CAPTIVE TO THE WORD

Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture

by

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*"I am bound by the Scriptures . . .
and my conscience is captive
to the Word of God".*
Martin Luther

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CHAPTER VI

LUTHER'S STAND FOR THE TRUTH

THE EXEGETICAL LECTURES GIVEN BY LUTHER AT Wittenberg, which we examined in the previous chapter, spanned the gap between his encounter with God and the beginnings of his protest against abuses in the Church. The affixing of his Ninety Five Theses to the door of the *Schlosskirche* is usually regarded as the first salvo in the battle, although Luther's intention was scarcely so dramatic. Indeed, he may well be described as in one sense a somewhat reluctant reformer. His temperamental inclinations were not such as to endue him with an appetite for controversy, much as he later appears to have relished it, if we are to judge by the vigour of his expressions. But he would not himself have chosen to make a stand unless he had been compelled to do so by the Word of God.

In the preface to his Latin works, Luther opened a window in his heart which lets us see how diffident he must have been at the start. This presents a very different picture of Luther from that painted by his detractors, and even by some of his more partisan admirers. "At first I was alone and certainly very inept and unskilled in conducting such great affairs," he confessed. "For I got into these turmoils by accident and not by will or intention. I call upon God himself as witness."[1] Here, then, is no self-confident enthusiast, foolishly rushing in where angels fear to tread. It was only in obedience to the Word of God that Luther dared to venture forth. It was through the Scriptures that he had been brought to a personal experience of saving grace. It was through the Scriptures that he had come to recognize justification by faith as the criterion by which all teaching must be tested. It was inevitable therefore that, however much he himself shrank from it, he should be led to speak out against the apostasy of his day, from the viewpoint of his new-found faith. It was thus the Bible that made him a reformer. Others had begun to see the need for a return to a more completely scriptural outlook, but with Luther it became a ruling passion. Henceforward he was a man of one book.

> . . . In his hand
> The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
> Soul-animating strains.[2]

[1] LW. 34. 328.

[2] *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (revised edn. 1950), p. 207. The reference is to John Milton and the sonnet.

In a perceptive introduction to Luther's reforming career, Harold J. Grimm has indicated the sequence of events which led up to his emergence as a prophet of renewal. He points out that Luther's programme did not begin with his attacks upon the corruption in the Church, "but with questions raised concerning his own salvation in the quiet of his monastery cell. It was there that he found an unequivocal and satisfying answer to the question which had long perturbed him and many of his contemporaries: 'How may I be certain of salvation?'"[1] The search was ended when Luther came to an understanding of what the Bible means by righteousness: this was the essence of his tower experience. Both in his mind and in his heart he embraced the justifying grace of God. "This doctrine of justification by faith and not by works, which became the fundamental principle of Protestantism, he had found in the Bible and not in the textbooks of the medieval Schoolmen. Therefore he turned from the works of men to the Word of God and enunciated the second evangelical principle which formed the basis of Protestantism: the recognition of the Bible as the sole authority in religious matters. When, finally, he came to the conclusion that the ecclesiastical hierarchy as it had developed in the Middle Ages hindered rather than aided the Christian in his personal, direct approach to God, he formulated the third fundamental principle of the Protestant Reformation: the universal priesthood of believers."[2]

Once Luther had arrived at his evangelical standpoint, it was really only a matter of time before some issue would arise which would compel him to speak, and thus bring him into conflict with the leaders of the Church. That occasion presented itself when Johann Tetzel came hawking papal indulgences within twenty miles of Wittenberg. This was more than Luther could stomach. He took his first public stand for truth as he pinned his theses to the sturdy wooden door of the church. Although he may not have been fully aware of what was involved, the die was now cast. Luther was destined to be a reformer. We must take note in this chapter of how at each point of challenge, in the stormy years from 1517, when he published the Theses, to 1521, when he was hauled before the Diet of Worms, Luther rested his defence exclusively on Scripture. We can only mark the major crises.

