priests had raised for their own profit between God and the soul of man was being torn down. Every man and woman was being brought face-to-face with Almighty God! As a result the monopoly of the caste system of the church was abolished and the Church was emancipated.

Chapter XI

But Wittenburg alone was not the only place in which the fire of the Reformation was being lit. In the spring of 1518 a general chapter of the Augustinian order was to be held in Heidelberg. Luther was summoned as one of the most distinguished men of the order. Encouraged by a reunion with Staupitz and Lange, Luther composed a new set of theses for public discussion which he entitled, *Paradoxes*. In the *Paradoxes* Luther affirmed the law as a welcoming doctrine but, said he, it cannot aid men in righteousness, on the contrary it impedes him. Neither is there help in the works of man, which may appear fair and good, but are deadly sins. To press the condemnation of man still further, Luther affirms that the will of man since the fall is not free, but is “an idle word; and if man does all he can, he still sins mortally.” The contrast to this seeming hopelessness is the grace of God that points to Christ and says, “Believe in Him! And immediately all things are done.” With stirring succinctness Luther concluded, “The love of God finds nothing in a man, but creates in him what He loves. The love of man proceeds from his well beloved.”

Five Doctors of Divinity attacked these theses, but three young men in particular heard and carried the word forth from Heidelberg. Martin Bucer hung on every word and, after a time of teaching in Heidelberg, carried the message to Strasburg and England. John Brentz at age nineteen was startled by the message of justification by faith in Jesus and not by works and carried the new message to Tubingen, Halle and Swabia. Ehrhard Snepf was the third youth to be bound in conversion, friendship and mission and he carried the new message to Marburg, Stuttgard, Tubingen and Jena. With great joy in the dawning truth Luther commented on that which was rejected by graybeards and welcomed by the rising generation and the spreading of the new Gospel message.

Chapter I

After returning from Heidelberg Martin Luther determined to clarify the meaning of the ninety-five theses because his statements on indulgences had been misunderstood – and his stand on indulgences were to become the chief conflict with Rome. Luther entitled his explanation of the theses, *Resolutions*, which he wrote in a moderate humble tone. But, Luther was unshaken in his convictions. He affirmed that every truly repentant Christian possessed remission of sin without papal indulgences. He further affirmed that Scripture was the sole rule of faith. In *Resolutions* Luther also attacked the papacy but expressed appreciation for Leo X as a good pope. Finally, Luther came to the point that the Church needs reformation and no man could do it. Reformation must be a work of God Himself. Each of these themes is developed or shattered in the details of book Four, as we shall see.

The letters of introduction that Luther composed to go with his *Resolutions* give us a window into his intention in writing and defending the theses. In his cover letter to the Bishop of Brandenburg, Luther affirms his commitment to the Church. The letter to Leo X shows a deep devotion to the pope and a reaffirmation of submission to his authority. Yet, Luther also conveys deep sentiments of conviction that his zeal in the theses was aroused for the glory of Christ, who is over all. To Staupitz, his spiritual father and friend, Luther bared his soul and confessed that this disturbance may well cost him his life. He affirms the wretchedness of his soul and the wonder of his salvation that now motivates him.

Luther's fear of being excommunicated and killed was advanced further by a letter from Cardinal Rafael to Elector Frederick. After learning its contents Luther exclaimed in a sermon, "No one can reconcile the fallen sinner except God...and no one can separate a man from God except the man himself by his own sin...blessed is he who dies under unjust excommunication!"

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Four: Luther Before the Legate. May to December 1518

Chapter II

The letters continued to flow, and chapter II is filled with them, giving us further background for the conflict with Rome that has become inevitable. After the conclusion of an Imperial diet at Augsburg, Emperor Maximilian addressed Leo X concerning Luther. This letter conveyed his concern over the discussion of indulgences and his worry over the growing mass of followers who shared Luther's convictions.

Frederick also wrote to Leo X and specified that he had never defended the writings of the sermons of Luther yet he still insisted upon safe conduct and a public forum in which Luther could defend his doctrine and present his case for discussion.

Leo, finally aroused by the clamor, decided to nominate an ecclesiastical commission instead of letting the matter run its course as he had previously determined. Leo designated Luther's old enemy, Sylvester Prierio as the accuser and judge of the commission, before whom Luther was commanded to report within sixty days. This summons generated a plethora of letters including some from Spalatin to the emperor, from the faculty at the University of Wittemberg to the pope and the university to Charles of Miltitz, all seeking a promise of safe conduct and a public meeting for the purpose of explanation.

In the hope of placing himself in higher regard before the pope after a failed campaign against the Turks, the papal legate De Vio [Aside – later introduced as Cajetan] petitioned the pope to entrust the matter concerning Luther to him. Leo concurred and sent a specific directive to De Vio to Summon and prosecute without delay...the said Luther who had been declared a heretic by Bishop Jerome of Ascoli. Luther had been declared a heretic before being heard in court. Further, he was summoned to appear immediately and safe conduct was denied him.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Four: Luther Before the Legate. May to December 1518

Chapter III

At the point of despair Luther needed a friend to share his sorrow and provide comfort. To meet this need, God raised up Philip Melancthon. Born February 14, 1497 to a skilled armourer and given the family name Schwartzerd Philip was providentially urged to fear God above all two days before his father died. At age eleven Philip went to live with his grandfather who employed a tutor to train the three boys in his household. Philip was remarkable in understanding and in explaining what he learned.

On the death of his grandfather later that year Philip went to school at Pforzheim and lodged at the home of a distant relation who was a sister to the famous Reuchlin. Recognizing Philip's skill Reuchlin presented him with a Greek Grammar and a Bible – the two books that were to be his companions for life – and he gave Philip a Greek translation of his German name; Melancthon.

A few months later, at age twelve Melancthon enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, where he earned a bachelor's degree at age fourteen. Continuing his influence in Melancthon's development Reuchlin invited him to study at Tübingen where many learned men were assembled. In 1514 at age 17, Philip was granted the doctor of philosophy degree qualifying him to teach. At this time Frederick was assembling distinguished scholars at the University of Wittenberg and extended an invitation to Reuchlin, who in turn recommended young Melancthon instead. Philip arrived in Wittenberg on August 25, 1518, two days after Leo X signed the brief to Cajetan and sent his letter to Frederick the Elector.

Philip did not make a good first impression upon Luther or the faculty of Wittenberg but all were struck with admiration after hearing his first lecture. Luther himself admitted that they

soon recovered from their prejudice and praised his eloquence. Thus the faculty stood behind Philip as he began his teaching career with classes on Homer and the Epistles of Paul.

Melancthon's arrival in Wittenberg affected a revolution of sorts in both university and country. Melancthon brought back the study of classics and philosophy and "thanks to him," said one German historian, "Wittenberg became the school of the nation." But Melancthon's greatest influence may have been the support and moderation he provided for Luther as a life-long friend. Melancthon's influence as a teacher and encourager may be seen in the manner in which he helped shape Luther's view on penance. In the Latin Bible and Roman understanding the Greek word *metanoia* signified penance as a satisfaction required by the church. However Melancthon pointed out that the Greek word really meant "transformation of the heart." For Luther, a thick mist rolled from his eyes. Salvation was a matter of the heart and not a matter of the pronouncement of the church. From this time, Luther urged Melancthon to share in his research and Melancthon inspired Luther in the standard of Bible translation that he would apply to his teaching and to the German Bible that he would in time translate for the people.

Chapter IV

No doubt Melancthon's arrival and ensuing relationship provided a respite for Luther, but it was to be short lived for shortly after his arrival Luther's citation to appear in Augsburg arrived. The summons brought out a deep fear in Staupitz such that he was conflicted in advice. He wrote to Spalatin to encourage Luther "to not be frightened by the roaring of the lions," and he encouraged Luther to flee and seek asylum with him saying, "it appears to me, that the whole world is enraged and combined against the truth...abandon Wittenberg and we shall live and die together." Count Albert of Mansfeldt echoed Staupitz's sentiments.

