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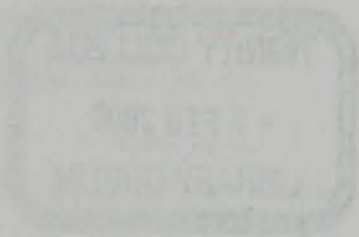
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The Triumph of Heresy:

**Luther's reformation and the common people: A study of pamphlet
propaganda in Erfurt, c. 1520-1525**

Philip Devlin



Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of
Dublin, 1997.

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DECLARATION

This thesis has not been submitted previously as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. It is entirely my own work. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this thesis on request.

Melvin Dewlin

Summary

This thesis deals with religious conflict. Concentrating on the period 1520-1525, it examines the attempt by Luther and a large party of like-minded men, mainly clerics, to win public support for a reform of piety. It focuses on one city and its rural territory, Erfurt in Thuringia. The main source is the 'popular' pamphlets produced during the propaganda battle against the 'old faith'. The foremost goal of the thesis is to elucidate public attitudes to Luther and his proposed reform, particularly to examine the lay understanding of, and response to the 'evangelical message'. This message was 'Christian freedom'. That is to say, the believer was liberated from the obligation to do good works, since salvation could be attained only through grace, which was freely given to all with faith.

The thesis is organised into six parts. Part I lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis of pamphlet literature. Chapter 1 reviews some of the main studies of the lay response to Luther's message during the period 1520-1525. Starting from the premise that Luther could count on overwhelming support, most historians of the urban reformation have sought to explain his popularity by identifying links between the reformer's doctrine and the religious and social concerns of the common people. The present writer argues that this line of investigation has led to a serious distortion of popular attitudes towards Luther. Evidence of a change of heart towards the reformer has not been given the consideration it deserves. Above all, there has been no attempt to assess the impact of the vigorous Catholic campaign against him. The present study aims to make good this deficit. Building on R. W. Scribner's pioneering work in the field of popular belief, the investigation focuses on four 'modes of persuasion' used by evangelical propagandists: the use of images; the appeal to prophecy; doctrinal instruction; and 'ritual deconstruction'.

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the political, religious and intellectual life of Erfurt on the eve of the Reformation and traces the city council's policy during the 1520s. The choice of Erfurt for a case-study is also discussed. Chapter 3 reviews previous approaches to the analysis of popular pamphlets. It is argued that historians who have examined the texts on the assumption that Luther remained a popular figure throughout the 1520s have overlooked evidence both of the growing effectiveness of the Catholic campaign and of a major shift of opinion on the part of the laity.

Part II assesses the effectiveness of the use of images by evangelical propagandists in their attempt both to invest Luther with charismatic authority and to denigrate his clerical opponents. Chapter 4 deals with the period from late 1519 to mid-1521 and discusses the reasons why Luther was widely perceived as a saint-like figure in the early phase of his conflict with Rome. Chapter 5 traces the efforts of evangelical pamphleteers to defend Luther's reputation as a divinely inspired teacher

after the Diet of Worms. It is shown that, following his condemnation, they found it increasingly difficult to refute the charge that he was guilty of heresy. Chapter 6 discusses the evangelical attempt to portray the Roman clergy as diabolical agents who hated scripture and taught 'human' laws. It is argued that the reformers' denigration of their opponents failed, mainly because they relied too heavily on the images of the corrupt Dominican developed in humanist propaganda during the Reuchlin affair. These images proved ineffective in localised conflicts, where ordinary people could see clearly that they did not 'fit' Luther's leading opponents. Chapter 7 examines the Catholic appeal to traditional authority: canon law, the Church councils and the 'approved doctors'. It is shown that although evangelical propaganda could appeal effectively to popular hatred of canon law, the doctrinal decisions of the Church councils continued to command respect. Above all, many laymen accepted that the 'approved doctors' had been divinely inspired. Evangelical propagandists constructed an antithesis between the divine and the human which ordinary folk did not swallow.

Part III deals with the evangelical attempt to show that Luther's reformation was the fulfilment of God's plan of redemption. Chapter 8 outlines the two main views of salvation history, that of the Church and Joachite millenarianism. Luther's relation to each of these traditions is also discussed. It is shown that the reformer, who believed in the imminence of the Second Coming, was mainly concerned to attack the Church's 'long-term' view of world history. Nevertheless he owed his early popularity to the fact that his assault on the Church was widely perceived to be 'covered' by the immensely authoritative Joachite prophecies. Chapter 9 looks at Luther's unsuccessful attempt to persuade his contemporaries that the End was at hand and discusses the reasons for his failure. In calling on people to prepare for the Last Judgement, he disregarded the aspirations of those who had found consolation in Joachite prophecies of terrestrial renewal. Chapter 10 examines evidence of the continuing influence of the Joachite legacy. It is shown that, although the millenarian prophetic tradition had initially favoured Luther, by 1522 it had started to work against him.

Part IV treats of the conflict over Luther's doctrine of justification. Chapter 11 compares the teaching of the rival parties and traces the debate in Erfurt. It is shown that Catholic preachers, who propagated the soteriology of the *via moderna*, were more than able to hold their ground. Although Luther won some adherents, probably the greater part of the laity accepted the Catholic standpoint that scripture prescribed good works as a condition of salvation. Chapter 12 discusses the issues of temporal satisfaction and purgatory. It is argued that although the cost of many of the practices associated with the cult of the dead - indulgences, endowed masses - was resented, the cult itself was also popular. Chapter 13 deals discusses the question whether confession was 'psychologically burdensome'. It is shown that the perceived benefits of the sacrament of penance greatly outweighed fear of the confessor. Chapter 14 discusses the thesis that Luther's emphasis on charity, as opposed to the

other 'classic' Christian virtues of fasting and prayer, appealed to the laity. It is shown that the 'pious majority' continued to see fasting as a good work. At the same time, the fact that Luther's adherents were not perceived to be practising Christian charity reinforced doubts about his teaching.

Part V examines the evangelical assault on the regular orders, the cult of saints, the celibate priesthood and the mass. All of these practices and institutions had been valued by the laity, partly for their spiritual efficacy, partly as channels through which flowed the 'sacred power' which gave protection in everyday life. In attacking them evangelical propagandists generally combined doctrinal instruction with 'ritual deconstruction'. The simpler their audience, the more important was the latter 'mode of persuasion'. In Chapter 15, it is shown that the evangelical campaign against monasticism relied less on theological argument than on the claim that the monks had grievously violated their Rule. Charges of gluttony and sexual licence proved to be the more effective way of robbing the monks of their aura of holiness. It is argued that the common people continued to hold monastic piety in high esteem. Chapter 16 traces the Erfurt debate about the role of the saints as intercessors. The methods by which evangelical reformers attempted to destroy people's faith in the power of images and relics are also discussed. It is shown that reformers closer than Luther to the common people recognised their need for powerful protectors in this life and, to this end, attempted to set up a 'cult of Christ' in place of the cult of the saints. Chapter 17 examines the evangelical case against enforced celibacy and traces the popular reaction to the marriage of priests. It is shown that the common people despised married priests. This attitude is discussed in the light of evidence of continuing popular belief in the power of the Roman mass. It is argued that most people opposed clerical marriage because they believed that priestly continence enhanced the efficacy of the mass.

Part VI discusses the 'ideology' of the popular revolt of 1525. Chapter 18 summarises the evidence of Catholic 'success' and evangelical 'failure'. In Erfurt, 'the Reformation' can be shown to have been a coup by zealous Lutherans. There follows a discussion of the different ideas and interests which forged a temporary bond between people divided over the 'religious question'. The part played by evangelical propaganda in unleashing the communal rebellion is also discussed.

The thesis shows, not only that pamphlets provide access to the religious world of ordinary lay folk, but also that reformation historians have greatly exaggerated the level of popular support for Luther and his religious reform.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BENTZINGER Die Wahrheit muß ans Licht! Dialoge aus der Zeit der Reformation, ed. Rudolf Bentzinger (Leipzig, 1982).
- BÖCKING Ulrich von Hutten. Schriften, ed. Eduard Böcking (Leipzig 1859-1870).
- CLEMEN Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation, 4 vols., ed. Otto Clemen (Halle, 1907-1911; reprint: Nieuwkoop, 1967).
- CWE Collected Works of Erasmus (Toronto, 1974 -).
- DR Deutsche Reichstagsakten, Jüngere Reihe, Vols. 2 and 3 (Gotha, 1896, 1901).
- ENDERS Johann Eberlin von Günzburg. Sämtliche Schriften, 3 vols., ed. Ludwig Enders (Halle, 1896, 1900, 1902). Neudrucke deutscher Litteraturwerke des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts, 139/141, 170/172, 183/188.
- GÖTZE Martin Butzers Erstlingsschrift. Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 4 (1906).
- KÖHLER Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts. Teil I, Das frühe 16. Jahrhundert (1501-1530), 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1991, 1992, 1996).
- LAUBE Flugschriften der frühen Reformationsbewegung (1518-1524), 2 vols., ed. Adolf Laube (Vaduz, 1983).
- LAUBE/
SEIFFERT Flugschriften aus der Bauernkriegszeit, ed. Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert (Berlin, 1975).
- LILIENCRON Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert, ed. R. von Liliencron, 5. vols. (Leipzig, 1865-1869), Vol. 3, 1867.
- SCHADE Satiren und Pasquille aus der Reformationszeit, ed. Oskar Schade, 3 vols., (Hanover, 1863; reprint Hildesheim, 1966).
- SPRIEWALD Hans Sachs. Die Prosadialoge, ed. Ingeborg Spriewald (Leipzig, 1970).
- STOKES Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum: The Latin Text with an English Rendering, Notes and an Historical Introduction, ed. Francis Griffin Stokes (London, 1909).
- THIELE Memoriale thüringisch-erfurtische Chronik von Konrad Stolle, ed. Richard Thiele (Halle, 1900). Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen, 39.
- TRILLITZSCH Der deutsche Renaissancehumanismus. Abriß und Auswahl, ed. Winfried Trillitzsch (Leipzig, 1981).
- V. HASE Bibliographie der Erfurter Drucke von 1501-1550, ed. Martin von Hase (Nieuwkoop, 1968).
- WA Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Schriften (Weimar, 1883 -).
- WAB Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel (Weimar, 1930 -).

1. Approaches to the investigation of popular attitudes

(i) The common people and Luther: interpretations of the urban reformation

In the first half of the 1520s, the German cities were the scene of a devastating assault on the Catholic church. By 1525, Rome's authority had collapsed and new orders of worship and church constitutions were being established. The role of the common people in this 'triumph of the reformation', in particular the question of how they conceived of Luther, is a perennial topic of debate. The main line of investigation has been strongly influenced by Bernd Moeller's essay, *The Imperial Cities and the Reformation*. Moeller argued that the German cities rejected Catholicism largely because of 'pressure from below': the citizens, not the town councils, were the agents of 'the reformation'. To elucidate their motives, he sought to identify 'points of contact' between their specific concerns and Luther's theology. Moeller's view of the reformation as a distinctively 'urban event' has not gone unchallenged. Economically and socially, it is argued, the cities and their rural hinterland were interdependent.¹ In the early 1520s, townsmen and peasants frequently joined forces to apply pressure to urban governments.² Yet historians who stress the peasant contribution to the 'success' of the urban reformation have nevertheless adopted Moeller's 'points of contact' model.

Discussion of popular motivation has focused on two main issues: whether people were attracted by Luther's doctrine of justification by faith; and how his theology interacted with the broader social concerns of urban and rural communities. Loosely speaking, two schools of interpretation have emerged. On the one hand, 'intellectual historians', such as Moeller and Steven Ozment, believe that the laity understood and loudly endorsed Luther's message of salvation. This marked a break with the 'negative' anticlericalism of the late middle ages. 'Social historians', on the other hand, are more sceptical. Hans-Jürgen Goertz finds it 'difficult to say' whether the urban commons were moved by 'love of the gospel'. Thomas A. Brady believes that Luther's adherents were convinced that 'the bible required the abolition of certain religious traditions and the curbing of ecclesiastical power'. However, he also suggests that they may not have grasped the core of evangelical teaching. To gain a sympathetic hearing, reformers addressed such secondary issues as usury, tithes, clerical immunities, etc. In so doing, they risked 'sowing unclarity' about their message.³ For Peter Blickle, the doctrine of justification by faith was a negligible factor behind the dynamism of the popular movements.⁴

¹ Brady (1978), pp. 13ff and (1982), pp. 170ff.; Goertz (1982), p. 208; Held (1988), pp. 7ff.

² Blickle (1985), pp. 114ff.

³ Brady (1985), pp. 152ff.

⁴ Blickle (1985), p. 21.

Intellectual historians tend to stress the impact of 'evangelical' teaching on the cities' system of values. Moeller once argued that Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers appealed to the urban commons, whose political status was being undermined by the growth of oligarchic government.⁵ More recently, he has suggested that the manifold conflicts of interest in urban society created a yearning for unity and harmony which was answered by Luther's call for Christian neighbourliness.⁶ According to Ozment, the same call met the laity's need for a 'religious transvaluation'. Weary of the dominance of monastic values, townspeople chose a piety of active charity to enhance their own social status.⁷ Social historians discern links between Luther's message and popular insurrection. Goertz argues that the common people believed that Luther endorsed a 'revolt against the clergy'.⁸ Both Brady and Blickle stress the connection between Luther's message and the 1525 urban and rural revolts. According to Brady, 'the little people in the cities, in the small towns and on the land absorbed the propaganda of Luther into a pre-existing program of social transformation...'.⁹ Blickle believes that the common people assimilated evangelical ideas, in particular Luther's defence of the right of the *Gemeinde* (congregation) to elect its pastor, to their own 'theory of a Christian republic'.¹⁰ Like Brady, he stresses that the gospel, understood as the *lex Christi*, legitimated protest against social injustice.¹¹

Some scholars try to reconcile all standpoints. Heinrich R. Schmidt argues that people initially saw Luther's cause as the redress of anticlerical grievances. Once reformers began to preach his message of salvation, the 'revelation' that the existing sacramental system was a 'human' invention produced a movement of faith. For the common people, however, the gospel was both the promise of redemption and, as the *lex evangelica*, the standard by the secular order was judged. To improve their lot, they were prepared to rebel against authority. Yet in the end they settled their differences with the town councils in a spirit of Christian neighbourliness.¹² Schmidt's study exemplifies a trend toward 'multi-dimensional' explanation of Luther's popular appeal. While this may reflect a growing appreciation of the complexity of human motivation, it can also be seen as a symptom of analytical deadlock. Blickle has recently remarked that 'research on the urban reformation seems to have exhausted all possible interpretations'.¹³ Certainly, the current line of investigation is unlikely to yield new insights. At all events, there are two good reasons for a critical appraisal of Moeller's 'points of contact' model. First, its premise - that the common people stood behind Luther - is questionable. Second, narrowly focussed on the links between 'doctrine' and popular concerns, it provides only limited access to the religious thought-world of the common people.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶ Moeller (1983).

⁷ Ozment (1975), p. 124.

⁸ Goertz (1982).

⁹ Brady (1978), p. 199.

¹⁰ Blickle (1985), p. 165.

¹¹ Brady (1985), pp. 152ff., Blickle (1985), p. 70.

¹² Schmidt, H. R., (1986), esp. pp. 51-52, 70, 119, 154, 171, 261, 330.

¹³ Blickle (1995), p. 168.

(ii) Did the common people support Luther?

It is usually assumed that Luther was backed by clear majorities. Scholars speak of the laity, the common man, the little people, ordinary folk and so on. Such usage, though suggestive of popular consensus, in fact reflects the difficulty of establishing who was involved.¹⁴ Brady, however, points out that majorities for the evangelical reform are undocumented. The most that can be said is that reformers mobilised 'large numbers'.¹⁵ Certainly, when cited to Worms in 1521, Luther was an unchallenged hero, the embodiment of Germany's yearning for reform. There is broad agreement that, at this stage, people saw his cause as the redress of anticlerical and anti-Roman grievances. It also seems clear that the communal revolts of 1525 drew on widespread popular support. In many cities, the pattern of protest is identical with that in earlier popular uprisings.¹⁶ Blickle and others have stressed that the lists of articles presented by the insurgents rarely endorse evangelical doctrine, but appeal to older, uncontroversial principles of legitimation, such as the *lex evangelica*. Blickle sees this as proof that 'social concerns' shaped popular perception of Luther's message. Yet it also suggests that the insurgents may not have regarded themselves as Luther's partisans. Blickle's view that they did rests on the questionable assumption that the common people were indifferent to the 'core' of his message. Yet, as Berndt Hamm observes, 'the public clash of opinion, heated by propaganda, made theological truth the object of general debate'.¹⁷ Confronted with the alternatives of 'true' and 'false' religion, people came under increasing pressure to choose.

Historians who believe that the majority endorsed Luther's doctrine usually advance three mutually reinforcing arguments. First, 'late medieval piety' was somehow unsatisfying. People were therefore 'predisposed' to accept a message offering certainty of salvation. Second, Luther's teaching was skilfully propagated, both from the pulpit and through the print medium. Both large attendance at the reformers' sermons and the high level of demand for their pamphlets attest to the enormous popularity of their message.¹⁸ Third, the introduction of a Lutheran reformation attests to broad popular support.¹⁹

The thesis that 'medieval piety' failed to relieve, or even generated, religious anxiety is highly controversial.²⁰ Scholars taking this view have had to confront what Moeller terms 'churchliness', i. e. an external picture of overwhelming lay

¹⁴ Cf. Blickle (1985): 'Die Unschärfe der Begriffswahl liegt in der Sache begründet, weil es sich als äußerst schwierig erweist, die Verfechter der evangelischen Bewegung und ihre soziale oder politische Stellung genau zu fixieren.' See also Brady (1978), pp. 38, 43-44, who points out that without sufficient evidence, 'faceless generalisations' are inevitable in respect of the lower classes.

¹⁵ Brady (1985), p. 156.

¹⁶ See esp. Rammstedt (1978) and Rotz (1985).

¹⁷ Hamm (1995), p. 211.

¹⁸ Moeller (1979), pp. 31ff; (1981), p. 265; (1983), p. 19.

¹⁹ Ozment (1975), pp. 48-49.

²⁰ For a critique of this thesis, see Oakley (1979), pp. 118ff; Duggan (1984), Russell (1986), pp. 45-47.

contentment with religious life. Moeller pleads for 'latent anxiety'.²¹ Yet the main proof is the supposedly enthusiastic response to Luther's doctrines. Although evangelical preachers drew large crowds, the most we can safely deduce is that people were curious to hear their message.²² The same may apply to the purchase of pamphlets.²³ At the outset of the evangelical campaign, after all, Luther enjoyed an enormous bonus of trust. However, by 1522, his message was evoking contrary reactions. As the Wittenberg Movement illustrates, some laypeople impatiently attacked the trappings of 'papal religion'.²⁴ Yet this led others take a fresh look at Luther. In 1522, an adherent of the *devotio moderna*, remarked that although he 'seemed' to be preaching the truth, the fruits of his teaching told a different story.²⁵ Luther, well aware of the offence caused by the assault on old customs, warned the Erfurt reformer, Johannes Lange, to ensure that the Wittenberg 'tumult' was not repeated there.²⁶

By this time, Luther was explaining the divided response to his message within the framework of the Pauline distinction between the 'strong' and the 'weak'.²⁷ Reforms, he argued, should be introduced cautiously, to avoid offending 'the weak', i.e. those not 'strong' enough to dispense with the 'outward' props of Catholic religion. Yet the 'weak' were less open to persuasion than he had initially hoped. In 1523, he called for a firm stand on the sacrament in two kinds. Whoever took offence was not weak, but obstinate.²⁸ In several towns, popular opposition to evangelical reformers was strong.²⁹ Heiko Oberman argues that Luther never expected a 'great harvest'. Although he addressed a wider public, he did so for the sake of the small community of elect Christians. By contrast, urban evangelical leaders were more optimistic.³⁰ One indication of this is their subsequent disillusionment. Adolf Laube points out that, around 1523/1524, a 'mood of crisis' set in. The realisation that their gospel had not produced the expected response baffled and disheartened evangelical leaders.³¹ Looking beyond the 1520s, it is clear that 'weakness' and 'obstinacy' were no transient phenomenon. Scholars have coined the term 'Second Reformation' to cover, among other things, the task which fell to the second generation of reformers: eliminating 'leftover papal dung'.³² Gerald Strauss's landmark study of visitation records shows that little progress was made, either in urban or rural society.³³ Strauss concludes that an enormous burden of proof rests on historians who 'claim... that the

²¹ Moeller (1971).

²² Cf. Wohlfeil (1982), p. 124.

²³ This question is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

²⁴ On the Wittenberg Movement, see Scribner (1987), pp. 146-149.

²⁵ Post (1968), p. 586.

²⁶ Kleineidam (1980), p. 19.

²⁷ Brecht (1986), p. 41.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁹ Cf. Russell (1986), p. 101: 'Apparently many people in Memmingen were reluctant to abandon the faith of their fathers.' See also Scribner (1987), pp. 152-153, who points to the unbroken popularity of the Franciscans in Zwickau as late as 1525, observing that the council feared that its cautious *Ratsreformation* might provoke popular revolt. Schmidt, H. R. (1986), pp. 283, 285ff, presents evidence of strong loyalty to the Church which is not easily reconciled with his thesis that the greater part of the citizens had been won over to Luther's teaching.

³⁰ Oberman (1982).

³¹ Laube (1983), pp. 93ff.

³² Cf. Nischan (1994), pp. 132ff.

³³ Strauss (1978), esp. pp. 249-308.

Reformation in Germany aroused a widespread, meaningful and lasting response to its message'.³⁴

As long as it was held that city councils accepted 'the reformation' against their will, the inference that Luther's teaching must have enjoyed mass popular support, though not compelling, was at least tenable.³⁵ However, scholars no longer believe that the councils were wholly hostile to Luther.³⁶ Individually, many councillors sympathised with his teaching. Collectively, they faced a difficult political choice. Like the territorial princes, they hoped to use the 'Luther affair' to extend their influence over their local churches. They would enforce the Edict of Worms only in return for concessions from Rome.³⁷ However, their partnership with the Habsburg monarchy, the mainstay of political independence, would have been served better by opposition to Luther.³⁸ Generalisation about which of these considerations weighed more heavily is difficult. Wolfram Wettges, interprets council policy in the context of a longer term process by which city councils consolidated control over ecclesiastical affairs. The relatively late establishment of 'the Reformation' in Augsburg (1533) and Regensburg (1542) indicates that popular pressure could, but did not necessarily, accelerate this process. Regardless of when the new religious order was established, it bore the stamp of city governments.³⁹ The Cologne council, on the other hand, unwilling to jeopardise imperial good will, resolutely opposed Luther, previous internal ecclesiastical policy notwithstanding.⁴⁰ Its successful suppression of 'Lutheranism' not only shows how easily 'pressure from below' could be withstood. Indirectly, it confirms Wettges's view that, elsewhere, many councils were happy to allow themselves to be 'pushed'.

Certainly, in justifying their half-hearted enforcement of the Edict of Worms, city councils consistently claimed that popular pressure was irresistible. Schmidt sees this as evidence of a universal, spontaneous espousal of Luther's teaching. Given the councils' determination to exploit the 'Luther affair', however, the honesty of their apologies may be doubted. Yet even at face value, they do not support Schmidt's reading. On the one hand, councils asserted they could enforce the Edict of Worms only if action were first taken on grievances.⁴¹ On the other hand, they pleaded that enforcement was difficult as long as the common people were 'confused' by the doctrinal conflict, an argument also advanced by Saxon delegates to the imperial diets.⁴² Schmidt dismisses this as polite fiction.⁴³ Yet there was every reason for

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 307-308.

³⁵ Cf. Wohlfeil (1982), pp. 124-125: 'Aussagen über Annahme und überzeugte Aneignung reformatorischer Lehre werden historiographisch meist aus späteren Fakten abgeleitet. Derartige Rückschlüsse sind nicht zu vermeiden, können jedoch komplizierte Wirkungsprozesse als ausschließlich religiös... erscheinen lassen.'

³⁶ Cf. Ozment (1975), pp. 121ff; Brady (1978), p. 200; Blickle (1985), pp. 101-103; Press (1986), p. 25, n. 51; Goertz (1987), p. 160.

³⁷ See esp. Schmidt, H. R. (1986), pp. 42-45.

³⁸ Brady (1985), pp. 185, 228; Schmidt, H. R., (1986), pp. 129-130.

³⁹ Wettges (1978), esp. pp. 118-123.

⁴⁰ Scribner (1987), esp. pp. 224-225.

⁴¹ On the estates, see Borth (1970), p. 139. Schmidt, H. R. (1986), p. 100, points out that the cities used the same argument.

⁴² Borth (1970), pp. 136-137.

⁴³ Schmidt, H. R. (1986), p. 139.

confusion. On the one hand, Luther, hero of the grievance movement, suddenly emerged as the enemy of all that was holy. On the other hand, the hated Roman clergy became defenders of religious practices to which the 'churchly' Germans had been strongly attached. The failure of the 1525 articles to endorse Luther's teaching could indicate confessional parity or even a Catholic majority.

(iii) 'Popular religion' and the response to Luther.

The response to Luther cannot be explained solely in the light of the perceived social relevance of evangelical doctrine. R. W. Scribner has shown that evangelical reformers employed several modes of persuasion in their appeal for support. Working with images, they attempted to set Luther up as a charismatic leader.⁴⁴ Invoking prophecy, they tried to portray his conflict with Rome as a cosmic battle against the papal Antichrist.⁴⁵ No less important, they were aware that, for a great part of the laity, the efficacy of traditional modes of piety depended less on Catholic doctrine than on the perceived power of religious ritual. Accordingly, anti-Catholic propaganda often took the form of the ritual deconstruction of the symbolic world of papal religion.⁴⁶ The relevance of Scribner's groundbreaking work to urban reformation studies might appear self-evident. Yet just how little cross-fertilisation there has been between the two fields is illustrated in the recent *Handbook of European History: 1400-1600*.⁴⁷ The 'urban reformation' and 'popular religion' are treated as distinct and largely unrelated phenomena.⁴⁸ The present study aims to bring together these two strands of reformation research.

In examining the religious thought-world of ordinary folk, Scribner's main concern has been to explain the 'success' of evangelical propaganda. If, however, evangelical reformers won only limited support, we need to expand our horizon. As well as analysing the attempt to invest Luther with charisma, it is necessary to examine the sources of legitimation to which his opponents appealed. In studying the apocalyptic dimension to the conflict, we need to be alert not just to how prophetic traditions favoured Luther, but also to how they might have worked against him. Finally, as well as focussing on evangelical attempts at 'ritual deconstruction', we should ask to what extent the 'ritual mentality' of ordinary folk hindered the propagation of Luther's message.

⁴⁴ Scribner (1981), pp. 14-36.

⁴⁵ Scribner (1981), pp. 148-189.

⁴⁶ Scribner (1987), pp. 1-47; 103-122.

⁴⁷ *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Obermann and James D. Tracy (Leiden, 1995).

⁴⁸ Blickle (1995) asks how the common people conceived of Luther. However, he makes no reference to Scribner's work on the 'Luther myth', on apocalyptic themes in evangelical propaganda, or on the thought structures of the common people. Hamm (1995), p. 200, refers only in passing to Scribner's work on 'deconstruction'. On the other hand, Scribner (1995), pp. 231-255, does not interpret the conflicts of the period 1520-1525 in the light of his findings on popular culture and belief.

(iv) 'Public opinion' and popular movements

The striking line of continuity between late medieval 'churchliness', 'weakness' and 'obstinacy' during the 1520s, and the evidence of later visitation records speaks for strong popular resistance to Luther's message. If the urban revolts drew on broad support, they must have included both passionate adherents and resolute opponents of Luther. Pressure 'from below' produced results which were not commensurate with the pace and direction of opinion formation on the issues raised by Luther. This discrepancy highlights a major deficit of the 'points of contact' model: its failure to distinguish between 'public opinion' and the 'ideology' of movements. Public opinion is concerned with issues. Some scholars question whether the term can be used meaningfully in respect of sixteenth century urban society. Rainer Wohlfeil has proposed the concept of '*reformatorische Öffentlichkeit*' as an alternative to *öffentliche Meinung*.⁴⁹ The distinction seems a little fastidious. Obviously criteria such as education, press freedom, or the franchise are not fulfilled. Nevertheless, there was public controversy about matters of general concern. Broadly speaking we can identify four distinct, though related, issues. The first was Luther himself; the second, God's purpose in history as revealed in prophecy; the third, Luther's doctrine of justification; the fourth, the efficacy of Catholic religious ritual. Evangelical propagandists fought a battle for legitimation, addressing their audience through sermons, pamphlets and illustrated broadsheets. Their Catholic opponents fought back, largely, though not exclusively, from the pulpit. One of the most serious deficits in urban reformation research is the neglect of the Catholic campaign. Although Luther's opponents lost their battle to save the Church, it is far from clear that they lost the people's hearts. Opinion was certainly divided.

A movement can be defined as a form of collective behaviour which arises at moments of crisis, that is when the need for change is urgently felt but the hope of achieving it through conventional channels is slight. Movements are held together by a unifying idea.⁵⁰ Scribner cites examples of movements which, animated by evangelical preachers, took impatient action against the old faith. Their protest expressed itself in satire and mockery, disobedience and provocation, rowdiness and riot.⁵¹ However, not all movements were narrowly confessional. Wohlfeil speaks of a broad spectrum of overlapping reform movements. Although all were committed to 'the word of God', some pursued largely 'secular' goals.⁵² Similarly, Goertz argues that the 1520s did not bring forth a single movement, but rather a 'conjunction' of movements, disparate groups not necessarily pursuing the same objectives, but united in hatred of a common enemy - the clergy - and by a common desire for Christian renewal.⁵³

⁴⁹ Wohlfeil (1982), pp. 123 ff.

⁵⁰ Cf. Rammstedt (1978) and Scribner (1987), esp. p. 150.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 145-174.

⁵² Wohlfeil (1982), pp. 99ff.

⁵³ Goertz (1987), pp. 244-250.

These definitions can reconcile the evidence of strong popular hostility to Luther, on the one hand, and broad participation in the popular revolts, on the other. Anticlericalism, communal solidarity or the idea of divine justice may have forged a bond between people split over the 'religious question'. Loyal Catholics could have joined forces with 'evangelical' Christians in protest against tithes, usury or clerical wealth and privilege. The call for the destruction of monasteries, repeatedly made in late medieval popular prophecy and reform tracts,⁵⁴ was not incompatible with Catholic belief. Townsmen who rejected Luther's 'heresy' might nevertheless have invoked the *lex Christi* against secular authority. In the late medieval period, after all, the demand for social justice was commonly legitimated by an appeal to 'God's law'.⁵⁵ At all events, the public debate of religious questions has considerable bearing on interpretation of the urban and rural revolts. Clarification of the process of opinion formation would make it easier to identify the 'unifying idea' of the popular movements.

One other feature of a movement to which Goertz draws attention is its uncontrollability. The results which it produces do not necessarily reflect the aims of those involved, but rather depend on the reaction of those whom it challenges.⁵⁶ Although many of the insurgents may not have supported Luther, the popular movement posed a challenge to secular authority which his sympathisers in the urban governments were able to exploit. Catholic councillors were ill placed to resist a religious settlement which not only strengthened urban autonomy in religious affairs, but was also a means of placating at least a section of the insurgent populace. Although the propagation of Luther's gospel drove a rift through urban society, support was broad enough to make the imposition of 'the reformation' a viable option, possibly overriding 'public opinion'. From the standpoint of the common people, what historians have often described as a 'triumph of the reformation' may well have been a 'triumph of heresy'. At all events, if investigation of the 'popular response' to Luther focuses only on the motives of his supporters, it will lead to an unbalanced, even a false picture. The case of Erfurt, which we shall examine in the next chapter, will serve to illustrate the point.

⁵⁴ Such a call is found, for example, in the *Reformatio Sigismundi*. See Robinson-Hammerstein (1989), p. 25.

⁵⁵ Lenk (1976), pp. 78-79; Strauss (1986), p. 196.

⁵⁶ Goertz (1982), esp. pp. 183-184.

2. Erfurt - the background to the religious conflict

(i) Economy and politics

With a population of at least 16,000,¹ Erfurt was one of the larger German towns. It controlled an extensive territory beyond its walls - some 375 square miles with 24,000 inhabitants.² Unlike many other cities of its size, it had never achieved free imperial status, but was subject to the archbishop of Mainz.³ Surrounded by Saxony, it also maintained ties with the house of Wettin and participated in the Saxon safe-conduct system.⁴ Although late medieval Erfurt had flourished, the basis of its wealth was fragile.⁵ Manufacturing played a subordinate role. The only major export was woad, a regionally cultivated dyestuff.⁶ From the early sixteenth century, demand fell with the spread of new dyeing techniques. Trade, the second pillar of the city's economy, also suffered through growing competition from Leipzig and other Saxon towns.⁷ New opportunities, in particular the expanding regional mining industry, were seldom seized by the merchant class, which tended to invest profits in land.⁸ As the fifteenth century progressed, the citizens' participation in Erfurt's prosperity was increasingly restricted. The 'middle class' shrank as wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small 'upper stratum'. For independent craftsmen, the future held the prospect of impoverishment and loss of social status.⁹ The poorer artisans and labourers making up the 'lower stratum', roughly three quarters of Erfurt's taxpayers, owned less than a tenth of the city's wealth.¹⁰ Outside the ranks of taxpayers were the masses of have-nots. The distribution of political power was even more unbalanced. Although the constitution guaranteed broad representation,¹¹ by the late 15th century the commune's role in government was purely nominal.¹² While this development doubtless reflects the decline of the middle class, wealth alone did not provide access to power. The government was dominated by a small patrician clique. Both the 'new rich' and a number of patrician families were excluded.¹³ Following a communal revolt in 1509, the base of the government was broadened to take in these groups.

¹ Weiss (1979), p. 240, puts the figure at 16,000. Scribner (1987), p. 186, gives an estimate of 18,000. Other authorities put the figure as high as 20,000.

² On the importance of the civic territory to Erfurt's economy see esp. Held (1988), pp. 90-95.

³ On Erfurt's constitutional position, see esp. Benary (1919), pp. 65ff. Neubauer (1948), XII-XIV, argues that the oath of allegiance to the archbishop was no more compromising of the city's independence than similar oaths by such episcopal free imperial cities as Basel or Strasbourg. The possibility of developing imperial ties existed. Erfurt held the fortress of Kapellendorf in fee from the Emperor with the usual rights and obligations.

⁴ Neubauer (1948), pp. XIV-XV; Scribner (1972), pp. 21-22.

⁵ Scribner (1972), p. 34; Weiss (1982 a), p. 280.

⁶ Scribner (1972), pp. 28-32; Weiss (1982 a), pp. 276-8.

⁷ Cf. Weiss (1982a), pp. 278-279.

⁸ Scribner (1972), pp. 34-35; Weiss (1982 a), pp. 279-280.

⁹ Weiss (1982 a), pp. 240-241. On broadly similar trends in other Thuringian cities, see Held (1988), pp. 25 ff.

¹⁰ The figures are presented in tabular form in Scribner (1987), p. 187 and in Weiss (1979), p. 240. For a discussion of the pitfalls inherent in this procedure, see Held (1988), pp. 37-38.

¹¹ The system is described in detail in Benary (1919), pp. 50 ff. See also Scribner (1987), pp. 189-191.

¹² On the mechanisms of oligarchic control in Erfurt, see Benary (1919), p. 59. On the trend towards oligarchy in the German towns during the second half of 15th century, see Blickle (1985), p. 177.

¹³ Scribner (1972), pp. 59-61; Weiss (1982 a) pp. 277, 283; Held (1988), p. 45.

(ii) Foreign policy and urban revolt

The number of urban uprisings in late medieval Germany was significantly higher than elsewhere in Europe, some two hundred between 1310 and 1540. Rhiman A. Rotz sees frequent revolt as consequence of weak central government. Territorial princes and cities competed to fill a power vacuum. Urban governments financed a costly 'foreign policy' by unilaterally increasing the tax burden on the commune. Revolt was the only recourse for the citizens when their right to be consulted was ignored. Townspeople did not wish to participate in government, but rather to prevent their rulers from riding rough-shod over them. Although economic and social trends often 'affected the timing and particular issues of one citizen movement or another', there was no 'class conflict'. The socio-economic composition of anti-government movements was always mixed. In explaining the link between the 'citizen movements' of the early 1520s and Luther's message, Rotz follows Moeller's original thesis. The commune saw doctrinal change 'as a means of escaping subjection and drawing councils back into the community'. The councils, for their part, unwilling to grant consultation and partnership, offered religious change as a means of defusing citizen protest.¹⁴

By and large, Rotz's theory of urban revolt fits the pattern of conflict in Erfurt. Despite its ambiguous constitutional status, Erfurt had long enjoyed political autonomy. The overriding aim of its policy was to defend its independence against Mainz and Saxony. While the former sought to revive lapsed feudal rights, the latter aimed to incorporate the Thuringian metropolis into its territory.¹⁵ In the late fifteenth century, both powers had taken joint action, forcing Erfurt to reaffirm its allegiance to the archbishop and to accept the Saxon elector as protector in perpetuity. Happily for the city, this hostile alliance proved short-lived.¹⁶ Skilfully, the city's rulers played off the rival powers against each other.¹⁷ However, the 1483 settlement with Mainz and Saxony imposed vast reparations on the city, forcing the government to borrow heavily.¹⁸ The cost of servicing the civic debt was met mainly by increasing indirect taxes, placing a disproportionate burden on men of small means. It was against this background that the 1509 revolt broke out. The announcement of bankruptcy by the government ushered in seven years of turmoil.¹⁹ After the restoration of order in 1516, the city faced the same momentous problems as before the outbreak of the crisis. In 1517, the new government reintroduced unpopular taxes suspended during the revolt.²⁰ The financial crisis worsened and the commons

¹⁴ Rotz (1985), pp. 64-95.

¹⁵ Weiss (1982 a), pp. 282-283. Although it is sometimes suggested that Erfurt's ambiguous constitutional status made the city particularly vulnerable to Saxon designs, Weiss (1979), pp. 239-240, points out that the imperial cities of Mühlhausen and Nordhausen proved no more successful in resisting Saxon encroachments on their independence.

¹⁶ On the circumstances leading to this temporary alignment between two traditionally rival powers, see Scribner (1972), pp. 22ff.

¹⁷ Weiss (1979), p. 239; Scribner (1987), p. 191.

¹⁸ Weiss (1988), pp. 77-78.

¹⁹ For the years 1509/10, see Neubauer (1948). For the whole period, Scribner (1972), pp. 54-107.

²⁰ Scribner (1972), p. 160; Weiss (1979), p. 247.

continued to shoulder the burden. The *Twenty Eight Articles* presented during the 1525 revolt repeat the demands made in 1509.²¹

(iii) Religious life in late medieval Erfurt

Known to contemporaries as the 'Thuringian Rome', Erfurt was a major ecclesiastical centre.²² There were fourteen religious orders, more than in most other German cities.²³ In general, the religious orders were well-endowed, the regular clergy relatively well educated.²⁴ The observant reform movement achieved some notable successes and standards in the monasteries were fairly high. The city was divided into 25 parishes, an unusually high number. Of the secular churches, only the collegiate foundations of St Mary and St Severus were wealthy. At St Mary's standards of pastoral care were high, despite the absenteeism of all but one provost during the fifteenth century.²⁵ The picture for Erfurt's other parishes is unclear. On the one hand, the secular clergy were denounced, for their low morals, for studying law rather than theology, and for pluralism. The objectivity of the critics, monastic reformers, is difficult to assess.²⁶ On the other hand, some pastors may have been 'simple priests'.²⁷ Taking the worst possible view, it might seem as if the cure of souls was in the hands of men who were either uninterested in, or ill-equipped for, the job. However, the reality was probably less shocking.²⁸

In Erfurt, we find the same pattern of unequal competition between regular and secular clergy as in other great towns. The clear lay preference for the religious orders was an enduring source of grievance among the secular clergy.²⁹ The allure of a monastery was greatest where strict observance had been established. The laity prized the piety of those dedicated to a quest for a perfection which they themselves could not achieve.³⁰ Well into the sixteenth century, the desire to share in the merit of the monks was undiminished and could be met in different ways. For the less wealthy, the confraternities offered a means of association.³¹ As late as 1518, brotherhoods were being founded in Erfurt.³² Towards the end of the fifteenth century, wealthier townsmen increasingly retired to spend their last years in the monasteries. Others, even humanists, arranged to be buried in a monk's cowl in the grounds of monasteries.³³

²¹ Scribner (1972), p. 219.

²² Cf. Weiss (1983), pp. 11-12.

²³ Kolde (1898), p. 3.

²⁴ Kleineidam (1969), pp. 115-118.

²⁵ Kleineidam (1974), pp. 24-27.

²⁶ Zumkeller (1962).

²⁷ 'Simple priests' were clerics who, although they had not studied theology, had been educated at collegiate or Latin schools to a standard which set them apart from the majority of the lower clergy. See Hamm (1982), p. 145.

²⁸ Cf. Cameron (1991), p.48.

²⁹ Kolde (1898), p. 11.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 39, and pp. 151ff.

³¹ Kolde (1898), pp. 16-18; Weiss (1988), pp.72ff.

³² Kolde (1898), p. 40. The total number of brotherhoods in Erfurt is unknown. Those documented are listed in Meisner (1971) p. 25.

³³ Cf. Kolde (1989), p.12. Kleineidam (1969), p. 118, mentions 'a respected humanist and scholar' who expressly requested to be buried in Augustinian grounds.

Late medieval piety had many faces. On the one hand, preaching became increasingly popular³⁴ In Erfurt, there were resident preachers at the collegiate churches and in the mendicant orders.³⁵ On the other hand, the monasteries attracted vast crowds whenever they placed their relics on display. Günter von Nordhausen, reformer of Erfurt's Benedictines, travelled far to add to the collection of his house.³⁶ People also travelled to holy places. One example of 'sacred mobility' is the pilgrimage to Wilsnack, where, after a fire in 1383, three bleeding hosts were found in the smouldering ruins of the church. Countless miracles were reported. In Erfurt, the Franciscans promoted the cult, which was popular throughout the fifteenth century. To canalise popular religious energies, reformers sponsored such alternatives as the Corpus Christi procession.³⁷ Yet the lure of the miraculous often proved stronger. In 1475, central Germany was seized by frenzied fervour as thousands spontaneously set off on pilgrimage to the bleeding hosts.³⁸ The Erfurt chronicler, Stolle records controversial discussion among the townsmen. Some saw 'the evil spirit' behind the pilgrimage, others divine inspiration.³⁹ The city fathers, evidently among the sceptical, tried unsuccessfully to prevent Erfurters from joining in.⁴⁰

The popularity of sermons is sometimes seen as evidence that the laity wanted more than 'external' piety.⁴¹ Certainly, a new style of preaching foreshadows the Reformation sermon. Criticising abuse, mechanical piety and superstition, preachers catered for the solid burgher.⁴² In 1488, Erfurters set up a fund to enable a master 'to continue to study holy scripture and to become a doctor', a clear sign that they wanted 'high' standards.⁴³ On the other hand, many sermons encouraged reliance on the sacramental institutions. Erfurt was a centre of *Frömmigkeitstheologie*. Its leading exponent, Johannes von Paltz, aimed to equip 'simple priests' for the task of pastoral care. Convinced that only minimal demands could be made of the masses, he elaborated a *via securior*, a spiritual lifeline which all could grasp. Its focus was Christ's passion and sacrifice, in the efficacy of which all could share through the sacraments and indulgences. Paltz himself preached in Erfurt, and his message seems to have been propagated by other preachers on the eve of the Reformation.⁴⁴ An opponent of 'sacred mobility', he was one of a series of local theologians who attempted to combat popular cults by promoting a 'proper' understanding of the eucharist.⁴⁵

³⁴ On preaching in Thuringia, see Höß (1967), p. 2.

³⁵ Kleineidam (1969), p. 125. In parishes incorporated in the Benedictine monastery, preaching also appears to have been a regular feature of the service. Frank (1973), pp. 81-82.

³⁶ Frank (1973), pp. 70-71.

³⁷ See Zika (1988), pp. 37ff.

³⁸ Weiss (1988), pp. 49-50.

³⁹ THEILE, p. 378.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 378-379.

⁴¹ Cf. Höß (1967), p. 2: 'Daß dem religiösen Bedürfnis der Menschen der sakramentale Gottesdienst nicht mehr genügte, beweist der Massenzulauf, den Volksprediger überall hatten.'

⁴² Kleineidam (1969), p. 120: 'Die neue Art der Predigt forderte eine neue Art der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift; ganz auf dieser Linie wird das theologische Interesse der Reformation liegen.'

⁴³ Weiss (1988), p. 46.

⁴⁴ Weiss (1988), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵ See Zika (1988), esp. pp. 62ff.

Religion played a central role in public life. The council, of course, prized moral exhortations from the pulpit as an instrument of social discipline.⁴⁶ No less important, regularly held religious processions involving the entire population encouraged acceptance of the existing social order.⁴⁷ The physical marking out of space sanctified the bonds between people and place.⁴⁸ The procession commemorating Erfurt's patron saints, Adolar and Eoban, though started on the initiative of townsmen, was encouraged by the council. The saints' relics were carried with pomp through the city.⁴⁹ Sacred objects, whether relics or the host, were the power through which divine blessing was invoked. Despite the misgivings of theologians, eucharistic processions were frequently held for profane purposes, in particular to obtain good weather.⁵⁰ In 1483, fearing pestilence and drought, the council initiated processions both in Erfurt and the surrounding villages. Stolle's account illustrates the earnestness of such occasions. Commercial activity was forbidden. The city's gates were locked, save that through which the procession was to exit. The procession was led by the clergy, among them two prominent churchmen, who carried the host. The participants made their way around the walls, stopping at intervals for prayer, before re-entering through the same gate and returning to St Mary's. Since the church could not possibly accommodate them all, they filed through the building. According to Stolle, the procession was an emotionally charged affair. Those who did not weep openly, 'wept in their hearts'. At all events, it seems to have paid off. On the following Saturday, 'came a good, fertile rain and several afterwards'.⁵¹

Anticlericalism was also a feature of religious life.⁵² Underlying a great deal of anticlerical sentiment was the laity's sense of dependence on sacred power. The root cause of popular complaints about clerical immorality was scepticism about the efficacy of sacraments administered by a dissolute priest.⁵³ In late medieval Erfurt, there were pogroms against clerics living with concubines.⁵⁴ Hatred of the clergy was reinforced by their use of such severe sanctions as excommunication and the interdict. In 1472, much of Erfurt was destroyed by fire. Stolle records how the distraught townsmen surveyed the devastation. For some, there was an obvious explanation for the catastrophe. Some months earlier, the city had been placed under interdict following the murder of two priests. Cessation of divine service had caused the fire. Several people 'fell upon the priests and wanted to beat them to death, saying: you clergy are to blame for this plague... sing now in the name of all'.⁵⁵ Such threats underline both the sense of dependence on clerical power and the expectation

⁴⁶ Weiss (1988), p.46.

⁴⁷ Cf. Weiss (1988), p. 52, 'Die alt überlieferte Prozessionsordnung sollte soziale Differenzen verwischen, unzufriedenen, murrenden Bürgern die Unabänderlichkeit des gesellschaftlichen Gefüges suggerieren.'

⁴⁸ Zika (1988), p.44.

⁴⁹ Weiss (1988), pp. 52-54.

⁵⁰ Scribner (1987), pp. 34-35.

⁵¹ THIELE, pp. 498-502.

⁵² On the different types of anticlericalism, see esp. Scribner (1987), pp. 244-250.

⁵³ Cf. Hamm (1982), pp. 269-272.

⁵⁴ Schulze (1973), p. 141.

⁵⁵ THIELE, pp. 293-294.

that it be exercised to the benefit of the community. Failure to meet such obligations justified violent chastisement.

(iv) Humanism and the religious conflict of the 1520s

The humanist enterprise spanned a wide range of religious, social and political interests and outlooks, but was united in the conviction that the moral regeneration of society hung on the recovery and effective propagation of the unadulterated message of the texts of classical, but especially of Christian, antiquity.⁵⁶ In 1519, Erfurt University formally adopted a humanist curriculum⁵⁷ However, the humanist spirit of enquiry had long been established.⁵⁸ It was at Erfurt that Luther acquired the textual and philological tools on which his 'discovery of the gospel' depended. He owed his methods, though not his insights, to Erfurt humanism. He also gained confidence from the sense of community with the enemies of scholasticism. Criticism of scholastic theology had begun to intensify in the early sixteenth century. Some Erfurt humanists played a major role in the great polemical battles of the period. During the 1510s, Mutian and Eobanus Hessus actively supported Reuchlin in his struggle with the Order of Preachers. Erfurt, one of four universities charged with pronouncing on the *Augenspiegel*, condemned the work while exonerating its author. This compromise can be interpreted as a humanist defeat, but also as evidence of growing humanist sympathies in the theological faculty.⁵⁹

One of the most prominent humanist theologians was Johannes Lange, who would later lead the city's evangelical party. Lange contributed to the popularisation of Erasmus, who by 1516, had become a cult figure among Erfurt humanists. During these years, he worked closely with Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen, Luther's former teacher and Erfurt's Catholic leader during the 1520s. Usingen was a 'conservative' biblical humanist. Convinced of the need to return to the sources, he cited almost exclusively from scripture and the patristic writings in his theological works.⁶⁰ In 1519, he supported Lange's promotion to doctor of theology. This spirit of harmonious co-operation came to an end in 1521, when the University aligned itself firmly with the Church. Lange was expelled from the theological faculty, while several other humanists left the city.

If Erasmus's programme for Christian renewal strengthened the bond between avant-garde and moderate humanists, Luther's assault on the Church would eventually drive them apart. Initially, however, the widespread perception of his conflict with Rome in terms of humanist concerns delayed the formation of Catholic forces. Johannes Femelius, a thoroughly 'militant' humanist, who would later defend

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the varieties of humanism, see Augustijn (1985), pp. 119ff.

⁵⁷ Scribner (1972), pp. 108ff.

⁵⁸ Junghans (1985), pp. 31-49.

⁵⁹ Cf. HöB (1967), p. 17.

⁶⁰ On Usingen and humanism, see Häring (1938), pp. 9-12.

the Church, published Erasmus's letter to the archbishop of Mainz, less a defence of Luther than an attack on his Dominican detractors. Suspicion of the motives of the latter, rather than sympathy with Luther probably caused many humanists to suspend judgment.⁶¹ There is no evidence that Usingen had turned against his former pupil. Until the early 1520s, Luther, for his part, repeatedly greeted Usingen in his letters to Lange and evidently hoped to win his support.⁶² Luther's opponent, Eck, though well received when canvassing support in Erfurt, could not persuade the theological faculty to adjudicate in their dispute. The faculty's neutrality is a measure of Erasmus's influence even on conservative theologians.⁶³ Not until the papal bull was issued against Luther in June 1520 did opinion begin to shift.⁶⁴ In November, as the university discussed the question of its publication there were signs of growing polarisation.⁶⁵ This tendency was reinforced by Luther's ceremonial burning of the canon law books and by the fact that Erasmus had begun to distance himself from the Wittenberg reformer.⁶⁶ With the purge of Luther's adherents in 1521, the University became a Catholic stronghold.

By late 1520, Luther was being both attacked and defended from Erfurt's pulpits.⁶⁷ In the following years Lange was supported by a small group of preachers, among them Aegidius Mechler and Andreas Culsamer.⁶⁸ With the arrival of Eberlin von Günzburg in 1524, the local reform movement gained its most prestigious spokesman. The humanist movement did not just provide Luther with his stormtroopers. It also transformed Catholic theology and preaching, giving the Wittenberg reformer some formidable opponents.⁶⁹ In 1522, Usingen was appointed preacher at St. Mary's. With the backing of Femelius, Konrad Kling - a popular Franciscan preacher - and others, he defended the old church tirelessly, attracting thousands to his sermons.⁷⁰ Usingen quickly became the target of abuse by former admirers, Luther included.⁷¹ Evangelical preachers now denounced many of their former allies as sophists. Only Eobanus Hessus, a supporter of Luther, refused to join in the mockery of fellow humanists merely because they opposed the evangelical party.⁷²

⁶¹ See below, pp. 52 ff.

⁶² Häring (1938), pp. 4-5, n. 10.

⁶³ Abe (1969), p. 463.

⁶⁴ Scribner (1972) p. 153.

⁶⁵ Abe (1969), p. 465; Scribner (1972), pp. 143-144.

⁶⁶ Abe (1969), p. 466.

⁶⁷ On the beginning of preaching in defence of Luther, see Hüb (1967), p.22.

⁶⁸ On Erfurt's evangelical preachers, see Häring (1939), pp. 13-23 and Kleineidam (1980), pp. 17-19.

⁶⁹ Kleineidam (1980), p. 24.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 5-6; Hoar (1965), p. 156.

⁷¹ Häring (1939), pp. 5, 6, n. 15.

⁷² Entner (1969), p. 479.

(v) Council policy and anticlericalism

'Anticlericalism' is usually regarded as the precipitant, or accelerator, of the popular movements in the 1520s. Both the role of ecclesiastical princes as secular rulers and the wealth of the monasteries had long been criticised by laypeople who felt that the clergy's foremost business was prayer. In the countryside, where the peasants were not only tenants of the monks, but also borrowed heavily from them, usury was greatly resented. Clerical immunity from taxation gave further cause for complaint, particularly in the cities, where ecclesiastical corporations competed with the laity in economic activities such as milling or brewing. In 1517, the Erfurt council launched an propaganda campaign aimed partly at its overlord, the archbishop of Mainz. The crisis of 1509-1516 had given Mainz the chance to reactivate its sovereignty. Siding with the commune, the archbishop tried to win concessions from the hard-pressed council.⁷³ Once the crisis had passed, the council appealed to popular resentment of the Mainz customs, which had been increased in 1516. The archbishop was blamed for the city's financial problems.⁷⁴ The same line of attack was used against the ecclesiastical corporations within the city. Since the late 1480s, relations between the council and clergy had deteriorated as a consequence of Erfurt's financial difficulties.⁷⁵ The city's indebtedness led to growing dependence on clerical capital. At the same time the clergy resisted cautious attempts to persuade them to pay tax on their economic activities.⁷⁶ The financial crisis of 1509 led to a fundamental reappraisal of clerical privilege. The council elaborated a programme of retrenchment which would affect the clergy in two ways.⁷⁷ First, it proposed to re-negotiate loan terms. Refundable annuities were to be redeemed at one third of the original capital value, while the interest on life annuities was to be halved.⁷⁸ Second, it decided to tax clerical property.⁷⁹ Negotiations with the clergy produced encouraging, if mixed, results. Some monasteries agreed to pay tax.⁸⁰ The stiffest opposition came from the collegiate clergy.

The council's main goals were to check the ambition of Mainz and to break the resistance of the collegiate clergy. At the same time it hoped to deflect popular anger at the growing tax burden.⁸¹ In 1521, the campaign reaped its first fruits. In a violent uprising, the so-called *Pfaffensturm*, the collegiate clergy were attacked and their property destroyed. Although it is not clear whether the council colluded in the assault, it certainly exploited it.⁸² The collegiate clergy sought protection, in return for which the council extracted the promise to submit to

⁷³ On Mainz's policy, see Weiss (1982 a), p. 284; and Scribner (1987), pp. 192-193.

⁷⁴ Scribner (1987), p. 194. On growing popular resentment of the numerous dues owed to Mainz, see Scribner (1972), p. 162 and Weiss (1979), p. 260.

⁷⁵ Weiss (1979) pp. 270-271; Scribner (1972), p. 42. Both date the deterioration from the late 1480s.

⁷⁶ Weiss (1979), pp. 272.

⁷⁷ For a summary of the various measures planned, see Scribner (1972), pp. 78-79.

⁷⁸ Weiss (1979), pp. 268-269, and (1988), pp. 86 ff.; Scribner (1972), p. 78.

⁷⁹ Weiss (1988), p. 90.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁸¹ Scribner (1987), p. 195.

⁸² Scribner (1972), p. 158, points out that there is no evidence implicating the council in the planning of the riot. Weiss (1979), p. 262, suspects that it was active behind the scenes.

taxation.⁸³ Its clear-cut policy towards the clergy within its walls contrasted with its ambivalence towards its overlord. During the *Pfaffensturm*, it intervened to protect Mainz property. Although it wished to shake off the archbishop's sovereignty, the maintenance of cordial relations seemed a promising way of increasing pressure on Erfurt's clergy.⁸⁴ In the years after the *Pfaffensturm*, the financial crisis deepened and the council extended its plans for clerical taxation. All the clergy were to be assessed, and property held outside the city was also to be taxed.⁸⁵ In 1524 the policy of secularisation entered a new phase. Inventories were drawn up of the property and income of the religious orders and the parish churches. The same was done for all rural churches.⁸⁶

These policies, which were supported both by evangelical and Catholic councillors, explain the Council's tolerance of evangelical preaching. The reformers' assault on the Church created a climate in which clerical resistance to secularisation had little prospect of success. As the religious conflict progressed, the Council abandoned its policy of benevolent neutrality for a tentative alliance with evangelical preachers. The increasing tax burden on the common people had begun to provoke protest, and the Council found it increasingly difficult to make the clergy a scapegoat for the city's problems. By 1523, part of the peasantry refused to pay dues not just to the clergy, but also to secular landlords and the Council.⁸⁷ The danger was exacerbated by the activity of radical preachers, who blamed the Council for the hardship of the common man.⁸⁸ The Council hoped that the reformers would be able to contain the simmering unrest. The latter, keen to win recognition, called the people to obedience.⁸⁹ By the spring of 1525, these hopes had been dashed by the turn of events.

(vi) Revolt, reformation and restoration

As the peasants began to mobilise in the territories, the Council attempted to pre-empt a strike against its authority by joining the rebels.⁹⁰ With relative ease its envoys persuaded peasant representatives that Mainz was the common enemy.⁹¹ When the peasant bands converged on Erfurt, the townspeople clamoured to have them admitted.⁹² On April 28th, the Council opened the gates. Setting thousands loose on archiepiscopal buildings, it supervised the work of demolition. This act of emancipation was completed by the destruction of the symbols of Mainz's authority - a move which was justified on the grounds that powers claimed by the archbishop

⁸³ The terms of the agreement are summarised in Scribner (1972) p. 164. For a more detailed commentary see Weiss (1979), pp. 264ff.

⁸⁴ Scribner (1972), p. 162; Weiss (1979), pp. 260-261.

⁸⁵ Scribner (1972), pp. 186-187.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 188-189; Weiss (1982 a), p. 297.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 199ff.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 182. Radlkofer (1887), p. 510.

⁹⁰ Scribner (1972) p. 202.

⁹¹ Weiss (1982 a), p. 300.

⁹² See Radlkofer (1887), pp. 514-515, for the account of a contemporary witness.

had no basis in scripture.⁹³ On the same day the insurgents - peasants and citizens - disrupted the services in the collegiate churches, stripping the buildings of crucifixes and images. The Council offered the clergy protection in return for acceptance of all obligations of citizenship. For evangelically-minded councillors, the popular uprising offered the occasion to strike a blow for 'true' religion. On May 5th the parishes were reformed and Catholic divine service prohibited.⁹⁴ Lutheranism became Erfurt's sole creed.

Neither the action against Mainz, nor the moves against the Church, sufficed to still the insurrection. On May 1st, the council agreed to abolish the excise and hold elections. Encouraged by the peasants' example, the commune and suburbs rose to press their demands. Each group formed separate committees to deliberate on their grievances. A new, so-called 'eternal council' - essentially the old Council in a fresh habit⁹⁵ - appeased the crowd by introducing a civic seal depicting the risen Christ seated on a rainbow. It bore the inscription 'Judge justly, sons of men, lest ye be judged.'⁹⁶ On May 9th, it formally accepted the *Twenty-Eight Articles* presented by the commons. For a number of weeks, it simulated compliance with the citizens' demands. Once the revolt of the Thuringian peasants had been suppressed, however, the pretence was dropped. The execution of a number of rebel leaders signalled the return to order.⁹⁷

Most of the *Twenty-Eight Articles* deal with government accountability, taxation and the restrictive regulation of the urban economy.⁹⁸ The first, however, might seem to confirm Rotz's view that the commons saw doctrinal change as a means of calling the council to order. Calling for a reform of Erfurt's parochial structure, it also demands that the congregation 'should appoint and dismiss the pastor; and that the same... pastor will proclaim the pure word of God without the addition of diverse human laws, ordinances and doctrines *which affect the conscience*' (my italics).⁹⁹ Blickle, who believes that the commons were untouched by Luther's central message, cites this article as evidence that control of appointments was their main concern. However, he omits the last four words, a brief but clear affirmation of evangelical doctrine.¹⁰⁰ Although Blickle underestimates the popular appeal of Luther's teaching, there is nonetheless good reason to doubt whether the article in question faithfully reflects public opinion.

Up to 1525, the play of forces had favoured the evangelical preachers. Through their influence, the Council had hoped to channel the rebellious energy of the commons against targets of its choosing. Thereafter, the tide turned against them.

⁹³ Scribner (1972), p. 210; Weiss (1982 a), pp. 300-301.

⁹⁴ Scribner (1972), pp. 212-213.

⁹⁵ Weiss (1982a), p. 304.

⁹⁶ Scribner (1987), p. 202.

⁹⁷ Weiss (1982 a), pp. 308-309.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of the articles, see Scribner (1972), pp. 215-219; Weiss (1982 a), pp. 305-306.

⁹⁹ LAUBE/SEIFFERT, p. 65.

¹⁰⁰ Blickle (1985), pp. 80-81.

One reason was the council's fear of subversive activity by radical reformers.¹⁰¹ More important, the 'conversion' of the Erfurters in 1525 was more apparent than real. The mass, still officially forbidden, soon became the focal point of a 'Catholic revival'. Although Usingen left Erfurt, the Church found an effective leader in Konrad Kling.¹⁰² The stages by which Luther's opponents regained influence are difficult to trace. However, they were soon a force to be reckoned with.¹⁰³ Against this background the Catholic wing of the Council gained ascendancy.¹⁰⁴ To be sure, while many townsmen returned to the Catholic fold - if indeed they had ever left it - others supported the 'new faith'. The latter, urged on by the evangelical preachers, disturbed the mass with militant hymn-singing. The adherents of either side despised each other. The Council, aware of the threat to order, prevailed upon preachers of both confessions to desist from incendiary preaching.¹⁰⁵ Such bitter divisions certainly show how seriously the issues raised by the evangelical party were taken.

Erfurt's confessional divisions constituted a major threat to civic independence. While Mainz could hope to mobilise aggrieved Catholics, Saxony saw a role for itself as defender of Erfurt's reformation.¹⁰⁶ The adoption of a single creed, Catholic or evangelical, would have bound the city too closely to one or the other. The Council decided to seek reconciliation with Mainz which was finally effected in the Treaty of Hammelburg (1530).¹⁰⁷ Erfurt agreed to pay compensation for the damage to archiepiscopal property, while refusing either to expel the Lutheran preachers or fully to restore the rights of the collegiate clergy. For the Catholic dominated council, the principle at stake was the city's right to regulate its internal affairs. Hammelburg established confessional parity. The formal recognition of Catholic worship confirmed a trend which had set in with the resumed celebration of the mass in 1526. During the 1530s, evangelical fortunes declined rapidly.¹⁰⁸

As one scholar puts it, 'the Erfurt of the early 1520s represents a microcosm of the Reformation'.¹⁰⁹ Yet although the city seemed predestined to go over to Luther, it chose confessional neutrality. The contingencies shaping its post-1525 policy make it an exceptional case. However, the outcome also suggests that other towns, which did not face the same external pressures, merely suppressed the religious debate in the interest of internal peace, without a resolution of the issues capable of commanding broad consensus. For this reason, Erfurt lends itself well to a case study of the evangelical campaign. The 'Catholic revival' indicates that the phenomenon of 'weakness', about which Luther and other reformers constantly spoke, was anything but transient. In particular, it underlines the need for a re-examination of reformation pamphlets. The mere establishment of a reformation

¹⁰¹ Scribner (1987), pp. 208-209.

¹⁰² Kleineidam (1980), p. 41.

¹⁰³ Weiss (1988), pp. 216-218, 233.

¹⁰⁴ Weiss (1982 a), p. 313; Scribner (1987), p. 210.

¹⁰⁵ Weiss (1988), pp. 238-241.

¹⁰⁶ Weiss (1982 a), p. 315.

¹⁰⁷ On the terms of the treaty see Weiss (1982 a), pp. 317ff; Scribner (1987), p. 212.

¹⁰⁸ Scribner (1972), pp. 270-271.

¹⁰⁹ Hoar (1965), p.156.

cannot be taken as evidence that the common people endorsed the reformers' message.

3. Pamphlets and public opinion

(i) The 'flood' of pamphlets and the 'tide' of public opinion

In the early Reformation years, Germany was 'flooded' by a 'torrent' of pamphlets.¹ Between 1520 and 1526 some 6000 editions appeared. The total number of copies is estimated at over 6,000,000.² Production peaked in 1524 with some 2,400 editions, or 16% of the total for the period 1501 - 1530.³ The growth in production was accompanied by a shift from Latin to the vernacular.⁴ Pamphlets were 'a major tool of those who sought a change in the religious loyalties of a large number of people'.⁵ The authors were mainly clerics.⁶ With hundreds of titles to his name, Luther outstripped all others. Reformers such as Bugenhagen, Eberlin, Kettenbach, Karlstadt, Regius and Zwingli also contributed substantially to the outflow of tracts.⁷ A small number of laymen, both 'educated' and 'simple', also published.⁸ Most of the many anonymous pamphlets, however, although once thought to be the work of ordinary folk, were written by 'the learned'.⁹ Catholic writings account for a small, though not negligible, proportion of total output. Emser, Cochlaeus and Schatzgeyer were among the most productive authors.¹⁰ In Erfurt, a major printing centre,¹¹ the same trends can be observed, with one significant deviation: production peaked in 1523.¹² After Luther, the most frequently printed author was the Eisenach preacher, Jakob Strauss.¹³ Others well represented include Kettenbach,¹⁴ Eberlin,¹⁵ and Regius.¹⁶ Local evangelical reformers were less productive. On the Catholic side, by contrast, Usingen published several tracts, all in Latin.

Scholars usually argue that the reformers created a new type of literature, much less narrow in its appeal than pre-Reformation works. Often addressed to the laity, pamphlets dealt with highly topical themes. The shift from Latin to the vernacular and the adoption of a 'popular' style facilitated wider access. In contrast to the often exquisitely finished books of the age of incunabula, the rough and ready

¹ For a definition of the term 'pamphlet', see Köhler (1976) and Schwitalla (1983), pp. 13-25.

² Köhler (1986 b), pp. 154-155.

³ Köhler (1986 a), p. 250.

⁴ Köhler (1986 b), p. 167.

⁵ Cole (1981), p. 139.

⁶ Dickens (1974), p. 117; Cameron (1991), pp. 227-228.

⁷ Cole (1981), p. 159.

⁸ On Spengler, an 'educated' lay author, see Lesting-Buerman (1982) and Hamm (1986). On simpler pamphleteers, see Russell (1986), Arnold (1990).

⁹ Könniker (1975), p. 26.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 159.

¹¹ Cole (1981), p. 161; Köhler (1986 b), p. 170.

¹² See Appendix.

¹³ V. HASE, Nos.: 125; 128; 159, 160, 526; 161, 681; 162; 163; 488; 630; 679; 680; 683; 684; 685; 686; 712.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, Nos.: 135a, 646, 647; 503; 504; 602; 650; 651, 652. In addition, Loersfelt printed low German editions of Nos. 622 and 650 (Nos. 648 and 649).

¹⁵ *ibid.*, Nos.: 168a, 168b; 421; 639; 696. In addition, one title was printed in high German (Nos. 129, 498), low German (No. 641) and Latin (No. 640).

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Nos.: 155; 194a; 194aa; 711; 742, 796; 795. One title, No. 742, was in low German.

pamphlet was affordable for ordinary people.¹⁷ Some scholars argue that the 'flood' is a reliable gauge of the 'tide' of opinion. Pamphlet production was demand-oriented. If the message which they transmit had not been popular, they would not have sold so well.¹⁸ Just as the 'flood' of evangelical titles is regarded as the means and measure of Luther's 'success', so the trickle of tracts from the Catholic side has served as a yardstick for assessing the campaign against him. A. G. Dickens, writes: 'The initial response... of the Catholic champions proved inadequate not merely in quantity but in popular appeal... Their relative... failure arose from the paucity of their polemical and devotional writings in German'.¹⁹ Scholars are of course aware that, in a largely illiterate society, most people will not have encountered the evangelical message through private reading. It is now usually argued that evangelical ideas were disseminated through a two-step or multi-step process. The literate could act as 'opinion leaders', spreading the message orally, through preaching, reading aloud or informal conversation.²⁰

Evangelical pamphlets have long been regarded as a major source for the investigation of the popular response to Luther. Interpretation of texts has been strongly influenced by the assumption that there is some correlation between the sheer volume of texts and the level of public support for Luther. In Erfurt, however, although evangelical titles greatly outnumbered the Catholic, Catholicism remained strong. This raises three questions, the answers to which will have considerable bearing on the methods of textual analysis. First, can the flood of pamphlets be interpreted as a popular vote of confidence in Luther? Second, is the modest scale of Catholic pamphleteering an indication of Catholic weakness? Third, how effective was the oral transmission of Luther's message by 'opinion leaders'?

While many printers sympathised with Luther, profit was their dominant motive. Pamphlets reprinted by the same printer certainly sold well.²¹ Many, but by no means all, meet this criterion. Scholars have usually assumed that printers accepted manuscripts on speculation. That this was not always the case is evident from a legal battle between the Erfurt printer, Michel Buchfurer, and the pamphleteer, Martin Reinhart.²² The conflict arose because Reinhart broke his side of the contract - supply of paper and payment of seven gulden. Paper accounted for a high percentage of total production costs.²³ Buchfurer, an enthusiastic 'Lutheran', did not print Reinhart's tract against the Roman mass. In the light of this incident, we might cast a critical eye at Erfurt's most prolific author after Luther. Nearly all of Strauss's works are first editions. Only two of his 15 titles were reprinted in Erfurt.²⁴ It is reasonable to ask whether, like Reinhart, Strauss had to subsidise the spreading

¹⁷ On the shift in favour of German see Köhler (1986 b), p. 156. On falling prices, see Hirsch (1967), p. 62. On style and price, see Moeller (1979), p. 31, and Cole (1981), pp. 142-144.

¹⁸ Moeller (1979), pp. 31ff.; (1981), p. 265; (1983), p. 19.

¹⁹ Dickens (1974), p. 121.

²⁰ Schmidt, J. (1977), pp. 48-49; Lesting-Buermann (1982), pp. 47, 63ff; Köhler (1986 b), pp. 163ff.

²¹ Hirsch (1967), pp. 65, 82, 125.

²² For the story, see v. Hase (1928) pp. 22ff. The pamphlet in question was eventually printed in Jena.

²³ Hirsch (1967), p. 39.

²⁴ v. HASE, Nos.: 159, 160, 526; 161, 681.

of his message. At all events, the mere printing of a pamphlet does not necessarily attest to strong demand.

There are further reasons for questioning the usual assumptions about the level of demand. Several reformers complained about the declining quality of prints. In 1522, Luther accused printers of 'carelessness' in putting out the 'word the of God'.²⁵ In 1524, Eberlin denounced them for using cheap paper and letter types and for sloppy proof-reading.²⁶ Obviously, such cost-cutting made pamphlets more affordable. However, it also suggests that printers were hard pressed to undersell each other. Competition was certainly strong. Chrisman mentions a Strasbourg printer who went bankrupt, despite printing Luther and other major reformers.²⁷ By 1523, there are signs that the market was saturated. In 1521, the Strasbourg dialogue, *Bailiff and Pastor*, was reprinted throughout Germany in at least thirteen editions. By contrast, there is only one extant edition of the 1523 Erfurt dialogue, *Father and Son*. Perhaps the Strasbourg work was much better reading. Probably, however, the cost of printing yet another dialogue was not justified by the expected gain. In 1524, Eberlin alleged that many printers, no longer able to satisfy their 'greed' by printing evangelical pamphlets, were now publishing Catholic tracts as well.²⁸ Apparently, the market for the former was not big enough to support all those engaged in supplying it. Printers might have responded by issuing smaller editions. Alternatively, the attempt to corner a share of a doubtless thirsty but possibly limited market may have led to overproduction. One way or the other, estimates of the number of purchases would need to be corrected.

Given the difficulty of measuring literacy, we can only guess at the size of the potential market. It is usually assumed that about 5% of the population could read, although estimates for cities range from ten to thirty percent.²⁹ Assuming a rate of 5%, Köhler calculates that, over a seven year period, there were about ten copies for every literate German.³⁰ If the rate were 10%, the number would drop to about five. Clearly, if individuals purchased on a grand scale, their circle was relatively small. If, however, pamphlets were bought by large numbers, the scale of purchase was modest. Allowing for the fact that up to 20% of editions were Catholic, and that a certain proportion of evangelical titles will have been bought by the curious or uncommitted, or by Catholic clerics for purposes of refutation, the total number of pamphlets, however impressive, hardly justifies interpreting the 'flood' as a popular endorsement of Luther. If printers overproduced, this would reinforce the point.

The picture of the ordinary layman hungrily devouring evangelical pamphlets becomes even more improbable if we consider that actual purchase

²⁵ WA 10, 3, p. 176.

²⁶ CLEMEN 3, p. 162.

²⁷ Chrisman (1982 b), p. 17.

²⁸ CLEMEN 3, p. 162.

²⁹ On literacy, see Wendehorst (1986), Eisenstein (1979), p. 62; Chrisman (1982 b), pp. 69ff; Lang (1987), p. 57. On the spread of German (as opposed to Latin) schools, see Arnold (1990), pp. 19ff.

³⁰ Köhler (1986 b), pp. 154-155.

patterns are unlikely to have conformed to any statistical average. There is no way of proving who bought what.³¹ Some account must, however, be taken of reading skills and habits. Not all of the literate read with ease or frequency.³² Scholars usually distinguish between the 'truly literate' and readers with more rudimentary skills. The first group comprises clerics, academics, lawyers and wealthy burghers and the occasional artisan. Perhaps up to 80% of titles printed in the late medieval period were intended for this sector of the market.³³ The second group might include some of the lower clergy as well as lay people from various 'ordinary' walks of life. The evidence of wills indicates that this group purchased far less frequently than the 'truly literate'. If, between 1520 and 1526, only one percent of the population bought, say, five pamphlets a year, this would account for over half of total production. As Köhler points out, although pamphlet production declined after 1525, it continued at a much higher level than before 1520³⁴, even though the texts were no longer addressed to the common people. This suggests that *more frequent purchase* by a small group of habitual readers may have been the main cause of the printing boom in the preceding years.

The clergy probably accounted for the greatest source of demand. Between 5 and 10% of the urban population,³⁵ they were well represented in the ranks of habitual book buyers. Luther raised countless issues in which they had a personal and professional interest. The numerous clerics who left the monasteries or married, for example, are likely to have bought some of the many pamphlets written to justify these steps. Almost certainly, clerics were the main market for specialised theological works, but possibly also for vernacular sermons and devotional writings. Before the Reformation, such literature had often been targeted as much at the lower clergy as at the laity.³⁶ Evangelical preachers of modest ability required models for their own sermons. This may explain a curious fluctuation in demand for Luther's sermons. The number published in 1522 and 1523 was extremely high, but fell sharply in 1524. It is possible that the appearance in that year of Luther's church postils - a manual for preachers - made further collection of his sermons unnecessary.³⁷

Although many pamphlets were targeted at and, doubtless, bought by laypeople, it is important to take a differentiated view of the lay market. Late medieval authors of vernacular religious writings knew that the laity was culturally heterogeneous. Some tracts were written for the educated, others for simple folk.³⁸ Inferences about purchasers of pamphlets can, up to a point, be drawn from the difficulty of the subject matter and the level of argument.³⁹ Two Erfurt dialogues by

³¹ Cf. Weyrauch (1981), p. 246.

³² Eisenstein (1979), p. 65.

³³ Cf. Hirsch (1967), pp. 128-129.

³⁴ Köhler (1986 b), p. 156.

³⁵ Isenmann (1988), p. 210.

³⁶ Eisenstein (1979), p. 63; Chrisman (1982 a), p. 85; Scribner (1990), p. 73.

³⁷ Cf. WA 10.3, IX.

³⁸ See esp. Steer (1992) and Honemann (1992).

³⁹ Köhler (1981).

Balthasar Stanberger, were clearly addressed to different audiences: *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* and *Peter and the Peasant*. In an attack on papal authority, the former discusses the problem of reconciling the respective statements of Matthew 16 and 18 on the powers of Peter. *Peter and the Peasant*, by contrast, alludes only in the vaguest terms to the debate on difficult scriptural passages. Instead, it attacks papal authority by claiming that the Pope did not possess St Peter's body.⁴⁰ In a 1523 pamphlet addressed to 'all pious and elect Christians at Ulm', Eberlin discusses such topics as grace and merit, predestination and free will. He was clearly speaking to fairly sophisticated readers. By contrast, his *Erfurt Sermon* (1524) avoids theological jargon and explains evangelical teaching simply.⁴¹ The pamphlet ends with an apology: 'That various points in this sermon have been repeated several times, and may be irritating to read, is for the benefit of the poor simple reader who attends poorly'.⁴² One can only speculate as to how such readers fared with more demanding texts if, as seems questionable, they bought them at all. Gerald Strauss believes that 'as disseminated in sermons, catechisms, tracts, hymns, Bible comments and housefather books, the Protestant message was pitched to the solid burgher'.⁴³ At all events, more frequent purchase, even by a section of the 'truly literate' laity would account for a significant proportion of total pamphlet sales.

