booklets

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AT 500 YEARS

167

Jaume Botey

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AT 500 YEARS
FROM RUPTURE TO DIALOGUE

Jaume Botey

In memory…

In February, while we were preparing the English edition of this booklet, its author, Jaume Botey Vallés, passed away. As a member of the Cristianisme i Justícia team, Jaume was a person profoundly committed to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and he worked energetically for peace and for the other world that is possible. Jaume, we will miss you greatly.

Cristianisme i Justícia

Jaume Botey has a licentiate in philosophy and theology and a doctorate in anthropology. He has been a professor of the History of Culture at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona. He has published the book *El collapse del sistema. Bases per a pensar el nou milleni* (2014) [The collapse of the system: bases for thinking about the new millennium] and in this collection: *Bush and his God* (booklet 118, June 2004). He is a member of the team of Cristianisme i Justícia.

Publisher: CRISTIANISME I JUSTÍCIA - Roger de Llúria 13 - 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismeijusticia.net
Printed by: Ediciones Rondas S.L. - Legal deposit: B 6852-2018
ISBN: 978-84-9730-412-2 - ISSN: 2014-6566 - ISSN (virtual edition): 2014-6574

Editor: Santi Torres i Rocaginé - Translated by Joseph Owens
Cover drawing: Roger Torres - Layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas
Printed on recycled paper - March 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

On 31 October 2017 some 500 years will have passed since Luther, according to legend, nailed his treatise about indulgences on the door of the church of the Wittenberg castle. That date is considered the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The treatise caused a rupture that went beyond the religious terms in which it was presented. The consequences of this cataclysm revealed the existence in Europe of two different cultures, two models of social relations, two forms of understanding politics and power, and even two economic models, which are evident to this day in the differences between northern Europe and Mediterranean Europe.

The doubts and misgivings of a decadent society became evident in the great debates that took place concerning rationalist and empirical models, Platonism and Aristotelianism, lay power and hierarchy, the Church's temporal power and poverty, faith and religion. At the same time, the society was conscious that it contained within itself the seeds of a new model that was just being born. Many of those debates that roiled the early years of the Renaissance have become once again topics of debate in today's world, in a society as perplexed as the society of those days. To understand today's Europe it is important to understand the situation that produced the Reformation of the 16th century and especially the starting-point of its main protagonist, Martin Luther.

1.1. Attempts at reform before the Reformation

Luther's movement was an indication of the deep fissures that had been appearing since the end of the 13th century; the bonds between papacy and Empire on which feudalism was based had become frayed. The symptoms announcing a change of epoch included the birth of individual conscience, the tendency toward secularization, the desire for a new model of social relations, the appearance of new inventions (printing press, compass,

etc.), the new vision of the universe proposed by Copernicus and Galileo, the incipient capitalism, and the development of nationalism and nation-states. Scholastic philosophy and theology were in decline, nominalism was ascendant, and the empirical method became an important source of knowledge. In the religious sphere, there was a growing awareness of the need to reform the Church, which was too closely tied to temporal interests.

The late Middle Ages saw frequent proposals and attempts to reform the Church, most of them sincere. We could mention Saint Bernard (11th century), who completely renewed the monastery movement, or Saint Francis (13th century), who introduced a new model of spirituality geared to city life and stressing evangelical imitation of the poor Jesus. In the kingdom of Aragón we have figures like Ramon Llull, Eiximenis, and Arnau de Vilanova. At the same time, there arose a series of movements that wavered between fidelity and dissent; find themselves in constant conflict with the hierarchy and the Empire, they were persecuted by both. For example, the Beguines and the Beghards in the Low Countries and the Waldensians (or the "Poor of Lyon") in northern Italy were movements that are now considered predecessors of Protestantism, as was the movement of the Cathars and Albigensians in southern Frances in the 13th century. All of them suffered severe persecution.

The beginnings of the 14th century saw the rise of new forms of spirituality of a more mystical and subjective character, such as the "Devotio Moderna." It was a time when the mystics Eckhart and Tauler thrived on the banks of the Rhine, while the Brothers of the Common Life were finding more inspiration in personal experience and contemplation than in the rational, deductive processes of scholasticism. What all these movements had in common was the conviction that "truth" is expressed more in deeds than in words, that a ready will is more important than rational knowledge, and that personal experience of faith is worth more than intellectual grasp of a dogma. They all agreed on the need to return to primitive Christianity and a Church that is poor. They wanted the sacred texts to be available in the language of the people, and they promoted a warm and tender devotion to the human figure of Jesus. They had little tolerance for hierarchy and extravagant liturgies. These movements were a sign of the profound religious and moral crisis of the ecclesiastical institution.

Giving priority to experiential knowledge meant downplaying knowledge about the supposed "articles of faith," which were impossible to demonstrate in any case. Questions were therefore raised concerning concepts about whose meaning we cannot be certain, such as "justification," "salvation," "grace," and "forgiveness." This stance was one of the effects of nominalism, which held that priority should be given to knowledge that proceeds from reality, that is, from concrete things that we see and touch, rather than to the names or concepts of abstract philosophy. From this position it was just a further step to declaring that the papacy, the hierarchy, the sacraments, and the Church were all human inventions placed at the service of those words without content. Ockham was one of the main representatives of this current of thought.

This way of thinking helps to explain the popularity of John Wycliffe and John

Huss, who were condemned during the Council of Constance, at the height of the Western Schism. Wycliffe was already dead when he was condemned, while Huss was burned at the stake. Today they are considered precursors of Protestantism.

The history of these centuries shows that the "rupture," to give it a name, had taken place prior to Luther. "Everything that needed to be reformed but was not became the cause and the justification of the Reformation."[1]

1.2. The situation of the Empire and the Church

The Church was at one of its lowest points. Since the 11th century there had been a long struggle between the Pope and the secular powers about investiture, but even more than that, the scandal of the Western Schism in the late 14th and early 15th centuries severely weakened the moral and political authority of the popes. The situation was so extreme that the Council of Constance, in attempting to resolve the quandary created by the existence of three popes, proclaimed that the papacy was subject to the general Council.[2] Once the schism was past, the succeeding popes very quickly adopted the worldly lifestyle of the Renaissance, engaging in wars among clans (the Borgias, the Medicis, the Farnesios, etc.) and worrying more about art than about the life of the Church.

At the same time, Machiavelli in his work *The Prince* (1513) resurrected the theses of Marsilio of Padua that had been condemned 200 years previously. He defended the separation of religious and secular power, the lay-controlled state, and the people's sovereignty in electing the emperor. He consequently saw no need for the emperor to be consecrated by the Pope.

This was the context in which the Renaissance took shape. The first great humanists, especially Thomas More and Erasmus of Rotterdam, contemporaries of Luther, gave evidence of both rupture and continuity. They did not want to break with anything, but they were aware that the previous political unity, with its concepts and social model, had come to an end.

Socially and politically, the Holy Roman Empire was a fragmented polity, divided into small states that were relatively autonomous –duchies, counties, ecclesiastical domains, and small city-states– all of which were controlled by princes and the great noble families of feudal times. Meanwhile a new social class, the bourgeoisie, came on the scene, promoting commerce and economic development through manufacturing, artisanal trades, mining, and banking. Compared to the power of the princes and the bourgeoisie, the emperor's power was limited, concerned mostly with defending the Empire against France and the Ottoman Turks. The princes frequently obliged the emperor to call imperial assemblies called "diets," at which they made demands that he had to concede. The majority of the population, meanwhile, consisted of peasant farmers, the lowest social class; they were illiterate and accustomed to a precarious existence, often suffering famines and epidemics.

Conflict among the social classes affected also the clergy. The hierarchy (archbishops, bishops, and other prelates) constituted an "ecclesiastical aristocracy"; they were princes with vast

estates who exploited their serfs just as the secular lords did. Most of the clergy, in contrast, were a true spiritual proletariat, poor men without training, taken from the local population. Moreover, all of them were subjected to a rigorous and burdensome system of taxes that they had to pay to Rome.

This turbulent situation –with its political fragmentation, social conflict, ecclesiastical corruption, and nominalist philosophy– provided a propitious setting for the birth of many different "reformations." Besides Luther there were plenty of reformers: Melanchthon, Zwingli, Müntzer, Calvin, the Anglicans, the Anabaptists, and others. All of them sought to express themselves in fresh religious language; they wanted to find a new way of relating directly to God, without mediation. It was a spiritual crisis. It was a cultural rupture.