In 1510 the "warrior pope", Julius II, instituted a jubilee indulgence in order to pay for the new basilica of St. Peter's in Rome.[3] It was revived in 1515 by his successor Leo X, who later permitted Albrecht of Brandenberg, Elector and Archbishop, to recoup his debts to the banking house of Fuggers by pushing it in his dioceses and sharing the profits. He appointed

[1] LW. 31. ix. [2] Ibid., x.

[3] Julius II was dubbed the "warrior pope" because he joined in the League of Cambrai against Venice.

a Dominican friar from Leipzig named Tetzel to be his publicity man. Tetzel had considerable experience in this sort of thing, for he had been doing it for a number of years in various parts of Europe. He had brought the sales technique to near perfection, and backed up his travelling exhibition with "patter worthy of an Autolycus".[1] Johann Tetzel was a curious mixture of the mountebank and the revivalist missioner. It seems that he quite genuinely regarded himself as an evangelist of sorts. According to Friedrich Myconius, who wrote the first history of the Reformation and had actually heard Tetzel preach, he claimed that he had saved more souls through indulgences than St. Peter had through the preaching of the gospel.[2]

Luther opened his attack in a sermon on All Saint's Eve, the 31st October 1516, in the parish church of Wittenberg. On the following day a plenary indulgence was being offered to those who venerated the relics housed there. There were so many of them that they occupied eight aisles as they were displayed. Two years later their number was no less than 17,443, and it has been calculated that those who prayed before them could gain the equivalent of 127,709 years and 116 days of indulgences.[3] Luther objected on the ground that the peddling of indulgences militated against true and inward repentance. On St. Matthew's Day, 24th February 1517, he spoke out even more sternly. Indulgences are well named, he declared, for their effect is to indulge the sinner.[4] Luther's sermon ended with this ejaculatory peroration: "Oh, the dangers of our time! Oh, you snoring priests! Oh, darkness deeper than Egyptian! How secure we are in the midst of the worst of all our evils."[5] There spoke a prophet indeed.

The Elector Frederick of Saxony would not allow Tetzel into the city of Wittenberg, but he came as near as he could. In the autumn of 1517 Luther saw a copy of the instructions issued by Archbishop Albrecht to those who were involved in the indulgence traffic. In it he suggested that it should be used as a means of reconciling men to God. It was this prostitution of the gospel which stung Luther into action. He thereupon decided to arrange a disputation on the subject in the University. He drew up a long list of the items he wanted to debate and, according to the custom, advertised them on the church door. There was nothing intentionally spectacular about what he did. As Erikson explains, it was "not a defiant gesture in itself but rather scholastic routine".[6] Luther made it plain in the preamble that he took this step "out of love and zeal for truth and

[1] *Times Literary Supplement*, 23rd February 1946, p. 86.
[2] Friedrich Myconius, *Historia Reformationis*, ed. E. S. Cyprian (1718), pp. 17–20.
[3] Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 312. Cf. Johannes Hausleiter, *Die Universität Wittenberg vor dem Eintritt Luthers* (1903), p. 26 n. 2.
[4] LW. 51. 31. [5] Ibid.
[6] Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (1958), p. 215.

the desire to bring it to light".[1] Not so much because of what went into it but much more because of what came out of it, the 31st October 1517 has come to be regarded as a historic date.

Luther's jealousy for the Word of God is evident throughout. He left no doubt that this was the ground on which he took his stance. "53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others. 54. Injury is done to the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word. . . . 62. The true treasure of the Church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."[2] The first four theses lay down the scriptural definition of repentance. "1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matt. 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. 2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy. 3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh. 4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven."[3] "These four statements introduce a world-historical revolution," asserts Bornkamm. "They rend the tie between the Catholic sacrament of penance and Christ's words on penitence. They deprive the sacrament of penance of any binding power, for it would be ridiculous for a Christian to pursue a mode of penance which does not conform to Christ's demand."[4]