The relatively abrupt abandonment of Latin may suggest that printers were supplying a much broader market. However, the use of German was more than an aid to diffusion. An attempt to recreate the Whitsun miracle, it underscored the reformers' claim to reveal truths withheld by the Roman clergy.⁴⁴ Even specialised theological works were generally written in the vernacular. In Erfurt's pamphlet warfare Usingen wrote exclusively in Latin. His evangelical opponents, though they responded mainly in German, occasionally answered with a Latin tract.⁴⁵ The switch of language during a single dispute suggests that Erfurt reformers used German as much out of principle as in the hope of reaching a wider audience. From a practical standpoint, the shift to German may have facilitated communication with a large clerical audience of mixed abilities. As regards the laity, it would have been necessary even to extend only slightly the number of recipients.

Undoubtedly, the press was a condition of Luther's 'success', enabling him to reach a nation-wide audience of educated laymen and clerics. Educated lay supporters, many of whom occupied key positions in secular government, threw their political weight behind him. A solid base of clerical support made it possible for his gospel to be preached on a massive scale. However, the flood of pamphlets in itself tells us little about the wider reaction to the evangelical message. If the 'truly literate' were avid readers of pamphlets, this would probably account for the greater part of sales. Even allowing for the fact that literate laypeople may have borrowed,

⁴⁰ Cf. below, pp. 179, 221.

⁴¹ See below, p. 224.

⁴² ENDERS 3, p. 252.

⁴³ Strauss (1978), p. 307.

⁴⁴ On the attempt by propagandists to strike capital out of Luther's use of German, see below, p. 64.

⁴⁵ Cf. V. HASE, NO. 615.

exchanged or passed on pamphlets,⁴⁶ the pulpit undoubtedly remained the more important 'mass medium'. As Elizabeth Eisenstein argues, the 'disjunction between new modes of production and old modes of consumption' was an enduring feature of the early modern age.⁴⁷ The case for seeing the scale of pamphlet production as a measure of popular support for Luther is weak.

Given the continued importance of the pulpit, a simple comparison of production figures for evangelical and Catholic prints may give a skewed picture of the respective strength of the parties. Erfurt pamphlets indicate that Catholic preachers were numerous and may even have dominated the pulpit medium. In a 1522 sermon, Luther remarks that although the Erfurters have enough 'good preachers' there are also 'a good few' who 'defame and persecute the gospel'. Nobody, he counsels, should be impressed by their academic titles. Their scholastic methods disqualify them. Reminding his audience that he 'went to school with them', he alleges that 'they don't understand their own books.'⁴⁸ Although Luther pours scorn on his opponents, privately he admitted that he had underestimated Usingen.⁴⁹ In a 1524 dialogue, Eberlin alludes to the pulpit warfare in the city: 'P.: Eberlin... is now preaching in Erfurt... L.: I would like to know how he manages to stand up to so many opponents...'.⁵⁰ Several statements by Erfurt's local reformers suggest that they used the press to compensate their relative weakness in the pulpit. In his *Refutation* (1522), Culsamer remarks that 'the sceptical preachers... are so numerous in Erfurt, and we, being so few, cannot refute them sufficiently by preaching alone.'⁵¹ Similarly, in 1524, Mechler justifies publishing yet another pamphlet on justification by referring to the 'godless and self-interested preachers' who 'daily complain of us... that we forbid good works and break the law'.⁵²

Both the limited impact of evangelical prints and Catholic strength in the pulpit could of course have been counterbalanced by the activity of lay 'opinion leaders'. However, there is no reason to suppose that the 'secondary diffusion' of evangelical ideas was smooth or unopposed. On the one hand, sermons by men like Usingen doubtless supplied lay Catholic 'opinion leaders' with arguments which served both to answer enthusiastic Lutherans and to reassure waverers in their own ranks. In a 1523 pamphlet, Kettenbach, the Ulm reformer, accuses a laywoman of working against him: 'Whenever you hear something said against [your superstition], you become inwardly angry and change the meaning of my words and those of others and help the... [Catholic clergy] to murmur against me and... [other evangelical preachers], and say nothing good about us...'.⁵³ On the other hand, it is doubtful whether evangelical 'opinion leaders' disseminated Luther's message faithfully or effectively. He himself felt that lay 'opinion leaders' merely strengthened Catholic

⁴⁶ Cf. Scribner (1987), pp. 54-55.

⁴⁷ Eisenstein (1979), p. 130.

⁴⁸ WA 10.3, pp. 352-353.

⁴⁹ Häring (1939), p. 6, n. 15.

⁵⁰ ENDERS 3, p. 165.

⁵¹ Culsamer, Johannes, *Ein widerlegung Ioannis Cullsamer* (Erfurt, 1522), Aiv.

⁵² Mechler, Ägidius, *Eyn Chzistliche vnterzichtung*, (Erfurt, 1524), Aiii.

⁵³ CLEMEN 2., p. 56.

hostility to his teaching. In a 1522 pamphlet, he warns that it is no use 'if you... point out how they do not pray correctly, fast, hold mass, and [if you] want to eat meat, eggs, or this and that on Fridays, do not also say with mildness and awe the cause and reason...'. Many people accordingly consider 'the gospel' to be evil and think that 'you have been taught monstrous things'.⁵⁴ In a 1524 dialogue by Hans Sachs, one speaker, Master Ulrich, refuses to attend the evangelical sermon. He has heard more than enough about Lutheran ideas from his brother-in-law. The latter is then rebuked by Hans, the author's mouthpiece:

You also do wrong in this. You and your comrades come out with things like this: Our preacher says this and that. And in so doing, you don't say the reason why he has said it to you, and topple the simple people from the doctrine, who then curse the Christian preachers and flee such of their sermons where they might hear the reason. And they blaspheme against the word of God saying, if that is the new teaching, then I will keep to my old faith...⁵⁵

From the standpoint of evangelical reformers, 'secondary diffusion' could clearly prove counter-productive. Sachs's remarks indicate that the interaction of the various channels of communication was probably complex. If churchly laymen came away from Catholic sermons thinking that Luther opposed 'good works', this unfavourable impression was probably reinforced by evangelical 'opinion leaders'. Similarly, if Luther's lay adherents were attracted by the 'negative' drift of his message, Catholic denunciations of his 'rejection' of good works doubtless confirmed them in their 'misunderstanding'. At all events, the assumption that oral diffusion worked exclusively, or even primarily, to the advantage of the evangelical party is unfounded.

(ii) The reformation dialogue and the 'fiction' of public opinion

Of the various genres which pamphleteers used, none conveys a more vivid picture of the lay response to Luther than the 'reformation dialogue'. The number of titles is estimated at about 80.⁵⁶ With few exceptions, they were written by Luther's university trained followers.⁵⁷ The 'typical' dialogue is fictitious and uses a limited number of stock characters, who can appear in different guises: the author's mouthpiece, who is often a layman; a 'waverer', who, though usually sympathetic to Luther's cause, raises various objections before being 'converted'; an 'obstinate' adherent of the Church, normally a cleric, who is invariably vanquished. The exchange of views is contrived, the outcome predetermined.⁵⁸ Such texts can be distinguished from a number of 'atypical' dialogues such as Kettenbach's *Conversation with an Old Woman*, which claims, credibly enough, to report an

⁵⁴ WA 8, pp. 685-686.

⁵⁵ SPRIEWALD, p. 158.

⁵⁶ Schwitalla (1983), p. 113.

⁵⁷ Lenk (1968), pp. 31, 35.

⁵⁸ Cf. Schwitalla (1983), esp. pp. 117, ff.

authentic exchange of views, or Eberlin's *Mich wundert das kein geld im Lande ist*, which critically assesses the progress of the evangelical cause.⁵⁹

With many parish churches still under Catholic control, the public reading of dialogues at informal gatherings helped the reformers to compete with their opponents. At the end of a 1523 Erfurt dialogue, one speaker addresses the audience: 'Well, dear friends, all of you that have come to this conversation and followed it from beginning to end, I ask in God's name that you will keep my poor lesson in mind, especially as I imagine that you will not have heard it from your pastor'.⁶⁰ As a propaganda tool, the dialogue had many advantages. It creates a world into which simple 'readers' could easily enter. Speakers are usually everyday characters, the language that of the street. Oral culture is transferred to the print medium.⁶¹ Dialogues come quickly to the point and, although not authentic conversation, attempt to reproduce the spontaneity of real-life exchanges. The speakers' contributions are usually short. This pattern of conversation creates great scope for satire, especially in dialogues with a clerical speaker. Authors could entertain their audiences while pursuing a more serious purpose. No less important, dialogues serve to influence lay self-perception. Audiences are invited to emulate flattering models. Through the upright, articulate lay hero, authors transmit the message that ordinary folk were capable of deciding the issues for themselves. Through the 'waverer', on the other hand, authors promote a sense of the inevitability of conversion. Dialogues 'demonstrate' the irresistibility of evangelical arguments, conveying the impression that Luther's opponents will be left behind by events. This is, perhaps, a subtle form of intimidation, aimed primarily at the 'weak'.

In interpreting dialogues, the obvious danger lies in their seductive proximity to 'real' life. However accurately they reflect the language and culture of ordinary folk, they nonetheless create what Scribner has called a 'fiction' of public opinion.⁶² They suggest that the evangelical party was more persuasive, the Catholic party more ineffectual, than may have been the case. Although the attempted superimposition of an 'alternative reality' on the real world was an important propaganda technique, its effectiveness should not be exaggerated. Luther's lay opponents knew that Catholic preachers had 'better' arguments than the corrupt idiots of dialogue literature, who do little more than provide the evangelical speaker with his cue. They knew that they were not alone in rejecting evangelical religion. It is significant that from 1524, dialogues such as Sachs's work, cited above, reflect this reality. Master Ulrich is no 'waverer', but a resolute foe of Luther. To be sure, he is finally won over. Yet propagandists were clearly realising that they had to take lay reservations about Luther more seriously.

⁵⁹ See below, pp. 42-43, 44.

⁶⁰ CLEMEN I, p. 168.

⁶¹ Schmidt, J. (1977), p. 25.

⁶² Scribner (1990), p. 78.

writings, he argues that the latter illustrated the practical consequences of Luther's theology. Attuned to 'aggrieved hearts and minds and ears', they 'have a unique ability to stand at the intersection of mentality and society'.⁶⁵ Ozment believes that the eventual introduction of the 'reformation' attests to the general enthusiasm evoked by the 'protestant message': 'I work with the educated hunch that both expectation and final achievement measure motive.'⁶⁶ Certainly, from 1522 on, most pamphlets written in defence of Luther propagate his teaching. However, by measuring its attractiveness in the light of the outcome of the conflict, Ozment arrives at conclusions which the texts do not support. His interpretation of Kettenbach's *Conversation with an Old Woman* a case in point.

The *Conversation*, which purports to record a real encounter, runs as follows. Unsettled by an evangelical sermon against candles, anniversary masses and other pious acts, the woman asks for advice. Kettenbach answers that 'it is difficult to talk to you people about such things, for you cannot bear anyone to speak against your opinions and superstitions', even if the whole of scripture is cited against them. All she wants is for him to praise her false beliefs.⁶⁷ Kettenbach attacks the cult of the saints, which profits only the clergy and leads to neglect of the poor. Faith in Christ is sufficient. The woman asserts that 'images make me joyful and devout because they are so nice and pretty'.⁶⁸ Kettenbach accuses her of seeking 'sensual' gratification. She then asks about endowed masses. Kettenbach replies that the money spent should go to her heirs. When he points out that she doesn't understand Latin, she calls for a vernacular mass. However, when he explains that the mass is not a sacrifice, she accuses him of contradicting the 'teachers which the Christian church has confirmed and authorised'.⁶⁹ Insisting that he repudiates only their deviation from scripture, Kettenbach accuses the woman of 'thinking a lot of the fact that the men in Paris have condemned Luther'. The woman then admits to having heard that 'our preachers' have added practices such as holy and fast days to the twelve articles of faith.⁷⁰ When Kettenbach blames the Pope, she attacks the clergy: 'And don't they say from the pulpit that nobody can be saved unless he is in the holy Christian church... Where does that leave me and the other poor laypeople. If they are the Church, then we are all damned.'⁷¹ She then complains that the monks flout the regulations on fasting.⁷² As Kettenbach turns to leave, she asks how she can find peace of mind. Conventional pious exercises do not help her. Kettenbach answers that he has often preached that only faith in Christ relieves the conscience. The woman then attacks clerical immunities. Blaming the Pope for clerical privilege, Kettenbach points out that from Frederick II to Luther, there have been many attempts to discard the papal yoke. However, 'the Pope and his mercenaries' have persecuted 'all those who wanted to free you from... Babylonian captivity. So you

⁶⁵ Ozment (1975), p. 47.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁷ CLEMEN 2, p. 56.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 61

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 71.

can stay there. What has it got to do with me? I wanted to help you, but you didn't want that'. The woman justifies her attitude: 'But Luther is damned'.⁷³

Ozment sees the woman's sympathy for a vernacular mass, her attack on clerical immunities and, above all, her failure to find peace of mind as the 'kind of experience which gave birth to Reformation as a religious movement'. To be fair, he acknowledges that she is 'torn between an old doctrine she suspects, but says »she cannot hate« and a new doctrine she finds attractive but hesitates to embrace'. Nevertheless he counts her as a 'convert'.⁷⁴ However, his summary of the conversation falsifies its course and outcome. He omits to mention: Kettenbach's comments on the woman's motives for approaching him; the doggedness of her defence of Catholicism; her respect for 'authorised teachers' and Parisian theologians; the fact that, although she asks how to find peace of mind, she at no point 'embraces' Luther's teaching; that Kettenbach abandons her as a 'hopeless case'; and that, in the end, she rejects Luther as a heretic. Nothing, apart from Ozment's assumption that 'final achievement' is the measure of motive, justifies presenting her as a 'convert'. In fact, Kettenbach's pamphlet suggests that Luther's assault on Catholicism generated religious uncertainty which his message did little to relieve. Reflecting a lay attitude which is at once anticlerical *and* hostile to Luther, it illuminates the 'weakness' or 'obstinacy', of which evangelical reformers so frequently spoke.

Moeller attaches special importance to the printed sermon. Accounting for the greater part of pamphlet literature, sermons are an authentic record of what was preached in the cities. With 'monotonous regularity', they propagate Luther's doctrine of justification.⁷⁵ Although literacy was limited, oral transmission ensured that his message reached a wider audience.⁷⁶ Printed sermons not only sold well. In some cases, there is evidence of large attendance at sermons which were later published. Arguing that reformers needed to address popular expectations in order to gain support, Moeller implies that had Luther's message been seen as legitimating social protest, sermons would contain some indication of this. However the clergy are the sole target of 'social criticism'.⁷⁷ Sermons also show that Luther was not seen as an exponent of late medieval, anticlerical protest. Stressing the uniformity of content, he also rejects the view that urban preachers deviated from Luther's line. There was no 'wild growth' (*Wildwuchs*). As the 'most normal' type of reformation pamphlet, Moeller argues that sermons should take priority over songs, poems and fictitious dialogues in the investigation of popular attitudes.⁷⁸

Both our earlier discussion of the 'flood of pamphlets' and the evidence of lay hostility to Luther speak clearly against Moeller's conclusions about the level of

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁴ Ozment (1981), pp. 178-181.

⁷⁵ Moeller (1979), p. 36; (1984) pp. 184, 191.

⁷⁶ Moeller (1983), pp. 19-20.

⁷⁷ Moeller (1979), p. 38: 'Die Sozialkritik erschöpft sich in Kleruskritik...'

⁷⁸ Cf. Moeller (1979), p. 34; (1981), p. 261; (1983), pp. 33-34; (1994), p. 153.

support for evangelical teaching. It is also debatable whether attendance at sermons necessarily signals approval of Luther. In his *Conversation*, Kettenbach states that the old woman had often heard him preach on justification by faith. However, she also attended Catholic sermons and, in the end, repudiated Luther. In Erfurt, Luther's sermons account for a high proportion of total pamphlet production between 1520 and 1525.⁷⁹ Yet, in 1527, he threatened the Erfurters with divine vengeance for refusing to listen to a preacher whose teaching he unreservedly approved.⁸⁰ Moeller's approach to pamphlets, like Ozment's, leads to an unbalanced picture of lay sympathies. However, are the inferences which he draws from sermons at least valid for Luther's adherents? Obviously, such texts are not the best source for measuring urban social tensions. Neither preachers nor printers could risk jeopardising the councils' toleration of their activities. Yet may not the fact that sermons greatly outnumber popular dialogues indicate that Luther's supporters were more profoundly touched by the core of his message than by 'late medieval' denunciations of clerical vice?

Contemporary observations suggest otherwise. In a 1524 dialogue, Eberlin takes stock of the evangelical campaign.⁸¹ One speaker, Zingk - Eberlin's mouthpiece - attacks printers and demagogic preachers. Seeking only profit, printers publish anything, particularly defamatory tracts and satirical songs. They also printed 'Lutheran books on holy scripture' as long as there was a market for them. Zingk complains: 'I would often buy and read a book, but when I see such foolish, knavish titles on them, such as *bundtsgnossen*, *Schweytzer pauren*, *Fuchs vnd wolff*, *Zygeuner*, *Turck vnd Unger...* *Karsthans*, *Flegelhans*, etc. What purpose do these titles serve?'⁸² Authors truly interested in Christian instruction would give their books appropriate titles. Zingk continues:

We used to criticise the papists on account of such lewd titles and forms, and now we are adopting them ourselves and attack God's word with them... And when one reads practically any one of these books, one finds nothing but scolding, cursing... against monks, priests and universities, as if Christianity consisted in this.⁸³

Many preachers, Zingk continues, are no better. Interested only in agitation, they speak 'coldly and without experience' of 'Christian teaching'. Having stirred opinion against the papists, the 'loose, (so-called) evangelical agitators' now attack 'the good preachers'. When rebuked on the basis of Luther's teaching, they 'dare to set themselves over Luther... and say: What has Luther to do with me ...'. Like the papists, they hate the true message of scripture. Hence 'the holy gospel faces all manner of blasphemy from the right side and from the left'.⁸⁴ On hearing Zingk's

⁷⁹ See Appendix.

⁸⁰ See below, p. 238.

⁸¹ LAUBE 2, pp. 1133-1136.

⁸² CLEMEN 3, p. 162.

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

complaint, another speaker, Laycher, interjects: 'I can see very well that Eberlin was your schoolmaster. For he is now beginning to direct all his writing against such agitators, and has many tracts printed on the matter, even though he used to be a intemperate man in preaching himself.'⁸⁵

Eberlin's contention that 'lewd titles' were more readily available than 'Lutheran books on holy scripture' may seem far-fetched, given that the majority of titles belong to the latter category. However, his remarks suggest that the impact of the more 'popular' works, most of them dialogues, was disproportionate to the number of titles. Although many did in fact propagate Luther's teaching, Eberlin evidently believed that the anticlerical wrapping left a deeper impression. Moreover, if his observations on pulpit warfare are correct, Moeller's sample of printed sermons does not faithfully reflect what was being preached in the cities. Apparently, the 'good preachers' were being squeezed between the 'so-called' evangelicals and the Catholics. Eberlin's analysis is the more credible for its self-criticism. He counts his own *bundtsgnossen* as a 'lewd title' and admits to having preached 'intemperately'. In his judgment, evangelical propagandists had fuelled popular anticlericalism without promoting a 'true' understanding of Luther's gospel. Luther himself, moreover, took a similar view. In 1522, he expressed the wish that he could take back the 'greater part' of his works, 'especially those in which I still had a lot to give to the pope, councils and the like...'⁸⁶

If a fundamental criticism can be made of the respective approaches of Blickle, Ozment and Moeller to the interpretation of pamphlets, it is that they take all too simple a view of cause and effect. Starting from the premise that evangelical reformers proclaimed a message which won general endorsement, they merely define criteria by which supposedly attractive ideas can be extracted from the texts. Pamphlets, however, were a product of public discourse. They show that, from 1521 at the latest, Luther was a controversial figure. Initially, as *Bailiff and Pastor* indicates, he could be defended without reference to the 'core' of his message. By 1523, however, this was no longer possible. Blickle takes too little account of the changing public perception of Luther. Ozment and Moeller though they recognise the growing importance of 'religious issues', merely reiterate evangelical propaganda.

(iv) Pamphlets and the process of opinion formation

Scribner also doubts whether pamphlets attest to the popular reception of evangelical doctrine, albeit for different reasons. Like Ozment and Moeller, he assumes that public opinion was behind Luther. Stressing the role of other media, however, he challenges the view that pamphlets are a 'unique means of access to the ideas and issues motivating the religious movements'. Reformers relied heavily on

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 165.

⁸⁶ WA 10. 3, p. 176.

pictorial propaganda, which, open to interpretation, was not particularly well suited to disseminating specific ideas. By depicting Luther as a saint and the Pope as Antichrist, propagandists fostered a negative image of the papacy without necessarily transporting a positive religious message, encouraging people to see the conflict as an eschatological showdown. In a society in which religion was highly ritualised, action was also a major communication channel. By staging parodies of traditional rites, reformers confronted people with their message, forcing them to take up a position. Action of this kind helped to change popular perception of the efficacy of papal religion.

While Scribner acknowledges the power of the pulpit, he stresses the difference between traditional Catholic and early evangelical sermons. While the former were a one-way process, the effectiveness of which depended on passive acceptance of clerical authority, evangelical preaching often occurred in an informal setting. Active participation by the audience encouraged the free exchange of ideas. Similarly, public pamphlet-reading unleashed open-ended discussion. Oral propaganda was not an extension of the printed word, but a medium with its own dynamism. An investigation of the popular response to the evangelical message must take account of the complex interaction of various media: pictures, ritual action, the spoken and the printed word. The scattered records of private conversations and street gossip, Scribner suggests, may give a clearer picture of public opinion.⁸⁷

Given that intellectual historians have generally focussed on the 'unified' doctrinal message which, unquestionably, pamphlets transmitted, Scribner's scepticism is understandable. However, pamphlets also employ the same 'modes of persuasion' as the 'alternative' media. Like pictorial propaganda, they use images to influence perception of the conflict. Dialogues, in particular, portray Luther as a devout champion of lay interests.⁸⁸ His opponents are subjected to a 'ceremonial slaying'.⁸⁹ Several genres - practicas, sermons and dialogues - are concerned with the eschatological dimension to the conflict. The Erfurt dialogue, *Father and Son*, combines glorification of Luther with an appeal to prophecy and doctrinal instruction. Other Erfurt dialogues, such as *Grimmenthal* or *Peter and the Peasant* are exercises in 'ritual deconstruction',⁹⁰ although they also convey the rudiments of Luther's teaching. Pamphlets document the complex interaction between different 'modes of persuasion', to which Scribner rightly attaches importance.

Although visual propaganda focuses on major issues, and the details of many images illuminate 'popular culture', the images themselves say little about the popular response. In countless woodcuts, for example, Luther is portrayed as a pious monk.⁹¹ Martin Warnke has shown that Cranach's famous woodcut of a determined, obstinate Luther was withheld during the 1520s. Purged of individualist traits, the

⁸⁷ Scribner (1981b), pp. 65 ff. and (1987), pp. 49 ff.

⁸⁸ See below, pp. 63 ff.

⁸⁹ Cf. Stopp (1968), pp. 55-56.

⁹⁰ Cf. below, pp. 218-221.

⁹¹ Scribner (1981), pp. 14-36.

published version depicted him in the medieval hagiographic tradition.⁹² Pamphlets show that, from 1522, reformers were forced defend Luther against the charge of innovation.⁹³ This suggests that the pious monk may be as much a measure of popular suspicion as of popular adulation. Similarly, while scurrilous woodcuts of the papal Antichrist underline the apocalyptic dimension to the conflict, pamphlets show that the popular prophetic tradition was anything but friendly to Luther.⁹⁴ The lengths to which pictorial propagandists go in denigrating the Pope may reflect the reformers' difficulty in verifying their reading of salvation history. Much the same could be said of their ritual assault on Catholic religious usage. While it drew attention to the issues, and illustrates how ordinary folk conceived of religion, the action itself reveals little about its own effectiveness.

Pamphlets may not have been the chief medium through which reformers reached ordinary folk. However, there is no necessary correlation between the direct accessibility of the printed text and its value for the student of opinion. Köhler has suggested two related reasons why pamphlets may indeed be a 'unique means' of investigating public attitudes. First, they answer the arguments of Luther's opponents.⁹⁵ Transmitting a shadow of the Catholic case, they allow us to identify and weigh the issues dividing the rival parties. Interpreted in the context of the pulpit battles, pamphlets can reveal the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the arguments on either side. In the area of doctrine, a comparative analysis of texts aimed at different audiences can help to answer the controversial question whether Luther's teaching was beyond the mental grasp of simple folk. Second, in formulating their message, evangelical pamphleteers often consider the reaction hitherto evoked.⁹⁶ On the one hand, they address the reservations of sceptics. Complaining about incorrigibility of the 'weak' or 'obstinate', they even identify the 'common man' as their chief opponent.⁹⁷ On the other hand, conscious that their adherents were often a poor advertisement for their cause, they upbraid them for taking up their message wrongly. Their attempts both to assuage and to 'correct' shed light on the reception of their message. Opening a window on the conflict which produced them, pamphlets illuminate a dynamic, complex and by no means unilinear process of opinion formation.

As far as possible, the conflict should be traced chronologically. The 75 texts used in this study appeared between 1518 and 1527. Broken down by year, the figures are as follows:

1518	1520	1521	1522	1523	1524	1525	1527
1	3	16	15	23	11	5	1

⁹² Warnke (1984), esp. pp. 26-28.

⁹³ See below, pp. 68ff.

⁹⁴ See below, pp. 133ff.

⁹⁵ Köhler (1981), p. 8.

⁹⁶ *ibid.* pp. 5-6.

⁹⁷ See below, pp. 71, 190, 194, 230.

Although a small number of 'foreign' texts has been used, mostly for the year 1521, the rest were printed in Erfurt. They include 15 pamphlets by Luther, 9 by Eberlin, and 7 by Kettenbach. Of 9 evangelical pamphlets by identifiable local authors, 5 were written by clerics, 4 by laymen. None of Usingen's Latin titles has been included in the sample. His writings have been treated in excellent studies,⁹⁸ on which basis it is possible to say with reasonable accuracy what was preached on the Catholic side. The sole Erfurt Catholic pamphlet in German has been included. Some 18 anonymous pamphlets have also been used. Altogether, at least 20 titles were addressed to an Erfurt audience, most by local authors, a few by Luther. The sample includes a variety of different genres - sermons, dialogues, practicas, letters, and poems.

⁹⁸ Paulus (1893), Häring (1938), Hoar (1965).

PART II

THE BATTLE OF IMAGES

4. The Charisma of the early Luther

(i) Charisma versus tradition

R. W. Scribner shows how visual propaganda presented Luther as a 'living saint'. The reformer is invested with 'Weberian charisma',¹ while his opponents, depicted as enemies of Christian belief 'are supplied with anti-charisma'.² The propagation of these mutually reinforcing images was crucial, for people would not break with the Church if this carried the stigma of heresy.³ Scribner pinpoints, but does not really investigate, the dilemma facing ordinary folk. Catholic propaganda, he suggests, was too slight to be influential.⁴ Certainly the woodcut illustrations, like pamphlets directed against Luther, are significantly fewer. Yet the Catholic view of his role certainly reached laypeople through the pulpit. Evangelical pamphlets reflect the undiminished vigour with which the reformers were denounced as heretics.⁵

The earliest tract to allude to the campaign against Luther in Erfurt, is the *Intimatio Erphurdiana pro Martino Luthero*, which dates from summer 1520. The author attacks those 'who shout from the public pulpits, that Luther is a heretic and a disciple of the Hussite error'.⁶ Lacking good arguments, they rely on typical 'Roman' methods.⁷ In 1522, Culsamer criticises Catholic leaders for declining to engage in disputation with those who 'have been damned by the Church'.⁸ However, when 'they ought to be preaching the word of God to the poor people, where nobody can contradict them, they are very spirited in denouncing and crying loudly: Heretics! Heretics!...'.⁹ Copp's *Two Dialogues* (1522) accuses the Catholic party: 'When you see a man preaching the gospel... and ... cannot ... refute him with the truth, you throw up the accusation of heretics and knaves as a snake does poison'.¹⁰ Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* (1522/3), makes the same charge: 'When a pious evangelist comes, such as Martin Luther... and Lang in Erfurt, ...and tell you of your old heretical superstitions, your deceptive life or false spirituality, then they must be heretics and the Devil's for ever...'.¹¹ In 1523, Lang himself accuses a Catholic critic: 'Your best argument... consists in abuse and defamation. And the others of your ilk do just the same. You can only shout knavery, scoundrels and heretics...'.¹²

¹ Scribner (1981), p. 36.

² Scribner (1981), p. 242.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁴ Scribner (1981), pp. 229ff.

⁵ See Häring (1939), p. 159.

⁶ *Intimation der hoch berühmten Vniversitet Erdtfurt* (Augsburg 1521), Aiii^v.

⁷ *ibid.*, Aiii^v.

⁸ Culsamer, Johannes, *Ein widerlegung Ioannis Cullsamer* (Erfurt, 1522), A^v.

⁹ *ibid.*, Aii^r.

¹⁰ Copp, Johannes, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi*, Erfurt (1522), Eiii^r.

¹¹ Stanberger, Balthasar, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler legen zū trost*. || (Erfurt 1522/1523), Aiii^r-Aiii^v.

¹² Lange, Johannes, *Von gehorsam der Weltlichen oberkait vnd den ausgangen klosterleuten* (n. p. 1523), [Aiv]^r.

Up to the Diet of Worms, Catholic efforts certainly failed. In late 1520, the papal legate, Aleander, reported: 'Martin is depicted with a halo and a dove above his head. The people kiss these pictures. So many have been sold that I was not able to buy one...'.¹³ Luther's reception at Erfurt, as he stopped over en route to the imperial diet in April 1521, attests to intense public enthusiasm. As he approached the city, the dignitaries of the University rode out to welcome him. His entry was an exhilarating occasion, which he himself compared to that of Christ into Jerusalem.¹⁴ The poet, Eobanus Hessus, celebrated the event as the manifestation of divine providence. Luther alone, he asserted, could convey the word of Christ to the people.¹⁵ Certainly, they thronged to hear him preach, in such numbers that the church could hardly accommodate them. During his sermon, panic broke out as a gallery threatened to collapse. Luther, however, spoke and - 'miraculously' - the gathering was pacified.¹⁶ Such incidents, Scribner suggests, were the stuff of Luther legends akin to those about medieval saints.¹⁷ Be that as it may, the universal enthralment was short-lived. When the reformer visited Erfurt in autumn 1522, there was no official reception.¹⁸ In the meantime, the Catholic party had mobilised thousands. The council pursued a policy of non-commitment, which, though partly a response to external pressures, also reflected a desire to avoid controversy among townspeople.¹⁹ This time, Luther left Erfurt sensing that 'the gospel' had suffered a decisive setback.²⁰ Although, therefore, evangelical propagandists allege that the Catholic cry of heresy merely compensated weak arguments, the change of mood raises the question whether the people agreed.

Luther's conflict with the Church can be viewed as a contest between charismatic and traditional authority. Charisma is an heroic quality which, imputed to a single individual, arouses rapturous allegiance among a group of adherents. Through actions or bearing, a charismatic leader demonstrates extraordinary powers. He appeals to a source of legitimation which transcends the authority invoked by his opponents. He thus assumes a form of ascendancy which, inherently opposed to 'traditional' (pre-industrial) or 'rational' (modern) systems of authority, can, in propitious circumstances, be brought into play against them. Social scientists agree that charisma is by its nature mercurial and ephemeral.²¹

If the Luther image was intended to mediate charisma, the counter-image of the heretic served to undermine his charismatic allure. By casting doubt on the divine character of his mission, his opponents hoped to minimise the threat to 'traditional' authority. This term is used here loosely. In a strict Weberian sense, the Church did not exercise 'traditional domination'. As an institution, it was at once rational,

¹³ Quoted in Green (1974), p. 108.

¹⁴ Brecht (1981), p. 427.

¹⁵ TRILLITZSCH, p. 305.

¹⁶ For an eyewitness account of the event, see WA 7, p. 803.

¹⁷ Scribner (1981), p. 22.

¹⁸ Scribner (1987), p. 197; Weiss (1988), p. 144.

¹⁹ Weiss (1988), p. 139.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 145.

²¹ On charisma, see Weber (1966), 358ff and Shils (1968).

charismatic and traditional. Rational, because it demanded compliance with legally established, bureaucratically enforced rules. Charismatic, because its observances and institutions - the sacraments, the cult of the saints, etc. - evoked awe and reverence. Traditional, because its ultimate source of legitimation - beside the bible itself - was the appeal to precedent, custom and historical continuity from the time of Christ.

This chapter aims to explain why, up to the Diet of Worms, Luther's charisma was irresistible. It will also suggest that his authority rested on a fragile foundation. This will become apparent when we examine the post-Worms conflict. Chapter 5 focuses both on the evangelical attempt to build on the early Luther image and on the increasingly effective Catholic efforts to cast him as a heretic. Chapter 6 discusses, and attempts to gauge, the influence of the *Feindbild*, or hostile image, of the clergy transmitted in evangelical pamphlets. Chapter 7 deals with the Catholic appeal to 'tradition'.

(ii) Erasmus and the University of Erfurt

In late 1519, Femelius published Erasmus's *Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz*.²² This Latin pamphlet helped to sway opinion at the University in Luther's favour, or at least to retard the consolidation of forces opposed to him.²³ Erasmus's standpoint on Luther is cautious. He stresses that he is unfamiliar with his writings and had opposed their publication, which he considered ill-advised.²⁴ Nevertheless, he sees it as his 'Christian duty to support Luther to this extent: if he is innocent, I would be sorry to see him overwhelmed by some villainous faction; if he is wrong, I would rather, he were set right than destroyed.'²⁵ Although Luther's detractors have not understood, or even read, his writings, 'their mouths [are] full of nothing but the words 'heresy' and 'heretics''.²⁶ They condemn Luther, although he has only raised issues which have always been discussed.

This qualified defence of Luther is combined with a vehement assault on his opponents, whose alleged motives are made the measure of the credibility of the charge of heresy. The 'villainous faction' is the Order of Preachers, which fears a loss of prestige to the learning of the schools.²⁷ They also have a financial interest in scholastic dogma, the basis of the lucrative, but indefensible, practices, above all the sale of indulgences.²⁸ Stressing his desire to avoid dogmatic dispute, Erasmus treats the 'manner and occasion' of the attack on Luther as the principal issue.²⁹ With the

²² Desiderij Erasmi. ad Reuerendissimum Moguntinensium praesulem atque illustrissimum principem epistola non nihil Martini Lutheri negotium attingens (Erfurt 1519/1520). English translation: CWE 7, pp. 108ff.

²³ Abe (1969), p. 463.

²⁴ CWE 7, p. 110.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 113.

appearance of Luther's books, 'they began to tie up the ancient tongues and the humanities and Reuchlin and Luther and even myself in the same parcel.'³⁰ Mistakenly, they supposed Luther 'to be equipped with the subjects that I study, although in fact his acquaintance with them is but slender.'³¹ Erasmus deplores the fact that the charge of heresy has been made a weapon in intellectual combat. In the past, heresy was understood as dissent from the gospel or from the articles of faith. Now, however, 'if anyone disagrees with Thomas, he is called a heretic... Anything they do not like, anything they do not understand is heresy. To know Greek is heresy; to speak like an educated man is heresy. Anything they do not themselves do is heresy.'³² Erasmus attacks the Preachers for relying on coercion, rather than instruction. They are 'intent on nothing but compulsion, destruction and annihilation'. Thirsting for blood, 'they play the butcher, not the theologian.'³³

Throughout the letter, Erasmus defends properly exercised papal authority. Luther, he argues, 'submits himself to the judgment of the Apostolic see'.³⁴ The mendicants, however, exalt the Pope out of self-interest, seeking 'to arouse his holy fervour against Luther, or... anyone who dares open his mouth in opposition to their favourite ideas.' The Pope is either misinformed or unable to restrain them. The princes, Erasmus urges, should 'consider the Pope's abiding wishes, and not his acquiescence secured by force or fraud.'³⁵ If the Preacher's greed is 'allowed full rein, they will begin to show their resentment against all good men everywhere, and will end up by threatening the very bishops, even the Pope himself'.³⁶

Scribner argues that in Erfurt Luther was initially 'assessed in terms of an Erasmian scheme of reform'.³⁷ Similarly, Moeller suggests that the reformer profited from the 'productive misunderstanding' of humanists, who, impressed by his opposition to scholasticism and exaltation of scripture, saw him as one of their own.³⁸ Although it is true that several of those who backed Luther at this stage continued to do so once they had become familiar with his teaching, this view is nonetheless problematic, at least in respect of Erfurt. Why should devotees of Erasmus have regarded Luther as a kindred spirit, despite their hero's unambiguous insistence that he shared little common ground with him? There is no compelling reason to suppose that they read Erasmus's disclaimer merely as an attempt to cover himself against conservative criticism, and that between the lines they detected a fuller endorsement of the Wittenberg reformer. Indeed, the fact that the majority of Erfurt's academics would eventually decide against Luther suggests that their initial attitude may have been quite similar to that of Erasmus himself. Underlying much of the support for Luther at the University was probably distaste for the methods and supposed motives

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 114.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 115.

³² *ibid.*, p. 115.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁶ CWE 7, p. 115.

³⁷ Scribner (1972), p. 138.

³⁸ Moeller (1972).

of his opponents combined with concern to defend free inquiry. Men who would never have countenanced disobedience to the papacy are also likely to have been impressed by Erasmus's conciliatory approach.

(iv) Downward diffusion of the Erasmian view

The University had always influenced opinion in the city.³⁹ The fleeting appearance of unanimity over Luther among Erfurt's academics was doubtless an important signal to townsmen. Yet it is difficult to say whether, or how quickly, ideas transmitted in Latin filtered down to ordinary folk. However, Erasmus's view of the conflict was also propagated in German. In 1520, seeking to win moderates within the Curia for his politics of conciliation, he issued his *Consilium*.⁴⁰ Reprinted frequently in Latin and German, it evidently answered to a wider need for advice on the Luther affair following the publication of the bull of excommunication.⁴¹ The 1521 Erfurt vernacular edition was entitled: *What action should be taken in the Martin Luther affair and how one should behave*.⁴²

The thrust of this pamphlet is broadly similar to that of the *Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz*. Here, too, Erasmus sees scholastic hostility to the humanist enterprise as the cause of the conflict between Luther and the Curia.⁴³ Luther's opponents 'have acted wholly against the opinion of the Pope', who has always promoted humanist studies.⁴⁴ Erasmus is emphatic in his praise of the Pope, whose 'lawful authority' is the foundation of Christian unity. Yet papal dignity should be defended with reasoned arguments, not by intimidation or bribery, which merely damage the pontiff.⁴⁵ As in the letter of 1519, Erasmus distinguishes between action taken in the Pope's name and his real wishes. The papal bull, he asserts, is the work of a handful of envious monks, not of the gentle-natured Pope.⁴⁶ The proceedings against Luther should not be continued. Whatever the merits of the case against him, the peace and unity of the Church is the greater good.

As in his earlier work, Erasmus's 'support' for the Wittenberg reformer is carefully measured. If Luther has erred, he should be admonished amicably and shown his error through scripture.⁴⁷ Although determined to condemn him, his opponents have yet to agree on what grounds. Neither their character nor their learning qualify them to judge the matter.⁴⁸ Luther, Erasmus argues, has criticised the discrepancy between current Christian practice and pure evangelical teaching. He seeks a reformation of the Christian community. Though perhaps hot-headed, he is

³⁹ Weiss (1982 a), p. 292.

⁴⁰ On Erasmus's authorship of the anonymous tract and his motives, see CWE 7, pp. 99-100.

⁴¹ On the printing history, see LAUBE 1, pp. 537-538.

⁴² was man in Martino Luthers sachen handlẽ vnd wie man sich darin halten soll (Erfurt, 1521).

⁴³ *ibid.*, Aii^r.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, A ii^r.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, Ai^v.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

well intentioned.⁴⁹ His personal piety is well known. Many people say that they have profited from reading his books, even if they do not approve of all that he has written.⁵⁰ Erasmus proposes that controversial theological issues be referred to impartial arbiters or to a general council.⁵¹ Only if Luther then persisted in error, should he be punished. In that event, moreover, people would stop supporting him.

Of particular interest are Erasmus's comments on the laity, although, of course, he refers only to the educated or 'semi-educated'. Such people, he argues, want to be instructed, not coerced. They have yet to be shown the error in Luther's writings. The burning of his books, however, will not drive his teaching out of their hearts, unless it is refuted with plausible arguments.⁵² Those involved in the proceedings against Luther are widely thought to be pursuing base interests. So strong is the laity's desire to escape from scholastic sophistry and return to true evangelical teaching that change will come, 'even if Luther were to displease everyone and be repudiated'.⁵³ Erasmus also observes that Luther's criticism of papal burdens has struck a chord with the people, although he stresses that many blame, not the Pope, but those who abuse papal power.

Attesting to the dissemination of the Erasmian view to a public beyond the University, *What action should be taken* suggests that some people may have been able to reconcile a strong sympathy for Luther with an underlying obedience to the Church. There were good grounds for believing that the Pope himself did not stand behind the moves to discipline Luther. The papal legate, Eck, was suspected of pursuing a personal vendetta against Luther. The bull of excommunication was widely thought to be a forgery.⁵⁴ The Erfurt *Intimatio* speaks of an 'ungodly, heretical, papal bull conceived and implemented by Eck'.⁵⁵ While it is difficult to say how many people were inclined to distinguish between the 'abiding wishes' of the Pope and the actions of his agents, or how many took a less differentiated view, the important point is that the two attitudes could co-exist comfortably. The Erasmian view could spare the scrupulous a conflict of conscience, thus providing a basis for a picture of unanimity over the Luther question, which, for a time at least, would be self-reinforcing.

(iv) Hans Schwalb on Luther

The *Complaint of a layman called Hans Schwalb about great abuse of the Christian life, including a short report on Jan Hus*, which originated in Erfurt,⁵⁶

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, Aiii^f.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Aiii^v.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^f.

⁵² *ibid.*, Aiii^f.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Aiii^v-[Aiv]^f.

⁵⁴ Brecht (1981), p. 384.

⁵⁵ The text in German, *Intimatio der hoch berühmten Vniversitet Erdtfurt*, Aiii^f, lends more emphasis to the 'shabby' role of Eck than can be conveyed in English translation.

⁵⁶ *Beclagung eines leyens genant Hanns Schwalb*. Modern Reprint: CLEMEN 1, pp. 345-357. Both dialect and references to local events indicate that Schwalb came from the Erfurt area, although the only extant copy of the *Complaint* was printed in Augsburg, CLEMEN 1, pp. 339 ff.

gives a somewhat different perspective on the early Luther.⁵⁷ Although the 'semi-educated' author may have been a cleric, his standpoint is doubtless typical of many of those who, according to Erasmus, wanted to see proof of Luther's 'heresy'.⁵⁸ Writing shortly after Luther's condemnation at Worms, Schwalb addresses a yet simpler audience. He criticises the fact that, despite evident abuse of the ban, 'we poor peasants remain completely silent'.⁵⁹ Perhaps suspecting that Luther's standing had suffered from his unexpected failure to gain imperial backing, he justifies his own forthrightness by citing Matthew 5: 'Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake'. Stressing that he is not criticising all clerics, he identifies the *verkertten glernten*, the 'perverted learned', as the persecutors.⁶⁰

Convinced that 'the pious Martin' has 'told the truth', Schwalb argues that the threat of excommunication should not discourage laypeople from supporting him. Appealing to his reader's experience of the misuse of ecclesiastical sanctions to enforce payment of lay debts, he denounces those clerics who 'become rich, purchase great houses, earn interest...' for ignoring Christ's command to feed his sheep. He also attacks the stringent investigation and punishment of sexual misconduct, a cause of deep popular resentment.⁶¹ He accuses priests of robbing townsmen and peasants of their wives and daughters,⁶² a transgression truly deserving of excommunication. Such behaviour, he argues disqualifies the clergy as guardians of moral order. Secular authorities should assume responsibility in this area.

Doubtless reacting to the attempt by Luther's early opponents to brand him as 'a disciple of the Hussite error', Schwalb reports on the 'true' role of the Czech reformer. It was because of the 'great arrogance' of the 'higher clergy', expressed in 'splendid clothing, beautiful women, great stallions...', that 'Hus converted the Bohemians, so that they no longer held much of the Pope'.⁶³ To clarify the choice facing them, Hus had two contrasting pictures painted on the church walls: on one side, Christ entering Jerusalem on an ass on Palm Sunday, followed by his barefoot disciples; on the other, the Pope and cardinals, splendidly attired, with a great team of horses.⁶⁴ Schwalb's familiarity with this probably authentic story would attest to a Hussite undercurrent in Erfurt.⁶⁵ This would in turn help to explain the ineffectiveness of the early campaign against Luther. Schwalb evidently sees Hus as

⁵⁷ Beclagung eines leyens genant Hanns Schwalb. Modern Reprint: CLEMEN 1, pp. 345-357.

⁵⁸ Scribner (1972), p. 150, suggests that Schwalb's views were typical of the poorer artisan. Lucke, CLEMEN 1, pp. 342ff., argues that he may have been a cleric of humble social origins. In that case, as indicated by clumsy syntax and the unrefined structuring of his argument, he belonged to the less well-educated clergy. However, Schwalb certainly saw himself as a spokesman for ordinary lay people. Throughout the text he describes himself alternately as a peasant or an artisan.

⁵⁹ CLEMEN 1, p. 348, ll. 17ff.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 348:

⁶¹ On lay resentment of the 'sexual power' of the clergy, see Scribner (1987), pp. 247-248.

⁶² This is possibly an allusion to a local scandal. Another Erfurt text from the same period raises the same complaint. Cf. *Ain new Gedicht wie die gaystlichait zu Erffordt in Dhüringen Gesturmbt ist worden kurtzweylig zu lesen*, in CLEMEN 1, p. 366, ll. 57 ff.: 'Es ist doch kundt vnd offenbar, wie manchem wirt behalten vor Mit gwalt sein eelicher gemael...'

⁶³ CLEMEN 1, p. 350.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 350.

⁶⁵ On Hussite influence, see Hoyer (1981).

a forerunner of Luther. It was for telling the truth about papal power and clerical knavery that he was declared a heretic and burned.⁶⁶

Schwalb's critique of the methods used in prosecuting heresy strongly echoes that in Erasmus's *Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz*. Regardless of whether Hus was guilty, he should not have been burned. Heretics, Jews and Turks should be converted with good works and learned words.⁶⁷ Coercion achieves nothing: 'What need do we poor artisans or peasants have of such useless people as scholars, scribes, bachelors, masters, Doctors, if they bring no profit to anyone other than that they convert a man to the faith by fire?'⁶⁸ Such conversion is the work of the hangman, not of an apostle or a priest.⁶⁹

As well as indicating Hussite sympathies, Schwalb's *Complaint* reflects the influence of northern humanism. Rather than preach and instruct, he complains, the clergy keep useless choirboys who, without understanding the words, fill the church with ridiculous noise. Through the singing of the hours, priests earn their goods without work. These goods then 'die', invested in bells and organs.⁷⁰ The money would be better spent on the poor. God is not praised by ritual lacking in understanding.⁷¹ It is above all the effortlessness of such ritual that offends Schwalb: 'For if I should do something good, then I must apply good diligence, otherwise I do nothing good.'⁷² Clerics who take holy orders merely to enjoy an easy life should be expelled and their goods given to the devout and learned, who would instruct the people correctly. Schwalb condemns the current neglect of the ten commandments, above all of the admonition to love God and neighbour. Although the *verkertten glertten* speak the words, they do not explain them, fearing 'that if they interpreted them correctly, people would say: why do you not observe them as you have taught us, as in great theft, usury, adultery, giving false witness, taking other people's wives...'.⁷³ Schwalb also counsels against reliance on pilgrimages. On no account should people visit shrines on account of miracles, which are being faked everywhere. Thus they are persuaded to part with their money, which the clergy then lend to them at interest.

Schwalb's *Complaint* also attests to a certain affinity to, if not to the direct influence of, distinctive aspects of Luther's thought. The latter's *Sermon on Penance* (1519) had argued that the efficacy of the sacrament depended on the recipient's faith in Christ's promise of forgiveness.⁷⁴ Having criticised the clergy for encouraging sin by their poor example, Schwalb warns his audience that this sin cannot be washed

⁶⁶ CLEMEN 1, p. 350.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 351, ll. 4-7. Cf. CWE 7, p. 112, ll 120 ff: 'If they wish to prove themselves eminent divines, let them convert the Jews, let them convert to Christ those who are now far from him...'

⁶⁸ CLEMEN 1, p. 351, ll. 12-15.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 351, ll. 16-17. Cf. CWE 7, p. 112, ll. 117-20: 'Men in whom gentleness was most to be expected... are all agape for nothing so much as to seize Luther and destroy him. This is to play the butcher, not the theologian.'

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 352, ll. 13-15.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 353 ll. 2-6.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 353 ll. 7-9.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 354 ll. 6-10.

⁷⁴ See below, pp. 177ff.

away with holy water, as the priests claim. Holy water is effective only where the sinner repents and asks God for forgiveness. These remarks also reflect the importance of the sacramentals in 'popular religion'. Fully aware that his 'simple' audience depends on such props, Schwalb criticises the clergy's attempts to stifle enthusiasm for Luther in the villages, whether by refusing to consecrate bells or withholding the sacrament of confirmation. To treat pious, simple people in this way cannot be godly.⁷⁵ Schwalb advises them to leave their bells unconsecrated. Where a bishop refuses to confirm children, their parish priest may do so. The pamphlet ends with a plea to the reader to stand behind Luther, notwithstanding threats by the ecclesiastical authorities.

(v) The Lutheran '*Pfaffennarr*'

For a final view of the early Luther, we may look at the *Lutheran 'Pfaffennarr'*. Originating in southern Germany and running to at least five editions, the pamphlet appeared in Erfurt in 1521.⁷⁶ Better educated than Schwalb, the anonymous author is an advocate of the interests of the nobility,⁷⁷ denouncing the system of papal provisions as an attack on the proprietary rights of benefactors. His strongly anti-Roman polemic identifies him as an adherent of the national tradition represented by Hutten, whom he praises in the same breath as Luther.

In this pamphlet, a canon - the aggrieved party - and three priests - the villains of the piece - approach a fool, asking him to decide which of the two are the real thieves.⁷⁸ The fool, who symbolises objectivity, takes the familiar image of the hunt to characterise the activity of place-seeking clerics.⁷⁹ Traps have been laid and the horn sounded. The hunted - i.e. the nobility deprived of their benefices - are in danger of their lives, for 'we have but little forest where we could conceal ourselves.'⁸⁰ Luther and Hutten, however, have planted a garden which will be fenced in by the angels. There, Luther and all 'Lutheran brothers' will take refuge, and with them, all ecclesiastical and secular princes who want to help both the Christian faith and the pious canons endowed by the nobility.⁸¹ However, the benefice hunters will not seek entry to the garden 'for Christ is waiting inside'.⁸² The fool praises the city of Nuremberg for vigorously defending its claim to fill vacant benefices. Such action, however, has angered the Pope, who now uses the Luther affair as a pretext for attacking the interests of the Empire.⁸³ Anyone who criticises the 'Pope's hunters', is accused before the pontiff. 'And so it is necessary to burn him, for he is a heretic and doesn't believe in the red swine which St. Anthony

⁷⁵ CLEMEN 1, pp. 355-356.

⁷⁶ LAUBE 2, p. 746.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 745, ll. 40ff.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 742.

⁷⁹ Cf. Scribner (1981), pp. 62-63, on the frequent use of the hunt image. In his *Babylonian Captivity* (1520), Luther speaks of the papacy as the 'hunt of the bishop of Rome', Brecht (1981), p. 363.

⁸⁰ LAUBE 2, p. 742, l. 18.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 742, ll. 22-26.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 742, ll. 28-29.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 743, ll. 7-9.

devised so that the hunters would be able to eat together with their fat whores and with other useless menials.⁸⁴

Attacking the flow of resources to Rome, the author singles out the monks and indulgence sellers, whose economically harmful activities serve no useful religious purpose. The fool complains about how the monks extract money from the peasantry: 'And they say that they must give it to them, and that they owe it to them, for they have to pray for them day and night.'⁸⁵ Their intercession, he insists, is superfluous: 'I do not believe that anyone can love God for me, for with those words and teachings they are leading us to hell...'. The fool continues: '...and whoever wants to be saved must serve God himself, for whoever wishes to be the herald of a prince must go with him himself, and so we must all serve God ourselves...'.⁸⁶ This unmistakable of rejection of vicarious piety echoes Luther's *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* (1518).⁸⁷ The author insists that people can do without the grace sold by the monks. Grace is not a marketable commodity, but is available wherever the word of God is found.⁸⁸ The monks should be expelled and, like John the Baptist, live in the desert. Property which they have acquired through bequests should be returned to its rightful owners, the nobility. The cessation of their economic activities would also bring welcome financial relief to the people.⁸⁹

(vi) The foundation of Luther's charismatic authority

These four texts suggest that Luther's charisma was founded on several mutually reinforcing elements. First, the reformer leads a devout life. In contrast to many later pamphleteers, there is little attempt to portray Luther. His piety and incorruptibility, his will to persevere, are taken for granted. These were hallmarks of sainthood.

Second, with the possible exception of Erasmus, each author saw Luther as articulating his own misgivings about the state of religion. None was able to see anything harmful in his writings. Indeed, neither Schwalb nor the *Pfaffennarr* entertains the possibility that he might have erred. To have abandoned him as a heretic would have involved blind obedience against their better judgment. Erasmus, while recognising a need for clarification of disputed points of dogma, nevertheless sees this as secondary to reform of Christian practice. On the priority of this latter goal, and of Luther's earnestness in pursuing it, all three authors agree.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 743. On the late medieval criticism of the cult of St Anthony, which also died out in sixteenth century Catholic Germany, see Mischlewski (1992), esp. pp. 143ff.

⁸⁵ LAUBE 2, p. 744.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 744, ll. 19-23.

⁸⁷ See below, pp. 165f.

⁸⁸ LAUBE 2, p. 745.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 745.

Third, this image of Luther was reinforced by the perception of his opponents as a small, though powerful, interest group. Although they interpret the motives of Luther's detractors differently, all three authors agree that the charge of heresy is a pretext. For Erasmus, the Dominicans are a 'villainous faction' aiming to suppress liberal studies. For Schwalb the *verkertten glerkten* are privileged, licentious clerics opposed to a moral renewal which would threaten their lifestyle. For the author of the *Pfaffennarr* papal bureaucrats and mendicants collaborate with the papacy to keep the entire German nation, cleric and layman alike, in check. At no stage was the conflict so universally perceived as a straight showdown between good and evil. So discredited, indeed, were Luther's opponents that their campaign against him probably boomeranged. The charge of heresy served only to confirm people in their sympathies.

Fourth, Luther's condemnation was unjust. Of the three authors, only Erasmus recommends an impartial hearing of the reformer. The others, perhaps, were so persuaded of the righteousness of his cause as to consider further discussion superfluous. At all events, it was the strong demand from below that he should not be condemned unheard which led to his citation to appear at Worms.⁹⁰ It is of interest that the 1520 dialogue, *Karsthans*, deprecates uncritical acceptance of the reformer's condemnation. The speakers include Luther, his Franciscan opponent, Murner, the pro-Luther peasant Karsthans, and the latter's son - the Student - who sides with the Church. When Luther enters, the Student remarks that Murner has condemned him as heretic. Karsthans reaches for his flail, evidently intending to chastise Luther. The latter, however, remarks that even Murner has said that neither party should be believed before the matter has been fully investigated. Why then should they accept Murner's opinion before a free Council has decided? While the Student is unmoved by this argument, Karsthans rebukes him: 'Son, you should know... that the good Martin Luther has a just cause and opinion. First of all, hear both parties, then judge and condemn'.⁹¹

Finally, not only do all three authors see Luther as the victim of persecution; they also see themselves as persecuted, or in Erasmus's case at least threatened,⁹² by his opponents. If Luther lost, they were also defeated. If he triumphed, they were also the victors. For a brief moment, different groups and interests placed their hopes in Luther, drawing solace and encouragement from his refusal to bend to attempts to silence him. The *Pfaffennarr*, in particular, is imbued with a keen sense of the reformer's solicitude for the oppressed, expressed above all through the image of the garden planted by Luther and Hutten. The reformer will lead his followers into paradise.

However broad the charismatic appeal of the early Luther, its foundation was not particularly solid. First, as the conflict with Rome intensified, anyone who had

⁹⁰ Brecht (1981), pp. 413, 418-419.

⁹¹ CLEMEN 4, p. 90.

⁹² Cf. Overfield (1984), p. 290.

been attracted by Erasmus's conciliatory approach will have found it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the Pope's 'abiding wishes' and the actions carried out in his name. By the Diet of Worms at the latest, this reading of events would lose all credibility, and the issue of papal authority have to be faced.

Second, Luther's condemnation at the imperial Diet probably created a dilemma for many of those who shared the anti-papal sentiments of Schwalb or the *Pfaffennarr*. Luther's struggle had been widely interpreted in the context of the historical conflict between Papacy and Empire.⁹³ The Emperor embodied the reform aspirations to which he had appealed. Following his condemnation, he himself pleaded with the German princes to intercede with Charles V on his behalf. Offering to have his case heard by 'impartial' judges, he explained: 'it is my heart's desire that His Imperial Majesty, the Holy Empire and the common German nation be assisted and blessedly preserved in God's grace, which up to now, next to the honour of God and the salvation of Christendom, I have sought and will seek again, and not my own, although I have been damned by my detractors.'⁹⁴ Yet unlike his detractors, neither Charles V nor the German princes had any obvious sinister motive for damning the reformer. This difficulty was clearly appreciated by the author of a 1521 pamphlet, who has the Pope and hierarchy, not the Emperor, sitting in judgment over Luther at Worms.⁹⁵ For their part, Luther's opponents saw imperial policy as a welcome vindication of their position. In a letter to Pirckheimer, Hutten reports how the spirits of the *Pfaffen* rose as news spread of the Emperor's decision to stand by the Church, although he predicts that their rejoicing will prove premature.⁹⁶

Third, after the Diet of Worms the 'Catholic party' grew to embrace many who had hitherto counted as supporters of Luther. Erasmus and Erfurt University are but two examples. How mighty the wave of 'defections' appeared from a local perspective is difficult to measure. Yet it would certainly become more difficult to dismiss Luther's opponents as a 'villainous faction' or odious interest group.

Finally, Luther's opponents had initially tried to blacken him through association with Hus, a strategy which, if Schwalb's view of the Czech reformer as a critic of clerical greed and low morals was widely shared, was bound to fail. However, once they had made an issue of Luther's teaching, and its implications for religious practice, the reformer would appear in a different and, depending on the viewer's perspective, not necessarily favourable light. How the simple believers of whom both Schwalb and the *Pfaffennarr* speak conceived of the early Luther remains obscure. Judging by Schwalb's appeal to their sense of grievance towards the clergy, they identified primarily with the reformer's struggle against the machinery of

⁹³ See below, Chapter 8.

⁹⁴ Luther, Martin, *Copia einer Missiue* (Erfurt, 1521). Modern reprint: WAB 2, p. 317.

⁹⁵ Scribner (1981), p. 23.

⁹⁶ Ulrich von Hutten, *Ein send briue so vlrich von hutten an Kaiserliche Maiestat gethan/ Bebstliche botschafft betreffende/ vast lustig tzu lesen. Ein Anderer sentbziue/ so der obgemelt von hutten/ an einē Namhaftigen burger tzu Nurenberg beschriben/ Doctor Martinus Luthers abschied von Worms betreffende/ in welcher wol tzu mercken/ die grossen arglist so dy Romischē furgewent haben hye in kurtz begriffen*. Modern reprint: BÖCKING 2, p. 61.

ecclesiastic discipline. Both authors mention - disapprovingly - their dependence on the 'sacred power' of the clergy: on indulgences, the prayers of the monks, the sacraments and sacramentals. Once Luther was presented as a threat to these vital props, he might cease to appear so heroic.

Nor was the support of better educated critics of 'late medieval piety' inevitable. Erasmus's later conflict with Luther on the question of grace and free will is well known and need not be discussed here.⁹⁷ The positions of Schwalb and the author of the *Pfaffenarr*, on the other hand, merit attention. If they had read such key texts as the *Babylonian Captivity or Freedom of a Christian*, they certainly had not interiorised their central message. Certainly, both authors reject vicarious piety. However, neither betrays the slightest sense of doubt in the adequacy of human effort. Both Schwalb's declaration that to 'do something good' he 'must apply good diligence' and the *Pfaffenarr's* insistence that 'we must all serve God ourselves', though not necessarily incompatible with Luther's message of salvation, could equally reflect an Erasmian view of the role of grace and works in the order of redemption. Their image of the saintly Luther rests on what was at best an imperfect understanding of the core of his message.

⁹⁷ On recent discussion see Pesch (1985).

5. Conflicting Views of Luther: 1521-1525

Although historians generally define the object of evangelical propaganda as 'winning' adherents for Luther, it might also be seen as an attempt to stem the loss of support. If the foundation of Luther's charismatic authority was indeed fragile, this might explain why, after Worms, evangelical propaganda contains numerous calculated attempts to promote a positive Luther image. In this phase of the conflict, several pamphleteers often acknowledge the impact of Catholic propaganda, and take far greater pains to refute the charge of heresy. On the basis of these refutations, it is possible to suggest reasons why several laypeople were perhaps beginning to reconsider their initial enthusiasm for Luther.

(i) Luther's learning and mission

Evangelical propaganda stresses that Luther's learning greatly exceeds that of his opponents. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, the pastor initially praises the learning of the pope and bishops,¹ but eventually acknowledges that 'Luther is far more learned' than his clerical opponents.² The pastor also concedes that 'there are many other learned men on his side, especially Dr. Erasmus of Rotterdam...'.³ References to Luther's learned following often serve to authenticate the reformer's position. The *Laienspiegel* declares that Luther is supported by 'highly learned men and the majority' and opposed by 'scoundrels and useless prattlers'.⁴ In *A Short Address*, it is asserted that 'to this very day, no learned and devout man has opposed Luther, but only very base, foolish, wrong-headed and impudent men...'.⁵ Another dialogue, *Bembus and Silenus*, affirms Luther's learning by parodying the denunciations of his opponents. A Dominican friar expresses his irritation at the 'mischief which this unlearned *gugelfritz*, Martin Luther, has caused, together with his supporters, such as Rotteradamus'.⁶ It is difficult to say whether and at what point ordinary folk learned of the estrangement between the two reformers. As late as 1523, however, propagandists attempt to suggest that Erasmus had taken Luther's side. A striking example is the publication in Erfurt of a translation of Erasmus's *Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz*.⁷ One can hardly begin to imagine what the informed reader can have made of the great humanist's defence of Luther in that year. Yet evangelical propagandists were conscious that Luther's prestige hung, in part at least, on the recognition of such illustrious figures.

¹ GÖTZE, p. 27.

² *ibid.*, p. 28.

³ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ Pamphilus Gengenbach, Aii^f.

⁵ A[gricola], J[ohannes], *Eyn kurtze anred* (Erfurt, 1523). Modern reprint: SCHADE 2, p. 191, ll. 34-37.

⁶ -Ein schöner dialogus oder gepszech / so ein Prediger münch Bembus genāt vnnd ein Burger Silenus / vnnd seyn Nartz mit ein ander habent. (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: SCHADE 3, p. 214, ll. 23-25. 'Gugelfritz' is a derogatory term for 'monk'.

⁷ V. HASE, Nos. 130, 131.

Pamphlets stress that Luther knows no authority but scripture. In *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521), we learn that he ‘bases all his writings on true faith and the holy gospels and the doctrine of St Paul’. In this early work the reformer is praised mainly for attacking abuse. Later pamphlets convey more clearly Luther’s own view of himself as a mediator, rather than interpreter, of the gospel.⁸ In Stanberger’s *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the laybrother rejects the charge of heresy, arguing that Luther’s writings ‘are not his but rather God’s’.⁹ In *Father and Son*, the father opens the conversation by asking what people think of Luther ‘and about Christ’s doctrines... which he is now writing and revealing.’¹⁰

The revelation of pure doctrine to simple believers is Luther’s special mission. In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the beggar declares that God has sent Luther to ‘us poor men as a comfort, to proclaim to us and bring to light the joyful message of the gospel, about which... [the clergy] have long remained silent for... [their] own profit.’¹¹ In *Grimmental*, the artisan admits to having ‘read some of Luther’s books and found out quite a lot about [the clergy’s] knavery and also discovered much comforting teaching...’.¹² In *Peter and the Peasant*, Luther is described as ‘an angel’. Peter explains to a somewhat confused peasant that whoever ‘preaches and teaches God’s word is an angel, tool, or prophet of God.’ Like John the Baptist, ‘Martin has been sent to preach God’s Word to the poor, deceived, persecuted and straying sheep...’.¹³ Luther’s use of the vernacular is frequently cited to reinforce this point. In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the beggar praises God for illuminating the laity with his gospel. ‘If Martin had written this only in Latin, so that the poor layman could not understand it, that would have been agreeable to [the clergy]...’.¹⁴ In *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*, the Devil, arriving in Wittenberg, asks Luther what he is doing. The latter replies that he is ‘trying to translate into German all of the old testament, which you clergy hold to be misleading, for the benefit of the poor layman...’.¹⁵

⁸ Cf. Junghans (1985), p. 302. See also Brecht (1981), p. 444, on how Luther told Cochläus that the word of God had been revealed to him.

⁹ Stanberger, Baltasar, Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler (1522/1523), [Aiv]^f.

¹⁰ CLEMEN 1, p. 25.

¹¹ Stanberger, Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler (Erfurt, 1522/1523), Bi^f-Bi^v.

¹² Eyn gespzech zzwyschen vyer Personen wie sie ein gezengk haben / von der walfart ym Grimetal (Erfurt, 1523). Modern reprint: CLEMEN 1, p. 143.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 205, ll. 8ff.

¹⁴ Stanberger, Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler (Erfurt, 1522/1523), [Biv]^v-Ci^f.

¹⁵ Ain schoener Dialogus von Martino Luther vñ der geschickte pottschaft auß der helle (Erfurt, 1523). Modern reprint: BENTZINGER, p. 318.

(ii) Luther's sanctity

Pamphleteers do not only praise Luther by suggesting that, in preaching the word of God, he is fulfilling a divine mission. By means of a tendentious account of his struggle with Rome they seek to bring his virtues into sharp relief. Scribner shows how, in representing Luther as a 'living saint', pictorial propaganda uses the image of the pious monk.¹⁶ Although pamphlets neither illustrate Luther's piety in terms of the monastic ideal nor, as a rule, expressly describe him as a 'saint',¹⁷ they do portray him as the embodiment of virtues traditionally associated with sainthood. Three saintly attributes are repeatedly stressed: incorruptibility, endurance and invincibility.

In his *Sermon on the Road to Worms*, delivered in Erfurt in April 1521, Luther declared: 'I want to tell the truth and must do so. That is why I stand here and take no money for it.'¹⁸ This point is emphasised in numerous other pamphlets. Following Luther's appearance at the imperial diet, representatives of Pope and Emperor offered him a lucrative benefice in the hope that he might yet recant.¹⁹ This is perhaps the background to recurring allusions to attempts to buy his compliance. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, the bailiff rejects the charge of heresy on the grounds that Luther 'does nothing for money'. Although the pope tried to buy him off with a bishopric, he 'would rather be poor than forsake God's truth.'²⁰ *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* also reports how 'the worthy angel Martin' rejected this bribe, preferring to stand by God's Word.²¹ In *Grimmenthal*, the artisan declares that were Luther to defend the status quo, 'the Pope would have long since made him a cardinal'.²² In *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*, he rejects advances by the Devil: 'Get thee behind me Satan. The true word of God will not be sold... for money... I am not here to surrender God's word for a cardinal's hat.'²³

A second saintly virtue emphasised in pamphlets is Luther's fortitude in adversity. Just as he would not be corrupted by offers of power or money, so he would not be deterred from his mission by threats to his person.²⁴ In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the laybrother applies Matthew 5 to Luther: 'Blessed are they who suffer violence and persecution for the sake of righteousness, as Martin Luther and other pious knights are now doing.'²⁵ In *Peter and the Peasant* we read that '...Martin wants to offer and give his body, life, soul and everything that he has to Christ's sheep...'²⁶ In *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*, 'Martin' tells the

¹⁶ Scribner (1981), pp. 14ff.

¹⁷ Cf. Scribner (1987), pp. 303-304.

¹⁸ WA 7, p. 812.

¹⁹ Brecht (1981), p. 446.

²⁰ GÖTZE, p. 20, ll. 5-10.

²¹ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (Erfurt, 1522/1523), Cif.

²² CLEMEN 1, p. 158.

²³ BENTZINGER, pp. 334, 337.

²⁴ Cf. Junghans (1985), pp. 302-303, who points out that this conviction was firmly established in humanist circles by 1519.

²⁵ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (Erfurt, 1522/1523), Dii^v.

²⁶ CLEMEN 3, p. 205, ll. 30ff.

Devil: 'I am glad to hear that people shout 'crucify him' with respect to me. Blessed is the man who would carry the crucifix on his neck for the sake of God's word...'.²⁷

The papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, had called on all monks to apprehend Luther and send him to Rome.²⁸ Pamphlets often contain chilling allusions to the fate awaiting him. *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* recounts how the Pope has 'dispensed a great deal of money and given it to various courtesans [i.e. papal bureaucrats], so that they might kill the trusty Martin.'²⁹ In the *Short Address* we read that papal supporters are plotting 'to put a rope around Luther's neck with the articles with which they falsely accused Hus'.³⁰ Luther had reacted to attempts to associate his teaching on the sacraments with the ideas of Hus by denying the validity of his condemnation.³¹ Perhaps consciously appealing to pre-existing Hussite sympathies, evangelical propagandists attempt to invest Luther with the aura of martyrdom by comparing him with the Czech reformer. In *Father and Son*: the father praises Luther for 'clothing us with the armour of the bible', and in the same breath recalls how the pious Hus, 'who wanted to bring the gospel to light... had to burn gruesomely without help from anyone'.³² In *Grimmenthal*, the artisan explains that Hus 'told the Pope and his supporters the truth and they could not bear it. It was therefore necessary to make him a heretic and burn him.'³³

Luther's ordeal is also set in the context of biblical history. In *Father and Son*, Eck is compared with Judas. For a few pence he would 'sell Martin and the whole of Wittenberg to their deaths.'³⁴ Later on the Son remarks: 'What Dr. Luther is doing is to tell ...[the clergy] the truth... Do you not know that God told the high priests the truth... and that is why he was nailed to the cross...'³⁵ Heinrich von Kettenbach draws a similar parallel: 'Luther alone tells you the truth and brings the clarity of scripture to light. And so you persecute and condemn him, as the Jews did to the prophets of God and to Christ himself...'³⁶

A third virtue praised in pamphlets is Luther's invincibility. His fortitude in the face of persecution, it is suggested, will be rewarded by the ultimate triumph of his cause. In the *Short Address*, the author celebrates the failure of the papal adherents to suppress Luther: 'They stand by their lies/ As has been seen this year/ Through what happened to Luther/ And what he has suffered/ And how he has fought/ And how he was slandered by some people/ Who failed in the end.' The author then goes on to extol Luther's success in routing his enemies.³⁷ Several pamphlets, referring to the famous encounters between Luther and his opponents,

²⁷ BENTZINGER, p. 327.

²⁸ Brecht (1986), p. 376.

²⁹ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenzuder vñ Bettler* (Erfurt, 1522/1523), [Div]^v.

³⁰ SCHADE 2, p. 191, ll. 44-46.

³¹ See Brecht (1981), p. 364, on how Luther accuses papists of being the real heretics.

³² CLEMEN 1, pp. 37-38.

³³ CLEMEN 1, p. 158.

³⁴ CLEMEN 1, p. 39.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 41.

³⁶ CLEMEN 2, p. 148, ll. 10ff.

³⁷ SCHADE 2, p. 193, ll. 110-114.

suggest that he emerged victorious. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, the pastor is forced to acknowledge that Luther scored a great victory at Worms. Since 'nobody was able to prove him wrong' the pastor abandons his opposition to the reformer.³⁸ *Father and Son* credits Luther with inflicting a series of devastating defeats on papal adherents: 'Luther has now survived Leipzig, Augsburg and Worms. Nobody has been able to do anything to him.'³⁹ Here, it is suggested that Luther's skill in disputation will ensure his triumph over his adversaries, although in fact he was not particularly proficient in this discipline and Eck was thought to have done well at Leipzig.

In Germany, a recent study suggests, the Reformation succeeded because that country's saints were relatively remote figures who 'stood apart from the spiritual needs of ordinary lay people, as well as from ecclesiastical and secular politics.'⁴⁰ It might also be argued that the Reformation won adherents because it made good this deficit. With his role compared to that of the prophets, apostles, angels and Christ himself, the reformer was placed in such close proximity to the divine that he was destined to become a cult object. That his appeal may have exceeded that of the Church's saints may be explained partly by the success of evangelical propaganda in suggesting that Luther shared with the people a common fate and a common interest, partly by the scope of the promise which he came to embody. Whereas other saints offered protection from the hazards of day to day life either for the individual or the community, Luther could be seen as guarantor of the fulfilment of a more fundamental yearning for the renewal of the church.

The appeal of the charismatic Luther - to a section of the laity at least - is reflected in the reformers' efforts to discourage Luther worship. In Erfurt, the reformer's supporters called themselves 'Martinists'. In *Father and Son*, the Father promises to become 'a good Martinist', whereupon the Son admonishes him to 'boast of God, not of Peter or Martin... You were not saved by either of them.'⁴¹ This attempt to cut Luther down to size was made in a pamphlet which, as we saw, likens his ordeal to the crucifixion of Christ. The author was evidently aware that charismatic authority was bought at the expense of 'theological correctness'. His attempt to correct the self-perception of Luther's adherents doubtless reflects his interest in promoting 'pure doctrine'. However, there was a second, arguably more pressing, motive behind his admonition.

The term 'Martinist', was not just a badge of honour worn by Luther's adherents, but also welcome ammunition to his opponents. It spoke for their view of Luther as a sectarian leader. Copp's *Two Dialogues*, responds to this allegation. The evangelically-minded speaker asserts: 'I don't know anyone who is a Martinist. For Martin is not a god, but just a preacher and teacher of the word of God...'⁴² He then accuses his Catholic interlocutor: 'You call all those who accept the truth Martinists,

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.28, ll. 10-15.

³⁹ CLEMEN 1, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Weinstein and Bell (1982), esp. pp. 186 -187.

⁴¹ CLEMEN 1, p. 30.

⁴² Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Eiii^r.

although they are more properly called Christians. Nobody is a Martinist... Do not make sects of us as you have already made of your monks...'.⁴³ That Copp felt obliged to deny Luther's divinity attests to the intense devotion to the reformer which evangelical propaganda had helped to generate. At the same time, his reproof to his Catholic opponents exposes a weak flank on the evangelical side. Doubtless with this in mind, the author of *Grimmenthal* rejects a label which smacked of sectarianism. When the artisan attacks misuse of the ban he is challenged by the monk: 'I think you are a Lutheran'; to which the artisan responds: 'No, not Lutheran, but Christian.'⁴⁴ It is one of the ironies of the evangelical campaign that a Luther image, developed and propagated to refute the reformer's detractors, evoked a response which, in the eyes of many, appeared to confirm their allegations.

(iii) Luther the heretic

In the early phase of Luther's battle with Rome, his opponents had tried unsuccessfully to discredit him through association with Hus. Before long, however, they were making a much weightier case against the reformer. Writing in 1523, Heinrich von Kettenbach complains that papal adherents allege that 'Luther is bringing forth a new doctrine and a new faith'.⁴⁵ Kettenbach believed that this charge was discouraging popular support for the evangelical side: 'Accordingly, many simple people say, I want to keep to the old faith and my forefathers.'⁴⁶ In Erfurt, Usingen condemned sects unequivocally, warning that there was no salvation outside the Church.⁴⁷ In response, evangelical propagandists often parodied the Catholic standpoint. In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the prior attacks the evangelical party: 'They want to corrupt us and establish a new faith. But I want to keep my rent book and ceremonies. Our forefathers were not fools and where they travelled, I will travel also.'⁴⁸ Although the author tries to suggest that defence of the 'old faith' was motivated solely by greed, the charge of apostasy was taken seriously by the public at large.

A closer analysis of pamphlets suggests that there were at least five reasons why Luther's opponents could plausibly denounce him as a sectarian leader. First, the perceived novelty of evangelical belief gave rise to suspicion. Conformity to custom was a generally accepted criterion of legitimacy.⁴⁹ Its force is implicitly acknowledged by the Erfurt preacher, Aegidius Mechler. Writing in 1523 to justify his marriage, he complains how his opponents 'seek to cover their shame with the cry of old custom'. Pointing out that the celibate priesthood was an 11th century

⁴³ *ibid.*, Eiii^r.

⁴⁴ CLEMEN 1, p. 143.

⁴⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 167, ll. 13-14.

⁴⁶ CLEMEN 2, p. 167, ll. 14-16.

⁴⁷ Häring (1939), pp. 159-160.

⁴⁸ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gepszech zzwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), [Aiv]^r.

⁴⁹ Cf. Strauss (1986), p. 98, who points out that the appeal to custom was 'more than a rhetorical strategy'.