2. LUTHER'S PERSONALITY AND THE THEME OF JUSTIFICATION

The earthquake that Luther unleashed had a great deal to do with his personality. He was a sincere believer with a mystical bent, but he was also a disturbing, contradictory, passionate man, intemperate in many ways and always excessive. While alive, he was the object of blistering controversies, and until recently the Catholic world viewed him only as a heretic perversely determined to harm the Church, or more condescendingly, as a victim of pathology.[3] The prejudices[4] surrounding him began slowly to dissipate only little less than a hundred years ago.

2.1. The years of training

Luther was born on 10 November 1483 in Eisleben, a small town in Upper Saxony, and was baptized the next day, the feast of Saint Martin, which explains his name. He was the oldest of eight siblings. His parents, Hans Luder and Margaret, came from farming families of that region, and in 1484 they moved to Mansfeld, where the father had found work in the prosperous copper mines. It seems that he eventually became owner of a small deposit. Martin spent his childhood in Mansfeld and received his primary education there. His father, hoping that he would become a government official, sent him at age 14 to the cathedral school in Magdeburg, run by the "Brothers of the Devotio Moderna." In later years Luther would say that the Brothers taught him a type of religion that was "more interior, more personal, and less formalistic than was then usually the case."[5] But young Martin got sick, and after a year he went to study with the Franciscans in Eisenach, a bigger city with 4,000 inhabitants, where he had friends and relatives. Luther always kept a fond memory of his parents and was grateful to his father for providing him the wherewithal to study.

In 1501, at the age of 18, he entered the University of Erfurt, where he earned a bachelor's degree and then in 1505, at the age of 22, a master's degree in philosophy.

The philosophy courses at Erfurt pursued "the modern way," that is, nominalism. At the end of his life Luther commented that at Erfurt he had become a follower of Ockham and Tauler.

Conforming to his father's wishes, Luther enrolled in the Faculty of Law of the same university, but everything changed one day, 2 July 1505, when he was returning to his parents' home. Caught in a severe storm and terrified when a lightning bolt struck close by, he cried out, "Saint Anne, help me, and I'll become a monk!" Surviving the storm, he abandoned his legal studies, and fifteen days later, on 17 July, he entered the convent of the Augustinians in the same city, against the will of his father. There he dedicated himself to reading Saint Augustine, to penance and fasting, to long hours of prayer, and to constant confession. However, the more he tried to please God, the more he felt the weight of his sin.

The superior of the community, Johann von Staupitz, was Martin's confessor and eventually his friend. Being also rector of the University of Wittenberg, he told Martin to pursue studies there. Compared to Erfurt, Wittenberg was a small town of about 2000 inhabitants, and its university was a recent creation. The prince elector, Frederick of Saxony, was its founder and patron. In 1507 Luther was ordained a priest, and in 1508 he began to each ethics. After receiving a bachelor's degree in biblical studies on 9 March 1508, he returned to Erfurt. Staupitz then sent him to Rome to deal with an internal matter of the Augustinian order.

After a short stay in Rome, Luther returned to Wittenberg, where he studied biblical theology, Greek, and Hebrew; these studies would later be of use to him in translating the Bible. In 1512 he earned a doctorate in theology and from 1513 to 1516 was a professor of biblical theology. He lectured on the Psalms, on Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians, and on the letter to the Hebrews. He was also dean of studies and subprior of the Wittenberg monastery.

Historians today agree that Luther was a man with a sincere thirst for God. He sought after the Absolute, had a profound spiritual life, and was a faithful and pious monk. At the same time, his was a soul in anguish, tormented by scruples, obsessed with sin and the God of terror; he experienced the "justice" of God mainly as punishment. Influenced by Ockham's nominalism,[6] Luther believed that the word "salvation" had no meaning, and so he underwent frequent crises of desperation.

During his years of training, he was obsessed with sin, especially "his" sin and his salvation. He asked himself repeatedly: "What must I do to obtain the mercy of God?" Good works are nothing before God; human beings can do nothing to merit grace; sin reigns, and God's justice punishes. He was tormented by his own interpretation of the concept of "God's justice" in the letter to the Romans,[7] which he lectured on at Wittenberg. Not even in monastic observance and penances was he able to find peace. Staupitz tried in vain to free Luther from his anxiety and urged him not to torture himself by his obsession with sin: "God is not angry with you. It is you who are angry with God."[8] In 1545, a year before his death, Luther wrote a prologue to the edition of his *Complete Works* in Latin; in it he recalled that "although my life as a monk was irreproachable, I felt myself to be a sinner before God, and my con-

science was troubled. Indignant with this God, I nourished in secret, if not blasphemy, then at least violent grumbles…"[9] "… I know of a man who has suffered this way many times … with such harsh, infernal violence that neither tongue can express it nor pen write it down."[10]

It must be appreciated that Luther, in adopting this introspective, experience-based approach to God, was inaugurating a new theological method. He spoke about God, not in academic terms or doctrinal deductions, but by using his own autobiography. He had no use for the attempts made by the scholastics and Erasmus to explain God in terms of reason. Though not systematically ordered, Luther's thought expressed the life and spirituality of a man whose temperament was at once mystical, resolute, restless, and enamored of the Absolute.

2.2. The search for the merciful God

Around the year 1514 Luther, perhaps assisted by Staupitz, made a 180-degree turn and discovered the God of mercy: he saw that divine justice was not a matter of "punishment" but of love. This change came to be known as the "tower revelation," in allusion to the place to which monks withdrew to pray. He later wrote: "Finally, by divine goodness and after meditating night and day, I understood the relation between two passages: 'God's justice is revealed in him' and 'the just man lives by faith.' I began to realize that God's justice is none other than that justice by which the just man experiences the gift of God, that is, the gift of faith. Thus, the significance of the phrase is that God's justice is revealed by the Gospel; this is the passive justice by virtue of which the merciful God justifies us by faith."[11] From this moment on, Luther would speak of the justice of God which makes a person just; he would insist that God looks upon us always with love and that God makes us a gift of this love. The individual is a "passive" recipient of God's justice (mercy), regardless of his sins, if only he renounces himself and entrusts himself unconditionally to God. Accepting this and opening oneself to God with humility and confidence is Faith and fulfillment of the Law. In magnificent texts filled with gratitude and filial devotion, Luther acknowledged justification to be the presence of God's love and mercy "in me."

Since the human condition is one of limitations, we know that we will never completely fulfill the Law. Only Christ fulfilled it perfectly. For that reason the believer will always be at one and the same time "just and sinner" (*simul iustus et peccator*). Luther insisted on the believer's freedom: we are free to accept "gratuitously" God's grace, the Law's demands, and forgiveness of sin. We are also free to serve others without expecting rewards, because we are saved not by works but only by faith, which we receive from God without any merit on our part. This is the essence of Luther's thought, and he repeats it in a relatively late work, the *Smalcald Articles* (1538): "I have no need to change anything of what I have until now unnecessarily taught about this matter … [namely] that by faith we receive a different heart, one that is new and pure, and that God wants to hold us totally justified because of Christ, our Mediator. Even though sin has not disappeared completely nor died in the flesh, God does not want to take it into account or have it mentioned." [12]

3. THE GREAT CONTROVERSIES, AND THE PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS THOUGHT

Drawing on his personal experience of the God of mercy, Luther in short order developed a complete theological system, one which destabilized the institutional mediations on which the Church had historically been based (papacy, sacraments, political and economic power, etc.). Starting in 1517, there took place a series of debates and controversies of a theological nature which involved both religious and political figures.

3.1. Indulgences. Wittenberg, 1517

The doctrine of justification by faith alone carries an implicit condemnation of indulgences, not because of the false preaching[13] or the scandals in Rome, but because the doctrine asserts that salvation cannot be earned by human merit. It is the opposite pole of Pelagianism, which minimizes the role of grace and exalts the merits of individuals. Before Luther made the 95 theses public, he sent them as a private document to his ordinary, the bishop of Maguncia, and to Albert of Brandenburg, the bishop of Magdeburg. When neither one responded, he entrusted the document to his friends and made it public on 31 October 1517. A golden opportunity had been lost. Pope Leo X also failed to take the problem seriously at first.

The text of the 95 theses neither was nor pretended to be a revolutionary document. Its aim was simply to provoke an academic debate for the purpose of correcting abuses, especially the idea that money could be used to obtain salvation. It was a moderate text that Luther himself was soon dissatisfied with. Nevertheless, the resulting controversy opened a Pandora's box of unforeseeable consequences in theology, politics, and economics. The theses with the most pronounced antipapal character are these: "27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory. 28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is

in the hands of God alone. … 82. Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial. … 86. Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"

The text was very quickly publicized through all of Germany, heightening even more the already antagonistic relations between the Empire and the Pope. The princes were delighted at being relieved of payments to Rome, and the Pope stopped receiving funds that were destined for the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica and the war against the Turks. Within the Empire itself, tensions among the princes increased, and the emperor feared for the unity of his realm.