But nothing could frighten him. In response to his summons, without the promise of safe conduct, Luther set out on foot for Augsburg. Pausing briefly at Nuremberg to borrow a cloak from his good friend Wenceslas Link, preacher at Nuremberg, Luther proceeded on under the motto, "Let Christ live; let Luther die."

Link and good friend Leonard could not bear to let Luther continue alone so they set out with him and provided support when Luther, exhausted by the trip fell ill with violent pains in his stomach as he was nearing Augsburg. In great alarm the two friends hired a wagon and brought Luther into the city on the evening of 7 October, 1518.

Chapter V

Immediately upon entering the city of Augsburg Luther insisted that Link go pay his respects to the papal legate and announce his arrival in the city. At the same time as Link went to De Vio, Leonard went to inform Staupitz of their arrival.

James De Vio, surnamed Cajetan, was to judge Luther's case. De Vio, born in 1469, showed great promise from his youth. At sixteen he joined the Dominican order and soon became the general of his order and cardinal in the Roman church. Changing his name to Thomas in honor of the famous Aquinas, De Vio became one of the most zealous defenders of scholastic theology. Thus the contrasts were defined and the stage was set for the conflict of opposites in Luther's trial.

Cajetan's hands were tied even though he determined to deal kindly with Luther. Since Martin had already been declared a heretic the legate must send him to prison or excommunicate him should he escape. In preparation for the hearing, Cajetan sent the Italian courtier Serra Longa to meet with Luther. "I am come to offer you good advice," Longa began and he endeavored to persuade Luther to submit to the legate and retract his doctrine, his oaths and his theses. With the preparations concluded Longa departed and Luther was met by numerous other visitors who implored him to seek the granting of safe conduct before he appear. When Serra Longa made his second visit, Luther presented the requests of his supporters and demanded safe conduct before he responded to the legate's summons.

Longa tried to dissuade Luther with words of assurance regarding the legate's benevolence and kindly disposition. When this did not produce the desired result Longa turned indignant and demanded that the whole matter could be settled with six letters: "Revoca," retract. They parted on this impasse and Longa did not visit Luther again.

Chapter VI

While Longa was prepping Luther, Martin's friends were appealing to the emperor, who was hunting in the area, to grant safe conduct, which at length he agreed to do. With this protection in hand, Luther was now ready to appear before the legate Cajetan. Accompanied by Link and one from the Augustinian order Luther, in accordance with the instruction given by Serra Longa, prostrated himself in submission before the legate.

Confident of Luther's submission the cardinal set forth three articles demanded by the pope: first, that Luther retract his errors; second, that he promise to abstain from them in the future; and third that he bind himself to greater moderation. In response Luther requested to see the papal articles, which was refused.

"Condescend then to show me my errors," Luther pleaded. "Most dear son! Here are two propositions that you have advanced and which you must retract... 1st, the treasure of indulgences does not consist of the suffering and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ; 2nd the man who received the holy sacrament must have faith in the grace that is presented to him." So it is seen that the position of Rome was that the pope granted both forgiveness and grace, a point which Luther could not accede. Cajetan continued his refutation affirming that he would rely entirely upon Scripture as Luther requested but immediately broke from that by appealing to the *Extravagance* of Clement VI.

Of course Luther rejected that defense to which Cajetan replied that the pope had "power and authority over such things." "Except Scripture!" Luther asserted. "Do you not know that the pope is above the councils," replied De Vio, and so the debate continued.

Chapter VII

The next day the parties appeared for a second interview. In the meantime, Staupitz had stopped into encourage Luther to bear constantly in mind that Luther began these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the customary greetings Luther began his reply to the charges levied against him. He first affirmed his loyalty to the Roman church. He acknowledged that he, a mere man, may have erred in his articles and he implored the cardinal to show him his errors. To demonstrate his willingness to be corrected Luther appealed to have his articles transmitted to universities in Basle, Friburg, Louvain and Paris so that they might be studied and he might be shown his error.

The legate was put off by this protest and dismissed it as unnecessary. "I have no desire to dispute with you either privately or publicly," the cardinal replied and then he launched into a speech on the importance of retracting. Empowered by the presence of witnesses De Vio reverted to his emphasis on the two fundamental errors of indulgences and faith at the sacrament. No less than ten times Luther tried to speak but the legate continued to speak and overwhelm him with threats. "Pray, allow brother Martin time to reply to you," Staupitz implored him, but De Vio continued to quote the *Extravagances* and the opinions of Thomas Aquinas.

Since he was not permitted to speak Luther begged that he might submit a written reply, which Staupitz seconded and several spectators threw in their support. At length Cajetan consented and the meeting broke up.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Four: Luther Before the Legate. May to December 1518

Chapter VIII

Friday, October 14, Luther returned to the cardinal and the great crowd with his written reply.

“You attack me on two points. First, you oppose to me the constitution of pope Clement VI, in which it is said that the treasure of indulgences is the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the saints – which I deny in my theses.

“Panormitanus [Ives of the 11thc] declares in his first book that in whatever concerns the holy faith, not only a general council, but still further, each believer, is above the pope, if he can bring forward the declarations of Scripture and allege better reasons than the pope...

“My greatest cause of grief ...is that this constitution contains doctrines entirely at variance with the truth. It declares that the merits of the saints are a treasure, while the whole of Scripture bears witness that God rewards us far more richly than we deserve...thus the saints are not saved by their merits, but solely by God’s mercy, as I have declared...the merits of Jesus Christ are not a treasure of indulgence...but of grace...”

“I affirm,” said he, coming to the second article, “that no man can be justified before God if he has not faith...the faith of the righteous is his righteousness and his life.

“You have indulged in useless verbiage,” De Vio replied, then with an air of contempt he flung Luther’s protest aside and he began to exclaim with all his might that Luther ought to retract. The cardinal again appealed to *the Extravagances* of Clement VI and claimed, as on the previous day, the sole right of speaking.

Finally, Luther broke in, “if it can be proved by this constitution that the treasury of indulgences is the very merits of Jesus Christ, I consent to retract.” The Italian crowd and cardinal were beside themselves. Luther was had! The cardinal read with panting eagerness and at last came to the words, “The Lord Jesus has acquired this treasure by his sufferings.”

“Christ has acquired a treasure by his merits,” Luther interrupted. “The merits are not therefore the treasure; for so to speak, the cause and effect are very different matters...this constitution which you invoke with so much noise testifies with me to the truth I proclaim.”

De Vio held the book in his hands and could make no reply except, “Retract, retract!”

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Four: Luther Before the Legate. May to December 1518

Chapter IX

Luther and De Vio did not meet again in assembly. But the impact of their meeting was profound and De Vio himself had been personally affected. The theologians of Rome beheld in surprise and discontent the sentiments he advanced on justification in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. He who shouted, "recant, recant," repeatedly changed his views and he indirectly recanted.

With the meetings going poorly, at length, the legate Cajetan appealed to Staupitz to prevail upon Luther to retract. The vicar-general met with Luther to persuade him to come to some arrangement. "Refute then, the declarations of Scripture that I have advanced," Luther replied. "It is beyond my ability," declared Staupitz. "Well, then, it is beyond my conscience," said Luther and another stalemate was reached. Staupitz did not persist, he only informed Luther that the cardinal had consented to declare in writing the points that he must retract.