'innovation' he concludes triumphantly, 'it is far longer the custom among priests to have a wife than not to have one'.⁵⁰

To denounce Luther for overturning practices hallowed by tradition was an obvious means of discrediting him. Pamphlets indicate that by 1522, many people were uneasily conscious that support for Luther amounted to a rejection of the faith of their forefathers. In Copp's *Two Dialogues*, the Spirit alludes to the case put by Catholic preachers. They argue that 'your parents... were god-fearing and pious people and remained in the Roman church, and that if you dared to behave differently you would disgrace your parents by this. For it would be a sign that you acknowledged that your forefathers... did not have a true faith, which would cause men to line up against you and accuse you'.⁵¹

The response of evangelical propagandists was twofold. On the one hand, they denied that Luther was an innovator. In his *Two Dialogues*, Copp insists that the reformer's teaching 'is nothing new, it is old'.⁵² In *Father and Son*, the son seeks to alleviate his father's doubts: 'But dear Father, isn't the old custom that which God and the apostles taught. It is not new...'.⁵³ In *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*, 'Martin' asserts: 'it is not my invention to preach about the word of God. This has been done before my time. The faith which I teach has been taught by the apostles and Christ himself...'.⁵⁴

On the other hand, the evangelical side maintained that it was legitimate, indeed necessary, to abandon 'ungodly' customs. Copp urges his reader to 'take the example of the holy martyrs', who also broke with tradition. He tries to ease this step by arguing that the forefathers 'would also have stood by the gospel if God have given them the grace which he is now giving you and if the gospel had been preached to them as diligently as the decretals'.⁵⁴ In his *Refutation*, the Erfurt preacher, Andreas Culsamer, accuses Usingen of ignoring Matthew 10 [37], 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me'. Instead of admonishing people to follow their parents indiscriminately, Usingen 'ought to teach that if father, or mother... draw a man away from God, he should abandon his earthly father and follow the heavenly father'.⁵⁵ The prophets, Culsamer adds, 'continuously rebuke the people for following the wicked ways of their parents'.⁵⁶ In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the laybrother rejects the prior's defence of customary observances by citing Christ's example: 'The Jews had tarried long with their ceremonies, yet Christ and the apostles led thousands away from them, so that they accepted and adhered to the teaching which they called new, which it was'.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ CLEMEN 4, p. 240, ll. 25ff.

⁵¹ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), [Civ]^v.

⁵² *ibid.*, B^v.

⁵³ CLEMEN 1, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522) [Civ]^v.

⁵⁵ Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung*, Aii^v.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Aii^v-Aiii^r.

⁵⁷ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Di^r.

A second reason why Luther's aura may have faded was the disintegration of a once solid front of prominent supporters. Evangelical propagandists, we have seen, claimed that the majority of learned men backed Luther. This was flatly rejected by his opponents. Kettenbach cites the Catholic argument that 'nobody supports Luther but lay and unlearned people, few members of the universities... few Thomists...'.⁵⁸ In retrospect, this may read as if Kettenbach was merely mocking the 'discredited' authority to which his opponents appealed. Yet the turn of events at Erfurt suggests that he was addressing earnest reservations. During Luther's visit in the spring of 1521, the University had, to all appearances, been solidly behind the reformer. Within a year, however, its change of heart was evident. Weiss has pointed to the link between the University's refusal to back Luther and a growing divergence of opinion in the city.⁵⁹

In Copp's *Two Dialogues*, one of the speakers, the Man, asks his interlocutor, the Spirit, why 'so many learned men are opposed to Luther.' Challenged to name them, he mentions the stock villains of evangelical propaganda, including Murner, and 'the whole Order of Preachers'. Yet Copp knows that irony alone will not suffice. Pressed by the Man, the Spirit admits that Luther has several reputable opponents, arguing: 'it would not be good if among so great a crowd there were not also some pious people'.⁶⁰ Again, the Man asks: 'why are so many abandoning Luther?'⁶¹ Here, the Spirit replies that only the clergy who fear the loss of their benefices oppose Luther.⁶² Copp's polemic reflects a dilemma facing evangelical propagandists once the shift in opinion at Erfurt University had become apparent. He seeks to press into service stereotypes which he himself recognises to be outdated. Several of Luther's opponents in Erfurt, notably Usingen and Femelius, did not fit the clichés which Copp tries to attach to them. Such undifferentiated invective might of course have destroyed their reputations. Alternatively, it could have undermined the credibility of evangelical propaganda.

In his 1524 *Erfurt Sermon*, which addressed a much wider audience than Copp's pamphlet, Eberlin treats the same question. He complains that Luther's earliest opponents have now been joined by

those who in the beginning undertook to stand in the front line against the kingdom of the Pope, fighting against it with books in the Latin and German tongues, with courageous preaching... praising Luther in verse and song, advising and encouraging him to advance further...

⁵⁸ CLEMEN 2, p. 172, ll. 13ff.: 'dem Luther hengt niemant an dann die leyen vnnd vngelernten, wenig vß den ordern, wenig auß den hosenschulen, ich solt sagenn vß den hohenschuln, wenig Thomisten... wenig auß den Keysern, Künigen u.' Here, the play on the terms 'hosenschulen' / 'hohenschuln' is intended to suggest that students of scholastic theology sat around wasting their time.

⁵⁹ Weiss (1982a), pp. 292-293.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, [Biv]^v.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, C^v.

⁶² *ibid.*, C^v.

These 'defectors' now participate in the campaign against Luther: 'Openly, defiantly, they revoke the truth which they had previously acknowledged, criticising that which they had previously praised and extolled.'⁶³ Eberlin appeals to his audience not to be discouraged by this change of heart, calling on them to pray for help 'against our enemies, whose number and strength, cleverness, courage etc. are far too burdensome for human stupidity, unless it is defended and protected by divine assistance.'⁶⁴ Significantly, Eberlin acknowledges not just the numerical strength of Luther's opponents, but also their skills and positive qualities. It was no longer credible to claim that the greater and saner part of the nation's learned was behind Luther.

The third reason why people may have grown suspicious of Luther follows from the second: in Kettenbach's words, 'only lay and unlearned people' supported him. Kettenbach dismisses this argument, pointing out that the Jews said the same about Christ.⁶⁵ Answering the charge that Luther's followers are 'shiftless people', he points out that 'whores and knaves, usurers and public sinners followed Christ, and also the best in the world such as Mary and the apostles... Annas and Caiphas, the hypocrites and other haughty holy men didn't want to be of Christ...'.⁶⁶

The same issue is raised in Hans Sachs's 1524 dialogue, *Canon and Shoemaker*. The canon asks: 'If he [Luther] is so right, why do so few learned and powerful men support him. Only the base masses without understanding do so.'⁶⁷ The shoemaker replies that: 'neither Pilate, nor Herod, nor Caiphas supported Christ... Only the common people supported him.'⁶⁸ In contrast to Kettenbach, however, Sachs admits that the level of popular support is modest. The canon objects that only 'the smaller part of the common folk considers Luther to be right'.⁶⁹ The Shoemaker does not dispute this, but instead complains: 'That is the fault of you wretched preachers, who cry out that it is heresy, and do so without using scripture.'⁷⁰ Sachs evidently believed that the evangelical movement had a relatively narrow popular base. In order, perhaps, to encourage those disheartened by a sense that the majority was ranged against them, he quotes Matthew 22.14: Many are called, but few are chosen.

A fourth criterion by which traditionalists invited people to judge Luther was the consequences of his teaching. In his *Two Dialogues*, Copp deals with the charge that Luther was responsible for social unrest. The Man alleges that 'Martin has stirred Karsthans' and that his teaching is therefore harmful. The Spirit answers by citing cites Matthew 10, in which 'Christ says... that he has not come into the world

⁶³ ENDERS 3, p. 234.

⁶⁴ ENDERS 3, p. 236.

⁶⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 172, ll. 20ff.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 174, ll. 9-14.

⁶⁷ SPRIEWALD, p. 89, ll. 729-732.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 89, ll. 733ff.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 89, ll. 742-743.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 89, ll. 744-746.

to bring peace (by which you should understand human peace), but the sword.⁷¹ In his *Practica*, Kettenbach alleges that fear of social upheaval explains the reluctance of urban governments to back Luther. Although he responds that the battle for the Christian faith had always cost the blood of the innocent, he evidently felt it prudent to deny that Luther had fuelled social protest: 'Who is making Conz rebellious. Luther?...Who is creating upheaval in Erfurt, Halle, Speyer, Cologne and Worms? Luther? No! He wasn't even known [when it started]. 'From the beginning of time, the real cause of all civil strife, upheaval and wars has been the failure to follow the gospel...'.⁷²

Both authors were evidently addressing the fears of the solid burgher. However, it was not just the spectre of revolt, but also acrimonious debate on religious issues which could count against Luther. In Copp's *Two Dialogues*, the Man complains of how 'one man wants to be a Martinist, the next a papist.'⁷³ The Spirit replies: 'Martin has never desired this, but rather preached and taught against it several times...'. His sole purpose is to preach the gospel. 'For this reason, nobody should think that he wants to found a new sect...'.⁷⁴ According to Kettenbach, his opponents argued that if Luther's 'teaching were of the holy ghost, good, then it would bring forth good fruits, such as peace, love and unity...'.⁷⁵ In response he declares that, throughout the ages, Christ's teaching has caused 'bloodshed, murder, killing and martyrdom throughout the world'. This does not make it false, a point which he underlines by appealing to Matthew 10.21: 'Don't you know that Christ said, I have come to bring the sword, and to separate children from their parents, and father and son, brother and daughter will oppose each other.' What Christ offers is 'inner peace of conscience'. Since he himself says [John 14.27] that he does not give peace as the world gives it, it follows that 'Martin Luther brings forth good fruit'.⁷⁶

Much the same argument is found in *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*. Like Kettenbach, the author of this dialogue makes no attempt to deny that Luther has destroyed the peace, but rather seeks to present upheaval in a favourable light. The Devil accuses Martin of 'burdening the whole world with feuds, starting up a new faith...'.⁷⁷ Martin does not deny the charge. 'You are right to blame me for causing so much upheaval in Christendom with my writings. God wills it so... He has come to light a fire which will cause all friends to oppose each other. Matthew 10 [34ff], Luke 12 [49].'⁷⁸ Later, the Devil accuses Martin of failing to observe Matthew 5.9 - Blessed are the peacemakers. Martin responds that peace, like other virtues, can be wicked. Citing John 14.27, he admonishes the Devil: 'Look, Christ makes this distinction, and therefore so do I. But your scholars and pupils, the sophists, do not want to make the same distinctions as in scripture.' When Christ said that he had not

⁷¹ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Biii^v -[Biv]^f

⁷² CLEMEN 2, pp. 189-190.

⁷³ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Biii^v.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, Biii^v.

⁷⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 166, ll. 12-15.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 318.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 319.

come to bring peace, but the sword, he was speaking of the 'wicked peace' which the papists now seek to defend. Although souls are at risk, the Catholic party merely praises obedience to the authorities.⁷⁹

A final reason why people may have ceased to regard Luther with the same reverence as in the early years of his campaign is the vehemence with which he attacked his opponents. According to Kettenbach, 'the papists complain: Luther has not observed evangelical and brotherly love. He is wicked and envious and dishonours people.' Kettenbach, does not deny the accusation, but argues that Christ's 'unfriendliness' to the 'hypocrites and corrupters of scripture' sets a venerable precedent: 'If Christ was wrong in this, then Luther is also wrong... for it is the same in both cases'. Kettenbach is nonetheless anxious to stress the reformer's personal virtue. Replying to the charge that 'Luther ... is such an angry man', he points out that he has not yet acted like Moses in throwing the tablets to the ground. Although Moses, too, was angry, 'there is testimony to the fact that in those days, he was the mildest of all men.' Similarly 'Martin Luther is by nature a gentle, mild, good, friendly, gracious, unembittered, pure and unstained man, also towards children and the poor.' However, he is right to show his anger towards hypocrites.

Neutral observers also took exception to Luther's angry manner. In the strongly anticlerical 1522 *Dialogue on Pope Hadrian's Entry*, one of the speakers, the Devil, praises Luther as one of his closest allies.⁸⁰ 'Although his teaching is good and Christian, his manner of rebuking is envious and unchristian. For it is against the love of neighbour and the teaching and commandment of Christ, who said, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.'⁸¹ Two other speakers, an abbot and a 'courtesan' (papal bureaucrat), take umbrage at the Devil's failure to help them get rid of Luther.⁸² The Devil responds that he is no less useful than they are. First, 'he has caused envy between the spiritual and secular estates which will lead to bloodshed'. Second, 'there is disrespect for human ordinances and failure to fulfil the divine.' Nobody has been improved by Luther.⁸³

To sum up: the contrast between the treatment of Luther in pamphlets before and after Worms is both striking and instructive. Up to the imperial diet, with the notable exception of *Karsthans*, there were no attempts to demonstrate the reformer's saintliness, which was regarded as self-evident. Similarly, the charge of heresy against him was dismissed as a pretext, without any reference to the arguments of his opponents. His condemnation by the imperial estates and the Catholic assault on the 'new faith' changed everything. Evangelical propagandists were now forced to prove

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

⁸⁰ *Eyn Dialogus wie d' heilig vatter bapst Adrianus eyngeritten ist.* (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: CLEMEN 3, pp. 15-23.

The original title described the pamphlet as a 'dialogue..... against the pious Pope Adrian'. In the third (Augsburg) edition, the title was changed, possibly to enhance its newsworthiness. It now promised an account of the Pope's entry to Rome. Frederick the Wise, who received a copy of the pamphlet complained that it did not fulfil this promise, so unwittingly spotting the printer's deception. (CLEMEN 3, pp. 4-5).

⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁸² *ibid.*, p 21, ll. 23-26.

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

what had hitherto been taken for granted - that Luther was a man of God - both by emphasising his charismatic qualities and by taking issue with the case against him. In evaluating their efforts, we can speak at most of a qualified success. The laity was clearly split. Although many retained their rapturous allegiance to the reformer, many others turned away, horrified by the new faith, by the 'defection' of many reputable men, and by the divisions which Luther had wrought in the Christian community. Whereas Luther had initially been perceived as brave and righteous, he soon came to be regarded as cantankerous and dangerous. It is significant that Hans Sachs believed that the majority of the common people believed him to be a heretic. Whether or not his assessment is correct, he would not have conceded this point, unless it had been widely believed. At the very least, the tide of opinion had turned dramatically.

6. The 'Real Heretics': the demonisation of the Catholic clergy

The swing of opinion against Luther also explains the unparalleled campaign of vilification which evangelical propagandists launched against his opponents. The reformer's condemnation at Worms increased the pressure on them to answer the charge of heresy in kind. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, which appeared shortly after the diet, the allegation is thrown back at the reformer's Catholic critics: 'You say that Luther is a heretic. Well, I say that most of you are heretics yourselves...'.¹ Once people began to associate Luther with the 'new faith', reformers intensified their efforts to attach the stigma of heresy to their opponents, as a brief glance at Erfurt pamphlets indicates. In his *Refutation* of 1522, Culsamer rejects Catholic allegations, arguing that 'it would be much more just to regard as heretics and as apostates (as they truly are) those who contradict the word of God with human rancour and laws...'.² In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the beggar scornfully rejects the prior's offer to pray for the enlightenment of 'Lutheran heretics': 'Take yourself by the nose and pray for yourselves, you heretics.'³ In *Grimmenthal*, a friar warns the artisan not to believe the writings of Luther, 'a heretic and a corrupter.' The artisan retorts that Luther has not been refuted, adding: 'But you Dominican monks are heretics...'.⁴

(i) Clerical hostility to the gospel

The image of Luther's opponents constructed by evangelical propagandists is a foil to that of the reformer himself. In the Erfurt dialogue, *Father and Son*, the father learns 'that the preachers have not followed the Christ's command...: Go into all the world and preach the gospel...'.⁵ They oppose Luther because 'he has used the gospels and the epistles... to show the falseness of their knavery with their statutes and their Opinions...'.⁶ In his *Conversation with an Old Woman*, Kettenbach alleges that the clergy 'could not bear the epistles and gospels to be read to you in German in the mass, which Christ commanded to be preached to all creatures...'.⁷ Catholic teaching is ceaselessly denounced as 'human'. Copp's *Two Dialogues*, attacks the clergy for teaching 'only their own invented, human law to the people, forcibly knocking it into their heads.'⁸ Johannes Lang, delineates the front between the parties. Addressing an opponent, he declares: 'I want to keep to... the word of God, but you want to keep by man's laws.'⁹

¹ GÖTZE, p. 20.

² Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung*, Aii^f.

³ *ibid.*, Di^f.

⁴ CLEMEN 1, pp. 143-144.

⁵ CLEMEN 1, p. 32.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷ CLEMEN 2, p. 66.

⁸ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), [Civ]^f.

⁹ Lange, Johannes, *Von gehorsam der Weltlichen oberkait vnd den ausgangen klosterleuten* (n.p., 1523), Aii^v.

As already seen, evangelical propagandists had argued that Luther's refusal to accept money was proof of the authenticity of his teaching. To supply a motive for Catholic 'hostility to the gospel', pamphleteers play relentlessly on the age-old idea that greed inevitably leads to false preaching. *Father and Son* alleges that 'for the sake of money the papists and houndish Christians have farted in their mouths and suppressed the gospels...'.¹⁰ For the same reason, they oppose Luther. Fearing the loss their income from indulgences, they 'become the enemy of God and of the man who has written about it'.¹¹ *Grimmenthal* complains that 'the Pope's affairs are all antichristian and that he is only interested in our money and [not in] whether the Devil takes our body and soul...'.¹² As far as Rome is concerned, 'whoever gives money is a Christian... whoever gives none is a heretic...'.¹³ In his *Final Statement*, Eberlin traces the process of clerical degeneration. Originally, the monks came to Germany to preach Christ and were given tithes in return. However, they soon developed a taste for easy living and began to delegate their pastoral work to vicars. Since the monks held on to the tithes, the vicars needed another source of income. This led them to introduce 'false' divine service, for which the people had to pay extra.¹⁴

As seen in the last chapter, Luther's opponents attacked him for starting a 'new faith'. For their part, evangelical propagandists attempted to cast the Catholic clergy in the role of innovator. In his *Apologia*, Kettenbach compares 'the old faith which Christ and his apostles taught us' with 'the new faith which the Pope, prelates, universities and tonsured men have devised and presented to us...'.¹⁵ In Hans Sachs's *Canon and Shoemaker*, the shoemaker complains that 'several new forms of divine service have been introduced' by the clergy. Although called good works, they are 'vain, outward and superficial' and were not ordained by God...'.¹⁶ In *Grimmenthal*, having exposed the link between clerical greed and 'works righteousness', an artisan explains to a confused peasant the true meaning of heresy: 'A heretic is someone who believes or teaches something which is contrary to our faith, and especially contrary to the articles of the Christian faith, the gospels, the apostles and the prophets. Whoever invents new things and teaches them is a real heretic.'¹⁷

Evangelical pamphleteers often reinforce the *Feindbild* of the clergy through association with Aristotle. In the middle ages, attitudes towards the value of Aristotle in theology had ranged from boundless enthusiasm to deprecation.¹⁸ Luther took a differentiated view which need not be elaborated here. Suffice it to emphasise his conviction that scholastic Aristotelianism could not provide access to the gospel message.¹⁹ In his more polemical writings, he attacks the philosopher as the father of

¹⁰ CLEMEN 1, p. 38.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁴ ENDERS 1, p. 182.

¹⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 167.

¹⁶ SPRIEWALD, pp. 85-86.

¹⁷ CLEMEN 1, p. 167.

¹⁸ Junghans (1985), pp. 146-149.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 153ff.

error. Up to a point, Luther's attitude overlapped with that of mainstream humanism. Despite a certain interest in recovering the 'true' Aristotle by way of the original text, humanist contempt for the intellectual pursuits of scholastic theologians expressed itself in mockery of their deification of the 'heathen' philosopher.

Humanist polemic in the 1510s prepared the ground for the campaign of the following decade. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, the clergy are accused of preaching only 'human ordinances from Aristotle and other similar heathen books.' In sermons, people are reminded more of their financial obligations to the clergy than of the 'gifts which God desires... faith, hope and charity.' For such reasons, the clergy are 'more heretical than full of Christian works.'²⁰ *Father and Son* complains that the clergy have 'preached Scotus, Thomas of Coquinas, Aristotle, Occam and others. And they have kicked Christ's gracious message... under the bench...'²¹ *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, emphasises the link between scholastic method and Catholic error. The laybrother admonishes the friar: 'You must not take sayings out of scripture according to your own pleasure, and then treat them as though you were a sow in a field of beet, wanting to prove this with Scotus and Thomas Coquinas ... with the heathen masters, Aristotle, Plato and Averroes...'²²

In his *Two Dialogues*, Copp contrasts Luther's fidelity to the gospel with his opponents' veneration of Aristotle. Here, a man is visited by a good spirit, who has come to bring him grace. The Man asks who else has been commended to the Spirit's care. The latter names Luther, Melanchthon, Hutten and several Erfurt humanists - Lang, Forchheim, Crotus and Eobanus Hessus. Acknowledging their learning, the Man inquires whether the Spirit also instructs 'certain masters of Paris'.²³ When the Spirit denies any association with the latter, the man insists that 'the men of Paris, Cologne and Louvain' are also learned men. They have studied 'the books of Aristotle... the commentary of Averroes, Albertus Magnus, the Eisenacher, Eck and the logic of the Erfurt Aristotelian sophist, Usingen...'.²⁴ The Man explains: 'I learnt this fourteen years ago in Freiburg... from Dr. Eck... I was his pupil. And in addition I learnt many amusing, funny Stories and Arguments, for he was extraordinarily skilled in the *via moderna*.' The Spirit is unimpressed. Quoting I Cor. 3 [19], he stresses that 'the wisdom of the world is folly with God'.²⁵ Such 'sophistry hinders rather than assists salvation'. The Man sees the light: 'I have always thought the same myself, for I know well about the life of the sophists... Nobody doubts that Aristotle and Averroes were heathens. How then can they be the foundation of the faith?'²⁶ The polemic against Aristotle closes with a classic argument: '...at the beginning of Genesis, you will find that God created heaven and

²⁰ GÖTZE, pp. 20-22.

²¹ CLEMEN 1, p. 32.

²² Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespr̄ech zwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Ciii^v.

²³ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Bii^v.

²⁴ *ibid.*, Bii^v-Biii^f. On Usingen's angry reaction to attempts to place him in the company of Reuchlin's opponents, see Kleineidam (1980), pp. 16-17.

²⁵ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Biii^f.

²⁶ On the background, see Junghans (1985), p. 156.

earth... And then the good heathen Aristotle comes with his supporters and says that heaven and earth had always been there... Should a Christian believe that?²⁷

Luther saw the papacy as a diabolical fabrication and, until his death, reviled the Church in these terms.²⁸ In the early 1520s, evangelical propagandists repeatedly stress that, as teachers of 'human' doctrine, the clergy do the Devil's work. Eberlin accuses the bishops of enforcing the celibacy laws merely to protect their income from the annual fines on concubinage. 'Some are so obstinate... that they want to fight God forcefully and support the Devil. For they are pleased with the knavish profits that they have from the priest's whores...'.²⁹ Kettenbach alleges that although the clergy lack the authority to impose fasting, they do so because it is 'required by the Devil', their 'master'.³⁰ In another pamphlet, he complains that 'the world is seduced and given unbeknownst to the Devil through the invented teaching of the monks and priests'. People think that they are serving God, but 'are in fact courting the Devil'.³¹ In Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the regular clergy are denounced as members of 'the order and sect of Lucifer, who was cast out of heaven because of arrogance'.³² The monks 'lie awake alone in their monasteries and cells, like bears in their dens, thinking only of their own profit...'. They have been 'cut off from Christendom... by their corrupting human works which are done without faith'.³³ People have been deluded into thinking that salvation depended on observing man's laws. If these laws are not overturned 'man will belong to the Devil for ever'.³⁴

The second of Copp's *Two Dialogues* begins with a soliloquy in which Satan appeals to the clergy to hold fast in the face of the reformers' assault: 'O Pope, dear faithful servant, O dear bishops and prelates... if you let go, we will be altogether lost in our kingdom. For you are the ones who bring us so many thousands of pious souls every year'.³⁵ He then lavishes praise on the religious orders. For a thousand years after Christ, he had been unable to make any headway. With the growth of monasticism, however, his fortunes changed.³⁶ Complaining that people are beginning to see through the monks' deception, Satan appeals to his 'allies' to redouble their efforts.

The plot of *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell* echoes the well-known story of the temptation in the wilderness. Anxious to limit the damage to their interests, the hosts of hell decide to win Luther by bribery. Disguised as a Dominican friar, the emissary asks him to stop attacking the Church. From the outset, however, Martin holds fast to the gospel. The clergy 'have no understanding in matters of

²⁷ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), C^r.

²⁸ Scribner (1987), pp. 278, 283.

²⁹ ENDERS 3, p. 30.

³⁰ CLEMEN 2, p. 15.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 169.

³² Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zwischē einem Pzior / leyenzuder vñ Bettler* (Erfurt, 1522/1523), Bi^v.

³³ *ibid.*, Cii^r.

³⁴ *ibid.*, Fii^v.

³⁵ *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), Cii^r.

³⁶ *ibid.*, Cii^r.

grace'. Their writings 'are nothing more than council, council, Pope, Pope, tradition and the Devil and his mother.' Since 'the Pope and tradition have no time for God' Martin complains, 'men do not think of God.' The worldly wise clergy 'fear the clear scripture of God' because 'God does not fill up bags and chests.'³⁷ Initially, Martin is unaware of the true identity of his visitor. Once the Devil reveals himself, the Church's satanic origins are given yet greater emphasis. The Devil confesses that

no devil, nor most of the clergy in Rome, like you because you are harming us devils in hell, and the Pope in his treasure chamber, and the monks and priests in their kitchens and cellars. And it would be better for us if you had never been born...³⁸

Towards the end of the dialogue he offers Martin a cardinal's hat. Laughing, he boasts of how 'we managed so well to deceive and corrupt the clergy.'³⁹ Martin, however, stands firm.

(ii) The image of the Friars Preachers in evangelical propaganda

Scribner points out that, in constructing a *Feindbild* of Luther's opponents, evangelical propagandists drew on a long tradition of popular, anti-monkish sentiment.⁴⁰ It may be added that their vilification of the clergy relied heavily on one especially potent image, that of the 'evil' Dominican. In the early sixteenth century, the Order of Preachers was involved in a series of scandals and conflicts which, by 1520, had seriously injured its reputation. In 1507, Johannes Jetzer, a laybrother at the Dominican friary in Bern, claimed to have witnessed several apparitions by the Virgin Mary. Revealing that she had been conceived in original sin, she impressed upon him Christ's stigmata. Thereafter, the friary was the site of several miracles. The Dominicans hoped that these events would secure papal confirmation of their doctrine - disputed by the Franciscans - on the Virgin's conception. Jetzer, however, was later recognised while staging an apparition. Confessing under torture, he denounced the prior and three senior members of the friary as accomplices. At their trial, the four Dominicans denied involvement, probably truthfully. The city council of Bern, however, had a strong political interest in securing their condemnation, which sealed their fate. They were burned at the stake on May 31, 1509.⁴¹ Whatever the truth concerning the involvement of the four Dominicans, they were widely believed to have been guilty. The most influential of several reports on the affair was that by the Franciscan humanist, Thomas Murner, who exposed the 'deception' in both a Latin and a vernacular pamphlet.⁴² Humanist circles readily received the story

³⁷ BENTZINGER, p. 320

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 332.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 337.

⁴⁰ Scribner (1981), p. 37.

⁴¹ On the Jetzer affair, see v. Greyerz, H., (1932), pp. 243-299; Andreas (1959), pp. 176-178.

⁴² Von den fier ketzeren Prediger/ordens der Observantz zu Bern/im Schweitzerland verbrannt in dem jar noch/Christi Geburt MCCCCCIX/ uff den nechsten/donderstag noch Pfingsten. mit vil schoenen figürlin und lieblichen reymSprüchen neulich geteutsch.

- welcome ammunition in their battles against scholastic theologians and popular cults.⁴³ It was also used by Luther's early defenders. In his letter to Albrecht of Brandenburg, Erasmus remarks: 'How far the Order of Preachers can go... we can learn from Girolamo Savaronola and that outrage at Bern. I have no wish to refresh the memory of their disgrace; I issue a warning of what we must expect if all their rash attempts succeed.'⁴⁴

No less damaging to the Preachers' reputation were the polemics of the Reuchlin affair. The best known and most influential publication, the *Letters of Obscure Men*, was the first work of satire targeted at living, well-known and hitherto widely respected figures.⁴⁵ As is well known, the mainly Dominican correspondents of Ortwin Gratius comment on the progress of 'the Cause', i.e. their suit against Reuchlin, transmitting a damning picture of their Order. Confiding in Gratius on their private affairs, they reveal their low morals. Praising their own accomplishments in bad Latin, they inadvertently denounce themselves as barbarians. Aristotle is their highest authority, whom they quote copiously where citations from scripture would have been appropriate. The *Letters* are also peppered with allusions to the Jetzer affair.⁴⁶ Noteworthy are Ulrich von Hutten's contributions, which present the affair as a 'cosmic battle' which will decide the fate of the German nation.⁴⁷

In reformation pamphlets, the instances of Dominican perfidy reviled in humanist writings in the 1510s colour the image of Luther's opponents. The black friar becomes the archetypal Catholic 'heretic' of evangelical propaganda. In popular dialogues, he is often the Church spokesman. The plot of *Bembus and Silenus* centres on a shady deal between Bembus, a Dominican, and Silenus, a burgher. Bembus wants Silenus to look after the Order's treasure until the present disorders have died down. Initially wary of broaching so delicate a matter, he offends Silenus by his caution: 'If I thought that you did not trust me to hold my tongue, then I would regret everything that I have ever given you. You know that I have given you a lot and left my sister, brother and other relatives suffering need.'⁴⁸ Now persuaded to confide in Silenus, Bembus laments the failure to suppress the evangelical movement. Yet although the people no longer contribute as generously, the prudent financial management of earlier generations of friars will ensure an ample income.⁴⁹ Initially reluctant to take the Dominican treasure into safe keeping, Silenus is won over when Bembus offers some barrels of wine and a fur coat for his wife.⁵⁰ A third speaker, Silenus's Fool, provides an 'objective' commentary. Disgusted at his master's susceptibility to bribery, he complains: 'What a disgrace that they should have so much rent and tribute and still come begging among the poor people.' He goes on to question the value of their religious services:

⁴³ Cf. v. Greyerz, H., (1932), p. 271.

⁴⁴ CWE 7, p. 116, ll. 273-276.

⁴⁵ Cf. Könniker (1975), p. 19.

⁴⁶ STOKES, pp. 333, 383, 471, 522.

⁴⁷ Overfield (1984), pp 293ff.; Andreas (1959), pp. 478-479.

⁴⁸ SCHADE 3, p. 214.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 215.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 217.

When they sing at funerals, they dress themselves up for the people, and every one of them has a white cloth around his neck. And they take a pound of farthings and nothing less. If this is supposed to help the souls towards heaven, may God grant it. I, however, do not hold much of it.⁵¹

Through the image of the scheming, grasping Dominican, the author suggests that where the profit motive dominates, there can be little genuine interest in the welfare of souls.

Evangelical propaganda also makes the most of the Jetzer affair. In *Bembus and Silenus*, Bembus utters a quick prayer to steel himself for the difficult task of confiding in Silenus. ‘O holy Dominic, O holy Thomas, give me inspiration now... so that I may neither overplay it nor underplay it’. Here, the Fool interjects with a mocking allusion to the scandal at Bern. ‘If you were to call upon the tailor of Bern and his brothers, they would surely help you. They are great martyrs. The other two are only confessors...’.⁵² *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell* also alludes to the Jetzer affair. Significantly, the Devil appears in a Dominican habit. When he eventually reveals his identity, the message of this image is reinforced in the text. Luther asks: ‘Why have you come like this, you wicked Devil, dressed up in the cowl of a Dominican monk...?’ The Devil replies: ‘You should not be surprised at the form I have taken. Do you not know that we made a pilgrimage to the monks of that order and accomplished our secret treachery through them, in Bern for example, and in many other places...’.⁵³ In *Grimmenthal*, untypically, the story of the Bern ‘heresy’ is told in full. The Dominican friar denounces Luther as a heretic, at which the artisan responds that the Preachers are themselves guilty of heresy. When the friar argues that the artisan is out of his depth in such matters, the latter brings up the Jetzer affair, stressing that it illustrates how religion has been falsified: ‘I have read about the matter... Would God that everyone knew about it. Then they would find out how saints and pilgrimages are made.’⁵⁴ Having recounted how the four friars were tried, condemned and burned, he concludes: ‘Here you can see clearly that the monks have committed heresy and that Luther hasn’t.’⁵⁵

In his *Two Dialogues*, Copp uses the tarnished Dominican image to clinch his case against Luther’s opponents. As already seen, the Man is worried by the numbers of ‘learned men’ in their ranks. Repeatedly, the Spirit asks him to name them. Finally, the Man responds: ‘Isn’t the entire Order of Preachers against him?’ Copp now pulls out all the stops: Bern, Reuchlin, sophistry, greed and sexual licence. The Man defends the Dominicans: ‘While I was [studying] at Freiburg I heard tell of many learned men in Bern’. When the Spirit reminds him of the scandal, the Man praises the Dominicans of Cologne. The Spirit advises him to ‘ask Reuchlin about

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 218.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 216.

⁵³ BENTZINGER, p. 332.

⁵⁴ CLEMEN 1, p. 144.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 146.

that'. Now persuaded that the Order of Preachers is bereft of learned men, the Man asks why 'they are so opposed to Martin'. The Spirit explains that the Dominicans 'have got a different sect'. Asked to elaborate, he continues: 'They are called *Domisten*. Oh, that is a slip of the tongue. I meant *Thomisten*.' With this play on words, Copp suggests that the interests of the place-seeker and the scholastic theologian are identical. When the Spirit explains that Thomists are followers of the 'great sophist', Aquinas, the man concludes: 'From what I hear, they are not Christians.' The Spirit confirms this: 'They are Thomists and they call themselves that.' They fear the loss of their benefices and concubines should the teaching of Christ get the upper hand. The Man is persuaded: 'Now I hear that Luther's teaching is Christian'.

(iii) Clerical 'ignorance' of scripture

The attempt to attach the negative images of earlier conflicts to Luther's opponents in the 1520s could be regarded as skilful propaganda. It can also be taken a measure of the difficulty of legitimating the reformer following the 'defection' of erstwhile supporters. In Erfurt - as elsewhere - evangelical reformers were forced to take on respected scholars, several of them humanists. For this reason, the image of the clergy transmitted in pamphlets is by no means congruous. However much evangelical propagandists wished to portray their opponents as 'enemies of the gospel', they could not ignore reality.

In a 1522 pamphlet, the onetime adherent of Luther, Johannes Femelius, censures his opponents for denigrating those earnestly seeking the truth through scripture. Such backbiting, he argues, '...is truly wicked and poisonous, leading surely to evil things'. Anyone can engage in defamation. Praiseworthy is the man who 'takes a certain article and confirms this with the support of testimony from scripture...'. Regardless of who wins, an argument should be conducted without rancour, for 'in this way many people can learn and improve themselves, and understand scripture better...'.⁵⁶ Doubtless, there were Catholic preachers who did not share Femelius's spirit of detached moderation. Yet, as their opponents acknowledged, they too argued biblically. Writing in 1524, Mechler, an evangelical preacher, remarks that the Catholic party 'use several sayings from holy scripture' to show that salvation depends on good works. Mechler adds that his own party can cite more and clearer texts.⁵⁷ Whatever the truth of the latter claim, there is no doubting the former.

This doubtless explains why evangelical preachers attempted to belittle their opponents' understanding of scripture. Their main target was Usingen. In his *Refutation*, Culsamer alleges that the latter had claimed that his age made him a

⁵⁶ Femelius, Johannes, *Eyn kurz Sermon szo die heyligen Gottes belangen* (Erfurt, 1522), Ai^r-Ai^v.

⁵⁷ Mechler, *Eyn Chzistische vnterzichtung*, (Erfurt, 1524) Aii^v- Aiii^r.

reliable interpreter of scripture. In rebutting this, Culsamer - like most of Erfurt's evangelical preachers, a relatively young man - cites Joel 2 [28] and Acts 2, [17]: 'And your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.' He then admonishes him not to 'say any more that we should believe you in matters relating to holy scripture on account of your age, for I know many who are older than you and know just as little or less than you about scripture, and on the other hand, many who are younger and vastly superior to you in holy scripture.'⁵⁸

- Popular dialogues also transmit this view of the Catholic clergy, both directly and indirectly. In *Father and Son*, the Father observes that the clergy 'do not understand and read scripture, and are such uncultured blockheads that they can hardly sing a requiem...'⁵⁹ Similarly, in *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the beggar accuses the prior: 'Dear sir, you understand scripture as much as an ass the Psalter...'⁶⁰ The dialogue, moreover, provided scope for a more subtle reinforcement of this picture. First, the clergy may cite biblical passages which are easily turned against them. In *Bailiff and Pastor*, the pastor denies that laymen may criticise the clergy, citing Romans 13 [2]: 'He who resists the authorities resists God...'⁶¹ The bailiff's reply exposes the limits to the pastor's scriptural proficiency: '...Say the whole thing. Doesn't it continue: the authorities do not bear the sword in vain. There he means the sword of the secular power...'⁶²

A second technique is the loading of scriptural evidence against the Catholic spokesman. In the Erfurt dialogue, *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the figure of the prior is almost certainly intended to resemble Usingen. Most striking is his call for the burning of Luther's supporters, which echoes remarks made by the Augustinian.⁶³ In addition, he uses many of the same scriptural arguments.⁶⁴ Whenever the prior appeals to the bible, however, the laybrother responds with a barrage of citations to prove the contrary. Up to a point, faithful restatement of the Catholic position was necessary, if the public was to recognise Luther's opponents in the villains of evangelical propaganda. Through the 'staging' of confrontations, however, propagandists also achieved a controlled presentation of the Catholic position, which could then be refuted more effectively than in real life. The evangelical speaker is given the last word, while the representative of the old church is left speechless.

This prepares the ground for a third device - the admission by the Catholic party that his opponent has the better case. Both *Bailiff and Pastor*⁶⁵ and *Prior*,

⁵⁸ Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung* (1522), Aiiii^r.

⁵⁹ CLEMEN 1, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁰ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspztech ztvischē einem Pzior /leyenbruder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Bii^r.

⁶¹ GÖTZE, p. 13, ll. 23ff.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 14, ll. 1 ff.

⁶³ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v. For a discussion of what Usingen actually said and how his remarks were interpreted by his evangelical opponents, see Paulus (1893), pp. 51-52.

⁶⁴ See below, pp. 202f.

⁶⁵ See above, p. 41.

Laybrother and Beggar end in this way. In the latter dialogue, the prior senses that the laybrother must be right, 'since he is citing scripture in this way.'⁶⁶ As the dialogue closes, we learn that 'the prior, having searched and found these things in the Bible, also left the monastery for God's estate'.⁶⁷ Other pamphleteers, while appreciating the propaganda value of a Catholic 'capitulation', would also seem to have felt that the final picture of a cleric graciously deferring to scripture was less than effective in mobilising opposition. In *Grimmenthal*, for example, an artisan confronts a friar and a priest. Towards the end of the dialogue, the friar is moved by the 'force' of the artisan's argument to exchange his cowl for an overall. Infuriated by the monk's defection, the priest loads abuse on the artisan and admits: 'We do not want the people to find out these things. I am also not allowed to tell the peasants the truth.'⁶⁸ The propagandist succeeds in extracting an admission of error from the Catholic party, while at the same time keeping the ugly face of Catholicism firmly in view.

The image of the 'ignorant' but ultimately 'reasonable' cleric is probably an involuntary concession to the reality of pulpit warfare as perceived by a wider public. From the standpoint of evangelical propagandists, to be sure, this was no contradiction. Regardless of whether Catholic spokesmen could offer a scriptural justification of their position in specific instances, through their failure to take to heart what Luther had declared to be the central message of the gospel, they automatically exposed themselves to the charge that they were hostile to it. Nevertheless the second line of attack indicates that the impact of the first was limited. Luther's most prominent opponents at local level simply did not fit the clichés transported in popular pamphlets. Propaganda which overshoots the mark is apt to rebound on its authors.

⁶⁶ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspztech zzwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Fii^v.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Fiii^v.

⁶⁸ CLEMEN I, pp. 162, 163.

7. The Catholic appeal to tradition

In Chapter 5, it was noted that Hans Sachs admitted that only a minority of the 'common people' supported Luther's teaching. Sachs, it will be recalled, blamed the 'wretched preachers, who cry out that it is heresy, and do so without using scripture'. Obviously, if people heeded such warnings, the authority of the Catholic clergy, though rejected by some, continued to command enormous respect. If many lay folk refused to see Catholic spokesmen as the Devil's obedient henchmen - despite a three year campaign of vilification - this compels us to ask about the sources of legitimation to which the clergy could appeal. Reformation scholars have generally assumed that the evangelical invocation of 'scripture alone' robbed the clergy of the last vestige of legitimacy. Yet the sharpness of the cutting edge of the so-called 'scripture principle' has been exaggerated. It is highly unlikely that those who turned their backs on the Wittenberg reformer saw themselves as owing obedience to 'man's laws' rather than to God. What is at issue here is the credibility of the antithesis which evangelical propagandists sought to construct between scripture and the laws and doctrines of man, between the divine and the human. Reformation scholars have tended to assume that the choice was as straightforward as evangelical propagandists make it out to be. In reality, however, as a closer analysis of pamphlet literature will reveal, the situation was considerably more complex.

In the reformers' polemic the term 'man's law' refers to overlapping and mutually reinforcing authorities: canon law; 'oral tradition', that is the decrees of the Church councils; and the teaching of the doctors approved by the Church. Initially, the evangelical assault on 'human' law was targeted at canon law. Hence, in *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521) - a repudiation of the charge of heresy against Luther - the author attacks the Pope as an arbitrary legislator,¹ but does not question the legitimacy of the councils and the approved teachers. By 1522, however, the scope of the evangelical denunciation of 'human' law had been extended to cover these latter authorities. To be sure, Luther's critics had already condemned his refusal to be guided either by conciliar decisions or by the teaching of authorised doctors. However, not until public attention was focussed on the doctrinal conflict did popular pamphleteers feel obliged to answer them. This suggests that until it had become clear to all that Luther was proposing, not just to tackle abuse, but also to overturn traditional modes of piety, the Catholic side had little to gain by drawing attention to the range of authorities which could be invoked against him. Only against the background of growing public alarm about the emergence of a 'new faith' could the authority of the councils and doctors be brought effectively into play.

¹ See below, p. 161.

(i) The legitimacy of canon law

So strong was the influence of legal ideas on medieval Christianity that 'speculation on the problems of human society tended to take the form of reflections on legal obligations'.² Before examining the 'legal dimension' to the conflict of the 1520s, we should look briefly at the relation between different categories of law. 'Divine law', as understood by the learned, comprised both the natural law of philosophy, which had entered Christian thought via the Roman Empire, and the revealed law of theology, the 'law of Christ'.³ Simpler people, though less conscious of this distinction, knew that 'God's law', the Bible, was the highest authority.⁴

The cardinal test of the legitimacy of all other laws, divine law had little direct impact on social relations. What affected people's everyday lives was above all the 'old law', Roman law, and canon law. The term 'old law' denotes ancient, indigenous, often unwritten laws and customs - a tangled growth of privileges and freedoms.⁵ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was gradually undermined by Roman law, also known as 'imperial' or 'written law', the codified law of imperial Rome.⁶ While the 'old law' hindered secular rulers attempting to build 'modern' administrations, Roman law enabled them to justify the restriction of freedoms and the promotion of uniform laws. Those whose 'ancient' rights were overturned saw this as a process of degeneration. Popular anger found its target in 'greedy' lawyers, who profited from their interference with a tried and tested order.⁷ Social protest often expressed itself in calls for a return to that order.

Canon law comprised the *Decretum Gratiani*, subsequent papal decretals, church council legislation and Roman legislation on ecclesiastical affairs. Together, Roman and canon law made up the *ius commune*, a universally valid corpus of codified law. Whereas natural law and the law of Christ were unquestionably divine, and customary and Roman law unquestionably human, the status of canon law was less clear. This was partly because it drew equally on two principal sources, scripture and 'human laws', partly because of differences of learned opinion on the relation between scripture and papal legislation.⁸ Such considerations did not, of course, impress critics of the status quo, for whom both canon and Roman law obstructed justice. Commenting on Jeremiah 2.13,⁹ Johannes Lichtenberger, the influential late fifteenth century apocalyptic writer, asserts that 'the art of civil and canon laws is like earth mixed with water, so that one cannot see clearly. Thus the substance of the earth hinders many jurists, so that they cannot judge correctly, which is not the case with the godly law and holy scripture'.¹⁰

² Strauss (1986), p. 41.

³ Bierbrauer (1982), pp. 217ff.

⁴ Strauss (1986), pp. 40-41.

⁵ On the idea of freedoms, see *ibid.*, pp. 112, 116 f.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 15f.

⁸ On the latter issue, see below, pp. 92ff.

⁹ 'For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'.

¹⁰ Quoted in Lenk (1976), p. 55. Cf. Kurze (1960), p. 26.

Gerald Strauss has argued that two related and mutually reinforcing strains of anti-Roman sentiment - hostility to canon and Roman law - contributed decisively to popular support for Luther. In the religious sphere, once people learned that the Church's statutes were 'human', they quickly came to see the demands of canon law as illegitimate interference, eagerly reclaiming lost freedoms. In the secular sphere, conscious that they lived under laws which were incompatible with divine law, and aware that custom offered little protection against the intrusion of imperial law, they read evangelical propaganda as promising a reformation of society in accordance with timeless biblical norms. In either case, the reformers' call for obedience to God rather than man touched a yearning to live without the constraints of positive law. That people 'wrongly' supposed that Luther rejected written law entirely was due to the ambiguities of his numerous statements, and to their own inability to grasp his distinction between the spiritual and fleshly realms.¹¹

Up to a point, we can agree with Strauss. People's hatred of the ecclesiastical courts doubtless made them receptive to claims that the canon law lacked legitimacy. In calling for obedience to God rather than man, the reformers appealed to undisputed principles. In attacking canon law, they could build on the tradition of protest against 'human laws' exemplified by Lichtenberger. Popular pamphlets show how they attempted this. In *Grimmenthal*, the artisan asks

What good has ever come from the monks and especially from the mendicants? All they have done is to elevate the Pope... and thus faith in God has been set back. The Pope's canon law has advanced. And so many human laws and human doctrines have developed and so many burdens have been placed on the poor people, which has caused them great despair.¹²

This is not an attempt to discredit canon law. Rather, the argument derives its force from the fact that canon law is already seen as the basis of illegitimate demands on the laity. The author's real target is the regular life, which he attempts to denigrate by casting the monks as champions of a tyrannical system of law.

In Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, we find a similar ploy. The author's main concern is to refute the Erfurt Catholic party's scriptural defence of monasticism.¹³ At regular intervals, however, the prior argues that Church's law must be obeyed. Without discussing its validity, the other speakers merely dismiss it as 'human'.¹⁴ This contrasts starkly to Stanberger's efforts to demonstrate the 'falseness' of the Catholic reading of scripture. It is because canon law was already discredited that he could attempt to score an easy point against the monks. On the

¹¹ Strauss (1986), pp. 191ff.

¹² CLEMEN 1, p. 155.

¹³ See below, pp. 203ff.

¹⁴ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspztech zzwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Aiii^r, Bii^r, Cii^v.

final occasion on which the prior invokes canon law, the laybrother again denies its authority, going on to ask:

Should we take upon ourselves so many burdens when we are unable to bear those which God has commanded without his divine help. Thus God complains in Hosea 11. A yoke will be laid upon my people and will not be taken back from them. We have the yoke of man's law around our necks. But we want to... throw their [the clergy's] yoke from us...¹⁵

This critique of monasticism as a way of life now overflows into castigation of clerical lordship. Quoting the prophets, the laybrother denounces shepherds who feed on their flocks and govern with 'great ferocity and force'. Stanberger, whose goal is to justify the wave of monastic exits, attempts to link the 'burden' of asceticism with the economic power of the ecclesiastical corporations. In common with ordinary folk, the fugitive monks suffered under an oppressive system of law.

Certainly, in the early phase of his battle with Rome, Luther profited from popular resentment of canon law. As Scribner suggests, if any one dramatic event ignited the reformation movements, it was his burning of the canon law books in late 1520.¹⁶ Pamphlets appearing around 1521 suggest that this symbolic act was interpreted primarily as an assault on the ecclesiastical courts and on clerical wealth and legal privilege. The authors of the dialogues quoted were attempting to exploit a 'medieval' tradition of protest in order to build an alliance with people whose experience of 'legal tyranny' differed from their own. Yet their arguments also indicate that the perceived legitimacy of canon law depended on the issues under discussion. People knew - and Catholic leaders did not deny¹⁷ - that the laws safeguarding clerical economic interests were 'human'. Yet does it follow that they were persuaded that the statutes governing piety were illegitimate? In his *Erfurt Sermon on the Road to Worms*, Luther remarks that people were reacting to his critique of Catholic doctrine by asking whether 'human laws' were not to be obeyed at all.¹⁸ The reformer was evidently aware that people distinguished between good and bad 'human' laws. This raises the question whether the law of the Church was regarded as fundamentally wicked. Reformation pamphlets indicate that attitudes towards both imperial and canon law were less clear cut than Strauss suggests.

Strauss cites Eberlin as typifying antipathy towards positive law. In a 1521 pamphlet, he complains that imperial and canon law have corrupted the equitable order which once obtained in Germany.¹⁹ In the same year, he reports on the constitution of the fictitious land of Wolfaria, which abolishes both imperial and canon law. Since everyone knows what is just, there are no jurists and advocates.²⁰

¹⁵ *ibid.*, Biii^r [= Diii^r].

¹⁶ Scribner (1990), p. 69.

¹⁷ Cf. Smolinski (1983), p. 56.

¹⁸ See below, p. 152f.

¹⁹ Strauss (1986), p. 7.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

Yet two years later, discussing the curriculum for a new school in Ulm, Eberlin recommends that 'the law of the land, civic law, imperial law, old histories and whatever serves human discipline and prudence should be read and taught for one hour a day'.²¹ Doubtless, he was at once idealist and realist, captivated by the idea of a society free of imperial law, but conscious of its value, whatever its shortcomings. The same ambivalence may well have prevailed among common people. The 1525 articles of the commune at Frankfurt, while they blame the machinations of lawyers for hindering justice, do not reject the system of law, but rather demand a speeding up of judicial procedures.²²

To be sure, Eberlin did not advocate instruction in canon law. As a theologian, he had little time for jurists. As a partisan of Luther, he avoided implicit recognition of the authority which had condemned him. Yet he is nonetheless ambivalent. In his *Final Statement*, complaining that the laity have been blinded by the 'deceptive' piety of the monks, he reminds his audience how the clergy protect their temporalities. Having received lay gifts under 'false' pretences, 'the monks and priests have also made their own law, so as to defend the unjust possession of common property'.²³ At the same time, Eberlin is aware that scripture and canon law often agree. A little later, he demands that lay donations be used solely for the cure of souls. This is not only required by scripture, but is also 'written in papist canon law: *beneficium datur propter officium...*'.²⁴ To resolve this apparent contradiction, we may look at another passage, in which Eberlin calls for an end to the writing of books in 'matters concerning God'. Luther 'desires that his and other teachers' books be burnt so that Christians can attend solely to the bible...'.²⁵ Having criticised theologians for causing confusion, he turns to the lawyers:

It is miserable to see how many fine minds have to trouble themselves in vain... with canon law. Concerning human arts and laws I do not want to judge, except to say that ... if we stick to the ancient ones... we will have greater insight. All human reason is meddling.²⁶

Eberlin clearly felt that, although the law of the Church was not wholly evil, it had been corrupted by the activities of jurists. Just as scripture was the more reliable guide in doctrinal matters, and even Luther's writings should be burned, so the bible was to be preferred to jurisprudence.

Strauss himself remarks that jurists among Luther's adherents accepted the legitimacy of canon law. Even Luther, though he generally spoke of 'papal filth', on occasion accused popes of violating their own law.²⁷ This was evidently a common

²¹ CLEMEN 3, p. 28.

²² LAUBE/SEIFFERT, p. 62.

²³ CLEMEN 1, p. 178.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 180.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 203.

²⁷ Strauss (1986), p. 219.

cause of complaint. The grievances presented at the Diet of Worms appeal to canon law against the clergy. Although 'their own canon law forbids the imposition of the interdict where money is owed... this is not observed'.²⁸ The courts are not 'held in the manner established in canon law, but rather the fines and punishments are the object of money and greed'.²⁹ Seeking redress within the system, petitioners use language which implies recognition of it. Yet this need not mean that they paid lip-service to the status quo, while inwardly denying its legitimacy. Significantly, the same line of attack on the clergy is found in several evangelical pamphlets. In Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, the laybrother rebukes the prior: 'And since you think so much of canon law... then you must also observe what is written in *Questio 12 l. ca. Clericus*, that a cleric should not possess anything secular'.³⁰ Kettenbach also accuses the clergy of breaking canon law. His *Comparison* complains that 'the Pope seldom acts righteously, but generally against all law, ... even against his own law, ... as often as it profits him'.³¹ In his *Sermon on Fasting*, he assures his opponents that 'you will not find in the whole of canon law a single passage in which we are commanded to fast, either on pain of the ban or of mortal sin...'. He accuses them of corrupting the law of the Church: 'Now, since the Pope and canon law do not speak as you speak, you are lying in what you say about the Pope and canon law, as though even that which is written in the law were not to be observed'.³² No penalties were imposed on those who did not fast until 'the monk Gratian... came and forced them into the wicked canon law'.³³ Kettenbach's distinction between 'uncorrupted' and 'wicked' canon law indicates that, like Eberlin, he believed that interfering jurists had perverted a previously equitable system.

When accusing their opponents of violating their own law, evangelical propagandists doubtless wished to expose them as hypocrites. Yet there would have been little point to this barb, had they not assumed that their readers, too, distinguished between 'uncorrupted' and 'wicked' canon law. Grievance literature indicates that this assumption was well founded. This would explain the need for a second, better known, strand in evangelical propaganda: the wholesale denigration of the Church's law. Precisely because canon law continued to command a degree of public respect, the reformers had no choice but to react to Luther's condemnation by rejecting the system outright. The 1521 dialogue, *Bailiff and Pastor*, answers the charge that Luther writes 'against the Christian church and canon law': 'Can it be that the Pope and his followers are the Christian church? I don't believe that. It is said that he himself establishes canon law and can do this just how he likes. I fear that very little of God's law is contained in it...'.³⁴ The year 1521 also saw the publication of the *Passional Christi und Antichristi*. Comprising thirteen pairs of

²⁸ *ibid.*, Aiii^f.

²⁹ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v.

³⁰ Etzliche besondere artickel, [Aiv]^v.

³¹ CLEMEN 2, p. 145, ll 15-22.

³² *ibid.*, p. 19, ll. 17ff.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 20, ll. 7-12.

³⁴ GÖTZE, p. 8.

woodcuts by Lucas Cranach, the *Passional* underlines the contrast between Christ's virtues and papal vice. To clarify the visual message, each image is accompanied by contradictory citations from scripture and canon law respectively.³⁵ Kettenbach uses the same technique in his *Comparison* of 1523, a pamphlet which also attempts to cast the papacy as Antichrist. In some 66 articles, he juxtaposes antithetical scriptural passages and canon law texts.³⁶

Obviously, while the evangelical assault on the Church's legal system may echo public dissatisfaction with it, the very vehemence with which canon law is attacked could equally be taken as a reflection of the authority which it continued to enjoy. We can guess as to whether people were so susceptible to manipulation as to accept the proposition that canon law and scripture had nothing in common. There are some grounds for believing that they were not. This is unwittingly suggested by Eberlin in a 1523 pamphlet. Discussing the validity of the Church's laws, he admonishes his audience 'to learn Christian order from the Bible alone. There it is found purely and clearly. Even though several parts of the bible are cited in papal law... it is hazardous to learn from this'.³⁷ Eberlin evidently sensed that the scriptural pillar of canon law lent it authority in lay eyes. In the light of such observations and of the attitudes which they reflect we should beware of overestimating the impact of attempts to persuade people that canon law was wholly lacking in divine inspiration.

To sum up: the tendency in Reformation studies has probably been to exaggerate the decline in public respect for canon law. Doubtless, it was not a particularly sharp and - we shall see - certainly not the sharpest weapon in the Catholic armoury. Yet neither was it entirely blunt. On the one hand, people were conscious that the law of the Church had been corrupted by human influence. The canon lawyers were at fault. The making of law was comprehended as a movement away from the original, divine source of inspiration. Hence Eberlin recommends that society would fare better if the older laws were observed. Innovation was seen as the cause of current problems. In particular, people saw the indefensible power and privilege of the clergy as a result of the degeneration of canon law, that is of legislative activity. Certainly, the more acutely the laity felt that clerical tyranny was founded on the inexorable drift from the original paradigm, the more likely they were to question the legitimacy of the legal system. On the other hand, the fact that people might appeal to scripture in protest against oppressive laws need not mean that they rejected the legal system outright. They themselves appealed to canon law. Propagandists who accused the clergy of violating their own law evidently knew that people distinguished between corrupt and 'undefiled' legislation. The laity knew, as Eberlin put it, that canon law contained 'several parts from the bible'. However sore the grievances people may have borne towards the papacy, a break with the Church and the 'faith of the forefathers' was too serious a step to be taken without profound

³⁵ Scribner (1981), pp. 148ff

³⁶ See below, p. 162.

³⁷ *Ain kurtzer gschriftlicher bericht etlicher puncten halb Christlichs glauben* (n.p. 1523). Modern reprint: ENDERS 2, p. 179.

reflection on the question of authority. This will be seen more clearly in the debate on oral tradition and the approved teachers.

(ii) Scripture and the Church

In an Erfurt sermon of October 1522, Luther raises the question 'what the Christian church is'. Inspired by the Devil, he alleges, the Pope and bishops have equated the gospel with canon law books, assuming control of the spiritual sword. It would, however, be a 'poor Church' which rested on such miserable authority.³⁸ Christ says that he is the bridegroom, and the bride the believing church. A spouse of Christ can judge 'the Pope, the Devil and all this authority'. A Christian with faith, even 'a simple miller's maid' or a 'nine-year old child', is competent to decide between true and false teaching. To deny him this right is tantamount to saying that he has no faith. Whoever claims that the Pope can decide disputed issues of scripture is a liar. Any Christian can say to the Pope: 'I am a Christian and therefore, dear brother, you must hear me'. The Pope, for his part, may do likewise. Where there is disagreement this 'war' should be settled by holy scripture.³⁹ 'Sophists' who invoke the decrees of the Pope and councils, or the teaching of Church Fathers or universities, should be ignored. These texts are not worth a single word of scripture. Although this conflict of authorities 'is the cause of great quarrelling and discord in Christendom', nobody should be impressed by appeals either to the doctors or to the Pope and councils. If the Pope and bishops come with bulls and human babble, the proper response is: 'Get thee behind me, Devil'. Luther mocks the Catholic appeal to the schools. His opponents 'advance with their rusty spears: Hey, they say, we are the old grey heads. Our university of Cologne, etc. has stood for so long. Can we have erred for such a long time?' Luther answers that if age is the criterion of legitimacy, 'then our Christ and his gospel are older than the university of Paris...'.⁴⁰

In this sermon, as well as attacking canon law, Luther ridicules two other late medieval views of the authority of scripture, which Heiko Oberman has named 'Tradition I' and 'Tradition II'. Briefly, 'Tradition I' was the 'medieval' principle of 'scripture alone'. The Bible was not contrasted with its approved interpreters. Rather, their writings belonged to a continuing process of reception going back to the biblical canon. 'Tradition II' recognised, in addition, a parallel, extrascriptural, oral medium of revelation, in effect the Pope, bishops and councils. It was based on the crucial text, John 21.25: 'But there were also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written'. Just as the Church had received the biblical canon, so also, through the operation of the holy spirit, it received and guaranteed the authenticity of truths not explicitly contained in scripture. Oberman argues that until the fourteenth century 'Tradition II' was championed primarily by canon lawyers. Thereafter, it

³⁸ WA 10.3, p. 358.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 359.

⁴⁰ WA 10.3, p. 361.

gained adherents among theologians attempting to account for doctrines which could not be validated by 'Tradition I'.⁴¹ Alister McGrath disputes this last point. Canon lawyers never recognised the Pope as a source of doctrine, but merely granted him authority in the area of ecclesiastical discipline, including the identification of heresy, where the juridical and doctrinal spheres overlapped. No theologian recognised the Pope as an independent source of revelation in respect of truths necessary for salvation. At most, oral tradition was valid in subsidiary areas of theology. On the eve of the Reformation, most theologians, including the early Luther, adhered to 'Tradition I'.⁴²

Following McGrath, we might expect the Catholic response to Luther to rest squarely on 'Tradition I'. Yet although his opponents frequently appealed to the approved doctors, several also invoked 'Tradition II'. They include Augustin von Alveltdt and Hieronymus Emser, Franciscan theologians who published vernacular tracts against Luther. Both cite John 21.25, which is valid in respect both of essential and lesser points of doctrine.⁴³ In some cities, 'Tradition II' was defended from the pulpit. Heinrich von Kettenbach devotes an entire pamphlet to refuting adversaries who preach that they are empowered to 'change the gospel'.⁴⁴ This would confirm Oberman's thesis, unless of course the evangelical assault prompted Catholic theologians to extend the scope of oral tradition. Which argument Catholic propagandists regarded as the stronger is difficult to say, although Emser believed that Luther feared the Church Fathers most.⁴⁵ At all events, since in Luther's case the distinction between the Pope's disciplinary and doctrinal authority was blurred, any previous differences among Catholic theologians regarding papal competence will have counted for little.

In Erfurt, evangelical preachers elaborated on Luther's image of the bride and groom. Mechler and Lange compared the governance of the Church with 'human laws' with the violation of another man's wife. The Catholic side interpreted the same image somewhat differently. For Usingen, there was no spiritual union between Christ, the sole head of the undivided Church, and those who break away from the mystical body. Just as a husband may employ a servant for his wife's convenience, so Christ appointed the Pope as the Church's servant. In obeying him, the bride obeys Christ. Usingen is clearly an adherent of 'Tradition II'. Born of the word of God, the Church flourishes by various means. Christ speaks through scripture, but not through scripture alone. The apostles did not write down all the truths revealed to them by Christ, nor did Christ reveal to them all truths. The holy spirit also instructed them, and still instructs their successors. Neither the written nor the living word may be scorned. As well as defending oral tradition, Usingen sees no qualitative difference between the writing and the interpretation of scripture. Both the biblical authors and their interpreters were men, both instruments of the holy spirit. In either

⁴¹ Oberman (1966), pp. 53-65 and (1967), pp. 361ff.

⁴² McGrath (1987).

⁴³ Smolinsky (1983), pp. 98-107, 256ff.

⁴⁴ See below, pp. 95ff.

⁴⁵ Smolinsky (1983), pp. 258-259.

case, the Church guarantees authenticity. Where the Bible was unclear, the approved doctors were to be followed. Where the doctors disagreed, the Church had the final word.⁴⁶

By late 1522, those attending Luther's Erfurt sermon were probably adherents of the 'new faith'. The reformer's attack on 'Traditions I' and 'II' indicates that even those attracted by his message of salvation needed reassurance, if they were to support a condemned heretic. Ideally, any evaluation of the impact of Luther's 'scripture principle' would begin by examining existing lay assumptions. Was the Catholic view of legitimate authority the more or less exclusive property of academics? Or had it been absorbed into the religious culture of ordinary folk? Luther may have been addressing the educated 'solid burgher', who would have had some grasp of the issues at stake. Yet given the handling of the subject in simpler pamphlets, the opinions of late medieval theologians would seem to have struck deep roots. One example is Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant*, addressed to the Erfurt peasantry. Stanberger is aware that the doctrinal conflict has caused uncertainty among ordinary folk. Asking Peter for advice about Luther, his peasant remarks that 'one man says that he is right, another that the Pope is right, and so the whole world is confused.'⁴⁷ Stanberger's case against Catholic teaching rests largely on the suggestive force of the idea that the doctrines of clerics who lived off tithes and usury could not possibly be divine. He writes on the assumption that the mainstay of papal authority was the cult of St. Peter, which he seeks to expose as fraudulent.⁴⁸ However, he is aware that his reader has been drawn into the dispute on the relation of scripture and the Church. At one point, his peasant remarks that the clergy assert that 'the prophets and apostles were men',⁴⁹ Stanberger offers reassurance:

... what the prophets and apostles have written is not human, rather they have received it from God, who has given it to them that they may preach it... as also John 5 [39] testifies. They were men but the scripture which they wrote was not human. Let others follow the Pope and their evil human laws.⁵⁰

It unclear whether so vague an assault on 'human' authority' was directed against 'Tradition I', 'Tradition II', or both. At the lowest levels of society, the distinction may not have been clearly grasped. Yet Stanberger's pamphlet nevertheless reveals a lay awareness of complex issues which, without the conflict of the 1520s, would probably have remained concealed from our view.

⁴⁶ Häring (1939), pp. 174-178.

⁴⁷ CLEMEN 3, pp. 204-205.

⁴⁸ See below, pp. 220 ff.

⁴⁹ CLEMEN 3, pp. 211-112.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 213.

(iii) Scripture and oral tradition

Although the issue of oral tradition was certainly debated in Erfurt, none of the popular pamphlets originating there treat it in any detail. For a clearer view, we can examine works by pamphleteers based in Ulm and Nuremberg. As the title of Kettenbach's *Sermon against the Pope's Kitchen Preachers* suggests, the main thrust of his argument is that the appeal to oral tradition was motivated by greed. Kettenbach claims that, since he has cornered his opponents with scripture, the latter now 'spoil the game' by asserting publicly that the Pope and prelates can 'change the gospel'.⁵¹ Building on what is probably a distortion of the Catholic position, he invokes various scriptural texts to the effect that God's word must endure unchanged.⁵² His opponents' attempts to 'change' the gospel proves their hostility to it.⁵³ If they were right, 'there would be no more unstable or unchristian faith or law on earth'.⁵⁴ Here the idea that true law is immutable is invoked order to invalidate the notion of a continuing process of revelation..

Kettenbach next attacks the 'appearance and argument' of Catholic 'lies'. They support 'Tradition II' by arguing that, guided by the holy spirit, the Pope and council have 'changed' the gospel in such matters as the celibacy of the priesthood⁵⁵ and communion in both kinds.⁵⁶ Since the apostles themselves 'changed' the gospel, their successors, the Pope and bishops, may do so.⁵⁷ Just as the law of Moses was later changed - circumcision, the Sabbath, the eating of pork - so scripture is subject to modification.⁵⁸ Acts 15 recounts that such changes were authorised by the apostles.⁵⁹ The prophets, evangelists, apostles and Christ himself were human. The humanity of the Pope and other teachers cannot therefore count against their doctrines.⁶⁰ In addition, the Catholic side invokes Augustine's statement that he would not have believed the gospel had not the Church forced him.⁶¹

In response, Kettenbach accuses his opponents of making a 'traitor' of the holy spirit: 'Are you saying that when Christ says, Do this... the holy spirit whispers in your ear: It is not true.'⁶² In fact, it is the Devil who inspires the councils of the Church. Even if the holy spirit did speak to the clergy, like Caiphas, they would understand him only in the fleshly sense. The Pope and prelates cannot invoke Matthew 18.20 - Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. This could equally apply to Luther, Melanchthon and Karlstadt.⁶³ Kettenbach also denies that the Pope and episcopate can act like the apostles. Unlike

⁵¹ Eyn Sermon zvidder des Bapsts Küchen pzediger zu Vlm (Erfurt, 1523). Modern reprint in CLEMEN 2, p. 33.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 40.

the latter, they neither drive out demons, heal the sick, nor speak in tongues.⁶⁴ In any case, the apostles never altered the gospel, for that would have been to oppose Christ. In this point, papist proof is mere sophistry.⁶⁵ As for changes to the Old Testament law, these were made by God, the holy spirit and Christ. The Pope and councils have not got the same power.⁶⁶ Just because God changes his law, it does not follow that man can do so. Even if the apostles had made these changes, 'they would have done so by the authority of God and the holy spirit, which they possessed.'⁶⁷ Kettenbach also repudiates the argument that the apostles, like the Pope and prelates, were men. Paul said that he received his doctrine not from man, but from Christ [Gal. 1.12]. Hence, he also said that no-one should believe him, 'should he ever say anything different from what he had previously preached through the holy spirit' [Gal. 1.8].⁶⁸ Replying to the Catholic appeal to Augustine, Kettenbach first attacks and then invokes him. In saying that he would not have believed the gospel, he spoke like the apostle Thomas, whom Christ rebuked for doubting. In any case, Augustine also said, that 'the Church has truth and faith through the gospel... not the other way round.'⁶⁹

The persuasiveness of Kettenbach's refutation is not easily measured. Read in isolation, his scriptural citations on the immutability of God's word seem unanswerable. It is, however, striking that he does not deal with John 21.25. Perhaps his local opponents did not appeal to that text, although it is unlikely that they would have ignored this cornerstone of the 'two source' tradition. Luther had dealt with the text by arguing that the many unrecorded things which Jesus did referred, not to doctrine or law, but to the signs which he gave.⁷⁰ Kettenbach may not have read the pamphlet in question and possibly ducked a difficult question. This would suggest that the Catholic case was more credible than historians have generally assumed. At the very least, Kettenbach's pamphlet indicates that the mere denunciation of oral tradition as 'human' was not enough to undermine Catholic claims to legitimate authority. The case had to be argued.

Apart from the biblical citations, Kettenbach's argument lives from his denial that the Pope and councils acted under divine inspiration. Given the notorious greed and low morals of ecclesiastical dignitaries, Catholic propagandists were probably ill placed to defend the proposition that the holy spirit dwelt at the apex of the Church hierarchy. It is a different question whether the Church councils, to which Kettenbach himself appeals in another pamphlet,⁷¹ could be tarred with the same brush. Possibly, their authority was undermined by the fact that men of poor repute appealed to their decisions. Alternatively, churchmen whose perceived standards of personal piety left them vulnerable to attack may well have found a protective shield in the presumed sanctity of the councils.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ Smolinsky (1983), p. 260.

⁷¹ CLEMEN 2, pp. 18-19.

Significantly, Hans Sachs, who as we have seen bewailed Catholic success in blackening Luther, devotes considerable effort to demolishing conciliar authority. In his *Canon and Shoemaker* (1524), the canon defends oral tradition by citing John 16.12-13: 'I have many things yet to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you unto all truth'.⁷² The shoemaker counters with John 14.26, where Christ said that the spirit would 'remind you of those things that I have told', not that he would 'teach you new things that I have not told you'. The dialogue continues:

Canon: So you do not think much of any council?

Shoemaker: Yes, of the one that the apostles held in Jerusalem.

Canon: Did the apostles hold a council there?

Shoemaker: Yes, have you got a bible.

Sachs's treatment of the issue illustrates how an uncritical reading of evangelical propaganda distorts the religious conflict. The suggestion that the clergy were ignorant of Acts 15 is a gratuitous slight on their scriptural proficiency. Kettenbach's 'kitchen preachers' had appealed to this text. Doubtless, Nuremberg's 'wretched preachers' did the same. The passage recounts how, at the assembly of elders in Jerusalem, the apostles revoked the law as an unnecessary burden on those saved by grace. Clearly this could be read as proof either of the competence of the councils to 'change' the law or as an affirmation of 'Christian freedom'. As late as 1524, Sachs clearly felt that Acts 15 was perceived as legitimating Catholic claims, for which reason he pleads for an alternative exposition. The message of Acts 15, he declares, is that 'one should not lay the burden of the law upon Christians, let alone devise many new laws and inventions...'. Since later Church councils violated this commandment, their decisions are invalid. The reader is encouraged to make doctrinal, as opposed to institutional, continuity the test of authenticity. What is at issue here is not whether scripture rather than 'human laws' should be followed, but rather whether there was a scriptural warrant for 'human' lawmaking. That many lay folk were still inclined to accept that there was is strongly suggested by Sachs's handling of the problem.

(iv) The interpretation of scripture

In attacking the approved doctors, evangelical propagandists pursued two different strategies: denigration and appropriation. The former was used mainly against scholastic theologians, for whom the reformers had little but contempt. Regarding the Church Fathers, however, they tried to reconcile their own reverence for patristic writings with a refusal to accept any text which counted against them. In his 1521 tract, *Reason and Cause*, Luther stressed that although he had no wish to

⁷² SPRIEWALD, p. 83.

overthrow the Fathers, they should not be followed where, as men, they had erred. They themselves did not desire this. Unless scripture itself is to be overthrown, patristic teaching should be accepted only if verified by the bible.⁷³ Luther would have his audience believe that there was no real conflict between himself and the Fathers, who, like him, accepted scripture as the measure of their teaching.

Ozment has argued that laypeople were interested in theological questions inasmuch as they affected day-to-day practice and 'not because they agreed or disagreed with Paul or Augustine'.⁷⁴ In fact, however, popular pamphlets show that people were anything but indifferent to patristic authority. In *Father and Son*, the father responds to his son's attack on 'the monks and the humanists [i.e. exponents of man's doctrine]', by asking: 'Shouldn't we listen to St Augustine, St Jerome and others?'⁷⁵ The son answers that they should be believed

in so far as they accord with the gospel. For they have also erred in part, as they have admitted. Paul, Peter and John have interpreted the gospel clearly enough. And they did so through divine revelation... For this reason it is not necessary to gloss the gospel, for the writings of Paul, Peter and John are in full accordance with the gospel'.⁷⁶

In *Discord*, a priest defends patristic authority: 'There are four teachers in the Christian church who can instruct you where you are going wrong. And thus the Pope teaches correctly.' The case against the Church is put by several biblical figures, including Christ: 'Whoever relaxes one of the least of my commandments and teaches men so shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven'.⁷⁷ Having heard both sides, the layman draws his conclusions:

I would advise any man also to stand by it [the bible], and to look upon all other doctors, writers and teachers as unnecessary, because nobody writes perfectly without the holy spirit. And for this I have got the twelve apostles, who wrote with the inspiration of the holy spirit, and did not leave out much, though the monks and doctors now want to introduce new matter, or have done so...⁷⁸

These arguments presuppose familiarity with, and possibly concurrence in, the Catholic position. The formulation in *Father and Son* - 'Paul, Peter and John have interpreted the gospel clearly enough' - reflects the author's awareness that his audience accepted that scripture needed interpretation. Similarly, by arguing that apostles 'did not leave out much', and suggesting that later commentators lacked the inspiration of the holy spirit, the author of *Discord* encourages his reader to

⁷³ BENTZINGER, p. 346, n. 22.

⁷⁴ Ozment (1975), p. 48.

⁷⁵ CLEMEN 3, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ SCHADE 3, p. 210.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 212.

distinguish between apostolic and post-apostolic authorship, thus invalidating the notion of an unbroken tradition of reception reaching back to antiquity. Both passages indicate that the reformers needed to overturn 'Tradition I'.

The treatment of patristic authority in Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* suggests that this was no easy task. The prior, who is almost certainly a caricature of Erfurt's Catholic leader, Usingen, accuses the beggar of not understanding scripture and 'what the holy fathers have written about it'. He names both late medieval theologians and the Church Fathers.⁷⁹ During the discussion, Stanberger repeatedly raises the issue of lay payments to the clergy. The laybrother declares that financial support should be given only to those who preach God's word. The prior insists that the Catholic clergy do 'nothing else, and so we must have some means to help us.'⁸⁰ The laybrother accuses him of preaching only human doctrines, mentioning only Aristotle and a host of scholastic theologians. He adds that although the clergy are entitled to 'some means to help', they do not need 'an income of twelve thousand gulden a year...'. The prior protests: 'You must not denigrate the holy fathers. If we did not have them, it would not be possible to understand the bible. God commanded them to interpret it.' Stressing that the fathers themselves did not wish their teaching to be accepted 'if they followed God differently', the laybrother demands proof. The prior answers that 'the holy father, the Pope, has said it in his canon law, and so it is just as much if he commands it as Christ or Peter...'. The beggar now intervenes: 'Oho! If the Pope is the same as Christ and Peter, he must also perform miracles and preach the gospel...'⁸¹

This is a gross distortion of Usingen's real position. Stanberger seeks to discredit the idea of horizontal reception by associating it with late medieval theologians, although Usingen taught exclusively on the basis of the biblical canon and patristic testimony. The teaching of the schools is then denounced as the basis of clerical worldliness and oppression, of which Usingen was in fact a vehement critic. With an appeal to economic anticlericalism Stanberger has forged a chain of association which, linking 'Tradition I' with the financial burdens on the laity, is intended to guide the reader towards acceptance of Luther's understanding of 'scripture alone'. Possibly sensing that so blatant a misrepresentation might easily misfire, Stanberger retreats, only to resume the attack with the standard evangelical argument: the fathers did not wish to be followed where they 'deviated' from scripture. In other words, the fathers themselves are called as the chief witnesses against 'Tradition I'. When the prior finally appeals to canon law - i.e., to the idea that the Church's approval is the objective guarantee of the authenticity of the interpretation of scripture - a second chain of association is established: between the 'illegitimate' appeal to patristic authority and clerical tyranny.

⁷⁹ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespräch zwischē einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Bi^v.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, Bi^v - Bii^f.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, Bii^f.

In attempting to discredit 'Tradition I' by linking it with scholastic theology, Stanberger pursued the same strategy as those propagandists who used the image of the Dominican to blacken all defenders of Catholic orthodoxy. Whether or not this was ultimately effective, the very fact that it was necessary attests to popular respect for the Fathers. No less telling is the strategy of appropriation. It is one of the great unnoticed paradoxes of the conflict of the 1520s that the reformers' attempt to verify their understanding of 'scripture alone' depended on authority which they themselves rejected as 'human'. What Augustine said counted. Only by enlisting the Fathers in their own ranks would evangelical propagandists be able to break a vital link in a chain of interlocking arguments in support of papal authority. It is unlikely that they succeeded. The derision with which several pamphleteers speak of patristic authority - notwithstanding the strategy of appropriation - surely reflects their awareness that the Fathers were not regarded as their allies. In his *Refutation* of 1522, Culsamer denounces Usingen for appealing to 'the four dogs'.⁸² In a 1524 pamphlet, Mechler writes: 'If any raving spirit comes and seeks to oppose these arguments [against 'works righteousness'] with the balderdash of the Fathers or the decisions of the councils, with ancient custom or the like, he should know that I can only bravely disdain his writings as godless.'⁸³ Mechler's 'brave disdain' is an expression of defiance in the face of the respect which 'godless' authority continued to command, not just among the Catholic clergy but among the public at large.