Luther naturally became the main focus of the polemics. There would follow many difficult years of public debates and condemnations which would eventually lead to his excommunication. He wrote incessantly and always in a polemical manner. Thanks to the printing press, his writings were widely disseminated, and there were constant new printings.

3.2. The Theology of Glory and the Theology of the Cross. Heidelberg, 1518

In 1518, after the scandal about indulgences, Staupitz convened a chapter of the Augustinian order in Heidelberg so that the members of the order could discuss the basic aspects of Luther's theology in a propitious setting. To kick off the discussion Luther prepared a document called *Paradoxes,* which contained "28 Theses of Theology and 12 of Philosophy." Contrary to the expectations of those attending the chapter, this text did not discuss indulgences but instead presented a general discourse on the difference between human works and the works of God, between supposed human wisdom and the wisdom of God, and between nature and grace. Most of the Augustinians tended to favor Luther's theological perspective.

Luther thought that theology, especially scholastic theology, was trying to understand the invisible God in terms of visible things, the uncreated God in terms of created things. Scholastic theology had fashioned a God to human measure and wanted to gain heaven by means of earthly effort. It encouraged people to save themselves by means of their own works. It tried to make into a "science" what could only be an object of faith. Calling this theology of pride and human reason the "Theology of Glory," he fulminated against it.

Thesis 19 states: "No one can be justly called a theologian if he believes that the invisible things of God can be understood in terms of what is created." He criticized theology that based itself on the philosophies of Aristotle or Plato instead of on the word of God. He repeated over and over again that Christianity was a spirituality, not a "religion"; that Christianity was a faith, not a morality; and that truth was not an idea but a person, Jesus, whom we know through the Bible. Before Luther the Bible was used for the most part only to "confirm" what could be "demonstrated" by reason.

At the height of the Renaissance, Luther's rejection of reason made him seem anti-humanist. The Renaissance humanists considered reason to be the primary means by which we could reach a free and innocent stage of humanity. The ideal man of the Renaissance was Prometheus, the Nietzschean hero who defied the gods and discovered his true nature in his own strength, which resulted from his freedom and creativity. Luther was totally opposed to such a vision. For him, the ideal man was the one who trusted in God's mercy rather than in himself. True to the Renaissance spirit, Luther began an unstoppable process by emphasizing the value of the individual and the importance of conscience, based not of reason but on faith. This radical difference put him in conflict with the Renaissance humanists, especially Erasmus.

Claiming that the only foundation of faith was God himself, who speaks to us through the scriptures. Luther inaugurated the use of scripture as the basis of faith, and he did so apart from –and even against– the academic and clerical establishments of the day. What helped him in this regard was not only the newness of his method and his personal honesty but above all his courage, since he was opposing very powerful political and intellectual interests without having much in the way of academic recognition himself.

Theology of the Cross. The Theology of Glory is contrasted with the Theology of the Cross, which sees God not in abstract speculation but in nothingness, in the senselessness of suffering, and in the paradox of paradoxes: the crucifixion of God himself. "True theology and true knowledge of God can be found only in Christ crucified" [Thesis 20]. In his commentary on this thesis, Luther cites the whole of 1Cor 1,18-25: "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. … Where is the one who is wise? … For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

Turning human religious values upside down, God reveals himself in the cross of Christ, a scene full of pain, shame, ridicule, and failure. The cross offended the pretentions of the humanists and confounded the religious thought of the time, and it continues to do so in our day, since humanism and religious thought have always believed that God reveals himself through power, wisdom, and glory, not through weakness and failure. In contrast, those who have faith see in the cross of Christ the power and wisdom of God.

Luther's Thesis 21 confirms the aforesaid: "The theologian of glory prefers works over suffering, glory over the cross, power over weakness, wisdom over foolishness, and always the evil over the good." For Luther, God always acts in a way that contradicts appearances and common religious thought. Only faith, confidence in God and not just in appearances, and hope for a better world, can help us believe that God reveals himself in these circumstances. Only faith allows us to see the God who looks deep into our world, hidden among the last and the least.

In other texts Luther cites key biblical passages, such as Philippians 2,6-11, "Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as

something to be exploited, but emptied himself, … becoming obedient to the point of death –even death on a cross." Christ crucified calls into question every type of religious triumphalism, for "God has chosen the foolish of the world" (1Cor 1,26-31) in order to "proclaim Christ crucified" (1Cor 2,1-4).

The Theology of the Cross is the theology of faith and also of doubt because, though God cannot suffer, he makes himself visible in weakness, and especially in the weakness of Christ crucified. Much faith is required in order to understand the power of God hidden within suffering. But it is not a theology of weakness, sadness, or tribulation; it is rather a theology of the "power of weakness" (2Cor 12,9), a theology of hope inspired by our discovery of signs of God amidst our trials.

This is Luther's main interpretative key, one that has taken a 180º turn from scholastic theology. It makes manifest the perpetual paradox and the antitheses present in the words and deeds of Jesus: the little ones, the poor, the widow, Lazarus, the Pharisee and the publican, the guests invited to the banquet –these are the crucified ones and so are God's favorites.[14].

3.3. The need for faith and the value of tradition. Augsburg, 1518. Debate with Cajetan

Rome was beginning to suspect Luther of heresy, but it waited almost a year before reacting. On 7 August 1518, he received a citation to present himself in Rome within a space of 60 days to give an account of his writings. However, the prince elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, founder of the University of Wittenberg, arranged to have the debate take place in Augsburg instead of in Rome. Presiding over it was Cardinal Cajetan, who promised to treat Luther "with paternal gentleness" and to refrain from arresting him in case he was condemned. The debate was set for 8 October, but before that Cardinal Cajetan received a note from Leo X, declaring that Luther was to be considered a heretic and was to be sent to Rome if he did not submit.

Luther traveled the 500 kilometers between Wittenberg and Augsburg and was sick when he arrived. Also present at the interrogation, which lasted three days, were Staupitz, his superior and friend; Prince Frederick; and Spalatin, the prince's assistant. Cajetan focused the inquiry on the two topics he considered central to Luther's thought: justification by faith and the value of tradition as a basis for papal power. Luther affirmed the need for faith as an essential requisite for justification, whereas Cajetan argued that justification was received through the sacraments. Luther considered the scriptures to be the only source of religious authority, whereas Cajetan claimed that "tradition," that is, papal authority, was also authoritative. This debate marked the beginning of the famous Lutheran slogans *–sola fides, sola scriptura,…–* which we will discuss later.

Luther made no retraction. The debate only made clear the distance that separated them. From that point on, the conflict concentrated on two questions: 1) biblical theology versus ecclesiastic institutions, and 2) the certainty of faith versus ecclesiastical mediations.

Cajetan was enraged but kept his promise not to detain Luther, but Luther

knew that he could expect the Pope to excommunicate him at any moment. Writing to the Pope, Luther called for a Council. Unfortunately Leo X was so worried about Italian politics –and the Medici family– that for more than a year he had no time to worry about that "bothersome German monk."

3.4. The legitimacy of the People and the authority of the Councils. Leipzig, 1519. Debates with Eck

Despite the political truce, the theological deliberations continued, at least at the academic level. A former friend of Luther, Johann Eck, had published an essay against the teaching of Karlstadt, a faithful friend and interpreter of Luther. Eck's basic criticisms were aimed at Luther and his conception of papal authority. When Eck proposed a debate in Leipzig. Luther replied that he would take part in the debate, which was scheduled for June 27 to July 16. The first debate was between Eck and Karlstadt, who argued the question of the gratuity of God's forgiveness. Then Eck and Luther debated the topics of divine right, papal primacy, and the authority of the councils.[15] It happened that on June 28, during the Leipzig debate, Charles V was elected emperor of Germany at the tender age of 19; he had been made emperor of Spain three years before. Being so young, the new emperor would obviously be troubled by the conflict in Germany, especially since Catholic unity was needed to preserve political unity.

In Leipzig Luther argued that papal primacy had no biblical basis but was founded on decrees of the popes themselves, some of them very recent. The Pope was therefore just another secular authority. In a letter he wrote to Spalatin, Luther said that in preparing for the debate the question was raised as to whether the Pope was the Antichrist or at least his emissary, since by his decrees he was cruelly crucifying Christ, who is the Truth. Luther also questioned the authority of the councils since these can err and have in fact erred; for example, the Council of Constance was wrong in condemning Huss. Once again Luther proclaimed that scripture was the only source of faith, and he refused to recognize any supreme authority for interpreting scripture.