But the punch-lines in the theses are kept until later in the argument. "35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges, preach unchristian doctrine. 36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters. 37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters."[5] Whereas the Roman sacrament of penance was designed to make things easy for a man by relaxing the punishment he deserved, Luther taught that genuine penitence will be ready to suffer for sin and to make amends. It will be noted that a certain pseudo-evangelical presentation of the cross offers the same soft option, which Luther was to repudiate as sharply as the tactics of Tetzel. He would have nothing to do with what Bonhoeffer has dubbed "cheap grace".[6]

The theses reach a ringing climax. "92. Away then with all those

[1] LW. 31. 25. [2] Ibid., 30. [3] Ibid., 25–26.
[4] Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought* (E.T. 1958), p. 45.
[5] LW. 31. 28–29.
[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (E.T. 1959), p. 35.

prophets who say to the people of Christ, 'Peace, peace,' and there is no peace! (Jer. 6:14). 93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, 'Cross, cross," and there is no cross! 94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; 95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22)."[1] Boehmer rightly concludes that the Ninety Five Theses are not only a religious-historical document but also a world-historical document of the first order. "When Luther attacked indulgences he involuntarily – nay, against his will – touched the pope's crown and forced the hierarchy to engage with him in a struggle which was to be the signal for half the world to revolt against Rome."[2]

It is not often noticed that nobody came to the disputation which Luther tried to convene through the medium of his theses. But when they were printed and circulated – by Luther's friends without his approval – they spread like wildfire. Myconius reported that within a fortnight they had covered the whole of Germany, and added piously: "It was as though the angels themselves were the messengers carrying the news to all peoples."[3] No doubt only the angels could have achieved such an astonishing distribution rate in so short a time, but even allowing for the exaggerations of Luther's well-wishers, it seems clear that the theses soon began to cause a stir throughout the land, and beyond. We might say that never did a meeting which failed even to take place have such an effect on mankind!

Late in 1517 Luther planned his *Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses* in order to correct misinterpretations which had already been voiced. The statement was ready in February, but in the end it did not come out until August. As Carl Folkemer remarks, it is one of the most important documents written during Luther's formative years, and "illustrates how inexorably his doctrine of justification by faith alone was compelling him to break with the past".[4] What is presented here is something much more radical than simply an elucidation of the theses. "They contain, rather, an independent reform programme of basic importance," as Boehmer discerns.[5] The *Explanations* are of the highest scholarly value.

In his opening declaration Luther laid down the biblical basis of his arguments. "First, I testify that I desire to say or maintain absolutely nothing except, first of all, what is in the Holy Scriptures and can be maintained from them; and then what is in and from the writings of the church fathers and is accepted by the Roman Church and preserved both in the canons and the papal decrees."[6] This was not an appeal to Scripture *and* tradition as set over against each other: it was an appeal to Scripture *in*

[1] LW. 31. 33.
[2] Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, p. 189.
[3] Myconius, op. cit., p. 23.
[4] LW. 31. 79.
[5] Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, p. 197.
[6] LW. 31. 83.

tradition, which was always Luther's line. He did not equate tradition with biblical doctrine, but wherever it was plainly based on Scripture he was prepared to acknowledge it. Throughout the *Explanations* the Bible is quoted in a plethora of references. An extract will indicate how Luther relied on the Word of God to advance his propositions. "It is impossible for one to be a Christian unless he possesses Christ. If he possesses Christ, he possesses at the same time all the benefits of Christ. For the holy apostle says in Rom. 13 (:14), 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' And in Rom. 8 (:32) he says, 'Will He not also give us all things with Him?' And in 1 Cor. 3 (:21–22) he says, 'All things are yours, whether Cephas or Paul, or life or death.' And in 1 Cor. 12 (cf.:27) he says, 'You are not your own, but individually members of the body.' And in other places, where he describes the Church as one body, one bread, we are altogether in Christ, members one of another (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17). And in the Song of Solomon we read, 'My beloved is mine and I am His'" (Song of Sol. 2:16). By faith in Christ a Christian is made one spirit and one body with Christ. 'For the two shall be one flesh' (Gen. 2:24). 'This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church' (Eph. 5:31, 32.)."[1]