If evangelical propagandists found it difficult to cope with the Fathers, could they at least assume that the names of the great scholastic doctors evoked the same repugnance among ordinary layfolk as among humanist scholars. Certainly, they are often merciless in their mockery of medieval theologians. In the popular dialogue *Bembus and Silenus*, Bembus, a Dominican friar, explains the nature of the Lutheran heresy:

They maintain that the gospel is more important than those who have written about it. And the result is that people attach little or no importance to our Thomas or to the Scotus of the discalced friars, although they are truly holy teachers. And if they had not written, then nobody could understand the gospel and St Paul.⁸⁴

There is no further discussion of the issue. To discredit 'Tradition I', the author relies on parody. Copp's *Two Dialogues* contains a more subtle attempt to cast doubt on the sanctity of the medieval doctors. One speaker, the man, asks about the origins of the term Thomist. The dialogue continues:

The Spirit: They have it from their founder, who was called Thomas.

The Man: The apostle?

⁸² Culsamer, Johannes, *Ein widerlegung Ioannis Culsamer* (Erfurt, 1522), Aii^r.

⁸³ Mechler, Eyn Chzistische vnterzichtung, Bii^r.

⁸⁴ SCHADE 3, pp. 214-215.

The Spirit: No, of Coquina, I mean Aquina. He was a bishop of their order and a great sophist. Now out of regard for them he has been made a saint. By this means, all of their interests have been confirmed.

The Man: Isn't he a holy man then?

The Spirit: That is best known to God...⁸⁵

Such innuendo suggests that, in the early 1520s at least, Aquinas still had a reputation to lose, even among the relatively sophisticated lay audience addressed by Copp.

Although several pamphleteers attempted to demolish Aquinas by denigration, some were sceptical about this strategy. In *Discord*, the layman pleads: 'If only they would not trouble us with their glosses and interpretations, and would base their argument on no teacher outside of the bible, such as Scotus and Thomas of Aquinas...'.⁸⁶ To prepare the ground for this appeal, the author invokes the authority of Aquinas himself:

And now I want to stand by the prophets and apostles. For I have heard that Thomas of Aquinas (who was himself regarded as a fountain of holy scripture), though he wrote a great deal, nevertheless dried up on his death bed, and took the bible in his hand and said: I believe what is written in that book. And so I would advise any man to stand by it...⁸⁷

Like the Church Fathers, Aquinas was to be enrolled in the evangelical ranks. The fact that most evangelical propagandists preferred denigration to appropriation, a reflection of their distaste for the schools, doubtless ensured that Aquinas remained a Catholic symbol, and probably a more potent source of legitimation than a superficial reading of the run of the mill attacks on his sanctity might lead us to suppose.

Kettenbach's *Conversation with an Old Woman* contains evidence of the high esteem in which teachers like Aquinas were held by ordinary lay folk. As already mentioned, Kettenbach's old woman may have been an authentic figure. Though highly critical of clerical worldliness, she finally rejects Luther as a heretic. During the dialogue, the question of legitimate authority is raised. When Kettenbach denies that the mass is a sacrifice, the woman responds: 'Dear brother Heinrich, you are speaking against the teachers whom the Christian church has confirmed and authorised...'.⁸⁸ Although Kettenbach attempts to show that she 'misunderstands' the term Christian church, she remains unrepentant: 'Ah, dear Brother Heinrich, you despise the old teachers and stand by the new ones. I don't like that.'⁸⁹ Kettenbach answers that it is the schools, which are only four hundred years old, which have

⁸⁵ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (1522), C^v.

⁸⁶ SCHADE 3, p. 212.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

⁸⁸ CLEMEN 2, p. 68, ll. 15-16.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 69, ll. 6-7.

introduced new doctrines. The old woman responds: 'You are against the Preachers' saint, Thomas of Aquinas, although Christ and Pope Urban have confirmed his teaching as correct.'⁹⁰ Kettenbach's answer sheds some light on the woman's veneration for the saint:

Christ did not verify his teaching. It is a fairy tale that Christ said to Thomas when he was kneeling down in front of the cross, Thomas, your teaching is pleasing to me and it is correct. There was a monk hidden in the church who spoke this through a tube, as happened in Bern, or there was a devil in the air who said this, or the monks invented these lies...⁹¹

Kettenbach clearly knew that, for many people, scripture was indeed a continuing process of revelation. The old woman's Aquinas is not the arid logician of the humanists, but a divinely appointed guarantor of the authenticity of beliefs and practices to which she is clearly attached. The charisma of the dead saint, Aquinas, could clearly be brought into play against that of the living saint, Luther.

(v) Tradition versus Charisma

The last four chapters traced the shifts in public attitudes towards Luther and his clerical opponents in the period 1520 to 1525. Two main conclusions can be drawn. First, Luther's charismatic appeal proved transitory. Second, the clerical appeal to tradition proved increasingly effective.

In 1521 Luther's opponents were powerless to break the captivating spell of his charisma. The attempt to suppress him was an affront to the whole nation, which took heart from his steadfastness in the face of persecution. Although evangelical propagandists laboured to sustain this view of his role, they could not prevent a split in the hitherto united front of his lay supporters. For some he remained a man of God. Others came increasingly to see him as an arrogant, headstrong sectarian leader. The decline in support for Luther, though it cannot be measured accurately, was clearly substantial. The Catholic cry of heresy, initially dismissed as an empty pretext, was soon filled with meaning. Once it became clear that the attack on Rome was not just a rejection of abuse and corruption, but an assault on piety itself, Luther's star began to sink. However receptive people may have been to criticism of clerical greed and even of certain controversial modes of piety - indulgences, for example - many were reluctant to abandon the 'faith of their forefathers'. Whereas, before Worms, Luther had lent the German nation unity of purpose, increasingly he came to symbolise division and strife. Not only could he be plausibly blamed for simmering social unrest. The sense that he was responsible for the loss of religious peace and harmony

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 69, ll. 22-24.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 70, ll. 6ff.

and for the rise of confessional bickering cut across the lines of social class or sectional interest.

In denouncing their opponents as the 'real heretics', as the true authors of a 'new faith', evangelical reformers were attempting to redefine concepts which counted against them. The fact that they were forced to do so can be read as an indication of underlying Catholic strength. Evangelical propagandists did their utmost to cast suspicion on conventional piety by arguing that it was the cornerstone of an elaborate system of financial oppression. To drive this message home, they sought to cloak Luther's opponents in the shabby garb of Reuchlin's detractors. Playing on the proverbial greed of the Friars Preachers, on their 'glorification' of Aristotle, on their reputation as defenders of the rights of the papacy, and on their involvement in scandals such as the Jetzer affair, they aimed to suggest that there could be no motive for loyalty to the Roman Church other than a financial interest in false doctrine. In the period before Worms, it had been easy to denounce Luther's opponents as a 'villainous faction'. As they grew in number and stature, however, the doubts of the sceptics were reinforced. Evangelical propagandists were aware that the reformer's status as an eminent Christian teacher depended in part on scholarly recognition. Their assertion that Luther enjoyed the unanimous support of the learned is loudest at the moment it ceases to correspond to the perceived facts.

The decline in public support for Luther in the period up to 1525 coincided, not just with the entry of Catholic protagonists of unstained repute into the doctrinal debate - in Erfurt, men like Usingen and Femelius - but also with a growing popular awareness of the weight of the authority counting against the Wittenberg reformer. Luther's charismatic authority reached its peak at the moment when the denunciation of 'human' authority was perceived principally as an attack on the manner in which the incumbents of clerical office dispensed the law. In propagating the idea that Catholic teaching was based on human rather than divine authority, evangelical propagandists could attempt to build on pre-existing anticlerical sentiment. It was easy enough to score a point by arguing that both the secular power and worldly lifestyle of the clergy, though a violation of scriptural ideals, were nonetheless sanctioned by canon law. However, it is less certain whether opponents of the Church succeeded in translating dissatisfaction with existing legislation into rejection of the system of law. People seem to have been conscious that canon law drew on scripture and could itself be invoked against clerical greed and corruption.

The power of tradition made it difficult to accuse Luther's opponents of doctrinal fraud. Although disgusted by clerical degeneracy, people were reluctant to doubt the validity either of the decisions of the Church councils or the teaching of approved doctors. Evangelical propagandists had attempted to persuade their audiences to see Luther as a *mediator* rather than an *interpreter* of Christ's teaching. Yet the more evangelical and Catholic clerics became embroiled in conflict, the more

people realised that Luther had been 'deserted' by former allies, the greater the danger - from the evangelical standpoint - that the Wittenberg reformer would come to be seen as one teacher among many. This could well have strengthened the Catholic case for 'extrascriptural' criteria of verification. Confronted with the testimony of the fathers, evangelical reformers tried to present the choice as one between scripture on the one hand, and Augustine or Jerome on the other. Yet, increasingly, the choice is likely to have been perceived as one between Luther and the Church Fathers. If, in the eyes of ordinary lay folk, even the authority of the much derided Aquinas weighed heavily against Luther, the authority of the teachers of Christian antiquity surely tipped the scales yet more decisively in the Church's favour. The Catholic party gained in stature as it became clear that Luther had set himself - or as he and his supporters saw it, the gospel - above revered authorities, whether Augustine or theologians like Aquinas. These were figures whose perceived sanctity could be invoked both to reinforce people's sense of the holiness of the Church as an historic institution and to counterbalance Luther's own charisma.

PART III

THE HISTORICAL DEBATE

8. Apocalyptic tradition and the rise of Luther

(i) God's redemptive plan and the advent of Antichrist

Both parties to the religious conflict saw themselves as fighting an historic battle against the forces of evil. This view of events led them inevitably into the related realms of salvation history and apocalyptic thought. Spanning both past and future, salvation history involved the more or less mechanical unfolding of a grand divine plan, long worked out. As Luther put it in his *Address to the Christian Nobility*: 'It is all of God's ordaining, which has been done before we have known about it.'¹ Underlying inquiry into future history was the assumption that God, through various media of revelation - prophecy, signs, the astral world - vouchsafed certain insights for the orientation of his people. Although 'historical research' was often conducted by disinterested academics, their results provided the framework for political or religious propaganda. Diverse interests sought to prevail in the present by taking possession of a divinely plotted future. Apocalyptic interpretation of history sees the transition from present to future as a consequence of crisis and tells of dramatic battles fought by a cast of strikingly coloured actors. Propagandists could try to influence opinion by claiming the heroic parts in an unfolding drama and/or by casting opponents as the villains. The most effective way to promote a tendency, party or interest was to present it as the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan.

A central figure in that plan was Antichrist, whose advent signals the end of time. Although scripture mentions him only briefly, medieval exegetes elaborated a fuller picture, ascribing to him all the attributes of God's enemies and supplying a *vita*, a grotesque parody of the life of Christ.² Of diabolical origin, he is at once deceiver and tyrant. On arrival, he quickly establishes his regime, using methods reflecting both sides to his nature - false preaching, miracles, bribery and barbaric violence. After three and half years, however, he is defeated and slain. Antichrist, therefore, personifies both a sense that evil in the world was unrestrained and the belief that it could not ultimately prevail. Yet he is nonetheless an actor on the stage of history, the story of his advent no more allegorical than that of Christ's Second Coming.

As is well known, evangelical reformers attempted to cast the pope, or papal church, as Antichrist. Scribner argues that they were thus able to legitimate Luther's assault on Rome. Exploiting a pre-existing sense of imminent crisis, they successfully involved the common people in a cosmic battle against the forces of evil.³ Scribner's argument is based on pictorial propaganda spanning several decades. In the longer term, Lutheran communities probably did equate Antichrist with the papacy. In the shorter term, however, evangelical propagandists would find it difficult to prove their case. Scribner focuses on the person of Antichrist, disregarding the plan into which he fits. In

¹ WA 6, p. 463, ll. 14-15.

² On Antichrist's *vita*, see Emmerson (1981), esp. pp. 74-107.

³ Scribner (1981), esp. pp. 148-189.

the middle ages, the drama of Antichrist's coming had been elaborated in two main interpretative traditions, that of the Church and that of the chiliast 'opposition'. Each took a different view of the structure of history, each told a different story, each had its own social meaning. Although evangelical propagandists initially profited from the chiliast tradition, before long it began to work against them. To appreciate their problems, we need to examine the medieval Antichrist dramas.

(ii) The medieval Antichrist dramas and Luther

The medieval Church took what could be called a 'long-term view' of history. A powerful institution, it had long abandoned the spirit of eschatological urgency characteristic of primitive Christianity. At the very least, it regarded the Second Coming with some ambivalence, a paradox not lost on critical contemporaries. As the thirteenth century writer, Arnald of Villanova, remarked: 'it would be ridiculous for the Church to spread the Gospel about the End and consummation of the world daily and not attend to the approach of that event - nay more by either attacking or neglecting the approach of the End to contradict silently the gospel message about it.'⁴ For the Church, the object of the battle against Antichrist was to hold him back pending the completion of its work of sanctification. This view found support in II Thessalonians, which, suggesting that the time for the Second Coming is not ripe, refers obliquely to a power 'restraining' Antichrist. During the middle ages, the power in question was generally equated with the Church's secular partner, the Roman Empire.⁵ Of course, the evil state of the world always convinced people that Antichrist might come at any moment.⁶ However, official teaching distinguished between *Antichristus verus*, whose advent would usher in the End, and his precursors - *figurae Antichristi* - who were usually equated with the infidel.⁷ In emphasising both the future and contemporary dimensions to the battle against Antichrist, the Church was able to enunciate the idea of enduring world order without ignoring current dangers.

This view of the End was diffused downwards through various media, including regularly performed Antichrist dramas and popular vitae.⁸ Despite variations in detail, the overall plot is fairly consistent. On Antichrist's arrival, the prophets Enoch and Elias return to preach against him. Slain for their efforts, they are raised from the dead after his defeat. The climax of the struggle satisfies the Empire's claim to enduring world dominion while reaffirming the Church's supremacy. Antichrist's principal opponent is the Last World Emperor, a figure of seventh century sibylline prophecy.⁹ His coming marks the beginning of a long, universal reign of justice. Like Antichrist, however, he is a figure of the remote future, who stands for the durability of the present order. When Antichrist arrives, the Emperor is forced to lay down his insignia of office, thus

⁴ McGinn (1979), p. 223.

⁵ Kampers (1969), p. 11; McGinn (1979), p. 33; Emmerson (1981), pp. 88-89; Borchardt (1971), pp. 183-184.

⁶ Kampers (1969), p. 49; Emmerson (1981), pp. 83ff.

⁷ Emmerson (1981), p. 67.

⁸ See Emmerson (1981), pp. 146-203.

⁹ On the origins, see McGinn (1979), pp. 70ff., Emmerson (1981), pp. 48-49.

signalling that the Empire has ceased to act as restraining power. The Last Things are then quickly accomplished. Christ returns and, in most accounts, kills Antichrist. The resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment follow immediately.

Chiliasm challenged the Church's view of history. Strictly speaking, it is the doctrine that Christ will return in the flesh to rule the world for a thousand years. Yet, as R. E. Lerner suggests, the term may refer to 'any hope for an impending, supernaturally inaugurated, marvellously better time on earth before the End.'¹⁰ Fearing the subversive potential of such hopes, the medieval Church, following Augustine, argued that the kingdom of Christ had commenced with his nativity. The present was the last of seven ages. One obvious impediment to millenarian fervour was the belief that the Last Things would follow in quick succession. For early medieval Christians at least, the Last Judgment was a formidable test. However, popular hopes for a new dispensation of peace and justice were encouraged by prophecies which interpose a period of repose on earth - often calculated at 112 years - between the defeat of Antichrist and the Last Judgment.¹¹ Joachim of Fiore provided a surer foundation for aspirations to an age of peace. As is well known, he undertakes a threefold division of time based on the Trinity. The world, he taught, was on the brink of transition from the second to a third and final *status*. The present order would end with the advent of Antichrist. It would be followed, not by the Last Judgment, but by an age of terrestrial perfection.¹² Antichrist might now come and wreak terrible violence on the faithful. Yet, his certain defeat also held out the alluring prospect of a renewed world. By postulating the imminent arrival of Antichrist, while at the same time making the Last Judgment comfortably remote, Joachitism accommodated the pessimism engendered by reflection on the state of the world without squashing optimism. While Antichrist remained the focus of anxiety, those who survived his reign would be more than adequately compensated for their endurance. By the fifteenth century, Joachim's view of the structure of history, propagated by the critical clerical intelligentsia, gripped society at all levels.¹³ In Erfurt, the city's leading preachers were hard pressed to stem the influence of prophecies of a third age.¹⁴

Just as Joachim's view of the structure of history was more in tune with popular aspirations, so the account of the coming battles transmitted in popular prophecies was more closely connected with the 'real world'. Although the prophecies lack the relatively fixed structure of the 'official' Antichrist drama, they contain several constant elements and foresee a fairly consistent pattern of conflict. The central figure was a Saviour Emperor, whose captivating hold on the popular mind can only be appreciated in the light of the idea of Empire which he embodied. As a political institution the Empire exercised, in theory, immediate power over Germany and Italy and, in addition, transcended all other realms. Its mission was to defend the Church and to establish universal peace and justice. The fact that Christ had chosen to be born in the Roman Empire and to submit himself to Roman law underlined its sacred character. As the

¹⁰ Lerner (1983), p. 194.

¹¹ Töpfer (1964), p. 17; Emmerson (1981), p. 104; Lerner (1983), pp. 190ff.

¹² Cf. Emmerson (1981), p. 60.

¹³ Peuckert (1966), p. 155; Mc Ginn (1979), pp 270-272; Oberman (1982), p. 98; Strauss (1995), p. 10.

¹⁴ Kleineidam (1969), pp. 107-109.

name 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' - used increasingly in the fifteenth century - indicates, the Empire was at once Roman and German. At all levels of society, these two attributes were axiomatic, so much so that one popular vernacular history claims Julius Caesar as a German.¹⁵ For learned commentators the Emperor is a vicar of Christ, for the common people a god-like figure.¹⁶

For the German nation, possession of the Empire enhanced its view of itself as God's chosen people. The main basis of German entitlement was the *translatio*, the transference of the Empire from the Greeks to Charlemagne by the Pope, although this was not necessarily seen as placing the Emperor under obligation to the pope. Charlemagne had earned the dignity for his services to the Church and had, it was held, been crowned by God.¹⁷ In the later middle ages German historians strove to furnish additional proofs of their nation's claim to Rome's glory. The Empire's factual weakness never diminished the power of the idea. On the contrary, the only hope of reformation lay in the advent of a leader equal to the colossal task.

For most people, this was the Third Frederick. Asleep in a cave, he will one day awake and complete the work of the Hohenstaufen Emperor, Frederick II. Four main tasks await him. The first is to regain Rome and Italy for the Empire, the loss of which has created a pernicious imbalance between the two powers. The pope has illicitly acquired a power base from which he works to destabilise the Empire. His is the hand behind the interminable conflicts in Germany, his policy to divide and conquer. The object of the military campaigns in Italy is not to overturn, but to restore, the papacy. The great fifteenth century authority, Johannes Lichtenberger, prophesies that the Emperor will go to Rome and chastise prelates and priests. However, he also foresees a reconciliation of Empire and Church, to be consummated in the reign of an Angelic Pope.¹⁸ Such a pope accepts that world order can obtain only if each power plays its divinely appointed role, that of the papacy being prayer.

The Saviour Emperor's second task, a constant theme of prophetic literature, is violent chastisement and expropriation of the clergy.¹⁹ Lichtenberger predicts that the clergy will be destroyed for not preaching the word of God.²⁰ However, St Peter's ship, though it will experience turbulent days, will not sink.²¹ Here, too, the goal was to restore order. Not only was the clergy's abandonment of prayer offensive in itself and dangerous to souls; their pursuit of worldly power had created an imbalance between clergy and laity which mirrored that between Church and Empire.²² The Emperor's third task is to establish peace and justice. He will subdue the contending powers within Germany and concentrate power in his hands. The villains were the territorial princes, whom Lichtenberger suspects of being forerunners of Antichrist. This was a view with

¹⁵ Borchardt (1971), esp. p. 83.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 53, 155 and *passim*.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁹ McGinn (1979), pp. 270-271.

²⁰ Kurze (1960), p. 20.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

²² On the perceived responsibility of the clergy for social decay, see Peuckert (1966), p. 236.

which those threatened by their expansionist policies - above all the cities and the knights - might easily identify. Not just the princes, however, would be cut down to size. The laity were not just helpless victims of a rapacious clergy, but were themselves consumed by greed, the source of all social conflict. The Third Frederick would accomplish a general reformation.²³ The fourth and grandest task is the defeat of Antichrist. It was the Turk who filled this role. Late fifteenth century prophecy tells of how the invading infidel will advance as far as Cologne, where the Third Frederick will defeat them. Thereafter, he will proceed to the Holy Land, crowning his work with the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. In the millenarian tradition, the recapture of Jerusalem is equated with the establishment of an earthly paradise.

All of this has considerable bearing on the evangelical attempt to cast the papacy as Antichrist. First, Luther rose to fame because his revolt against Rome was seen in the context of the redemptive drama of Joachite prophecy. Pamphlets appearing around 1520 to 1521 raise the question to what extent Luther's own legitimacy depended on the traditions to which, inadvertently or not, he initially appealed. We shall examine the evidence in the rest of this chapter. Second, by 1522, Luther had emerged as a veritable prophet of doom, his main concern to attack the Church's long term view of history. Like many, though not all, of his leading adherents, he believed that the basic condition for the Second Coming had been fulfilled. The light of the gospel, as he saw it, had revealed the Antichrist of the Last Days. He thus propagates an account of God's redemptive plan which cannot accommodate the chiliast impulse underlying the tradition to which he had first appealed. Chapter 9 will assess the effectiveness of the campaign to show that reformation involved preparation for the End. Third, Luther not only confronted the popular view of the structure of history. Before long, his reformation was also taking a course which deviated from the 'script' of popular Joachite prophecies. Chapter 10 will discuss how the medieval tradition worked against him.

(iii) Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility*

The *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520) belongs to the late medieval Empire reform tradition.²⁴ Touching on pressing common concerns, he emerged as spokesman for the grievance movement.²⁵ No less important, the struggle with Rome is set in an eschatological context. Aware that the Turk was widely feared as Antichrist, Luther argues that the papacy is the more probable contender for that role. The annates, he remarks, were originally granted to the Pope to finance war against the infidel. Yet they have been used only to inflate papal bureaucracy, the running costs of which are met by starting yet another collection for the crusade. In future, rather than contribute, the Germans should answer that they could fight the Turk better themselves, if only they

²³ Kampers (1969), 137ff.

²⁴ On the *Address to the Christian Nobility* in the context of the literature of Empire Reform, see Angermeier (1984), pp. 84-99, esp. p. 95.

²⁵ Cf. Brecht (1981), p. 354.

had the money.²⁶ So numerous and burdensome are the Pope's financial deceits that 'it would not be possible for Antichrist to rule more wickedly'. The Germans have more urgent priorities than the infidel: 'If we want to fight against the Turks, then let us begin here, where it is most vexatious. If we rightly hang thieves and behead robbers, why should we spare the Roman avarice, which is the greatest thief and robber that has ever come to earth, or may come, and that all in Christ's and St. Peter's holy name'.²⁷ At all events, secular rulers are obliged to protect their subjects against Roman demands. In justifying their protective function, Luther seems to demand a restoration of the threefold division of society on which medieval order was founded: 'it is said to the Pope and his own: Tu ora: you should pray, to the Emperor and his own: Tu protege: you should defend, to the common man: Tu labora: you should work'.²⁸

Luther repeatedly attacks papal involvement in secular affairs. The canon laws permitting this were 'devised by the Devil, to usher in, in time, the Antichrist, and to raise the Pope above God'. 'Except in the spiritual offices, which are preaching and absolving...', the Pope is not greater than secular rulers. Although Christ rules heaven, his role on earth was service. The Pope, having abandoned service for secular lordship, is against Christ and is therefore Antichrist. Secular lordship is incompatible with the papacy's spiritual role: 'How, if an Empire is to be ruled, can preaching, prayer, study and the service of the poor be accomplished, which office pertains most especially to the Pope...'.²⁹ This is why Christ forbade his disciples to carry a coat or money with them. Luther dismisses the Pope's claim to Naples and Sicily, 'to which he has just as much right as I'. The Emperor should direct him instead to the bible and the prayer book. Other papal territories, too, are held falsely in the name of Christ and St. Paul, although the latter says [II Tim. 2]: 'No one gets entangled in secular business, who is supposed to be a soldier of God'. Christ wanted nothing to do with secular government. The Pope's involvement is so extensive that he acts like a god, forgetting what Christ is, whose vicar he claims to be. In particular, the practice of the Emperor kissing the Pope's feet is an 'Antichristian instance' and should be ended. Luther bids his audience to 'hold them against each other, Christ and the pope. Christ washed the feet of his disciples and dried them, and the disciples never washed his. The Pope, being higher than Christ, turns this on its head...'.³⁰ Yet another 'Antichristian instance' is papal involvement in European political conflicts, which has caused much shedding of Christian blood. In view of this, Luther again expresses the hope that the Last Day is at hand, 'for it could not be more evil, how the Roman see acts'. There can be no doubt that Antichrist is the Pope.³¹

Luther also argues that the papal Antichrist endangers the salvation of souls, albeit without attacking the Church's doctrine of justification. He refers instead to a recurring complaint of grievance literature, the activity of papal legates empowered to

²⁶ WA 6, p. pp. 418-419.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 427.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 428.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 434.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 435.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 454.

settle cases reserved to Rome. He complains that 'they make wrong right, dissolving vows, oaths and obligations, thus destroying and teaching how to destroy trust and fidelity'. They take money for 'teaching us sin and leading us to hell'. This alone suffices 'to prove that the Pope is the true Antichrist'.³² The Pope is not the 'most holy', but the 'most sinful'. By releasing people from vows and obligations, he breaks God's commandments, setting himself above him. Thus the noble German nation, which 'is praised as steadfast and true in all histories', is corrupted. Contemplating this practice, Luther calls upon Christ to 'look down and let your Last Day break and destroy the Devil's nest in Rome. Here sits the man of whom Paul has said, he will raise himself above you, and sit in your Church, acting like a God...'.³³

Yearning for a strong, reforming Emperor, yet sensing the approach of the Last Days, Luther inevitably reflected on the health and destiny of the Empire. This passage was an afterthought, added to the second edition of the *Address*.³⁴ Charles V is not the Last World Emperor, a figure who, apart from being alien to scripture, was expected to capitulate to Antichrist. Luther's argument - based on biblical prophecies mainly from the book of Daniel - is idiosyncratic, an attempt to allow Charles scope for successful action against the Pope without compromising his hardening premonition of the proximity of the End. In particular, he wishes to refute the papal view that the *translatio* placed the Germans under obligation to Rome. The old Roman Empire, he contends, is dead, its rise and fall having been prophesied in scripture. What the Germans now possess is a second Roman Empire, established by God after the fall of the first and given directly to them. The *translatio* merely tricked them into trading its rich substance for the empty title of its predecessor.³⁵ Their gullibility has cost them dear, for Germany has been plundered mercilessly: 'the pope consumes the fruit, while we play with the empty peels'.³⁶

Earlier writers had also identified a German Empire independent of the Roman. Yet they had wished to reinforce Germany's claim to Rome's glory.³⁷ Luther, however, does not want that glory. God bestows and revokes empires according to his own inscrutable design, conferring them on the wicked and taking them away from the godly. Accordingly, 'we Germans should not be overweening on account of receiving a new Roman Empire...'.³⁸ Both Luther's insistence on the demise of the old Empire and his deprecation of German pride in a defunct dignity appear to be connected with his conviction that Antichrist's rule has begun. Of this, the fall of the Roman Empire was a precondition. At the same time, Luther needs to show that the new Empire has a meaningful mission to fulfil. Why call upon Charles V to play his historical role, if the End is in sight? He resolves this problem by arguing that 'since ... the [second] Empire has been given to us, I would not advise that the same be abandoned, but rather be ruled

³² *ibid.*, p. 453. Brecht (1981), p. 357, wrongly states that this denunciation of the papacy refers to the sale of indulgences.

³³ WA 6, p. 453.

³⁴ Brecht (1981), p. 357.

³⁵ WA 6, p. 463.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 464.

³⁷ Borchardt (1971), p. 191.

³⁸ WA 6, p. 463.

honourably, in fear of God, as long as it pleases him...'. No matter where an Empire comes from, it must be governed. The king of Babylon acquired his Empire by theft and force. Yet God wished it to be governed by the holy princes, Daniel, Anania, Asaria, Misael. How much more he must wish that the present Empire, which was not gained dishonourably, 'be governed by Christian, German princes'.³⁹ As if suspecting that his argument may seem improbable, he assures his reader: 'it is all of God's ordaining, which has been done before we have known about it'.⁴⁰

While stressing the provisional character of the present Empire, Luther reaffirms traditional beliefs in the competence and destiny of the Emperor. Although the Pope crowns him, this does not imply papal supremacy. 'The prophet, Saint Samuel anointed King Saul and David by God's command, and was nevertheless subject to them.' Only the Pope has ever claimed to be above those whom he crowns. He himself is crowned by three cardinals, 'and yet is no less their superior' He should, therefore, follow his own example. It is enough for him to be above secular rulers 'in divine matters, that is in preaching, teaching and administering the sacrament...'. Luther concludes by appealing to the age-old idea that a mighty Emperor must restore the proper balance between the estates: 'Therefore let the German Emperor be rightfully and freely Emperor, and not restrain his power through such blind pretensions of papal hypocrites, as if they... ruled over the sword in all things'.⁴¹

Presenting himself as the loyal servant of Charles V, that ruler sent by God 'to rouse many hearts to great and good hope',⁴² Luther appeals to the idea that it was the task of a powerful Emperor to carry out a reformation. Attacking the aggrandisement of the papacy, he touches the main themes of late medieval prophetic literature: the usurpation of imperial authority by the papacy; the theft of Italy; the various burdens on the laity; the failure of worldly clerics to concentrate on their proper task of prayer, the need to chastise their insatiable greed. In asserting that the papacy, as opposed to the Turk, was Antichrist, Luther went one step further than late medieval protest literature. His remark that 'Roman avarice' was the more pressing problem may well have captured the mood of the moment. As late as the spring of 1521, when the Turk was advancing up the Danube valley, Hungarian delegates to the Diet of Worms would plead in vain for aid.⁴³

Although Luther cannot be called a chiliast,⁴⁴ his critique of the papacy was such that he could easily have been mistaken for one. The *Address* was not conceived as an earnest eschatological warning, in contrast to his later works. It merely indicates the direction of his eschatological reflection. At the time of writing, Luther later asserted, he had wished to reform the Church from within.⁴⁵ There is much in the pamphlet which

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 464.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 463.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 465.

⁴² WA 6, p. 405.

⁴³ Vaughan (1954), pp. 108-109.

⁴⁴ See Oberman (1982).

⁴⁵ Headley (1963), p. 229.

speaks for the truth of that claim. He frequently defines the papacy's proper task in terms which suggest that he believed that it was capable of reformation. His thought is recognisably in a state of flux. His occasional remarks on the Last Days, though they make sense in the light of the subsequent development of his thought, are out of joint with the idea of reformation which could easily be read into in the text. For the public at large, Luther's denunciation of the papacy as Antichrist probably did not constitute a recognisable break with the idea that the battle for world renewal would soon be decided through confrontation with a destructive tyrant, although obviously it opened up a new front. To be sure, the *Address* does not cover the whole spectrum of popular expectation. Luther speaks only of the interests of the nobility, a group which, gratified by his evident sympathy for its social predicament, would become his earliest ally.⁴⁶ However, the recovery by the Empire of its God-given rights was, for diverse groups, the *sine qua non* of the restoration of justice. Through his apparent championship of the first goal Luther was bound to be seen as an ally by many of those whose specific problems he did not mention.

(iii) Luther's debt to the imperial idea and Joachite prophecy

Luther's debt to the imperial idea is reflected in several 1521 pamphlets. In the satirical *New Letter*, which predates the Diet of Worms, the Pope and the clergy conspire with the Devil, their aim to frustrate reform by Charles V.⁴⁷ They have heard that he plans a general council in order 'to return us to poverty... and also to take back from us all secular authority which does not lawfully belong to us'.⁴⁸ Begging the Devil's assistance, they brag of past services. They praise Pope Sylvester, 'who managed to get Constantine to take the whole of Italy out of the Roman Empire, against his oath and obligation, and to give it to him'. They recall how Emperor Sigismund had wanted to make the spiritual estate 'an honourable power of equal rank'.⁴⁹ To prevent any loss of secular power, however, 'our predecessors... had the same Emperor killed on account of his piety... For the same Emperor Sigismund would have considered the need of poor Christians, had he remained living among them, as the book, *The Reformation of the Emperor Sigismund*, shows'.⁵⁰ To increase their power over the laity, the clergy shun no means, however execrable. If people complain 'we put them under the ban, under the pretext of being the vicar of God and of having all of his power'.⁵¹ Most of the various tyrannies of which they boast correspond to the complaints of grievance literature.

The *New Letter* enunciates a view of history, the sway of which helps to explain the impact of Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility*. Papal usurpation of imperial rights and clerical striving for secular power have undermined world order. The interests

⁴⁶ Cf. Blickle (1982 b), pp. 66-67.

⁴⁷ Ein neuer Sendbrieff von den bosen geystlichhen (Erfurt, 1521). Modern reprint: SCHADE 2.

⁴⁸ SCHADE 2, pp. 93-94.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 95.

of ordinary Christians depend on the restoration of equilibrium. The author, however, places all his hopes in Charles V and does not even mention Luther. If he read the *Address*, he would certainly have applauded the thrust of the argument, probably accepting that the pope was Antichrist, a point which he himself does not explicitly make. Yet he clearly felt no sense of debt to Luther's defence of the Charles's right to undertake a reformation. He probably derived his view of the Emperor's competence from the tradition exemplified in the sole authority which he mentions, the *Reformation of Emperor Sigismund*, which calls for the concentration of power in the Emperor's hands.⁵²

Written shortly after Luther's condemnation at Worms, *Bailiff and Pastor* defends him against the charge of heresy. Central to the argument is the idea that common burdens result from the clergy's perversion of world order. Having heard the bailiff's complaints about the clergy, the pastor questions the laity's right to protest. The bailiff argues that in refusing to submit to lay authority, the clergy ignore Christ's example:

Did not the lord God even want to be subject to the secular power on earth? For he said to Peter: Go out to sea, and in the first fish that you catch you will find a piece of money; give it to them for you and for me. And he did not mean to give it to the priests and hypocrites, but rather the Emperor and the secular power.⁵³

The pastor retorts that the Pope, not the Emperor is the supreme power, 'for he crowns the Emperor, not the Emperor the Pope...' ⁵⁴ The bailiff appeals to I Peter 2.9ff:

Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for God's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him...Why... did he not speak of the Pope as supreme, and of the legates and bishops as those that are sent by him? He never thought about you... And thus it is clear that the Emperor is more than the Pope.⁵⁵

Scripture is invoked here in support of the imperial idea. There is some irony in the fact that in the very moment at which Luther is placed under the ban of the Empire, the author responds to the charge of heresy by invoking the Emperor's God-given authority. It is noteworthy that he does not confront his audience with Luther's 'new' doctrines, or with the real reason for his condemnation at Worms. Rather, he appeals to the age-old idea that each estate must resume its proper role. The clergy labour under delusions of secular grandeur: 'I can see that you are grasping after this and already possess the half of it. You set up all wars, all shedding of blood and wrangling among Emperor, kings, princes and lords. You have to be involved in everything...' ⁵⁶ The authority given to

⁵² Angermeier (1984), p. 88.

⁵³ GÖTZE p. 15.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 16-17

them, however, is 'nothing other than earnest and pious prayer and preaching, and working solely with God and according to God's scripture'.⁵⁷

Bailiff and Pastor suggests strongly that Luther's cause is the Emperor's, but without explaining Charles's refusal to recognise a common interest. Eberlin's *First Confederate* addresses this problem. At the time of writing, Eberlin, a Franciscan, was facing disciplinary measures by his order, a conflict which influenced his perception of the wider reform struggle. He sees Germany's welfare threatened by a Franciscan conspiracy to corrupt Charles V, to whom the pamphlet is addressed. Beginning deferentially, he appeals to 'our head, our long requited and very welcome Emperor...'. The millenarian undertones of his praise of Charles are unmistakable. The Emperor is a highly endowed ruler, 'the like of which there has not been for a thousand years...'. All 'wise and prudent men' believe that 'a government pleasing to God will arise under you, which the German Emperors who have preceded you have desired so much and so earnestly, but which of God's special judgment has been reserved especially for you...'.⁵⁸ Charles will accomplish great things, for God has laid the foundation, both by ordaining that Germany 'has always been freely obedient to the Roman Emperor' and by promoting a renaissance of the arts and languages. Charles should accordingly listen to Germany's humanist scholars, above all to God's chosen messengers, Luther and Hutten. Luther has uncovered evangelical teaching, on which 'salutary government' in Germany depends.

Just as Luther's emergence signifies God's favour, so the machinations of the mendicants and 'courtesans' attest to the Devil's enmity.⁵⁹ The German nation is worried about the influence of the Emperor's Franciscan confessor, Glapion. Charles should ignore the mendicants, who are trying to turn him against his 'best friends', Luther and Hutten. Only the latter and their adherents 'seek salvation and honour, prosperity and beatitude for you and your subjects...'.⁶⁰ The mendicants, however, with papal support, wish to destroy the Empire. They drain Germany of its resources, while the Pope 'sends legates into every territory to cause disunity among lords and princes'.⁶¹ They falsify evangelical doctrine and wish to enlist the Emperor in their 'Antichristian sect'.⁶² Eberlin, however, is confident that Charles has not condemned Luther and Hutten 'in good conscience'. Now that the Emperor is informed about mendicant deception, he will see the light. For this reason, despite the Edict of Worms, Eberlin will continue 'to read what Luther and Hutten have written' in the hope Charles 'will put the mendicants and 'courtesans' under the imperial ban.'⁶³ 'God will grant this soon, for we do not doubt that he loves you too much to allow you to err for long'.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ ENDERS 1, p.2.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

The mendicants, Eberlin complains, 'want to scare us with papal bulls, published against the truth, with imperial bans which were imposed without your informed judgment'. Yet their sole interest is to play a powerful role in the world. 'They are not monks at all and they do not want to be. Nor do they want to remain in their bishoprics, but rather move to the courts of kings and great princes...'.⁶⁴ People are so distraught by their influence that they may even become disaffected to Charles. To prevent this, however, Eberlin has told the German nation that any mandates against Luther were issued without the Emperor's knowledge. Charles, he predicts, will take Erasmus as his confessor, and either Erasmus, Luther or Karlstadt to advise him on government. There will follow a religious reform, ending financial abuse and moral decay. Once the reformation of the nation has been accomplished

then the sturdy Germans will arise and proceed with you against Rome, and make all Italy subject to you. And in future nobody may become Pope or cardinal without first being confirmed by you and all your successors. Your authority, however, should rest on the electoral power of the electors. In such a manner you will be a powerful king on earth. If you first accomplish God's affairs, God will afterwards accomplish yours.⁶⁵

Although Eberlin denounces his opponents as an 'Antichristian sect', he does not question the papacy as an institution, but sees its role as one of spiritual leadership. If the Pope was Antichrist, this was on account of his hostility to the interests of the German nation. Those interests could best be served subjecting the papacy to the Emperor's will.

In attempting to justify Luther, Eberlin uses a familiar expedient, the fiction of misinformed authority. Whether Eberlin, in his heart of hearts, believed in a Franciscan conspiracy to corrupt Charles is not of great importance. What is significant is that he knew of no other way to legitimate Luther's assault on the papacy than to find an honourable role for the Wittenberg reformer in the drama of medieval prophecy. Luther's emergence as a 'national saint' must be seen in the light of the power of prophecy. The readiness of the German public to approve Luther's assault on the papacy did not depend on his charisma alone. Rather, it was in the context of the Empire reform tradition enunciated in late medieval millenarian prophecy that the Wittenberg reformer's charismatic authority struck roots and flourished. The break with that tradition, though it did not prove fatal to the evangelical movement, would contribute significantly to the loss of mass support after 1521.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.13.

9. Stars and signs and the end of the world

(i) Luther's pessimism and the problem of authority

By 1522, Luther's view of the struggle against Antichrist had developed in two major respects. First, Antichrist's primary characteristics - deceptiveness and tyranny - are now defined in the context of the dispute about justification. Rome's deception is to teach salvation by works, its tyranny to enforce observance of its laws and ceremonies. Luther's Antichrist is the institutional Church, which, usurping Christ's role as redeemer, imposes an intolerable burden on individual consciences. Second, the basic condition for the Second Coming had been fulfilled. The *Address to the Christian Nobility* had already reflected the tension between medieval hopes of renewal and his own sense that time was running out. Although the papal Antichrist is still revealed through its illegitimate exercise of secular power, Luther no longer stresses the need to correct the imbalance between Church and Empire. Instead, a veritable prophet of doom, he wages a battle for the liberation of consciences in preparation for the Last Judgment.¹

For Luther, scripture was the sole source of prophetic knowledge. To propagate his view of history, he had to confront hostile authority. Of course, he rejected the sibylline oracles, which, like the bible, were considered divinely inspired, and on which both the 'official' and Joachite dramas had drawn heavily. His main concern, however, was to challenge the Church's view of the structure of history. This led him to launch a ferocious attack on astrology. A prestigious science, astrology assumed that the celestial bodies influenced the terrestrial, both inanimate and animate. Special attention was paid to planetary conjunctions.² Although, seriously practised, astrology was a demanding discipline, it was also a popular science. Where livelihoods depended on uncontrollable forces, prognostications about the weather, the prospects for agriculture, famine or plague, political turmoil or war were eagerly devoured.³ Theologians had long debated the permissibility of astrology. The main objection, which Luther shared, was that astral influence was incompatible with the doctrine of divine omnipotence.⁴ The standard answer was that the laws by which stars and planets operated necessarily conformed to the Creator's will. This idea enraged Luther, for it implied that God had tied his own hands. If that were the case, it spoke for the permanence, rather than the transience, of life on earth.

For Luther, God spoke through signs, a medium amply validated by scripture. What some people regarded as signs were often the very phenomena which astrologers sought to explain. Whereas astrology aimed to discern cosmic order, signs were in some sense a deviation from the norm, usually read as tokens of divine wrath. They included bad weather, disease, social turmoil or war, crosses falling 'miraculously' from the

¹ For a discussion of Luther's understanding of Antichrist, see Headley (1963), esp. pp. 195-223; Oberman (1982), pp. 98ff. For a comparison of the 'medieval' and the 'protestant' Antichrist, see Emmerson (1981), pp. 206ff.

² On astrology, see Peuckert (1966), pp. 152ff., Thomas (1971), pp. 283-292 and North (1986).

³ For a typical prognostication, see Eis (1956), pp. 55-62.

⁴ For Luther's views on astrology, see Ludolph (1986), esp. pp. 105-107.

heavens, freak births. Some signs, however, invited interpretation. The birth of Siamese twins in Worms in 1495 unleashed a twelve-year debate.⁵ During the 1520s, the Monk Calf (a freak birth), and the Papal Ass (a legendary monster) were pressed into service by Luther's supporters and opponents alike.⁶ The more sensational a sign, the more portentous it was considered to be. The proliferation of signs - sensational or not - impressed some contemporaries. The Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine sees the frequency of plague, bad harvests and falling crosses as portents of a major turning point.⁷

Scribner argues that pessimism, the signs, astrology and popular prophecies can be regarded as mutually reinforcing elements of apocalyptic fervour.⁸ However, as the mood of confident expectation generated by Luther's citation of Worms indicates, apocalyptic fervour is not necessarily pessimistic. Despair of the world's future, moreover, though always an element of popular prophecy, is seldom the keynote. Catastrophe leads to renewal. At all events, the interaction of mood, pessimistic or optimistic, with the different media of revelation is more complex than Scribner suggests. Although signs often indicated divine wrath, they might also carry a hopeful message. Sebastian Brant saw the Siamese twins of Worms as presaging the unity of papacy and empire.⁹ Astrology, too, could be harnessed both to pessimism and optimism. The catastrophes regularly announced by astrologers could be read divine warnings and used by propagandists of various hues to apply pressure to their audiences. A classic example is the prediction of a Flood for the year 1524. Alternatively, a 'scientific' explanation of natural phenomena could make them less threatening. Astrology was also the backbone of Joachite prophecy.¹⁰ Lichtenberger owed his enormous influence to his success in fusing 'calculation with divination'.¹¹ What makes the historical debate of the 1520s so tangled is partly the conflicting aspirations of the participants, partly the competition between different 'systems of explanation'. The present chapter focuses on Luther's attempt to propagate his pessimistic view of world history.

(ii) The 'Flood debate'

Before Luther began to make his case for the End, debate on the fate of the world had already been triggered by astrologers. A major planetary conjunction in the sign of Pisces, expected for February 1524, had raised the spectre of a universal deluge and was producing copious literature.¹² Most of the mainly Catholic contributors sought to allay fears of a universal deluge, allowing at most the possibility of local flooding. However, while rejecting the pessimistic reading of the astral message, many stress the

⁵ Wuttke (1977).

⁶ Scribner (1981), pp. 127-136.

⁷ Peuckert (1966), p. 225.

⁸ Scribner (1981), p. 117.

⁹ Wuttke (1977), p. 223.

¹⁰ Lerner (1983), pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Cf. Kurze (1958), p. 64; and Robinson-Hammerstein (1986), p. 132.

¹² Zambelli, 239-240; Talkenberger (1990), pp. 154-155.

need to appease God's anger through repentance and amendment of life. The pacifiers castigate the evil state of the world, particularly clerical corruption. Identifying Luther with the false prophets foretold in scripture, they see his revolt as a further affliction. Although they blame him for stirring the common man, they also criticise secular rulers, whose policies are no less destructive of social peace. Emphasising the need to fight the infidel, they call for a restoration of Church and Empire.¹³

On the evangelical side, only two publicists based their predictions of the End on planetary influence.¹⁴ One was the Erfurt pamphleteer, Johannes Copp. His *Urteil* (1522) and *German Practica* (1523) predict, not a universal, but a 'semi-universal' deluge, a qualification which defers to Genesis 9. 11, in which God promises Noah never again to destroy the world by a flood.¹⁵ In the *Urteil*, Copp warns the clergy, in particular the monks, that they will lose both their property and their lives if they persist in opposing the evangelical cause. With the end of the world in 1524, they will receive their just deserts. For the intervening period he predicts a cumulation of catastrophes, including a peasant rising. In the *German Practica*, responding to criticism from 'the authorities', Copp moderates his tone somewhat. Denying that his prediction of popular revolt should be understood as justifying disobedience, he appeals to the common man to fight, not with the sword, but with the word of God. In respect of the clergy, he advocates timely conversion as the only means of escaping condemnation on the Last Day.

The ebb and flow of collective anxiety is difficult to measure. Yet the efforts to pacify - both by Catholic and evangelical authors¹⁶ - the comments of contemporaries, the reports of various precautions taken in advance of the conjunction, speak for the credence given to awful prediction. Although the weight of astrological opinion was against a pessimistic reading of the conjunction, fear of destruction gained enormous ground. Several factors doubtless contributed to the mood of grim foreboding. Both the accession of Charles V and Luther's citation to Worms had roused hopes which were dashed by the outcome of the Diet. The collapse of order during the early 1520s suggested that society was on course for cataclysm. Copp's experience of the Erfurt *Pfaffensturm* of 1521 probably reinforced his belief in the coming apocalyptic conflagration.¹⁷ With the approach of the crucial moment, public unease was bound to increase. Notwithstanding the attempts at pacification, the diversity of learned views is likely to have fostered uncertainty, which - even if optimistic readings of the astral evidence engendered a spark of hope - only the test of time could finally banish.

A curious indicator of the state of panic in Erfurt is the *Practica of Doctor Schrotentreck of Bissingen*, which appeared in at least two editions in 1523.¹⁸ Of Swiss origin, it belongs to a genre of vernacular satirical practicas, which can be traced back to

¹³ *ibid.*, esp. pp. 262-265.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 266ff.

¹⁵ On Copp's practicas, see *ibid.*, pp. 224-235.

¹⁶ On the attempt by an evangelical author to calm popular fears, see *ibid.*, 312ff.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁸ V. HASE, Nos. 156, 157, *Practica doctor Schrotentrecks von Bissingen* (Erfurt, 1523). Modern reprint: CLEMEN 4, pp. 347-359.

the 1480s. That the Erfurt editions were intended for local consumption is indicated by the insertion of two references to the city's Fish Market.¹⁹ There is, however, no allusion either to the religious conflict or to the flood prediction. The *Practica* begins with a parody of the conventional foreword. Aristotle, Sibyl and other 'renowned masters' are praised for their skill in astrology, thanks to which 'everyone may recognise when it is day or night'.²⁰ The predictions which follow deal with the outlook for different social groups, the prospects for crops, disease, etc., and are written in the same nonsensical vein.

Wilhelm Lucke saw satirical practicas as a welcome assault on popular gullibility.²¹ Yet they were hardly the seeds of a 'healthy' scepticism, which, as Lucke himself pointed out, only began to flower in the mid-seventeenth century. Practicas were hungrily devoured, although experience showed that astrologers often got it wrong. Their popularity reflects a desire to discern order in the erratic, arbitrary forces governing the natural and political world. The function of satirical practicas was surely to help people cope with the fallibility of a prestigious science. Ridicule served as a safety valve, which, paradoxically, reinforced the authority of the astrologers' science. Satirical practicas do not undermine astrology, but are much more an integral part of that system of belief. The strong demand for the *Practica of Doctor Schrotentreck* is hardly unconnected with the great conjunction. Humour flourishes in moments of crisis. In mocking the astrologers, Erfurters seem to have sought an antidote to the fear of destruction by which they had been seized. In the event, their anxiety proved unfounded.

(iii) The '*Christian Proof of the Day of Judgment*'

The brief period of intense anxiety gave Luther and his followers a unique opportunity to put forward their own views of God's plan. On the second Sunday in Advent, 1522, he preached on Luke 21. 25-36, which lists the signs of the Second Coming. Although the text was prescribed by the religious calendar, the occasion alone cannot explain his treatment of it. We find the same tone of urgent anticipation in several of his other pamphlets published at this time.²² The sermon was included in his Advent Postils (1522). Entitled '*Christian Proof of the Day of Judgment*', it was also published as a separate tract in at least 7 editions.²³ In Erfurt, it appeared in 1524, almost certainly before the conjunction.²⁴ Luther fights a battle on different fronts: against the people, whose blindness to the signs of the End will ensure their damnation; against the astrologers, whose heathen science obscures the wrath of God; and against Catholic propagandists who use the flood prediction to denounce his reformation.

¹⁹ CLEMEN 4, p. 346.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 349.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

²² Cf. WA 10.3, p. 356.

²³ KÖHLER lists six editions, but not the Erfurt edition.

²⁴ Eyn Chzistlich vnd fast zvol gegründte beweyzung vō dem Jüngstē tag (Erfurt, 1524). Modern reprint: WA 10.1, 2, pp. 93-120.

Luther attacks scepticism about the approach of the End. The majority will not understand the 'manifold and great' signs. Feeling secure, they will mock those who 'are worried that the sky will fall and that we will live to see the day.'²⁵ Although the sceptics argue that the Last Day has not come for over a thousand years, 'in the flash of an eye, they will stand before God's terrible judgment'. The Great Flood and the fate of Sodom illustrate both the suddenness of the Last Day and the totality of the destruction which the worldly-wise will face.²⁶ Such is the state of the world, that 'everyone sees, everyone also says that it must break or be transformed.'²⁷ Worldliness, Luther argues, is itself a sign of the End. His definition is sweeping. Not just eating and drinking, but sumptuous dress, the growth of trade, 'the keeping of wife and child', the flowering of the arts and advances in learning are unmistakable signs. Humanist achievements are not excepted. 'The languages', like the art of printing or advances in military technology, are all telling manifestations of worldly wisdom.

Breaking point has also been reached in spiritual affairs. The gospel has been 'publicly damned' - at the Council of Constance - and the Pope's lies accepted as law. Current piety could not be more sinful: 'Masses are offered daily more than many hundred thousand times, which sin is unequalled by any other. Through confession, sacraments, indulgences, precepts, countless souls are driven to hell, so that it appears as if God has handed the entire world over to the Devil.'²⁸ Other sins, 'unchastity, murder infidelity, greed and the like' are so obvious that they hardly need mentioning. It is above all the shamelessness of papal tyranny which shows that 'Christ must come soon'.²⁹ The very fact that the clergy deny the imminence of the Second Coming proves them wrong. II Peter 3.3-4 prophesies: 'In the Last Days there will come deceivers... saying: Where is the promise of his coming. Since the fathers died, all things continue as they were at the beginning'.³⁰ This applies to 'the clerical papists', who, besotted by worldly power ask: 'Do you think that the Last Judgment will come so soon? Ah, things are sure to continue as they have done so far'. Because of such blindness, the clergy will be destroyed.³¹

The signs listed in Luke's gospel, which Luther now interprets, fall into two categories: natural phenomena (eclipses of the sun and moon; falling stars; the roar of water and rushing of winds; and movements of the heavenly bodies); and human emotions ('the distress of nations in perplexity'; and men fainting 'with fear and foreboding of what will come over the whole world'). Aware that the natural phenomena are not taken seriously, Luther argues that this is because God has not yet sent any catastrophes. However, the very fact that signs are given, 'and yet nothing special follows', can only mean that what they portend is indeed the Last Day: 'for they

²⁵ WA 10.1,2, pp. 93-94.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

³¹ In other pamphlets, too, Luther argues that the refusal of the papists to acknowledge the signs of the End will lead to their destruction. Cf. his *Faithful Admonition to Avoid Uproar and Tumult Admonition* (1522), WA 8, 679.

must be many and often, to signify and proclaim the great day sufficiently.³² Another reason why people feel secure is that the signs are not particularly spectacular. Luther answers that they need only be perceptible. Just as not all stars will fall ‘so not all waters will roar...’. What counts is frequency. In earlier times the signs were ‘rare’ and ‘single’. Now, however, ‘they are accumulating in all forms’. As well as the signs listed in Luke, ‘we have also seen comets, and recently many crosses have fallen from heaven, and... the new... French disease has also arisen’.³³ Luther blames astrology for people’s failure to understand the signs. ‘Scientific’ explanations of natural phenomena conceal their eschatological significance. The blind Aristotle denies that they are in fact signs.³⁴ Yet, they cannot be explained by natural causes, for astrologers ‘have not... predicted any of them’.

Luther applies the prophecy that the ‘powers of the heavens will move’ to ‘the great constellation of planets which will occur in two years’. Like all other signs, the constellation is not spectacular, but merely sufficiently distinctive to be noticeable. Christ did not say that all the powers of heaven would move, but only some. They signify not a Great Flood, but the Last Day. Warning people not to ascribe to nature an event which Christ calls a sign, Luther emphasises that the constellation merely proves that the signs are now proliferating. He appeals to his audience: ‘Let the unbelieving doubt and ignore God’s signs and say it is a natural business, you stick to the gospel’.³⁵ Towards the end of the sermon, in an allegorical interpretation of the signs, Luther equates the ‘the powers of the heavens’ with the Pope, bishops and universities. Deeply ensconced in the ‘realm of the world, goods, honour and lust’, they are unaware that they are planets, which in Greek means ‘errant’. However, like planets they cannot keep to the right path, but move backwards and sideways. The constellation is the clerical conspiracy to suppress Luther’s reformation. Now that the gospel is resurgent, ‘they become angry, move, and form a constellation. They join together and want to protect it with bulls and paper, threatening [their opponents] with a Great Flood. But it will not help, for the day is breaking...’.³⁶

Discussing the human emotions, Luther argues that just as eclipses or falling of stars need not be spectacular, so it not necessary that ‘many people suffer this distress and anxiety, but only very few, and not continuously’. Christ does not refer to bodily distress, for people are preoccupied with commerce and worldly pleasure ‘as though they wished to remain here for ever’.³⁷ The prophecy applies to those who find no peace in good works. However, only ‘tender souls’, not the ‘great, base mass’ will suffer from a burdened conscience.³⁸ Their miserable dependence on their confessors is ‘our Lord God’s sign of the Day of Judgment’.³⁹ Anticipating the objection that a long-standing practice could hardly signify the End, Luther answers that confession has ‘never before

³² WA 10.1,2, p. 101.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 102, ll. 9-13.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

been ordained and practised so extensively' and, therefore, has 'never before been a sign of the Day of Judgment, but only now'.⁴⁰ Similarly, in interpreting the prophecy that 'men will faint with fear and foreboding' as the End approaches, Luther argues that the prophecy applies not to the 'wicked, great crowd, which ignores God's signs and ascribes them to nature', but to only to pious souls. The anxiety of the pious few is a necessary and sufficient warning to the wicked majority, although they will not heed it.

On his Second Coming, Luther announces, Christ will appear 'with great power, with all the hosts of the angels and in great glory, seated on a cloud of light, and all the saints with him'.⁴¹ On this day, according to Luke, people should raise their heads at the approach of their redemption. These words, Luther argues, are spoken only to those who find the present life 'sour and ugly', for whom the words 'Thy kingdom come, deliver us from evil' are a heartfelt plea. Fear of the Last Day, on the other hand, 'is an evil sign which pertains to the damned'. Christ tells believers to raise their heads to console those who, though ready for the Last Day, are still too faint-hearted to yearn for it with the required intensity.⁴² Luther attacks the 'dream preachers' who exploit fear of the End to promote 'good works'.⁴³ It is necessary, he concedes, to instil fear, but only in the blind and obstinate, who, once reduced to despair, should then be strengthened and consoled. When saying the Lord's prayer, most people really mean: 'Thy kingdom come not, or not yet'.⁴⁴ If fear of the Last Day is 'wisely used', however, people will pray for the grace which 'removes the fear' and makes them 'yearn for this day'. There is every reason for glad anticipation. Christ compares the Last Days with a fig-tree coming into blossom. People should rejoice, just as 'all creatures look forward to the spring and summer.' However, nobody who does not long for the Last Day will survive it, even if he has performed all the works of the saints.⁴⁵ Towards the end of the sermon, Luther discusses how the End will come about. Dismissing scholastic explanations, he stresses that scripture states that 'on the Last Day heaven and earth with all the elements and whatever is will be melted by fire and reduced to powder.' Immediately afterwards, however, everything will be recreated 'most beautifully'. Nobody should worry about how souls will survive the inferno. It is enough for people to know that they are in God's hands. For it is clear that 'heaven and earth will be new, and our bodies too, and will come to life again in eternal bliss'.⁴⁶

Luther feels, on the one hand, that he is addressing an audience convinced of the need for a *Wende*, a turning point. Everyone sees that 'it must break or be transformed.' On the other hand, the majority laugh at the idea that the End is approaching. There is no yearning for the Second Coming, only fear of it by the pious, and at best indifference among the impious, who 'would rather remain here for ever'. Luther argues that material prosperity has blinded people to the signs of the times. Although his goal is

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

partly to offer consolation to the 'tender souls', his point of contact with the blind majority is the latter's disbelief. He attempts to reach his audience by arguing that its scepticism is divinely confirmed proof of the truth of his message. In order to open people's eyes, he resorts to what he sees as 'constructive intimidation'. Having emphasised the wrath of God, he holds out the prospect of redemption and eternal bliss, Not here, but only hereafter, can the faithful expect justice.

What can people have made of Luther's reading of the signs? Obviously, the persuasiveness of his claim that the entire apparatus of medieval piety provokes the Last Judgment depended to some extent on whether people shared his view of its inherent sinfulness. Yet it is noteworthy that he feels obliged to defend his equation of the 'distress of nations' with the burdened conscience by arguing that not 'the great base mass', but only a handful of tender souls, are affected. No less telling is his assertion that only a few suffer under the 'tyranny' of the confessors. His discussion of natural phenomena, reveals what he evidently sensed was a major weakness in his case. In order to demonstrate that scriptural prophecies of the End are now being fulfilled, he is forced to develop the idiosyncratic notion that the attribute of a sign is that it is only barely conspicuous. The ad hoc character of this principle is evident in its selective application. He makes the point in respect of winds and roaring waters, while capitalising fully on clerical greed, plague or war. He attempts to compensate the dramatic deficit of the unacknowledged signs by pointing out that he himself has witnessed an increase in eclipses or strong winds in recent years. We should not see this as deliberate distortion, even though, with respect to the eclipses at least, there is no factual basis for his observation.⁴⁷ So convinced is he that the End must come, that he can only believe that the signs of that event prophesied in scripture must have been given. Those who fail to see this can only be blind.

One obvious question is how, at the height of the Flood debate, Luther could assert that people did not fear the End. Is this an indication that the pacifiers had succeeded in assuaging anxiety? Probably not. As his remarks on Catholic attempts to present the deluge as God's response to the evangelical revolt indicate, Luther is fully aware of the fear aroused by the conjunction. What angers the reformer is the astrologers' role in promoting confidence in cosmic order. Through the popularisation of astrology, wind and water, even eclipses of the sun, have lost their power to impress. Most people probably knew little about Aristotle. However his name stood for the orderly working of the natural world, which explains the ferocity of Luther's attack on the 'heathen science'. The reformer pinpoints the reasons for its attraction. Astrology provided an effective antidote to people's sense of powerlessness, a feeling of security which he denounces as 'false'. Popular acceptance of the idea that the mysteries of the world around them could be 'scientifically' explained was, Luther felt, a massive obstacle to reception of his eschatological message. What Luther means when he says that people do not fear the End, is that they have accepted - passing scares notwithstanding - the Church's long term view of history.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 100, n. 2.

(iv) An attack on Joachim

Evangelical reformers were aware of the power of the medieval tradition. In a 1521 pamphlet, Luther offers his own reading of the Sleeping Emperor legend. The Third Frederick is Luther's protector, Frederick the Wise. The holy Sepulchre is the gospel, in which Christ's truth, killed by the papists, lies buried.⁴⁸ Several of his leading adherents also propagate this interpretation.⁴⁹ In 1527, the Nuremberg reformer, Osiander, issued a Lutheran reinterpretation of the *Wondrous Prophecy of the Papacy* which, in the original Joachite version, had promised a reformed papacy. In the foreword, he complains that people are more inclined to believe 'human' prophecy by authorities such as Lichtenberger than scripture.⁵⁰

Reinterpretation was one way of attacking hostile authority. The alternative was confrontation. Heinrich Pastoris's *German Practica* (1523) denounces the chiliast tradition. The Devil, he complains, has issued a new anthology of prophecies by the Sibyl, Joachim and others.⁵¹ Pastoris refers to a 1523 edition of the 'Anonymous Practica', a typical assortment of prophecies of tribulation and deliverance. He presents a biblical alternative to the Joachite drama, remarkable for its parallels to the Church's 'official' Antichrist drama. First, he casts Luther as the Elias chosen by God in 'this last perilous time' to open the bible before the world and against the Antichrist's followers.⁵² Second, there is a part for Luther's protector, the Elector of Saxony. Unlike Luther in his 1521 tract, Pastoris does not equate Frederick the Wise with the Third Frederick. The Saxon elector's role is more evocative of the Last World Emperor's. He is the Emperor 'elected by an Angel of God', whom Luther first instructed in scripture, and who now holds it dear. Pastor points out that the 'rediscovery' of scripture by a pious king has been prefigured in the bible itself. Referring the reader to II Kings 22 [8ff], he tells about the rediscovery in the temple of the book of Deuteronomy, which was then shown to King Josiah.⁵³ The king rent his clothes and said to his scribes:

Go and inquire of the Lord, for me and the people and the entire Jewish land concerning the words in the book that has been found. A great wrath of the Lord has been kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, that we might have done that which has been written for us.⁵⁴

Pastoris also tells how it was prophesied to Josiah that, in his own lifetime, he would not see the desolation which God would send. After his death, however, the whole land was destroyed. It is significant that although the pious king is spared this humiliation – out of

⁴⁸ Peuckert (1966), pp. 629-630.

⁴⁹ Peuckert (1966), pp. 630-631; Headley (1963), pp. 232-233.

⁵⁰ Scribner (1981), pp. 142 ff.

⁵¹ *Practica deutsch von vergangen, vñ zû kunfftigen dingen* (Erfurt, 1523), A^v.

⁵² *Practica deutsch*, Aii^f.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Aii^f-Aii^v.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

deference to Frederick the Wise? - like the Last World Emperor, he does not triumph over Antichrist. For this is the End.

Pastoris pleads for Luther's view of history. Only scripture can help people 'understand and mark what the great Conjunction means (of which the astrologers speak), which portends a notable change of things on earth, greater than any recorded by historians since the time of the Great Flood...'.⁵⁵ Its message is that 'God is calling people of all nations to his consoling word, through which the world will be judged... to believe in this alone and that nobody will be justified without it.' The Conjunction is a sign by which God warns people of eternal damnation, and points to the eternal light. He reminds his reader that, should he witness the outbreak of war, he should recall that according to the gospel this must happen before the Last Day. Like Luther, he warns that Christians must yearn for that day: 'for the redemption of all of us is approaching according to Luke 21'.⁵⁶ Absent from Pastoris's tract is Luther's menacing tone towards the recalcitrant.

(v) After the conjunction

Dated Christmas Day 1524, Balthasar Wilhelm's *Practica* appeared some ten months after the great conjunction. He begins by stressing that 'the stars do not cause or govern future things, but are only signs, not of all and various future things, as astrology opines... but only of those [things] for which God has ordained them'.⁵⁷ Since scripture forbids astrology, the numerous prognostications in circulation cannot be trusted. People ignore the true 'conjunctions', i.e. the numerous scriptural texts which unanimously identify the papal Antichrist. They also neglect the 'signs of our times', which, 'even if they have not all been given and are a little delayed are certainly true and of the future'.⁵⁸ This is the first of several concessions which suggest that Wilhelm was uncertain about the imminence of the End.

Wilhelm points to five scriptural 'conjunctions' which warn of false prophets who, out of avarice, teach works righteousness. Nearly everyone will be led astray, which is so obvious 'that even the peasants notice it'.⁵⁹ There will also be war, plague, inflation and earthquakes. Those who stand by the gospel will encounter enmity and hatred. Christians, however, 'must be sanctified through persecution'. Although the false prophets love the flesh more than God, they are not easily recognised. Outwardly, in their clothing, words and works, they appear attractive. Yet 'they are like painted sepulchres'.⁶⁰ The fifth conjunction, 'the most powerful, which confirms and illuminates all the others', shows that the 'abomination of desolation', the 'son of perdition' - i.e. Antichrist - will occupy the holy places. Wilhelm concludes: 'I believe

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Aiii^v.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, Aii^r.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, Aii^r.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^r.

we can see before our eyes the abomination of desolation, and who the sons of perdition are, who commit freely and without punishment all sins and vice against God's commandment: that they are now primarily in those places which we call holy, such as churches and monasteries...'.⁶¹ He seems to suspect that this message lacks credibility: 'Mark here, you may not ask, or be amazed, about why that and that happens. Christ has predicted it all and so it must unfold thus.'⁶²

Like Luther, Wilhelm practises 'constructive' intimidation. St Peter has 'warned us most urgently, showing what will happen if we do not stop [sinning], giving weighty examples and the revelation of past history, from holy scripture.'⁶³ Both the Great Flood and the destruction of Sodom show what 'will happen on the day ... when God visits us on account of our sin.'⁶⁴ Numerous biblical examples of divine vengeance on the wicked serve to underline the point. Like Luther, Wilhelm argues that people are blind to the signs, and that 'swift destruction' must therefore follow, 'for this is what happens when people are least cautious, and everyone thinks there is no danger.'⁶⁵ Christ, the prophets and apostles have all warned that neglect of the signs of the End shows its imminence. Unlike Luther, however, he allows that he may have got it wrong. Nobody should scorn his prophecy, 'for they are not my words but God's'. However, he concedes, 'perhaps the measure of our fathers has not yet been filled, as Christ says in Matthew 23.'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, 'blessed is he' who is prepared when the Lord comes.

Finally, Wilhelm interprets the flood prediction:

And when I recall the great deluge, of which so much was spoken and prophesied, then I consider that it was a deluge such as the famine of which Amos the prophet spoke in Chapter 8 [8-11] and just like the same famine, which, before people became aware of it, gained ground, as is now the case, so the water of the godless crowd has so swamped and overwhelmed us, as did the natural water in the time of Noah, that nobody has the ability or power to restrain it, except those people alone who float and are preserved in the ark of the Christian community, through the one faith in Christ...⁶⁷

Amos 8 deals with God's threat of retribution on the people of Israel. The flood stands for the increase in evil by which they will be punished. The famine, the withholding of the 'words of the Lord', is the punishment. The 'water of the godless crowd' is the 'false' preaching of the Catholic clergy. Only through the ark, the gospel, can people avoid damnation, come the Last Judgment. What is remarkable is that, to clinch his case for the End, a vehement opponent of astrology speaks of a flood, even metaphorically. The conjunction, after all, was only a sign. This amounts to acceptance of the

⁶¹ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v.

⁶² *ibid.*, B^f.

⁶³ *ibid.*, B^f.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, B^v.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Biii^f.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Biii^f.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Biii^f-Biii^v.

astrological interpretation of the heavenly movements. Such inconsistency is revealing. Evidently aware that, for his audience, the Flood was the cardinal test of the authenticity of prophecies of impending doom, he sees a figurative reading as the best means of kindling eschatological fervour. The implicit tribute to the astrologers, doubtless unintended, testifies to a failure to persuade people that the signs of the End had been given.

Both Pastoris and Wilhelm share with Luther a keen awareness that popular trust in astrology hindered reception of their view of history. The very attempt to propagate Luther's case for the End through the *practica* - the astrologer's medium - reflects the power of hostile authority. Like Luther, Wilhelm sensed that people's belief that 'natural forces' caused the calamities of this world prevented them from fathoming the magnitude of God's wrath. Imbued with a sense of cosmic order, they refused to believe that the world stood at the edge of time. Both the Joachite tradition and astrology were the basis of an optimistic view of history. While Joachitism was the source of grandiose, but fathomable, visions of a better future, astrology answered to a fundamental need for protection against unbridled pessimism. It was easier to persevere in a hostile world if plague, disaster or war could be 'scientifically' explained. While accommodating the undeniable wrath of God, astrology also subjects it to comprehensible, reliable laws. Hence, reformers who wished to unleash that wrath with all its destructive consequences denounced astrologers as practitioners of an unchristian, indeed diabolical science. Paradoxically, fear of the End intensified for a brief period precisely because the Flood prediction was based upon a system of belief, the normal function of which was to offer comfort and consolation. Once the pessimistic reading of the conjunction proved mistaken, the brief period of panic came to an end. The non-fulfilment of the Flood prediction arguably lent a new lease of life to hopes of a better terrestrial future. There is doubtless a link between a widespread sense of delivery and the mood of expectation underlying the popular revolts of 1524/1525.

Underlying popular refusal to believe the signs, was a fundamental aversion towards the message which, allegedly, they carried. The panic stirred by the flood prediction shows that there was little disposition to await the End with glad expectation. Promising imminent eternal bliss, Luther could not accommodate the millenarian yearning to which he had initially appealed. He closed the gap which medieval prophecy had interposed between the confrontation with Antichrist and the End. It is little wonder that Pastoris identifies the Joachite promise of terrestrial renewal as the major obstacle to popular reception of 'the clear word of God'. His appeal to scripture will hardly have impressed his audience. To plead for recognition of the 'true' source of prophetic knowledge, while at the same time confronting people with its awful message, is not the best way to topple established authorities. Pastoris's attack on the late medieval melioristic tradition indicates that people were assessing current events within a Joachite framework.

(vi) The resilience of the meliorist tradition

Eberlin was no less concerned than Luther that his contemporaries failed to take the signs seriously. In his *Erfurt Sermon* (1524), written shortly after the great conjunction, he remarks:

God has shown his wrath so greatly this year..., in the stars, more than he has previously done in hundreds of years, all of which is mocked and scorned, or merely discussed in disputations and practica, pro and contra. There is nobody among them who comes forward with prayer and asks God for assistance.⁶⁸

Eberlin evidently considers the Flood debate an unhelpful diversion. He shares both Luther's view of the conjunction as a sign and his concern at the lack of respect for its message. He reprimands his audience: 'There are reliable signs of hunger and inflation, war and many deaths at our door, and we are singing and frolicking, overeating and romping, and are so mad that if the city were destroyed at one place, we would nevertheless dance and frolic, curse and overeat at another place...'.⁶⁹ Eberlin describes behaviour which may reflect a mood of defiance engendered by prophecies of doom, relief at the passing of the threat of inundation, or both. At all events, his remarks attest to a strong desire to make the most of this life, which for Luther was a sign of the End. Although Eberlin criticises people's refusal to take the signs seriously, for him they carry a different message. If people only turn to God for help, catastrophe can be averted. The *Erfurt Sermon* stresses that true faith will profit body, goods and soul.⁷⁰

Like Luther, Eberlin attacked the triumph of worldliness. In his *First Confederate* (1521), he complains that 'for many hundred years, because of God's special ordinance, it has been taught that the world is God, that Antichrist is Christ... that heresy is truth...'.⁷¹ Yet, whereas Luther turns his back on the world, Eberlin believes in its perfectibility. Announcing that 'it now pleases God that a Christian life for the whole world should begin in Germany, as once happened in Judea', he justifies his optimism: 'for many years a seed of all goodness has ripened imperceptibly; a subtle intellect and sharp and reasonable calculation; masterly work in all the crafts; the recognition of all writings and all the principal languages; the new and useful art of printing...'.⁷² For Luther, these achievements were signs of the End. To be sure, Eberlin's remarks pre-date both his own 'conversion' and Luther's *Christian Proof*. Yet later pamphlets attest to his unbroken optimism. The object of the struggle against Antichrist is not just to redeem souls, but also to save the world.

In a 1523 pamphlet, addressed to the council of Ulm, Eberlin propagates the establishment of a 'Christian order', the cornerstone of which is the dissolution of the

⁶⁸ ENDERS 3, p. 250.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 250.

⁷⁰ See below, p. 224

⁷¹ ENDERS 1, p. 4.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 3.

monasteries. He acknowledges that it will 'be difficult to expel Antichrist and his apostles and regime...'.⁷³ However, the preaching of the Word will ensure victory. Eberlin sees the defeat of Antichrist as the condition of a better world. He concludes that 'if a Christian order were established in Ulm, it would bring great profit to the whole country'.⁷⁴ In his *Friendly Letter* (1524) Eberlin again attacks the regular orders. God 'has recently sent out his Word against the kingdom of Antichrist', which is founded on 'self-devised divine service...'.⁷⁵ Like Luther, he sees the triumph of 'false' piety as a manifestation of divine wrath. For centuries 'God has concealed himself from us (through his own secret, terrible and just judgment)'. Eberlin denounces in equal measure the spiritual and the material burdens. In Antichrist's kingdom, 'our souls have been led astray and martyred, our body captured and our goods destroyed'.⁷⁶ Despite manifold devout exercises, 'body and soul have remained unsaved'. Now, however, the merciful God has 'sent his Word to us, to enlighten and save all the elect who are caught in the Antichristian regime, and to punish the Antichrist and his supporters in the monasteries, foundations and universities'.⁷⁷ Whoever opposes God's word should remember that 'it is in God's power to destroy your honour, cause illness to your body in several ways and harm your property through fire, flood or war, etc.'. The recalcitrant will know all about it 'when the evil day breaks upon you... *O deus averte iram tuam nobis*'.⁷⁸ Eberlin sees the manifestations of divine wrath - fire, flood or war - not as signs that God is about to destroy a world lost to sin, but as the punishment of those who stand in the way as much of terrestrial renewal as of the salvation of souls. Whereas Luther argues that the Last Day has been irrevocably provoked by the overabundance of evil, offering only the option of surviving the certain, final inferno through faith, Eberlin suggests that God may yet be mollified.

Whereas Luther stresses the antithesis between worldliness and the battle against the Devil, for Eberlin the interests of body and soul are harmonious, indeed identical. Whereas for Luther, the ultimate manifestation of God's mercy is his readiness to destroy the world, for Eberlin it is his willingness to spare it. When Luther complains that the paternoster is not prayed with the appropriate fervour, he is attacking a disposition which was not confined to his Catholic opponents. Nowhere in Eberlin's writings do we find that piercing note of eschatological urgency so characteristic of the Wittenberg reformer. The object of the battle against Antichrist is a better life on earth. Salvation, of course, is promised, but it is not on the immediate agenda. Theologically, Eberlin's Antichrist is Luther's; historically, Joachim's. This indicates that a fusion of the basic Joachite impulse - world renewal - with Luther's view of the papal church was possible. It suggests that even though people were unimpressed by the reformer's case for the End, the idea of the confrontation with Antichrist as a battle against 'works

⁷³ ENDERS 3, p. 30.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ ENDERS 3, p. 130.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

righteousness' was able to strike roots within the transcendental framework of the Joachite tradition.

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(4) The imperial ideal and the meaning that crisis of legitimation

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10. The Joachite legacy and the identification of Antichrist

Commenting on the evangelical debt to the medieval prophetic tradition, A. G. Dickens suggested that 'Luther rather than Charles V became the beneficiary of the Hohenstaufen emperors.'¹ Yet Dickens, I believe, greatly exaggerates the benevolence of the medieval tradition. The discernment of God's purpose always involved the attempt to comprehend current affairs in the light of what had been authoritatively foretold. The early 1520s witnessed a cumulation of portentous events which begged interpretation: the accession of Charles V; the revival of the Turkish threat; the election of a reforming pope; and, not least, Luther's emergence as an actor on the stage of history. Friend and foe alike saw him as a figure of eschatological stature.² While history unfolded in accordance with a preordained design, and its course could not be altered arbitrarily, prophecy did not provide a hard and fast account of things to come, but allowed, within certain limits, a number of options. With the exception of the Turk, any of the principal actors in the drama of salvation history could play either an heroic or a villainous part. The Emperor might be messianic hero, but also, according to a tradition dating from the days of Nero, Antichrist. The Roman pontiff could be an ungodly ruler and potential Antichrist or, alternatively, the Angelic Pope. For Luther, too, we shall see, prophecy offered two antithetical roles. However much people hated the papacy, their perception of the papal role was in some measure contingent upon their understanding of the parts played by other leading figures, all of whom had to be credibly accommodated in the great divine drama. The identification of Antichrist involved the attempt to resolve a complex historical equation.