After Leipzig Luther's fame became widespread in Germany. Prince, knights, lords, farmers –all viewed him according to their particular interests, proclaiming him as the prophet that had dared to break the yoke, which for some was the yoke of Rome and for others the power of the princes and taxes; for still others the yoke was the oppressive religiosity or the heavy feudal obligations placed on the common people. At the same time, Luther was the object of fury from the opposite direction. At the head of the movement against Luther was Eck, who persuaded the universities of Cologne, Louvain, and Paris to condemn Luther's writings.

3.5. The Bull *Exsurge Domine*, 1520

On 15 June 1520 Pope Leo published the bull *Exsurge Domine,* condemning 41 errors of Luther and warning him to issue a retraction within 60 days or face the threat of excommunication. It was Johann Eck who delivered the bull to Germany and publicized it there. Luther

responded with a violent anti-papal pamphlet, "Against the Execrable Bull of the Antichrist," which in effect excommunicated the Pope: "I confess as Catholic dogmas all that the execrable bull condemns. … Just as they excommunicate me in the name of their sacrilegious heresy, I excommunicate him in the name of God's holy truth. Jesus Christ the judge will see which of the two excommunications is valid in his sight. Amen."[16]

The deadline for retraction was 10 December 1520, the day when Luther publicly burned a copy of the bull and several volumes of canon law at the entrance to Wittenberg. This was in reaction to the burning of his own writings that Eck had promoted in different parts of Germany. In any case, by burning the documents Luther was also burning the bridges of possible reconciliation with Rome

On 3 January 1521 Pope Leo X signed the bull of excommunication, *Decet Romanum Pontificem.* The civil authority had the responsibility of carrying out the excommunication, and the recently proclaimed Charles V, without hearing Luther, had him condemned and ordered his books to be burned and his followers persecuted. Nevertheless, a significant number of the prince electors supported Luther and convoked the Diet of Worms.

3.6. The lay basis of political power

Luther's burning of the bull and the canon law books had an enormous symbolic impact. It meant the end of attempts to justify political power by theological argument. Since the start of the Middle Ages, theology had been used to sustain the Holy Roman-Germanic Empire, which was seen as a historical concretion of the biblical concept of God's Kingdom. Luther's stance also meant breaking with the "Two Swords" doctrine, proclaimed at the end of the 13th century by Pope Boniface VIII in the bull *Unam Sanctam,* which held that the spiritual power of the Pope was superior to the temporal power of princes. The bull also defended the separation of the temporal and spiritual spheres and therefore the need for lay control of the state, a position espoused also by humanists. It also asserted individual conscience as a birthright.

Making individual conscience an autonomous source of revelation meant displacing the centrality of God-as-Absolute-Power and replacing him with subjectivity. For Luther, the Kingdom of God on earth was not a political kingdom, for God would never legitimize any political order. His understanding negated the "politics of glory" and power and reaffirmed the biblical criterion of God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, who from the cross saves the world.

As we shall see, denying the Divine Right of rulers forced thinkers to seek other sources of political legitimation. This led to a strengthening of the nation-state, as well as of princes and various political institutions, but now the justification was based on political strategy rather than on theology.

4. THE GREAT TREATISES OF 1520 AND THE DIET OF WORMS

Strictly speaking, it cannot be said that Luther had the intention of reforming the Church. His real interest was in reforming himself, but in trying to do that he ran up against arthritic ecclesiastical structures, incomprehension in Rome, and an empire incapable of uniting in the face of the challenge. It was probably because of incompetence or politics that they excommunicated him, but it is also true that he did not make things easy for anybody. Once expelled from the Church, he directed all kinds of insults against the Pope, and his rage only increased with time.

The latter part of 1520 was one of the most difficult moments of Luther's life, when he was caught between the threat of excommunication and the actual fact of it. During this period he wrote three doctrinal treatises which defined clearly his position with regard to the Pope and the Vatican. In August he published *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,* which treated the universal priesthood. In October he published *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,* on the sacraments. In November he published *A Treatise on Christian Liberty*. The first two works were frontal attacks against papal authority, claiming that the Pope and the ecclesiastical institution had no right to administer spiritual goods, and that the sacraments were chains of exploitation at the service of the Pope.

4.1. To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation. The universal priesthood

In this pamphlet published in August, Luther affirmed the universal priesthood of all the baptized and claimed the ministerial priesthood was not a sacrament but only a function. Every baptized person could understand the sacred scriptures and make a commitment to Christ. Since those who possessed secular power had

greater responsibility, Luther called on them to take the lead in reforming Christianity, in accord with the priesthood they received with baptism. He instructed the rulers to resist the three barriers that the Church of Rome had constructed to protect itself: 1) the distinction between priesthood and laity; 2) the claim that the Pope was the only legitimate interpreter of scripture; and 3) the claim that only the Pope could call a council. He asserted that Christians were in "captivity" because of the hierarchical priesthood, the monopoly on interpretation of scriptures, and the impossibility of a general council. The essay was polemical and violent, using all kinds of insults against Rome, a practice he would continue. The work was distributed widely and had immediate effect because it linked the social and national aspirations of Germany at that time with the theology of the universal priesthood, the suppression of the hierarchy, and criticism of the Pope (whom from now on Luther would call "devil," "prostitute," "ass," etc.).

4.2. The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. The Sacraments

This work was written in Latin because it was addressed to clerics and theologians. Instead of the Roman Church, Luther spoke of a type of "Invisible Church," formed of believers who were united not by external bonds of obedience to the Pope but by truth faith in Jesus Christ. Luther argued that the Christian people were being held captive by the Pope, as Israel had been held captive by Babylon. He claimed that the sacraments were instruments used by Rome to subject the life of Christians to the dominion of the hierarchy. This part of the text was especially cruel and destructive. Luther knew that by attacking the sacraments he was assaulting the backbone of the Church and of Christian life.

The only sacraments Luther accepted were Baptism, the Eucharist, and Penance (as he understood it). Baptism was the sacrament he treated most profoundly and beautifully, and he did so with great respect. He understood Baptism as the symbol of the Father's gratuitous love and permanent blessing for his children.

He understood Eucharist as the promise and the testament of the Lord, not as the Sacrifice of Christ, since that Sacrifice was accomplished on Calvary once and for all. But even with the Eucharist, Rome had built up a triple wall that had to be overcome: the withholding of communion under two species, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the doctrine of sacrifice.

4.3. A Treatise on Christian Liberty. Compendium of the Christian Life

This work does not have the same polemical tone as the previous two. Luther's intention was to write about "the peak of Christian life," the interior freedom that was God's great gift and the principal treasure of God's children. He proclaimed that Christians were free by virtue of a faith that looked to the future with eschatological hope. This was a freedom that rose above social, political, and economic concerns, and it needed to complemented with attitudes of service. Luther wrote the work as a summary of his doctrine, and he wanted it to be sent to the Pope to show his good will. He

had already been warned that he might be excommunicated.

However, he prefaced the text with a defiant letter addressed to Leo X.[17] The first part of the letter expressed such extravagant praise and adulation that it could not be taken as anything other than ridicule by those who knew of Leo's scandalous lifestyle. In the second part Luther mercilessly criticized the "corruption" of the Roman Curia, which he called a "pestilent lair which stinks to high heaven," a "most dangerous place whose sins exceed by far the sins of the Turks."

The leitmotiv that runs through all three texts is the three "*Solas,*" which are considered the heart of Lutheran theology and will be continually repeated in later texts:

- *Sola Scriptura:* scripture is the maximum authority in faith and in practice. Nothing which contradicts the revelation of God can regulate the life of believers (Gal 1,6-10; 2Tim 3,16; 2Pet 1,3).
- *Sola Gratia*: salvation is a gift of God, something that the receiver receives undeservedly. It is based on the merits that Christ gained by his life, death, and resurrection (Eph 2:8).
- *Sola Fides*: salvation can be received only when we place our faith in the One who died for us and exclude the possibility that our own works can contribute to it (Eph 2, 8-9; Rom 3,28).
- *Solus Christus*: salvation is found only in Christ. There is no other way to reach God (Acts 4:12).
- *Soli Deo Gloria*: the purpose of the salvation we receive is to glorify God and to make manifest the excellence and beauty of his character (Eph 1,4-6; 1Pet 2,9).

4.4. Commentary on the Magnificat

Nowhere does Luther express the significance of the *Solas* so beautifully, poetically, and spiritually as he does in his *Commentary on the Magnificat,* a work which makes plain the tenderness of his filial devotion to Mary. The work is a biblical/theological/spiritual commentary written while he was composing his more important doctrinal treatises. It was written at a particularly difficult moment, when he was on the point of being excommunicated.