The next day Luther waited for the articles the legate was to send him. When nothing appeared he sent his friend Link to call upon the cardinal. De Vio received Link warmly and said, "I no longer regard Luther as a heretic. I will not excommunicate him at this time." Then to show his intention he said, "If Doctor Luther would only retract what concerns indulgences the matter would soon be finished; for as to what concerns faith in the sacraments it is an article that each one may understand and interpret in his own fashion." Upon recording these remarks Spalatin commented that this showed clearly that Rome looked to money rather than to faith.

With nothing resolved Luther drafted a letter of departure and he arranged for the letter to be delivered to Cajetan two days after he left the city in secret with the aid of a magistrate appointed police officer as companion.

Chapter X

Luther and his guide continued their flight from Augsburg recalling the similar manner in which John Huss was caught and had his safe conduct revoked for fleeing. But the open country soon quieted his soul as he comforted himself in the knowledge of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. Reaching Nuremberg Luther again met up with Staupitz who was visiting the convents of his order and there, for the first time he saw the articles drawn up against him by Pope Leo X. "It is impossible to believe that anything so monstrous could have proceeded from any sovereign pontiff," he declared.

De Vio did not wait long after learning of Luther's departure to pour out his indignation upon Frederick the elector. "I beg your highness," he stated, "to send him to Rome or expel him from your states."

A few days later Frederick replied, "Since Doctor Luther appeared before you at Augsburg you should be satisfied. We did not expect that you would endeavor to make him retract without having convinced him of his errors," and in this way the prince refused Cajetan's request. Upon hearing this news, Luther was filled with joy. He wrote to Spalatin that he read the letter again and again with great delight.

Chapter XI

With rumors and conflict surrounding him Luther imagined that he might be expelled from Germany. France seemed a likely escape since the faculty at Paris enjoyed such freedom although Spalatin cautioned him about this move. In light of imminent flight Martin Luther determined that he would publish his report on the Augsburg conference as a testimony to the struggle between him and Rome.

At last the sad news arrived. Frederick informed Luther that he wished him to leave Wittenberg. Luther was crestfallen. Never was he lower than this moment. But shortly a new messenger arrived and Luther is given a new order. He is permitted to remain, and more, Frederick would like to meet him in Lichtenberg to have a personal conversation with him.

Meanwhile, Rome was very displeased with cardinal Cajetan. Many thought he was clumsy in the affair and some even thought that he should have tried to allure Luther with a cardinal's hat instead of debating him. The pope however, resolved to pursue another course. Since Luther professed submission to Rome he would lead him in that submission by commissioning a papal bull to be published in Germany. The bull would confirm the doctrine of indulgences precisely in the points attacked. In this way Luther would have to keep his word and submit or show himself openly as a disturber of the peace.

Cardinal De Vio published the decree at Lintz, Austria on December 13, 1518. But Luther had already placed himself beyond the reach and authority of the bull. On November 28 in the Chapel of *Corpus Christi* Luther had publicly to a general council of the church.

Chapter I

Contrary to what one might think, Luther's appeal to a general council put him in greater danger of excommunication. Pope Pius II had issued a bull stating that anyone, even an emperor himself would receive "greater excommunication" for the revolt of appealing to a general council of the church. But Leo X for inexplicable reasons other than the hand of God was inclined to mildness and moderation – for a time.

To seek the favor of Elector Frederick and his court, Leo sent a new envoy, Charles of Miltitz with the coveted annual award of a golden rose blessed by the pope himself. To his surprise upon arrival in Germany every three of four people he met were followers of Martin Luther. Even though he was armed with the favors of more than seventy apostolic briefs from the pope Miltitz found his task suddenly more difficult when Emperor Maximilian died and Frederick became the administrator of the empire. Hence, Frederick no longer had need of or fear of the papal nuncios.

Miltitz began his tour of Saxony with a visit to his old friend Spalatin who immediately refuted every attack upon Luther with equal complaints against Tetzl. Miltitz was astonished at the reports and summoned Tetzl to a hearing. However, Tetzl refused to appear, marking a stark contrast to the summons laid before Luther.

Luther and Miltitz met for informal discussions at Spalatin's home and agreed upon a truce in which both parties were forbidden to advance the discussion against the other in any way and Luther offered to clarify his views in a letter to Leo X. In this letter Luther affirmed that he was not opposed to the papacy or warring against its forms but he was merely arguing a positive doctrine of Christ and His Word. Independently from Luther, Frobenius, printer at Basle published a collection of Luther's writings and distributed throughout Europe.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Five: The Leipsic Disputation, 1519

Chapter II

With the news of the reformation spreading far and wide and being translated into French and Spanish, Luther's old friend Doctor John Eck broke the truce. Eck had distinguished himself as the foremost debater of the day with victories in eight universities. He had little fear for the "little monk that had become a giant."

The context for the breach occurred through some sparring between Carlstadt and Eck. In the guise of attacking Carlstadt, Dr Eck composed thirteen theses aimed squarely at the teaching of Martin Luther. Carlstadt refuted these theses and the two agreed to hold a public discussion at Leipsic. Luther petitioned Duke George for permission to participate but was denied, except in the role of a spectator or advisor to Carlstadt.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Five: The Leipsic Disputation, 1519

Chapter III

The participants arrived in Leipsic amid great pomp and pageantry; except for Carlstadt, whose carriage lost a wheel at the gate of the city sending him careening to roll in the mud – which was interpreted by the city as a poor omen. On June 25 the debate began as the regulations were issued and immediately disputed for bias.

Luther himself threatened to withdraw when it was determined that all documents had to pass before the pope as judge before they could be printed. Luther argued for the view that the people should be the judges and be permitted to form their own opinion. Nonetheless the discussion proceeded under protest.

Chapter IV

The discussion began with a notable spirit of unity as all participants humbled themselves before God and sang *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, (Come Holy Spirit). For seventeen days the discussion raged and finally concluded as an inevitably divided assembly. The semblance of unity gave way to the reality of irreconcilable differences. With notes and books banned the combat opened with a discussion on the will of man and Carlstadt was invited to begin.

“Man’s will, before his conversion,” said Carlstadt, “can perform no good work; every good work comes entirely and exclusively from God who gives man first the will to do, and then the power of accomplishing.”

Dr Eck countered with the doctrine of *merit of congruity* in which he affirmed that the natural powers of mankind were not destroyed by sin, but inhibited as by an obstacle, which when removed permits the action of human powers again. But when pressed Eck affirmed, “I grant that the will has not the power of doing a good work, and that it receives this power from God.”

The two further agreed that the will of man is entirely passive and that the first impulse of man’s conversion must proceed from God. They also agreed that after the first impulse is created by God something in man is required of man. But the two disagreed on the source of the consent of man; Carlstadt affirmed that God created it anew, while Eck held that it came partly from God and partly from man.

Eck, then argued, that the reformers were making man a stone, to which the Luther, Melancthon and Carlstadt replied that the gift of God of a new heart and new spirit made man for the first time, truly alive and truly free.

Chapter V

The fourth day of the debate began with a discussion on the head of the church, and Eck proposed that the pope was the rightful head of the church while Luther affirmed that Christ Himself is the head for He alone is the ruling King. Luther proceeded to discuss the nature of the Kingdom and he refuted all who “banished Christ to the Church triumphant in heaven,” while affirming that the kingdom is a present kingdom beheld by faith. This was Luther’s first argument in the debate since he had been banned until this point. All attempts by his colleagues to permit involvement were rebuffed until Eck himself petitioned the Duke saying that he needed to chop off the head to be effective. At length the Duke agreed.

John Eck refused to yield and insisted upon the primacy of the pope. In rebuttal Luther pointed to the Greek Church as part of the true Church but not under the pope; and second he appealed to the Council of Africa in which it was decreed that, “the bishop of the first see shall neither be called prince or pontiff nor sovereign pontiff, nor by any other name of that kind, but only bishop of the first see.” Eck feigned ignorance of the subtle distinctions in title and professed that the pope held office by divine right regardless of the council’s affirmation. Luther simply rebutted that divine right looked to Christ as the only foundation and Head of the Church.