(i) The imperial idea and the evangelical crisis of legitimisation

Following Luther's condemnation at Worms, pamphleteers had tried to present him as a loyal servant of the Emperor. In his *First Confederate* (1521), Eberlin had still hoped that God would soon 'enlighten' Charles. Eighteen months later, in his *Final Statement* (1522), he still denounces papal treachery in the spirit of imperial ideology. 'The Pope is cleverer than the Emperor, for the Pope has engaged mercenaries in all places, that is the priests...'. He can act against the laity because they are compelled to 'reveal all their thoughts' to the priests. Eberlin is galled by the attitude of the Emperor and princes to Luther: 'If anyone wants to help them, in relieving their conscience, or in the salutary government of their country, they do not want to accept loyal advice, and persecute their best friends as though they were their most wicked enemies'. Yet the fiction of Luther as the Emperor's willing servant can no longer be upheld. Since, for Eberlin, Luther's cause is ultimately the higher good, he can only wonder at the Emperor's blindness and prophesy doom to all those who oppose the reformer.³

¹ Dickens (1974), p. 1.

² Kurze (1960), p. 57; Lerner (1983), p.158.

³ ENDERS I, p. 188.

Like Eberlin, Heinrich von Kettenbach would have gladly confronted the papal Antichrist within the framework of papal-imperial conflict. Kettenbach, who could be called a 'Joachite Lutheran', is a millenarian whose assault on Rome echoes Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility*. His *Comparison* (1523) states that Antichrist's kingdom was 'set up by the first Pope who wanted to be above the Roman Emperor...'. While 'the Pope has become rich, the Emperor, kings, lords, princes and especially the knights have been destroyed...'.⁴ The Pope and clergy 'have stolen the Emperor's capital of Rome from him...'. They 'remove three tons of gold from Germany every year and will not allow the eagle to sit in his own nest, which is the Latin land.'⁵ The object of the battle against Antichrist is to restore medieval order, which will be accomplished

with the downfall of the papacy in Rome, when pope, bishops, priests, and monks are again servants and ministers of the church, and their servants, the Emperor, kings, lords, princes and nobility are again lords of the church. For it is to them and not to the clergy that authority has been given to rule over land and people. *Tu protege* is what has been said to each of them. But to the Pope and his tonsured men has been said, *tu supplex ora*, you must pray devoutly.⁶

Kettenbach compares scriptural passages with canon law texts. Covering a variety of themes, he deals first with the papal claim to precedence over the Emperor:

Christ says: My kingdom is not of this world John 18. The Pope: I am the ruler of the Emperor and the Emperor is my bailiff. I have taken the Empire from the Greeks and the French and have given it to the free Germans, so that they may be my servants and their property may be mine...⁷

Like Luther, Kettenbach also attacks the 'apparatus of medieval piety', denouncing it as the product of clerical greed. He propagates Luther's doctrine of justification, yet does not see the Church's teaching as the ultimate evil. Rather, it is one of several diabolical stratagems through which the papacy undermines the Empire. He assimilates Luther's reform of piety to a vision of world renewal to which the Wittenberg reformer had ceased to appeal.

Writing against the background of the Knight's Revolt, Kettenbach calls the nobility to arms. Yet he detects among Luther's earliest adherents, not just a disinclination to resort to force, but also a more fundamental disenchantment: 'You see... the Antichristian, devilish, heretical, knavish, simoniacal life, teaching and works of the Pope, and yet none of you speaks and writes against it.'⁸ He accuses the nobility of succumbing to intimidation. 'You see that this great mass is against Luther. The bishops and their tonsured men are obliged on oath to act against God. The cities fear

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 131, ll 9-10.

⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 131.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 132.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 148.

the emperor Nero. The princes have got their children and brothers who are waiting for or possess a fee from Antichrist...'.⁹

In identifying Charles V with Nero, Kettenbach oversteps the boundaries of good taste respected by most evangelical propagandists. His charge that the cities feared the Emperor also anticipates the theme of his *Practica* (1523). Written in advance of the Imperial Diet at Nuremberg, it appeals to the urban polities to support Luther. Like Luther, Kettenbach rejects all sources of prophetic knowledge other than scripture: 'since we have ... scripture for our instruction, I want, using the same, to write a *Practica*... and to leave astronomy aside...'.¹⁰ Stressing his concern for the Empire, Kettenbach issues 'a warning for the future and a reminder of the past'.¹¹ His theme is the rise and fall of kingdoms. The Germans, he prophesies, will lose the Empire and calamity will follow unless they change course.¹² In this pamphlet, he does not cast Charles V as Nero, but attacks imperial officials: 'Hear, therefore, poor Empire... Your wise men have given foolish counsel at the imperial Diet of Worms in the presence of the poor child, Charles, called Roman Emperor etc. (He is the Emperor, but his deputies rule)'.¹³ Kettenbach cites Isaiah 19, which records how, having accepted bad advice 'the king and his lords and his country fell into decay' and were defeated by their enemies. The counsellors 'attended only to their own interests, keeping their eyes neither on God nor on justice. And thus God let it come to pass that their counsel was foolish...'.¹⁴

Running through Kettenbach's pamphlet is the familiar idea that the Empire exists to maintain justice. If it fails, it has become redundant. Scripture states that 'for the sake of justice, the Empire will be transferred ... from one people to another, that is if men do not rule and govern according to the Word of God and his will'.¹⁵ Justice can only be realised by supporting Luther's battle against Antichrist.¹⁶ As evidence that this is the Empire's only option, Kettenbach cites the German defeat at the hands of the Bohemians - 'a sign that God is angered with us for not acting according to his Word'.¹⁷ God's word has now been revealed so that such humiliation can be avoided in the future. As if addressing those for whom the idea of Empire renewal lives only through hope in the person of the Emperor, he stresses their obligation to a greater emperor: 'The Jews, when they denied Christ, said: We have no other king but Caesar. But... we have the emperor Christ above Emperor, Pope and all kings...'. If Charles rejects the opportunity opened up by Luther, he will live to regret it: 'The Emperor and his brothers want to be blind and do not want the good fortune offered to them. They will, therefore, have to suffer much'.¹⁸ As well as dropping Charles V from the cast of his eschatological drama, Kettenbach also gives Luther a role which corresponds to the paradigm of the sleeping Emperor prophecy: 'Luther will be almost forgotten in several kingdoms, and the

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 184.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 187.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 192.

shaven heads will watch over his grave. But then he will rise again (like Christ). And he will terrify the Antichristian army, and defeat a great part of them, and will be valued again by the world as was the faith of Christ, after he had risen.¹⁹ The Christlike Luther supplants the Third Frederick as saviour of the Empire.

Kettenbach's pamphlets could perhaps have served as a bridge between the Joachite tradition and Luther. Yet they also reflect the difficulty of accommodating the Wittenberg reformer within a still influential view of history. The Emperor's condemnation of Luther was a problem not easily resolved. Kettenbach deals with it by distinguishing between the Empire, which will flourish only by following Luther, and the Emperor, the 'poor child' manipulated by wicked counsellors, his historical role prefigured by Nero. His attempt to set up Luther as an alternative Third Frederick, is the desperate ploy of a man all too aware that the popular apocalyptic tradition no longer worked in favour of his hero. Luther's 'resurrection' is the measure of, but not necessarily a solution to, the evangelical crisis of legitimisation. Charles V remained the more probable contender for the role of Sleeping Emperor. Both before and after Worms, he was frequently identified as the Third Frederick.²⁰ Peuckert argued that, for the peasants at least, he remained *the* messianic hero, and that in the revolt of 1525 they believed that they were acting in his cause and with his approval.²¹

(ii) Luther as Antichrist

Luther's rise to fame was facilitated by late medieval prophecies of a saintly reformer.²² He was widely identified with the 'little prophet' foretold in Lichtenberger's *Pronosticatio*.²³ Based on the 1484 conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, the prediction is ambiguous. The 'little prophet' will interpret scripture anew and change the Church's ceremonies. Although learned, he will not benefit Christendom, but cause tumult. Lichtenberger declares that his advent will fulfil the warning of Matthew 24.11.²⁴ The accompanying illustration identifies the 'little prophet' as Antichrist. Creatively interpreted, however, the prophecy could be applied positively to Luther.²⁵ At all events, opponents and adherents alike invoked it. On the evangelical side, Melancthon, a supporter of astrologogy, linked Luther's birth to the 1484 conjunction. That this required the 'correction' of his actual year of birth - 1483 - merely attests to the power of the prophecies in question.²⁶ For his opponents, Luther was the obvious Antichrist, although, presumably deferring to the Church's long term view of history, they often cast him as *figura Antichristi*.²⁷ Luther was well aware that his role appeared to fulfil dire prophetic warnings. In his *Faithful Admonition to Avoid Uproar and Tumult* (1522),

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁰ Cf. Kampers (1969), pp. 143-144; Lerner (1983), pp. 172-4; Vaughan (1954), p. 107.

²¹ Peuckert (1966), p. 161.

²² Cf. Scribner (1990), p. 75, and Strauss (1995), pp. 12-13.

²³ Peuckert (1966), 618.

²⁴ Kurze (1960), 26-27; Talkenberger (1990), p. 66.

²⁵ Cf. Kurze (1958), pp. 71-72.

²⁶ Warburg (1979), p. 219.

²⁷ Cf. Lerner (1983), p. 158, and Smolinsky (1983), p. 255.

he declares that the Devil had caused several prophecies to be made against him.²⁸ He may have had Lichtenberger in mind.²⁹

One of several pamphlets to acknowledge public confusion over Luther's historical role is the 1522 dialogue, *Discord*. The speakers include a layman, a priest, and five biblical figures, through whom the author attempts to bring the bible to life, mainly as a prophetic authority. The layman remarks that 'one man says that Luther is right, the other that the Pope is right'. The priest repeatedly stresses that an illiterate layman cannot decide such issues. The biblical speakers, however, argue that the clergy cannot be trusted. Christ intervenes: 'not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father.' Paul issues a warning with strong eschatological overtones: Now we beg you, brethren, concerning the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our assembling here to meet him, not to be quickly shaken in mind, or excited either by spirit, or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us. Let no one deceive you in any way...'. The layman is reluctant to believe that the clergy would deceive him. Paul then warns of 'seducing spirits' who, 'in the Last Days will deviate from the faith', forbidding marriage and commanding abstinence from food. In each case, the layman draws the 'right' conclusions. 'This prophecy has already been fulfilled, for the priests no longer have wives.' 'It is truly [the Pope and clergy], for they have forbidden the eating of meat and eggs at certain times'.³⁰

The priest again criticises the layman's lack of understanding. The latter exclaims 'I would gladly know who the enemy is... Luther or the Pope, so that I will know how to protect myself'. Christ now speaks of false prophets who will lay heavy burdens on men's shoulders, but will not move them themselves [Matt. 23.4]. Here, too, the layman recognises the application to the clergy: 'for they have forbidden meat although they themselves eat it ...'. Christ assures him that 'you will know them by their fruits. Matthew 7. [20]'.³¹ The layman interprets this as referring to clerical greed. The clergy do not live from tithes alone, but charge fees for spiritual services. Christ again warns that 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and hypocrites, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven'. Anxious lest he too be excluded, or even 'follow Antichrist and succumb to his seduction', the layman asks for advice on how to recognise him. The dialogue continues:

Paul: He will be exalted and honoured above all things that are God. He will sit in God's temple and show himself as though he were God. II Thess. 2.

Layman: Perhaps it is the Pope? He sits in St Peter's church in Rome and is called a god on earth, and is honoured and exalted, so that it is necessary to carry him, and to call him the holiest of the holy, and to kiss the earth before his feet, and to kiss his feet...³²

²⁸ Peuckert (1966), p. 621.

²⁹ On Luther's contrary statements on Lichtenberger's reliability, see Lerner (1983), pp. 164-165.

³⁰ SCHADE 3 p. 208.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 209.

³² *ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

At this point, the priest threatens to refuse the layman absolution. The latter answers: 'But you are not going to make a liar of Paul.' The priest insists: 'you must understand him correctly. He meant Luther.'³³ The layman, however, persuaded that Luther seeks only to uphold the 'law of the gospel', decides in his favour.

In denouncing the Church, the author of *Discord* presents 'new' prophetic evidence of clerical deception - celibacy and mandatory fasting - while at the same time appealing to 'traditional' anticlericalism. The idea that the clergy should live from tithes alone was a recurring theme in popular prophecy. Similarly, in attacking the exaltation of the Pope the author builds on medieval criticism of papal ambition in the secular sphere. However, as his acknowledgement of lay 'confusion' indicates, he was aware that the public was now divided over Luther. Although he alludes to Catholic attempts to cast the reformer as Antichrist, he does not consider the case against him, but relies on attack as the best means of defence.

One pamphlet which answers Catholic charges is the dialogue, *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*. The anonymous author begins by stressing that scripture is the true source of prophetic knowledge. The Devil, disguised as a Dominican, visits Martin. The latter is translating the new testament - 'for the benefit of the poor layman, so that... he may beware of the papist Antichristians, false prophets...'.³⁴ Arguing that Martin himself is the false prophet and Antichrist, the Devil denounces him for disdainning established authority: 'Neither the Devil, the holy father the Pope, bishops, Emperor, princes or lords can detract you from your purpose. You are the second Pharaoh, the very Balaam, as Emser calls you...'.³⁵ By including the Emperor in this diabolical alliance, the author implicitly acknowledges the hostility of the medieval apocalyptic tradition. His aim is to refute the charge that Luther's disobedience to the Church reflects an insufficient faith. Pharaoh recognised the spirit of God only after Joseph had interpreted his dream;³⁶ Balaam saw the angel of the Lord only after his ass had spoken.³⁷

Martin maintains that he has done nothing but preach Christ's word, for which reason 'I am a Pharaoh in the eyes of the clergy (at least in respect of their chests and money, kitchens and cellars): or rather not I, but Christ through me'.³⁸ The clergy hate scripture because it harms their interests. Martin defends his refusal to reach some accommodation with the papal Church. The 'proposals made to me so far' are all 'against my saviour'. The Word 'cannot be subjected to the power of man'.³⁹ The Devil argues that, in 'referring to the pious holy father as Antichrist', Martin has gone too far: 'Now you are not a god, but rather a poor friar like me. And so you cannot see into the Pope's heart. It is as if you thought that you were the Pope'.⁴⁰ The Devil concludes:

³³ *ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁴ BENTZINGER, p. 318.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 318-319.

³⁶ Cf. Genesis 41.

³⁷ Cf. Numbers 22-24.

³⁸ BENTZINGER, p. 319.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 321.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 321.

'Peter and Paul were right to say... There will come false prophets who will be destructive, arrogant and avaricious. Your own power has become so far-reaching, about which Daniel speaks so finely... that nobody dares to resist you. Verily, you are in my opinion the son of destruction, of whom Paul speaks'.⁴¹ Answering that all of these prophecies apply to the clergy, Martin continues:

Whether I am the monk about whom the prophecy was made I'll let God decide... As far as my works are concerned: the tree reveals where the Antichrists are, Matthew 7 [17-20], Luke 6 [43-44]. I do not need Prophecy. Christ prophesied correctly to me and explained how Antichrist will rule'.⁴²

The Devil has not hitherto mentioned a prophecy about a monk. Yet the author is surely thinking of Lichtenberger's 'little prophet', who would seem to have personified the scriptural warnings which the Catholic party was now applying to Luther. The very obliqueness of the allusion suggests that the identification with Luther was so familiar that it needed no explanation. The prophecy, it seems, had started to work against him. Martin's remark that he does not 'need Prophecy' is an attempt to dismiss medieval prophetic tradition as a criterion of legitimisation.

Lichtenberger had warned that the 'little prophet' would cause upheaval. The author seeks to exonerate Luther of this charge. Martin declares: 'It is another who drives the wheel. It is not possible for a man to overthrow Antichrist, the Pope. Rather it must be done through the mouth of God, and it has been. Daniel 6 [25] and II Thessalonians 2 [8]: But he shall be broken without hand.' It is the Devil who has stirred up the people in order to protect his interests. These tactics show that the clergy are panicking. However, as foreseen in scripture, they will fail: 'The Pope's mouth, the bishops, priest and monks and all Antichrists of the gospels are frozen with fear. They do not know where to turn. They fear that the water will burst its banks. Their heart is sad and fearful, afraid of a rustling leaf. Leviticus 16.' In calling the Pope Antichrist, Martin declares, he has only asked for the tree to be judged by its fruit.⁴³

The Devil accuses Martin of judging and condemning others, in contravention of scripture. Responding with the standard appeal to Matthew 18, Martin emphasises his lowly role: 'My mother conceived and bore me in sin. There is no justice in us. All our dealings are in God. Nobody may follow me. Christ is the one they should follow.' Scripture has revealed the clergy's 'Antichristian works'. The prophets and evangelists have 'portrayed very clearly how ... kings, princes, Emperor and bishops have had to subject themselves to the Pope...'⁴⁴ Echoing the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, this indicates that evangelical propagandists could still hope to score points by appealing to long-standing resentment of papal pretensions to secular power.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 324.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 326.

Martin now accuses the clergy of denying that all men can be saved by Christ.⁴⁵ The Devil replies that he should nonetheless 'have defended his holiness'. Martin, however, declares that 'if I want to be Christ's messenger, then my teaching must be such that everything, even death, the Devil and hell is my enemy. Otherwise, God is not with me'.⁴⁶ The collapse of papal authority confirms the justice of his 'patient' opposition to Roman tyranny: 'Now you can see how the Pope's mouth has been stopped with a divine bolt. Now they have their reward for corrupting the poor people and making consciences sad and doubting towards God...'.⁴⁷ Declaring that Karsthans and Kegelhans, now realise that the sole object of works righteousness was money, Martin continues:

Is this not the true work of Antichrist, through which they have led us away from faith in Christ to faith in works, attracting us by distorting scriptures, denying God, indeed not recognising him, and making a liar of him, and leading the people to their works? We want, however, to tear their human monetary chains apart, as Samson rent his ropes, Judges 15[14].⁴⁸

The Devil, however, argues that Martin's hostility to good works reveals him as Antichrist. Martin replies that people 'trusted too much in these and still do so, and are so attached to them, that it is impossible to lead them away from them. Thus many souls have been led to the Devil...'.⁴⁹ Alluding now to the imminence of the End, he reminds his audience of what is at stake: 'But there is still time to stop: Christ is raising the axe and is going to cut down the tree. He creeps about like a thief in the night, Matthew 25 [24.43], Luke 13 [12.39], Mark 13 [32ff].⁵⁰ By means of these eschatological images the author suggests that conversion is a matter of urgency. The discussion turns to the subject of faith and works. In the end, the Devil credits Martin with having forced him to reveal his true identity. Martin, however, gives this honour to God, reiterating his reason for rejecting papal authority: the Pope uses his illegitimate power to damn Christians and would even expect Christ to kiss his feet. God, however, 'wants to set up a sheep fold and a shepherd. John 10. Those sheep will be saved who hear his voice.'⁵¹

The author of *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell* clearly took Catholic charges against Luther seriously. His refutation allows us construct a profile of Luther as Antichrist. Significantly, he identifies both Luther's 'destructiveness' and the 'falsity' of his teaching as the telling eschatological characteristics. The reformer's arrogance and obstinacy, his usurpation of legitimate papal authority, his disobedience to the Emperor, all count against him. Even the fact he enjoyed a degree of popular support is a two-edged sword, for it was known that Antichrist would win a large following. Luther's assault on 'works righteousness' completed the picture. The author was aware that all of

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 327.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 327.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 329.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 329.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 335.

these elements spoke for the veracity of Lichtenberger's warning. Although the identification of Luther with the 'little prophet' had initially contributed to public recognition, it now offered an escape route for those reconsidering their early enthusiasm.

(iii) The Antichrist debate and the re-emergence of the Turk

On April 29th, 1521, Belgrade fell to the Turks. Germany was struck by fear of invasion, which is reflected in copious literature 'against the Turk'.⁵² For evangelical propagandists the issue was difficult to handle. Widespread fear of invasion threatened to undermine Luther's argument - advanced in his *Address to the Christian Nobility* - that Roman tyranny was a more urgent problem than the Turk. Yet the reformers were reluctant to endorse military action. In his *Ninety-Five Theses* Luther had argued that to fight the Turk was to resist God's judgment on men's sins.⁵³ Although, by the end of the 1520s, he would abandon this position, even considering the possibility that the Turk and the Pope were jointly Antichrist, in the earlier part of the decade neither he nor leading adherents could support a campaign against the infidel.⁵⁴ Apart from the fact that the Turk was an unwelcome contender for the role of Antichrist, the crusade stood in a tradition of holiness which they rejected out of hand.

In his *Final Statement* (1522), Eberlin attacks the crusade. Addressing the nobility, he praises them for resisting the diabolical temptation of confession, fasting and the monastic estate. Yet they, too, are victims of the Devil's 'subtle snare'. By establishing military orders, they have 'formed a sect to help Antichrist'. Crusading, however, cannot be justified. 'God forbids the shedding of men's blood'. Likewise, 'Christ forbids above all things the use of the sword in his name'. To 'do battle against the enemies of God and of Christendom' is not to honour God, but to serve the Devil, who appeals to the nobility's greed and to their bellicose disposition. He has persuaded them that 'everything the enemy possesses may be taken from him...'. To camouflage the evil of war, 'he teaches us to fight against the infidel, not as against our enemies, but as against God's enemies.' In particular, the Devil wants the military orders to display the cross, so that the 'unjust, unchristian shedding of blood should gain a good appearance'.⁵⁵

What appals Eberlin is that 'false' holiness legitimates the pursuit of material profit and military adventure. Quite different is the standpoint of the anonymous 1522 dialogue, *Türkenbüchlein*,⁵⁶ There are four speakers: two Christians - a hermit and a Hungarian - and two Moslems - a Turk and a Gypsy. Although the author does not explicitly identify the Turk as Antichrist, he imputes to him the two definitive characteristics: deception and tyranny. As the dialogue opens, the Moslems discuss

⁵² Vaughan (1954), pp. 135ff.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on Luther's attitude to the Turk, see Headley (1963), pp. 244ff.

⁵⁵ ENDERS 1, pp. 191-192. Although the *Final Statement* is often listed as a 1521 publication, it cannot have been written before late 1522. See LAUBE 2, p. 1049

⁵⁶ *Turcken puechlein* (n.p. 1522)

whether to ambush the two Christians. The Turk, however, commends the example of his emperor, who has deviously spared Christians in order to conceal his true intentions. 'Whoever wants to catch birds, should not begin by casting stones at them.'⁵⁷ The discussion of this diabolical strategy continues upon the arrival of the hermit and the Hungarian. Both Christians stress that the Turk rules oppressively, once his regime is firmly established. Repeatedly, the implicit equation with Antichrist is underlined with stories of the Turk's cruelty. The author cannot, however, conceal a certain admiration for the enemy. The Turks were widely believed to have an exemplary system of secular government. Luther speaks of its renown in his *Address to the Christian Nobility*.⁵⁸ The author of the *Türkenbüchlein* believes that Turkish victories have been won through resolute avoidance of those very faults which lame the Empire. If the Germans are to defeat the Turk, they first must learn from him.⁵⁹ The author's message is that a successful crusade depends on the establishment of 'a common reformation and better order than heretofore'. This would be 'highly disagreeable' to the Turks, for 'our cattle would then become fat again and... [theirs] would decline ...'.⁶⁰

Although the Empire's present weakness is due partly to the vice and greed of the laity,⁶¹ the Pope and clergy are the main culprits. Intensely anti-Roman, the author applauds the Bohemians for disputing the claim of the bishop of Rome to papal dignity. Neither Christ nor St. Peter ever went there.⁶² At one point, the Turk quips that many Christians would rather accept 'my emperor as a widely renowned, just and warlike lord', given the financial burdens imposed by the Pope and secular rulers.⁶³ Yet although the author compares Roman and Turkish tyranny, he approves of the papacy as an institution. Roman ambition, however, must be checked. By pressing unlawful claims against the Emperor, the Pope divides Christians.⁶⁴ The Turk explains the weakness of Christendom: 'you have not got two equal heads as Christ your prophet taught ... though it would be more profitable to have one...'.⁶⁵ If here, the author appears to envisage merging both offices under the Emperor, an idea seriously entertained by Maximilian I, his real concern is that the two powers, properly balanced, unite to defend Christendom. The hermit warns that if the Turk continues to persecute Christians, Charles V, assisted by 'papal holiness' and other Christian kings and communities', will drive their enemies back beyond Constantinople.⁶⁶ Co-operation between the two powers is essential. In the interest of co-ordinated policy, Pope and Emperor should keep permanent envoys at each other's courts.⁶⁷

As well as subverting imperial power, the Pope and clergy hinder the crusade in other ways, above all by refusing to take up arms themselves. This is forbidden in laws

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, A3^v.

⁵⁸ Strauss (1986), p. 200.

⁵⁹ *Turcken puechlein*, Fii^r and *passim*.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, C iii^v.

⁶¹ Cf. esp. *ibid.*, Ciii^r, Eiii^r-Eiii^v, Fii.

⁶² *ibid.*, Diii^r.

⁶³ *ibid.*, B^r-B^v.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, [Biv]^r.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Eii^v-Eiii^r.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Fiii^r-Fiii^v.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, [Giv]^r.

which they 'have made more for [their]...own good than for love or fear of God's gospel'.⁶⁸ More generally, the clergy hinder that love and unity among Christians without which the Turkish tyrant cannot be defeated.⁶⁹ The heavy burdens imposed on the people hinder the financing of a crusade. The clergy, moreover, are too numerous, while their rule of celibacy is against the common good. The Turk observes: 'I have also heard that the... clergy, who can be found among you in great and superfluous numbers, take no wives, to the ruin of your country, so that all the goods which they have will remain [theirs] in perpetuity...'.⁷⁰ By contrast, the Turkish emperor keeps fewer clergy, who are obliged to marry and go to war. On their death their fees revert to him, although provision is made for their children.⁷¹

Despite its anti-Roman, anticlerical tenor, the *Türkenbüchlein* is hostile to the evangelical movement. It contains a single, disparaging reference to 'die lutherischen'. The hermit calls for preaching against the Turk. The Hungarian is sceptical, 'given that the Lutherans say that we Christians should not defend ourselves, according to the teaching of the gospel'.⁷² This objection, however, is dismissed out of hand: 'I do not share your opinion, especially as Christ was at times angry, and hit out, and likewise St Peter, when he cut off the Jew's ear...'. Given that Christ reproved Peter, this text [Luke 22.50-51] may seem badly chosen. Yet what is important is the author's subjective conviction, evident throughout the *Türkenbüchlein*, that his views accord fully with scripture. Despite his agreement with Luther on the issue of clerical celibacy, moreover, he is blissfully unaware of the peril of 'works righteousness'. Commenting on the Turk's suggestion that the Bohemians are the weak flank of Christendom, the Hungarian insists that they are 'Christians like us'. Among other things, 'they consider those who fail to fast on a Friday blasphemous and foolish'. To defeat the Turk, it will be necessary to hold masses and processions asking for God's mercy and to fast once a week.⁷³

The *Türkenbüchlein*'s endorsement of clerical leadership in war suggests that its author belonged to a military order, or at least to the nobility. It was to this group that Eberlin appealed in his *Final Statement*. We can therefore compare evangelical arguments with the views of a target audience, a rare opportunity. Like evangelical propaganda, the *Türkenbüchlein* fiercely attacks papal pretensions to secular power, the financial burdens on the German nation and even clerical celibacy. The author also sympathises with the Hussites, whom evangelical propagandists claimed as forerunners. Yet this was not a productive 'point of contact' with the evangelical party. Despite common ground, the author of the *Türkenbüchlein* rejects Luther because he cannot be accommodated within a view of the purpose of history which is clearly moulded by the late medieval prophetic tradition. Eberlin's assertion that to fight against the Turk is to support Antichrist turns traditional assumptions on their head. He rails against an enterprise, the urgent need for which was apparent, and which had generally been

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, [Biv]^v.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, Eii^f-Eii^v.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, Eii^v.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, Ciii^v-[Civ]^f.

⁷² *ibid.*, Gii^v: '... so die Luterischen sagen/ wir Cristen sollen vns nit weren/ nach lere der Euangelium...'.
⁷³ *ibid.*, Gii^v.

thought of as the ultimate fulfilment of prophecies of deliverance. The two authors could hardly have been further apart. For the one, the treachery of Pope and clergy manifested itself in their failure vigorously to pursue war against the infidel; for the other, it is their very championship of this goal which reveals the diabolical nature of the papal regime.

Although the *Türkenbüchlein* propagates the standpoint of a distinct interest group, it also appeals to a familiar view of history. In 1524, Eberlin included it in a list of 'lewd' pamphlets whose influence he deplored.⁷⁴ Unlike evangelical reformers, the author was at least proposing to tackle a widely feared danger. Regardless of whether the Turkish threat evoked so 'conservative' a reaction among the public at large, it surely weakened the case against Rome. The spectre of the Turk moves through evangelical propaganda. Chilling analogies between the clergy and the infidel serve to underline the perils of papal religion. Eberlin, for example, in his *Erfurt Sermon* (1524), exhorts his audience to assist those who, 'imprisoned in the kingdom of Antichrist', are 'unable to hear a sermon from the kingdom of God'.

If we were true brothers...we would make every possible attempt to rescue them, more than if they were held captive by the Turks and heathen. For a fearful conscience, imprisoned by many laws, is more unbearable than the power of any Turk, as many more Christians have discovered who have also been tormented in the kingdom of darkness.⁷⁵

Eberlin's attempt to claim for the evangelical cause the lustre of the crusade suggests that the impact of his earlier denunciation of war against the infidel was probably slight. It also reflects where, in the view of his audience, the real danger lay. If the reformers' identification of the papacy with Antichrist was to gain credence, it was necessary to inspire fear of the papacy, not merely to harness hatred. People had to feel 'tormented in the kingdom of darkness'.

The 1523 Erfurt dialogue, *Father and Son*, illustrates the problem facing evangelical propagandists. Both C. S. Meyer and A. G. Dickens have drawn attention both to the pamphlet's anticlerical tenor and to the author's grasp of Luther's doctrine of justification.⁷⁶ More significant, however, is the apocalyptic framework within which the author makes his case against the Church. His aim is to prove that the papacy is more dangerous than the Turk. In the opening lines, the Son remarks that 'if we had to have false preachers to corrupt us... it would have been better to have had the Turks.' Startled, the Father remarks that 'the Turks would murder us horribly...'. The Son replies that the Turks kill only the body. False preachers, however, 'lead body and soul away from God our Saviour.'⁷⁷ The clergy have failed to turn sinners from their evil ways. The Father protests: 'But they have a lot to say about great sins. Indeed they alert us and teach us to flee sin...'. The Son responds that they do not do so correctly, but

⁷⁴ Cf. above, p. 44.

⁷⁵ ENDERS 3, p. 247.

⁷⁶ Meyer (1967), pp. 82-84; Dickens (1974), pp. 129-131.

⁷⁷ CLEMEN 1, p. 26.

‘teach us to help ourselves, as though we did not need Christ...’.⁷⁸ Paul foretells [II Timothy 2] ‘that in the Last Days there will come men who are lovers of self, of their own intellect and pride, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it...’. Mark 13.22 warns that they would even corrupt the elect.⁷⁹ These prophecies, which are now being fulfilled, refer to indulgences and memorial masses.⁸⁰ Scripture, however, prophesies that the clergy will forfeit their role as pastors. ‘Thus Christ spoke to the Pharisees in Matthew 21: The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.’⁸¹ The Father asks why the pastors have not preached God’s word. Like the children of Israel, the Son explains, ‘we have deserved this through our sins’. Hence Zachariah 11 warns: ‘I am raising up a shepherd in the land who will not seek the wandering, heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones.’⁸²

Here, appealing to scriptural prophecy, the author propagates Luther’s view of ‘works righteousness’ as the manifestation of divine wrath. Yet although evangelical propagandists present new evidence of clerical iniquity, they also invoke familiar arguments. Having identified the danger, the author stresses the need for immediate action:

It is therefore high time to pray with a true faith that God will let his light, which is he, shine upon us poor lambs again so that we do not do as God complained in Jeremiah 2 [13]: My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, a fountain of living waters and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. These are indeed human laws which do not bring salvation.⁸³

This interpretation of Jeremiah 2.13 as applying to the clergy’s abandonment of God’s law is also found in Lichtenberger’s *Pronosticatio*.⁸⁴ Building on the ‘medieval’ anticlerical tradition, the author now appeals to ‘economic’ grievances. The Son stresses that false doctrine and financial tyranny go hand in hand, always invoking the testimony of the prophets. Pointing out that scripture ‘contains many such passages’, he advises his father to ‘buy a bible now that it has been translated by Martin.’⁸⁵ Here, it should be stressed, scripture is recommended as a prophetic authority. The Father, however, hesitates: ‘you attach more importance to the gospel than is advisable... The pastor... does not support the Martinist side. And he might hear us and ban us and give us to the Devil.’⁸⁶ Conscious that the priesthood’s perceived power over souls stemmed enthusiasm for the evangelical party, the author reminds his audience how, in contravention of scripture, the ban is used as an instrument of financial oppression,

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁸⁴ See Kurze (1960), p. 26.

⁸⁵ CLEMEN 1, p. 34.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 40.

whereupon the father promises to buy a bible. The Son encourages him: 'follow the bible and you will live, even if you should be persecuted by Pope, bishops, the Emperor, the Devil and men... Paul says in II Timothy 3 [12]: All those who desire to live devoutly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution...'.⁸⁷ By placing the Emperor in diabolical company, the author subtly attacks that part of the medieval tradition which no longer favoured the evangelical party. Linking Charles V with the burdens on common people, he attempts to tarnish his heroic aura.

(iv) Hadrian VI - Antichrist or Angelic Pope?

Medieval prophecies foresaw not just the violent chastisement of the clergy but also the renewal of the Church. Lichtenberger foretold the advent of a pious pontiff whose brief reign - four years - would prepare the ground for a series of Angelic popes:

afterwards a Hermit will arise known for his great sanctity. As Joachim says...: 'A man in great sanctity lifted up to the Roman throne like an apostle... He will condemn plural benefices and incomes and will command that clerics live from tithes and offerings. He will forbid ostentatious clothing and all unseemly choruses and songs, and will bid the gospel be preached.'⁸⁸

This avenue of hope was closed off by Luther's view of the papacy as corporative Antichrist. Yet whether this novel concept caught on at a popular level is difficult to say. The view that the clergy were collectively responsible for the ills of the world perhaps favoured reception. However, the notion of a personal Antichrist was so deep-rooted that people may not have abandoned it quickly. If that is the case, the brief pontificate (1522-1523) of a German pope - Hadrian VI - may have contributed further to the difficulties of evangelical reformers.⁸⁹

Kettenbach, whose *Comparison*, appeared during Hadrian's pontificate, evidently believed that the evangelical assault on the papal Antichrist had yet to bear fruit. 'Many people', he complains, still 'await... Antichrist, although his kingdom has been established for many hundred years...'.⁹⁰ Their blindness is like that of the Jews, who failed to recognise the Messiah. Pointing to a series of 'wicked' popes - Hadrian's immediate predecessors - Kettenbach attempts to convey the notion of a corporative Antichrist:

Antichrist is the name of many successive rules in their kingdom and not the particular name of one person. Thus one Antichrist will be called Alexander, the next Julius and then Leo, and the like. He will be called the most holy

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁸ McGinn (1979), p. 274.

⁸⁹ Born in Utrecht, Hadrian counted as German. On his pontificate, see Kelly (1986), pp. 258-259.

⁹⁰ CLEMEN 2, p. 131.

and his ordinances will be more highly regarded than God's ordinances, as Paul tells us...⁹¹

The name of the reigning pontiff is not included, arguably because it would have weakened Kettenbach's case. As a German, Hadrian was a less easy target for anti-Roman polemic than his Italian predecessors. During his short reign, he set about tackling abuse at the Curia and attempted, unsuccessfully, to organise a defensive war against the Turk.⁹² Significantly, people had access to information about his life and deeds.

The *Dialogue on Pope Hadrian's Entry* (1522) sets Hadrian up as a figure of hope. The author's attitude towards Luther is ambivalent. Acknowledging that Luther's teaching is correct, he nevertheless criticises his hostility towards authority. The dialogue begins on the road to Rome, where, meeting a 'courtesan' (i.e. papal bureaucrat), the abbot asks for news of Hadrian. The 'courtesan' answers that he is 'far too pious'. By abolishing reserved benefices, he has frustrated his career plans. 'Everything that I acquired from the pious Pope Leo is no use to me anymore. I have wasted my time and money and must now live on a poor chaplaincy with which I could hardly keep a cat, let alone a virgin...'⁹³ Such damning criticism is praise indeed. Continuing in this vein, the dialogue emphasises Hadrian's unassuming piety and his determination to end all pomp, worldliness and traffic in benefices. The author repeatedly links Hadrian's virtues to his nationality. The 'courtesan' complains: 'And so we have got a German pope with whom nobody is able to get on. He has got a German head and is a theologian. He would be better fitted to rule a charterhouse than papacy.'⁹⁴

The author fears that Luther's agitation will foster social conflict and cause 'great shedding of blood'.⁹⁵ Hadrian, on the other hand, will ensure that the papacy reassumes its proper role. For this reason the 'courtesan' sees the new pope as Antichrist:

All triumph and pomp will end, and the great papal authority to which kings and princes and lords were subject will disappear. I believe that this Hadrian is the beast whom John saw in the desert.... Oh, when I recall the great power and magnificent triumphs of the most holy fathers Alexander, Julius and Leo and then look at the lousy beggardom of this beast, my heart could break.⁹⁶

This is a message of hope in the capacity of the papal church to reform itself.⁹⁷ It could perhaps have been read as the fulfilment of Lichtenberger's prophecy. Yet even if the

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 132.

⁹² Vaughan (1954), p. 109.

⁹³ CLEMEN 3, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ For further evidence of hope in Hadrian, see Talkenberger (1990), p. 240.

brief career of a single pious pope did not suffice to restore public confidence in the papacy, to cast such a man in the role of Antichrist was, as Kettenbach evidently appreciated, to strain credulity, especially when we consider the main thrust of his case against the papacy:

See how your property has been impoverished and destroyed. The wicked clergy possess everything. Though they ought to be servants and beggars, they have become your masters. You address the abbots, deans and mad monks as gracious lord. Indeed, many abbots are princes and ride out like princes, and yet they have made vows of poverty. If that is not deceit and the work of Antichrist, then no Antichrist will ever come, or will ever be.⁹⁸

If, as Kettenbach appears to suspect, the laity's main grievance was their sense of servitude to the overmighty clerical estate, the case for seeing Rome as the seat of Antichrist had surely been weakened.

(v) The power of the Joachite tradition

The Joachite tradition initially gave, and later robbed Luther of, legitimacy. Up to 1521, his denunciation of Rome was sanctioned by the imperial idea as elaborated in late medieval apocalyptic literature. People saw his assault on the papacy as the fulfilment of authoritative prophecies of terrestrial renewal. Once he began to preach the End, it was much more difficult to show that his reformation was 'all of God's ordaining'. Evangelical propagandists failed to establish scripture as the sole source of prophetic knowledge. The signs carried much less weight than astrology, which, reinforcing people's belief in cosmic order, made it difficult for evangelical propagandists to persuade people that the Second Coming was at hand. Visions of a new age retained their captivating hold on the common people. Against the background of events in the 1520s, Luther's revolt seemed less heroic, his charges against the papacy less plausible. He himself lost prestige both through disobedience to the Emperor and through his assault on Catholic piety. The negative reading of the 'little prophet' prophecy gained force. At the same time the dramatic re-entry of the Turk onto the stage of history and the election of a pious German pope combined to undermine the credibility of his case against Rome. While these factors deprived Luther of the cloak of legitimacy which he had so effortlessly assumed, it is conceivable that many of those who remained loyal to him assimilated his Antichrist to the Joachite scheme of world renewal.

⁹⁸ CLEMEN 2, p. 146.

PART IV

THE DOCTRINAL CONFLICT

11. Alternative paths to salvation

(i) Justification - the conflicting views of theologians

The credibility both of the Luther image and of the evangelical reading of prophecy depended to some extent on the appeal of the teaching which the reformers sought to propagate and, no less, on their ability to verify it in the face of stiff opposition. Luther's assault on the Church was a particularly acrimonious episode in a theological debate on justification dating back to the fifth century conflict between Augustine and Pelagius. At issue was the resolution of certain tensions inherent in Christian belief: Scripture spoke both of a merciful and of a just God. It promised salvation to those who obeyed God's commandments and yet portrayed him as a sovereign power who could not be placed under obligation to man. As a consequence of original sin, man was utterly dependent on the gift of grace. And yet the alternatives of eternal reward or punishment at least implied that man had the power to choose good over evil, that he possessed 'free will'. Pelagius's teaching on justification, which aimed to promote moral responsibility, emphasised obedience to scriptural precepts and, as Augustine saw it, diminished the role of grace and the sovereignty of God. For his part, Augustine stressed man's total dependence on grace. The merit which counted before God was imparted by him, and was not the Christian's own work. In defence of divine sovereignty, he emphasised the idea of predestination. While leaning towards Augustine, the medieval Church steered a course between these two positions. Pelagius was condemned, Augustine's teaching on the necessity of grace moderated, his emphasis on predestination dropped. The official view of justification was heavily influenced, not just by Augustine's anti-Pelagian, but also by his anti-Donatist, writings. The Donatists had denied the validity of sacraments administered by a sinful priest. Augustine answered that their efficacy as channels of grace depended, not on the priest, but on the holiness of the united, institutional Church. In effect, his doctrine on the necessity of grace was subordinated to his ecclesiology.¹

The dominant soteriology of the late middle ages was the *via moderna* - the teaching of Occam and Biel, which was based on the dialectic of the two powers, 'absolute' and 'ordained' power. The former refers to God's uncircumscribed power to do anything; the latter to what he had freely chosen to do. *De potentia absoluta* God could save or damn man as wished, by whatever means which he saw fit. Although grace alone would have sufficed for man's justification, God had established an order - ordained power - within which he contracted to reward those who did their best with eternal life.² Doing one's best, *facere quod in se est*, meant two things. First, the Christian was required to show contrition - perfect sorrow for his sins - and to seek grace through the sacraments. This initial step was an act of free will, which, though it might be aided by grace, was not beyond man's natural capacities. Second, the Christian

¹ Oakley (1979), pp. 159 ff., 208.

² On the dialectic of the two powers see Oakley (1979), pp. 142 ff., and McGrath (1987), pp. 77-81.

was bound to observe God's commandments. Adorned by the so-called 'co-operative grace' received through the sacraments of baptism and penance, his inherently worthless works became acceptable to God.³ This covenantal theology accommodated both the merciful and the just God. Further, since God had chosen to place himself under obligation, his sovereignty was undiminished. No less important, although man retained the freedom to respond to God's offer of grace, it was through grace that his works counted as meritorious.

The young Luther was an adherent of the *via moderna*. In the course of the 1510s, a personal crisis led him to espouse Augustine's anti-Pelagian doctrine of grace.⁴ Taking an increasingly pessimistic view of man's inner resources, he rejected both the doctrine of free will and the concept of 'co-operative grace', throwing himself entirely on the mercy of God, through whose grace alone salvation was possible. The decisive moment in his 'breakthrough' was his reinterpretation of the concept of the 'righteousness of God'. Following the *via moderna*, he had originally understood this to refer to the dispensation to justice to those who had done, or failed to do, what lay within them. Reflection on Romans 1.17⁵ led him to comprehend the term as denoting the free gift of salvation. The merit which counts before God is Christ's alone, 'alien righteousness', which God, of grace alone, imputes to those with faith. The latter, for their part, will follow God's commandments out of gratitude, not in the expectation of reward. Luther, of course, was not the first to launch an 'Augustinian' assault on the 'semi-Pelagian' *via moderna*.⁶ Where he parted company with his medieval 'forerunners' was in formulating a sacramental theology which rejected the Church's monopoly on access to grace. His *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) accused Rome of making the sacraments an instrument of oppression and robbery. They were not, Luther argued, a channel of grace, but a divinely instituted pointer to the promise of redemption. The Reformation has therefore been seen as the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over his ecclesiology.⁷

According to Moeller, Luther's teaching on justification made him overwhelmingly popular. It became the basis of a 'new system of collective attitudes' established on a 'broad front' in the cities.⁸ His teaching was not only simple and attractive, but also novel - not just a negation of existing positions - and highly credible.⁹ It relieved the urban laity of the *Leistungsdruck* (pressure to achieve) generated by late medieval theology.¹⁰ Its effective dissemination in pamphlets and sermons was reinforced by the parallel process of oral diffusion among lay folk themselves. Moeller acknowledges, but dismisses as ineffectual, the activities of Catholic pamphleteers.¹¹ However, he completely ignores Catholic preaching. As McGrath has remarked, Luther

³ See Oberman (1967), pp. 120-184.

⁴ Brecht (1981), pp. 76-77.

⁵ 'For in it [the gospel], the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written "The righteous shall live by faith".'

⁶ Oberman (1966).

⁷ Cf. McGrath (1987), p. 179.

⁸ Moeller (1994), p. 162.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁰ Moeller (1983), pp. 15, 23.

¹¹ Moeller (1994), pp. 159-161.

elaborated his doctrine of justification through 'direct and sustained engagement with the theology of the *via moderna*'.¹² What reformation historians have generally overlooked is that the propagation of Luther's message also involved 'direct and sustained engagement' with the 'Occamist school'. Erfurt was a leading centre of the *via moderna* and Usingen, the Catholic leader, one of its principal spokesmen.¹³

(ii) Faith and works

Luther's *Sermon on the Road to Worms* (1521) is the first verifiable occasion on which his doctrine of justification was preached in Erfurt. Starting from the premise that everybody 'would like to act in such a way that he will be justified and obtain everlasting bliss', he rejects the teaching of 'the philosophers and doctors'. There is no 'power' in activities such as 'building churches, pilgrimages, fasting or praying, wearing caps or going barefoot'. God has chosen 'one man Jesus Christ to annihilate death and destroy sin...'. Reminding his audience of the blemish of original sin, Luther stresses that Christ overcame death so that 'through his works, which are alien to us, and not with our own works, we might be saved...'. The papal regime, however, 'ordains fasting, prayer and eating butter', promising salvation to those who obey and damnation to those who do not.¹⁴

Luther attacks the optimistic appraisal of man's resources underlying 'works righteousness'. Not even saints, 'nor even the holy mother of God with her virginity and motherhood' have obtained salvation through their works, but through 'the will to faith and the works of God'.¹⁵ Faith means believing unreservedly in the gospel's message, which, out of greed, the papacy has suppressed. Luther, however, appears to sense that his audience is more concerned about financial burdens. Stressing that 'it would be a small thing, if the people were only taxed', he argues that the greatest possible evil 'is for man to be persuaded of the merit of his own works'. God has ordained 'works righteousness' to punish a wicked world. So severe is his judgment that 'people are destroyed and deceive themselves in their own head, for building churches, fasting and praying have the appearance of a good work...'.¹⁶ Repeatedly, he attacks people's 'unfounded' confidence in the merit of works. Children 'grow up deluded' and think that 'salvation consists in praying, fasting, holding mass...'.¹⁷ People punctiliously perform pious exercises, although their hearts are filled with envy. They might strangle their neighbour, and still hold mass. Yet if, in contravention of the Church's regulations, they had eaten 'three grains of sugar' before attending mass, 'it would be impossible to get you to the altar with burning tongs'. Luther seems aware that his attack on conventional piety is unpopular. 'I know well that it is not gladly heard'.¹⁸ Many people

¹² McGrath (1987), p. 121.

¹³ On Usingen and the *via moderna*, see Häring, (1939), pp. 25-67 and Oberman (1967), pp. 178-181.

¹⁴ WA 7, pp. 808-809.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 809.

¹⁶ WA 7, p. 810.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 811.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 812.

ask: 'Should we not observe human laws at all? And is it not possible still to pray, fast etc. As long as the right way is there...'. The reformer stresses that what counts is the attitude with which works are performed: 'if a true Christian love and faith is there, then everything that man does is meritorious and everyone may do as he likes, but in the sense that he considers the works to be naught, for they cannot save him...'. Nevertheless, everyone should perform works for the benefit of his neighbour: 'for when you notice, that you alone profit, then your service is wrong'.¹⁹

Luther's message is faithfully disseminated in more 'popular' pamphlets. In *Father and Son*, the son gives 'a short lesson and instruction... which will be profitable... to all of us, if we want to obtain eternal life from God in a different manner'.²⁰ Citing the text fundamental to Luther's 'breakthrough' - 'The righteous shall live by faith' - he explains that the bible is full of such passages. If salvation were through works, 'then Christ would have shed his rose-coloured blood for nothing'. The son warns that 'even if you could perform the works of all the saints, that would not save you'. Without faith, the Christian cannot receive God's mercy.²¹ He urges his father to 'assist... [his neighbour]... in body and soul and give him bread. And if you cannot do that, then comfort him and shelter him...'.²² Such acts of charity should not be performed 'just to win a place in heaven. No, you should do this as a favour to, and for love of God. It is impossible for you to be righteous by works. If a man is a scoundrel and attempts to be righteous by means of works, then he is building on sand...'.²³ In contrast to some pamphleteers, the author does not insist that conventional 'ceremonies' be abandoned. Provided that true acts of love have been performed, 'you can do as you like with outward works such as going to church, making bequests, donating candles, consecrating bells and other such things...'. Apparently aware that he was demanding a great deal of his reader, he is content to emphasise that a Christian who neglects these works 'will not be damned for this'.²⁴

The Catholic side offered an alternative path to salvation. Whereas Luther maintained that faith was the path of access to grace, Usingen taught that grace was the precondition of faith. Although Christians are justified by grace alone, faith and works are also necessary. By faith, Usingen means both assent to Christian truths and an ardent trust in God's readiness to reward works performed under the order of ordained power. Scripture shows that Christ requires those with faith to obey his laws. In addition, Church regulations, though manmade, are divine ordinances, indirectly, just as regulations of a royal official are those of the king. Works proceeding from grace are God's works in respect of merit. Nevertheless he has contracted to reward those who, under the influence of grace, fulfil his commandments. For Usingen, this does not constitute a burden, but is rather a gift of God, through whose goodness and mercy alone man's works are counted as meritorious. God's shows his love for man by recognising

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 813.

²⁰ CLEMEN 1, p. 42.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 43.

²² *ibid.*, p. 44.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 45.

his inadequate service. On this basis, he rejects the evangelical charge that he teaches reliance on works. He places his trust solely in Christ.²⁵

In his *Sermon on the Holy Cross* (1524), Usingen affirms that salvation depends on Christ, who through his death earned the grace which redeems the believer. However, grace is obtained only through the order established by Christ, through the sacraments of baptism and penance. Although Christ has saved all sinners, he has not freed them from moral responsibility. Life everlasting is granted only to those who, following his commandments, model their lives on his and become his brothers. It is not enough to found churches or to trust in the intercession of the saints.²⁶ Like Luther, Usingen stresses the need for charity. On either side of the confessional divide, theologians were concerned about the appeal of modes of piety which, they felt, were seen as an alternative to following Christ's example.

The influence of the Catholic campaign is reflected in Luther's Erfurt *Sermon at St. Michael's* (1522). Here, the reformer uses the biblical image of the wise and foolish virgins to clarify the distinction between his faith and that of his opponents. The latter are like the foolish virgins whose lamps contained no oil. Their righteousness is outward only. Although they wish to follow the gospel, they do not know that the kingdom of God consists not of words, but of power. They cannot do good, for 'the oil is not in the lamps, that is, ['true'] faith is not in their hearts'. Mistakenly, they 'consider... [their 'false' faith] to be the oil and yet persist in their habits just as before, and are... just as wrathful as before, just as greedy, just as merciless to the poor, just as artless...'.²⁷ Such faith is human, not divine. Although they like to hear faith preached, they do not understand what it is. True faith is not mere assent to gospel truths. To believe in God, and that 'Christ died for me' is nothing if 'no oil is there'. To overcome sin and death, the Christian must believe that 'Christ's guiltlessness becomes his, and likewise Christ's piety, sanctity, blessedness and all that Christ is'.²⁸ Such is 'true' faith, which God arouses in everyone who acknowledges that, though his own works are nothing, God has given Christ to him. Although the Catholic side may say 'our works are nothing', they cannot mean this, for otherwise they would not teach free will. They understand grace and faith 'less than a goose the psalter'.²⁹ To explain what 'true' faith is, Luther employs the metaphor of the bride and groom. It would be a 'flawed' love, 'if the groom did not give his spouse the keys and power over wine, bread and all that is in the house'. Likewise, Christ give his riches to those wedded to him in faith.³⁰ What counts is not the strength or weakness of an individual's faith, but rather the fact that it is 'true' faith, which is like an 'excellent wine', the quality of which remains unchanged whether poured into a glass or into a 'great silver cup'.³¹

²⁵ Häring (1939), esp. pp. 128-134; Oberman (1967), pp. 178-181.

²⁶ Häring (1939), pp. 145-147.

²⁷ WA 10. 3, p. 355.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 356.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 357.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 360.

It is instructive to compare Luther's *Sermon at St. Michael's* with his *Sermon on the Road to Worms*. The thrust of the message is the same. Yet by 1522, the reformer felt obliged to define much more precisely the points of divergence between him and his opponents. In 1521, he made a passing sneer at the concept of ordained power: 'our gentlemen say, yes, indeed, our redeemer or saviour, that is certainly true, but it is too little...'.³² While he stressed the need to believe in Christ, he did not explain the difference between 'true' and 'false' faith. Instead, he spoke of a choice between faith in the promise of the gospel and obedience to canon law: 'For it is written... 'righteousness is faith and through faith'. Therefore, if we want to have faith, we should believe the gospel, Paul etc., and not papal letters or the decretals...'.³³ Whereas in 1521, Luther had accused his opponents of enforcing human laws, a year later he accepted that they at least wanted to follow the gospel. Whereas in 1521 he had alleged that they exalted good works, by 1522 he conceded that they taught that 'our works are nothing'. In 1521, he had implied that his opponents did not preach faith. A year later he admitted that they did. By 1522, Luther had clearly realised that those who merely attended to the 'words' of the rival parties would not easily grasp what he was criticising.

Some pamphlets targeted at simpler readers make no attempt to convey Luther's idea of true faith. In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant*, Peter explains: 'Faith is a secret, hidden and incomprehensible thing, known to God alone and not to any man. But if you want to recognise a devout Christian with faith in God, then look at the works which he does. Does he help his neighbour? Does he give alms, bread, shelter and comfort...?'.³⁴ *Father and Son* is more ambitious. The son explains that the Christian 'must firmly believe that Christ was born, died and rose again for him'. So much, Luther admitted, was also standard Catholic teaching. The son continues: 'you must also believe that the righteousness of Christ is your righteousness, Christ's satisfaction is yours, Christ's mercy is yours, etc.'.³⁵ Unlike Luther, however, the author does not clarify the distinction between 'true' and 'false' faith. Perhaps sensing that the attempt to do so would confuse his audience, he preferred to build on, rather than to stress the 'inadequacy' of existing assumptions. Erfurt's evangelical preachers may have used their sermons to press home what was arguably a difficult point for simple believers. However, if they did succeed in moving their popular audience to reflect on what faith was, this may only have complicated the issue. As pointed out above, Usingen defined faith not just as assent to Christian truths, but also as firm trust in God's readiness to accept man's inadequate efforts to fulfil the law. At all events, Luther's charge that his opponents did not see Christ as the power by which man was saved, or that, ignoring faith, they preached salvation by works, can only have made sense to those who probed more deeply into the issues dividing the two parties.

Aegidius Mechler's *Christian Instruction concerning Good Works* (1524) sheds some light on the progress of the evangelical campaign. He begins by remarking that

³² WA 7, pp. 809-810.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 810.

³⁴ CLEMEN 3, p. 208.

³⁵ CLEMEN 1, p. 42.

‘highly learned men’ have written so much about justification that it should be unnecessary for him to contribute further to the literature on the subject. What forces him to publish is ‘the intolerable lies of the godless and self-interested preachers’. Of interest is Mechler’s implicit acknowledgement, not just of the influence of Catholic preaching, but also of the limited impact of evangelical pamphlets. The Catholics, Mechler alleges, ‘daily complain of us ...that by preaching faith in Christ we forbid good works and break the law...’. Because they wickedly attempt to establish their own laws in place of God’s, a further evil arises: ‘namely, false security or trust in works, as a result of which righteousness through faith is declining everywhere. Indeed, it has almost completely disappeared’. Noteworthy is the defensive tone which Mechler adopts. There is, he insists, no truth in the charge that evangelical preachers oppose good works. On the contrary: ‘we say together with St Paul, No, we are establishing good works and are learning how good works are done...’.³⁶ Sensing that the ‘apparent’ sense of scripture was perceived to confirm Catholic teaching, Mechler admonishes his audience:

For it is certainly true... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And this solely through his will and grace, which is given to us in Christ Jesus and not through our works. And where certain [scriptural] texts... sound as though the reward is given to us because of the merit of our work, then you must look to the fountain from which these works flow.³⁷

‘True’ good works, Mechler stresses, are wrought in the believer by Christ. From this it follows that ‘when we read in scripture about the reward of good works, then we must not judge the works according to their outward shape or form, but rather in the light of the inner divine working of faith, which alone makes works acceptable and praiseworthy in God’s eyes’.

If, as Mechler evidently thought, people still had to be persuaded that the works which God had promised to reward were not theirs, but Christ’s, they either misunderstood, or disagreed with, Luther’s definition of faith. At all events, he was not addressing an audience burdened by *Leistungsdruck*. On the contrary: his apology draws attention to two related problems facing reformers. First, the ‘false security’ of which Luther had complained in 1521 hindered reception of their message. Second, they had gained a damaging reputation for being against good works. Hence, Mechler protests vehemently against the charge that they ‘forbade’ them. It is possible, as he alleges, that Catholic preachers had promoted the view of Luther as an opponent of good works, although Usingen denied this.³⁸ Yet whatever the truth of the matter, we need to examine the reasons for the apparent impact of the Catholic campaign.

³⁶ Mechler, *Eyn Chzistische vnterzichtung*. (Erfurt, 1524), Aii^r.

³⁷ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v.

³⁸ Häring (1939), p. 129.

(iii) Grace and free will

The theological basis of 'false security' was the doctrine of 'ordained power' and 'co-operative grace'. Usingen held that Christ had established an order which, accommodating human weakness, made it possible for man to fulfil the law in a manner acceptable to God. Possessed of free will, he could choose good over evil. Through the gift of grace, he could meet his obligations. Culsamer's *Refutation* (1522), a response to a sermon which Usingen had preached before 'many devout people', attacks this standpoint. The two principal commandments - love of God and neighbour - 'cannot be fulfilled and never have been, as Peter shows in Acts 15'.³⁹ Nobody, therefore, should assert that he will be saved by his own works. Scripture, above all St Paul's epistles, shows that all men are children of wrath by nature. The free will which Usingen 'praises so highly' is nothing:

For if we are by nature the children of wrath, what then can we do of our own power that is pleasing to God? If, as nothing, we are acceptable to God only through grace, then it is not of us, but rather God's grace. And it does not follow that the grace of God makes our works more meritorious. For the merit of Christ alone is our chief asset or merit...⁴⁰

Arguing as though Usingen had never distinguished between absolute and ordained power, Culsamer distorts his position, constructing an antithesis which he would have rejected as false. The Christian must glory in Christ's righteousness, which alone counts before God. He admonishes Usingen to 'stop glorying in your wisdom as much as you do. If it is yours, then it is human and useless. If it is God's, then you ought not to claim it as though it were yours'.⁴¹

Did it matter to most people whether, as the reformers argued, grace made them participants in Christ's works, or as the Catholic side maintained, it made their works acceptable to God? On a purely abstract level, probably not. However, each of the competing theologies also has an 'emotional basis'. Luther, after all, developed his doctrine of justification in response to an overpowering sense of his own sinfulness. Catholic theology, for all its safeguards against Pelagianism, catered for a more optimistic, even flattering, view of humanity. In effect, people were offered rival systems of consolation. They could find comfort either in unqualified acceptance of their own sinfulness or in religious action.

By examining the treatment of grace in evangelical pamphlets the emotional appeal of evangelical doctrine can be assessed. Copp's *Two Dialogues* is addressed to a 'sophisticated' audience. Bombarding the reader with scriptural citations on man's innate depravity, he stresses the need for grace. The Spirit informs the Man that 'we are all sinners. That is why you men ... cannot do any good of your own power, as Paul says

³⁹ Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung* (1522), Aiiiif.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, B'-B^v.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, B^v.

in Romans 8...'.⁴² This is the consequence of the Fall: '...as soon as you think you know the right thing to do, it is mixed with the poison which Adam left to us'.⁴³ The man is sceptical. The Spirit explains that the poison is 'pride in your own works' and the arrogance of 'considering yourself better than your brother, like the hypocrites'. The old Adam loves God only because he fears damnation. God, however, wants to be loved for his own righteousness. Even if man applies all his strength, he cannot give God the love which he demands. Hence 'all human intentions, efforts, wisdom, skill, works and thoughts are nothing'.⁴⁴ Christ alone 'is the truth, the way and the life'. The Man, of course, draws the 'right' conclusion: 'From what I hear, I have to be saved through Christ and not through my works'.⁴⁵ What Copp is saying - although he avoids theological jargon - is that original sin has destroyed free will. He clearly senses that his readers felt confident in the 'goodness' of works which, on their part, were well intended. The minds to which he spoke were 'uninformed', not weighed down. He attacked error without offering relief. However his audience may have reacted to his arguments, they were not emotionally predisposed to accept them.

Grimmenthal (1523) addresses simpler folk. Attacking auricular confession, the artisan encourages the peasant 'to acknowledge your sin to God as a poor sinner, and seek grace from him'.⁴⁶ Turning to works, he warns him that 'at the Last Judgment, [Christ] will certainly not ask what bequests you have made, but will require works of mercy from us'.⁴⁷ Noteworthy is the assumption that what counts is the Christian's own contribution. Salvation depends on fulfilment of the precepts of charity. Yet does our author make it clear to his audience that it is not they who do good works, but rather Christ through them? Certainly, he stresses God's mercy. The artisan accuses the clergy of portraying Christ as a 'severe judge':

You have frightened the people so much... that we have feared Christ more than we have loved him. You have left aside the faith which is works and fixed our attention on works alone, although works themselves proceed from faith. If I have a true faith in God, then I love him, then I do his will. If I do his will, then I love my neighbour.⁴⁸

Now, the words 'the faith which is works' can be read in a Lutheran sense. So far, however, the author has not clearly stated that the believer lacks the power to do God's will. Nor does he do so. In arguing that salvation cannot be bought, he never goes beyond deprecating gifts to the clergy. Advising the peasant to close his purse, the artisan explains how

⁴² Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi*, Cii^v.

⁴³ *ibid.*, Ciii^r.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Ciii^v.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, Ciii^r-Ciii^v.

⁴⁶ CLEMEN 1, p. 151.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 156-157.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 157.

lightly has God prescribed our law and life... Nobody can say: I am not learned, I cannot understand it... Love God above all things and your neighbour as yourself are but a few words. If a man reflects a little, it will be clear to him how he should live... If you love God, you will not do anything against him, neither swearing nor idolatry, or lack of faith... If you love your neighbour as yourself, then you will not kill him, you will not steal from him...⁴⁹

The author 'descends' to the level of his audience. Conveying as much of Luther's teaching as he thinks can be understood, he suppresses its core. Whereas both Culsamer and Copp stress the impossibility of loving God, *Grimmenthal* is more concerned to offer an alternative path to grace than to clarify Luther's view of the consequences of its reception. What, in effect, the author propagates is a doctrine of 'co-operative grace'. The believer can and should love God with all his strength. With grace, he can obey God's 'light' law. His good works proceed from faith. It is these works, not Christ's, which count at the Last Judgment. Apart from the rejection of confession, Usingen could have raised no objection to this theology of grace. Catholic theology, it seems, was better attuned to the minds of simple folk.

Whereas *Grimmenthal* ducks a difficult question, Eberlin takes the bull by the horns. His *Erfurt Sermon* (1524) addresses a simple audience. Preaching on John 16.23 (Verily I say unto you, all that you ask of the father in my name shall be given to you), Eberlin instructs his audience in 'Christian prayer'. Alluding to Catholic teaching on sacramental penance, he attacks those who maintain that man has the power to attain faith in Christ. Although his opponents speak poignantly about Christianity, 'this is more a human dream or delusion than faith'.⁵⁰ In seeking grace, 'fleshly' man relies on 'his own merit, ...performing great works to please God...'. However, because 'great majesty is not satisfied by our small and worthless piety... our heart jitters constantly... and doesn't know whether God is friend or foe'. For this reason, people turn to the saints. Finding no peace of mind, they then experiment with other stratagems, to no avail. This shows 'that there must be another way of reconciling ourselves to God other than through our own piety, or that of the saints...'. That way is acknowledgement of the poverty of man's inner resources. 'Christian prayer' must be preceded by 'a heartfelt and painful recognition and discovery of one's own needs and deficiency...'. The trouble, however, is that

so few know their defects, for which reason they do not cry earnestly for help, still less do they know that only God is to be called upon, and that he alone is able and willing to help. Least of all do they know that Christ is the means to which they should attach themselves and through which God's grace may be obtained.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 235.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 243.

For this reason 'few people pray properly'. Yet what Christ says in John 16.23 is that God 'loves you as much as he loves me. He wishes no longer to remember your sins. My righteousness has become yours through faith...'. It is because people do not grasp this fact that they are incapable of 'true' Christian prayer.

In criticising reliance on the saints, Eberlin attacks a mode of piety which, as Rothkrug perceptively observes, was 'the very embodiment of the doctrine of free will'.⁵² The fact that he speaks of the failure to find peace of mind through good works, the mediation of the saints or other means might seem to confirm the thesis that 'late medieval piety' was flawed. Yet this conclusion is hardly justified. Like other Erfurt preachers, Eberlin repeatedly speaks of 'false' security. He complains, for example, that those who 'rely on the intercession of the saints... think that through them they have got God's grace'.⁵³ He also criticises his audience for their dogged refusal to abandon the cult. What Eberlin is attempting is to persuade people to see the sheer variety of paths to grace as proof of their inefficacy. If any one stratagem actually worked, it would be unnecessary to try others. He is not appealing to doubt, but rather trying to induce it. He saw clearly that simple people believed that they were capable of pleasing God. Unaware of their 'defects', they could not grasp that what was well meant might be badly done. To put it differently, Luther's view of the consequences of original sin was beyond the emotional grasp of a large section of the laity. Inasmuch as people believed that they could do good, the idea that they did not need to could hardly evoke the same relief and gratitude as in Luther's case. This explains the persistence of 'false security'.

(iv) The 'law and the gospel' and the 'law of the gospel'

The second problem to which Mechler alludes is that the reformers were perceived 'to forbid good works and break the law'. In his *Freedom of a Christian* (1520), Luther had tried to reconcile his doctrine of 'faith alone' with the fact that scripture contains so many laws. The law, he argues, was given to induce despair, arouse the desire for liberation, and foster appreciation of the need for faith.⁵⁴ However, it must nevertheless be obeyed. Faith alone would suffice if man were only a spiritual being. Yet as a fleshly being he is bound to service and should do good works freely, as a favour to God.⁵⁵ Good works are 'to be rejected and not to be rejected'.⁵⁶ Erfurt pamphleteers propagate Luther's dialectic of the law and the gospel. *Father and Son* explains that 'if a man sins against the Saviour, then the law... is held in front of his nose, so that he can see what he has done. In this way a man recognises how horribly he has sinned and sighs and blames himself...'.⁵⁷ Similarly, in his *Erfurt Sermon*, Eberlin stresses that 'God's word has got two parts, the law and the gospel'. The law, he explains, 'forces us to acknowledge and lament our own deficiency.' The gospel 'shows

⁵² Rothkrug (1979), p. 49.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁴ WA 7, pp. 23 ff.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 30 f.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ CLEMEN 1, p. 42.

us where to find help and comfort - that is, with God...'.⁵⁸ On the other hand, *Grimmenthal*, as we saw, speaks of the gospel as a 'light law'.

We have already discussed the late medieval understanding of the bible as the supreme, immutable legal authority. McGrath has remarked that 'the equation of *lex*, *scriptura* and *evangelium*, implicit (and often explicitly stated) in the writings of... late medieval theologians was, if anything, a hindrance (rather than a catalyst) to the emergence of the reforming theology at Wittenberg.'⁵⁹ It might be added that the same equation in the public mind hindered reception of Luther's message. In his tract *On Secular Authority* (1523) he deals with what was evidently a recurring objection: 'So you say: Why did God give so many laws to all men, and Christ in the gospel also teaches that much is to be done?'⁶⁰ Here, answering the charge that his 'rejection' of the law has encouraged social unrest, Luther develops the idea of two *Regimente*. The gospel belongs to the spiritual *Regiment*. Since true Christians are rare beings, the law is needed in the secular *Regiment*. Its abolition would 'dissolve the chains and bonds of the wild, wicked animals', who would abuse Christian freedom, as present experience shows. A Christian order cannot be established throughout the world, 'or even in one country or among a large crowd'.⁶¹ The two orders, the one which justifies, the other which restrains wickedness, must co-exist.

Luther implicitly admits that his dialectic of the law and the gospel was not understood. Hence some people invoked Christian freedom to justify social protest. The same failure to grasp Luther's truly novel idea also explains why others were appalled by his teaching. To appreciate the shock caused by his 'rejection' of good works, we need to recall how, at the height of his popularity, propagandists had justified his 'disobedience' to Rome. The widely published *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (1521) comprises thirteen pairs of woodcuts, which highlight the contrast between Christ's virtues and papal vice. Short citations from scripture and canon law respectively reinforce the visual message.⁶² Although the scriptural texts are not, strictly speaking, commandments, the *Passional* was almost certainly read as an appeal to evangelical law. *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521) appeals explicitly to the law of the gospel. Quoting Ezekiel 18, the author stresses that obedience is the path to salvation: 'Whosoever keeps my statutes and repents his sins and perform works of mercy will not die everlasting death'.⁶³ The Pope is condemned for enforcing canon law. Isaiah 29 states that 'God does not want man's law to be set beside his law'. In Jeremiah 25, he 'curses everyone who relies on man's laws instead of his law'. The bailiff admonishes the pastor to 'use only the gospel and the good doctrines contained in it'. He should also 'stop attacking Dr Luther, who has criticised the abuses, extortion and human laws which you all preach...'.⁶⁴ Luther is set up as the defender of rigid legal biblicism.

⁵⁸ ENDERS, pp. 235-236.

⁵⁹ McGrath (1987), p. 151.

⁶⁰ WA 11, p. 250.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

⁶² For a discussion of this work, see Scribner (1981), pp. 148 ff.

⁶³ GÖTZE, p. 22.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

The popular sense of the majesty of God's law helps to explain why many early enthusiasts later deserted Luther. However, it may also explain why others continued to support him. Several propagandists portray him as a champion of the law of the gospel even after the focus of debate had shifted to justification. In *Discord* (1522), the priest invokes the Church Fathers. The layman cites I Timothy: 'Many people err from the correct faith and yet want to be called teachers of the Christian law...'. He then asks: 'Is not the gospel all that Luther desires, and that we stand by it?'⁶⁵ Christ and Moses respond:

Christ Whoever shall break one of my least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Moses Cursed be he that does not confirm all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say Amen...⁶⁶

The layman sees Luther vindicated: 'There! We ought to believe him who has the gospel as his goal. That is what Luther does, and I want to keep to it too, and accept no other law or faith.'⁶⁷ For Luther, however, Moses, the lawgiver, and Christ, the redeemer, played complementary roles. The law reveals God's wrath, the gospel the promise of grace. Here, that distinction is wholly obscured. Law and faith are synonymous.

Kettenbach's pamphlets show how 'medieval' legalism shaped the reception of Luther's teaching on justification, even by learned adherents. He sees Christ primarily as a legislator. In his *Sermon on Fasting*, he rejects Catholic appeals to patristic authority: 'Christ is our lawgiver. Not Ambrose. Not Augustine...'.⁶⁸ In his *Sermon on the Pope's Kitchen Preachers*, he argues that the people themselves are to blame for papal tyranny. 'Because we do not want to accept... [Christ's] light burden or law, he has ordained that we receive and bear the great and heavy burdens of tyrannical men...'.⁶⁹ His *Comparison*, written to prove that the Pope is Antichrist, juxtaposes scriptural and canon law texts. Most of the former are commandments. Here, too, he contrasts the two systems of law:

Christ My yoke, or law, is light and sweet and my burden is light.

Pope If the law or burden which I lay upon you is so heavy that it cannot be suffered or borne, you are nonetheless obliged to be obedient to me...⁷⁰

Whereas for Luther, Christ had freed Christians from the grasp of the law, for Kettenbach, he had imposed a 'light law'. Christian freedom was first and foremost a legal privilege undermined by a competing system of law.

⁶⁵ SCHADE 3, p. 210.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 210.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶⁸ CLEMEN 2, p. 17.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 134.

To sum up: In propagating Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, evangelical reformers encountered strong lay resistance. Although they also managed to mobilise support, printed propaganda provides little support for Moeller's contention that evangelical doctrine evoked an enthusiastic response among the majority of urban laymen. There is nothing in Luther's *Sermon on the Road to Worms* which suggests that beneath the surface of complacent acquiescence in the status quo he detected even the faintest desire to be free of the 'burden' of 'works righteousness'. As late as 1524, Mechler complained about the persistence of 'false security'. Three main reasons for the reformers' 'failure' can be identified. First, their critique of 'works righteousness' rested on a definition of faith which was difficult to get across. Second, the dialectic of the two powers was psychologically better attuned to laypeople who did not share Luther's view of human depravity. It satisfied their need to feel involved in the process of their own salvation. Third, the idea that Christ had established laws, but did not require their fulfilment as a condition of salvation, simply did not catch on at popular level. In attacking 'works righteousness', Luther undermined the basis of his early popularity.

12. Temporal satisfaction and the cult of the dead

Many reformation scholars believe that Luther's doctrine of justification was popular because it offered a simplified piety in place of the labyrinthine 'system' of the late middle ages. Hans-Christoph Rublack argues that the idea that human efforts were of no avail appealed to those who had invested heavily in achieving salvation.¹ Alister McGrath sees the traffic in indulgences as exemplifying a half-hearted 'spiritual athleticism' aimed at obtaining benefits to which Luther's teaching gave access by a 'more convenient and less demanding route'.² Similarly Euan Cameron writes: 'For lay people, the point about the Reformation was that it abolished the expensive and complicated apparatus to which they had resorted so regularly for the good of their souls. In its place it put preaching, prayer and acts of moral piety towards one's neighbour.'³

Several considerations seem to support this view of the popular response to Luther. First, both the cost of the 'system' and manifold 'abuses' were a recurring cause of complaint, particularly in grievance literature. Second, the reformers argued that their doctrine of justification rendered conventional 'spiritual athleticism' redundant. Third, the 'system' did indeed collapse. The financial difficulties of religious houses which depended on endowed masses are well known. In Erfurt, one of the *Twenty-eight Articles* of 1525 demanded that income from bequests made for the performance of masses for the soul should no longer go the clergy, but to the benefactors' heirs. Yet if all this means that the laity went over to Luther *en masse*, how can it be reconciled with our conclusion that Catholic preachers effectively refuted Luther's critique of works righteousness, or indeed with Erfurt's post-1525 'Catholic revival'? In fact, closely analysed, pamphlets do not provide evidence of the shift in attitudes which, according to the above interpretations, is supposed to have occurred.

(i) Temporal satisfaction and purgatory

In approaching the problem, it is necessary to distinguish between the reformers' assault on the *via moderna* and their critique of the 'apparatus' of medieval piety. Good works fell into two distinct categories: those which under the order of ordained power counted towards salvation; and temporal satisfaction, the penance by which the sinner was reconciled with the Church. The most common penitential exercises were fasting, prayer and alms. As a rule, confessors imposed only as much as they thought the penitent capable of bearing comfortably.⁴ However, there was no certainty that the satisfaction done in a believer's lifetime would suffice. Whoever departed this life with unpaid penitential debts, though justified, was consigned to

¹ Rublack (1985), pp. 251 ff.

² McGrath (1990), p. 10.

³ Cameron (1991), p. 132.

⁴ Tentler (1977), pp. 327 ff.

purgatory; an intermediate state in which, by a painful cleansing process of uncertain duration, he prepared for entry into paradise. In the later middle ages, purgatory was the chief focus of anxiety. The Church made no earnest attempt harmonise its teaching on purgatory with penitential practice. Instead, it helped to bridge the gap between the penitent's own accomplishment and what was required of him, spawning such typical modes of piety, as indulgences, endowed masses and the cult of the saints.