In Heidelberg he had already formulated the principle of the Theology of the Cross, and he was now applying it in a devout way to the life of Mary, the poor, despised woman who counted for naught. It was as if he saw himself reflected in the situation of Mary because of the condemnation and contempt he was suffering. Luther set up a structural antithesis: the power, might, and mercy of God over against the insignificance and impotence of the young servant girl, the handmaiden. Her lack of merit contrasted with the great work that God would realize in her. For Luther "humility" was not precisely a "virtue" but an objective, ontological reality: it was "not being nothing." In her poverty Mary was the incarnation of the principle that salvation comes to us not by our own merits by only by the grace of God.

4.5. Retreat is impossible. The Diet of Worms, 1521. Excommunication

In January the Emperor summoned the princes to Worms for a meeting that was to last until May. When Luther was called to Worms at the end of April, the inten-

tion of the papal delegate and the emperor was simply to ratify his condemnation. Since he had already been excommunicated and could be arrested, Prince Frederick III obtained for him a safe-conduct pass so that he could come and go without being detained. Many people attended the sessions dedicated to Luther: his friends Staupitz, Spalatin, and Melanchthon; numerous theologians, princes, and ecclesiastical authorities; and the emperor himself. The hall was filled to overflowing.

Luther confessed to being the author of the books that bore his name. In his discourse he defended his vision of faith and declared that he could not retract what he wrote. Luther knew perfectly well that he was exposing himself to condemnation, which could mean being burned at the stake, like Jan Huss. He ended his speech with words that have since appeared in various anthologies of texts on conscientious objection: "Unless you refute me by the testimony of the Scriptures or evident arguments, I cannot submit, since I do not believe in the popes or the councils, which have often been wrong and have contradicted one another. I am chained to the texts of scripture, and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot retract, nor will I retract anything, since it is not just or honest to act against one's conscience. God help me. Amen."

Luther's arguments directly attacked the teachings of the Church since Catholic doctrine held that the Holy Scriptures were only part of the divine revelation, along with Tradition, and they could be interpreted only according the Church's directives.

After the Diet of Worms the astute Prince Frederick of Saxony sequestered Luther in his castle at Wartburg in order to protect him. By doing this the prince became the arbiter of the situation. That same May, however, the emperor and the nuncio signed the Edict of Worms, which declared Luther a heretic and fugitive, prohibited all teaching of his doctrine, called for his books to be publicly burned, and made the split between the Church and Lutheranism official.

4.6. The benefits of exile. Translation of the New Testament

During his time in Wartburg Luther translated the New Testament into German, wrote his *Commentary on the Magnificat,* corresponded with Erasmus, and became friends with Cranach and Albert Dürer. Despite his isolation, his doctrinal deviations kept spreading, and religious conflicts had society on the point of exploding.

At that point another side of Luther's personality became evident: he had little ability for organizing a new model of church, and he was hardly a social reformer. He was aware that his supporters were criticizing him for being indecisive; even though he was confined to Wartburg, they wanted him to establish a new church since the time was ripe for consolidating the work he had begun.

In the field of social reform, he was especially worried about the radicalism of Müntzer, who was preaching a "Kingdom of Christ" of a social and spiritual nature. He secretly made a journey to Wittenberg to become better informed and to combat this new movement. He insisted always on the separation of the spiritual life and material improvements. In October 1524 he stopped wearing the habit of the Augustinian friars.

4.7. The Controversy between Erasmus and Luther on Christian Liberty

Luther engaged in an important controversy with Erasmus after the publication of *The Babylonian Captivity.* The most influential figure of Renaissance humanism, Erasmus was considered a Church reformer. He criticized religion made up only of ritual observances[18] and spoke of the need for inner conversion. He called for a return to scripture, condemned clerical wealth and ostentation, advocated cultural and educational renewal, embraced a militant pacifism, and insisted on morality more than on dogma. Luther, however, accused Erasmus of propounding a religion of humanism, not one of a transcendent God.

In September 1524 Erasmus, probably pressured by the Catholic princes and by Rome, and angry about *The Babylonian Captivity* and Luther's rash burning of the papal bull and the canon law books, published a polemical text against Luther called *On Free Will.* He knew that this would mean a definitive break with Luther, but he feared that with Luther savagery would return to Europe and humanistic ideals would collapse. Most certainly his own reform efforts would fail. Erasmus knew the Bible well, and he held that the Bible taught that human beings were not evil by nature, despite original sin. For Erasmus, therefore, Luther's doctrine of *Sola gratia,* excluding human collaboration, could not lead to salvation. Rather, works and the collaboration of human freedom were necessary for salvation.

The following year Luther responded to Erasmus by writing *On the Slave Will,* a furious and defiant text that reaffirmed Luther's teaching about the uselessness of works and the transcendence of God. He claimed that Erasmus was using "reason" to fashion a vision of God that was dominated by the Theology of Glory, and he rejected the idea that the human will could be a factor in salvation. Salvation was the exclusive work of grace and depended on the will of God. Only God could save and decide the ultimate destiny of every person.

5. THE PEASANTS' WAR

The "peasants' rebellions" at the beginning of the 16th century were a desperate response to the harsh conditions of poverty and disease and to the princes' ruthless exploitation of the people. Rebellions arose throughout the Empire as a result of the princes' seizure of communal lands and the multiplication of unreasonable taxes.

5.1. The beginnings of the rebellion

Before 1524 there were only isolated outbreaks, often spontaneous and disorganized, resulting from the peasants' vexation and feeling of impotence. They were always defeated, and harsh repression followed. But things began to change in 1524: the rebellions were months in the making and occurred in different places. The first conflicts took place around Nuremburg and Erfurt; by February and March of 1525 there were armed groups in all of Germany.

Representatives of the groups agreed on a program of reforms that was spelled out in a manifesto called *The Twelve Articles.*[19] For the first time the demands of the peasants were established by consensus, put into writing, and presented to the authorities. The earlier uprisings had failed mostly because they were widely dispersed and did not support one another.

In response, however, the nobles stalled long enough to organize a powerful army, with the financial backing of the Fugger bankers. The armed conflicts began toward the end of March. On Easter Sunday, April 16, in Weinsberg, the peasants assassinated the son-in-law of the Emperor Maximilian and his knights. The humiliating execution of these nobles by the spears and clubs of the peasants came to known as the "Weinsberg massacre." The rebels thus took on the appearance of brutal assassins. Luther at first stayed out of the conflict, but then joined the battle against the rebels. Part of the reason why Luther took the side of the princes was that the insurgents had the support of two former disciples with

whom he had had a falling out: Karlstad and Thomas Müntzer.

5.2. Thomas Müntzer

Müntzer, who was born in Stolberg in 1490, was at first a follower of Luther and had preached reform in Zwickau and Allstedt. He had an interpretation of history that was apocalyptic, eschatological, and millenarian; his ideas were messianic and prophetic, probably influenced by the doctrines of Joachim de Fiore, who had preached the dawn of a third stage of history with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Müntzer's aim was to establish the Kingdom of God by means of a just social order that would abolish privileges, dissolve monasteries, create refuges for the dispossessed, give aid to the poor, grant equality to all –it would be a kind of primitive communism. He founded the "League of the Elect" and partly inspired the emergence of the Anabaptists. He split with Luther because of the Peasants' War; he did not hesitate to take the side of the peasants, to the point of inciting them to take up arms.

Müntzer was not satisfied with the interior liberation that Luther was preaching; he was convinced that interior freedom had to be accompanied by concrete social freedoms. He therefore untiringly condemned the civil and religious authorities who controlled the levers of power and refused to change anything.[20] Müntzer reproached Luther for his political passivity and criticized his theology as lacking in commitment. The two men were opposed personalities, and the debates between them were rich displays of verbal vehemence, dialectical force, and literary skill.

On 15 May 1525 Müntzer, who had become a spokesman for the peasants, broke off all negotiations with Prince Albert of Mansfeld, thus provoking the battle of Frankenhausen in Turingia. Before the battle he delivered a fiery sermon to the troops, but the imperial army annihilated the poorly equipped peasants. Müntzer was captured, tortured, and beheaded on May 27 in Mühlhausen.

From that point on the insurgents were easily and mercilessly exterminated in almost every battle. On May 17 in Saverne some 20,000 died. On June 4 some 8,000 died in two hours. The final battles were waged on June 23 and 24, and by September the revolt was over. The most intense part of the conflict lasted only three months, from late March to late June of 1525, during which 300,000 peasants rebelled and 100,000 to 130,000 of them were killed.