Luther did not conceal his concern at the abuses in the Church and his desire for renewal. "The church needs a reformation which is not the work of one man, namely, the pope, or of many men, namely the cardinals . . . but . . . the work of God alone. However, only God who has created time knows the time for this reformation. In the meantime we cannot deny such manifest wrongs. The power of the keys is abused and enslaved to greed and ambition. The raging abyss has received added impetus. We cannot stop it. 'Our iniquities testify against us' (Jer. 14:7), and each man's own word is a burden to him (cf. Gal. 6:5)."[2]

In the Ninety Five Theses, and in Luther's detailed *Explanation* of them, we hear the first blasts of reform. Luther leaves us in no doubt as to where he made his stand for truth. It was unambiguously on the basis of the Word. Now we must notice how he defended himself against his accusers in a series of interrogations. As in the writings we have just examined, Luther was content to rest his case on the Scriptures. We need only mention the Heidelberg Disputation, which had in fact taken place before the *Explanation* appeared in print. Luther was not on trial here. He was simply attending the triennial general chapter of his order, which as a provincial superior he was obliged to attend. Staupitz invited Luther, with Leonhard Beier as respondent, to hold an academic disputation, with a view to familiarizing the brethren with the new theology, as it was considered to be.[3] The items discussed dealt with original sin, free

[1] Ibid., 189–90. [2] Ibid., 250.

[3] Schwiebert, op. cit., pp. 327–8. Cf. Theodor Kolde, *Die deutsche Augustiner-kongregation und Johann Staupitz* (1879), pp. 313–14.

will and grace. There was no reference to the indulgence controversy. As a result, most of the debate was directed against Aristotle and Occam. The Heidelberg professors were not unduly disturbed by this onslaught on Scholastic philosophy. One junior instructor, however, was more agitated, and interrupted: "If the peasants heard that, they would stone you"; but his outburst was only greeted with laughter.[1] Amongst those present was young Martin Bucer, a Dominican from Schlettstadt, who was much impressed by Luther and later became one of his staunchest supporters. He was struck by the way in which Luther had "got so far away from the bonds of the sophists and the trifling of Aristotle, one who is so devoted to the Bible, and is so suspicious of the antiquated theologians of our school."[2] He admired "his answers, so brief, so wise, and drawn from the Holy Scriptures" which quickly won over his hearers.[3]

This is borne out when we consult the forty theses Luther had drawn up in preparation for this dialogue at Heidelberg. Right at the start Luther disclaimed any dependence on his own wisdom, according to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, "Do not rely on your own insight" (Prov. 3:5).[4] His sole concern was that the debate might decide whether or not he had rightly interpreted the Scriptures. In the proofs which followed, Luther appealed to the Word in almost every other sentence. As in the *Explanations*, the argument is littered with texts. He resorted to the biblical evidence to substantiate his teaching about sin and grace, about righteousness and works, about the bondage of the will, and about the theology of the cross.[5] "Heidelberg was a triumph for Luther," observes Todd, "his last in the old world of his early monastic and university life."[6] Soon the heat was to be turned on, but his determination to stick to the truth of revelation did not falter.

The confrontation with Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg in the summer of 1518 was more testing, although it did not match the tense inquisitions at Leipzig and at Worms. Thomas de Vio, general of the Dominican order, was the apostolic legate in Germany. He was known as Cajetan from his birthplace of Gaeta in Italy.[7] He himself had pressed the cause of reform before the Lateran Council of 1512. He was reputed to be the outstanding theologian of his time. He treated Luther with the utmost patience in the earlier part of the examination at the imperial diet, where Luther had been eventually summoned to answer for himself instead of in Rome.[8] Cajetan attempted to concentrate the enquiry on the two matters of indulgences and the efficacy of faith.[9] Whereas Cajetan repeatedly

[1] This was Georg Schwarz von Löwenstein (WAB. 1. 173–4 and 174 n. 8).
[2] LC. 1. 80. [3] Ibid., 82. [4] LW. 31. 39.
[5] Ibid., 53, 55–56, 58–70. [6] Todd, op. cit., p. 134.
[7] His Christian name was Jacopo, but he assumed that of Thomas in deference to Aquinas.
[8] LW. 31. 261. [9] Ibid.