In interpreting the response to Luther's message, reformation historians have emphasised popular resentment of the clergy's financial interest in purgatory, while ignoring the appeal of the doctrine. Like many forms of 'popular religion', the cult of purgatory had emerged through the interaction of official teaching and lay culture. The scriptural evidence, though not overwhelming, was adequate.⁵ Although the Church never actively promoted belief in purgatory,⁶ it provided a doctrinal framework which accommodated both pre-existing belief in an intermediate state and the desire of the living to cultivate relations with their dead. The crystallisation of the doctrine of purgatory coincided with changes in attitude towards the duration of time. As men began to 'settle down' in the world, as the Church began to propagate a long term view of history, the idea that the After-Life fell into two phases explained the whereabouts of souls between the death of the body and the Resurrection.⁷

Although the prospect of purgatorial torture was certainly frightening, it also mitigated the starkness of the alternatives of heaven and hell, accommodating the fears of sinners without robbing them of hope. A 'transitory hell', it was also the anteroom to paradise.⁸ While the believer could assume that at worst he would face finite punishment, the Church helped him to minimise, even avoid, the painful period of transition. Taken together, Catholic teaching on satisfaction and justification can be regarded as mutually reinforcing elements of what the evangelical reformers denounced as a system of 'false security'. Late medieval piety catered to both sides of human nature. On the one hand, purgatory was a focus for anxiety, terrifying enough to be credible, yet neither inevitable nor final. On the other hand, the dialectic of the two powers was the basis of a pastoral theology which encouraged the faithful to believe that obedience to God's commandments was a sure path to salvation.

(ii) The impact of Luther's message on satisfaction (1518-1521)

In March 1518, responding to the interest roused by his *Ninety-five Theses*, Luther published his *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace*.⁹ Consisting of twenty-six theses, it focuses on indulgences, although his main topic is satisfaction. Although he denies wishing to challenge standard teaching, he hovers on the brink of rejecting it. While

⁵ Le Goff (1984), pp. 59-62.

⁶ Cf. Le Goff, esp. p. 290. On the popular conception of the structure of time and relations between the living and the dead, see Rothkrug (1979), pp. 49 ff.

⁷ Cf. Brandon (1962), p. 234 and (1965), pp. 185-186; Le Goff (1984), pp. 280-281.

⁸ On the appeal of the 'transitory hell', see Le Goff (1984), pp. 437-438 and *passim*.

⁹ Eynn Sermon von dem Ablaß vnnnd gnade (Wittenberg, 1518). Modern reprint, WA 1, pp. 243-246.

convinced that the traditional understanding of temporal satisfaction has no scriptural basis, he has not quite abandoned the underlying idea that the sinner must make amends with the Church:

It is a great error for anyone to think that he should do satisfaction for his sins, when God constantly forgives the same for nothing of inestimable grace, desiring nothing in return but good living thereafter. The Christian community certainly makes some demands, but it can and ought to relax the same and not impose anything hard or unbearable...¹⁰

Despite this vacillation, he nevertheless makes two assertions which were potentially subversive of the 'system'. First, scripture shows that God's justice requires no punishment or satisfaction other than sorrow for sin and a resolve to bear the cross of Christ and to do good works. Although God himself punishes sinners, so as to induce sorrow, nobody knows what this punishment is or has the power to remit it.¹¹ However, neither the punishment nor the works which God demands 'are so much that a man cannot accomplish them on account of the brevity of his life...'. Second, there is no proof that sinners are 'directed to purgatory or to the indulgence' in respect of 'outstanding punishment'.¹² Rather than procure indulgence, therefore, they should accept the punishment and perform the works. Although they may make gifts to the churches, if this is done for God's sake, it would be better to give to the poor, as long they need help. Luther is, however, aware that vicarious piety still exerted a strong appeal. Although indulgences should not be actively promoted, they should nevertheless be permitted 'for the sake of the imperfect and lazy Christians who do not want bravely to practise good works'. However, they are not a work of obedience, but exemption from obedience. While nobody should be prevented from buying indulgences, it would be better to encourage all Christians to accept the 'works and punishments'.¹³

By 1519, Luther had come closer to completely rejecting temporal satisfaction. In his *Sermon on Penance*, he argues that it is best 'not to sin any more, and to do all manner of good to one's neighbour, ...which is too seldom mentioned; [instead] all is to be paid through imposed prayers'. Satisfaction, however, is 'immeasurably' less important than justification.¹⁴ Like the *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace*, this pamphlet ran to numerous editions. Yet there is little evidence that the reformer's ideas had any impact on public opinion. The 1521 grievances relating to vicarious satisfaction all deal with abuses. The *Sundry Articles* criticise indulgences, first, because the system has become a racket. Not only do the vendors live off the proceeds. 'In addition we have to give part of this to the bishops and certain secular authorities..., which money is then raised from the poor simple people.'¹⁵ Second, the 'poor simple people' are deceived 'in a most wicked and unchristian way' by the 'stationers', i.e. itinerant mendicants who

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 245.

¹¹ WA 1, pp. 243-244.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 245.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

¹⁴ WA 2, p. 714.

¹⁵ Etzliche besondere artickel, Aii^f.

attracted custom by selling indulgences in combination with relics. Although this practice has got out of hand, the bishops fail to intervene.¹⁶ However, the idea of indulgence is not attacked, merely the profit motive underlying the perceived degeneration of the system. There is no criticism of the plenary indulgence, either in the *Sundry Articles*, or in the full original list.

If some laypeople were sceptical about the efficacy of certain indulgences, the same cannot be said of masses for the soul. The *Sundry Articles* complain that the secular clergy 'put pressure on poor people who cannot afford to have memorial services for their friends...'. They also charge fees, 'even though they are obliged to sing mass on account of their benefices'.¹⁷ Such grievances reflect resentment at what was seen as ruthless exploitation of lay dependence on clerical services. Nonetheless, the underlying assumption was that satisfaction had to be done, even after death, and that the mass was an efficacious means of paying this debt. Of course, since grievance literature deals mainly with the financial aspects of religion, we would not necessarily expect to find direct evidence of Luther's influence. However, popular pamphlets appearing around this time do not offer his insights on satisfaction as a solution to the problem.

In *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521), complaints about the clergy correspond broadly to those in grievance literature. The bailiff attacks the pastor for collaborating with the 'stationers'. 'If a mendicant comes and tells us a tall story about strange relics and great indulgences, then you help him, because you will receive your share...'.¹⁸ The anonymous author (possibly Martin Bucer), evidently knew Luther's *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace*. He recommends good works as an alternative to the indulgence. The monks

stand up in the pulpit to proclaim a pile of letters [of indulgence], knowing that it is against God, especially when it has something to do with their wicked avarice. If, however, it had something to do with the works of mercy, with people helping one another or feeding the poor, that would be a good work.¹⁹

Yet the core of Luther's message on satisfaction is not transmitted. Similarly, the author's treatment of memorial masses echoes the complaints in the *Sundry Articles*. The pastor reminds the bailiff of the services which the clergy provide: 'Now what are you lacking in the Church? We have mass every day. And the 'sevens' [memorial masses] are held... in the correct manner...'.²⁰ The bailiff merely attacks the clergy for charging fees, despite their vast wealth. When the pastor argues that they need the income to live on, the bailiff calls for an end to pluralism and papal provisions. If church

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Aii^r-Aii^v.

¹⁷ Etzliche besondere artickel, [Aiv]^r.

¹⁸ GÖTZE, pp. 21-22.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 14.

funds are no longer diverted from their proper purpose, 'the poor will be freer and exempt from financial demands'. Priests will receive a 'fitting' income and lead pious lives, spending their time in church, 'praying, preaching, studying, performing matins, prime, ters, sext, none, vespers and compline'. Writing to defend Luther against the charge of heresy, the author of *Bailiff and Pastor* portrays the reformer as a spokesman for the grievance movement, whose aim was to cut the cost of vicarious piety. Although there was certainly a 'point of contact' between lay complaints and Luther's ideas on satisfaction and purgatory, the author does not develop it.

Eberlin's *Praise of the Pastor* sheds some light on the possible reasons for this omission. Written in late 1520, it proposes an alternative to memorial masses.²¹ Eberlin praises the Germans for their charity in assisting their dead. This should be encouraged 'in all sermons'. Both the 'light of nature' and the 'sun of Christian usage' move people to help their relatives 'to be freed from purgatory (should they be in it) and to obtain the salvation which they desire'. However, communal intercession would be more efficacious and pleasing to God than private masses. This should be done in the mass on Sunday, and during the subsequent week. Everyone should know that, after his death, God will be merciful 'in the same measure that that man now shows to the dead through his prayers...'.²² People should also help the poor, for this moves God 'to show mercy on the souls of the departed, while the poor are obliged to pray more diligently' for their benefactors.²³ The dead are also helped if the living lead better lives. Masses for the soul, by contrast, 'serve worldly pomp and the inflated sense of honour of the living', while filling the pockets of the mass-priests and regular clergy.²⁴ Eberlin criticises the flippant manner in which the latter discharge their duties.²⁵ With the money paid for thirty masses, simple layfolk could keep their families for a month. Many do not realise how they are being cheated. The monks and priests 'have contracted to read so many masses that they are forced to compress thirty of these into one, and yet take the full charge for each one from everybody'.²⁶ Eberlin censures the clergy for consuming what they do not earn. If people gave up, or at least cut down on, endowed masses, the clergy would lead more pious lives while the donors themselves would benefit financially.

In essence, Eberlin's proposal was a fifteenth century commonplace.²⁷ The communalisation of the spiritual benefits of the mass was favoured both by city governments and observant reformers. As well as stemming the flow of civic resources to the regular clergy, it left the latter free to cultivate their piety.²⁸ Yet the reform foundered on the popularity of the memorial mass, its attraction enhanced by the renewed piety of the observant orders. Eberlin criticises secular authority for failing to implement reforms. However, the blame lies chiefly with the 'common people' who

²¹ Das lob der Pfarrer (Augsburg, 1521). Modern reprint, ENDERS 1, pp. 68 ff. On the date of composition, see Lucke (1902), pp. 37-48.

²² *ibid.*, p. 70.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁷ Nyhus (1975), p. 11.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

strengthen the system 'through their lively adherence and pressure'. He expresses the hope that his arguments will move 'those with understanding (of whom many can now be found in the community)'.²⁹ However, he is conscious that the weight of opinion in favour of the mass is much stronger. Towards the end of his tract, he makes a small concession to his audience: 'if you want to endow an anniversary mass, then do not let it extend beyond twenty or thirty years, for it will either not be maintained, or else done badly.'³⁰

Read in conjunction with the other pamphlets, Eberlin's *Praise of the Pastor* points to several conclusions. First, Luther's influence in 1521 was in inverse proportion to his popularity. Not only were people unaware of his ideas on justification. Even his earlier message on satisfaction had hardly begun to filter downwards. Second, lay people clearly resented the cost of vicarious satisfaction. However, the cult of purgatory was highly popular nevertheless. This might explain the silence of *Bailiff and Pastor* on Luther's views on satisfaction. It was safer to focus on grievances. As an immediate response to the reformer's condemnation, it might have been counter-productive to have linked him with an assault on a popular cult. Third, Eberlin's pamphlet confirms that historical analysis of the evangelical assault on the 'expensive and complicated apparatus' of medieval piety must consider, not just the grievances which it engendered, but also its popularity. Memorial masses were the means by which people forged bonds with their departed. Assisting the dead was act of Christian neighbourliness and, even for those of moderate means, a badge of social status.

(iii) The evangelical assault on purgatory

Evangelical reformers attacked purgatory partly out of calculation, partly out of conviction. On the one hand, the main lay grievances against the clergy were all connected with the cult of the dead. On the other hand, the reformers rejected the concept of satisfaction. Although it is often claimed that they 'abolished' purgatory, they were in fact divided on the issue. Some rejected the doctrine outright. Others - including Luther - argued that the Catholic case was unproven. In 1521, he denied rejecting purgatory. He had, he insisted, merely questioned Catholic reading of the scriptural evidence. Given the lack of clear proof, nobody should be forced to accept the Church's teaching. He illustrates his point by means of an analogy: 'The gospel compels me to believe that St Peter and St James were holy. But that St Peter was buried and lies himself in Rome, or St James in Compostella, need not be believed, because scripture says nothing about it.'³¹ In short, Luther distinguishes between what he held to be true - he did not doubt that St Peter was buried in Rome - and what scripture forced him to accept. Not until 1530, did he finally repudiate purgatory.³²

²⁹ ENDERS 1, p. 68.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 76.

³¹ Grund vñ vrsach (Augsburg, 1521). Modern reprint: WA 7, p. 453.

³² Brecht (1986), p. 383; Pelikan (1983), pp. 136-138.

The Erfurt dialogue, *Grimmenthal* (1523) conveys the essence of Luther's position, both on satisfaction and on purgatory. The artisan explains to the peasant that penance is 'nothing more than turning from the old and sinful life to a new life, having rejected our sins'. Otherwise, there is no point in going to confession:

Do you think that you will be helped by the penance which you receive from the monk, reciting four or five paternosters, or fasting for a day. Nothing comes of that. Rather, ...if you have dealt dishonestly with your neighbour, then reconcile yourself with him, and acknowledge your sin to God...³³

Although Luther had criticised imposed works of satisfaction several years earlier, our author is addressing people who still participate fully in the penitential round and, he seems to suspect, find relief in the light penance given by a monk. For whatever reason, he does not clearly state that satisfaction is less important than justification. It is possible that the simple audience which he was addressing did not distinguish so sharply between the two, although they certainly knew that purgatory and hell were two different places.³⁴

The discussion turns to vicarious satisfaction. The peasant believes that the indulgence will help him escape purgatory: 'I thought that as soon as I died, I would receive absolution on account of it and go straight to heaven.' The artisan replies that calf hide and red wax will not impress God. Otherwise, 'nobody would be more blessed than the calves and bees from which these letters and seals have been made.' What God wants is faith. 'If we have that, he will certainly save us. We do not require letters and seals as though we were buying a house.'³⁵ The author is speaking to people for whom indulgences provided a sense of contractual security.

The peasant asks about memorial masses. His pastor 'talks so much about purgatory and how tortuously hot it is, and about how the priests can help the dead with their mumbling'. However, given the low morals of the clergy, it seems 'that there is no such thing as heaven, hell or Devil'. The artisan corrects him: '...heaven and hell are found in the gospel. But you do not find purgatory, and that is what brings in the most money.' Indignant, the priest interjects: 'Whatever next? Do you want to get rid of purgatory too?' The artisan replies: 'No, but I do say that it is not based on scripture.' The priest asks whether he has not 'heard in sermons of the horrible exempla about the souls, and the same which has been written of Tantalus and others?'³⁶ This reference to the punishment of Tantalus may have been intended to suggest that Catholic teaching was based on 'heathen' sources. At all events, it is evident that while the author wishes to stir popular resentment at the cost of assisting souls, he is aware that memorial masses serve a vital purpose. Faithfully adhering to Luther's position, he can only assert

³³ CLEMEN 1, p. 151.

³⁴ On the crystallisation of the idea of Purgatory as a distinct place in the topography of the After-Life, see Le Goff (1984), pp. 187 ff.

³⁵ CLEMEN 1, p. 159.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

that purgatory, as traditionally understood, has no scriptural basis, but cannot deny its existence.³⁷

Nowhere in pamphlets by an Erfurt author do we find a repudiation of purgatory. When the dialogue is placed in the context of the public debate, it may well be asked whether the artisan's emphatic 'No, but...' sufficed to set the reader's mind at ease. Catholic preachers had certainly used non-scriptural exempla to illustrate the horrors of purgatory. However, once the doctrine had been challenged, they probably presented the scriptural evidence disputed by Luther. Usingen's affirmation of the existence of purgatory is, at any rate, scripturally based.³⁸ The evangelical interpretation of the texts in question would probably have overtaxed the mental abilities of simple folk, which is perhaps why the author of *Grimmenthal* does not bother to explain it.

One reformer who did repudiate purgatory was the Eisenach preacher, Jakob Strauss. His *Short and Intelligible Doctrine* (1523) rejects Catholic teaching as incompatible with the doctrine of justification by faith. The dead fall into two categories: those who die without faith and God's grace; and those who die in faith and brotherly love. The fate of the former is eternal damnation. Since the latter are saved, they do not need the assistance of such sinful works as 'prayer, singing, reading, giving alms...'.³⁹ Such activities presumptuously diminish, not just God's omnipotence, mercy, and solicitude for his 'chosen children', but also Christ's sacrifice.⁴⁰ The gospel, however, is full of the promise of life to those with faith. To assist souls is to deny and destroy the Christian faith. 'For if faith at death has completed the last work of liberation from sin, and through death the old Adam is totally killed, what can the believing souls be lacking, that they should expect our miserable assistance'.⁴¹ To assist the dead is not evangelical neighbourliness. People spend enormous sums on masses and other forms of assistance, but neglect the living poor, the proper object of brotherly love. Many people show little respect towards their relatives in this life, but open their purses once they have died. There is no cause for concern about the fate of the departed, since scripture states that it is unnecessary to know how souls fare after death.⁴²

Temporal satisfaction, Strauss argues, was invented by the papal Antichrist.⁴³ However, the clergy's penance is worthless. Their prayer consists of 'unbearable' vigils. Their alms have nothing to do with the order of Christ. Although they maintain that memorial masses are the highest form of alms, the only god served is their belly. As for fasting, they never do it. Were they to fast for others as much as they mumble prayers for them, their god, the belly, would soon fall. Christians who do not wish to fast and

³⁷ Ozment (1975), p. 202, n. 183, summarises this passage to prove that evangelical reformers repudiated purgatory, but suppresses the artisan's 'No, but...'.
³⁸ Häring (1939), pp. 283ff. Usingen first treats of purgatory in a 1527 tract, after he had left Erfurt (in 1525). It is likely, however, that if he answered evangelical teaching from the pulpit while still in the city he will have made a similar case.

³⁹ Kurtz vnd verstendig leer (Erfurt, 1523), Aii^r-Aii^v.
⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Aii^v-Aiii^r.
⁴¹ *ibid.*, Aiii^v-[Aiv]^r.
⁴² *ibid.*, [Aiv]^r-[Aiv]^v.
⁴³ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v.

pray themselves cannot delegate this to the monks.⁴⁴ God states clearly that it is he who forgives sins, through grace and without payment.⁴⁵ Since there is no scriptural basis for satisfaction, Strauss continues, 'so the hot purgatory also falls and is extinguished'. Gratuitous liberation is incompatible with payment:

it is impossible to imagine how it can be reconciled that God says that he does not want to remember the sins of the justified man; and that such a man is nevertheless given to such unspeakable torment and martyrdom, so that as a friend of God he is tormented and martyred in the infernal flames.⁴⁶

The only distinction which the 'seducers' have ever drawn between hell and purgatory is that the latter will at some point come to an end. This dilutes the forgiveness promised in scripture. If purgatory existed it would have been shown clearly in the prophets and gospels.

Strauss now confronts the biblical evidence in support of purgatory.⁴⁷ Somewhat tortuously, he seeks to refute the traditional interpretation of Matthew 5. 25-26, I Corinthians 3 and II Kings 12. Going on to deal with 2 Maccabees 12 [42-45], he asserts that this text lacks the power of the holy ghost. Truly the papists would win the argument had not all the doctors of the Jews, Jerome and the ancient teachers questioned the authenticity of this book.⁴⁸ The apocrypha, however, are 'patched together' and include a lot of human teaching.⁴⁹ Somewhat inconsistently, having invoked the Church Fathers in order to reject an inconvenient text, he goes on to dismiss Catholic appeals to the patristic interpretation of other scriptural passages.

(iv) Eberlin's changing standpoint

In 1520, Eberlin had praised assistance to the dead, but denied the efficacy of anniversary masses. By 1522, he had intensified his attack on the means of assistance, but without rejecting purgatory. He traces the origins of the popular cult to the 'misappropriation' of Church funds by the monasteries. The monks abandoned the cure of souls for secular lordship, delegating their pastoral work to vicars. In order to survive, the latter had to 'grind and oppress the people.' Not only did people have to pay for the sacraments and other services. In addition, Eberlin argues, the practices associated with purgatory - confraternities, the cult of the saints, memorial masses etc. - were introduced solely in order to provide the vicars with an income.⁵⁰ Scripture, however, shows that only preachers of the word of God are entitled to the support of the congregation. The cult of the dead is the main reason why so many parishes and benefices have been founded. However, there is no reason to keep a priest at every

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, B^f.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, B^f-B^v.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, Bii^v.

⁴⁷ On the scriptural basis of the doctrine of purgatory see Le Goff (1984), pp. 59-62.

⁴⁸ Kurtz vnd verstandig leer (1523), Cii^f.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, Cii^v.

⁵⁰ ENDERS 1, pp. 178-179.

village graveyard, since vigils and memorial masses are unnecessary. 'What the prayer of the Christian congregation cannot achieve for the souls, with God, cannot be done'. To support his case against the mass, Eberlin appeals to Luther's tract, *De abroganda missa privata* (1522): 'it is also against Christ's ordinance that the mass be held in the manner in which this has been done in the last few hundred years.' Yet he seems aware that his call for a break with tradition will not be received with enthusiasm. He admonishes his audience: 'And even if our forefathers were led astray by the mass, we ought not to follow them in their error'. He stresses the financial benefits. Since the cost of supporting the mass-priests 'has caused great harm to us and our children, there is no better remedy than to withdraw superfluous things from them.'⁵¹

By 1523, Eberlin had changed his standpoint on purgatory. In his *Second Faithful Admonition*, following Luther, he argues that the Christian need not bother 'with those things about which scripture has nothing to say'. Whereas in his *Praise of the Pastor* he had extolled those who assisted their dead, he now declares that such people are 'no [Christians] or wicked Christians'. Like Strauss, he argues that the dead are either saved or damned. In neither case, therefore, are they helped by masses, vigils, or other placebos. Although preoccupation with the dead is deprecated in scripture, people nonetheless desire to maintain a link with their departed friends. The monks and priests exploit this unchristian yearning by encouraging the endowment of masses. However, without payment, they would forget purgatory. As well as arguing that anniversary masses are pointless, Eberlin also criticises the invocation of the saints. Their intercession does not help.⁵²

By contrast, his *Short Written Report*, written about the same time, gives somewhat different advice to those who refuse to give up assisting the dead:

Do not allow yourselves to be forced to endow memorial masses for the dead, especially as the opinion persists about the sacrifice of the mass. You may arrange vigils and other prayers for them. You may also desire the intercession of the saints, although you should not do battle too much by this means: honour them in that you hold them to be children of God...⁵³

While the *Second Faithful Admonition* was addressed to the council (of Ulm) the *Short Written Report* speaks to the people. This may explain its more indulgent line towards the 'wicked Christians'. In the interest of 'theological correctness', he exhorts the reader to dispense with what was evidently a valued, if financially burdensome, consolation: the mass. As an alternative he offers, not faith, but a variety of other placebos, even - as his cautionary remark on excessive faith in the power of the saints indicates - at the risk of encouraging 'superstition'. Although Eberlin himself had changed his standpoint on purgatory, he was conscious that his audience had yet to follow him.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵² Die ander getrezev || vermanung. (Erfurt, 1523) Modern reprint: ENDERS 3, pp. 22-25.

⁵³ Ain kurtzer gschriftlicher bericht (n.p. 1523). Modern reprint: ENDERS 2, p. 180.

(v) The impact of the assault on purgatory

In 1521, there was broad consensus on the need for satisfaction. Luther's practical rejection of the concept had not yet filtered down to the public at large. Although the cost of vicarious satisfaction was resented, the cult of the dead was clearly popular. It is impossible to say whether this reflects general ambivalence or the existence of two constituencies. At all events, as on the question of justification, the public response to the evangelical message was divided. Those whose appreciation of the benefits of the cult was outweighed by their resentment of its cost were doubtless most receptive to the idea that satisfaction was unnecessary. People may have 'converted' to evangelical religion in order to save money, time and effort. Yet the consequence of 'conversion', whatever the motive, was certainly to make this expenditure appear superfluous. The doctrine of justification by faith destroyed the symmetry between the two planes of Christian endeavour. For those who accepted that God did not require good works as a condition of salvation, the idea that the Pope could demand works of satisfaction was bound to appear preposterous. On that basis, people are likely to have been receptive to the evangelical argument that purgatory was an instrument of papal tyranny. A further factor in their conversion was probably the debate on the End. This created a new climate of fear in which the anxieties and expectations underlying vicarious satisfaction were dwarfed. The perceived immediacy of the alternatives of heaven and hell surely contributed to a reversal of priorities in the battle against sin.

Doubtless, converts began to boycott clerical services. The withdrawal of support, even by a section of the laity, would have been more than sufficient to usher in the collapse of the machinery of vicarious satisfaction, which was already under-financed.⁵⁴ Evangelical pamphlets, however, provide little support for the thesis that lay weariness of a costly and cumbersome piety led to mass conversion. People who were offended by Luther's 'rejection' of good works were less likely to accept that satisfaction was unnecessary. The evangelical case against purgatory was not necessarily persuasive. The obliqueness of the biblical evidence made it difficult to propagate a clear and consistent message. Scripture, reformers were convinced, did not speak for the 'Catholic purgatory'; but neither did it speak explicitly against it. Hence, they argued that what cannot be proven need not be believed. Strauss's attempt to prove that purgatory did not exist, suggests that he recognised that this line of attack was not working. Yet his main argument was somewhat circular. Purgatory could not exist because there was no scriptural basis for satisfaction. This standpoint was anything but well attuned to the strong popular belief in an intermediate state. Refusing to discuss the fate of souls after death, the reformers exhorted the laity to live in trusting ignorance of what awaited them, and even upbraided them for their interest in the question. They threatened to interrupt their lively intercourse with their dead, calling instead for charity to the living. From the standpoint of those who believed in an intermediate state, this was a false antithesis. To assist the souls in purgatory was the highest form of charity.

⁵⁴ Cf. Oakley (1979), p. 118.

The reformers' strictures reflect people's sense of the vitality of the communion with their departed kin. Eberlin, in particular, was keenly aware that the abandonment of the cult of the dead was tantamount to severing a bond of intimacy between fellow travellers on a common journey. Far from addressing lay concerns, the reformers attacked 'popular culture'. Their Catholic opponents, by contrast, provided a topography of the After-Life.

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(3) Conclusion - a 'psychological ladder'?

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13. Confession and clerical power

Luther's message freed Christians, not just from the obligation to do good works, but also from dependence on the conventional channels of grace, the foremost of which was sacramental penance. Ozment argues that laypeople were so fearful of confession that they gladly espoused the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Obviously, if confession generated anxiety, there was a strong motive for supporting Luther. However, two other aspects of the issue also need to be considered. The first is clerical power. The sacrament of penance was based on Matthew 16.19, in which, giving Peter the key of heaven, Christ promises that 'whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'. The clergy were empowered not just to grant, but also to withhold absolution. In practice, the latter power was exercised through the sanctions of excommunication and the interdict, the ban. The laity's sense of dependence on clerical power is reflected in grievance literature. The *Sundry Articles* complain that the use of the ban causes simple lay people to fear eternal damnation. The second aspect of the debate on confession concerns the nature of a sacrament. Medieval theologians might define a sacrament as a pact between God and man by which grace was promised, or alternatively, as a 'vessel' containing grace. The Erfurt theologian, Johannes Paltz, drew on both of these ideas.¹ At all events, it was held that grace was conferred through sacramental ritual, in which the priest played an indispensable, though variously weighted, role. As Scribner points out, the Catholic understanding of sacramental efficacy made perfect sense in a predominantly ritual culture. It was not enough therefore, for evangelical propagandists to appeal to anxiety.

(i) Confession - a 'psychological burden'?

It was customary to confess at Easter, before receiving communion, a practice which linked Christ's promise of absolution with his triumph over sin. By the eve of the Reformation, there may have been a tendency towards more frequent confession. Evangelical reformers certainly claim this was the case. Ozment argues that the laity was overtaxed by the conditions of a good confession, which he defines as 'contrite enumeration of all mortal sins according to their exact circumstances'.² In respect of the first requirement, however, he exaggerates the burden on penitents. Theologians distinguished between 'contrition' and 'attrition': i.e. perfect sorrow proceeding from a selfless love of God, and imperfect sorrow arising from fear of punishment. All theologians agreed that contrition was necessary. Some, notably Gabriel Biel, held that penitents must meet this condition unaided, that the sacrament worked only *ex opere operantis*.³ However most late medieval authorities stressed its power to convert

¹ Hamm (1982), pp. 274-275.

² Ozment (1975), p. 52.

³ See Oberman (1967), pp. 146 ff.

imperfect into perfect sorrow, that it worked *ex opere operato*.⁴ If, as Ozment assumes, people paid attention to theological opinion, the burden cannot have been too heavy.

Although, in theory, absolution depended on a full confession of sins, it is unclear what this meant in practice. Certainly, Tentler's study of confessors' manuals shows that theologians 'enumerated, classified, weighed, graded and analyzed' sins.⁵ No area of life, religious, social, economic or moral was excepted. On the basis of such manuals, Ozment argues that confessors gave penitents such a grilling as to reinforce their sense of their own sinfulness. Other scholars maintain that the manuals served primarily to keep confessors abreast of the Church's teaching.⁶ Obviously they needed to be equipped to deal with the variety of questions which might arise during the confession. Lawrence G. Duggan argues that ecclesiastical legislation on confession provides no support for the view that it caused anxiety. Both strong competition between the regular and secular clergy and the practical freedom of a penitent to choose his confessor, though subject to certain restrictions - reserved cases - may have hindered excessive probing. In attacking confession, evangelical reformers themselves may have stirred anxiety where previously there was none.⁷

(ii) Luther's *Sermon on Penance*

In his *Sermon on Penance* (1519), Luther propagates his message of gratuitous grace.⁸ Distinguishing between satisfaction and forgiveness of guilt, he accepts that works of satisfaction can be 'discarded' through indulgences. Forgiveness of guilt, however, is a 'heavenly or divine indulgence', which granted by God alone, enables the Christian to 'discard' fear and find inner peace. It is obtained solely through the sacrament of penance, which God established for the consolation of all sinners 'when he gave to St. Peter, as representing the whole Christian church' the power of the keys. The sacrament consists of the priest's words of absolution, of the grace signified by the words, and of the believer's faith in them. Penance is a sacrament because the words are a 'holy sign' of grace. 'It is not the sacrament, but rather the faith which believes in the sacrament, which removes sin'.⁹ Forgiveness depends neither on the quality of the penitent's sorrow, nor on his works. It does not lie in the power of the Pope, bishops or clergy.¹⁰

Arguing that the *Sermon on Penance* was 'the foundation for the Protestant assault on the confessional', Ozment cites a passage in which Luther speaks of confession as oppressive.¹¹ However, the reformer does not generalise about lay

⁴ Tentler (1977), p. 346.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 263, 291 ff.

⁶ Cf. Oakley (1979), pp. 126-130. For a critique of an earlier version of Tentler's thesis, see Boyle (1974), esp. pp. 127-129.

⁷ Duggan (1984).

⁸ (E)yn Sermon von dem Sacrament der Pusz. (Erfurt, 1520). Modern reprint: WA 2, pp. 714-723.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 715.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 716-717.

¹¹ Ozment (1975), p. 50.

attitudes. On the one hand, he states that his message is addressed specifically to the 'faint hearted', who have been unable to find peace of mind.¹² Although he does not say how numerous he considers this group to be, in his *Christian Proof of the Day of Judgment* he speaks of the 'tender souls' tormented by confession as a small minority. At all events, he assures them that, since nobody can possibly count all of his sins, only those 'which at the time oppress and cause anxiety to the conscience' need be confessed. The sacrament is efficacious regardless of whether 'the confession is too much or too little'.¹³ On the other hand, Luther rebukes those who, trusting completely in their sorrow and works, seek to 'fortify with their works the word of God, through which they ought [properly] to be fortified in faith'.¹⁴ Here, he alludes to the belief that the sacrament worked *ex opere operato*. He also criticises the 'hard hearted'. Those who have neither experienced anxiety nor desired consolation cannot profit from the sacrament. Such people need to be reduced to despair by 'the terrible judgment of God', so that they learn to 'seek and sigh for the consolation of the sacrament'.¹⁵ Here again we are reminded of Luther's *Christian Proof of the Day of Judgment*, in which he stresses the need for 'constructive intimidation' of the 'obstinate'. Late medieval churchmen had often complained of laypeople who, fully confident in the goodness of their works, underestimated the need for grace.¹⁶ In this respect at least, there was nothing new in Luther's battle against 'works righteousness'. At all events, we cannot speak of a universal predisposition to accept Luther's message.

(iii) Confession in early popular pamphlets

In *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521), the main theme of which is vicarious satisfaction, the issue of confession is raised only fleetingly. At the end of a long diatribe against the charging of fees, the bailiff admonishes the pastor 'not to burden us in confession, and delve into our conscience on your own account, which is your established practice'.¹⁷ Nothing more is said. Had the author believed that his audience was burdened by confession, he would hardly have treated the matter so peripherally. In his *Final Statement* (1522), Eberlin complains about the cost of supporting a large clerical estate. He reminds his audience that their forefathers 'were pleased that up to ten or twelve villages should not have more than one pastor'. However, 'as soon as auricular confession and the papist mass got the upper hand, and so many sacraments, people thought that there was nothing better than to have a priest and this kind of divine service among them...'. Eberlin encourages those with a guilty conscience to seek advice and comfort from a pious Christian, whether lay or clerical.¹⁸ This argument is targeted less to captive consciences than to burdened pockets. Not only does it suggest that people

¹² WA 2, pp. 719-720.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 721-723.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 718.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 719-720.

¹⁶ Cf. Oberman (1967), p. 157 and Tentler (1977), p. 299.

¹⁷ GÖTZE, p. 18.

¹⁸ ENDERS 1, p. 186.

did not find confession oppressive; it reflects a high level of confidence in the efficacy of the sacrament.

Copp's *Two Dialogues* dramatises Luther's teaching on grace. The Spirit visits the Man. Announcing that he brings grace, he seeks admission to his house. Since he lacks letters of authorisation, the Man is reluctant to let him in. Pointing out that he already possesses Roman indulgences, he explains that the Pope sends legates 'into all the cities of Germany', empowered both to 'loose all sins' and to release souls from purgatory. 'If a man gives money and confesses under the grace of the same, then he is given letters in which he is promised the kingdom of heaven.' The Spirit retorts that 'the confession was added because of the disgrace, so that the people might notice it less.'¹⁹ Nothing more is said on the subject of confession. It is unlikely that an author so well versed in Luther's teaching had not read his *Sermon on Penance*. Copp perhaps felt that by focusing on the traffic in indulgences, he could convey his message on the gratuity of grace more effectively. At all events, it is significant that he does not seek to score points by denouncing the 'tyranny' of confession.

(iv) Popular perception of clerical power

In his *Sermon on Penance*, Luther argued that 'the keys and power of St Peter are not a power, but rather a service, and ... were given not to St Peter, but rather to you and me'.²⁰ Stressing that Christ made this service available to all, he attacks those clerics 'who do no more than ban, threaten and harass, making pure tyranny of such benign, consoling power, as though with the keys Christ had established only their will and lordship, and who do not know for what they should be used.'²¹ Here, Luther alludes to the fact that in Matthew 16, the keys are given to Peter alone, in Matthew 18 to the congregation. Later, he argued that in the latter text Christ had interpreted his earlier statement.²² He also rejected the traditional reading of John 21.15-17 - 'Feed my sheep...' - which also supported papal authority. The sheep, he argued, had been entrusted to Peter only after he had affirmed his love for Christ. Whoever loves Christ keeps his word. Since the Pope does not do so, he cannot love him and has therefore forfeited his pastoral role.²³

Following Luther's condemnation at Worms, evangelical propagandists had a vital interest in showing that the clerical claim to the keys of heaven was bogus. People would not support them if they feared the ban. In Copp's *Two Dialogues*, the Man warns the Spirit that he risks being 'put under the ban, in which case you would be damned for ever'. Christ has given the Pope 'power, so that what he binds or looses here will be bound or loosed there.' The Spirit asks: 'Do you think the pope and Christ's disciples

¹⁹ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi* (Erfurt, 1522), Aii^v - Aiii^f.

²⁰ WA 2, p. 719.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 719.

²² WA 6, p. 309.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 318.

are the same?’ Copp now draws on Luther’s interpretation of John 21. When the Man objects that the Pope is Peter’s successor, the Spirit argues that ‘Peter followed Christ in everything and did not make any additions (as did the other popes)...’. However, since the Pope and clergy ‘exterminate the teaching of Christ with their decrees’, they evidently hate him. Had Peter hated Christ, the sheep would not have been entrusted to his care.²⁴ Copp makes no reference to the ‘contradiction’ between Matthew 16 and 18. Stanberger, however, discusses it in his *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* (1522/23). The prior threatens the outspoken laybrother. ‘Christ has commanded us to put the unbelieving under the ban. Matthew 16. And we have the power to ban anyone who is opposed to us.’ The laybrother reminds him of Matthew 18. The beggar asks why, in the first text, Peter alone is given the keys. The laybrother explains that only Peter had acknowledged Christ as the son of God. The other disciples had thought he was merely another prophet. Only those who recognise Christ can exercise the power of the ban. Luther’s followers are therefore entitled to ban the clergy ‘for fighting so obstinately against the gospel’.²⁵

It is difficult to assess the impact of these arguments. In Erfurt, the issue was hotly contested. Usingen denounced the evangelical attempts to qualify the clear message of Matthew 16 as a distortion of scripture.²⁶ It is possible that people held the testimony of scripture to favour the papal standpoint. To simple folk, Luther may have appeared guilty of the sophistry of which he often accused his opponents. The pains which both Copp and Stanberger take to sever the connection between the Peter and the papacy speak for the persuasiveness of the Catholic appeal to Matthew 16. At all events, attesting to the strength of pre-existing belief in sacerdotal power, the debate suggests that confession was not an easy target for evangelical propagandists.

(v) Confession as a Catholic ‘weapon’

Luther complained that confessors ‘abused’ their role to intimidate his supporters.²⁷ Several popular pamphlets allude to the problem. In his *Practica* (1523), Kettenbach seeks to arm his readers with evasive answers to the questions of the ‘silly confessors’:

If the priest says to you: Are you a Lutheran too, answer thus: I would that I were a good Christian... And if he asks you further whether you believe his writings, then say: I believe in holy scripture, let others write and teach what they will... And if the subtle Thomist or Scotist devil then asks whether you believe that Luther is a heretic, then say: that I leave to God and learned men. I do not want to be the judge of this matter...²⁸

²⁴ Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi*, Aiii^r-Aiii^v.

²⁵ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspztech zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), [Biv]^r-[Biv]^v.

²⁶ Häring (1939), pp.161 ff.

²⁷ Brecht (1986), p. 27.

²⁸ CLEMEN 2, pp. 199-200.

Obviously such practice might have stimulated a new aversion to auricular confession among Luther's sympathisers. On the other hand, the fact that Kettenbach offers such advice reflects unshaken belief in the power of the sacrament. The dialogue *Discord* (1522) provides further evidence. One speaker, a layman, refuses to accept any authority but the bible. The priest threatens him:

Priest If you are going to behave like that, you will not receive absolution in confession but will be put under the ban.

Christ Woe to you scribes and hypocrites, who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. For you neither go in yourselves, nor suffer others to go in.

Layman Then I will tell lies if I find a confessor who is willing to absolve me.

David Confess to the Lord, who has created heaven and earth, for his mercy is everlasting.²⁹

The layman's remarks indicate that the author makes three assumptions about the attitudes of his audience. First, people continued to believe that the clergy had the power not just to administer, but also to withhold the benefits of Christ's atonement. Second, they did not believe that the power of the sacrament in any sense depended on the 'quality' of the confession. It worked, *ex opere operato*, even if the penitent lied. Third, as Duggan argues, they felt free to choose a congenial confessor.

(vi) The evangelical 'assault on the confessional'

In the Erfurt dialogue, *Grimmenthal* (1523), the peasant complains that 'our rector plagues us so much with confession. It pleases him when we confess once a week.' The artisan explains that 'confession has three uses: money, beautiful women; and, whenever anything happens that could be of disadvantage to their band, they take steps against it in the confessional.' He also accuses the monks of encouraging penitents to endow anniversary masses. Horrified, the priest asks: 'Do you disdain confession as well?' The artisan insists that he opposes only the abuse. Agreeing that there is no salvation unless 'we acknowledge our sins before God', he denies that a full confession is necessary and speaks of the 'psychological burden'. 'If we farted in our sleep, we would almost have to confess that, and at a particular time and a particular place'. If auricular confession were important, Christ would have mentioned it as often as faith and love of God and neighbour. As well as denouncing mandatory confession, the author attempts to convey Luther's view of the true nature of a sacrament. Originally, the artisan asserts, there were only three sacraments. The clergy 'made seven of them, because this brought them more money'. However, 'a sacrament is something in which

²⁹ SCHADE 3, p. 211.

God's promise of eternal salvation is contained. You receive this promise in baptism, in penance and in the body of Christ, but not in the other four'.³⁰

In his *Apologia* (1523), Kettenbach answers the Catholic charge that 'Luther has diminished the power of confession.'³¹ People, he alleges will no longer 'allow themselves to be treated as fools and apes... They don't want to worship their confessors but want rather to place their trust and hope in God...'.³² He lists 'fifteen fruits' of confession, several of which can be subsumed under the 'three uses' mentioned in *Grimmenthal*. Confession is a lucrative source of income, an occasion for promiscuity, and a means of wielding political influence. Kettenbach stresses the 'psychological burden'. 'Several people have committed suicide', for they have not been shown 'the way to Christ's grace, but rather to man's work and doctrines'. The 'mad confessors are responsible for many erring, confused and doubting consciences, so that several people, have been urged without reason to fast and pray, etc.'. In addition, he emphasises the social disgrace to those who, burdened with heavy penance, reveal themselves as sinners. Confessors also betray the confidence placed in them: 'In confession, people learn what kind of manservants and maidservants they should hire, whom they should dismiss and whom they should retain. For people ask the confessor this kind of thing.'³³

It is extremely unlikely that the picture of confession transmitted in these pamphlets corresponded to reality, although there is doubtless a grain of truth in some of the allegations. On the one hand, the arguments were probably intended to stir uncertainties which, as both Luther's *Sermon on Penance* and earlier popular pamphlets suggest, were anything but widespread. On the other hand, they may reflect continuing popular belief in clerical power and sacramental efficacy, and could, therefore, have been a forced response to a swing in opinion against Luther. In the same pamphlet, Kettenbach alludes to the impact of the Catholic campaign: his opponents, he maintains allege that 'Luther speaks out against the seven sacraments of the church and has only accepted two or three...'. These 'goose preachers whine from the pulpits that this is great heresy. Consequently, many laymen have become hostile to Luther.'³⁴ At all events, the attempt by both authors to muster every conceivable argument against auricular confession suggests that they knew that their fundamental objections would not suffice. Kettenbach in particular betrays himself by his thoroughness. If people asked their confessors for advice on hiring servants, or on other mundane problems, it is likely that they saw absolution as a routine, if necessary business, not as a terrifying ordeal. Moreover, he also contradicts his assertion that laypeople no longer wanted to 'worship their confessors':

The fourteenth fruit is the superstition of the penitents, who place their trust in their own confessors and in the absolution of the confessor, and in the penance which they receive, forgetting about Christ's suffering and faith,

³⁰ CLEMEN 1, pp. 150-151.

³¹ CLEMEN 2, p. 160.

³² *ibid.*, p. 160.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁴ CLEMEN 2, p. 159.

and not considering that they can and must be justified by Christ alone, by believing and trusting that he has acted sufficiently for them, and will forgive and excuse them all of their sins.³⁵

Kettenbach concludes on a frustrated note: ‘...the fruit which the papists have from confession is like the apple or fruit which grows by the Dead Sea where formerly Sodom and Gomorra were situated. Outwardly they appear nice and sweet and good. But inside they are vile and stinking...’ Kettenbach perhaps chooses this image in the hope of opening the eyes of those ‘blinded’ by the ritual of the sacrament. Finally, he remarks: ‘I have never noticed a single good thing in all the canon laws of the popes ... and yet they appear good.’³⁶

(vii) Confession in later pamphlets

Of course, for whatever reasons, some people did turn against confession. In Sachs’s *Canon and Shoemaker* (1524) the Canon asks ‘how it is that you Lutherans never go to confession?’ This, he declares is ‘most heretical’. When the Shoemaker replies that it hasn’t been commanded in scripture, the Canon cites Luke 17.14: Go forth and show yourself to the priests. The Shoemaker rejects this reading: ‘Does show mean confess? That is a funny kind of German. You must prove it more thoroughly with scripture. Should it be that auricular confession is such a great and holy thing, then it must be stated more clearly...’³⁷ Sachs aims to justify the behaviour of Luther’s declared adherents. His goal, it would seem, is less to win converts than to equip the converted with arguments. There is good reason to believe that they needed encouragement.

Preaching on Palm Sunday 1524, the time of year at which people traditionally confessed, Luther deals with the subject of confession.³⁸ Although he has often preached about the sacrament it is necessary to repeat everything ‘on account of those who [now] want to receive...[it]’. Since Christians are free, they cannot be forced to go to confession on pain of mortal sin. This sacrament ‘cannot bear it’ if it is received under duress. It seeks only ‘a hungry soul which drives itself and is happy to come to it.’ In the past, the Devil, through his agent, the Pope, dishonoured the sacrament by forcing people to participate. Since this has come to light, people must ‘keep the freedom, which we have from Christ’. Luther stresses this last point ‘on account of those who do not want to go to the sacrament at this time, and do so only on account of tradition and common custom’. The latter should be aware that there is no harm in going at Easter, provided that they do so voluntarily.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁷ SPRIEWALD, pp. 82-83.

³⁸ WA 15, p. 440.

Although God has not commanded auricular confession, the Pope has forced people to enumerate and confess their sins and so burdened the conscience. He has treated the sacrament 'as though it belonged to the secular realm'. Even now, everyone goes [to confession] only because it has been commanded'. It is better to stay away than to go unwillingly. In this way the conscience is spared.³⁹ However, auricular confession is commendable, if people have the right approach. Here, Luther describes the efficacy of the sacrament in much the same terms as he had done in his *Sermon on Penance* of 1519. It is good to hear the words of absolution in faith. However, people should pay less attention to their confession and more to the words of the priest.⁴⁰ Although the same message can be heard in sermons, in that case it 'flies into the congregation' and does not hit the believer so directly. People should rejoice to know that there is a place where God speaks to them alone.⁴¹ Another advantage is that they can seek advice. For these reasons, Luther declares, he would not want to do without the sacrament, even though it has not been commanded.⁴² Again, he stresses that people should not go either on account of the commandment, or because they consider their confession to be a good work. The purpose of the sacrament is absolution. For this reason, no works of satisfaction should be imposed. Faith in God's promise of forgiveness is enough. If people feel that their faith is too weak, they should turn to their neighbour, who will strengthen and comfort them.⁴³

It is of interest that Luther speaks of penance as a sacrament, notwithstanding the position he had adopted in the *Babylonian Captivity*. This suggests that he was addressing an audience which continued to take the traditional view of the ritual. The sermon reflects a social consensus that to confess at Easter was the 'right thing' to do, so broad that even those who did not want to hesitated to defy conventional practice. The reformer would seem to consider the latter to be a minority. To these he recommends voluntary participation. At the same time, he is clearly concerned that those who 'want to receive the sacrament' still placed their trust in their confession. Contrition was not a problem. Five years after the appearance of his *Sermon on Penance*, he is evidently conscious that penance has yet to be comprehended as an occasion to hear the words of absolution in faith. He hints at the reason why people may not have found this idea appealing. Reliance of their own 'weak faith' did not provide the same consolation as trust in the efficacy of sacred ritual. Noteworthy is Luther's observation that everyone goes to confession because it has been commanded. By 1524, in many places, the ecclesiastical authorities were no longer in a position to enforce obedience. If people nevertheless continued to comply with the regulations, this can only mean that popular perception of clerical power had remained unchanged. This reflects at once fear of the ban and confidence in the efficacy of priestly absolution. Although Luther repeatedly stresses that coercion is a burden on the conscience, that point, however important to him, would appear to have been lost on the greater part of his audience.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 484-485.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 485-486, 489.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 486-487.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 487.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 488.

14. Monastic and apostolic virtues

In his *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther argued that, justified by the 'alien righteousness' of Christ, the Christian did not need his works for himself. In the sure knowledge that he was saved, he could devote his life to the service of his fellow men. The evangelical call for neighbourliness should be seen in the context of a perennial tension between the contemplative, ascetic ideal and the idea of apostolic service. Conflicting opinion over whether Christ could best be served by a life of fasting and prayer or of active charity is best reflected in the proliferation and diversification of the religious orders in medieval Europe. Although, in principle, all were committed to the three classic virtues, in practice the tendency had always been to give precedence either to the cultivation of individual piety or to service to the community.¹ Viewed in this perspective, the distinguishing feature of the 'Reformation' is its renewal of emphasis on the idea of service to others.

Ozment argues that the idea that service to one's neighbour was to be the 'measure of value and importance' in society 'flattered the social ideals and aspirations of men and women who needed a change for the better'.² In an age when most people could not realistically expect to improve their economic or vocational status, the promised 'ethical fruits of the psychological liberation of salvation by faith' appealed both to the poorest burgher and to the highest magistrate. The former were given new responsibilities which, put into practice, would serve the interests of the latter.³ Although there is little evidence that the majority found Luther's doctrines psychologically liberating, the possibility that they were attracted by his message of neighbourliness deserves consideration.

(i) The evangelical assault on the fasting regulations

Perhaps no question was more hotly debated than that of mandatory fasting. Fasting involved abstinence from meat, milk, butter, cheese and eggs. Fish could be eaten, although this was beyond the means of most ordinary folk. The number of fast days per year was about 135. Clearly impracticable for working people, the fasting regulations had been relaxed in the fifteenth century.⁴ Dispensations, the 'butter brief', could be purchased. It is not clear whether laypeople resented this practice. The 1521 grievances do not mention it. However, Luther's defenders evidently hoped to score points by criticising clerical 'hypocrisy'. *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521) complains that 'the Romans' attending the Diet of Worms 'ate meat during the whole fast time, even though they command us to fast'. Laypeople, however, have to pay for exemption from Church

¹ Cf. Southern (1970), pp. 251-252.

² *ibid.*, p. 62.

³ *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴ Arnold (1990), p. 26. Whether, as Arnold suggests, fasting was universally mandatory on Saturdays seems questionable. Evangelical propagandists speak only of Friday. It is possible that practice varied from region to region.

law. The author praises Luther for condemning this 'abuse', but does not explain his views on fasting.⁵

Kettenbach also accuses the clergy of gluttony, despite their formal observance of the Church's regulations. By contrast, 'the poor peasants and artisans fast for the greater part of the year, even if they eat three or four times a day. For they seldom have enough good food to eat and good wine to drink'.⁶ Voluntary fasting, to quench the lust of the flesh, 'is well founded in scripture'. Compulsion, however, is 'against the gospel and its freedom'. God forbids 'sad and involuntary fasting' and does not want any works 'if your heart is not there'.⁷ Although the clergy argue that Christ set an example by fasting for forty days, imitation is impossible. Just as ordinary mortals cannot revive the dead or walk on water, so they would 'die before ten days had passed' if they 'wanted to fast like our Lord.' Christ should be emulated in 'humility, gentleness and patience', not in fasting.⁸ Kettenbach then tries to show that the clergy have misinterpreted scripture. None of the texts which they cite is a commandment. He rejects, for example their reading of Luke 5.35: 'The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.' This is not law, but prophecy. Christ foresaw that his disciples would encounter great hostility, and that their enemies would give them nothing to eat.⁹

As well denying that scripture prescribes fasting, Kettenbach argues that mandatory fasting is incompatible with Matthew 18.15, which states that the ban should be only imposed on incorrigible sinners as a last resort.¹⁰ Even if Christ had commanded fasting, the clergy 'ought not to say that we commit a mortal sin by not fasting.' Not all commandments, he suggests, should be taken seriously. Christ also said: 'Call no man your father on earth...'. However, it would be preposterous to suggest that small children committed mortal sin every day.¹¹ The use of the ban is the more reprehensible, for scripture shows that God 'does not want any food to be forbidden... as long as it is eaten in thanksgiving. If you can eat meat without offence, then it is not a sin, provided that you have got faith.'¹² As well as being opposed to the gospel, Kettenbach continues, mandatory fasting contravenes conciliar legislation, canon and natural law, and custom.¹³ Alluding to the practice of dispensations, Kettenbach complains that the pope and clergy 'curse the food and drink, the time, the day and almost all creatures that Christ has blessed, and then they sell all of these for money. [They]... will soon forbid us wine and water, bread and meat, so that we will have to buy them back for money...'¹⁴

In *Grimmenthal* (1523), the artisan attacks the clergy for not practising what they preach. Listing the delicacies which the clergy consume, he quips that he would

⁵ GÖTZE, p. 12.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 21f.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

enjoy fasting of this kind. The peasant agrees, remarking that 'if I have a soup, and broth or milk, and a jug of water, then I have lived well'.¹⁵ The artisan argues that it 'would be proper fasting... if we ceased to cause trouble to one another, if we curbed our swearing and blasphemy.' Nobody should eat meat on fast days 'just to make a name for himself among his neighbours'. However if 'a man eats, thinking, almighty God, you created everything so that man may use it, and have not forbidden anything at a particular time, I want to use this freedom and eat that which has been provided by God ...then it is not a sin.' Anyone who cannot afford fish, may buy meat instead. However, he should avoid 'causing envy and annoyance' to his neighbours.¹⁶

There is only one argument common to all three pamphlets reviewed above. The Church imposes laws which the clergy - allegedly - did not keep. Both the author of *Grimmenthal* and Kettenbach reject mandatory fasting on the grounds that it has no legal basis in scripture. Unlike Kettenbach, *Grimmenthal* does not commend voluntary abstention. He may have felt that what simple believers wanted were clear directives, one way or the other. It is noteworthy that Kettenbach goes to some lengths to demolish Catholic arguments. His deference to a range of authorities other than scripture calls for comment. Although he asserts that the law of the gospel is the ultimate source of legitimation, he evidently felt that it gained in weight, the more it could be shown to be in agreement with other laws. He even claims to have the pope and canon law on his side. Why should he have felt it helpful to demonstrate the unanimity of all laws? The most plausible explanation is that the gospel was so open to interpretation, at least on the question of fasting, that people were reluctant to believe a reading which ran against, or was thought to run against, other authorities. Whether or not the relevant scriptural passages were, in a strict sense, commandments, the mere fact that the gospel spoke of fasting as a virtue may have sufficed to persuade people that the laws of the Church should be obeyed. If the practice was good in itself, they may perhaps have seen no reason why it should not be enforced.

(ii) The reaction to evangelical teaching

In his *Faithful Admonition* (1522), Luther discusses the various reactions to his teaching.¹⁷ Some people are attracted by novelty. After reading a couple of pamphlets, they want to overturn everything, scorning those who keep the old observances. Although they consider themselves good Lutherans, they have not understood his teaching.¹⁸ Others oppose the new teaching, whether out of 'obstinacy' or 'weakness'. 'True' Christians must take issue with the obstinate, especially where they seek to corrupt other people with their poison. The weak, however, should be dealt with gently.

¹⁵ CLEMEN 1, p. 152.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁷ Eyn trew vormanung (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: WA 8, pp. 676-687.

¹⁸ WA 8, pp. 684-685.

If they are merely denounced for their beliefs they will regard their critics as proud and blasphemous.¹⁹

In a 1524 sermon, Luther returns to the subject.²⁰ Christians, he argues, are free either to fast or not to fast. Nobody, however, should attempt to prove his Christianity; whether by eating meat and denigrating the pope and priests or by fasting.²¹ The Christian should never deny this freedom, whether for the sake of the weak or if cited before the authorities for eating meat. In the latter case, he must declare: 'I have eaten it and want to eat it'. Otherwise, he denies Christ. In dealing with the weak, people should be guided by I Corinthians 13, in which Paul declares that he would do without meat for ever to avoid offence to his brothers. This, however, does not apply to the obstinate: 'If these same people do what they want, then we shall also do what we want'. It is necessary to stand up to those who oppose God's 'commandment of freedom'. 'These people are not brothers, but opponents. Were they brothers, then they would not withhold our freedom from us'.²²

Luther complains that many are not prepared to defend Christian freedom. Some argue that they wish to spare the weak, when in fact they fear shame and disgrace if they take a resolute stand. However, it is necessary to cause offence to the obstinate who mock freedom, saying 'Indeed you are fine Christians, you cannot fast and [you] eat meat.' Others eat meat because there is no danger. If, however, they are attacked, 'they deny it and claim that they have not done it'. This is to make a joke of freedom. If people want to exercise it, they must 'begin with such a conscience as to be able to defy the Devil'.²³ Those who understand their freedom may eat as they wish, at the same time making the necessary allowances for the weak. However, there are limits to forbearance:

We have now preached the gospel here so long and so much that even the children know. If some people wish to be weak, this no longer counts. Why have they not wanted to hear the preaching. ... We have shown enough forbearance and charity, when this thing was still too green and new, so that the weak could follow. If they have not fathomed it in this time, it is a good sign that they do not want to. We are ready to accept that you are weak, and could not follow. But if you do not want to follow, we will not accept it.²⁴

People may fast if they wish to subdue the body. For if the body is full, 'then it serves neither for preaching nor prayer nor study'. However, people should not fast 'in order to earn something by a good work'. 'True' fasting profits the preaching of the Word. However, 'if you wanted to follow Christ, you would have to have to eat nothing for forty days and nights'.²⁵

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 685-686.

²⁰ Eyn Sermon vonn der Beycht vñ dem Sacrament., (Erfurt, 1525). Modern reprint: WA 15, pp. 444-450, 481-505.

²¹ WA 15, p. 445.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 446-447.

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 447-449.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 449.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 450.

Fasting is also the main theme in Sachs's *Conversation between an Evangelical Christian and a Lutheran*.²⁶ There are three speakers: Master Ulrich, a Catholic; his bother-in-law, Peter, a 'so-called' Lutheran; and Hans - the author's mouthpiece. Master Ulrich refuses to attend the evangelical sermon. The preacher is a heretic, and ought to hang. He has heard more than enough from Peter about how he rejects good works. He has never heard 'a good Christian word' from the Lutherans, who merely attack the clergy and mock lay Catholics. Peter defends his standpoint, while Hans pleads for patience towards the 'weak'. In the end, of course, all are reconciled. Sachs speaks primarily to Luther's adherents whose resolute exercise of 'Christian freedom', particularly their refusal to fast, has harmed the cause of 'the gospel'. Peter's arguments shed considerable light on their attitudes. It is noteworthy that Sachs assumes that his audience is sufficiently versed in scripture to be able to defend a harder line.

Peter refuses to make allowances for the 'weak'. Although St Paul counsels against giving offence, 'it is also written, I Corinthians 10 [29-20]: Why should I allow my freedom to be judged by the conscience of another?'²⁷ There is no need to consider those who 'were rejected by Christ, Matthew 5: Any plant that has not been planted by God my heavenly father will be rooted up'.²⁸ Forbearance has merely made the Romanists 'more wicked and obstinate'. Citing Revelations 18, Peter also defends violent action against the clergy: 'And inasmuch as they have been pompous and wanton, fill up their cup with agony and suffering.'²⁹ The evangelical preachers and Luther himself have denounced everything that he now attacks. 'If it is right for them', he argues, 'it is right for us.'³⁰ He also defends verbal and physical violence against Catholics. This is the only language they understand. Despising scripture, they stick to their old habits, still believing that they will be saved by their works. Meekness in the face of obstinacy is ineffectual: 'They act too basely and speak wicked words and accuse us of being heretics, and if we do not bite back they cry out joyfully: We've won! We've won!' That is why it is necessary to 'lay our clubs to their shields.'³¹

Hans argues that although 'God has made the eating of meat free and permissible', it is more important to consider the 'weak'. If you have faith, then have it to yourself before God.³² Many Lutherans eat meat out of wickedness. Their faith has no foundation. There is no need for impatience in opposing the 'Roman chain'. St Paul says: 'The Lord will strangle him with the spirit of his mouth and make an end of him'.³³ Charity requires that the burden of statutes and civic custom be borne willingly. To abstain from meat for the sake of a weak and ignorant neighbour is 'pleasing to God, though previously it was an abomination.' Only by showing patience, will Lutherans be

²⁶ Eyn gesprech eynes Euangelischen Christen mit eynem Luttherischen (Erfurt, 1524). Modern reprint: SPRIEWALD, pp. 150-173.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 155.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 163.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 169.

³² *ibid.*, p. 152.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 155.

recognised as Christ's disciples. Charity of this order 'is the true test of a Christian and not the eating of meat, for dogs and cats can do that as well.'³⁴ By refusing to fast, Lutherans have harmed the evangelical cause: 'for the eating of meat is to the common man the greatest scandal and offence in the evangelical doctrine'.³⁵ If Lutherans attack such works without explaining why they are unnecessary, they will merely reinforce people's attachment to the old faith. Only the comforting words that 'Christ's death is the sole work of our salvation' will 'soften the hearts of the ignorant' and bring down 'human laws'.³⁶ Hans also criticises violent action against the clergy. Vengeance should be left to God. If threatened, Christians should turn the other cheek and refute 'human talk' with the word of God. 'Uproar and shouting... is unjust and very offensive to the common man'.³⁷ When evangelical preachers attack the clergy, they are moved by 'responsible Christian charity', and seek to free the consciences both of the seduced and of the seducers. However, Peter and his friends do so out of 'insolence, envy, or of wicked habits', all of which is not only forbidden in scripture, but is also counter-productive. People who see that 'the Lutherans can do nothing but slander the clergy and beat and stab them' will 'flee evangelical doctrine'.³⁸ Although Luther has denounced the burdens on the conscience, he has also warned that the behaviour of his adherents is bringing 'the gospel' into disrepute. Eating meat and persecuting the clergy are fruits which 'show that the tree is certainly bad and rotten'.³⁹

Eberlin's *Erfurt Sermon* of 1524 criticises those who confuse Christianity with mere hostility to the old faith. The Christian way to tackle the Devil 'does not consist in desecrating images and devouring meat and abusing priests, but only in prayer to God in faith.' Many adherents of Luther 'still do not grasp the true fundament of Christianity':

They persist in purely outward forms. That is, they take steps against the ceremonies of feast days and fast days, the remembrance of souls, offerings, confession, criticising the estate of priests and monks. And besides this, they recognise little, and hardly discover themselves, or what God has made of Christ for us.⁴⁰

Many of those who reject Luther's message 'say that they are not deviating from God's truth, but from the abuse of those that are wanton, and are displeased by the neglect of a considerable number of feast days and fast days, and by the exodus of the monks from their monasteries and by disobedience to the bishops, etc.' However, 'Christianity does not justify any wantonness, any sacrilege, just as little on the side of the Lutherans as on the Pope's side'. Christ, however, 'does not cease to accept the Lutheran, that is the Christian, teaching as just, merely because some people abuse it'. Nobody who rejects the old customs should be 'judged as having acted in an unchristian manner'.⁴¹

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp 158-159.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁰ ENDERS 3, p. 248.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 248.

(iii) Luther's supporters and the call for Christian neighbourliness

Judging by the remarks of Luther, Sachs and Eberlin, the assault on mandatory fasting would seem to have alienated several laypeople, though it clearly appealed to his supporters. Yet were the latter also attracted by his teaching on charity? The author of the *Dialogue on Pope Hadrian's Entry* (1522) did not think so:

Where are they fulfilling love of their neighbour... They don't want to give the priests anything more, nor do they want to give the poor anything either. They never fasted properly up to now, and now they don't fast at all. Previously they prayed only a little, and now they don't pray at all, saying, Luther says that three or four paternosters are sufficient...⁴²

Ozment has drawn attention to this dialogue, as evidence that 'even strong allies... initially had questions about the ethical consequences of Protestantism'.⁴³ However, a 1525 sermon published under Kettenbach's name makes the same point.⁴⁴ The sermon is on the text Matthew 7. 15-20, in which Christ warns about false prophets who can be recognised by their fruits. This applies to the Catholic clergy, whose zealous service of God is based on opinion, and not scripture. Only true faith can bring forth good fruit, that is works of charity. However, the 'evangelical tree' is also producing 'bitter and sour' fruits. Usury, adultery, envy, theft and robbery are the order of the day. 'Many people now act as if all sin and evil were permitted... and nevertheless want to be called evangelical. O God, we want to use evangelical freedom to sin.' God will punish abuse severely, for there are many trees on which no evangelical fruits can be seen.⁴⁵

For Catholic propagandists, the failure of Lutherans to live up to the standards set by their leaders was clearly a boon. A 1524 dialogue by Hans Sachs sets out to refute an 'argument which our Romanists declaim loudly from the pulpit' in order to denounce evangelical doctrine.⁴⁶ Because they have achieved little through writing and disputation, they now attack the sinful life of Luther's adherents.⁴⁷ One speaker, Romanus, a Catholic priest, alleges that although the evangelicals constantly criticise clerical greed, they are no better themselves.⁴⁸ Citing copiously from the gospel, Romanus attacks the merchant classes for oppressing the

⁴² CLEMEN 3, p. 22.

⁴³ Ozment (1975), p. 132.

⁴⁴ Eyne Predigt auff den achten Süttag nach dē Pfingstag (Erfurt, 1525). Modern Reprint: CLEMEN 2, pp. 215-224. CLEMEN argues, p. 235, that Kettenbach had died by 1525 and that the unknown author of the sermon drew on Kettenbach's earlier works.

⁴⁵ CLEMEN 2, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Ein Dialogus: des ynhalt: ein argumēt der Römischen / widder das chzistisch heuflein / dē Geitz / auch ander offtllich laster || zc. betreffend. (Erfurt, 1525). Modern reprint: SPRIEWALD, pp. 123-149.

⁴⁷ SPRIEWALD, pp. 123-124.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 124-126.

poor.⁴⁹ Ignoring the gospel's prohibition of usury, they haul their creditors before the courts.⁵⁰ Nor do they help the needy. If a poor man occasionally drinks wine for the good of his health, they justify their stinginess by arguing that drunkenness should not be encouraged.⁵¹ There has been no change among the so-called evangelicals, except that they rail against the clergy. They say it is enough to preach 'faith, faith, charity, charity.' They refuse to confess, fast or pray, and are captive to heathen vices - greed, adultery, whoring, envy, murder, blasphemy, disobedience. 'It is on account of these fruits that you are called heathen and not Christians: for Christ says, Matthew 7: By their fruits you will know them'.

Reichenburger defends some of the practices which Romanus has condemned. Many of those who borrow money are not in need. In such cases, there is no harm in taking interest.⁵² Other debtors are drunkards or gamblers, who do not respond to charitable appeals. If the creditors are to see their money again, they have no choice but to go to court.⁵³ It is true, he admits, that many rich evangelicals do not help the poor. Some, however, do give alms, although not ostentatiously, like the Pharisees.⁵⁴ Sachs, however, clearly realises that the charges of greed and vice cannot be plausibly refuted. Throughout the dialogue, Reichenburger condemns most of the evils named by Romanus. However, evangelical doctrine should not be rejected on account of those 'who live more like heathens than Christians'.⁵⁵ It is true that most of those who call themselves evangelical are not Christians. As Christ said in Matthew 22, 'many are called, but few are chosen'. As Paul warned in Galatians 5, many use their freedom to satisfy the desires of the flesh. Like swine 'they tread the delicate daisies in the dung', doing great dishonour to the gospel. However, in time they will be dealt with in the same way as all others, for all men are sinners.⁵⁶

Romanus challenges Reichenburger: 'So you are saying that true Christians do not live without sin either'. Reichenburger replies that he has hit the nail on the head. Those who say that they are without sin deceive themselves. It is the dialectic of the flesh and the spirit which produces true Christians. It is written in I Peter 4 [1] that 'whosoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased to sin'. God sometimes allows his elect to fall into outward vice, as in the case of David's adultery or Peter's denial of Christ. In this way they thirst for his mercy. Romanus objects that few people have received evangelical teaching in this sense. He has noticed neither service of God nor the works of charity.⁵⁷ Reichenburger responds:

You keep saying 'notice', 'notice'. Do you not know that the kingdom of God does not come with signs that can be observed, so that you can say:

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 126-130.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 130-134.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 142-145.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

Look here or there. Rather it is inward in the heart, Matthew 7 [20-21]. True divine service does not involve outward gestures. True worshippers worship God in the spirit and in truth...⁵⁸

The 'works righteous' do not see the works of charity which are performed without ostentation. They wrongly believe that nobody has been improved by the gospel, as outward sin is still rampant 'especially among those who call themselves evangelical, together with other children of the world'. Good and evil must live together. God, however, will release the godly from temptation. They will flourish like lilies among thorns. The rest, however, can expect eternal damnation.⁵⁹

It is clear that Luther's supporters had gained a reputation for unruliness and loose living. Sachs evidently felt that the charges raised by the Catholic side could not credibly be denied. He freely admits that most of those who called themselves evangelical were, by his standards, not Christians. It is difficult to say whether the propagation of Luther's teaching actually led to an increase in anti-social behaviour, or whether the 'Lutherans' merely stood out on account of the vast gulf between reality and ideal. Gengenbach's observations suggest that people were much the same as before. The only difference was that those who had always defied previously accepted norms now felt that they could do so on the authority of Luther and the gospel. At all events, Luther's supporters did not choose neighbourliness as an alternative to conventional piety. Sachs's response to the charge that Luther's teaching had not produced the promised fruits is revealing. On the one hand, he seeks to vindicate his gospel by arguing that a handful of 'true' Christians were doing works of charity, but with such modesty that they passed unnoticed. On the other hand, he argues that the co-existence of good and evil is part of God's strategy for making the chosen few fathom the boundlessness of his mercy to sinners. Whatever the theological merits of this argument, historically it was the result of embarrassment. Sachs, like our other two authors, knew that most of Luther's followers supported him for the 'wrong' reasons. What clearly attracted some people was the idea that they could accept themselves as they were. Luther's view that sin was a human condition certainly struck a chord with a section of the laity. Unlike Luther, however, they were happy to leave it at that. If salvation was for nothing, why should they bother to show their gratitude by serving their neighbour? Under pressure from his Catholic opponents, Sachs inadvertently supplied arguments which were likely to reinforce this attitude. The kingdom of God does not come with signs that can be observed.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

(iv) The process of confessionalisation

The propagation of the doctrine of justification, far from uniting urban society in joyous affirmation of the 'rediscovered' gospel, split the laity. Difficult though it is to gauge the size of the mutually hostile confessional groups, I incline to the view that Luther's supporters were in the minority. This is suggested particularly by Sachs's *Dialogue between an Evangelical Christian and a Lutheran*. Sachs appears to be addressing a small band of highly motivated men. They feel that their 'freedom' needs to be defended. Their fear that concessions to 'the weak' will be interpreted as capitulation suggest that they could take no comfort in the strength of their numbers. Rather, they seek collective security in the demonstrative exercise of their new liberties. Aware of their vulnerability, Sachs offers consolation by suggesting that, contrary to appearances, events are unfolding in accordance with God's plan. 'The persecution which is now beginning to pass over the Christians' has been prophesied by Christ. It is highly significant that Sachs speaks of the 'common man' as an opponent of Luther's teaching. Nor is he the only pamphleteer to do so. Kettenbach, in his *Apologia*, responding to the charge that Luther has introduced a 'new faith', complains: 'Those whom the common man considers devout are shown by Christ to be knaves and deceivers of the people'.⁶⁰ Yet whether or not 'the weak' constituted the majority, they were clearly far too numerous to be ignored. Sachs evidently believed that the fate of the evangelical movement hung on its ability to broaden the base of its support. Like Luther and Eberlin, he was convinced that popular aversion to evangelical teaching was reinforced by the behaviour of the 'so-called Lutherans', who seemed set on overturning Christian virtue. For Sachs, the most urgent priority is to arrest the process of disenchantment with Luther by persuading the reformer's adherents to moderate their conduct.

Those people who rejected the evangelical message would seem to have done so because it came across as an attack on piety. It was not easy to convey Luther's idea that good works were 'to be rejected and not to be rejected'. Sachs's dialogue suggests evangelical preachers had few opportunities to correct 'misunderstandings'. People like Master Ulrich simply refused to attend their sermons. Evangelical propagandists explain scepticism by arguing that people had yet to fathom their teaching. As soon as they have realised 'that Christ's death is the only work of our salvation', they will abandon their resistance. So tendentious a rationalisation of the unpopularity of Luther's teaching cannot satisfy the historian. Indeed it is significant that by 1524, for Luther himself, it was no longer plausible. The refusal of the weak to embrace Christian freedom 'is a good sign that they do not want to'. To put it more objectively: his doctrine did not address their real needs.

It is doubtful whether many ordinary people shared Luther's sense of captivity. In a religious culture in which concrete action was as important as abstract belief, it was difficult to persuade people to comprehend laws as a burden on the conscience. On the

⁶⁰ CLEMEN 2, p. 168, ll. 22-25.

contrary: the law was a consolation. On the one hand, salvation was assured to those who obeyed it. On the other hand, it brought the relief which came more from 'doing' rather than believing. Moreover, through obedience people experienced a sense of nearness to Christ which, though it horrified the reformers, was nonetheless emotionally satisfying. When Luther and Kettenbach deprecated the attempt to emulate Christ in fasting, they were speaking to people who, in their own modest way, were practising the potent idea of *imitatio*. For Luther this was a 'delusion', for a great part of his audience, a form of security. The evangelical message of gratuitous salvation, however, devalued their role in the pursuit of holiness. The reformers' view of humanity was far from flattering. People doubtless agreed that they were sinners. However, the idea that they were totally corrupt, incapable of making amends, was bound to repel many. The reformers did of course offer believers a field of activity. Yet the call for service to others was much less attractive than scholars often suppose. Churchmen of both persuasions stressed the need for neighbourliness. Usingen warned people not to think that the foundation of churches or the intercession of the saints will help them escape their moral obligations. While a religious elite might praise charity, the idea that it was the mark of a true Christian was perhaps less alluring to people in whom the daily struggle for survival inevitably brought out the worst. In his *Sermon on the Road to Worms* Luther complained that people might strangle their neighbour and yet hold mass. Here, he put his finger on one reason for the appeal of 'medieval piety'. It was easier to make up for one's moral shortcomings than to overcome them.

What then of the motivation of the 'so-called Lutherans'? On the one hand, as Sachs's *Conversation between an Evangelical Christian and a Lutheran* indicates, they had made Christian freedom their slogan. On the other hand, there is broad consensus among evangelical propagandists that their supporters failed to grasp the core of their teaching. If this assessment is reliable, it is doubtful whether the attraction of Luther's teaching lay in the peace of conscience which followed from acceptance of human depravity and total reliance on divine mercy. As Eberlin puts it, Luther's lay adherents 'hardly discover themselves, or what God has made of Christ for us'. In many ways, the pattern underlying the response to the evangelical message by the 'so-called' Lutherans is identical to that which we have seen among 'the weak'. They find consolation in a legalistic view of the obligations of a Christian. For Luther and other reformers, freedom consisted in the knowledge that their salvation did not depend on the fulfilment of laws. For many of his followers, it was mere dispensation from the laws. The idea of freedom makes sense only if it brings concrete advantages. In Sachs's dialogue, Peter asks: 'What good is our freedom, if we cannot use it'. We are dealing with a legal culture which understood 'liberties' as a privilege of exemption to be defended against attack from without. For Lutherans, too, action is the medium of religious experience. As Luther put it, people wanted to 'prove' their Christianity either by eating or by not eating meat. Sachs criticises adherents of the evangelical party because they 'begin to be Christians by outward gestures'. Eberlin speaks of their 'persistence' in 'outward forms' as an inversion of 'works righteousness'. Through iconoclasm freedom became a tangible religious experience. When Eberlin objects that Christianity 'does not consist in

desecrating images and devouring meat and abusing priests', he is addressing people who clearly believed that it did.

Scholars have often treated the suddenness with which people abandoned established religion as an historical conundrum. How could people so apparently satisfied with the ministrations of the Church turn so violently against it? Beneath the external picture of radical transformation there is probably an underlying continuity of motive: the desire to reap the fruits of Christ's passion without the burden of individual responsibility. Luther had spoken of the army of 'imperfect and lazy Christians, who do not want bravely to practise good works', but preferred to follow easier paths offered by the Church. In offering people a 'heavenly indulgence', Luther effectively outbid the Church. He not only freed people from obligations which they had never wanted to bear, but ennobled the soft option. Whereas the medieval Church had made concessions to human infirmity, Christian freedom, in the eyes of those who espoused it, did not have the taint of a shabby alternative to true virtue. We need not argue that Luther stood alone, 'misunderstood' by all. However, had the evangelical movement depended on the support of 'true' converts, it would never have achieved the dynamism which enabled it to overthrow the existing order.

PART V

THE POWER STRUGGLE

15. The assault on the monastic life

(i) Sacred power

While the Church made demands on believers, it also allowed them to share in its vast reserves of power. As well as doing good works, laypeople participated in the merit of the monks and saints. Through the mediation of the priesthood, they had access to the sacraments and sacramentals. Power was equated with the holy and was valued for both its otherworldly benefits and its inner-worldly efficacy. Religion was the means of coping with everyday hazards and afflictions.¹ There was broad consensus that communities profited from the presence of monks, whose piety shielded them against evil. For individuals, too, there was practical help. Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* complains that the monks 'deceive' simple people: 'Dear woman, give us cheese, flax, eggs, bread and butter. You owe it to us. If you do this, your cows will not lose weight and the milk will be good.'² Much the same favours were expected from the saints and through the mass.

Evangelical theology struck at all of these props. Reformers rejected both the monastic ideal and the cult of the saints on the grounds that Christ was the sole power by which men were saved. Their belief that faith was the only path of access Christ led them to attack both the priesthood and the prevailing view of sacramental efficacy. In two senses, we can speak of a 'power struggle'. First, reformers wished to change people's perception of the holy. In *Grimmenthal* (1523), the monk complains that 'nobody reveres the saints any more, nor the priests nor the monks, nor holy water, nor consecrated candles, nor herbs, palm branches or fire, nor anything on earth...'³ The artisan retorts that 'there is no power in those things... If we put our faith and trust in God alone, we would not need them.'⁴ Second, as evangelical propagandists saw it, failure to acknowledge the 'true' source of sacred power did not merely endanger people's souls. They were also more likely to remain loyal to the Church. In *Grimmenthal*, the priest predicts that 'as soon as the saints perform some miracles, our cause will cease to be in difficulty, for the common people are generally very attached to... [them]'.⁵ Kettenbach compares the processions of the priests of Baal with those held on Corpus Christi, 'when the priests and virgins carry our relics and idols'. Their purpose, he explains, is 'to frighten you..., so that you may fear the idols, and honour them, and offer money and contributions...'.⁶

¹ Scribner (1987), pp. 1-16.

² Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zwischē einem Pzior leyenzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), Biii^r.

³ CLEMEN 1, p. 142.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶ CLEMEN 2, p. 58.

(ii) The vulnerability of the monastic ideal

The basic idea of medieval monasticism was that Christians could serve God best by abandoning the world - a widely accepted reading of Matthew 19.29: And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or land, for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. While all Christians were bound to obey the law, the religious lived under a Rule designed to help them follow the 'counsels of perfection'. The taking of religious vows, an irrevocable commitment, was regarded as a 'second baptism'.⁷ It was primarily this notion which led Luther to attack monasticism. While voluntary asceticism was acceptable, the view of the religious life as a more meritorious form of divine service was a particularly pernicious instance of 'works righteousness', irreconcilable with his doctrine of grace.⁸

Long before Luther, of course, monasticism had been the target of criticism, mainly because of the disparity between ideal and reality. Paradoxically, flight from the world invariably led to greater entanglement in it. Organised sanctity required a solid financial basis, which was provided largely by laypeople eager to participate in the monks' piety. Yet corporate wealth was difficult to justify, especially when standards fell. As established institutions, the orders fulfilled functions unconnected with their founders' aims. Offering prestige and economic security, they drew numerous recruits from the families of their benefactors. This undoubtedly contributed to the breakdown of internal discipline, the failure to enforce strict enclosure, sexual licence, and the many other symptoms of a malaise affecting practically every order. Late medieval monasticism, however, was both decadent and vital. The spread of the *devotio moderna*,⁹ the expansion of several smaller orders, notably the Carthusians, and the observant reform in the larger orders attest to the enormous appeal of the monastic ideal.¹⁰ Yet despite impressive successes, the 'ugly face' of unreformed monasticism remained a blight on the 'system'.

By the eve of the Reformation, humanist critics had raised more fundamental objections. The will to follow Christ could be roused only by moving the spirit, not by scrupulous submission to a Rule. Nor was it necessary to abandon the world for a life of self-abnegation. Under Erasmus's influence, the ideal of *contemptus mundi* was being redefined. The rejection of the carnal was possible in all states of life. Humanism threatened monasticism more through infiltration than confrontation. Although monastic reformers saw strict observance as an antidote to decadence, the idea was variously interpreted. The Erfurt theologian, Johannes Paltz, praised unfaltering conformity to the Rule as a vital support for weaker monks, who could rest assured that God would reward their obedience.¹¹ Geiler von Kaisersberg, by

⁷ On the monastic ideal in the middle ages, see Lohse (1963) pp. 43-200. On the social context of the growth of medieval monasticism, see Southern (1970), pp. 214-299.

⁸ Lohse (1963), pp. 375 ff.

⁹ Post (1968), pp. 653-656.

¹⁰ Elm (1989), p. 17.

¹¹ Hamm (1982), pp. 294-299. On Paltz's view of the monastic life, see also Lohse (1963), pp. 160ff.

contrast, warned against punctiliousness as an end in itself. Outward forms should not become a substitute for their original inspiration.¹² In seeking to promote an interior, affective piety, monastic reformers and humanists shared considerable common ground. At the same time, the idea that the world was the proper theatre for Christian endeavour gained currency among the monks. Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, a handbook on Christian living for the educated layman, strongly influenced his admirers among the religious.¹³ Luther would find among his audience of monks many whose attachment to the monastic ideal had been weakened. This, of course, applies only to monastic elite. The minds of the rank and file are a closed book.

(ii) The common people and the collapse of medieval monasticism

Lay attitudes towards the religious, though equivocal, were not inconsistent. In apocalyptic literature, resentment of their corporate wealth was regularly vented in prophecies of their destruction. There was also a long tradition of popular protest against laxity.¹⁴ On the other hand, the religious took the lead in a collective pious enterprise. People expected them to do their job properly and according held reformed houses in high esteem. With rising educational standards, awe of monastic piety probably declined, at least among the urban professional and merchant classes. However, it is difficult to say to what extent they had assimilated humanist criticism of monasticism. At all events, in 1521, the regular orders still dominated religious life.

By 1525, city councils were beginning to dissolve religious houses. It is usually argued that they acted under massive pressure 'from below'. Debate has focused on popular motivation. Henry J. Cohn suggests that popular perception of evangelical teaching was shaped by the anticlerical prophetic tradition and by resentment of clerical economic power. Applying the images of spiritual oppression to real instances of material oppression, layfolk attacked the monasteries and destroyed rent books.¹⁵ Alternatively, it is argued that Luther's exposure of Catholic 'error' transformed anticlericalism. Chrisman maintains: 'The laity were no longer concerned about the immorality of the clergy, the sexual mores of the monks, the wealth and luxury of the monastic or chapter clergy'. What counted now was the realisation that salvation depended on the individual's faith in Christ. Although pamphlets contain traditional complaints, they are only 'minor themes'.¹⁶ The fact that several laypeople removed their daughters from convents attests to acceptance of Luther's case against monasticism. In the early 1520s, 'both the Protestant clergy and the laity revealed a conscious desire to end the separation between the spiritual and the secular worlds'.¹⁷ Similarly, Ozment argues: 'Whether it came from the circles of

¹² Hamm (1982), p. 296.

¹³ Cf. CWE 66, xlii.

¹⁴ Cf. Scribner (1981), pp. 37ff.

¹⁵ Cohn (1975), pp. 3-31.

¹⁶ Chrisman (1980), pp. 36-38.

¹⁷ Chrisman (1982), p. 162.

the *Devotio moderna* or more traditional sources, humanists and Protestant reformers firmly rejected the *contemptus mundi* of late medieval piety'.¹⁸ The reformers showed that secular labour was pleasing to God, while the 'outward' piety of the monks was an abomination. 'Of such praise of the lay estate was Protestant popularity made'.¹⁹

One problem with such interpretations is their premise: that popular pressure led to the collapse of monasticism. This was in fact the result of several factors. First, it was due largely to the religious themselves. Following the publication of Luther's tract *On Monastic Vows*, they left the monasteries in droves. In Erfurt, the exits began in late 1521. Up to three hundred religious returned to 'the world'.²⁰ The laity did not have the option of retaining the existing system. Second, the mass exodus was possible because political deadlock over Luther lamed the machinery of ecclesiastical discipline. Third, in Erfurt - as in other cities - the council had already begun to dismantle the liberties of religious corporations. During the 1520s, with the support of its evangelical and Catholic factions, it fastened its grip on monastic property. Finally, there are indeed clear signs of lay hostility to the monks. In Erfurt, from 1522 on, they were subjected to insult and mockery. The council intervened to protect monasteries from stone-throwing crowds.²¹ In the 1525 revolt, peasants attacked the monasteries and convents, driving out the religious and destroying their sacred objects.²² There is evidence that, on this occasion, the peasants acted with the council's approval.²³

The attitudes underlying crowd behaviour are difficult to interpret. Acts of iconoclasm suggest that 'religious' motives played a part in the attack. Yet how accurately they reflect peasant opinion is impossible to gauge. In Erfurt, townspeople do not seem to have joined the assault on the monasteries, although - if Chrisman and Ozment are correct - it is conceivable that they welcomed a devastating blow to a mode of piety which they rejected. However, there is strong evidence that many were anything but happy with its demise. In 1522, Luther criticised Lange's exit. While his motives were honourable, he had given offence to laypeople and ammunition to the Catholic party.²⁴ In his *Erfurt Sermon* (1524), Eberlin speaks of the displeasure of many people at the exits.²⁵ After the brief phase of evangelical ascendancy, the Erfurt council refused to dissolve monasteries, arguing that 'many pious Christians' considered the regular life superior to 'fleshly life'.²⁶ In 1527, it prevented a citizen from removing his wife from a convent, insisting that 'the monastic life was not reproached by other pious Christian believers, but was considered better and more honourable than the fleshly life'.²⁷

¹⁸ Ozment (1975), p. 32.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁰ Weiss (1988), pp. 136ff.

²¹ Weiss (1988), p. 139.

²² *ibid.*, p. 178.

²³ Scribner (1972), p. 212.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 138; Brecht (1981), p. 68.

²⁵ ENDERS 3, p. 248.

²⁶ Weiss (1988), p. 219.

²⁷ Scribner (1987), p. 210.

(iv) The apology of a 'renegade' monk

Public criticism of the exodus forced fugitives to justify themselves. In his *Instruction on the Reasons for his Exit*, Heinrich Plunder, who left the Charterhouse at Eisenach, criticises the Visitor for forbidding Luther's writings. Arguing that it would have been better to prohibit the Order's statutes, he cites Hugo, author of the Carthusian Rule: 'We gave precedence to all those things written in the Epistle of St Jerome, the Rule of St Benedict and other accepted writings'. However, Plunder quips, 'there is no thought of ... Christ' or 'of the apostles who preached what Christ had commanded them'. Fearing hell, the monks 'took flight to the laws of man' and 'designed a way of ordering their lives'. For many, this is an unbearable burden. Others, who claim to profit from 'the presence and consolation of Bruno [the Order's founder]', lack 'the spirit of God (the best of all comforters...)'.²⁸ Only the gospel liberates man from sin. St Paul repeatedly admonishes Christians to beware of human laws. Christ says that he is the way, the truth and the life. Nowhere in the gospel 'will you find a single point with which the monastic life can be defended, unless you wanted to interpret it wrongly'.²⁹ Since Paul says that all are one in Christ, it follows that 'all sects and orders, all divisions are excluded'. On entering the monastery, Plunder admits 'I thought that through the order's piety, I could obtain the righteousness that counts before God...'. For this reason, he 'had a second baptism'.³⁰ Now, however, at a 'convenient time' he will discard his habit and take 'the common path of all Christians, which Christ himself preached'.³¹ Plunder admits the monks were widely admired, despite, their 'sinful' life. 'If the people knew what goes on [in the monasteries]..., they would not let us live an hour, and the walls would be razed. But because... they see only the outward appearance, they are well pleased'.³² He expected a hostile reaction to his exit. Although the 'weak' have taken offence, he is 'prepared to suffer... if abuse and reviling are heaped upon me by those with little understanding'.³³

(v) The debate in Erfurt

Plunder in effect acknowledges that strict observance was highly valued by the laity. Reformed houses were a difficult target for evangelical reformers. In Erfurt, standards were generally high.³⁴ This was a clear advantage for the Catholic side in the propaganda battle. Usingen put the traditional case for the regular life.³⁵ Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* gives a one-sided, but illuminating

²⁸ Eyns ausgangen Kartheusers Heinrici Plunderi Vntherzicht (Erfurt, 1523), Aii^r - Aii^v.

²⁹ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^r - [Aiv]^v.

³⁰ *ibid.*, B^v.

³¹ *ibid.*, B^v.

³² *ibid.*, B^r.

³³ *ibid.*, [Bii]^r.

³⁴ Cf. Kleineidam (1969), p. 115.

³⁵ Paulus (1893), pp. 58-59.

picture of the debate. As suggested earlier, the prior is probably based on Usingen. The dialogue hardly reflects the force with which he and others defended monasticism. Yet, transmitting a 'shadow' of the Catholic case, it helps to explain its continuing popularity. The plot indicates that public discussion was triggered by the mass exits. The prior rebukes the laybrother for ringing the wrong bell. Scornful of this attention to formality, the lay brother announces his decision to leave.³⁶ He cannot serve his neighbour if he is 'locked up here'.³⁷ In the end, the prior concedes that he has the better arguments. After his capitulation, 'they went their ways, the laybrother out of the monastery... to earn his keep himself with his own hands... And the prior, after he had searched for and found these things in the Bible, also left the monastery for God's estate...'.³⁸ Although the beggar has relatively little to say, his poverty and understanding of the gospel are a foil to the greed and ignorance of the monks.

The prior's defence of monasticism is mainly scriptural. He insists that Christians can serve their neighbour 'just as well inside the monastery as outside, with prayer, masses for the soul, giving alms and consolation'. The monastic life is based on Matthew 19: 'Any man who leaves father and mother, etc., for my sake will have eternal life'. The prior denies that monks are greedy. Since they preach God's word 'and nothing else', they are entitled to support.³⁹ 'We poor monks are content with what is ours... People persecute us enough, if occasionally we have a hot meal or a good fresh drink. But we also hunger and live strictly.'⁴⁰ Such works are necessary for salvation. 'Heaven is not given for nothing... If I want to merit something, I have to work for it.'⁴¹ The monks obey the gospel. 'Did not God command us, Luke 18 [7], never to cease praying... Hence Hugo says... that we should pray seven times a day, that is the hours'.⁴² Scripture also commends asceticism. Paul 'says I chastise my body and drive it to service. What he means is the fasts... And Christ also fasted...'.⁴³ The monasteries are the best place to practise these virtues. They were founded by such men as Bernard, Francis and Benedict, whose commitment to poverty accords with Christ's command to take up the cross.⁴⁴ The monks' dedication to the cross is evident from their adherence to fasting and prayer despite the current 'persecution'.⁴⁵ God is with them for they serve him day and night. The monasteries are the best place for divine service. 'The world is full of sin and wickedness. That is why I entered - to flee the Devil'.⁴⁶

³⁶ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespr̄ech zzwisch̄e einem P̄zior / leyenbzuder v̄n Bettler (1522/1523)*, Aii^r.

³⁷ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

³⁸ *ibid.*, Fiii^v.

³⁹ *ibid.*, Bii^r.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Biii^v.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, C^v.

⁴² *ibid.*, [Civ]^v.

⁴³ *ibid.*, D^v.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Dii^r.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, Dii^v.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, B[!= D]iii^v.

The laybrother argues that services rendered for money are not neighbourly works.⁴⁷ In any case, Christ 'does not say that it is necessary to enter a monastery'. Otherwise, his disciples would have become 'cowled gluttons and monks'. They, too, disdained outward things and followed God, but remained in the world. 'God says: You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine that they may see your good works... What you do, you do under lock and key...'.⁴⁸ Far from serving their neighbour, monks lead a life of self indulgence behind a facade of self-abnegation. 'And then you say, we have a hard and severe order... Nor do you allow anyone to enter the monastery lest your perfidy and your goods be noticed...'.⁴⁹ The religious orders have abandoned the tradition of their founders. The latter 'lay down on rocks and caves, restraining the old Adam in them, eating roots. And they did not have fat paunches'.⁵⁰ Now, however, those who enter monasteries import the worldly vices of greed and gluttony.⁵¹ Monks earn money by selling the supposed fruits of a bogus piety. 'Arrange to be buried in the monastery among the pious fathers. This will do you a lot of good. There, there is ceaseless praying and singing. There, many good works are done for you...'.⁵² The monks dress up the dead in their habits, although such outward works do not impress Christ. When criticised, they denounce Luther and claim to be victims of persecution. When the prior argues that the works are necessary for salvation, the laybrother cites the usual biblical texts on justification. It is because monks rely on their works that 'there is great danger in the monasteries'. They set the Pope and their Rule over God and his commandments.⁵³ Although they claim that their prayer and fasting are acceptable to God, Luke 18 does not refer to their 'wailing and superficial chattering'.⁵⁴ God wishes to be approached with the heart not with the lips. Whereas Paul and Christ fasted to subject the body to the spirit, the monks put on a show to defraud the people. They cannot 'prove... that it is necessary to fast in order to be saved'.⁵⁵ Christians build on Christ, not on their works. Faith, not flight from the world, brings salvation. 'The world is very full of sin, and likewise the monasteries. But as far as fleeing the Devil is concerned, it seems to me that you have found the right way to him'.⁵⁶

Stanberger's assault on monasticism combines the humanist affirmation of interior piety and service in the world with the evangelical rejection of 'works righteousness'. In assessing the impact of these arguments, it should be remembered that many laypeople were scandalised by the evangelical doctrine of justification. Stanberger was evidently aware that they would not suffice. Noteworthy is his response to the claim that the monks stood in the tradition of Bernard or Francis. Far from denouncing the latter as champions of 'works righteousness', he accepts them as heroes of piety. Aware that the monks were heirs to a tradition so venerable as to

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, Aii^v.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, [Aiv]^r.

⁵² *ibid.*, [Aiv]^v.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Cii^r-Cii^v.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, [Civ]^v.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, D^v-Dii^r.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, [Div]^r.

be unassailable, he can only accuse them of betrayal. Bearing in mind Plunder's complaint that people were 'well pleased' by the 'outward appearance' of monastic piety, Stanberger's accusations of laxity assume a larger significance. In particular, his assertion that the laity were prevented from entering the monasteries lest they noticed the laxity of the monks is a measure of the problem facing evangelical propagandists. Strict enclosure and the restriction of lay access were features of the observant reform. If anything, enforcement of these rules, which aimed to keep 'worldly' distraction to a minimum, speaks for high standards. Evangelical propagandists were determined to destroy the prestige of the monks at any price. If they could not persuade them that there was no salvation in ritualised self-abnegation, they sought instead to argue that the monks were no longer true to the monastic ideal.

(vi) The monastic exits: ideal and reality

A notable feature of Stanberger's dialogue is its portrayal of the fugitive. Enlightened by the gospel, the laybrother leaves the monastery to assume secular responsibilities. Many propagandists transmit a similar image. In *Martin Luther and the Emissary from Hell*, Martin praises monks who, having recognised the error of their ways, 'are... leaving and entering upon the estate of matrimony and working in the vineyards.'⁵⁷ In the foreword of his *Friendly Letter* (1524), Eberlin speaks of the

great miracle that precisely those people to whom it has been entrusted the least are now accepting the gospel fruitfully. I mean those who had been most despised in the monasteries, from whom no spirituality was expected, are now grasping the gospel and are leaving the drunken, lazy and secure life... and entering privation, labour and service.⁵⁸

Eberlin is speaking about the monastic underclass - 'those... from whom no spirituality was expected': the 'semi-educated', the ignorant gluttons of humanist satire, and the 'uncultivated' laybrothers, responsible for menial duties in the monastic economy. We know little about their motives for becoming monks, or about their subjective experience of regular life. Some will have entered monasteries as children. Others may have sought economic security. If they belonged to reformed houses, they may well have suffered under monastic discipline. Until 1521, those who regretted choosing the regular life had no option but grim perseverance. Once they left, they became living advertisements for the evangelical cause. Yet reintegration in secular society was hardly as straightforward as the propagandists suggest. The fugitives had no means of subsistence and it doubtful whether, in the short term, local economies could absorb them all. Recognising these hard facts, many returned to cloisters, a development which clearly alarmed some evangelical

⁵⁷ BENTZINGER, p. 336.

⁵⁸ ENDERS 3, pp. 126-127.

leaders. In Erfurt, Lange appealed to the council to forbid re-entry.⁵⁹

Eberlin wrote his *Friendly Letter*, partly to prepare fugitives for a hostile reception in the world, partly to encourage compassion among laypeople. His advice to the monks reveals a chasm between the ideal and reality of the exodus. Stressing the hardship awaiting them, he warns them not expect a better life. Although God will not abandon them, 'he will leave your food so far from your grasp that you will wonder how you can be filled.' They will soon regret their departure, if they lack 'the ship of faith in Christ'. This is the reward of those who cloak their 'malice and unbelief' with God's name. Eberlin clearly feels that many monks were fleeing for the 'wrong' reasons. In particular, he criticises the wave of marriages. 'When a monk or a nun has been out of the monastery for three days, they go and take whores and knaves in matrimony without any divine counsel.' Too late do they fathom the responsibility which they have taken on. All too often has he heard the complaints of those 'who would prefer to suffer the Charterhouse than their marriage.'⁶⁰

Eberlin's advice is irreconcilable with the propaganda image of the fugitive taking up 'honest labour' and matrimonial responsibilities. This was doubtless intended to gloss over both social disruption and the scandal of unrestrained lust. Aware that the laity valued the monastic enterprise, Eberlin warns fugitives that

the world has enough to do with wickedness... and would like to have people different from them, who are neither false nor unfaithful, and who are patient in misfortune. They think that the monks are like that, and when they leave the monasteries, people open their eyes to see what they are like, thinking that you ought to be less lecherous, knavish, wanton, slanderous, feckless, false, faithless, foolish, etc. than they are.⁶¹

Keenly aware of the impact of the exodus on public opinion, he adds: 'The people will be more set on keeping the priests and monks in the old estate, in so far as they see nothing better in the new one as compared with the old'. Moreover, unless the fugitives lead irreproachable lives, 'blasphemers' will 'rebuke both the faith and the faithful'.⁶²

(vii) Monasticism and the civic interest

Given the reality of the exodus, it is unsurprising that the Catholic side alleged that, by breaking their vows, the fugitives had encouraged social disorder. Some, moreover, had taken up preaching, telling the people that various secular dues were against the gospel. In his tract *On Secular Authority and the Departed*

⁵⁹ Paulus (1893), p. 55.

⁶⁰ ENDERS 3, p. 136.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 138.

Regulars, Lange seeks to limit the damage. In a calculated appeal to Erfurt's ruling class, he insists that he himself has never preached disobedience to secular authority.⁶³ Attacking the 'dangerous agitators', he argues that the council's Christian duty is to ensure that they 'fear the tower, the stocks, a beating, the gallows and the place of execution, the wheel and the sack and water..'. In this way 'the devout and innocent will be protected and the wicked and wrongdoers will be punished and killed, as St Paul advises.'⁶⁴ Lange also argues that, like the radicals, the religious orders subvert secular order:

Also guilty and punishable.. are those who come along with their disreputable privileges and freedoms, obtained with money and lies now from the Emperor, now from the Pope... with which they claim freedom from scot and tribute and sentry dues, from obedience and from punishment, when they act or live dishonourably...⁶⁵

Clerical privilege has impoverished towns and villages. Freedoms and privileges should, however, 'be given only to the advancement of the devout'.⁶⁶ Lange links this idea to the question of the exits: Nobody who has broken 'godless or foolish vows' should be criticised. The regular life is 'very displeasing to God and against the whole of scripture.'⁶⁷ God 'does not require that we be justified... through vows and the monastic life, but through Christ alone'.⁶⁸ Scripture also shows 'how true evangelical poverty consists in selling and in giving to the needy, and not in begging, taking, lying and deceiving'.⁶⁹ The monks' claim to be poor, is bogus. 'The cities would certainly not have allowed any prince or count to build free robbers' castles in the middle of the city on the best sites'. The monks have achieved this through 'sinful deceit'.⁷⁰ In claiming privileges, they pervert St Paul's injunction not to 'become the servants of man'. This applies not 'to outward and bodily service', but rather to 'the doctrines, laws and obedience of men where the conscience is burdened with invented service...'.⁷¹ Clerical exemption rests on a failure to grasp the true nature of Christian freedom.

More popular pamphlets also appeal to the civic interest. In *Grimmenthal*, the peasant asks about tithes. The artisan assures him that he is not obliged to pay them. Citing St Paul, the priest objects 'that whoever serves the altar should get his food from it'. The artisan answers that this applies only to those who administer the sacraments and preach God's word. There is no need to support 'so many lazy people who have consumed half the world'. The monasteries 'have already got three corners of the blanket and are still grasping at the fourth'. Everyone should therefore 'do all

⁶³ Von gehorsam der Weltlichen oberkait vnd den ausgangen klosterleuten (n.p., 1523), B^f.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, Bii^v-Biii^v.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Bii^v.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, Bii^v.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, [Biv]^f.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, C^r.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, C^v.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, Cii^f.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, Cii^v-Ciii^f.

that he can in the loyal defence of God's Word, lest the monks 'swallow us up'. The mendicants, in particular, have promoted 'human laws' which oppress the 'poor people'. Their freedoms are 'prisons for us poor Christians'. The monk protests: 'They were pious men who founded the orders, Benedict, Dominic and Francis.'⁷² The artisan responds:

I admit that they were pious. But what about those that followed them? If you led such a life as they led, then we could put up with you. Some of them lived in the woods in miserable huts of sticks and straw, and ate herbs and drank water. They were no trouble to anyone and served God.⁷³

However, the orders have ignored their example. They live in buildings 'in which it would be more becoming for a prince to hold court, than the useless knaves who laze about there and eat and drink of the best'. The princes and cities should expel them and give their property to 'useful' people who pay taxes. Otherwise the monks will continue to steal and practise usury 'until the Last Day'. Their poverty is a sham. The mendicants refuse 'a couple of pence' but, if offered 'a hundred gulden, accept it at once'. People give generously only because they been tricked into believing that they can be saved in this way.⁷⁴

While both pamphlets stress the incompatibility of monasticism and the civic interest, their arguments differ. Whereas Lange assures the ruling elite that Luther's gospel in no way legitimates the refusal to pay secular dues, *Grimmenthal* holds out the prospect of financial relief to ordinary folk, albeit without directly attacking the rights of secular authority. Evangelical propagandists spoke with two tongues, adapting their arguments to different interest groups. Lange rejects 'outward' liberties on the grounds that 'true' Christian freedom is of the spirit. *Grimmenthal*, however, uses Lutheran terminology without conveying the underlying idea. The 'captivity' which he denounces is material. Like Lange, *Grimmenthal* denies that the monastic life leads to salvation. However, like Stanberger, he also accuses the orders of betraying their founders. The 'sin' on account of which he demands their expulsion is their abandonment of poverty and asceticism. What made the monks vulnerable to attack was less the charge that their life constituted an extreme case of 'works righteousness' than the suspicion that it did not.

(viii) Chastity as a mark of sanctity

The debate on the value of monastic vows must clearly be interpreted in the light of general satisfaction with the 'outward appearance' of the regular life. The vow of chastity was especially controversial. For reformers, enforced sexual abstinence was a breach of Christian freedom. In his *Apologia*, written to justify his

⁷² CLEMEN 1, pp. 153-154.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

marriage, Mechler argues that since the bible commends both chastity and matrimony, the 'so-called monks, nuns and priests have the freedom to take a wife or remain without one.' The religious, he alleges, 'regard only the outward mark of chastity, which is not at all pleasing to God, but an abomination to him. For he sees with greater penetration and looks into the heart at how willingly and joyfully this chastity is observed...'⁷⁵ Since inner passion cannot be restrained by monastic discipline, the only solution is to leave and marry. The commitment to chastity is 'arrogant and blasphemous'. Whoever vows more than he can fulfil disdains his God-given freedom. Whoever receives the gift of chastity should 'maintain it freely'. The vow is the more godless, if, as the religious believe, 'a special crown or merit is attached to it'.⁷⁶ The clergy deny that they place their trust in their vows rather than in Christ. Were that true, they would not attack him for having left his order. The fact that they do is 'proof' of their 'godless way of life and perverse mind'.⁷⁷

Evangelical propaganda is not free of contradiction. On the one hand, the religious are denounced for the inner joylessness with which they observe their vows. On the other hand, it is suggested that they miss no opportunity to break them. Mechler alleges that he could 'fill a cow's hide' with the monks' breaches of chastity.⁷⁸ He will, however, remain silent about their 'unspeakable sins'.⁷⁹ Similarly, Lange's tract *On Secular Authority and the Departed Regulars*, which makes broadly the same case against monastic vows as Mechler, is spiced with allusions to sexual lapses. 'Do you think that it is not known what inhuman sins of the flesh have been imagined and committed by monks and nuns? It was not for nothing that Paul said in Ephesians 5 [12]: For it is shameful even to speak of those things that are done in secret'.⁸⁰ Lange refers repeatedly to the 'defiling' of young maidens, or 'illicit intercourse'.

Regardless of the truth of the reformers' allegations, it is important to ask why they made them. Usingen accused the evangelical party of using smear tactics to discredit those who kept their vows.⁸¹ He is probably correct. Lange more or less concedes this point. Accusing the monks of 'fornication and whoredom', he adds: 'We should really be ashamed to speak of matters of this kind, were there not people who attach importance to these foolish and dangerous vows, and even want to defend them as being of use'.⁸² Eberlin is even more candid. In his *Second Loyal Admonition* he defends his denunciation of the monks' vices. Although it is improper to publicise the personal failings of others, necessity justifies this. The religious are so blinded by the 'holy form' of their life that they cannot bear 'the true word of God'. For this reason he has criticised them, although with moderation, to avoid injury to any who wished to improve. However, should the monks remain obstinate, he will reveal

⁷⁵ CLEMEN 4, p. 233.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 236.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 237.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸⁰ Von gehorsam der Weltlichen oberkait vnd den ausgangen klosterleuten, Diii^v.

⁸¹ Hoar (1965), pp. 159-160.

⁸² Von gehorsam der Weltlichen oberkait vnd den ausgangen klosterleuten, Dii^f.

terrible things about them. Once his revelations are printed, their cause will crumble to dust. Yet it is not just the monks who need to have their eyes opened, but the townsmen too: 'You in Ulm think that your monks are so learned and pious that it is impossible for them to err.' However, there has been so much 'knavery' in the monasteries in Ulm in the last sixty years that 'that the sun should no longer shine over your city on account of it, or the leaves or grass grow any more. And great price increases or other setbacks will afflict your city. Who will not say that this is the fault of the secret vices and public blasphemy of your monks'.⁸³ Eberlin's comments underline that what was important for people was less the inner disposition of the monks than what they did. It is the 'holy form' which counts. As long as the religious were perceived to be living in accordance with the Rule, people were confident that their city would flourish. To destroy that confidence, he has no choice but to expose them as immoral hypocrites.

The reformers were addressing an audience for which the continence of the monks, more than other ascetic exercises, was the touchstone of their sanctity. Sexual abstinence was 'a generally accepted condition of holiness', an attitude which though promoted by, was not the creation of the medieval Church.⁸⁴ Denunciations of enforced chastity either as outward in form or arrogant in intention evidently cut little ice with a large section of the laity. The fact that chastity may have involved the suppression of lust, far from devaluing it, probably lent it an aura of heroism. To destroy the prestige of the monks, evangelical propagandists had to attack its real basis. There is a second, related motive behind the attempt to blacken them. Usingen alleged that the fugitives left the monasteries only to indulge their sexual appetite, arguing that it would have been better to suppress it.⁸⁵ The wave of marriages doubtless lent weight to his charge. Mechler denounces as 'mere child's talk, the cries of blue murder that are being raised: 'Ha! the monks and nuns are running out of the monasteries so that they can have wives.'⁸⁶ Nobody 'should take offence if certain people, including myself, have left the monasteries and taken wives, which I did not do, (as you may now think) in order to seek... the freedom of the flesh...'. He clearly recognised that this suspicion reflected unfavourably both on the individual and on the cause which he championed. 'Nobody should be offended by me or, on my account, by my teaching.'⁸⁷ If evangelical propagandists were to justify the marriage of monks before a public which valued chastity, it was not enough to argue that chastity was difficult. The main point for ordinary believers was that the vow was kept. This forced the reformers to depict conditions in the monasteries in such a light as to make marriage seem a better alternative. If the monks married, Mechler argues, 'whoredom, adultery, abuse of virgins and even the sin of sodomy would be avoided'.⁸⁸ Similarly Lange argues that the religious who cannot, or will not, keep their vows 'would do better to enter upon matrimony, so that they will not sinfully

⁸³ ENDERS 3, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁴ Thomas (1971), pp. 38-39.

⁸⁵ Hoar (1965), pp. 159-160.

⁸⁶ CLEMEN 4, p. 234.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 234.

commit adultery and fornication, to their own damnation, and to the great annoyance of poor, upright Christians’.

(ix) Reactions to the exits

Eberlin’s appeal to laypeople to assist fugitives reflects the polarisation of opinion. He addresses each confessional group separately, with different arguments. The assault on monasticism had certainly struck a chord with a section of the laity. Luther’s supporters, it seems, blamed the monks for what they had been, but gave them no credit for what they were trying to become. Eberlin alleges that they are more hostile to the fugitives than Turks to Christians.⁸⁹ Whoever accepts ‘the doctrine of the freedom of conscience’ ought, however, to help. ‘Christ says: What you do to the least of these, you have done to me also.’ This applies to the fugitives in their ‘new estate’, who are now ‘the laughing stock of the world...’. Luther’s supporters should remember the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son and rejoice with Christ. Although many fugitives had chosen the regular life, they are not beyond improvement. ‘They entered into this in ignorance and were stifled by it. Otherwise, they would rather have learned a trade, or something else to practise and live, just as you do’.⁹⁰ Clearly, Eberlin is speaking to people for whom secular labour was superior to the monastic life. However, that is only part of a greater picture.

Eberlin’s exhortation to Catholics indicates that hostility to Luther cut across social boundaries. He distinguishes between the ‘base and foolish’ and the ‘wise and honourable’. Since the former are unreceptive to admonition, the secular authority should prevent them harassing fugitives. The latter should use their reason. Not all fugitives support Luther’s teaching. Some wish only to escape an oppression worse than ‘three deaths’. ‘No reason can show that such burdens should be suffered when it is possible to flee them’. Reason also shows that strangers should be amicably received. Many former monks are of good family, driven by their conscience to abandon office and honour. Adaptation to an unfamiliar world is difficult. Although they are sometimes ‘unruly’, many of the stories about their behaviour are exaggerated or untrue. People who despise evangelical teaching ‘ought not to hold it against anyone for thinking a lot of it’. Nor should they resort to mockery or force. Patient instruction achieves more.⁹¹

⁸⁹ ENDERS 3, p. 129.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 141.

16. The power of the saints

According to official teaching, the Virgin Mary and the saints were possessed of supernatural excellence, which manifested itself in their extraordinary accomplishments. Like Christ, they were mediators between God and man, although theologians distinguished between their respective roles.¹ Christ alone redeemed the sinner. However, by venerating Mary and the saints, the believer could augment his tally of good works. Within the ambit of ordained power, he participated in their surplus merit. Although the Church differentiated between honour due to God (*latria*), the Virgin (*hyperdulia*) and the saints (*dulia*), it is unlikely that ordinary layfolk grasped these distinctions.² In the popular view, the saints' lives led set them apart from ordinary mortals. Chastity, for example - evidence that the saint stood above natural forces to which others succumbed - was generally a condition of popular recognition. Above all, the saints' power manifested itself through posthumous wonder working. Most miracles were healing events. Since people could not easily distinguish between minor ailments and serious disease, they would often experience natural recovery as miraculous.³ The saints could also be relied upon to send rain, protect crops or the interests of a city. Their perceived power to solve problems in this world probably reinforced belief in their role as mediators of salvation.

Luther opposed the cult of the saints primarily because he saw it as derogatory to the honour of Christ. Like the good works of any Christian, the accomplishments of the saints were attributable solely to grace. The main problem for evangelical propagandists was to prove that the saints had no powers of their own. This they sought to do partly by scriptural argument. However, they also had to grapple with the 'ritual mentality' of their popular audience. Belief in the efficacy of relics and images would prove a major obstacle to the propagation of their message. As well as denying the saints' powers, reformers argued that the popular cult was opposed to Christian neighbourliness. Luther also condemned the invocation of sacred power for temporal ends. Other reformers, however, realised that they could not deprive ordinary folk of protection from the hazards of this world. As on so many other issues, the popular response to the evangelical assault on the cult was divided.

(i) Luther's view of the role of the saints

In his *Sermon on the birth of Mary*, Luther argues that Christ is the sole mediator. Preaching on Matthew 1, which traces Christ's genealogy, he stresses that it includes notorious sinners. Had Christ been a Pharisee, 'he would have fled this genealogy until his shoes dropped from him, they [his forbears] would have stunk

¹ Müller (1986), p. 31.

² Weinstein and Bell (1982), p. 146.

³ Finucane (1975), pp 1-10; Weinstein and Bell (1982), p. 142.

before him and he would have wrinkled his nose at them.’⁴ However, since he accepts a king like Manasses, who killed the prophets and filled Jerusalem with blood, ‘then he will also cover our sins.’⁵ Other mediators are therefore redundant. The genealogy in Matthew 1 leads, not to Mary, but to Christ. The reason why scripture ‘discloses nothing at all about her birth’ is that ‘no-one should direct his heart towards her.’ The clergy, however, have ‘elevated Mary so high as to make us a goddess ... out of this humble servant.’⁶ As the chosen mother of Christ, she certainly has more grace than others. This, however, ‘is not due to her merit, but to God’s mercy. For we cannot all be the bodily mother of God. Otherwise she is the same as us, having come to grace like us through the blood of Christ.’⁷ Denouncing the *Salve Regina*, Luther asks: ‘Who will vouchsafe that she is our life, our consolation, our sweetness, although she is content to be a poor vessel...’. The *Regina celi*, he adds, ‘is no better, because there she is called a Queen of Heaven.’ Christ is dishonoured when people ‘ascribe to a creature that which is due to God alone.’⁸ Mary should be paid only that honour given to her by God. Christians should acknowledge that she is blessed among women, without making a goddess or idol out of her. Since she does not possess those powers claimed on her behalf, ‘we do not want to have her as a mediator. We want to have her as an intercessor, as we want to have the other saints.’⁹ Mary’s prayers have the same value as the prayers of all Christians.

Luther’s sermon focuses on the cult of the Virgin, whose role in late medieval piety is best reflected in countless images showing believers of all classes sheltering under her mantle. Hoping to break the bond of affection with so benign a protector, Luther presents the picture of a Christ whose stained lineage betokens his solicitude for sinners. It is questionable whether, on an emotional level, this will have sufficed to dethrone the Queen of Heaven. In his *Conversation with an Old Woman*, Kettenbach - a Franciscan - declares, in full agreement with Luther, that ‘God says, your only help is from me. Mary and all the saints cannot help us. They may well help by interceding, like other people, but all help is alone from God’.¹⁰ In his *Practica*, however, Kettenbach recommends the following prayer to the ‘Mother’ - not sister! - Mary:

And now I come to you, O Queen of Mercy, Virgin Mary, and call upon you in my need, I miserable child of Eve, that you should support me faithfully. Turn your merciful eyes towards me, and show me the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed fruit of your body, after this misery, O thou benign, O thou merciful, O sweet Virgin and Mother Mary. Amen’.¹¹

This is a slightly modified version of the *Salve Regina*, which Luther deprecated as

⁴ WA 10. 3, p. 328.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 330.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 314.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 321.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁰ CLEMEN 2, p. 60.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 197.

unbefitting to a 'lowly handmaiden'.¹² Kettenbach's reverence for the Virgin is easily explained. The view of Mary as Queen of Heaven was Franciscan in inspiration.¹³ Kettenbach's 'inconsistency' attests to an emotional bond so strong as to defy theological insight.

(ii) The debate in Erfurt

For Luther, 'intercession' denoted prayer which, though desired by God, was not a condition of salvation. One Erfurt dialogue, Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, allows the saints this modest role, yet rather curiously denies that they are intercessors. The (Catholic) prior challenges the laybrother: 'Doesn't David say that we should praise God through his saints. I must have an intercessor'. The laybrother answers that praise and intercession are different things. Praising God through his saints means thanking him 'for having chosen the saints, strengthening them in faith, showing them his grace and mercy and bringing them to eternal beatitude'. An intercessor is needed, but that role falls to Christ alone. People should regard saints as brothers who will pray for them, but should not place any trust in their intercession. The saints themselves call on God and should therefore serve as a model, so that 'you ask God for a firm faith, which will make you pleasing to God'.¹⁴

The discrepancy between Stanberger's message and his terminology is explicable in the light of the Erfurt conflict. In defending the saints, the Catholic party stressed the value of their intercession. The dynamic of pulpit warfare evidently forced their opponents to adopt a contrary position. Apparently, they argued that Christ's sacrifice made intercession unnecessary. Our main source, a pamphlet by the Catholic preacher, Femelius, indicates that Erfurt reformers deviated from Luther's position. Luther's *Letter on the Saints*, which advises Erfurt preachers to abandon their line of attack, corroborates Femelius. Stanberger, who was not directly involved in the pulpit battle, clearly wished to propagate Luther's position. However, since the Catholic party had chosen to fight on the issue of intercession, he was truly lost for words.

Femelius's *Short Sermon on the Saints* repeatedly affirms that Christ is the only mediator, while citing copious scriptural evidence supporting intercession:

Therefore, say that Christ is one unique mediator and that there is no other, neither in heaven nor on earth, who gave his body and life for all unto death... But he has, however, established such an order and unity in his spiritual body [the Church]... by which one member at all times participates

¹² Cf. Smolinsky (1983), p. 152.

¹³ Cf. Rothkrug (1979), pp. 73-75.

¹⁴ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zwischē einem Pzior leyenbzuder vñ Bettler (1522/1523)*, Fi'-Fi'.

in the faith, piety, sanctity and salvation of the other, desiring, asking, pleading and hoping for the same...¹⁵

According to Femelius, one of two texts which evangelical preachers invoked against intercession was I Timothy 2.5ff: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...'. Femelius answers that, in the preceding verses, Paul stresses that God wishes intercession to be done for all men. This confirms his view of the 'order' established by God.¹⁶ The second text cited by his opponents is I John 2.1ff: 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous...'. Here, too, Femelius rejects the evangelical case as unsound: 'From what single word is it possible to conclude that one man should not pray for another...?'¹⁷ Femelius can therefore argue that since scripture shows 'how through intercession we should help all the world to the only mediator... Jesus Christ... how then can he reject the saints' intercession?'¹⁸ They were, after all, God's special friends. 'It is certain that no father here on earth loves his son... as fervently and ardently as, according to scripture, Christ and God the father [loves] his saints, who shed their rose-coloured blood for his honour'.¹⁹ This made the saints intercessors *par excellence*. Christ, moreover, promises in Luke 18.7 to vindicate the elect 'who cry out to him day and night'. 'Day and night', Femelius argues, means 'always, without stopping'. This 'can only refer to those departed from this world. For the latter are not burdened with worldly preoccupations, for which reason they are able always to call and cry out.'²⁰

To reinforce their case against intercession, Erfurt's reformers denied the cognitive powers of the dead. In his *Refutation*, Culsamer states that Usingen 'justifies intercession by the saints with the story of Elijah, who was a man just as we are, who called upon God and obtained rain upon earth'. Usingen concludes that if 'he could do that on earth, how much more could he do it in heaven.'²¹ Culsamer argues that

it does not follow from the fact that Elijah obtained rain through his prayer that he now knows the things that we lack, or that he can know if we desire something (so that he may beseech God on our behalf), all of which he knew when he was on earth. And it is the same with other saints... It refers only to those on earth.²²

Femelius answers this argument by citing Luke 16.19ff, the story of the rich man, who, suffering in hell and observing the evil life of his brothers on earth, desired of Abraham that they be warned of the consequences. The rich man was no saint. Yet

¹⁵ Femelius, *Eyn kurz Sermon szo die heyligen Gottes belangen* (Erfurt, 1522), [Civ]^v.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Biii^v-[Biv]^f.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Cii^v.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, Ci^f.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Ci^f.

²⁰ *ibid.*, [D i]^f.

²¹ Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung* (1522), Biii^v.

²² *ibid.*, [Biv]^f.

the essential point was his knowledge of the living. Femelius could therefore argue: 'since he was in unspeakable pain, how much more will the saints, in the blessed life hereafter, have knowledge and information about their friends and brothers...'. The same text also proves the solicitude of the dead for the living. 'The rich man... is still benevolent... to the living and therefore prays for them, and persists, and does not want to accept that, the first time, Abraham turns down his request'.²³ Acknowledging that his pleading was of no avail, Femelius contends that, if space allowed, he could prove that this was 'no argument against intercession. Instead, he cites II Peter 1.13ff, in which Peter promises that his solicitude for the faithful will continue after his death.²⁴ Moreover, in Luke 15.3ff., Christ says that 'there will be more joy in heaven' over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine righteous men. Who, Femelius asks, will rejoice, if not the blessed, who have entered heaven? If Christ speaks of joy, then 'he does not mean a slight or meagre joy, but rather a great and incalculable rejoicing and spiritual lechery'.²⁵ From this, it can only follow that 'they pray for, hope for, and desire our salvation...'.²⁶

Luther evidently sensed that Erfurt's reformers were getting nowhere. In his *Letter on the Saints*, he advised them that God 'did not want to let us know how he has arranged things with the dead' precisely because 'whoever does not invoke the saints, but only holds fast to the one mediator Jesus Christ, on no account commits a sin.' Luther detects a plot by Satan to distract the preachers from proclaiming this simple message. They should be content if their opponents 'concede that there is no need to honour the saints...'. The people, however, 'should not be despised for their weakness. They should call on the saints if they wish, as long as they 'take care not to place their hope and trust in any saint, but in Christ alone'.²⁷

This implicit acknowledgement of the saints' popularity raises the question whether people had any strong motive for turning against them. Reformers argued, and historians have often accepted, that the popularity of the saints was reinforced by a view of God as stern and unapproachable. Eberlin describes the attitude with which, he maintains, people approached the saints.

You are benign and friendly and I will place my trust in you. I cannot approach God, he is too strict and hard and wrathful, for which reason I cannot but be afraid of him... But you, N. or N., holy, holy man, pray for me in a friendly manner. I can call on you. You are my God.²⁸

Against this view, Horton and Marie-Hélène Davies argue that while medieval piety did emphasise Christ's humanity, devotional practice was nevertheless influenced by a 'feudal attitude that one did not approach the most august earthly personages

²³ Femelius, *Eyn kurz Sermon szo die heyligen Gottes belangen* (Erfurt, 1522), Bi^v.

²⁴ *ibid.*, Bii^v.

²⁵ *ibid.*, Biii^f.

²⁶ *ibid.*, Biii^f.

²⁷ Luther, Martin, *Epistel odder vntterricht von den heyligen* (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: WAB 2, pp. 165-166.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 250.

except through intermediaries'. The saints were 'celestial courtiers', who could gain the favour of the heavenly king for their proteges.²⁹

According to Culsamer, the metaphor of the celestial courtier was Usingen's 'chief argument': 'For just as when a man wants access to princes or kings, he must first address, beseech and plead with the servants, ... [Usingen] considers that this comparison is not to be laughed at because Christ compares himself with a king in Matthew 18'.³⁰ Culsamer answers that 'kings and princes are men and cannot be reached at all places and times, as our Lord God can, who hears those who cry out to him from all corners of the earth'. God, moreover, expressly admonishes believers to call upon him. Although he compares himself with a king, 'we have to compare him differently, and not as though he journeyed on a high horse with a lot of travel equipment, so that his enemies will not capture him.'³¹

Copp's *Two Dialogues* indicates that many laypeople found the 'comparison of the princes' plausible enough. The Spirit stresses that Christ 'did not say that he ought to engage a speaker or advocate, without him, as the pious papists have taught...'. The Man sees no harm in invoking 'the dear saints, especially when God is angered by us because of our sins'. He insists: 'I do not pray to any saint in any other way than to ask God this or that on my behalf, not because I worship him, but that he may mollify God's anger against me and intercede for me'. This is '...just as if a prince were angry with a man, and the man... hurries to someone powerful in the prince's court and makes him presents, that he may mollify the prince so that the man may again come into grace.' The Spirit rejects comparisons between 'almighty God' and 'a poor and sinful man... a stinking little earthworm'. 'Do you think', he asks,

that matters proceed in heaven in the same way as at a prince's court on earth, where almost the greatest vices and sins against God are devised? ... God has not got any officials. He alone heads the government and needs no helpers. It is not St. Peter who opens the heavens, but God.³²

People should call on God only in Christ's name. The saints' assistance is unnecessary. The Spirit warns: 'If... you... trust more in a saint than in God, you are a despairer of, not a believer in, your God, and are more wicked than someone who worships an idol. For you are making idols of the saints against their will'.³³ In offering the exclusive mediation of Christ and trusting 'more in a saint than in God' as alternatives, Copp evades the Catholic argument that to seek the intercession of the saints is not to impute to them the unique power of Christ.

²⁹ Davies (1982), p. 33.

³⁰ Culsamer, *Ein widerlegung* (1522), Biii^v.

³¹ *ibid.*, [Biv]^f.

³² Copp, *Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dialogi*, E^f.

³³ *ibid.*, E^f.

(iii) The power of sacred objects

Some laypeople probably grasped the distinction drawn by official teaching between the material object of veneration and that which it represented. In his *Conversation with an Old Woman*, Kettenbach rails against those who venerate 'idols': 'They burn many candles before the idols, and yet they do not see that their eyes are full of dust and cobwebs. Do you hear, old woman. You burn a lot of candles before the idols of St Anna, St Helper and St Snotnose. But they don't see!' Kettenbach now anticipates an objection from his audience: 'Yes, you say, we are burning these candles to praise the saints in heaven...'³⁴ Although it is impossible to gauge the depth of understanding underlying the ability to reproduce formulae, Kettenbach is speaking to people who, from an orthodox standpoint, had been properly instructed. In Luther's judgment, however, most people could not distinguish between sign and prototype. In his *Sermon on Relics* (1522), he complains that the faithful were 'seduced' by the practice of venerating the cross, relics and images.³⁵ Aquinas 'says that people should venerate ... [the image], but only in so far as they associate the one who is in heaven with the one whom the artist has painted...'. However since the 'common man' is incapable of such differentiation, images

should all be done away with and pure faith alone taught. This is why I would like all crosses to be toppled, that have sweated and bled, with the result that the pilgrimages and the hullabaloo have arisen, that have been the cause of so much error and abuse.³⁶

Later, in his conflict with Karlstadt, Luther adopted a less radical standpoint.³⁷ Yet his remarks indicate that he saw the ritual mode of thought as an obstacle to discovery of his Christ. Sensing that he could not change people's way of thinking, he deprecated all practices which sustained 'misconceptions' about the nature of divine power.

To overturn the cult of the saints, reformers had to overcome people's awe of holy objects. This they attempted partly by casting doubt on the presence of a living personality in images and relics, partly by questioning the authenticity of relics. The author of *Grimmenthal* uses both methods. The dialogue attacks the Grimmenthal shrine, not far from Erfurt, which flourished from 1492 to 1519, before losing pilgrims to the Regensburg sanctuary.³⁸ The peasant, angered by Luther's denunciation of pilgrimages, reports: 'Now that people have stopped going... to Grimmenthal, the Virgin Mary has been weeping'.³⁹ He is on his way to see the miracle. The artisan, however, 'reveals' that it has been faked. 'The priests know

³⁴ CLEMEN 2, p. 59.

³⁵ Luther, Martin, *Ain Sermon von den Hayltumben*, (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: WA 10.3, pp. 332-341.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 335.

³⁷ See Eire (1986), pp. 65-73.

³⁸ CLEMEN 1, pp. 133-135.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

well how much they have been losing on the pilgrimages ...And they decided to take the image of Mary... and hollow out the head and fill it with water. They stuck a needle in the eyes, so that water came through and ran down her face. And they persuaded the people that the Virgin was weeping because they no longer came to see her'.⁴⁰

Although the dialogue suggests that the weeping Virgin had been set up to counteract Luther's influence, this may have been a response to competition from the Regensburg shrine. The author evidently suspects that his audience is not immune to its allure. Now aware that the Grimmenthal miracle was bogus, the peasant asks about Regensburg. In response, the artisan tells a parable, through which the author underlines his denial of the power of all saints. The story, which attacks belief in relics, is as follows:

Once upon a time in Silesia, a poor man was condemned to be quartered. A Jew came to the executioner and asked him for the poor man's heart, promising him some money. The executioner agreed, but then trying to act so that neither would be wronged, gave him a pig's heart instead of the man's. When the Jew received the heart, believing it to be that of a man, he buried it by a wayside. What happened after that I cannot say, but it is said that all the pigs in the area came streaming to this place, and a great number of them assembled. This might lead you to believe that the learned can easily go astray... But don't you be taken in by it.⁴¹

The man represents either Christ or a martyred saint; the Jew - the classic symbol of false belief - the clergy. Through the deception of the executioner - the Devil? - the cleric obtains a useless natural object - the pig's heart. Other creatures - the pigs - failing to recognise that the relic is of the same matter as they themselves, venerate it in the belief that it provides access to sacred power. However, relics have no connection with the holy personage from whom they allegedly stem.

To reinforce his case against the saints, the author tells the story of the Bern heresy, which he presents as an attempt to set up a cult around Hans Jetzer.⁴² The artisan explains that 'seeing... [Jetzer's] simplicity, [the Dominicans] thought he would make a proper Francis.' The charge that the Preachers 'produced a new St Francis' is also raised in the *Letters of Obscure Men*, albeit not with the deadly earnestness of the *Grimmenthal* dialogue.⁴³ The revelation produces the desired effect on the peasant: 'If you continue like this, I will not have any faith left in the saints at all... I'd almost suspect the Franciscans of having set up their Francis in the same manner'. Not daring to attack a figure of undisputed holiness, the author takes refuge in innuendo. The artisan replies: 'That I do not know, but God knows'.⁴⁴ The

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴² Cf. above, p. 79.

⁴³ STOKES, p. 383.

⁴⁴ CLEMEN 1, p. 146.

propagandist builds suggestive bridges over which he hopes his reader will pass on his own.

The *Sermon by the Peasant of Wöhrd* (1524) contains a similar exercise in 'ritual deconstruction'. The author, believed to be Diepold Peringer, complains that 'we have long been attached to the saints and trampled God under foot.' This is because the clergy have 'dressed up the material images in a cunning way, falsifying them in a deceptive manner.' Peringer 'reveals' that they 'poured oil into the back of the head of one of them, so that it flowed through the eyes, and into the other blood, so that it sweated blood. And then they said, is that not a great miracle. For in this way, the poor simple peasants came running and invoked the saints...'.⁴⁵ Citing scripture, Peringer argues the saints themselves reject the claims made on their behalf: 'Peter said, you men of Israel, why are you amazed? Why are you looking as if we had done this miracle through our own power or merit. The God of Abraham has healed his child.' Such passages show 'the saints did not work miracles of their own power.'⁴⁶ Peringer warns of the dire consequences of refusing God the honour due to him. He relates how Herod 'sat upon the seat of judgment and delivered a speech. And the people ran to him and said, that is the voice of God, not of man. And at once he was struck by the angel of the Lord for not having given the honour to God.'⁴⁷

In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant* (1523) the peasant meets the apostle crossing a field. Stanberger initially uses the encounter to propagate Luther's view of the saint as an equal, rather than a powerful helper. In his *Sermon on Relics*, Luther asked:

What can St Peter have more than you or I. He may well have more gifts and have done more powerful works, but the faith which he had is equally just in Christ as ours. He has just that Christ, just that spirit which we have, if we believe. So why do I want to pay honour to another?⁴⁸

In Stanberger's dialogue, the peasant falls at Peter's feet. Peter rejects his veneration: 'On your feet, for I am a man like you. I cannot be your helper or intercessor (that you may obtain eternal life on my account)'. The peasant contradicts: 'You are a high saint of God. The Pope says that you were a pope at Rome, a prince of heaven, the helper of all the miserable in captivity, a gatekeeper of Christ, with whom we all should find our refuge. So I, poor peasant, believing this, have paid great honour to you also.' Peter again stresses that his powers are those of an ordinary mortal: 'how can I, a fisherman and mender of nets have achieved this honour and lofty title.'⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Eyn Sermon gepzediget vom Pawren zû Werdt (n.p., n.d.). [Aiv]^f. On Peringer, see Packull (1985), pp. 246-247.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, B^f.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, B^v.

⁴⁸ WA 10.3, pp. 334-335.

⁴⁹ CLEMEN 3, p. 201.

The dialogue goes on to treat the basis of papal authority. R. W. Southern has argued that the pope 'whatever theoretical claims were made for him, in practice owed most of his authority to the fact that he was the guardian of the body of St. Peter. This brought men to Rome and made them listen to the voice of St. Peter mediated through his representative on earth'.⁵⁰ While Southern refers to an earlier period, his view holds good for the late middle ages, at least for simple folk. In Stanberger's dialogue, Peter praises Luther as a divine messenger 'who tells the truth to the Pope and his supporters, that I was never Pope in Rome, nor did I ever go there, nor have charge of the government there'.⁵¹ Luther, in fact, was sceptical about attempts to prove this point.⁵² Stanberger, however, realises that Peter's connection with Rome was the crucial test of papal legitimacy for ordinary folk. The peasant reminds Peter that his body is buried there, and that the Pope had built a church in his name. He continues: 'Does he not make a lot of money with your dead body, saying that you perform many miracles...?'⁵³ Peter replies that 'they will never be able to prove' that he was in Rome. The clergy have lied out of avarice. In the same way, they make money out of Christ's mantle in Trier, although they don't know to whom it belongs. This is true also of those 'those baked [i.e. concocted] saints at Erfurt'. However, 'God says, have faith in me, not in limbs, nor in the mantle, nor in saints or baked penny eaters'.⁵⁴

Stanberger's argument indicates how - through the figure of Peter - simple believers comprehended the Church as the source of sacred power. Respect for papal authority was grounded in their 'ritual mentality'. In denying the power of limbs, Stanberger attempts to force that transformation in people's way of thinking which was needed, were they to grasp the 'true' nature of the sacred. However, he clearly does not count on their capacity to distinguish between symbol and prototype. The crux of the case against the Church is not the powerlessness of relics, but that the Pope does not possess Peter's body. This assertion, like Luther's wish to topple all crosses 'that have sweated and bled', reflects their common doubt as to whether ordinary people could resist the 'seductive' appeal of sacred objects.

(iv) Pilgrimages and charity

Of the countless pious acts of which the saints were the focus, none was more prestigious than the pilgrimage. A journey to the holiest shrines - Jerusalem, Rome or Compostella was beyond the means of ordinary folk. However, the late middle ages saw a 'democratisation' of the pilgrimage. Shorter journeys to regional shrines became increasingly common.⁵⁵ By going on pilgrimage believers could at once imitate and honour the saints, thus combining personal with vicarious merit.

⁵⁰ Southern (1970), p.30. See also pp. 94-95.

⁵¹ CLEMEN 3, pp. 201-202.

⁵² On Luther's views on this point see CLEMEN 3, pp. 187-189.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵⁵ Sumption (1975), p. 150.

Shrines offered direct physical contact with relics and, in the later middle ages, increasingly with images. Pilgrims could saturate themselves in the saint's virtue.⁵⁶ It was common practice to leave offerings at a sanctuary.⁵⁷

In his *Sermon on the birth of Mary* Luther stresses that the communion of saints includes all Christians, living or dead. Popular preoccupation with the saints in heaven has caused them to neglect those in this world, in contravention of God's commandments:

For the saints that have been taken from this world you are not obliged by any commandment to honour. But those that are here you have been commanded to honour: that is the living poor Christians of which Paul speaks to Timothy, about how the saints should be given shelter and their feet washed.⁵⁸

In the past the saints have been honoured by the building of churches. 'What need,' Luther asks 'do the saints in heaven have of these houses?'⁵⁹ God has not commanded such works, nor will he accept them. Whoever invests in such 'false' piety 'will have lost all his costs, all his effort, work and hope.'⁶⁰ Nobody who abandons the old ways need fear damnation. Whoever neglects the living saints, however, will be damned.⁶¹ Luther exhorts his readers not to 'run here and there, as to Grimmenthal, Etingen, Aachen and Einsiedeln. Run to the house of your nearest neighbour, who is in need of your help, and give here that which you would have consumed and given there.'⁶²

In *Peter and the Peasant*, Peter deprecates pilgrimages to Grimmenthal, Rome, Aachen or Trier. The peasant's money will be snatched from him and he is 'nothing more than a knave both before and after'. He should make his pilgrimage 'to the sanctuary of Jesus Christ', the source of all help. *Grimmenthal* combines an exhortation to charity with an appeal to self-interest. The artisan advises the peasant to help 'poor and sick people who cannot work'. If he himself is poor, he may keep the money for his 'own house'. The artisan also stresses the social consequences of sacred mobility:

Some people make pilgrimages to St. James, some to Aachen, some to St Wolfgang, one man here, the other man there, taking from wife and children the money he needs for his food on the way, without regard for what his wife and children are to survive on. Thus his wife becomes a whore, and he a knave, and God is well served!⁶³

⁵⁶ Cf. Davies (1982), esp. pp. 106-107.

⁵⁷ On offerings, see Sumption (1975), pp. 158ff.

⁵⁸ WA 10. 3, p. 317.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 318.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 320.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 323.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

⁶³ CLEMEN 1, p. 146.

In Kettenbach's *Conversation with an Old Woman*, the old woman points out the 'dear fathers' had gone on pilgrimage to 'the holy places'. Kettenbach argues that custom should not necessarily be followed. 'In former times among the Jews', he points out, 'it was necessary to circumcise young boys, but that would now be heresy among us Christians'. Attacking sacred mobility, he stresses that Christ says 'that we should no longer seek him here and there.' Nevertheless, he accepts the woman's objection: 'If, however, anyone went on pilgrimage and wandered, the reason for this was to chastise his body, to avoid sin and to study scripture. And so I admit that it is possible to go on pilgrimage with a just cause.'⁶⁴

There was little new about these arguments against the pilgrimage, except perhaps the force with which they were put. In arguing that Christians should use their resources to help the needy, Luther was putting the 'classic case' against the opulence of the cult.⁶⁵ Similarly, churchmen had long attempted to restrain 'sacred' mobility. City councils, unhappy with the social disruption caused by spontaneous outbursts of religious fervour, had supported attempts by theologians to make the host the chief focus of popular devotion.⁶⁶ Yet such efforts had borne little fruit. It is doubtful whether the uncharitable face of the pilgrimage depicted in evangelical propaganda corresponded to people's experience of it. The remarks by Kettenbach's old woman suggest that laypeople believed that they were participating in a long and venerable tradition. In that case, they probably had little understanding for the strictures of moralising clerics. At all events, as long they believed in the power of the saints, they were unlikely to be moved by criticism of their 'antisocial' behaviour.

(v) Sacred power and everyday needs

In his *Sermon On Relics*, Luther argues that the elevation of the Holy Cross exemplifies, not just the materialist view of divine power, but also its 'inappropriate' use to obtain temporal benefit. Christ did not command people to elevate his cross. Rather he wanted 'every man to discover and take up his own cross, as he [Christ] discovered his own...' People should suffer misadventure and seek to comprehend God's purpose in sending it: 'When God sends me misfortune, whether sickness, injury to body and property, through evil men: then dig until you find it. Finding is recognising and when you know why God has sent this over you, so you have found it with the heart...' ⁶⁷ Only through the experience of affliction, can people discover the consolation of the holy ghost. The cross should be not be raised in the hope of triumphing over adversity. Rather, 'you ...honour the cross with your heart, by willingly and amicably accepting what God sends over you.'⁶⁸

⁶⁴ CLEMEN 2, p. 62.

⁶⁵ Cf. Sumption (1975), p. 155.

⁶⁶ Cf. Zika (1988).

⁶⁷ WA 10.3, p. 335.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 337.

Popular pamphlets suggest that this idea was not easily communicated to a mass audience. In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant*, Peter declares that he has never wanted gifts of 'gold and silver, iron and steel, onions and garlic'. Nevertheless, he has been turned into an oppressor of the poor. The bible recounts [Acts 3.6] how a 'poor man came to me, seeking something from me'. His reply on that occasion was that he had neither silver nor gold, but 'what I have, I give you. Stand up and go forth in the name of Jesus Christ.'⁶⁹ Stanberger is addressing people who made gifts to the saints to secure advantage in this world. Although he wishes his readers to see such donations as a burden, from the perspective of the donor, they were probably one side of an equitable exchange of favours. Later, Peter admonishes the peasant: 'You must have a strong faith that God is come to rescue you, to save you and to help you in all difficulties, without any effort on your part. You may not buy him, nor does he want to be bought. He wants to give himself to us without any effort on our part...'. In this way, Christians partake in Christ's treasure, and can rest assured that 'nothing can harm us, neither death nor the Devil, sin nor hell, violence nor the authorities, hunger nor frost, fear nor need'.⁷⁰ Stanberger may perhaps have meant that those assured of salvation can endure adversity with equanimity. However, he does not spell this out. He probably realised that, to break the power of the saints, it was necessary to stress the everyday, functional benefits of 'faith'.

In his *Erfurt Sermon* (1524), Eberlin follows Luther on several points. To trust a mediator is 'to put the creature in the place of the creator and to make a god of him, mocking and defaming God'.⁷¹ Even a saint cannot obtain grace 'unless he has got Christ as mediator'.⁷² Eberlin also echoes Luther in attacking materialism:

We should not have the wooden cross before us, but rather the crucified Christ, in whom we place all our hope. We should go through him not to the martyr's temple of a saint, but through the throne of grace of the holiest of holy, with the relics and sacrifice of our chastened body and pious prayer...⁷³

However, he is much more tolerant of the impulse to seek temporal advantage through religious action. It is not the goal, but the means hitherto used, which he questions. A pragmatist, he realised that if people were to be deprived of the saints' protection, they needed an alternative. In effect, he promotes a 'cult of Christ', which fulfils the same function as the cult of the saints.

Eberlin argues that there is neither temporal nor spiritual happiness on earth because people do not pray properly.⁷⁴ If they did, the favours which they seek through the saints would be granted. God wants us to 'see him as so good and

⁶⁹ CLEMEN 3, p. 202.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 209.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 240.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 242.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 251.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 243.

friendly that we can expect more good things from him than from all the saints, and all that through Christ's merit'. Eberlin interprets the gospel text of the day, John 16.24: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, All that which you ask in the name of the father will be given unto you'. Noteworthy is his commentary on the words 'All that which you ask': 'Nothing is excepted that serves and profits body and soul, honour and goods, both yours and others, whether great or small. That which you ask, that which stirs your heart, that which concerns you or makes you anxious...'.⁷⁵ If people believe firmly that God answers prayers solely on account of Christ's merit, then 'you can go trusting to the throne of his grace and tell of your wants and needs, asking for everything that you want.'⁷⁶ If prayers have not hitherto been answered, this is because 'you have not prayed in my name. You don't acknowledge me properly as your only saviour.'⁷⁷ The 'neglect... of Christian prayer is the cause of all evil on earth. Our sin is constantly provoking God against us. And because God is just and severe... unless someone forestalls God's anger by prayer, then God cannot restrain himself from imposing great misfortune and suffering and fear and want upon us.'⁷⁸ On the other hand, 'Christian prayer can counsel us, call upon God, obtain grace, comfort and help, weaken, diminish and disperse our enemies...'.⁷⁹

(vi) Lay perception of the power of the saints

Pamphlets indicate clearly that the debate on the saints evoked a divided response. Femelius speaks of 'hard, base, hot and unintelligent heads' and 'oafish women' who 'cannot bear to hear talk of the saints and say (if I may use the expression) that I should kiss ...[the saints] in the posterior.'⁸⁰ While Femelius deplores a new mood of hostility to the cult, evangelical propaganda tends to chide the 'obstinacy' of the many who remained attached to it. In his *Sermon on the birth of Mary* Luther anticipates popular objections to his message. People will respond with tales such as that of St Lawrence's assistance to Emperor Henry, 'whose sin the Devil laid on the scales, and which greatly exceeded his good works, even though he had built so many churches and monasteries. Then Lawrence came and threw to the good works a chalice, which Henry had had made in honour of Lawrence: thus this chalice saved Henry.'⁸¹ In his *Erfurt Sermon*, Eberlin remarks that people 'cannot bear the least action to be taken against ...[the saints], regardless of what is pleasing or displeasing to God'.⁸² Peringer complains that people 'would rather be strangled' than abandon the saints.⁸³

Ozment argues that if people remained attached to the saints, they were

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 244.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 247.

⁸⁰ Femelius, *Eyn kurz Sermon szo die heyligen Gottes belangen* (Erfurt, 1522), Biii^f.

⁸¹ *Ein Merklicher Sermon von der Geburt Marie* (Erfurt, 1522). Modern reprint: WA 10. 3, p. 320, ll. 22-26.

⁸² ENDERS 3, p. 241.

⁸³ *Eyn Sermon gepzediget vom Pawren zû Werdt*, Aii^f.

peasants rather than townsmen.⁸⁴ However, while authors like Peringer and Stanberger spoke to a peasant audience, *Grimmenthal* is addressed to artisans, while Eberlin appeals to 'all devout and elect Christians in Erfurt'. What can be said is that as we move from the thought-world of 'learned' and 'semi-learned' culture to that of simple folk, efficacy counted for more than theological argument. For Erfurt, it is impossible to say whether Luther's more 'sophisticated' supporters were persuaded more by his arguments, or by those of local reformers. At all events, the Erfurt debate attests to the limited impact of Luther's doctrine of grace. Had people accepted that faith in Christ sufficed, evangelical preachers would not have felt compelled to attack intercession. The Catholic side chose its ground well, forcing their opponents to defend untenable propositions. Femelius, Usingen and others provided 'sophisticated' adherents of the cult with arguments which served as a shield against Luther's challenge. For people with a deep affection for the saints, it probably did not matter whether they were 'powerful' mediators or 'influential' intercessors.

At a more popular level, the evangelical assault on the saints relied heavily on 'ritual deconstruction'. The impact of stories of manipulated images is difficult to measure. However, the questioning of the authenticity of relics, both in the tale of the pig's heart and the claim about St Peter's body, attests to an underlying belief in the potency of sacred objects. Such propaganda should not, of course, be assessed in isolation from scriptural argument. The metaphor of the 'celestial courtier' was probably classless. Noteworthy is the parallel between the attempt to expose sacred objects as dead matter and the claim by Erfurt preachers that the saints in heaven could neither hear nor see. While this argument may have influenced those sceptical of the power of relics or images, the argument from the Catholic side may also have reinforced religious materialism.

Ordinary folk tended to judge saints by their performance. Disappointment could lead to the demand for the return of gifts. In pre-Reformation Erfurt, for example, a citizen addressed a statue of St. Martin, declaring that he had been honoured with a golden tunic. In return he was expected to help the poor. Should he fail, the gold tunic would be removed and replaced by a grey one.⁸⁵ There were many precedents for the wave of iconoclasm in the 1520s. Drastic measures might be taken against a saint who failed to live up to expectations.⁸⁶ If people were persuaded to make the state of the world a test of the saints' power, they might well have concluded that they had not done a particularly good job. This was Eberlin's message when he stated that 'all evil in the world' was caused by the lack of 'Christian prayer'. Such arguments could rouse people to take vengeance.

Popular cults probably flourished when gratitude for favours and awe of the potent personality held each other in balance. For some people, the poor showing of the saints under attack during the 1520s was doubtless proof of evangelical

⁸⁴ Ozment (1975), pp. 66-67.

⁸⁵ Weiss (1983), p. 12.

⁸⁶ For details, see Scribner (1987), p. 113.

contentions. Although iconoclasts may have been a minority, it was clear to all that gestures of disrespect were being made with impunity. In Erfurt, the Catholic side perhaps encouraged critical scrutiny of the saints' performance by predicting that they would not tolerate the slights of sceptics. Insisting that his opponents could never refute him, Femelius prophesied that 'the dear saints will stand firm.'⁸⁷ At the same time, the evangelical preacher, Mechler, argued that the saints' reliance on Usingen proved their impotence. 'O you poor saints, what will you do when your patron has died...?'⁸⁸ If the saints were powerless to defend themselves, they were hardly in a position to protect others.

As Eberlin's *Erfurt Sermon* indicates, people were not prepared to do without supernatural assistance in their everyday lives, whether they decided for the 'cult of Christ' or the cult of the saints. Whatever the grounds for doubting the saints' powers, their miracles, told a different story. Of course, anyone who had invoked the saints to no effect might have been receptive to evangelical propaganda. Yet for many people, help received in the past must have spoken for the Catholic standpoint. To deny miracles was to fly in the face of 'incontrovertible' evidence. In his *Address to the Christian Nobility*, Luther rejects the view that miracles vindicate the pilgrimage, arguing that the 'the evil spirit can also work miracles, as Christ has proclaimed to us...'.⁸⁹ The deed itself is not questioned, only the credentials of its author. In his *Conversation with an Old Woman* (1523), Kettenbach tries to explain why 'people may be saved or healed through pilgrimages'. It is devils who made them sick in the first place. Once people 'came into their temples and knelt down before them, and worshipped them with sacrifices, the devils withdrew their hand and made them well again'.⁹⁰ The denigration of miracles by evangelical propagandists may be a reflection of unbroken popular trust in the power of the saints.

⁸⁷ Femelius, *Eyn kurz Sermon szo die heyligen Gottes belangen* (1522), [Civ]^f.

⁸⁸ Mechler, *Eyn Wyderlegung* (1524), Aii^f.

⁸⁹ WA 6, p. 447.

⁹⁰ CLEMEN 2, pp. 60-61.

17. The celibate priesthood and the mass

According to Luther, the sacrificial priesthood was a papal invention. What scripture foresaw was not a separate estate empowered to dispense the sacraments, but preachers of the Word, distinguished from their fellow Christians only by the office which they execute.¹ Closely connected with Luther's view of the preacher's office was his rejection of clerical celibacy, a state of life which set the priesthood apart from other Christians. These ideas certainly appealed to Luther's clerical followers. Yet did the people wish to have married preachers of the Word in place of a celibate priesthood which, through sacramental ritual, provided access to sacred power? The evidence of pamphlets suggests that they did not.

(i) The attempt to justify clerical marriage

Although celibacy had been mandatory for the secular clergy since the eleventh century, it had never been enforced. For the lower clergy, concubinage was an economic necessity.² In Thuringia, at least half the secular clergy lived with concubines.³ Annual fines levied on priests' 'whores' and illegitimate offspring were a major source of episcopal income. Luther denounced the bishops as whoremasters.⁴ Similarly, Eberlin alleges that they 'would rather permit... [a priest] to have ten whores than... to enter the estate of matrimony.'⁵ Mechler complains that people have failed to recognise 'the big whoremasters, the bishops', who authorise 'the life of knaves and whores' but refuse to allow marriage.⁶ For the clergy, the desire to avoid payments to their bishop and to end intrusion in their domestic lives was a strong incentive to support Luther.⁷ The first clerical marriages, which were frequently a mere legalisation of existing partnerships, took place in 1521.⁸ The trend continued in the following years.

The wave of marriages was accompanied by a wave of apologies. Reformers invoked the unequivocal evidence of the old testament. Eberlin stressed that the command in Genesis to increase and multiply was universally binding: 'God gave this law to Adam and Eve, for them and for their descendants, and the priesthood, monks and nuns were not exempted'. Obedience is a mark of piety: '...those priests who have wanted to please God have always been very particular about observing this law'.⁹ In the law of Moses, 'God demonstrated his intention yet more plainly'.¹⁰ The new testament, however, was less clear-cut. Reformers acknowledge that Christ

¹ Brecht (1986), pp. 34ff.

² Franzen (1969), pp. 22f.

³ Rogge (1957), p. 50.

⁴ Brecht (1986), p. 89.

⁵ CLEMEN 4, p. 11. Cf. Ozment (1975), 59f.

⁶ CLEMEN 4, p. 239.

⁷ Ozment (1975), p. 59f; McEwan (1986), p. 25.

⁸ On the first marriage, see McEwan (1986).

⁹ ENDERS 2, p. 23.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 23.

and Paul praise chastity as the highest good. However those without the gift of abstinence are not bound to practise it. Thomas Stör admits: 'It is a good thing for anyone who wants to and likes to, to observe chastity. But I fear that this high gift of God will be very rare'.¹¹ All writers emphasise the humanity of the priesthood. Stör argues that 'a priest is a man, a work and a creature of God, created to increase and multiply like other people'. The authorities 'will not succeed in making wood and stone of man through their diabolical commandment and impede him in his natural work. For what else is it, if marriage is forbidden to priests, than that a man is not a man.'¹² Mechler insists: 'I am also a child of Adam, born of flesh and blood, and no angel...'.¹³ Eberlin argues that since 'nature has given love to the priests as to other men', it is senseless 'to oppose nature and to restrain her...'.¹⁴ For those without the gift, the reformers declared, marriage was not just an option, but an obligation. Otherwise, the drive to satisfy the flesh will lead to scandal. Biblical precedents for clerical marriage are frequently cited. Mechler points out that 'Paul says that Peter and other brothers of the Lord had wives.'¹⁵ Eberlin asserts that several of Christ's disciples, including St. Paul, were married.¹⁶

In Erfurt, Usingen rejected evangelical arguments as a distortion of scripture.¹⁷ Christ lifted the old testament command to marry. Where his opponents argue that the new testament does not make chastity binding, Usingen stressed that it was recommended as preferable. At least one text which he cited - I Corinthians 7 - was evidently weighty. Eberlin refused to accept it as a commandment, 'for ... [it] is repellent to me as inhuman (sent by God over the world) and... has been used to turn all scripture on its head'.¹⁸ In *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar*, Stanberger invokes this chapter in favour of clerical marriage. However, he suppresses the passage which irritated Eberlin - Paul's praise of chastity - citing only the subsequent qualification: marriage is better than fornication.¹⁹ Usingen, however, argued that this could not be invoked by those who had vowed chastity. Against this, reformers insisted that 'godless vows' should not be kept.²⁰ Usingen considers the possibility that the Pope might release priests from their vows, so as to avoid sexual scandal, but leaves the decision to the proper authorities. He himself insists that chastity is possible. Since Christ and Paul recommend it, the obvious course is ask for God's grace, which, according to scripture, is stronger than human nature.

As well as appealing to scripture, some reformers stressed the practical benefits of clerical marriage. Eberlin argues that priests with whores and children cannot credibly preach against sexual misconduct. People will think that God does not punish fornication and adultery as severely as scripture states. Consequently, 'all

¹¹ Stör, Thomas, *Der Ehelich standt* (Nuremberg, 1524), [Aiv]^v.

¹² *ibid.*, Ci^v-Cii^f.

¹³ CLEMEN 4, p. 234.

¹⁴ ENDERS 2, p. 34.

¹⁵ CLEMEN 4, p. 230.

¹⁶ ENDERS 2, p. 25.

¹⁷ For a summary of Usingen's sermon, see Hoar (1965), pp. 157 ff.

¹⁸ ENDERS 2, p. 26.

¹⁹ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspzsch zzwischē einem Pzior / leyenbzuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), [Eiv]^v.