Perhaps Eck was cognizant of some loss of status so he resorted to an ethnic *ad hominem* linking Luther with the Bohemian Huss. Luther then shocked the entire assembly by agreeing. He agreed with Huss that there is only one universal church and that it was not necessary to hold to the supremacy of Rome to obtain salvation. “It is of little consequence to me whether these things were said by Wickliffe or by Huss, they are the truth,” he declared. Amazing, in a catholic assembly, those previously banned and even killed as heretics were now affirmed as orthodox causing Duke George and all, great alarm.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Five: The Leipsic Disputation, 1519

Chapter VI

The Leipsic discussion closed with both sides claiming victory. In his private letter, however, to Hochstraten on July 24, 1519, Dr Eck confessed, "The Wittembergers conquered me on several points..." Meanwhile, in public, Eck proclaimed and modeled his great victory with all manner of show and revelry. D'Aubigne agreed that there was not a clear winner so he examined the lives of several witnesses to discern the impact of the discussion.

Polinder, Doctor Eck's personal secretary and friend was persuaded by the reformation view at the Leipsic discussions and became a Gospel minister there. John Cellarius, the Hebrew professor at the University of Leipsic resigned his position and studied under Luther at Wittemberg. Even children were impacted by the debate. Twelve year old Prince George of Anhalt attended the discussions and decided partially for Luther. Later he yielded more fully (to the delight of his mother) and denied a bishop's position in order to affirm reformation truths.

Most notably, however, was the effect of Leipsic upon Luther and Melancthon. The latter sat listening silently and giving quiet advice, but there he heard the call and shifted his focus from literature to theology for the rest of his life. Luther himself affirmed, "The scales of scholastic theology fell entirely from my eyes." Searching the annals of the church he discovered that the supremacy of Rome had no origin other than their own ambition. Luther regarded the Latin church as something different from the true church and he affirmed the teachings of Huss as doctrines that he taught, "without being aware of it."

"Learn from me," declared Luther, "I had been seven years reading and publicly explaining the scriptures...I had the first fruits of knowledge and faith...I even maintained that the pope is not the head of the church by Divine right. And yet, I could not see the consequences that flowed from this, namely that the pope is necessarily and certainly of the devil..."

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Five: The Leipsic Disputation, 1519

Chapter VII

Not only was Luther under attack, but Dr Eck turned his venom against Melancthon, “that grammarian of Wittemberg.” Melancthon replied and laid down the fundamental principles of hermeneutics. He showed that one ought not to “interpret Scripture by the Fathers but the Fathers by the Scripture.”

“The meaning of scripture,” said he, “is one and simple, like heavenly truth itself. It is obtained by comparing scripture with scripture: it is deduced from the thread and connection of the discourse...(and) scripture brings all human opinions and maxims to it, as to a touchstone by which to try them.”

To press his point, Melancthon uses Luther as his example as one who does not follow ambiguous explanations of the ancients but one who understands the message of the Word and believes in the Fathers because he believes in Scripture.

But not all defended Luther so faithfully. Many new friends and enemies were springing up while old friends were deserting him. Even his old friend Staupitz who discovered him in a cloister and brought him from obscurity turned cool in his relationship. “You abandon me,” wrote Luther, and he continued to write of groaning in bitter tears as a weaned child crying after his mother. But Luther had risen to a level of opposition against Rome that Staupitz could not rise.

Chapter VIII

Luther could not retreat and seemingly advanced daily. It was at this time that he published his commentary on Galatians in which he expounded with great power, the doctrine of justification by faith. He affirmed that there is no salvation for men out of Christ and stressed that this salvation proceeds to transform men and makes them abound in good works.

“I should like to know,” said Luther, in attacking the papacy, “what part of scripture the power of canonizing the saints is given to the popes...and what utility is there in canonizing them...for that matter, let us canonize them as much as they like,” he sarcastically concluded.

From this, Luther turned to the Lord's Supper and he indicated three things that must be observed: first, the sign, which should be outward and visible; second, the thing signified, which is inward and spiritual in the mind of men; and thirdly, faith, which is present in both. “There is no closer, deeper, or more indivisible union than that which takes place between the food and the body which the food nourishes. Christ is so united to us in the sacrament that he acts as if he were ourselves. Our sins assail him; his righteousness defends us.”

Conflict continued and some urged moderation, but Luther defended himself saying, “too much folly is displeasing to men, but too much discretion is displeasing to God. The Gospel cannot be defended without tumult and without scandal. The Word of God is a sword...”

Finally, to Spalatin, Luther said by way of encouragement, “Why should you imagine that Christ will advance His cause by peace? Did not He fight with His own blood, and all the martyrs after Him?” [Aside – and why should we think it any easier today than the day of Christ, or the martyrs or the Reformers?]

Chapter I

Once again, D'Aubigne reminds us of the hand of God in the reformation story as he introduces the transition of imperial power from Maximilian to his grandson Charles, the most powerful monarch since Charlemagne. In raising this monarch, God showed that the reformation was not being advanced by the effort of man alone. If a friend of Luther, such as Frederick had ascended to the throne, the success of the reformation might have been ascribed to his protection. On the other hand a weak monarch might have allowed the triumph of the reformation to be attributed to the weakness of the monarch. But in Charles, a new actor appeared and he opposed the reformation as the sighs of a lowly monk.

Three kings claimed the throne upon Maximilian's death. Charles the grandson, just nineteen years old and made heir by the passing of his own father now possessed the states of Austria and he hungered for more. Francis I, King of France was the second to candidate. Francis argued that he was already a ruling member of the empire and that should account for more than hereditary succession. Henry VIII of England staked the third claim, but he soon withdrew from consideration.

The electors were not favorably disposed toward either candidate and pressure was put upon Frederick to reconsider. Fearing the influence of either King, the pope too lobbied among the electors to choose one of themselves. However, Frederick feared greatly the power of the Turks at their border and urged the selection of a strong emperor. On 28 June 1510 Charles was nominated emperor. Frederick summed up the sentiment of the electors saying, "God has given him to us in His favor and in His anger.

Chapter II

Before Charles left Spain for his coronation Martin Luther wrote him a letter to bring to the attention of the king of the earth that which was appearing before the Majesty of heaven. Luther appealed to the divine authority of the sword entrusted to Charles so that he would protect the cause of eternal truth. However, the letter received no reply.

While Luther was appealing to Madrid, trouble was brewing closer to home. Hochstraten intensified his persecution and demanded that the universities of Cologne and Louvain condemn the writings of Luther which they did. In Rome, Valentine Teutleben, vicar to the Archbishop of Mentz had been appointed as Saxony's representative at the papal court. Teutleben expressed shame at the protection awarded Luther on the part of the Elector of Saxony. To which Frederick replied that he had always let Luther defend himself. But neither would he be bullied, so Frederick pointed to the benefit of Luther's influences in saying, "Germany now possesses a number of learned men, well taught in every language and science, and the laity themselves begin to have understanding, and to love the Holy Scriptures."

It was these lowly laymen that proved to be Luther's greatest defense. As the persecutions increased and Luther feared for his life a great multitude recognized that they had seen the light in the writings of the humble doctor and they committed themselves to his safety.

This was the context in which Luther penned what in his judgment was "the best I ever published." The publication was a sermon dedicated to Duke John, Frederick's brother, on the subject of justification by faith. With all the Roman emphasis upon works Luther affirmed that faith is the noblest of all works from which all things proceed. He also proclaimed that faith is the healing of the sick man that enables his life and limbs. "Where then can we find this faith?" he then asked, "Faith comes solely from Jesus Christ who promised and gives freely."