appealed to the canons of the Church and papal pronouncements, Luther resolutely adhered to the testimony of Scripture.[1] He pleaded that nothing he had said or written was consciously contrary to the Word. His conscience refused to allow him to recant unless he could be convinced by Scripture.[2] "The more Cajetan insisted upon the infallibility of the papacy the more Luther relied on the authority of Scripture," according to Grimm.[3]

This attitude was maintained in the written statement which Luther presented on the third day at Augsburg. He again appealed to Scripture in upholding the doctrine of justification by faith.[4] He firmly rejected the bull of Clement VI relating to the treasure of the Church, being unwilling to "discard so many important clear proofs of Scripture on account of a single ambiguous and obscure decretal of a pope who is a mere human being. Much rather I considered it proper that the words of Scripture, in which the saints are described as being deficient in merits, are to be preferred to human words, in which saints are said to have more merits than they need. For the pope is not above, but under the Word of God, according to Gal. 1(:8): 'Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.' Furthermore, it was not unimportant to me that the bull stated that this treasure was committed to Peter, concerning which there is nothing either in the gospel or any part of the Bible."[5] In the outcome, Cajetan wilted under this continuous barrage of Scriptural proof, and brought the interview to an abrupt though inconclusive close.

Luther deplored the fact that there was such an unwillingness on the part of officialdom to settle these issues solely in terms of what had been revealed in the Word. His complaint against Cajetan was that "he never produced a syllable from the Holy Scriptures against me".[6] This failure Luther regarded as symptomatic. "Therefore, since the sacred Scriptures are abandoned and the traditions and words of men are accepted, it happens that the Church of Christ is not nourished by its own measure of wheat, that is, by the Word of Christ, but is usually misled by the indiscretion and rash will of an unlearned flatterer. We have come to this in our great misfortune that these people begin to force us to renounce the Christian faith and deny Holy Scriptures."[7]

In November 1518, Luther appealed from the pope to a general council. Meanwhile Karl von Miltitz was sent as a papal agent to try to settle the affair of Luther. This smooth diplomat – "a kind of ecclesiastical von Ribbentrop", as Rupp delineates him – persuaded Luther to pen a

[1] Ibid., 278.
[2] Ibid., 262.
[3] Ibid., 263. When Cajetan declared that the Pope possessed power over everything, Luther broke in with "Salva Scriptura – except the Scripture" (W. 15. 681).
[4] LW. 31. 265–7, 271–4.
[5] Ibid., 266–7.
[6] Ibid., 275.
[7] Ibid., 276.

pacific letter to Leo X in March 1519.[1] At the same time, however, the reformer gave himself to research into the history of the papacy.[2] He had been convinced from the Scriptures that indulgences were wrong. Now he found that it still remained technically the case that the authority of Scripture was in fact above that of the pope, and that, in any event, it was possible to regard a council as superior to a papal decree. Armed with this information, Luther was ready to answer the summons to appear in Leipzig for a public disputation with Johann Eck, in July of the same year.

Johann Meier, from Eck in Swabia, was a distinguished controversialist at the University of Ingoldstadt. He was a man of real mettle. Indeed, "if quickness and repartee could have won the victory," remarks Owen Chadwick, "Eck would have laid Luther low with ease."[3] However, his wit was not matched by a comparable mastery of the true source of theology in the Word of God. The debate "showed forth Luther's unrivalled knowledge of the Bible", as Todd concedes.[4] That all arguments must be based on the Scriptures was made plain by the professor of poetry at Leipzig, Peter Mosellanus, in his rather dreary opening oration. The first debate was between Eck and Karlstadt, in which the former was considered to have scored a triumph, although it was only a superficial one. It was thus with boosted confidence – though he had little need of such encouragement – that Eck faced Luther in the second part of the proceedings. Once again, as at Augsburg, Luther refused to be drawn away from his unequivocal reliance on Scripture. No other arguments would he employ himself and no other arguments would he allow to his opponent than those based on the Word. He knew that his position was unassailable. No one could overthrow him without at the same time jeopardizing the Scriptures.