²⁰ CLEMEN 4, p.237, ll. 20ff.

discipline breaks down in a village or city where there is a fornicating priest.²¹ Here, Eberlin addresses a complaint in the 1521 grievances. Most clerics 'keep house with loose female persons and children, leading a dishonourable and abhorrent life, which sets a bad example to their parishioners, with the result that they also become wanton.'²² Eberlin also argues that if clerics have to break one rule to satisfy their lust, they will not respect any others. Here, he appeals to the jealous husband. Warning that 'the Devil incites your wife and child to the love of priests', he adds that 'a priest often has as many women to sleep with as there are women in a village.'²³ Not without reason did men fear for their honour. In Erfurt, a 'whoring' priest was beaten to death by a cheated husband in 1505. At his trial, he was acquitted after accusing the delinquent of breaking the sacraments of matrimony and ordination.²⁴

Popular dialogues also exploit such incidents. In *Grimmenthal*, the priest calls the audacious artisan to order, reminding him of the dignity of his estate. The artisan replies: 'Yes, indeed you are clerical'. While laymen make do with their wives, priests have as many women as they want. The priest answers that he is forbidden to marry. The artisan then attacks the clergy for seducing the wives of laymen, and warns of the dangers: 'O pious men, look after your wives, if they spend a lot of time with their confessor...'²⁵ The artisan, however, does not recommend marriage as a solution. Perhaps, against the background of the current debate, the author expected his reader to draw this conclusion himself. Alternatively, he may have felt that his audience would find the proposal unattractive. Of the Erfurt dialogues, only Stanberger's *Prior, Laybrother and Beggar* attacks the prohibition of marriage. In his tract on matrimony, Eberlin complains that

the fact that this prohibition remains in force is very much the fault of the common man who doesn't want the priests to be given wives... They should know that they are following the Devil's counsel, who speaks through them. A woman is considered to be dishonourable if she marries a priest.²⁶

This suggests that although propagandists could score a point by attacking breaches of celibacy, they could not do so by supporting clerical marriage. Reformers, after all, were pleading for the legalisation of domestic arrangements which had always caused offence.

(ii) Popular hatred of the concubine

Rather curiously, the main target of popular hatred seems to have been the

²¹ Enders, pp. 31-32.

²² Etzliche besondere artickel, Aiii^v.

²³ *ibid.* pp. 32-33.

²⁴ Weiss (1983), pp. 13-14.

²⁵ CLEMEN 1, pp. 162-163.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 34.

concubine, rather than the unchaste priest himself. *The New Poem* savours the humiliation of priests' 'whores' during the Erfurt *Pfaffensturm* of 1521. When the rioters attacked, they fled the priests' houses by the back entrance. Previously, these 'painted women who honour the priestly estate' had 'cut a great figure, as though they were noblewomen'.²⁷ *Bailiff and Pastor* complains that behind every greedy cleric is a grasping woman. The 'cook' is 'the master of the house'. She dresses 'as though she were the judge's wife'. Anyone 'who doesn't know her considers her an honourable woman'. However, 'she has been sent to the clergy to consume the property and income of the benefice'.²⁸ If priests were given a 'fitting income', they would lose their attraction for women. The bailiff tries to persuade the pastor of the benefits: 'You won't have to put up with the complaints of loose, wicked women who take your money and keep you awake at night, disturbing you with quarrelling and bickering, and with worry and anxiety about keeping wife and child...'.²⁹

Chrisman cites a Strasbourg pamphlet by Steffan von Büllheym, an unidentified author. He speaks sympathetically of concubines, who bore social ostracism because they loved their priestly partners. His standpoint attests to a change in attitude. Rather than call for the clergy to live in celibacy, he accepted marriage as a solution.³⁰ Chrisman has suggested that the evangelical standpoint triumphed. However, even after reformers began to propagate clerical marriage, many propagandists continued to appeal to hatred of the concubine. In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant* (1523), the peasant complains that he is forced to finance the sumptuous living, not just of the priest, but also of the 'cook and whore's children'.³¹ In *Father and Son* (1523), the father 'explains' why his pastor has not preached the gospel. He 'is so busy with his bible, the cook, that he pays little attention to it'.³²

In the *Dialogue between Two Priest's Cooks* (1523), two concubines discuss the religious conflict. Kerstin visits her friend Else and finds her spinning. Amazed, she remarks that her priest 'although idle, can keep you very well'.³³ Else explains that the peasants no longer give as generously. Kerstin attacks the 'enlightened' peasantry. 'A plague upon the peasants. Hardly any of them gives anything to the priests'. However, Luther's triumph will not affect her:

But whether the cause succeeds or fails,
 I don't care about it.
 I have put some things aside,
 Even though I be damned and lost because of it,
 And whether it belonged to the priests or had been borrowed...
 All of this stock belongs to me.³⁴

²⁷ CLEMEN 1, p. 369.

²⁸ GÖTZE, pp. 11-12.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁰ Chrisman (1980), pp. 38-39.

³¹ CLEMEN 3, p. 202.

³² CLEMEN 1, p. 28.

³³ *Dialogus von Zweyen pfaffen Köchin* (n.p., 1523), A^v.

³⁴ *ibid.*, Aiii^r.

Kerstin mentions that a canon has made advances to her. However, he is interested only in her property. For her part, with the income of clerics no longer guaranteed, an alliance can no longer be seen as a worthwhile venture.³⁵

The idea running through the dialogue is identical to that in *Bailiff and Pastor*. A reformed clergy will lose its attraction for women. Underlying the popular image of the concubine is a deep-rooted conviction that sexual activity is incompatible with the dignity of the priesthood. In his *Friendly Letter* (1524), Eberlin warns married priests to expect the worst:

And you married priests should not be enraged if the four sacrifices, tithes, baptism money, etc. are not given to you as faithfully as before. God will strengthen you... Nor will your wives be esteemed as quickly as other wives are. If your wife should get angry and say, I am as good as you are, and if she is then hit on the nose, she must put up with this. And if you wanted to take offence at this you would never have any rest...³⁶

Clearly based on his observation of the reaction to clerical marriages, Eberlin's advice indicates that the countless apologies of evangelical reformers had little impact on the common people.

Popular hostility to clerical marriage may be due partly to the 'weakness' of evangelical arguments. They justify the breaking of their vows by invoking a concept of freedom which, as we have seen, had little impact on ordinary people. They appeal, not to the scriptural ideal, but to the loopholes. Eberlin even goes as far as to reject an inconvenient text as 'repellent'. Catholic preachers, on the other hand, presented a reading of the scriptural evidence more in tune with popular expectations. Yet the problem for evangelical reformers was not first and foremost exegetical. Rather, it was the idea that sacramental efficacy depended on the chastity of the priest. In his tract on clerical matrimony, Eberlin pointed out that if a sinful peasant were permitted to receive the sacrament, 'a hailstorm would come over the village... and people would cry blue murder about the mayor for allowing the knave into the village and bringing punishment on all of them'. He then asks: 'Now if there were so many priests in one hamlet dealing daily in the holy sacrament... and publicly remaining in a state of sin, how can there be happiness or prosperity in the village, city or territory?'³⁷ Eberlin is addressing an audience for which the 'sinfulness' of a priest diminished the power of the sacrament, but for which his 'solution' was none at all. The legal status of clerical partnerships was unimportant. Impurity was impurity, one way or the other.

³⁵ *ibid.*, Aiii^v.

³⁶ ENDERS 3, p. 140.

³⁷ ENDERS 2, p. 33.

(iii) The power of the mass

The mass was the most potent and versatile of all kinds of ritual action. Through the re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice, the drama of redemption was made present. Scholastic theologians explained Christ's presence in the eucharist by distinguishing between 'substance' and 'accident'. Through consecration by the priest, the bread and wine retained their outward, accidental character, changing only their substance. According to official teaching the mass was both a sacrament and a sacrifice. Participation not only gave access to divine power, but was also a good work. Since the canon of the mass was read silently in Latin, modes of participation varied. Simpler believers said their prayers. Seeing the host was the crucial experience. It was common to leave the church after the elevation. Better educated laypeople were admonished to acknowledge their sins, think of Christ's passion, hope for grace and thank God for having sent his son to atone for their sins.³⁸ In the late middle ages, the mass was increasingly an occasion for eucharistic devotion.³⁹

The fruits of the mass were both eternal and temporal. Theologians stressed the propitiatory character of the sacrifice and distinguished between 'acceptable' and 'superstitious' beliefs in its efficacy. Although they disapproved of the expectations which preachers often encouraged, they recognised that simple believers could best fathom the power of the mass through the miracles which it effected. Countless legends about the 'fruits' of the mass circulated in the late middle ages. In general, it was believed to give protection against misfortune or illness. However, there was no limit to the number of profane applications of its power. The desire to maximise its benefits is reflected in the proliferation of private masses.⁴⁰

For Luther, the mass was a sacrament, a sign of the promise of grace. For this reason he rejected Catholic teaching on its sacrificial character. Since the promise was a free gift to those who received it in faith, it was idolatrous to repeat the sacrifice. While he repudiated the doctrine of transubstantiation, he retained the idea of the Real Presence. This was a mystery which should be accepted without being understood. The practice of withholding the chalice from the laity, he argued, was unscriptural. The most far-reaching consequence of his teaching is indicated in the title of his definitive tract of 1522, *De abroganda missa privata*. Needless to say, he had nothing but contempt for the legends about the 'fruits of the mass'.⁴¹

Luther's tract provoked vociferous protest. In his *Apologia*, Kettenbach responds to the Catholic charge that 'Luther has spoken against the mass'. He defends the reformer by arguing that he has attacked only the 'foolishness, superstition, abuse, greed and deceit, as practised in the reading of the mass.' The

³⁸ Franz (1963), esp. pp. 10ff.

³⁹ On eucharistic devotion, see Kieckhefer (1988), pp. 98-102.

⁴⁰ On the uses of the mass see Franz (1963), pp. 36ff; Thomas (1971), pp. 33-36.

⁴¹ Brecht (1986), pp. 34ff.

clergy, he alleges, make a sacrifice of the mass so that a sacrifice can be made to them as well.⁴² While Christ says that Christians should receive from him, the papists say ‘*offeremus tibi*’. To repeat Christ’s sacrifice is to question its sufficiency.⁴³ The prolific celebration of the mass displeases God, which is why ‘since this has been done, things have never been well in Christendom.’ Christ is now sold for ten pence. ‘Judas did this for thirty.’ No mass should be read to laymen unless they learn the word of God through it.⁴⁴

In his *Conversation with an Old Woman*, Kettenbach expands on this last point. The old woman initially accepts that there is no point in going to mass ‘if I don’t hear the word of God’.⁴⁵ Kettenbach argues that by concealing Christ’s words in a foreign tongue, the papists reveal their contempt for the laity. The woman asks whether she should ‘hear several masses, or just one’. Kettenbach answers that it is just as good and sufficient if one mass is held at one place for an hour as if a thousand were held...⁴⁶ The mass, he explains ‘is not a sacrifice... which is just as pleasing to God, whether celebrated by a wicked or a good priest.’ The woman now raises the financial aspect of the question. ‘It is said that is very good to assist the mass, that is to offer a sacrifice at the mass.’ Kettenbach replies that ‘it is very good for the priest to whom you give it, for he has got so much more money. This was devised by a saint called Kiss the Penny. He performs great signs for old women and half-witted people with hallucinations.’

In his *Final Statement* (1522) Eberlin discusses the financial aspect of the sacrifice. One consequence of Christian freedom, he argues, is that ‘a Christian may give his money to whom he wants, where he wants...’. Eberlin, however, is not offering emancipation from a burdensome obligation. Rather, on the assumption people give gladly, he pleads with his audience to desist from exercising their freedom. He first explains that it is erroneous to believe that the mass is a sacrifice.⁴⁷ Citing I Corinthians 8, in which St Paul warns against the exercise of Christian freedom for the sake of the ‘weak’, he continues:

If an erring Christian sees you making a sacrifice, he feels strengthened in his error. If a good but nevertheless weak Christian sees it, he becomes faint-hearted in respect of beneficial teaching about the mass, which he has perhaps heard from good preachers, but is drawn towards the old abuse by your example (in so far as he cannot understand and follow your good faith) more than he is drawn by good teaching.⁴⁸

People should therefore ‘give up such sacrifices until such time as Christians are

⁴² CLEMEN 2, p. 164.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁷ Enders, p. 188-189.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 189.

instructed and considerably strengthened in faith.' Eberlin, however, does not seem to expect a receptive audience: 'Even if this advice of mine is not fixed in your hearts, this is not so important. Pay more attention to scripture than to your own opinions'. The papists, he alleges, 'portray God differently from what he is.' They have 'built up a false god and divine service under a good appearance and name. That, however, is the most wicked idolatry, against which few people can protect themselves, especially because it is concealed under the good name of God and his service.'⁴⁹

In Erfurt, the mass does not seem to have been a particularly contentious issue before 1525. The conflict over the saints was perhaps a distraction. In addition, the only change which evangelical preachers made to the Roman rite - in 1523 - was to offer the cup to the laity. At the same time, the mass continued to be celebrated in the traditional fashion. People were not deprived of access to its benefits.⁵⁰ During the revolt of 1525, the Roman rite was replaced by a reformed vernacular mass. The 'reformation' appeared to have triumphed.⁵¹ Within a year however, celebration of the mass was resumed. Attendance was large. In 1527, Justus Menius, an evangelical preacher, justified the publication of a pamphlet against Konrad Kling, a champion of the Roman rite:

For the priests and monks... have reassembled here... after they had for a time been weakened and driven out by God, and... cry out and write loudly in towns and villages how here in Erfurt the old order has been re-established; and say the old, honourable, holy and praiseworthy divine service... is being resumed and the new damned, Hussite and Lutheran heresy... is being diminished and forced onto its knees in the face of great humiliation and mockery, while masses, vigils, matins, vespers and all divine service are being held again...⁵²

In 1528, Menius abandoned the struggle against and left Erfurt.⁵³ In the same year the mass was officially restored. The council merely recognised a *fait accompli*.

Both Kettenbach's and Eberlin's comments on the mass shed some light on the attitudes which led to its restoration in Erfurt. To be sure, Kettenbach's old woman vacillates between momentary 'enlightenment' and stubborn loyalty to the Church. Yet his contemptuous reference to the signs performed 'for old women and half-witted people with hallucinations' indicates that he was aware that the subjective experience of power of the mass caused people to doubt the truth of Luther's assertions. When Eberlin complained that people could not protect themselves against 'wicked idolatry' because of its 'good appearance', he was merely acknowledging that, for them, the mass was the moment of encounter with Christ.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 180-190.

⁵⁰ Weiss (1988), pp. 143, 155, 183.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 183-185.

⁵² *Etlicher Gottlosen vnd widderchristischen lere von der Papistischen Messen* (Wittenberg, 1527), Aii^v-Aiii^f.

⁵³ Weiss (1988), pp. 235-236; 242.

Both evangelical and Catholic clerics stress the power of Christ's atonement. However, whereas the former sought to persuade people that they could rely on a verbal testament to the enduring efficacy of a distant historical event, Catholic sacramental teaching allowed immediate, tangible participation in the drama of redemption. Eberlin admitted that people had little inclination to accept the 'beneficial teaching on the mass', and could do not more than admonish them to 'pay less attention' to their 'own opinions'. Kettenbach sought to enhance his case with a typical appeal to the pocket. Yet Eberlin's attempt to persuade his audience not to exercise their liberty to give money indicates that the 'sacrifice at the altar' was not perceived as burdensome. It is more likely that such payments reinforced the believer's sense that he, too, partook in the power of the sacrament. Nowhere in grievance literature do we find any indication that this practice caused offence. Rather it is the 'arbitrary' hurdles to access to the benefits of the mass - the ban, the interdict, the charging of fees for memorial masses - which gave rise to complaint.

(iv) The popularity of Catholicism

It is one of the great ironies of the battle against Catholicism that evangelical reformers presented themselves as the advocates of the laity, although they can fairly be accused of contemptuous insensitivity to the needs and wishes of a large part of their audience. Partly for the sake of theological correctness, partly in order to destroy the authority of their opponents, they attacked religious practices which, from the standpoint of the common people were meaningful, fulfilling and consoling: the monastic life, the cult of the saints, the celibate, sacrificial priesthood. In attacking the regular life, propagandists attempted to show that the monastic ideal was incompatible with Christian freedom. However, they evidently realised that they could destroy the prestige of the monks more effectively by arguing that they had not kept to their Rule, in particular by alleging that the vows of chastity were a total sham. In denouncing the cult of the saints, reformers were driven by an obsessive sense that reliance on their assistance was derogatory to Christ. Aware that their theological objections had little impact on a popular audience, they employed techniques of 'deconsecration' aimed at shattering people's confidence in valuable props. In attacking celibacy, they showed even less respect for the sensibilities of ordinary folk than the pre-reformation clergy. In the light of the evident popularity of the mass, the common man's abhorrence of clerical marriage is easily comprehended. A chaste priesthood was the best guarantee of the efficacy of sacramental ritual.

PART VI

POPULAR REVOLT IN ERFURT

18. The reformation of the common man

(i) The failure of the evangelical campaign

In 1527, Luther wrote the foreword to Menius's tract against the mass. Although he does not intend to 'begin a new papacy', Christian charity obliges him, 'to bear witness to his teaching, where it is correct, and to warn and bear witness against the false teachers'. Since Menius's teaching is grounded in scripture, the Erfurters 'are obliged to recognise such grace and gifts of God, even if he had given you no more than one such man.' Since God has given them many such preachers, they should not be unthankful, or let 'their ears itch to hear and know differently, by which Satan gains ground...'. God wants his word to be honoured. If his preachers are scorned, he 'will take terrible revenge, as he threatens'. In the past, scripture was buried and was only recovered through hard and dangerous work. Now, however, there is so much scripture that 'it is scorned together with its servants.'¹ God tempts the Erfurters with the 'preachers of darkness' and has not given the city councillors the courage

to end the divisions among the preachers and let them be heard against each other. And whoever could not prevail should remain silent, as other cities like Nuremberg... have done. For it is not good for any city that divisions are suffered among the people on account of public agitators and preachers. One party should go, whether it be the evangelical or the papal, as Christ teaches in Matthew 10 [14]: 'If in any town they do not want to listen to you, leave and shake the dust from your shoes over them.' If anyone does not wish to listen to us, from thence we will depart easily and soon.²

In urging Erfurt's council to follow Nuremberg's example, Luther demands the impossible. Religious uniformity could have been imposed only at the price of civic independence. If the Nuremberg council was quick to introduce a Lutheran reformation, this was not because Luther's message was popular, but rather because it was divisive. If Hans Sachs is to be believed, evangelical teaching, though supported by a militant minority of laymen, was rejected by the 'common people'. So deep was the rift which it had driven through urban society, that the suppression of one of the two parties was the best way of restoring internal peace. Although the break with Rome may have placed a strain on Nuremberg's relations with the Emperor, confessional alignment did not threaten its independence. Had not Erfurt's survival as a political entity depended on keeping both Mainz and Saxony at bay, the settlement of 1525 might well have been final. The view that Luther won the hearts and minds of the urban laity could not be so easily exposed for the myth that it is.

¹ WA 23, pp. 15-16.

² *ibid.*, p. 16.

Luther's indignant remark that 'we will depart easily and soon' anticipates Menius's capitulation the following year. He is clearly aware of the strength of Erfurt's 'Catholic revival'. With the return to 'normality' after 1525 the Catholic side was able to reap the fruits of its successful defence of the 'old faith' in the preceding years. Once the 'religious question' was uncoupled from questions of secular and ecclesiastical politics, the evangelical party was confronted with the reality of its failure. At the height of Luther's popularity in 1521, people had had little idea of what he stood for. Pamphlets appearing around 1520/1521 show that they were oblivious of his doctrine of justification. Even his assault on temporal satisfaction, which had begun in 1517, had had no perceptible impact. His early popularity was based on his defiance of Rome. This lent him a charismatic aura which was reinforced by prophetic traditions which led people to interpret his revolt in the context of the historical struggle between Empire and Papacy. Once he became associated with a 'new faith', his charisma began to fade. By linking his message on justification to prophecies of the End, he detached himself from the Joachite tradition to which he owed his legitimation. His condemnation by the Emperor, the re-emergence of the Turk and the election of a reforming pope conspired to weaken his case against Rome. At the same time, his assault on 'works righteousness' activated the negative reading of Lichtenberger's 'little prophet' prophecy.

With the shift of focus to the issue of justification, the Catholic side appealed with greater effect to 'traditional' authority. The campaign was led by men to whom it was difficult to attach the anticlerical images of the 'Reuchlin affair'. Whereas the charge of heresy against Luther had initially lacked credibility, they were able to fill it with meaning. Many people wanted to participate in the process of their own salvation. Luther's teaching on grace not only denied them a role which they wanted to play. It also came across as an assault on the highest authority, the law of God. The paradox that good works were 'to be rejected and not to be rejected' made no sense to people who did not grasp the dialectic of the law and the gospel. The fact that faith alone was not perceived to produce the promised fruits of neighbourliness reinforced popular disenchantment with Luther. By making unrealistic claims about the fruits of faith in the early days of the campaign, evangelical propagandists had given hostages to fortune. Their assault on monastic piety, the cult of the saints, the celibate priesthood and the mass, contributed further to the mood of disillusioned hostility. People did not want to be deprived of powerful support either in the battle against sin, or in their struggle to master the problems of day to day life. Perceptive propagandists like Eberlin tried to argue that faith would bring the same temporal fruits as the traditional props. However, by 1524 he was offering an alternative which had already been discredited.

(ii) Evangelical teaching and communal ideology

According to Moeller the urban laity espoused Lutheranism because the principle of Christian neighbourliness reinforced the cherished values of peace and unity. Citing Lange - 'God dwells where the common good is sought, the Devil dwells where people act for their own profit or out of personal friendship' - Moeller argues that this simple sentence, which 'seemed best to meet the exigencies of civic co-existence' was grounded in Luther's understanding of Christian belief.³ Luther, however, took a different view of the Erfurt communal movement. At the council's request, he published a *Comment on the Twenty-Eight Articles*. He does not even praise the demand that each *Gemeinde* elect its own pastor. This is mere rebellion, as though it were no business of the council how the pastors discharged their duties.⁴ Luther either dismisses most of the other articles with biting sarcasm or declines to comment on the grounds that they deal with purely secular matters. A few - the demand for a renewal of the university or for the suppression of the city brothel, for example - meet with his approval. However, he attacks the core articles. On the demand for an 'Eternal Council', he writes: 'If the council is not trusted, why appoint one, rather than have none at all'. He rejects the call for accountability in respect of expenditure and revenue: 'So that the council no longer be council, but rather the mob rule everything'.⁵ On the demand that the council seek consent for new taxes, he remarks: 'In that case it would be necessary to pay the people.'⁶ To punish the commons' impertinence, all of the articles should be rejected, 'even though some of them are good'. The goal of the insurgents is clear:

Nothing is sought ... except that every man should have his profit and live according to his will, that the lowest should be the highest and everything turned on its head, that the council should fear the commune and be its servant, while the commune is lord and master and fears no-one, which is against God and reason.⁷

The townspeople should leave matters to the council. They cannot support their revolt with the gospel: 'Is it evangelical... to press ahead... without any humility and prayer..., as if Erfurt did not need God or God was not Lord over Erfurt, too. I see no article about how God should be feared, sought, prayed to... and the matter left to him.'⁸

Luther certainly understood the thrust of the *Twenty-Eight Articles*. He recognised that the driving force behind the revolt was the commune's desire to check the Council's unrestrained lordship. However, incapable of viewing the conflict from the standpoint of the townsmen, he saw only personal greed and

³ Moeller (1983), pp. 23-24.

⁴ WA 18, p. 540.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 535.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 538.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 539.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 540.

collective insubordination. That the Erfurters evidently felt that the gospel justified their rising appalled him. Although the *Comment* does not match his pamphlet against the peasants in barbarity, it reveals much the same uncomprehending animosity towards ordinary folk who demanded a just resolution of their grievances. There was no meeting of minds between Luther and the Erfurters.

The *Twenty-Eight Articles* make no explicit appeal to neighbourliness, or to any principle of legitimation. Yet Luther's remarks do not necessarily mean that the commons were unmoved by exhortations to charity. Neighbourliness is a versatile principle. Luther, after all, praised the butchering of the peasants as a neighbourly act deserving of salvation.⁹ What evangelical propagandists undoubtedly achieved was to establish a criterion of legitimacy which, transcending confessional loyalties and adaptable to different interests, could not be ignored. In the Erfurt of 1525, it served less to defuse, than to aggravate social tensions. The reformers, as Moeller himself observes, applied the standard of neighbourliness in judging the Catholic clergy. From the standpoint of the commons, secular rulers could also be accused of having offended against brotherly love. This probably reinforced their sense of the justice of their cause.¹⁰ It did not, however, drive people into Luther's arms.

(iii) The peasants and Christian freedom

Serfdom was incompatible with the postulates of natural law as assimilated into the Christian tradition. Created in God's image, all men necessarily possessed the same natural rights. Aquinas, however, had legitimated the feudal order by arguing that these rights had been forfeited in consequence of the Fall.¹¹ In the late middle ages, movements of social protest had begun to argue that Christ's sacrifice had broken the bonds of Adam's sin, restoring Christians to their natural law rights. This idea is found in popular prophecies, but also in Erasmus's *Education of a Prince*.¹² The law of Christ could thus be invoked to legitimate social change. Luther, for his part, insisting that Christ had freed only the spirit, granted the secular power practical autonomy in outward affairs.¹³ In effect, he provided the same support for the status quo as Aquinas.¹⁴

During the revolt, the peasants complained about high ground rents, labour services and other feudal dues owed both to lay and clerical landlords.¹⁵ By their own testimony, they saw themselves called upon to 'aid the gospel'.¹⁶ They were probably influenced by the late medieval arguments against serfdom. However, Luther's message was also communicated to peasant audiences in such a way as to reinforce

⁹ WA 18, p. 361.

¹⁰ Cf. Brady (1985), pp. 156-157.

¹¹ Bierbrauer (1982), pp. 220-221.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 225.

¹³ Griewank (1969), pp. 82-83.

¹⁴ Cf. Bierbrauer (1982), p. 231.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 221.

¹⁶ Scribner (1972), pp. 203, 222.

hope of 'fleshly' liberation. In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant*, the peasant complains that, unlike the clergy, he 'must go about the country to earn my keep with my flail and put up with great inconvenience as the good Adam did.'¹⁷ Peter assures him that the peasants 'do God a more agreeable service than someone who shrieks in the church all day and every day, without any piety.'¹⁸ Alluding to the Catholic campaign, he appeals to him not to accept 'the deceptive talk about me and my brothers any longer, for it is the work of the Devil'.¹⁹ The prophets have warned of the shepherds who prey upon their sheep. People have invested in good works, but 'their giving has not helped them'. The peasant should follow only that path 'which Martin shows' and 'let the pope be pope'. God will not desert those with faith. 'That which you have been taught, that you can obtain this through your own work, is lies and falsehood.'²⁰ Impressed, the peasant asks to hear more. Explaining that original sin arose from failure to observe God's Word, Peter links Adam's disobedience to the peasant's lowly status:

Likewise, he also cursed Adam, that he should earn his bread through the sweat of his brow, as you have already said. This is the origin of your flail, your hoe and your spade. See, this comes from lack of faith! But afterwards God comforted him and promised him salvation...²¹

Assuring him that Abraham and all of the prophets, were saved by faith alone, Peter then gives a faultless, if simple, exposition of Luther's doctrine of justification.

Throughout the middle ages, the peasant was a despised figure. The demeaning onus of agricultural labour was a consequence of man's fallen state. Werner O. Packull points out that the literary depiction of the peasant took a more positive turn during the early reformation years. Credited with honest simplicity, he served evangelical propagandists as a foil to a corrupt and deceptive clergy.²² Packull suggests that Stanberger was 'oblivious of the changing literary image of the peasant'. However, it is unlikely that he was unfamiliar with *Karsthans*. Unlike the author of that pamphlet, however, he has no use for the literary convention of the upright peasant. Addressing the peasantry directly, he seeks a point of contact between the social reality of economic bondage and Luther's teaching. Peter's remark that the flail 'comes from lack of faith' amounts to a promise of 'fleshly' liberation. Stanberger certainly 'understood' Luther. One of his pamphlets, a letter to the Erfurt printer, Michel Buchfürer, is a faithful and eloquent exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith, free of anti-Catholic polemic. Why then does he propagate ideas which he must have known would have horrified Luther? Most probably, he realised that this was his best chance of winning the support of people who readily believed the 'deceptive talk' of his Catholic opponents. Whether or not

¹⁷ CLEMEN 3, p. 202.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 204.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 206.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 207.

²² Packull (1985), pp. 254-258.

such propaganda won converts, it will certainly have reinforced a pre-existing belief that serfdom was incompatible with human dignity.

(iv) Anticlericalism and secular grievances

Fundamental to the thought-world into which Luther's assault on the Church was received was the idea that the perfection of society on earth was a stage in the process of sanctification. 'Economic factors' were a reliable eschatological 'indicator', and the evil state of the world a sure sign that things had gone badly wrong. Even before the issue of justification arose, propagandists had blamed the clergy for the world's miseries. In *Bailiff and Pastor* (1521) the pastor criticises Luther for attacking the clergy while ignoring lay vice. Secular authorities are no less oppressive than the clerical. 'If a peasant commits a crime or does not pay his dues, then you oppress him with the law, or put him in stocks or the debtors' prison...' ²³ With characteristic deference to lay authority, the author refuses to acknowledge the justice of these grievances. Secular lords are concerned for their tenants' welfare and are therefore entitled to demand dues. At the same time, the author blames the clergy for all secular evils. Admitting that the laity is also greedy, the bailiff tells the pastor that 'avarice first arose among you, where Christ drove the scribes out of the temple with a scourge for selling doves which had to be sacrificed to them....'. Clergy and laymen, he continues, are 'one body'. Christ is the head and the clergy the 'servants of the head'. Their proper role is 'preaching, prayer and administering the sacraments'. Since they have 'abandoned reason', they must be 'given medicaments, so that the members are restored to health'. This is why Luther has begun with the clergy. 'For you should be the teachers and we the followers'.²⁴ In attempting to deflect criticism of secular authority, the author invokes what was evidently a commonplace view of clerical culpability.

The same idea is found in the *New Poem* (1521). Probably sponsored by the Erfurt council,²⁵ it justifies the *Pfaffensturm*, while warning that future mob violence will be punished. 'Greed, vainglory and envy' have triumphed and 'God's commandments are not observed'. God inflicts 'penalties such as sickness death and hard years'. The clergy 'ought to direct us on the right course' explaining God's word and admonishing the people to 'love God, do right and leave wrongdoing aside'.²⁶ However they are only interested in counting their money. The author links these general complaints to the issue of clerical taxation: 'Should the priests be left alone and not required to give assistance? We have to give them tribute and rent even if... the commonwealth ... suffers. Nevertheless, they object that they are subjects of the Pope, who can keep them free under his protection'.²⁷

²³ GÖTZE, p. 23.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁵ CLEMEN I, p. 372, n. 15.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 364.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 367.

There is clear line of continuity between the *Pfaffensturm* of 1521 and the revolt of 1525. In Erfurt, people were united by opposition to clerical exemption from taxation and hatred of Mainz. The confessional divisions which arose in the intervening years did not destroy this unity of purpose. Anticlericalism worked in favour of the evangelical party in two different ways. On the one hand, it prepared the ground for a limited reception of Luther's teaching and contributed to the dynamism of the evangelical movement. For adherents, the revelation that they would not be saved by works was the last straw. On the other hand, although evangelical propaganda failed to persuade Catholics that the clergy's greed had led them to 'falsify' doctrine, it kept their minds focussed on their failings. The persistence of 'old-style' anticlericalism gave the evangelical party a decisive strategic advantage. The dynamics of conflict inevitably worked against those who, though they held fast to Catholic belief, were eager both to achieve civic independence and to force wealthy clerics to contribute to the alleviation of the city's financial misery. Anticlericalism did not, as Goertz suggests for Erfurt, lead to a general 'solidarity with the Reformation'.²⁸ Rather it acted at once as an accelerator of the evangelical movement and as a brake on the rallying of its opponents. Those who rejected Luther's teaching were tied to an institution which was self-evidently in need of a root and branch reform. Like Luther's adherents, they felt that the Church had failed them, and could not rise to its defence. In all probability, they participated in the anticlerical violence during the 1525 revolt. For Catholics, too, only the 'destruction of the clergy', so long prophesied in Joachite literature, could induce the experience of catharsis which was the condition of a new beginning. Offended by Luther's 'heresy', yet dissatisfied with the status quo, they were easy prey for militant Lutherans. The Erfurt conflict shows how, at critical junctures in history, a single group, not necessarily large but highly motivated, can seize the initiative and impose its will. The Lutheran reformation succeeded not because it won broad support, but because it was not opposed.

(v) The 'Peasants' Seal' - the common man as the 'rod of God'

The new seal, introduced during the popular insurrection in May 1525, depicted Christ the Judge enthroned upon a rainbow, with a lily and a sword. Bearing the inscription 'Judge justly, sons of men, lest ye be judged', it was a familiar symbol of divine justice, often decorating medieval court rooms. It was also commonly used in prophetic literature. It serves as the title page illustration of Lichtenberger's *Pronosticatio*.²⁹ The introduction of the seal was long seen as a concession by Erfurt's rulers to the insurgent populace. Following the suppression of the revolt, the Council destroyed it. Scribner describes the seal as 'a fitting symbol of the double game played by the Council'. Although it was imprinted on the document accepting the *Twenty-Eight Articles*, the Council used the old seal in official correspondence.³⁰

²⁸ Goertz (1982), p. 85

²⁹ Kurze (1986), pp. 185-186.

³⁰ Scribner (1972), p. 225.

Weiss, however, contends that the Council itself chose the seal at the suggestion of evangelical preachers. Just as the councillors sought to blame the common people for the revolt against Mainz, so they spread the rumour that they had accepted the seal under duress. Both contemporary observers and generations of historians were taken in by their deception. The councillors wanted the seal as a symbol of the city's emancipation. Although hesitant in adopting it, they used it in some official correspondence.³¹

Weiss's case is not wholly persuasive. Even if political caution explains the hesitant use of the seal, its hasty destruction does not suggest that it was of great symbolic significance. Be that as it may, the important question is whether the image of Christ the Judge can be seen as a key symbol of 'the reformation of the common man'. Several considerations suggest that it can. Weiss points out that one councillor questioned the wisdom of choosing a depiction of the Last Judgment.³² So emotive a symbol risked exacerbating the dangerously volatile mood of apocalyptic anticipation. Even if the Council took the initiative, it probably hoped to placate the commons with a motif which suggested that their aspirations were on the brink of fulfillment. The fact that contemporaries readily believed the 'rumour' that the Council had been forced to accept the seal indicates that it symbolised a concept of reformation with which ordinary folk identified.

The choice of motif shows that the events of the 1520s were comprehended as a turning point in salvation history. The long awaited moment of divine intervention was at hand. In an eschatological context, the depiction of Christ the Judge can, however, stand for different views of God's purpose. Weiss argues that the seal signifies evangelical piety, with its emphasis on the approach of the Last Judgment. The sword and the lily represent the related ideas of wrath and grace. Alternatively, the image might be associated with the twin themes of divine vengeance and terrestrial renewal. This reading is suggested by its use in popular prophetic literature. The rainbow, moreover, the sign of the covenant, carried connotations of rebirth which will not have been lost on those still mindful of the Flood scare. Yet whatever the perceived historical connotations of the seal, there can be little doubt that it stood for retribution, to be taken above all on the clergy.

In his *Faithful Admonition to all Christians to avoid Tumult* (1522), an appeal to the common man not to use force, Luther discusses the medieval 'misunderstanding' of the image of Christ the Judge. Although the wrath of God is passing over the clergy, he would like to spare them from the terrible revenge which people are beginning to wreak upon them. 'Scripture', he points out, 'gives the pope and his own quite a different end than bodily death and tumult'. Christ will not overcome the Pope with the sword but 'will kill him with the spirit of his mouth and destroy him through the illumination of his Coming'.³³ Luther continues:

³¹ Weiss (1988), pp. 175-177.

³² *ibid.*, p. 176.

³³ WA 8, p. 667.

The painters also paint Christ on the rainbow, with a rod and a sword coming out of his mouth, which is taken from Isaiah 11. There he speaks: He will smite the earth with the pole (*Stange*) of his mouth, and with the spirit of his lips he will kill the godless. That the painters paint a blossoming rod (*Rute*), however, is not correct. It should be a staff (*Stab*) or a pole (*Stange*). And both, the pole and the sword, should go over one side only, over the damned....³⁴

Both the pole and the sword, Luther continues, represent the power of the Word. Once the spirit of Christ's mouth has revealed the clergy's falsehood, the papal Church will count for nothing. With its collapse, the Last Day will break. Since the Word will destroy the papacy, he has not so far attempted to curb 'those who threaten with the hand and the flail'. Since force can achieve nothing, there is no need for him to restrain 'the hand'. However, he is obliged to instruct hearts. Only the secular power may use force. Hence, 'it is necessary to still the spirit of the common man and to tell him to renounce those desires and words that lead to tumult'. Unless commanded by the authorities, he should do nothing to advance the cause.³⁵

Luther wishes to emphasise that the punishment which awaits the gospel's enemies is not of this world. The sword and the staff or pole of Christ are spiritual weapons, while the punishment of the wicked is eternal damnation. It is not the business of man to exact retribution, although the secular power may use force to uphold order. The portrayal of the Last Judgment criticised by Luther differs slightly in detail from the motif of the Erfurt seal. Nevertheless, his appeal to the common man sheds light on how the popular understanding of the image of Christ the Judge diverged from his own. For the common people, it is the symbol of eschatological showdown, of physical chastisement, of the prophesied destruction of the clergy. The clergy are collectively culpable and deserving of punishment. For Luther, this is indiscriminate violence. The people, on the other hand, see themselves as the instrument of divine justice.

The conviction of ordinary lay folk that they were entitled to exact divine retribution is reflected in the efforts of evangelical pamphleteer to combat it. In his *Final Statement* (1522), Eberlin warns his audience against assuming a role which does not pertain to them. Attacking those who consider themselves good Christians because they 'strike down the priests like dogs' or refuse to go to confession, he challenges his audience: 'How can you say, I am persecuting the priests for Christ's sake?... Christ prayed for them on the cross, but you want to destroy them.' The priests are human beings, many of them learned and honourable, all baptised with the blood of Christ. On no account does scripture justify their persecution. Christ said that he 'is not come to destroy souls but to save them'. While conceding that the

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 667-668.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 678-679.

wrath of God is passing over the clergy, Eberlin warns that scripture shows that those whom God uses as an instrument of chastisement seldom fare well. The fate of Babylon or the Assyrians shows that people have every reason 'to fear being a rod of God against the priesthood'. God is not on their side. He does not want the clergy to 'be destroyed with the corporal, but rather with the spiritual sword of the God's word'. In any case, there are still many pious priests who should be protected, 'and on their account also the evil ones'.³⁶

Evangelical propaganda, however, probably encouraged the very attitudes which both Luther and Eberlin condemn. Whereas Eberlin stresses that Christ prayed for the wicked, other propagandists, sometimes inadvertently, transmitted an image of Christ the violent avenger. *Bailiff and Pastor*, we saw, justifies Luther's assault on the clergy by recalling the story of Christ and the money-changers. Similarly, Kettenbach answers the Catholic charge that 'Luther is an angry man' by pointing out that he has not yet 'driven the papists out of the church with scourges, as Jesus did to the hypocrites'.³⁷ In Stanberger's *Peter and the Peasant*, Peter prophesies that the clergy will not 'break the stone of the gospel, but will be broken with it'. This will illustrate the 'power of Christ, which he unleashes on these people'.³⁸ Criticising 'works righteousness', he asks: 'Is Christ so weak and powerless for them, who is in truth a strong God, a zealous one, who killed thousands with his hand and the rod of his mouth...?' Stanberger did not wish to encourage revolt. Like Luther and Eberlin, he appeals to his audience to leave punishment to God. Nevertheless, to help his audience fathom Luther's understanding of Christ's power to save sinners, he stresses his power to wreak destruction on the wicked. Here, the rod of Christ's mouth, that symbol which Luther felt was misunderstood, stands for corporal chastisement.

Evangelical propagandists found it difficult to strike a balance between agitation and pacification. In *Father and Son*, denouncing the clergy for falsifying the gospel, the son appeals to the reader to 'chase these fat-bellied blood suckers, with their indulgences, codicils, beggar's marks and distinctions into the Rhine'.³⁹ Later when the father threatens 'to give the clergy such an indulgence with a block of wood that they would have to be carried home in a basket', the Son cautions moderation.⁴⁰ When the father proposes to beat up Eck, the son reminds him that 'Dr Martin writes that Antichrist will be vanquished without the sword...'.⁴¹ In his *Friendly Letter*, Eberlin suggests that the tone and thrust of evangelical sermons fuelled anticlerical fervour. If preachers merely stir up their audience, evangelical teaching will never take root: 'Dear friends, it is not the shouting and crying of the listeners, but rather their turning, their sighing, the changing of their hearts and behaviour in earnestness and fear of God which show that your word is bearing

³⁶ ENDERS 1, pp. 195-198.

³⁷ CLEMEN 2, pp. 171-172.

³⁸ CLEMEN 3, p. 213

³⁹ CLEMEN 1, p. 32.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

fruit.' In some places, however, evangelical preachers 'are so zealous and cutting, so given to great conflicts and shouting, that good-hearted listeners think that God's word is such that it needs to be proclaimed in this manner'.⁴²

(vi) The common man as the judge of the clergy

The common people's refusal to leave retribution to God attests to a confidence in their powers of judgment which, ironically, was fostered by evangelical propaganda. The transformation in lay self-perception can be traced to humanists dialogues of the 1510s, in which simple believers confront educated defenders of papal claims. Helmar Junghans argues that humanists genuinely believed that honest simplicity was the key to understanding the truths of scripture. Although Luther was initially more sceptical, by 1521, he could assert that 'the poor peasants and children' understand Christ better than 'the pope, the bishops and doctors'.⁴³ Time and time again, evangelical pamphlets stress the competence of the common people. Kettenbach's *Apologia* (1523) speaks of 'women, virgins, servants, students, artisans.... who know more about the bible... than all the universities'.⁴⁴ In his *Friendly Letter*, Eberlin remarks: 'Unlearned laymen, peasants, colliers and threshers know and teach the gospel better than a whole chapter of canons in a town or village, or than the priests or even arrogant doctors'.⁴⁵

Eberlin, we have seen, was equally capable of upbraiding the common people for their 'blindness'. Whatever reformers really thought, they had no choice but to stress lay competence, if they were to overcome their deference towards clerical authority, especially in doctrinal questions. *Father and Son* attacks this attitude. The son quotes Matthew 5: 'You are the salt of the earth... [Christ] doesn't say the priests, but rather you'. The father points out that he gave the power of the keys to the priests 'and not to us laymen'. The son persists. The apostles, to whom Christ gave this power, were not priests. Paul says that all those with faith 'are a royal priesthood'.⁴⁶ Nobody should believe the clergy 'when they say that the peasants do not understand these matters'. God 'can dwell as easily among the poor and scorned peasants as among monks and priests'. The father, agrees, observing that Christ 'always ate and drank with poor sinners'.⁴⁷ Stanberger goes even further. In his *Prior, Laybrother, and Beggar*, the beggar praises God 'for illuminating the poor peasant with his gospel, so that he is able to say more about it than some clerics...'.⁴⁸ The laybrother asks how 'an un instructed laymen can quote scripture'. The beggar explains: 'Recently, a divine voice came to me saying unmistakably: Be strengthened, for the hand of God is without. And then my heart was lifted up, as

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴³ Junghans (1972), pp. 31 ff.

⁴⁴ CLEMEN 2, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁵ ENDERS 3, p. 127.

⁴⁶ CLEMEN 1, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Stanberger, *Ein Dialogus oder gspzdech zzwischē einem Pzior leyenzbuder vñ Bettler* (1522/1523), [Biv]^v-C^r.

happened to Paul'. The laybrother encourages him, pointing out that 'such a voice was also heard by the prophet Jeremiah...'.⁴⁹ Hans Sachs's *Canon and Shoemaker* discusses lay competence at some length, finally setting the enlightenment of simple people in an eschatological context: The canon asks: 'But where have you laymen learned these things? Some of you don't even know the alphabet.' Learning is necessary. Otherwise there would be no universities. The shoemaker responds, 'What university was John at, who wrote so loftily... and he was only a fisherman...?'. John, the canon points out, 'had the holy ghost'. The shoemaker answers: 'But it is written in Joel 2: And it will come to pass in the Last Days, says God, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...' The holy ghost, will be received by all who believe in him.⁵⁰ Such eulogies of simple lay folk explain how, in Erfurt, a peasant could justify revolt by saying that God had enlightened him.⁵¹

(vi) A vote of confidence in Joachim

In Erfurt, communal principles and anticlericalism were the ideological cement of a movement which embraced both opponents and adherents of Luther's teaching. For the latter, the citizen movement was also a vehicle for pushing through religious change. Catholic townspeople could hardly have foreseen the consequences of their revolt. The possibility that the Lutherans could win the day may never have dawned on them, especially if they were in the majority. However, the evangelical movement was an autonomous force which cut across the lines of urban political conflict. On either side of the divide between council and commune, zealous evangelical Christians saw the chance to suppress Catholicism. The tumult of 1525 gave evangelical councillors the chance to *impose* an unwanted reformation. The blow to Catholicism would have sealed its fate, had not the city's political interests spoken against a confessional alliance. Both pre-1525 pamphlets and the post-1525 decline in evangelical fortunes show that Luther's reformation cannot be described as popular in any meaningful sense of the term. For numerous people, it was a 'triumph of heresy'.

Although historians usually argue that the common people were attracted by the social implications of Luther's teaching, the case of Erfurt illustrates that this is to read motives into the outcome of the conflict. Only religious motivation can explain the refusal of numerous townspeople to subscribe to a teaching, the secular benefits of which evangelical propagandists never tired of stressing. This suggests that for converts, too, the decision for Luther was primarily religious, possibly based on a 'false' or 'outward' understanding of his teaching, but religious nonetheless. The people of Erfurt accepted or repudiated evangelical teaching on what they judged to be its merits. In the event, the process of confessionalisation which had begun in all cities in the first half of the 1520s ran its course.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, C^r.

⁵⁰ SPRIEWALD, p. 76.

⁵¹ Cf. Scribner (1972), p. 205.

The contribution of evangelical reformers to the popular revolt was at most indirect. On the one hand, their revolt against the Church suggested that change was possible. On the other hand, in attacking Catholic doctrine, they propagated an explosive mixture of potent ideas: neighbourliness, freedom, divine wrath and vengeance, lay competence. Exerting influence but gaining relatively little support, they reinforced popular belief in the imminence of terrestrial renewal. The communal movement was both pragmatic and visionary. The *Twenty-Eight Articles* dealt with mundane problems and conflicts of interest between the commune and council. The establishment of an 'Eternal Council' testifies to the interaction of communal ideology and eschatological expectation. Townsmen and peasants were also united by the belief that the clergy bore a heavy burden of responsibility for the ills of secular society. Although they took different views of the nature of clerical treachery, they shared a common calling to act as the 'rod of God'. The Peasants' Seal symbolised their belief that the moment of divine intervention was at hand, and that they had been chosen to carry out that purge which was the condition of social and religious renewal. Christ the Judge, seated on the rainbow, was a symbol rich in meaning. What certainly fostered a swelling of optimism was the passing of the threat of the Great Flood. Despite Luther's prophecies of doom, it was possible, once again, to look forward in hope. The common people may have believed, as Peuckert argued, that they were acting on behalf, and with the approval of the Emperor. If they did, it was evangelical propaganda which, unintentionally, had encouraged them to play their part in the drama of salvation history. The popular revolt was a vote of confidence, not in Luther, but in Joachim. Retribution, justice and renewal were its overriding aims.

Appendix

Erfurt pamphlets 1520-1525

TABLE 1¹

YEAR	NO. OF EDITIONS	INCREASE
1520	23	base year
1521	44	191%
1522	88	382%
1523	176	721%
1524	71	313%
1525	100	400%

TABLE 2

YEAR	NO. OF LATIN EDITIONS	TOTAL NO. OF EDITIONS
1520	11	23
1521	9	44
1522	2	88
1523	12	176
1524	4	71
1525	2	100

TABLE 3

YEAR	ALL WORKS BY LUTHER	SERMONS BY LUTHER
1520	1	1
1521	5	2
1522	24	13
1523	44	25
1524	16	4
1525	24	7

¹ Both this and the following tables are based on the entries in V. HASE.

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- *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum: The Latin Text with an English Rendering, Notes and an Historical Introduction*, ed. Francis G. Stokes (London, 1909).
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- *Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Schriften* (Weimar, 1883 -).
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Anon.

- Karsthans
(Erfurt, 1520).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 410.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 4, pp. 74-133.

- Der gut fromm Lutherisch Pfaffennarr heiß ich.
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE
MODERN REPRINT: LAUBE 2, pp. 742-747.

- Ain new Ge = || dicht wie die gaystlich || ait zû Erffordt in Dhüringen || Gesturmbt ist worden || kurtzweylig || zû lesen || Anno. MD XXI ||
(Augsburg, 1521).

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 1, pp. 365-370.

- Ein neuer Send = || brieff von den bosen geystlich = || hen geschickt tzu yrem rechten || herren. || Einn Antwort vonn yrem erb ||.herrn vñ ist fast Lustige czu lesen || Anno M.D. xxi. ||
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 599.
MODERN REPRINT: SCHADE 2, pp. 93-98.

- Etzliche besondere artickel auszgezogen. || von mehzt dan hundert der beschwerungen des Heyligen Rô = || mischen reychs / vnd besonderlich Teutzscher nation / vom || still zcu Rom vñ seyner anhangende gaystlichayt / dem || gemainē man nutzlich zcu wissen / zcu Worms ym || reychstag. 1521 iare. Rô: Kay: Ma: von den || Churfursten fursten vnd stenden des reychs || ernstlich furpzacht. ||
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 416.
MICROFICHE EDITION: 187/528.

- Eyn schoner Dialogus vnd gespzech || tzwischen eim Pfarzer vnd ein Schulthayß / betreffend allen || vbel Stand der geystlichen, Vnd böß handlung der || weltlichen. Alles mit geytzigkeit beladenn. ꝛc.
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 418.
MODERN REPRINT: GÖTZE

- Intimation der hoch || berüempten Vniuersitet Erdt = || furt / in Martinum Lut = || ther.
Durch Wolff || gang Rūsen ver || teütschet.
(Augsburg, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER
MICROFICHE EDITION:

- Passional Chzisti vnd.||.Antichzisti.||
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 432.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 9, pp. 677-715.

- [Erasmus of Rotterdam]
was man in Martino || Luthers sachen handlē || vnd wie man sich dar || in halten soll.||
(Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 446.
MICROFICHE EDITION: 1084/2746.

- (D)ialogus von d' zwitrach =|| tung des heyligen Chzis = || lichenn glaubens || neulich
erstanden / darin d' mensch vnterzicht wirt / wie er sich || yn denen vñ andern || yrtūmen
halte || sol. || [column 1] Die personen || yn disze buch = || lein || [column 2] Ley. ||
Pziester. || Christus. || Daud. || Paulus. || Moyses. || Iohannes. ||
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 106
MODERN REPRINT: SCHADE 3, pp. 205-212.

- Ein schöner dialogus || oder gespzech / so ein Prediger mūnch Bembus genāt || vnnnd ein
Burger Silenus / vnnnd seyn || Narz mit ein ander habent. || Bembus Silenus Narz ||
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 453.
MODERN REPRINT: SCHADE 3, pp. 213-218.

- [Gengenbach, Pamphilius ?]
Eyn Dialogus wie d' heilig vatter bapst || Adrianus eyngeritten ist.
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 456.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 3, pp. 15-23.

- Turcken puechlein || Ein nutzlich Gespzech / oder vn ||derrede etlicher personen / zu ||
besserung Christlicher orde = ||nung un̄ lebens / gedich || tet, In die schwer = || ren leüff
dieser un || ser zeyt dienst = || lich.
(n.p., 1522).

MICROFICHE EDITION: 223/623.

- Ain schöner Dialogus von Martino || Luther vñ der geschicktē pottschaft auß der helle die falsche || gaystligkayt vnd das wozt gots belangen || gantz hubsch zů lesen. || Anno. 1523. ||
(Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 616.
MODERN REPRINT: BENTZINGER, pp. 316-352

- Dialogus von Zweyen pfaffen || Köchin / Belangendt den abbruch des opffers / vñnd || nyderlegung der vorgengknis. || Jm Jar M.D. xxiiij. ||
(Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 617.
MICROFICHE EDITION: 567/1451

- Eynn Dialogus oder ge || sprech zwischen einem || Vatter vñnd Sun dye || Lere Martini Luthers vnd sūst an || dere sachen des Christenlichen glaub || ens belangende ||
(Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 618
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 1, pp. 21-50.

- Eyn gespzech zzwyschen || vyer Personen / wie sie ein gezengk || haben / von der walfart ym Grimetal / was fur vñnradt odder büberey / dar ausz || entstandenn sey ||
|Hantwerckszman. Pauer. Pfaff. Munch. || Eyn trew Chzistlich vermanung /an alle Hantwercksleu || te vor mueszsigang sich zcu huetten. ||
(Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 500
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 1, pp. 139-167.

- Pzactica doctoꝝ Schrotentrecks || von bissingen auff das Funfftzehen hundert || vñd xxiiij. jar In der hohen schul || Kutzingen da man die gais = || sen firmett ausserhal || ber des himels || lauffs tzwen || Schu || ch. ||
(Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 156.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 4, pp. 347-359.

- Eyn gesprech von dem || gemeynen Schwabacher kasten / als || durch Bruder Heynrich / Knecht Ruprecht / Kemerynn / || Spueler / vñnd yhrem Meyster / des Handtwercks der || Wuellen Thuchmacher. || Anno M.D. Xxiiij. ||
(Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 532.
MODERN REPRINT: SCHADE 3, pp. 196-206.

- [Peringer, Diepold]

Eyn Sermon gepzediget vom || Pawren zů Werdt/ bey Nürnberg / am || Sontag vor
Faßnacht / vō || dem freyen willen || des Menn= || schen.||
(n.p., n.d.).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER
MICROFICHE EDITION: 1019/2574.

- A[gricola], J[ohannes]

Eyn kurtze anred zu allen mißgūsti || gen Doctoz Luthers [!]vnd der || Chzistenlichen
freiheit ||
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 447.
MODERN REPRINT: SCHADE 2, pp. 190-195.

Copp, Johannes

- Czwen neuw nutzliche vnd lustige Dia = || logi oder gesprech darin zu vinden wie ein
yeder dem fleysch wider = || streben soll durch D. Iohanne Copp gedicht. Vnder redner
des erstē || ein mensch vnd der geyst das fleysch || vnd der teufel satan genant.
|| ει γαρ ετι ανθρωποισ ηρεσκον, Χρισου δουλοσ ουκ αν ημην || Si enim adhuc
hominibus placerem Christi seruus non essem ||
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 450.
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Culsamer, Johannes

- Ein widerlegung Ioannis Cull = || samer /wider etzliche Sermon geschehen || zw Erfurt
von Doctor Bar || tholomeo vsingen || MDxxij ||
(Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 105.
COPY IN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, BERLIN: CU 1760.

Eberlin von Günzburg, Johann

- Ain klegliche klag an den || Christlichen Römischen kaiser Karolum von || wegen Doctor
Luthers vnd Vlrich von Hutten || Auch von wegē der Curtisanē vñ betel münch || Das
Kay. Maie. sich nit laß solch leüt *verfüren*. || Der erst bundtsgnoß.
(Augsburg, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 793.
MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 1, pp. 1-14.

[unsigned]

- Das lob der Pfarrer von || dem vnnutzen kosten der gelegt wirt || von dem gemainen
vnuerstendigen volck auff || meß lesen / volgungen / begrebnus / sy= || bent dreysigst /
jartag &c. Vnd vō lob der Pfarrer vnnd jrer || nötigen Caplan. || ♠ ||
(Augsburg, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 801.
MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 1, pp. 67-78.

- Eyn new vnd das letzt auszschzeyben || der xv. bundtgenossen || I.E.M.W. || biß gedultig / die zceyt nahent. || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 421

MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 1, pp. 171-205.

[On the dating of this pamphlet, see LAUBE 2, p. 1049)

- Ain kurtzer gschriftlicher bericht et= ||licher puncten halb Christlichs glauben/ zů geschickt der || hailgñ samlūng außewelten Cristen zů Vlm in schwa || ben dadurch sy gemanedt werden nit abstson vom || Euangelj / etlicher entpörung halb vnd eyntåg || so in vergangen Sum̄er der teüfel zůgericht || hat / dauon auß vrsach nitt deutlich hye gesagt wirt. || Durch Johañ Eberlin von Gyntzburg || MDXXiij. || J E || M W || Si morum [! misprint of moram] fecerit expecta eum || Quia veniens veniet et non tardabit. || Titel der materien diß büchlein. || [Left column:] Was Christlich kirch sey. || Welchs jr haupt sey. || Von jren gsätzen || Etlicher fragen antwurt || Ob man vrtailen mag cō = || cilia bápst vnd vätter. || Wer vrtailen mag || Von vnnutzen fragen. || Etlich treüw warnung || Vō Doct. Lut. ler vñ lebē || [Right column:] Von gnad vnd verdienst || Von der anfechtūg göttlicher || predestinacion halb. || Vō glaubē vnd gūten werckñ || Vom freyen willen. || Von der mesß || Von beychttten. || Von Fasten. || Vom Feyren. || Vom Klosterstand. || (Augsburg, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 797.

MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 2, pp. 171-192.

- Die ander getrezv || vermanung Iohannis Eberlin vonn || Gũntzburg / an den Rath der loblichē || stadt Vlm || warzunhemē [!] yn was vn = || sãglichen schaden sie gefürt seint || von den weltverfüern / den Mũnchen / vnd wie mā || solchem vbel entryn = || möge / wilche || auch and'n sted = || ten seer nützlich seyn || Erdfürdt kan. M.D. xxiiij. (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 639.

MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 3, pp. 1-40.

- τVie gar geferlich sey || Szo ein Pziester kein Eee weyb hat. wye vn = || christlich vnd schedlich eym gemeynen || nutz Die menschen seynd. Welche hyndern die Pfaff || en am Eelichen stand. Durch Iohannem || Eberlin vonn guntzburg Im iar || M.D. xxiiij || ♣♣ || ♣. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 129.

MODERN REPRINT: ENDERS 2, pp. 21-37.

- Eyn Sermo zu den .|| Christen yn Erffurd / gepredigt || auff den Sotag er Creutzwo = ||
 chen / ynn wilcher alle Christen || Brüderlicher vermanet werden / || zuschreyen vmb
 hilff vñ schirm || wid' so grosse vbel / so vns ains || thails gegenwertig / ains || tails
 gewißlich vorstendig || In wilchen nicht dann || eyn Christlich gebet || helfen mag. ||
 M.D. .xxiiij. || Ioha Eberlin von || Guntzburg. || J.E.M.V.V.||
 (Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: v. HASE, 696.

MODERN REPRINT: Enders 3, pp. 233-252.

- i Eyn freundlichs zuschreyben .|| an alle stende teutscher nation / daryn se vermanet wer ||
 den / nit widerstandt zuzhun den geystlichen so auß klo || stern oder pfaffenstandt gehen
 woellen. ||.ij Das die auszgegner sich selbs || wik beweren vor hin / das sie aus guttem
 vertrauen || zu got vnd fürsichtiglich das handlen. || iij Das sie sich ehrsamlich vnd
 besserlich || halten ym newen angenehmen standt. || das sie wollen freuntlich mit yhnen
 handlen / das sie || nit durch harttle handlung zu eynem rewkauf vñ wi = || derkerung
 ynn Egypten verursacht werden. || Durch Johan Eberlin || von Gintzburg. || . 1524, ||.
 (Augsburg, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: v. HASE, 168 a.

MODERN REPRINT: Enders 3, pp. 125-145.

- Mich wundert das keyn || gelt im landt ist. || ¶ Eyn schimflich doch vnschädlich ge = ||
 spräch dreyer Landtfarer / vber || ietzemelten Tittel. || ¶ Leße das büchlin so wirdstu
 dich fü ||rohin verwundern / das eyn pfen =|| ning im ladt blieben ist. || M. D. Xxiiij. ||
 (Speyer, 1524).

Erasmus of Rotterdam

- Desiderij Eras = || mi. ad Reueredissimum || Moguntinensiu præsule: atq; illu = ||
 strissimu principem. epistola: || non nihil D. Martini Lu = || theri negotiu attinges || M.
 Iohannes Femelius lectori inditij de || Marti: Luthe: deq; eius doctria cupido ||
 (Erfurt, 1520).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: v. HASE, 400.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: CWE 7, pp. 109-116.

Femelius, Johannes

- Eyn kurz Sermon szo die hey || ligen Gottes belangen / An alle doctozes tzu || Erffurd
 / sie seynt jung ad' alt / man ad' frawe || Ioannes Femelius || Bzuder es gylt nit lesterenß
 / vñ vortspzechens /|| Sondern klarer antzeygung auß der schiff || wer das baß kann der
 bestehe || Gzawe hüt vnd schleyer / mögen wol in dysszer || sach auch mit sententz
 gebenn / ßo ferne sie die || schiff vortstehen /vñ fuglich vff bzingen können || PAVLVS ||
 Yhr Bzuder byttet vor mich
 (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: v. HASE, 315.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 733/1868.

Hutten, Ulrich von

- Ein send brieue so vlrich von hutten an || Kaiserliche Maiestat gethan/ Bebstliche botschafft || betreffende/ vast lustig tzu lesen. || Ein Anderer sentbzieue/ so der obgemelt von hutten/ an einē || Namhafftigen burger tzu Nurenberg geschri = || ben/ Doctor Martinus Luthers abschid || von Wozms betreffende/ in welcher || wol tzu mercken/ die gzossen || arglist so dy Romischē || furgewent haben hye || in kurtz begriffen || (Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: HASE, 427.

MODERN REPRINT: BÖCKING.

Kettenbach, Heinrich von

- Ein gespzech bzuder Hein || richs von Kettenbach mit aim || frommen altmutterlein von || Ulm von etlichē zufeln vñ aufechtūg des altmut = || terlein / auff welche || antwozt gegebñ || vonn bzuder || Heynrich. || Dasselb altmutterlein hat begert ir anzuschzei || ben / des sie gewert ist wozen von obge = || meltem bzuder / Darnach weytter kom = || men yn annder menschen hend zu = || lesen / vnnd yetzundt zuletzt inn || den Dzuck / als man sagt || Zū Eer gott. || Im Iar M.D. Xxiiij. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 503.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 55-78.

- Ein new Apologia vnd ver = || antwoztung Martini Lut = || thers wyder der Papisten || Moztgeschrey / die zehen || klage wyder in vsz || blasienieren so || weyt die || Chzistenn = || heyt ist / dann || sy toben vnnd wūt = || tendt recht wie die vsin = || nige hundert thondt. || . zc. || Brüder Heinrich kettenbach ||. M. CCCCC.xxiiij. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 504.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 158-175.

- ¶ Eyn Pzactica || practicirt / ausz der heiligē Bi = || bel / vff vil zultunfftig yar / Selig || syn die / die yhz warnemē / vnd || darnach richtē. Die zeyt ist || hier / dz man sollich pzac = || ticā meer acht hab / dan d' astronomy / || Gott wil selber || regirn vber sein volclz. || Qui habet aures auriendi audiat. || Subsannabāt nūcios dei: et paruipē = || debant sermones eius &. Parali. 36 || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 647.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 183-201.

- ¶ Eyn Sermon zvid || der des Bapsts Kūchen pzedy = || ger zu Vlm / die dan gepzediget vnnd || gelogen haben / der Bapst vnd pre = || laten mogen das Euangeliū voz / || wādeln oder vozādern / vñ son || derlicher widd' Peter Nestler || d' die leut auch leret / si sol / || len glawben / was der || bapst vnnd pzelaten || glawben / wer || Chzist ist / || mirck || eben || auff die nachfolgend spzuche. ¶ ¶ Bzuder Heynrich von || Kettenbach. || M.D. XXIII. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 650.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 32-51.

- Uergleichung des || des allerheyligsten herren / vnnd || vatter des Bapsts / gegen dem set || tzamen fremden gast in der Chzi || stenheyt / genannt Jesus / der ynn || kurtzer tzeyt widerüb yn Teutsch || landt ist kōmen / vnd yetzund wi = || der wyll yn Egipten landt / als || eyn verachter bey vns. || Domine quo vadis || Romam iterum crucifigi. || Bzuder Heinrich Kettenbach || M.CCCCC.XXiiij. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 651.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 132-152.

- Vom Fasten || Ein nutzlich Ser || mon zū trost allen Christen / ||.von dem fasten vnnd feyren || gepredigt ist wordē vō brū = || der Heinrich Ketēbach baz =fusser obseruantz zū Ulm in || jrem Conuēt auff de erste || sonntag d' faste in vol =|| streckug seyner ma = || terien der tzehen || gebot. || Gedruckt durch Michale || Buch. jm jar M.D. Xxiiij || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 622.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 11-26.

- Eyne Predigt || auff den achten || Sūtag nach dē || Pfingstag vber || das Euāgelion || Matthew am vij. Sehet euch vur || vor den falschen Propheten || Bruder Heinrich Kettenbach || An: M.D. xxv ||

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE 188a.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 2, pp. 217-224.

Lange, Johannes

- Von gehorsam der Weltlich= || en oberkait || vnd den ausgangen || klosterleuten / ain schutz= || red / an Doctor An= || dreas Frowin. || Doctor Johannes Lang= || en / Ecclesiastes zū || Erdfurt. || M.D. xx. iii. || (n.p., 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 2144.
MICROFICHE EDITION: 1128/2886.

Luther, Martin

- Eynn Sermon von dem Ablaß || vnnd gnade, durch den wirdigenñ doctorñ || Martinū Luther Augustiner || tzu Wittebergk. (Wittenberg, 1518).

MODERN REPRINT: WA 1, pp. 243-246.

- (E)yn Sermon || von dem Sacrament || der Pusz. || D. Martinus || Luther. || Wyttemberg. || (Erfurt, 1520).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 408 a.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 2, pp. 713-723.

- Copia einer Missiue: so Doctoz || Martinus.Luther nach seynem abschid zu Wozmbs || zurugk ann die Churfürstenn / Fürstenn / vnnd || Stende des heyligenn Römischenn || Reichs da selbst versam =let geschrieben || hat. || (Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 430.
 MODERN REPRINT: WAB 2, pp. 314-317.

- Grund vñ vrsach aller Artickel Doct. || Marti. Luther so durch Romische Bulle unrechtlich || verdampt seindt. || (Augsburg, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER 2521
 MODERN REPRINT: WA 7, pp. 308-457.

- Eyn Sermon D. Mar || tini Luthers so er auff dem hyneweg zu || K. M. gen Wormbß zu zyhen / auß bit vortreflicher vnd vile gelarter / || ane vortgehēde fleyß / ader sūn = ||derliche studirung in der eyle || zu Erffurdt gethan / von || eynem leyhen nach dem || im in seynem abwesem || die selbige in ruck || vngünstliche vn || warhaftig = || lich vnnd anders dan durch || inen vortlaut nach gesagt || zu entschuldigung vñ enthalt = || dūg vnleuckbarer warheit / auch || zu besserūg der yhenen so dar in getroffen || wie geschehē in dzuck bevoln vñ vschaft.|| (Erfurt, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V.HASE, 435.
 MODERN REPRINT: WA 7, pp. 808-813.

- Ain Sermon von den Hayltumben || vnnd gezierd mit vberfluß / Vom hailigen Creutz in || den kirchen. Gepzediget von Doctoz || Martini Lutter. Im Iar. ||M.D. Xxij. ||Nit zyer die bildtnus Gedenck nun der armen. || Vuittemberg.|| (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 475.
 MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.3, pp. 332-341.

- Ein Merklicher Sermon || von der Geburt Marie / || der muter gottes / wie || sy vnd dye heiligen || sollen geehrt wer || den / von einem || itzlich / cristen || menschen.|| D. Mar. Luther. || Anno Mdxix || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 111.
 MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.3, pp. 312-331.

- Einn Sermon || zu Erphozdt auff Sant || Seuerstag gepzediget || vom creutz vnd leidē || eins rechtē christē menschen zc. || D. Mar. Lu. || Jm Jar M.D. Xxij || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 604.
 MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.3, pp. 352-361.

- Epistel odder vntter = || von den heyligen / an die kirch || tzu Erffurd ynn || gott verßamlet. || D. Martin. || Lutter. || Ecclesiastes || tzu Wittemberg. || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 462.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.2, pp. 164-168.

- Eyn Sermon tzu sant || Michale gethan / tzu || Erffordt auff den || tag der xi tausent || Jückfrawē vom || glauben vnd || wercken. || Doct. Mar. Luther || Anno. M.D. xxii || Gedruckt tzu Erffordt tzum bunttē || Lawen bey Sant Pael. || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 119.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.3, pp. 361-371.

- Eyn trew vormanung Martini || Lutter tzu allen Christen. || Sich tzu vorhuten fur || auffruhr vnd || Em = || porung. ||.....|| Vuittemberg. || (Erfurt, 1522).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER 2916.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 8, pp. 676-687

- Von weltlicher vber = || keytt wie weytt man || yhr gehozsam schul = dig sey. || Mart. Luther. || Vuittemberg || M. D. xxiiij.|| (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 520.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 11, pp. 245-281.

- ¶ Eyn Chzistlich || vnd fast zvol ge = || gegründte beweynung vō || dem Jüngstē tag / vnd || seyne zeichen / || das er auch nit || ferr meer sein || mag. || Getruckt M.D.XXiiij. || (Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 704.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 10.1,2, pp. 93-120.

- Eyn Ser = || mon vonn der || Beycht vñ dem Sacrament. || Item Vom bzauch || vn bekentis Chzistlicher freyheytt. || Mar. Luther. || Wittenberg || M.D. Xxv. (Erfurt, 1525).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 731.
MODERN REPRINT: WA 15, pp. 444-450, 481-505.

S
-Wider die sturmē || den Bawzen || Auch wider die reu || bischen vnd mözdisschen rottē || der andern Bawzen. || Marti Luther. || Wittemberg. || Psalmo. 7. || Seyne tuck werden yhn selbs treffen. || Uñ sein mutwil. wirt vber in ausgehen. || 1525. || (Erfurt, 1525).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 549
MODERN REPRINT: WA 18, pp. 357-361.

Mechler, Ägidius

- APOLOGIA ODER || schutzrede Edidy Mechlery pfar = || ners tzu Sanct Bartholome = || us tzu Erffort. In welcher || wyrt grund vnd vrsach || erzelt seyenes weyb nemens || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 151.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 4, pp. 227-246.

- Eyn Chzistische vn || terzichtung. || Von gutten wercken. || Mit eynē nachfolgende Sermon || vber das Euangelium Luce. 6. || des vierden Suntags nach || Pfingstē. Gepzediget durch || Egidium Mecheler / Pfar = || ner tzu Erffort / jn der || Pfar Kirchen / Sancti || Bartholomei. || Anno. M.D.XXiiiij.|| (Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 177.

COPY IN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, BERLIN: CU 4092.

- Eyn wyderlegung || Egidij / pfar = || ners zū Erffort / zū Sanct Bartholo || meus betreffende / etzlyche yrzige || punct / geschriben vnd gepzert || durch Bartholomeum Vsingen || Augustinianern. Vnd sonder || lich inn der Sermon / Von || dem heyligen Creutz / ge = || than zu Erffozin d' || stiffckirchen [sic] / Vnser || lyeben frawen. || Erfurt (1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 178.

COPY IN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, BERLIN: CU 4096.

Menius, Justus

- Etlicher Gottlosen || vnd widderchristi = || schen lere von der Papistischen || Messen/ so der Barfusser zu Er = || furt D. Contrad Kling gethan / || Verlegung durch Justum || Menium am Sonntag || Reminiscere ge= || predigt || 1527.|| Wittenberg (1527).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 3335.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 837/2103.

Pastoris, Henricus

- Pzactica deutsch von vergangen. / || vñ zū kunfftigen dingen (wider die zū Speyer gedruckt) || auß der heiligen schiffit gegründet vñ getzogen. || Auff das. 1524, zc jar. || Christus Iesus ein || Herr vnnd Meister diß jar vnnd || alletzeit Mathei am xxiiij. || Gedzuckt zu Ezffordt durch Michel Büchfürer || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 626.

COPY IN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, BERLIN.

Plunder, Heinrich

- Eyns auszgangen Kartheusers .|| Heinrici Plunderi / Vntherzicht szo er vzsach || .seyns auszgangs antzeigt / tzû dem Visitizer || Martino Pziori zu Nurnberg / voller gut = || ther heyliger geschriefft / widder menschen || gesetz / vnnd Kloster lebenn. || Anno D.D.XXiiij || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 154.
COPY IN STAATSBIBLIOTHEK, BERLIN: CU 5197.

Sachs, Hans

- Disputatiönn zwischen Eynem Choꝝ = || herzn vnnd Schuchmacher daryn || das wort Gottes / vnnd eynn recht Christliche || wesen verfochten wurd. || Hanns Bachs [sic] || M. D. Xxiiij || (Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 541.
MODERN REPRINT: SPRIEWALD, pp. 67-100.

- Eyn gesprech eynes Euangelischen || Christen / mit eynem Lutterischen / daryn || der Ergerlich wandel etlicher / dye sich || Lutterisch nennen / angetzeygt / vñ || bruederlich gestrafft wirt. 1524 || Hans Sachs || Peter sich da kumbt meyn schweer / lyber ruff ym her || (Erfurt, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 180 a.
MODERN REPRINT: SPRIEWALD, pp. 150-173.

- Ein Dialogus: des || ynhalt: ein argumēt || der Römischen / widder das || chzistlich heuflein / dē Geitz / || auch ander offtlich laster || ꝛc. betreffend. || Hans Sachs Schuster. || Romanus. Reichēburger || Ephe. v. || Hurerey vnd vnreynigkeyt / oder || geytz || laßt nich vō euch gesagt wer= || den / wie den heyligen zustehet. || (Erfurt, 1525).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 744.
MODERN REPRINT: SPRIEWALD, pp. 123-149.

Schwalb, Hans

- Beclagung aines ley = || ens genant Hanns schwalb über || vil mißbreüch Christliches lebens / vnd dariñ be ||griffen kürztlich von Johannes Huß- ||sen. Jm Jar. M. D. XXI. ||
♠ || (Augsburg, 1521).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER, 4136.
MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 1, pp. 345-360.

Stanberger, Baltasar

- Ein Dialogus oder gespzech zzwischē . || einem Pzior /leyenbzuder vñ Bettler dz wort gottes belanget || Gemacht durch Baltasar Stanberger zû Weimar in dem Fürstlichē || schloß / dem armen legen zû trost. || Leyenbzû. Pzior Bettler. || (Erfurt, 1522/1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 609.

- Dialogus zzwischen Petro vnd eynem || Bawzn / darinne angezeigt wurd̄t wie mā auß Petro einē Juden || gemacht hat / vnd nie sie ken Roem kommen. Anno. ꝛc. xxiiij. || Uozrede || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 627.

MODERN REPRINT: CLEMEN 3, pp. 198-218.

- Ein Epistel oder sendtbriefff Balta = || sar Stanberger vo der lieb gottes / vñ des nechsten / seinem || geliebten bruder in Christo Michel Buchfurer / von || Weimar aus de Fürstlichen schloß gen || Erffurdt geschriben. An = || no domini M.D.XXiiij. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 628.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 983/2487.

Stör, Thomas

- Der Ehelich standt von got mit ge = || benedeyung auffgesetzt / soll vmb schwârheit wegen der seltzamen gaben der Junck = || frawschafft yederman frey seyn / || vñ niemāt verboten werdē. || (Nuremberg, 1524).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: KÖHLER 4291.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 342/963.

Strauss, Jakob

- Häuptstück. vnd || artickel christenlicher leer wider || den / vnchrystenlyche wuech = || er / darumb etlych pfaf = || fen tzue Eyssenach so || gar vnrywig vnd || bemyet sint. || Lasz her geenn Christus || lebt noch. || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 161.

MODERN REPRINT: LAUBE 2, pp. 1073-1077.

- Kurtz vnd verstendig leer /vber das wort. S. || Pauli / zu den Romern / der todt ist / der ist vō / sunden gerecht gemacht / fast dienstlich der gemeynent wochen / || so yn etlichen kirchen / jn Francken / vnd Dōzingen / jerlich für die / seelen gehalten. Darynnē das fegefeuer gar verleschet/ auch der || pfaffen vnd Muenichen heyliger geytz getziert / vnd rechge = ||schaffen abgemalet ist. || Christus || Fur war sag ich euch / Der yn mich glaubet / der || hat das ewyge leben. Iohan: 6 || Eyssennach. || Doct. Iacobus Straus: || (Erfurt, 1523).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 162.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 1808/4628.

Wilhelm, Baltzer

- Pzactica oder Pze || nostication auff || tzukünfftig tzeythe / auß || der heyiligen schrift ||
getzogen. || Baltzer Wilhelms. || Hiere. 6. || Verbum dñi factus est eis in op = ||
probrum: et non suscipient || ♣ illud. ♣..... ||

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE: V. HASE, 184 a.

MICROFICHE EDITION: 966/2417.

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- *Nachvolgend vorzeichnuß der artikel, so sich alle viertel der stadt Erffurdts sampt den
Hantwerken darin gehorende uff weiter verbesserung unterredt haben.*

PRINTED IN LAUBE/SEIFFERT, pp. 65-67.

-Luther, Martin

- *Nachvolgend Vorzeichnuß der Artigel, so sich alle Viertel der Stadt Erffurdts sampt den
Handwercken darin gehorende uff weither Verbesserung unterredt haben.*

[Luther's commentary on the Erfurt articles]

PRINTED IN WA 18, 531-540.

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Das pfaffensturmen zu Erfurt.

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