The survivors were placed under an imperial interdiction which amounted to a type of civil death: they were deprived of their rights and possessions and could be declared outlaws. The leaders were executed, and others were submitted to cruel criminal courts overseen by the landowners. Many accounts speak of beheadings, amputations of limbs, and other similar actions. Those who only had to pay fines could consider themselves privileged. Entire communities were dispossessed of their land rights, celebrations were prohibited, and fortifications were demolished. People were obliged to hand over their weapons, and they were even prohibited from entering taverns at night. The economic consequences of the devastations were enormous.

Emperor Charles V and Pope Clement VII thanked the Swabian League for the role they played in the combats.

Marxist tradition considers the Peasants' Revolt to be the first social revolution in modern Europe.[21]

5.3. On the side of the princes

Luther distanced himself from the revolt from the start. He distinguished between the spiritual sphere and the temporal sphere and claimed that the aim of the Reformation was to change the Church, not the world. The freedom he preached was purely spiritual; it belonged to a kingdom that had nothing to do with social, economic, or political conditions.

However, the princes increasingly blamed Luther for the conflict since he was ambiguous about the claims of the peasants and allowed the peasants to influence him. In *The Twelve Articles* the peasants asked that important persons, including Luther, be allowed to judge whether their claims were in accord with the Bible. Responding to them in March 1525, Luther wrote his *Exhortation to Peace. Regarding the Twelve Articles of the Peasants of Swabia,* a moderate work addressed partly to the princes and partly to the peasants. In the first part Luther criticized the princes: "For the love of God, yield a bit to the furor [of the peasants]. Renounce violence and vile tyranny, and with sound judgment deal with the peasants as if they were inebriated or simply mistaken. Don't go into battle with them because you don't know where it will end." On the other hand, he reprimanded the peasants: "The Gospel never justifies rebellion."[22]

But just a few weeks later, in April, reacting to the "Weinsberg Massacre," Luther placed himself firmly on the side of the princes and "against murderous and thieving peasants." He wrote this harsh statement: "With this letter I dip my pen in blood, calling on the princes to kill the criminal peasants as if they were rabid dogs, to stab them, strangle them, and destroy them to the extent they can. … I do not want to oppose those authorities which, being able and desirous, repress the peasants with all rigor and punish them without prior offer of an equitable agreement –even when such authorities are not tolerant with regard to the Gospel."[23]

Once again Luther was self-contradictory. What explanation could he give for this reaction? Was this man who condemned the peasants the same one who a few years previously had proposed the powerful Theology of the Cross? How could these declarations be linked to his former assertions that God is revealed not through power but through the cross of Jesus, and therefore was not revealed through the power of the mighty but through the cross of the crucified peasants? Luther may have felt overwhelmed by the course of events and may have wanted to maintain law and order so that the Reformation could be consolidated, but even so, it is worrisome that at this critical moment he was more interested in maintaining the established order than in helping the peasants escape from their misery.[24]

In some respects Luther was close to the humanism of the Renaissance, for example, in his acknowledgment of the right to individual freedom, but in other respects he was still close to the medieval mentality.

After 1525 Protestantism lost its initial revolutionary spirit. It submitted to authority and shored up the dominant institutions of aristocratic society.[25] It even ceded to princes the right to determine the religion of their territories.

6. CONSOLIDATION OF THE REFORMATION

In June 1525 Luther married Catalina de Bora, and the couple took up residence in the former monastery of the Augustinians in Wittenberg, ceded to them by Frederick of Saxony. These events caused consternation among Luther's closest associates, like Melanchthon. Luther gave reasons for doing what he did –pleasing his father, standing up to the Pope, breaking definitively with the obsolete forms of the Church– but they were not satisfactory. Was he tired? His life had been one of constant conflict, and he had good reason to be tired, but he was also affected by more recent factors: the guilt he felt about the Peasants' War, the execution of Müntzer, the continuous insults of the Anabaptists, the threats of the Catholics, the defiance of Erasmus…

6.1. Family life and pastoral initiatives

The married Luther was different from the earlier, creative Luther. His life was that of a professor dedicated to defending the basic principles of the Reformation and fighting against various adversaries: the humanist dissenters; his friend Zwingli, whom he warned about the danger of political deviation; Henry VIII of England; and even his friend and disciple, Melanchthon.

These were extremely confusing years in Europe, and events were happening with incredible speed. Luther followed the events, paying special attention to the political balance between Catholics and Protestants and among the different Protestant tendencies, but he did not intervene in the events since he viewed them as basically political. Besides, for the first time he had to safeguard his private family life and provide for a family with six children. Catalina felt exasperated at his failure to charge anything for his publications.

In 1526 he wrote *The German Mass* in order to restore the dignity of worship. Written in German, it maintained practically the same structure as the Catholic Mass, though it gave more weight

to preaching, celebration of the word, and hymns. Luther wrote many prayers, hymns, and canticles of great devotion; these formed part of the liturgy of the Reformed churches, where music and hymns were an important part of the liturgy.

In 1527 Prince John, the brother of Frederick, named Luther as official visitor of the churches of Saxony. During the visitations, Luther came face to face with the cultural and spiritual poverty of the people and the clergy; there was an intolerable cultural illiteracy, and in the religious sphere many vices had become custom. The people were baptized and attended services without understanding anything about the mystery. In order to provide better instruction Luther in 1529 published two catechisms: the *Large Catechism* for adults and clergy and the *Small Catechism*; the latter had drawings and was aimed, he said, at "teaching [Christian] doctrine to children and simple folk."[26] The two catechisms had the same contents, offering explanations of the ten commandments, the creed, the Our Father, and the sacraments. Both texts were moderate in their exposition and were of high pedagogical quality.

Luther established the custom, after eating, of engaging in lengthy conversations with his fellow diners, some of whom published the substance of these conversations in a book called *Table Talk.*

6.2. *Cuius regio, illius et religio.* The political conflicts

The Peasants' War influenced Luther's thought and turned him in favor of the princes. In a Germany that was social and politically divided, he believed that only the princes would be able to maintain the values espoused by the Reformation, and so he granted them some control over church life. Luther was also concerned about the need to insure good order in matters where secular and sacred overlapped, such as marriage, economic affairs, property, inheritance, etc. By accepting the involvement of the princes, this man who had advocated a purely spiritual church ended up putting the church under the direction of secular rulers. The relation between church and state was to be such that the prince could define the organization of the "visible" church, which was different from the "invisible" church of those justified by faith. This temporal jurisdiction would manifest itself mainly in the prince's right to impose the word of God in his domain and to define the religious doctrine that should be preached there exclusively and by obligation. Except for some particular cases (like Calvin), the legitimization sought was not of a theological nature but simply for reasons of political strategy or opportunism. Thus began to be applied the principle *Cuius regio, illius et religio*.

The conflict was not only between Catholics and Reformed but also among the different Reformation currents, which inevitably overlapped with the complex processes of configuration of the new states. All Europe was at odds for reasons that were religious, economic, and political. The instability lasted more than one hundred years.

The young Emperor Carlos, acting in his own interest, played all his cards in favor of Catholic unity. After the Diet of Worms he reluctantly accepted the document called the "Edict of Worms," which condemned Luther as a heretic

and prohibited the practice of Lutheranism, but which also conceded to the princes the power of choosing the religion of their territories. Five years later, in 1526, Carlos called for a new diet in Espira for the purpose of revising the Worms agreement, but the ambiguity of that diet's declaration allowed for the further expansion of Lutheranism. Consequently in 1529, at another diet held also in Espira, the Catholic forces retracted the concessions they had made to Lutheranism in 1526. The Lutheran princes, who were a minority, "protested" to the emperor and were from then on called "Protestants."

6.3. *Confessio Augustana*, 1530. Official exposition of the principles of Lutheranism

As the danger of division in the empire grew, the emperor in 1530 decided to intervene and called for a new diet in Augsburg. The Protestants asked Melanchthon to write a manifesto since he was known for his conciliatory nature. The resulting *Confessio Augustana* (Confession of Augsburg) was the first official exposition of the principles of Lutheranism. Luther gave his assent and attended the diet. The *Confessio* is considered the foundational text of the Lutheran Church and a basic text for most Protestant churches; it forms part of the Lutheran Book of Concord (*Liber Concordiae*). It is not a set of axioms, nor is it radical. It contains 28 articles divided into two parts: first are the *Articles of Faith* (1 to 21), where there is general agreement with Catholics for the sake of creating bonds of understanding and union; then there are the *Articles for Discussion* (22 to 28), where there is no agreement with Catholics. The tone of the document was so conciliatory that it surprised even the Catholics. The *Articles of Faith* outlined the positions held in common with the Catholic Church, such as the Trinity, original sin, Baptism, Christ as the Son of God, justification by faith, and the Holy Supper. The second part spelled out the specifically Protestant positions regarding such matters as communion under two species, celibacy, and monastic vows, and it did so by using arguments from scripture, the Church Fathers, and other doctrinal texts. The purpose was to debate these topics and eventually hold a future council, which was Luther's true objective.