It was as he maintained his stand that Luther became even more assured that he was right. Schwiebert has shown how important was the contest with Eck in consolidating his own convictions. "In the Leipzig Debate he came face to face with the orthodox Roman position on sin, grace, justification, the Church, and papal power, and he began to realize how far he had really drifted. Eck's blind fanatical acceptance of a position that seemed untenable on the basis of the clearly revealed Word of God made Luther realize that the whole Roman hierarchy rested on a very flimsy foundation. He determined that the principle of *Sola Scriptura* would have to be the basis for testing all decisions of church councils and the official

[1] Rupp, *Luther's Progress*, p. 64.
[2] CR. 1. 96. Cf. Ernst Schäfer, *Luther als Kirchenhistoriker* (1897), pp. 53–55.
[3] Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation, The Pelican History of the Church*, Vol. III (1964), p. 49.
[4] Todd, op. cit., p. 164. Mosellanus reported concerning Luther at Leipzig: "He is so wonderfully learned in the Bible that he has almost all the texts in memory. He has learned enough Greek and Hebrew to form a judgment of the translations. He has no lack of matter in speaking, for an immense stock of ideas and words are at his command" (LC. 1. 261).

decrees of the papacy as recorded in Canon Law."[1] It may well have been this increasing disenchantment which prompted Luther, in the highlight of the whole debate, to take his stand quite openly as one in the line of John Hus. This has been regretted by some as a tactical error, but it was in fact a prophetic *tour de force*. The words "fell like a stone into the hall", reported an eye-witness.[2] Luther had nailed his colours to the mast. He was ready to pay the price of reform.

Luther's parting shaft at the Leipzig Disputation was directed at Eck's refusal to meet Scripture with Scripture. "I regret that the holy doctor penetrates the Scriptures as deeply as a spider does the water: in fact, he runs away from them as the devil from the cross. Therefore, with all my regard for the fathers, I prefer the authority of the Scriptures, which I commend to those who will judge me."[3] "The Leipzig debate cast down the last barrier which restrained his antagonism to Rome," writes Owen Chadwick, with reference to Luther. "He had publicly and irrevocably identified himself, in part, with a man condemned by the authorities of the Universal Church. Henceforth he expected antipathy and incompatibility between the Bible and ecclesiastical authorities as now constituted, between the truth taught in the Word of God and the errors taught in the human tradition of papal churchmen."[4]

All this helps us to see Luther's historic stance at the Diet of Worms in perspective. It was no sudden, unpremeditated inspiration. It represented the crystallization of convictions which had been maturing over several years. He had long been captive to the Word. Now he said so in the presence of the Emperor and to the world. Forty-one propositions set forth by Luther were condemned as heretical in the bull *Exsurge Domine* of the 15th June 1520. He was given sixty days to recant. His books were to be burnt, and in Louvain and Cologne the flames consumed them. Luther retorted by casting a copy of the bull, together with the text of canon law and the papal decretals, into a bonfire in a meadow down by the River Elbe at Wittenberg.[5] On the 3rd January 1521 his excommunication was ratified, and the battle was on. "All Germany is in revolution," wrote the papal nuncio, Girolamo Aleander; "Nine tenths shout 'Luther!' as their war-cry; and the other tenth cares nothing about Luther, and cries: 'Death to the court of Rome!'"[6]

This was the setting for the notorious Diet of Worms. The Emperor gave Luther a safe-conduct, but it was a brave decision when he decided

[1] Schwiebert, op. cit., p. 416.
[2] W. 15. 1430. The eye-witness was Sebastian Fröschel.
[3] WA. 2. 282.
[4] Chadwick, op. cit., p. 51.
[5] This was outside the Elster Gate. Afterwards the students held their own celebration. Green (op. cit., pp. 92–93) describes it as "a theatrical demonstration that was half-way between an academic occasion and a university bump supper".
[6] *Die Depeschen des Nuntius Aleander von Wormser Reichstage 1521*, ed. Paul Kalkoff (1886), SVR. 17. 43.