Chapter III

The emphasis upon meritorious works was not the only evil identified in the church, but a haughty spirit had arisen in the shepherds of the flock, reminding us of D'Aubigne's instruction that the distinction of doctrine and the ministers that so blessed the early church were being lost in the fifteenth century. "The time to be silent is past," he exclaimed, "we must unveil the mysteries of the Antichrist," and Luther published his *Appeal to his Imperial Majesty and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation on the Reformation of Christianity*. The Romans have raised three walls of protection, he alleged. They have asserted that there is no authority over them, second they assert that no one may interpret Scripture except the pope, and finally, they claim protection against church councils for no one except the pope may call one.

Luther began his attack by highlighting the new caste system of the church by pointing out that office or laity only differ in function and not status. Second, Luther attacked the pope as a shameful regent of Christ by his lifestyle that exceeds the magnificence of all emperors. In the attack upon indulgences Luther called all who participate with them partners with thieves and decapitate highway robbers. Luther, further called for the expelling the papal legates from Germany. In their place he called for local town pastors or bishops who be permitted to marry and settle down in the cities they serve.

Luther next turned his attention to the universities, "I am afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and in engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount." [Aside – thus, Luther's strong emphasis upon Christian Education, from day school through university] The appeal caught fire, thousands of copies were sold and a powerful sensation was produced in the people.

Chapter IV

For years monks had been clamoring for action and accusing Leo X of caring for only pleasure and luxury. Concern was expressed that Luther was gaining too much influence. For example, an obscure monk whose testimony is preserved in the letter of a Roman citizen declared, "You should know, that in Rome there is scarcely an individual, at least among men of sound judgment, who is not aware, that in many respects Luther speaks the truth."

Dr Eck argued passionately to waken Leo, "It is unbecoming the dignity of the Roman pontiff, to give a reason to every little wretch that presumes to raise his head," appealed Eck. It was in defense of the dignity of the pope that the fate of Huss had been decided and Reuchlin discredited and now this pressure was applied to Luther. Leo listened by still remained passive.

The universities of Cologne, Louvain, and several others urged action and the balance against Luther was finally tipped by a private banker and the treasurer of the indulgences, Fugger of Augsburg. "Employ forces against Luther," said he, "and I will promise you the support of several princes." Now, Fugger had Leo's attention. Awakened, Leo acted swiftly.

All of Rome was surging forward toward the publication of a papal bull, but one stepped forward to employ every means to halt this action. This lone voice was Ulrich Zwingli [sic], child of the Swiss Reformation. He had no fear for himself, but Zwingli's great fear was for the Christian Church, if such a formidable blow should strike the reformer. He endeavored to persuade the representatives of Rome to enlighten the pope, and to employ all means to prevent Luther's excommunication. In the end, however, a final conference was held with Eck and De Vio in attendance after which the pope pronounced numerous excommunications and maledictions against Luther.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Six: The Papal Bull. 1520

Chapter V

Far from Rome the scene was more tranquil at Wittenberg. Melancthon was diffusing a brilliant light to fifteen hundred to two thousand auditors from Germany, England, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary and Greece. Only twenty four years old and not yet ordained to the ministry, all were delighted by the young scholar's presentations.

With no time to look after his personal interests, his friends, followed Luther's advice and determined to find a spouse for Philip. They settled upon Catherine Krapp, a sensible daughter of the local burgomaster. Melancthon, reportedly, received Catherine coolly but submitted to the idea if it should be God's will. On September 25 they were united in marriage and Philip was soon won over by his wife's affections, professing later that no where did he was never happier than when he was with Catherine and his children.

Learning remained Melancthon's passion and his writing bore the scent of antiquity because of the influence of his study of Homer, Plato, Cicero and Pliny. But the strongest influence was clearly expressed in Melancthon's desire to be completely mastered by Christ as his God. Adapting Cicero's words Melancthon advised Luther by saying, "without Christ we can do nothing...this passage signifies that we must be absorbed in Christ, so that we ourselves no longer act, but Christ lives in us. As the Divine nature was incorporated with the human in the person of Christ, so man must be incorporated with Jesus Christ by faith...By our example we must excite youth to the admiration of learning and induce them to love it for its own sake." No wonder Luther clung so closely to this friend and advisor.

Chapter VI

Rumors of Luther's condemnation continued to abound but the bull had not yet arrived in Germany. Fearing the worst, Luther called for more, "Living Books, that is preachers that we could multiply...in order that they might convey to the people a knowledge of holy things."

While Luther did not succeed, at first, in his mission to distant countries he became more zealous in announcing it himself. In Wittemberg he preached a sermon on the danger of the mass. He began by attacking the mass as a repeated sacrifice, then he attacked the understanding that there was some inherent virtue in the mass itself, and he concluded by proclaiming that the promises of the Word of God are the most precious parts of the sacraments. "Without faith in these promises," he affirmed, "the sacrament is dead."

Missionaries notwithstanding Luther had the printing press. Encouraged by the response to his sermon on the mass Luther published his greatest attack upon Rome, October 6, 1520 entitled, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. He thanked Prierio and Eck for insisting upon the Divine right of the pope which helped him see that the papacy is none other than the kingdom of Babylon. He invited his followers to burn all his books and replace them with one phrase, "*the papacy is a vigorous chase led by the Roman bishop to catch and destroy souls.*"

If this wasn't enough to lay the gauntlet, Luther turned to the sacraments which he reduced from seven to three: baptism, Lord's Supper and penance. Fearing that his emphasis upon faith would be used against him in his understanding of baptism applied to infants Luther preempted the attack saying, "as the Word of God is mighty to change a wicked man who is no less ignorant or deaf than a child...in like manner with the prayers of the church all things are possible..." In his view, God alone created faith and He poured it into the hearts renewing them.

Chapter VII

Five weeks before the publication of the *Babylonian Captivity* the general chapter of the Augustinian monks met at Eisleben. After decades of faithful service Staupitz resigned as the vicar general and Luther's friend from the defense at Augsburg, Wenceslas Link, was appointed in his place. Having been released from his vows by Staupitz to protect the order Luther attended as a visitor. But he was not alone. Cardinal Miltiz also came to make a presentation. Miltiz eager desired to have Luther reconcile with the pope and he appealed to the assembly to impose upon Luther to not compromise the dignity of the order. "We have nothing to do with the doctor," replied the fathers, thus showing the wisdom of Staupitz's earlier action in urging releasing Luther from his monastic vows. Nonetheless the assembly was persuaded by Miltiz such that they implored Luther to write the pope and seek amends.

"I shall write in conformity with the truth," Luther replied and he produced a twofold product. First, he published the *Babylonian Captivity* and next he wrote the pope directly calling Rome a "most licentious den of robbers, the most shameless of all brothels...in which the Antichrist himself could not increase its wickedness." At the same time, Luther expressed affection for Leo as a lamb in the lions. He implored Leo to recognize that faith unites the soul to Christ as a wife to her husband. He begged him to see that Rome could not remove sin because all sin in the believing person is bound to Christ as His property and thus removed entirely. Thus, by means of faith, the soul is delivered from every sin and clothed with the eternal righteousness of Jesus Christ.

From this faith, Luther continued in what has been published as his discourse, *On Christian Liberty*, the Christian is free from all works and burdens so that he may love God and volunteer to be His slave.

Chapter VIII

While Luther was publishing his attacks against Rome, the papal bull that would anathematize him was making its way to the German chiefs. The outcome had appeared uncertain but Fugger, the indulgence treasurer and now labeled, “the king of the crowns” used his influence and money to persuade the princes to accept the bull and reject Luther.