6.4. The Diet of Augsburg in 1555. New territorial and military conflicts

Not even the *Confessio* sufficed to calm the troubled waters. In 1531 the German princes, using the *Confessio* as its profession of faith, created in Smalcald, Thuringia, a powerful political and military league opposed to the emperor. More than half the empire's territories quickly joined the league, with France and Denmark joining a little later.

Although the League did not directly declare war against the emperor, its support of and adherence to the Lutheran Reformation, its confiscations of church lands, and its expulsion of Catholic bishops and princes made Carlos V decide to confront it.

After the death of Clement VII in 1534, Paul III decided to call the council that had been earnestly requested by both Luther and the emperor. It began in Trent in 1545. The persistent refusal

of the League to attend the council wore out the emperor's patience. When the empire's hostilities with France were finally ended in 1544, he decided to attack the League and eventually defeated it in April 1547 at the battle of Mühlberg.

The year before, 1546, Luther had died in Eisleben at the age of 63, piously invoking the protection of Jesus Christ. A year before he died, despite being sick, he had time to write his final satire, *Against the Papacy of Rome, Founded by the Devil.*[27]

In 1555 the emperor proclaimed the Peace of Augsburg, which was a type of compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism but gave precedence to the former. It basically established that the German princes, about 360 in number, could choose the religion they wanted –either Lutheranism or Catholicism– in their territories, in accord with their conscience: *Cuius regio, illius et religio.* The empire thus accepted the principle promulgated in the Confession of Augsburg fifteen years earlier. The peace was a fragile one and did little to diminish the hatred between the two religions. Theoretically a certain balance was achieved, but practically the two religions were continually in conflict.

One of the most regrettable conflicts took place on in Paris on the night of Saint Bartholomew, 24 August 1572, when thousands of Protestants, Calvinists, and Huguenots were killed. The Catholic monarchists (clergy and ultra-Catholics) and the aristocratic Protestants (mainly French Huguenots) developed strong political and military forces, thus breaking with the essence of the Reformation, which claimed to be a purely spiritual, religious movement. The Catholic persecution started on August 24 with the slaughter of Protestants, nobles, and common people, but the turmoil spread quickly through all of France. The massacres did not last long, but the chroniclers reported between ten and seventy thousand victims.

6.5. The Peace of Westphalia, 1648. The end of religious conflicts and the new Europe

The original conflict was due to the religious differences between Protestant and Catholic states, but most of the European powers joined the conflict for non-religious reasons and thus turned it into a general war. When a new political balance was finally achieved in 1648, the Peace of Westphalia put an end to the conflict and also to what was considered the confessional epoch.

Following such a long period of reformation attempts, religious wars, and overlapping of political, territorial, religious, and family loyalties, the Westphalia accords laid down the foundations of what are today considered the central ideas of political modernity:

- The secularization of politics.
- The sovereign nation-state.
- A certain "social pact" by which individuals yield their agency to a centralized authority.
- A new model of international relations founded on the principle of equality among member states and
- A commitment to resolving conflicts by means of politics.

The right of princes to impose their faith on their states was also extended to Calvinism, thus bringing to an end the cycle of European religious wars that had started in the 16th century.

7. EPILOGUE

Unfortunately, at Trent the desire to triumph and repudiate won out over the desire to dialogue and reconcile. The abyss between Catholics and Protestants became ever more unbridgeable. The Catholic "counter-reformation" failed to understand the profound change of mentality that had taken place in Europe. Now, after 400 years of mutual condemnations, historical and theological research has come to recognize the importance of the Lutheran contribution and the need for institutional rapprochement.

7.1. Luther, witness of Jesus Christ

In 1980, celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Confession of Augsburg, Catholics and Lutherans jointly issued *All Under One Christ: Declaration about the Confession of Augsburg: 1980,* a document which stated the bases for church unity by pointing to Jesus Christ as the living center of their shared Christian faith. In 1983, the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, the Catholic-Lutheran Commission on Unity published a declaration called *Martin Luther, Witness of Jesus Christ.*[28] On 31 October 1999 the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,* which accepted Luther's basic thesis concerning salvation by grace. Augsburg was chosen as the place for signing the declaration because of its symbolic value as the city where Luther was first condemned. Some consequently interpreted the declaration as a lifting of Luther's excommunication. In an address to an Evangelical Lutheran delegation, John Paul II took note of this event by asking that an all-out effort be made to clarify history and purify truth. To celebrate the 500th anniversary of 1517, a third declaration of the Catholic-Lutheran Commission, titled *From Conflict to Communion,*[29] urged Catholics and Protestants to engage in theological research and the practice of unity. Finally, in October

2016, to commemorate the beginning of the "year of Luther," Pope Francis traveled to Sweden, where he and the president of the World Lutheran Federation, Munib Younan, signed a joint declaration in the Lutheran cathedral of Lund, in which they rejected all violence in the name of religion. In his sermon on the occasion, the Pope said that "the spiritual experience of Martin Luther never lets us forget that we can do nothing without God."[30] Upon returning from Lund, the Pope gave an interview to *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in which he said: "Luther was a reformer at a difficult moment, and he placed the word of God in the hands of the people. Perhaps some of his methods were wrong, but if we read history, we see that the Church was hardly a model to imitate. There was corruption, worldliness, and lust for wealth and power."[31]

7.2. The laity today

Five hundred years have passed. Fortunately there are no longer any anathemas. Today Catholics and Protestants can celebrate together that dramatic epoch, while trying to discern what still unites us so that we can join forces and confront the challenges of today's world.

Many of the debates that characterized the early Renaissance have been resurrected once again in our own society, which is as perplexing and as decadent as the society of those times. Great changes are taking place in economic and political systems; ever shallower discourse is heard in politics, religion, and culture; and even philosophy has become increasingly nominalist. Here I will examine only two of the major challenges to which Catholics and Protestants must respond today.

As regards the dimension of faith, we are confronted with the irreversible fact of the secularization of contemporary culture. Today's world has no interest in God; God is no long a necessary being. Therefore, the vital dialogue that must still take place is not between religious denominations but between cultures. In this regard Luther's thoughts about the laity can possibly enlighten us.

The other great challenge concerns the foundations of faith that will enable us to face the monumental tragedies of today's world: the suffering of the poor majority, the scandalous growth of poverty, the marginalization of the "expendable," and the plight of the refugees, to name only a few. The responses offered by the politically and economically powerful are evasive and cynical. In this regard we can no doubt be helped by considering Luther's Theology of the Cross.

7.3. The Theology of the Cross

In Heidelberg Luther distinguished between the Theology of Glory, which is based on power and reason, and the Theology of the Cross, which is based on the nothingness of the crucified God. This contribution of Luther has great significance for the world of today; it may even be the key to helping our contemporaries recognize the importance of the message of Jesus. In fact, the Theology of the Cross has many similarities to the Theology of Liberation and to certain currents of contemporary Protestant theology, such as Moltmann.

What Luther called the Theology of the Cross is not just another division of theology in general; rather, it is a perspective, an epistemology, a way of view-

ing God and God's relation to the world. It is a theology of history read from the cross of Jesus Christ and from the agony of those who are being crucified today. It is a theology that gives meaning and hope to all the poor and abandoned persons who have lived down through the centuries. The Theology of the Cross helps us to see the world in ways contrary to the ways the world is seen by the Theology of Glory and by the secular world. When Luther states in his *Commentary on the Magnificat* that God looks down on the world, toward the victims and the outcasts, he is speaking of today's crucified and of their salvation. Such a theology understands and interprets God in the middle of nothingness. Jesus-God died on the cross, pierced and abandoned. This theology helps us to see that that cross and that crucified man are the paradigm of all who are pierced and forsaken today.

While hanging on the cross, Jesus felt completely helpless and rejected. The task of the theologian of the Cross is to seek God in the degradation and humiliation of the ancient Golgotha and all the other Golgothas: Auschwitz, the Great Lakes region, Idomeni, and all the refugee camps.

Given this perspective, the presence and commitment of Christians in the today's decidedly desacralized and secular world will not be a matter of power. Our job, Ellacuría tells us, is to "take the crucified peoples down from the cross." Salvation can come about only "in the reality of faith, where those who suffer bitter oppression cannot see deliverance –they can only believe."