to accept it. Hus had gone to the council of Constance under similar protection and had been burnt at the stake. But Luther nevertheless assured Georg Spalatin that he would go to Worms "in spite of all the gates of hell and the powers in the air".[1] His interlocutor was another Eck, not to be confused with the Ingoldstadt professor who tilted with him at Leipzig. This was Johann von Eck, secretary to the Archbishop of Trier. He was an experienced jurist, but not so ebullient as his namesake. At first Luther was simply asked whether the books which had been put out in his name (some twenty of them were piled on the table in full view of all) were in fact his, and then whether he wanted to retract anything in them.[2] After Jerome Schurff, professor of law at Wittenberg, who acted as Luther's adviser, had demanded that the titles be read, the reformer asked that, since the issue concerned "the divine Word, which we are all bound to reverence, for there is nothing greater in heaven or on earth", he might have time to consider his answer.[3] The hearing was thereupon adjourned until four p.m. on the following day, the 18th April 1521.

Then it was that Luther made a considered statement, over which we know he spent much prayer as well as time. The notes are still to be seen in the Weimar archives. Not all his books fell into the same group, he explained.[4] Some had to do with faith and morals, and did not raise any query even in the minds of his critics.[5] Some were attacks on the papacy, which if he retracted would open not only windows but doors to tyranny and godlessness.[6] Some were directed against individuals who had upheld the *status quo* and, although he admitted that his tone had been more violent at times than became his calling, since what was at stake was the truth of Christ, he could not withdraw.[7] Luther then declared that he would seek no other protection for his books than that which the Lord Jesus Christ offered for his teaching: "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong" (John 18:23).[8] He was not surprised that he had caused such commotion. "To see excitement and dissension arise because of the Word of God is to me clearly the most joyful aspect of all in these matters. For this is the way, the opportunity, and the result of the Word of God, just as He (i.e. Christ) said, 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have to come to set a man against his father, etc.' (Matt. 10:34–35). Therefore we ought to think how marvellous and terrible is our God in His counsels, lest by chance what is attempted for settling strife grows rather into an intolerable deluge of evils, if we begin condemning the Word of God."[9]

[1] WAB. 2. 298. Luther had written to Melanchthon from Gotha: "I shall enter Worms under Christ's leadership in spite of the gates of hell" (WAB. 2. 296 n. 3). The *Table Talk* has "even though there should be as many devils in Worms as tiles on the roof I would still enter" (WATR. 5. 65. No. 5342a).

[2] LW. 32. 106. [3] Ibid., 107. [4] Ibid., 109. [5] Ibid., 109–10.
[6] Ibid., 110. [7] Ibid., 110–11. [8] Ibid. [9] Ibid.

When Luther had finished, Eck reproached him for having evaded the question, and demanded not a horned response (i.e. a sophistical, ambiguous reply), but a simple one. Did he or did he not wish to retract?[1] Then it was that Luther uttered his most famous words, as he stood for the truth on the ground of the Scriptures. "Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience."[2] Then he added: "May God help me. Amen." It was in the earliest printed version of the story that the now familiar words were inserted: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise."[3] Bainton thinks that the saying may indeed be authentic, though not recorded on the spot, because the hearers were too moved to write.[4] But whether or not the words were actually uttered, they sum up all that Luther intended to convey by his heroic defence.

There was an uproar as Luther left. Outside, he raised his arms, like a knight who had unhorsed his opponent, and shouted: "I've come through!"[5] And so he had, with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, as his weapon. Kierkegaard called him "the knight of faith," and such he proved to be.[6]

[1] Ibid., 112. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid., 113.

[4] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 185. The words may have been drowned in the ensuing commotion, for Conrad Peutinger reported that "there was a great noise" (Johannes Kühn, *Luther und der Wormser Reichstag 1521, Voigtländer Quellenbücher* (1914), Bd. LXXIII, p. 75 n. 4).

[5] *Deutsche Reichstagakten unter Kaiser Karl V*, ed. Adolf Wrede, Bd. II (1896), p. 853.

[6] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (E.T. 1941), p. 452.