Fugger and Eck as a team were called by some “the most worthy pair of ambassadors.” However, Eck did not want to share the glory and considered that he alone should be the Atlas upon whose shoulders the world should rest.

Therefore, the Doctor Eck, as Chancellor of Ingolstadt, made haste to Saxony to exert the influence of his title. He succeeded in posting the bull at Meissen, Merseburg and Brandenburg towards the latter part of September. However, it was often posted where it was never seen and Duke George forbade its posting at Leipsic. A band of students noticed the bull and posted placards in opposition. Then they created a ballad about Eck and drove him to seek asylum at St Paul's where Tetzel, himself sought refuge. One night he escaped Leipsic and hid at Coburg. Cardinal Miltitz so delighted in hearing this tale that he celebrated heavily, fell into the Rhine, and was drowned.

Luther and Carlstadt both condemned the bull and Ulrich Zwingli again rose to Luther's defense. Before he could have read Luther's responses, Zwingli called the pope a heretic, schismatic and the antichrist. He pointed out that no one had refuted Luther or proven his error. While Luther was pleading for discussion he only got condemnation. The solution, said Zwingli, lied in a council of learned men and pure doctrine who would meet in discussion under the authority of the Kings of England, Spain and Hungary or their arbitrators. But the outcry produced no response.

Chapter IX

With all defenses falling upon deaf ears there was great fear for Luther. Who could stand against so formidable a foe as the pontiff of Christendom and the emperor of the West? Luther confessed that he did not know what would happen to him. "It is a little matter to die for the Word," he acknowledged, "since this Word, which was made flesh for us, died itself at first."

October 3, 1520, Luther received official word of the papal bull. His first response was to proclaim it as false. He said that he despised it and attacked it as worthy of Eck alone. He called for Charles V to rise and "act like a man." Many wondered if Luther would stand firm.

The answer for the curious arrived on November 4 when Luther published a treatise, *Against the Bull of Antichrist*. He dismissed the lies of the pope. He agreed that all his works should be burned for his desire was only to lead people into the Bible anyway and he reasoned that his works might prevent direct Bible study. Thirdly, Luther condemned the propositions on forgiveness and affirmed the articles of the Apostle's Creed stating that he believed in the Holy Ghost, the Catholic Church and the forgiveness of sins as testimony to forgiveness on the basis of faith alone.

Eck, now pressed the attack. Emboldened by Charles' statement that he would protect the old religion, the chancellor determined that he would bring the wretched grammarians to their senses. [Aside – note the titles applied to the reformers. Even the opposition acknowledged that they were men of the Word who paid attention to the text]

As a magistrate for the church Eck sought in the Netherlands, but Margaret as governor advised him to gather the learned and write their opinion of their learned writings opposed to those of the ignorant monk they feared so the world could judge in comparison. Similarly, the Count of Nassau urged the Roman scholars to preach the Gospel with the same purity as Luther.

Chapter X

The pope had put Luther under the ban of the church and Luther determined that he would put the pope under the ban of Christendom. On November 17 he summoned a notary and five witnesses to lodge his official appeal.

First, Luther condemned the pope as unjust and rash for condemning him without a hearing and reasons for judgment. Second, Luther called the pope a heretic who misunderstood and thus was condemned by the Scriptures. Third, he labeled the pope the antichrist and an oppressor of Scripture who sets his words above the Word of God. Finally, Luther branded the pope as a blasphemer of the Church and he called for all rulers and communities to adhere to his protest and abandon the Roman church.

A few weeks later, on December 10, Luther posted placards inviting people to an assembly at which he, in response to the burning of his works, publicly burned a copies of *Canon Law*, *Decretals* and the papal bull! Shortly after this action, Luther proclaimed in his classroom that all who do not contend against the impious government of the pope are outside salvation.

Luther's logic in his refutation reasoned that all doctors endeavored to prove their writings by Scripture, it must be held that Scripture is clearer and surer than the writings of the learned men. Luther also retracted all previous negative statements regarding John Huss and declared, "I now say that not a few articles, but all the articles of John Huss are wholly Christian. By condemning John Huss, the pope has condemned the Gospel...if Peter himself were sitting at Rome, I should deny that he was the pope by divine appointment." In this way Luther broadened his attack from a personal attack upon Leo X to an attack upon the papacy and all those of previous generations who promoted the system that led to the hierarchy and tyranny of Rome in the 16th century.

Chapter XI

The governors of the west and their advisors were occupied with the coronation of Charles V at Aix-la-Chapelle, into the void stepped two strangers serving as papal nuncios, Marino Caraccioli and Jerome Aleander. The latter had been selected for his particular skill as the most "learned man of the age." While Eck was the champion of the schools, Aleander was the ambassador of the court of the pontiff. He and Caraccioli immediately set about the work of having all the works of Luther collected and burned.

Surprisingly, Charles, the "defender of the old religion," provided the moderating voice, "Do you imagine that the doctrine of Luther is only found in those books?" he asked. "They are written where you cannot reach them, in the hearts of the nations. If you desire to employ force, it must be that of countless swords unsheathed to massacre a whole nation." [Aside – and that is exactly what Charles did in later years.]

Aleander appealed to the masses to recognize that unity with Luther meant separation from Jesus Christ. Thus people were urged to burn the writings of Luther and inflict upon him the punishment he deserved. In Frederick's court, John Frederick, son of Duke George and Frederick's nephew wrote to his uncle on behalf of Luther. Spalatin also used his office to seek the favor of the Elector on Luther's behalf. In time Frederick acquiesced and pointed out that neither the imperial majesty nor any other had shown that Luther's writings were in error so he requested safe conduct for Luther to appear before a tribunal of learned, pious and impartial judges. Still seeking advice, Frederick invited Erasmus to visit him. In unusual frankness, Erasmus summarized the dispute as the hatred of the monks toward learning and fear of loss of status.

Chapter XII

Even with its famed opposition, it was not the bull that was influencing the people of Europe. The greatest army against Luther turned out to be priests who sought to use the confessional to discern if people owned and agreed with the works of Luther – in which case they would deny the pronouncement of absolution.

Upon hearing of this abuse of office, Luther became livid and he published an address to the penitents. He advised the people to remind their priests that they were ordained as confessors and not inquisitors. He further urged that solace be sought in Christ as the true bishop and the people responded. Faith in the Word of God took the place of faith in the church. Hundreds of people gathered each day to hear the lectures of Luther and Melancthon and the two churches of Wittenburg were filled to the point that officials feared they would collapse.

However, not all rallied to Luther and some of those closest to him began to distance themselves from him. The pope had accused Staupitz and he appeared shaken. "I fear," wrote Luther to encourage him, "that by accepting the pope for judge, you seem to reject me and the doctrines I have maintained. If Christ loves you, he will constrain you to recall your letter...this is not a time to fear but to raise the voice...If you will not follow Jesus Christ I will walk alone, will advance alone, and alone will I carry the fortress."

All the religious elements were fermenting beneath the surface of society and the fire of enthusiasm urged souls to spring forward with courage both in this life. Providence was preparing and hurrying the nations.

Chapter I

Up to this point we have been charting the report of Luther's conflicts on behalf of reformation against Tetzel, against the Roman legate at Augsburg, against the learned at Leipsic, and against the pope in response to the papal bull. A final struggle lay before Luther that would bring the unleashing of the Word against the emperor of the West, the kings and princes of the local principalities. The first imperial diet of Charles V was scheduled for January, 1521 and dealing with the reformer was one of the items on the agenda.