NOTES

1. Luter, Martí (1996). *La llibertat del Cristià*. Introduction by Joan Busquets. Barcelona: Edicions Proa, Clàssics del Cristianisme, 62, p. 8.
2. In its fourth and fifth sessions the Council proclaimed that "any Christian, whatever his condition and dignity in the Church, even if he is the pope, is obliged to obey the Council in all that has to do with faith and to extirpate this schism." (Denzinger-Hünermann (2000). *Enchiridion symbolorum. El Magisterio de la Iglesia*. Barcelona: Herder, p. 421).
3. Denifle, Henri (1904). *Lutero y el luteranismo estudiados en las fuentes.* Manila.
4. Febvre, Lucien (1994). *Martin Lutero: un destino*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
5. Lutero, Martín (2016). «Charlas de sóbremesa», in *Obras*. Edición de Teófanes Egido. Salamanca: Sígueme, p. 425.
6. Which he received through Gabriel Bel, a disciple of Ockham.
7. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1,17).
8. «Exhortación a la paz», in Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 429.
9. Prólogo a la edición de Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 370.
10. *Resolutiones disputationorum de indulgentiarum virtute*, 1518, Léonard, Émile (1967). *Historia General del Protestantismo*. Vol. I. La Reforma. Madrid: Península, p. 49.
11. Prologue to the edition of Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 370.
12. «Artículos de Schmalkalda», in Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 356.
13. In 1514 Albert of Brandenburg was, at the age of 23, both bishop of Magdeburg and administrator of Halbertstadt. He connived to be elected bishop of Maguncia, one of the most desired sees because of its wealth and because its prince was an elector of the empire. To allow Albert to accumulate so many titles, Pope Leo X required from him a great sum of money, which was obtained thanks to a loan from the Fuggers' bank. To help Albert pay back the money, the Pope authorized him to preach the sale of indulgences in his territories, but he also stipulated that 50% of the money collected should be dedicated to continuing the war against the Turks and the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica, initiated by Pope Julius II. The preacher was the Dominican Johann Tetzel.
14. Cf. Moltmann, Jürgen (2010). *El Dios crucificado*, Salamanca: Sígueme; (1997) *Cristo para nosotros hoy*. Madrid: Trotta.
15. En García Villoslada, Ricardo (1973). *Martín Lutero, vol. I.* Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC) Maior, pp. 414-452. There is a detailed explanation of the debate in Leipzig between Karlstadt and Eck and between Luther and Eck.
16. García Villoslada, Ricardo (1973). *Op. cit.*, p. 515.
17. «Carta de Martí Luter al papa Lleó X», in Lutero, Martín (1996). *Op. cit.*, p. 53.
18. The famous work, *In Praise of Folly* (1511), is an implacable but delightful satire regarding the main issues of the world at that time: wealth, political power, peace and war, theologians, friars, etc. In most of the topics it treats the document could well be speaking of the world of today.
19. *The Twelve Articles* actually proposed a minimalist program; it did not question religion, taxes, the princes' authority, or their right to obtain firewood from the forests. The document simply asked that the peasants be respected and allowed to live in a dignified way, fearing God and free of arbitrary impositions.
20. Cf. «*Sermó als prínceps de Saxònia»*, 1524, in Müntzer, Thomas (1989). *Tractats i Sermons*. Barcelona: Edicions Proa. Clàssics del Cristianisme, 8, p. 34.
21. Kautsky, K. and Engels, F. (1850). *La guerra de los campesinos en Alemania*; Bloch, Ernst (1968). *Thomas Müntzer, teólogo de la revolución*. Madrid: Ciencia Nueva.
22. «Exhortación a la paz», in Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.

23. «Contra las hordas ladronas», in Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-255.
24. Some have attempted to see philosophical justification for Luther's political actions, for example, by proposing Augustinian roots in his theory of the two kingdoms or citing Ockham's principle of not subordinating the material order to the spiritual. Cf. Duch, Lluís, (1984). *Explicació del Parenostre*. Montserrat: Publicacions de l'Abadia.
25. Lluís Duch in the introduction of Müntzer, Thomas (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 22: "There is no doubt that the conflict with Müntzer was one of the decisive causes of the increasing intolerance and reification of Luther's theology and political thought."
26. «Exhortación a la paz», in Lutero, Martín (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 291.
27. Edition of Gabriel Tomàs, member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Barcelona. 2012.
28. *Documents d'Església*, 376 (1983), 1139-1148.
29. Comisión Luterano-Católica para la Unidad (2013). *Del Conflicto a la comunión. Conmemoración Conjunta Luterano-Católico Romana de la Reforma en el 2017.* Santander: Sal Terrae.
30. Here is a fragment of Pope Francis's discourse in Lund: "The question that continually tormented Luther was 'How can I find a merciful God?' In truth, the question of the right relation with God is the decisive question of life. As is well known, Luther discovered this merciful God in the Good News of Jesus Christ incarnate, dead, and risen. The concept 'by divine grace alone' reminds us that God always takes the initiative and precedes any human response, even at the very moment that one is seeking to give the response. The doctrine of justification therefore expresses the essence of human existence before God."
31. Bedoya, Juan. «El papa Francisco reivindica a Lutero, el "peor de los herejes"», *El País*. 31 October 2016.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bloch, Ernst (1968). *Thomas Müntzer, teólogo de la Revolución*. Madrid: Ciencia Nueva.
- Febvre, Lucien (1994). *Martín Lutero: un destino*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Comisión Luterano-Católica sobre la Unidad (2013). *Del conflicto a la comunión.* Santander: Sal Terrae.
- García Villoslada, Ricardo (1973). *Martín Lutero*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC) Maior. Vol. 1 *El Fraile hambriento de Dios*; vol. II *En lucha contra Roma.*
- Iglesia Católica y Federación Luterana Mundial (1999). *Declaración conjunta sobre la doctrina de la justificación.*
- Kasper, Walter (2016). *Martín Lutero. Una perspectiva ecuménica*. Santander: Sal Terrae.
- Kaufmann, Thomas (2017). *Martín Lutero*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Lutero, Martín (2008). *Escritos políticos*. Introducción de Joaquín Abellán. Barcelona: Tecnos.
- Lutero, Martín. *Comentarios. Gálatas* (2010); *Romanos* (2013). Barcelona: Ed. CLIE.
- Lutero, Martín (2016). *Obras*. Edición de Teófanes Egido. Salamanca: Sígueme.

Cristianisme i Justícia (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a Study Centre under the initiative of the Society of Jesus in Catalonia. It consists of a team of university professors and experts in theology and different social and human sciences, who are concerned with the increasingly important cultural interrelations between faith and justice.

The collection *Cristianisme i Justícia* introduces some of the findings of the seminars held by the Centre as well as some of the essays of its staff and contributors. The Foundation sends its booklets free of charge to those who ask for them.

148. J. LAGUNA. Evangelical Dystopias; 149. J. F. MÀRIA, E. DEVUYST. King Leopold's Mines; 150. V. CODINA. Fifty Years ago There Was a Council…; 151. A. BLANCH. Leo Tolstoy, Political Prophet and Evangelical Anarchist; 152. J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS. A New Church for a New World; 153. A. CALDERÓN, L. SOLS. Europe at the Crossroads; 154. S. HERRERA. Trapped in Limbo, Women, Migration and Sexual Violence; 155. J. CARRERA. The Revolution of Every Day. Christianity, Capitalism, and Post-modernity; 156. O. MATEOS. From «Tragedy» to «Miracle»? Africa in the New Multipolar Context; 157. J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS. God?; 158. X. ALEGRE SANTAMARIA, J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, J. MARTÍNEZ GORDO, A. TORRES QUEIRUGA. Rebuilding Lives, Divorce, Welcome, and Communion; 159. J. FLAQUER. Islam: The Crescent Moon… Waxing; 160. M. GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN. From Hostility to Hospitality; 161. SEVERAL AUTHORS. New Frontiers, the Same Commitment; 162. J. LAGUNA. Steepping on the Moon; 163. C. M. TEMPORELLI. Friends of God, Prophets of the People; 164. J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS. Inhuman and Subhuman; 165. J. CARRERA, L. PUIG. Toward an Integral Ecology; 166. J. SANZ. How to Think About Change Today; 167. J. BOTEY. The Protestant Reformation at 500 Years

All booklets can be downloaded from internet:
www.cristianismeijusticia.net/en/cj-booklets

N. 167, March 2018

Cristianisme i Justícia
Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona
+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com
www.cristianismeijusticia.net

cristianismeijusticia **cijusticia** **CristianismeiJustícia**