Rome took this action very seriously and a personal letter recovered reported Rome's interest, "if these methods do not succeed, we shall depose the emperor; absolve the people from their obedience; elect another (and he will be one that suits us) in his place; stir up civil war among the Germans, as we have just done in Spain." [Aside – talk about indicting ones' self]

Rome continued to apply pressure through Aleander as delegate so that Charles would rule against Luther and support the pope. "Would it not be scandalous," said he, "to behold laymen examining anew a cause already condemned by the pope?" At first Charles assented and determined that the time for Luther's response elapsed since the monk already lay under papal excommunication. Upon receiving the news, Luther was grieved by his exclusion from the diet. Emboldened by the emperor's decision, Leo X issued a new bull to enact the excommunication of Luther and all his adherents!

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter II

Germany was never the center of Charles' interests but that did not mean that Rome was not interested in influencing Charles' mind on Germany and the reformation. Charles' confessor, a wily monk named John Glapio took it upon himself to execute the latest scheme in detaching Frederick from Luther. As soon as Charles became emperor, Glapio, added by the wealth and influence of Leo X, applied himself to the crushing of the reformation heresy.

Among Frederick's councilors was Gregory Bruck, also known as Pontannus, who served as Frederick's chancellor. Glapio turned his focus toward Pontannus to seek an audience with Frederick so that he could show him Luther's errors. The chancellor informed Glapio that the diet occupied all Frederick's time and beside, that he did not care to mix himself in the matter.

Irritated at being rebuffed, Glapio continued to attempt to persuade Pontannus in his influence upon Frederick. "Luther always desires to argue from the Bible," he reasoned, "and the Bible is like wax, you may stretch it and bend it as please. I would undertake to find in the Bible opinions more extravagant even than Luther's."

When this tack proved ineffective Glapio tried another snare, "What an excellent book is that of Luther's on Christian Liberty. What wisdom! What talent!...I have told the emperor that God would chastise him ..., if the Church...be not cleansed of all the stains that defile her. I added that God himself had sent Luther...Five years hence it will be seen what Charles has done for the reformation of the church." Thus Glapio tried to prevent Luther from Worms.

The public however, while they were ignorant of the deals being proposed, were outraged that Luther would be condemned by the emperor without having heard him. The emperor had hoped to publish an edict enacting the bull into law without opposition but that was not the case.

Chapter III

Aleander was appointed to present the case for an edict without discussion and he, as one of the most eloquent men of the day, was ready for the task. He marched to the assembly with great procession. Never had Rome been called to make a defense before so great a body. The nuncio laid out copies of all of Luther's works and the papal bulls, waiting silence to begin.

"He denies the Holy doctrines of the Church," Aleander stated regarding Luther. "He sins against the dead for he denies purgatory;...he sins against the Church, for he maintains that all Christians are priests;..."

Having attacked Luther on many points of doctrine he moved to his second topic, which was to justify Rome. Aleander pointed toward Luther's frequent appeals to be heard. But, he alleged, "Luther will not allow himself to be instructed by anyone. The pope has already summoned him to Rome and he did not comply. The pope cited him before the legate at Augsburg and he did not appear until he had procured safe conduct, that is to say, after the legate's hands were tied...I entreat you imperial Majesty...Perform your own duties! Let Luther's doctrines be interdicted by you...let his writings be burnt...The king of France has forbidden the introduction of Luther's doctrines into his kingdom...if the axe is not laid to the roots of this poisonous tree...then I see it overshadowing the heritage of the Church of Jesus..."

After three hours the nuncio was silent. A deep impression had been struck upon the assembly. Murmurs soon arose against Luther and his partisans. If Luther had been present or if any had risen to his defense the harangue would have been nullified. Nonetheless, it was a victory in appearance only. After a few days the first impressions dissipated and a few became more sympathetic toward Luther.

Chapter IV

Many still seemed strong and they were bent on sacrificing Luther when the least likely of defenders arose. Duke George of Saxony and a personal enemy of Luther rose to beseech the diet. "The diet," said he, "must not forget its grievances against the court of Rome. How many abuses have crept into our states?...All shame has been put aside, and their only object is money! Money! Money! So that the preachers who should teach the truth utter nothing but falsehoods...A general reform must be effected. An ecumenical council must be called to bring about this reform." In conclusion the Duke handed out a list of grievances that he had enumerated.

Even Luther had not spoken with greater force against the abuses of Rome. While both pointed to the error, Duke George was merely reactionary while Luther suggested the necessary repair. Both opposed indulgences while Luther pointed to the one true indulgence that comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Both pointed to excessive devotion to outward forms while Luther tried to restore the kingdom of the Holy Ghost in the sanctuary of the heart.

The assembly was stirred and the Duke's speech produced a great response. Other members of the diet brought forward their grievances too. At length the diet appointed a committee to draw up all the grievances and they were found to amount to a hundred and one.

Charles V was entreated by duty to effect a general reformation and to undertake all the accomplishments listed in the list produced at the diet. Neither he nor Alexander expected such a reaction, but his confessor Glapio caught the momentum and threatened him with the vengeance of heaven if he would reform the Church. The emperor immediately recalled the edict commanding the burning of Luther's books and delivered a provisional order for all such books to be delivered to the local magistrates pending the ruling of the diet. Yet Luther was still not summoned.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter V

Finally, the emperor determined that summoning Luther to the diet was the only way to terminate the attacks against Rome. Charles extended the order to appear without the provision of safe conduct. Not to be outdone, however, Frederick and Duke George of Saxony and Landgrave of Saxony through whose land Luther would have to travel, each gave the pledge of safe conduct. On March 6, 1521 the summons was issued.

Of historic significance, D'Aubigne notes that the summons conferred upon Luther the titles of "well-beloved, honorable and pious." These, pronounced by the emperor upon the man whom the head of the Church had excommunicated!

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter VI

Acknowledging the indifference of the emperor, the indignation of the pope and the fears of his friends, Luther urged his followers to pray not for him but for the Word of God. Knowing that he was being summoned to retract he told his followers that this was his retraction, "I said formerly that the pope was Christ's vicar; now I assert that he is our Lord's adversary, and the devil's apostle."

At this trying time, there arrived at Wittemberg another, who like Melancthon, would be Luther's friend for life. A popular teacher for sixteen of his thirty six years and a diligent student of Scripture named, Bugenhagen, perused Luther's *Captivity of Babylon*, and all previous opinions were changed. "The whole world is lying in thickest darkness. This man alone sees the light," he exclaimed and set out immediately to go learn from Luther at Wittemberg.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter VII

April 2, 1521 Luther bade farewell to his friends and set out for Worms. He commissioned Melancthon with the task of carrying out the reformation if he should not return. Shortly after departure, Luther was confronted with the gloomy prospects before him. Imperial messengers were going town to town, street by street posting the emperor's edict commanding that Luther's writings be given over to city magistrates.

At Weimar, Luther had an audience with Duke John, brother to Frederick the elector who invited him to preach. A Franciscan monk, John Voit, long time friend of Myconius heard the message and was converted. Two years later he became a professor of theology at Wittemberg.

Coming to Erfurth, Luther met Justus Jonas, rector of the university. As a young student, his thoughts had been toward Luther and the reformation. To travel with Luther seemed the surest way to learn from him, thus bringing together two doctors who would labor together until death. Upon returning from Worms, Jonas was elected provost of the Church of Wittemberg and appointed doctor of divinity. Of the reformers Melancthon said, "Pomeranus [that is Bugenhagen] is a critic, I am a dialectician, Jonas is an orator...full of beauty and eloquence,...but Luther surpasses us all."

Although forbidden to preach at Erfurth, on the Sunday after Easter the Church of the Augustine's was filled to overflowing in anticipation of Luther's address. The humble friar who used to close these church doors at night was given the privilege once again to preach.

Ascending the pulpit and opening the Bible, Luther read these words. *Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed them his hands and his side* (John 20:19-20). "Philosophers, doctors and writers have endeavored to teach men the way to obtain everlasting life, and they have not succeeded. I will not tell it to you," he began.

“There are two kinds of works, works not of ourselves and these are good; and our own works, and they are of little worth,” He continued. “But now I am going to tell you what is the true work. God has raised one man from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ, that He might destroy death and extirpate sin, and shut the gates of hell...Our Lord Jesus Christ said; *Peace be unto you, Behold my hands*, that is to say, Behold O man! It is I alone, who have taken away thy sin and ransomed thee; and now thou hast peace...we are justified by God’s work and not our own...Let us believe in the Gospel...” After proclaiming faith for justification Luther continued.

“Since God has so saved us, let us so order our works that they may be acceptable to Him.” He calls for the rich to administer to the necessities of the poor and for the poor to serve the rich acceptably. Summing up that labor rendered to benefit self is a pretention before God. In the whole of the sermon, there was not a word about himself and his journey or predicament. With the eyes of the world upon him, he had no thought for himself proving his servant heart.

Chapter VIII

Fearing for his life, Spalatin and Staupitz urged Luther to abandon the journey and not enter Worms. Luther, however, determined that he would continue “despite the gates of hell and the powers of the air,” and reached the city on April 16, 1521. Two thousand people accompanied him through the gates giving testimony to the eager expectation of his visit. To some he was a prodigy of wisdom, to others a monster of iniquity, but all longed to see him.

Wasting no time, the emperor summoned Luther to appear at 4:00 the next day. When the time arrived the crowd had grown to five thousand spectators so that soldiers could not bring him to the assembly without going through houses and private yards. The Diet consisted of two hundred and four princes, kings and members of the royal court. Luther's appearance itself was a victory over the papacy. He had been condemned, yet here he stood before a tribunal that had set itself above the pope in defiance of the pope's action in condemning Luther in the papal bull.

John ab Eck, not the theologian but the chancellor of the Archbishop of Treves rose to present the charges. First, Luther was asked to affirm the books that he had written. Second, he was asked if he was prepared to recant. Regarding the first, Luther affirmed that it was impossible to deny his works. As to the second, to give time for reflection, he asked for time to prepare an answer “without offending against the Word of God.”

Even though Martin was only granted one day and prohibited from making a written reply, the rumor mills turned quickly. Many thought Luther was conquered and would retract. Politicians urged him to retract doctrinal errors but not yield on comments against the pope. But Luther, himself confided in friends that he, with Christ's help, should not retract one fragment of his works. But Luther's determination was not without struggle. In his prayer that evening he acknowledged feeling as if he was giving himself to death as a servant of God he confessed that

he was having a struggle of faith. At one point he asked God if He was dead or just hiding and a bit later he asked where God had taken Himself because he felt so isolated and alone. Even in this crisis Luther comforted himself. His solace was not in his feeling of the presence of God but in the assurance of faith that had transformed his life. God could not be dead, nor could He be absent, although it felt that way to him; God had to be present with him for so He declared in His Word.

The next day Luther reappeared before the diet and presented a four part response to the question of recanting. In the first reply Luther acknowledged that he may have attacked the pope with more acrimony than befitting ecclesiastical office but he conjured his opponents to prove from the writings of prophets and the apostles that he had erred.

Upon a repeated appeal to retract his statements Luther gave what he considered to be his simple answer, "I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear that they have erred and contradicted each other." He continually affirmed that he could not retract and concluded with his famous declaration, "Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me! Amen!"

The council was thunderstruck. "If you do not retract," said the chancellor, "the emperor and the states will consult what course to adopt against an incorrigibly heretic." To this, Luther made his third answer to the diet, "May God be my helper; for I can retract nothing." After this Luther withdrew so the delegates could deliberate. When recalled he was instructed by the authority of the emperor to declare with a simple yes or no whether he might retract a portion. "I have no other reply than that which I have already made," Luther answered calmly. To the eyes of all, there was no hope. Luther had just said, "no" to the Church and the empire both.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter IX

On the following day, Friday, April 19, the emperor ordered a message read to the assembly that he had written with his own hand. Charles resolved to follow the tradition of his ancestors. He pointed out that the trouble was now raised by a single monk that he intended to banish and proceed against him by way of excommunications, by interdict and by every means possible to destroy him and his followers.

The delegates of the diet were not pleased, however. They believed that honor was expunged by the withdrawal of safe conduct given to Luther. The princes revolted and even those who opposed Luther stood with the body to not accede to the lawlessness of violating safe conduct. At length, Charles was persuaded; although he admitted at a time when he was near his death that he committed a great fault in permitting Luther to live.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter X

With direct action prevented, Charles sought a political solution and sent a delegation to Luther to try to exhort him fraternally. [Aside – Rome banned contact with Luther in the papal bull and wants him to be considered as cut off from the face of the earth, and the emperor is negotiating with him!] Luther Richard Greiffenklau, archbishop of Treves, had taken the task of mediator and sought resolution concerning Luther's comment upon the councils of the church. "I have not blamed all councils," Luther replied, "but only that of Constance, because by condemning this doctrine of John Huss, '*That the Christian Church is the assembly of all those who are predestined to salvation,*' it has condemned the article of our faith, *I believe in the Holy Catholic Church,* and the Word of God itself."

Richard then appealed to Luther to leave the decision to the emperor and to submit himself to him. But Luther replied that all men regardless of status, down to the meanest of all Christians should examine his teaching and works according to one standard alone; that of the Word of God to which he would submit himself. "Why do you always appeal to Scripture?" asked Ab Eck, "it is the source of all heresies," and he continued to appeal to Luther to yield to the pope for interpretation. The "true rock," replied Luther, "is the Word of the Lord and on this basis every Christian should determine how they should live and die."

Archbishop Richard returned to the emperor with the news that negotiations had failed. Luther had refused to yield before the pope and his nuncios and now before the emperor and his diet and counselors. There was but one chance for resolution: the council that Luther originally sought. Would Luther really consent to a council of the Church? "Only on the condition," Luther answered, "that the council shall decide only according to Scripture." At this Richard gave up. Rome could not consent to a council based upon Scripture alone.

History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century
J.H. Merle D'Aubigne
Book Seven: The Diet of Worms. 1521, January to May

Chapter XI

The debates had ended. Frederick feared for Luther's life and for the withdrawal of safe conduct so he urged Luther to leave Worms. This absence meant freedom for the persuasion of Aleander to grow unchecked. Finally, Charles issued a proclamation condemning Luther and all reformation followers. He forbade, "under the pain of reoccurring penalties," the harboring of Luther. "As for his adherents, you will apprehend them, confine them, and confiscate their property," he continued. "As for his writings...you will burn them, or utterly destroy them in any other manner... As for printers of his works...you will deal with them according to your good pleasure...Let every man behave according to this decree." And so Charles imposed by law, lawlessness upon Germany. [Aside – and Luther is blamed for the revolts and riots!]

The news traveled fast and five horsemen, armed from head to foot caught up with Luther and entourage on the way back to Germany. Two guarded the procession while three pulled up to Luther's wagon, yanked him from the carriage violently and thrust a cloak over him. With the prisoner placed upon a spare mount, the captors hurried off into the forest. Nearing the hour of midnight the terrain changed and became exceedingly steep. At length they arrived at an old castle, the isolated fortress of Wartburg. Two of the horsemen, Burkhardt of Hund and John of Berepsch led Luther into a room where he found a knight's uniform and sword. They took off his ecclesiastical robe and dressed him in the armor. After giving instruction to let his hair and beard grow before he appeared in public, they left Luther to begin his new adventure as Knight George of Wartburg. Even Frederick and Luther's followers were ignorant for a time of the events that had conspired. To some, Aleander had triumphed in the end, at last. To others, God was simply waiting for another day.