LUTHER AT THE CASTLE COBURG, 1530¹

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The year 1530 was a landmark in the story of the Reformation, for it not only witnessed a notable confrontation between the Catholic powers, the Emperor Charles V, the Archduke Ferdinand and the Cardinal Campeggio and the Protestant princes, but it evoked the first great Protestant Confession, the Confessio Augustana. A full discussion of what went on in that assembly, and of the documents which emerged in the course of it, belongs properly to Melanchthon studies. Our concern, to borrow the title of Hans Von Schubert's notable essay, is with "Luther in the Castle Coburg".² For during the critical summer weeks, while stirring goings-on were afoot in Augsburg, Luther, as an outlaw of the Empire, had to wait and fidget, watch and pray, sometimes in an agony of anxiety and frustration, one hundred and fifty miles away in the Castle of the Coburg, the most southerly fortress of his Saxon patrons and protectors.

Compared with the Diet of Worms, nine years before, it is, as far as Luther was concerned, a less dramatic story. There is a noticeable drop in temperature between the "Here I Stand" of April, 1521 and "Here I sit, doing nothing in particular" of 1530 even though in Luther's case doing nothing meant enough thinking and writing for half a dozen men. In fact, a very deceptive idleness; for in those weeks, despite such ill health as would have driven most men from their books, Luther contrived a prodigious output of tracts, commentaries, manifestoes, letters, to say nothing of that which came upon him daily, the care of his colleagues, clerical and lay, whom he rebuked and encouraged and comforted in scores of letters.

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LUTHER AT THE CASTLE COBURG, 1530

There are some "déjà vu" similarities between Luther as "the Prisoner of the Wartburg" in 1521 and the guest of the Coburg in 1530. Once more Luther was installed, by his Prince, and reluctantly, in a romantic castle deep amid the forests. And this second sojourn was directly linked with the Edict of Worms, passed by a rump Diet after Luther's departure in 1521, which made Luther an outlaw for the rest of his days and which always threatened the Protestant cause in the next decades.

That the Edict had not, in fact, been enforced, as was required, not only on Luther but on all who gave comfort and aid to him, was not the fault of the Emperor Charles V. "That man will never make me a heretic",¹ the young Prince had muttered when he first saw Luther, and he never changed his mind, or his determination, when possible, to destroy the little friar and his supporters. But, under the political complexities of his vast dominions, the preoccupation of troubles in Spain and in the Netherlands, this "Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation" whose language he could neither speak nor read, had had to wait to deal with Germany, and now having learned the art of the possible, and under the influence of Erasmian counsellors like Gattinara and Valdès, he was ready to exercise patience. Above all, in the light of the growing menace of the Turkish invasion, he needed the aid of Protestant princes and cities and was unwilling to go to war, save as a last resort, and ready to consider compromise.

In 1529 the skies had marvellously cleared. He was reconciled with the Pope who crowned him in Bologna. The Peace of Cambrai meant that he had not to look over his shoulder at France and England. The Turks were stopped at the gates of Vienna. Now, if ever, was the time to do something about the Germans, and though the Pope was implacably opposed to calling a general Council, a Diet of the Empire might do as an interim settlement, might even seem to be that "free Christian council" which not only to the Protestant but also to Catholic German princes might seem to settle the long standing "Grievances of the German Nation". On the Protestant side

there was fear and suspicion. When the Protestant delegation, fresh from their famous “Protest” at Speyer in 1529, waited on the Emperor in Bologna he angrily threw them into prison and rejected out of hand the documents they attempted to set before him.

But, in contrast, the Imperial summons to a new Diet in Augsburg, issued on 21 January, was astonishingly eirenical and seemed to offer for the first time a genuine debate. It gave priority, naturally, to the Turkish menace. But it also appealed for the healing of the divisions between the Germans, that unity in Christian truth might be restored.

The summons reached the Elector John the Steadfast of Saxony in March and he summoned his councillors and his theologians to Torgau to discuss a plan of action. On the Saxon side, the outstanding statesman was the recently retired Chancellor, Gregory Brück. He was a lawyer, and rather like Sir Thomas More in that he saw to it that his daughters married lawyers; and he too was a lay theologian and humanist—he called his first daughter by his first wife, Euphrosyne—and his first daughter by his second wife was yclept (as Milton would say) also Euphrosyne II, poor girl. But he was immensely able and Luther called him “The Atlas of our Kingdom”. He it was who suggested that the Protestant princes would be wise not to turn up in Augsburg empty handed but that they should present some kind of rationale for their cause, and some explanation of the reforms in their territories. For there had been the Visitation of the Saxon churches (1527-9), the publication of Luther’s Catechisms, the supersession of episcopal jurisdiction in matters of patronage and ordination, and in the sequestration of church and especially of monastic property, while from the university of Wittenberg, to which Catholics were forbidden to send their sons, had come a growing number of teachers and pastors.

Shortly before Easter a cavalcade of Princes, civil servants and theologians was set in motion, with a waggon-load of books and papers, and journeyed towards Augsburg by way of Castle Coburg.

They spent Easter at Coburg. Luther had staged a one
man strike since January when, in protest against the ingratitude and disobedience of the people in Wittenberg, he had stopped preaching. But now he preached a fine series of Easter sermons on the Cross, as something given to Christians, but also shared by them, and a series of meditations on the Easter story. But he did not let his audience forget the things in store. The most important thing, he said, was for them to pray that the coming council might bring peace, "for this concerns you [vestra res agitur]—and your wives and children".2

On 24 March the company set out for Augsburg. In the small hours of that morning Luther, his secretary Veit Dietrich, and his nephew Cyriacus had been quietly smuggled into the Castle. Melanchthon, perhaps remembering the Wartburg, was worried for Luther—"you see", he wrote, "his health will suffer and his temptations will multiply". The castle was poorly garrisoned, with about two dozen soldiers and could perhaps have easily been taken. Luther himself, half ironically, paid deference to the need for security by signing his letters from "the land of the Birds" or the mystic word "Cruboc" which it does not take long to break down into "Coburg" spelled backwards. But as he stood alone, dandling the bunch of keys in the large empty house within the Castle which had been assigned to him, it may have been one of the more lonely, poignant experiences of his life. His own books had not arrived, so he wrote notes to his friends, Melanchthon, Jonas, Spalatin who had just left him.3

We have arrived at our Sinai, dearest Philip: but we shall make a Zion out of this Sinai and build here three tabernacles: one for the Psalms, one for the prophets: and one for Aesop's Fables.

With that scholar's touch which makes us feel we can love to work in somebody else's study he added:

It seems a very pleasant place—and most convenient for study—except that it is all rather miserable without you—" from the Kingdom of the Birds at the third hour. Martin Luther"4.

"The Kingdom of the birds"—apt, for it was almost a bird

1. Luther's Werke (Weimarer Ausgabe, 1883-), 32.4 ff. (Hereafter W.A.)
2. W.A., 32. 27.33.
4. Ibid. 5-7; Luther's works. American edition, 49. 287 (Hereafter L.W.).
sanctuary, though the dawn chorus soon began to interfere with his sleep. But he said his prayers, as he liked to do, standing by the open window, looking out over the trees—praying simply, sometimes three hours in a day, on behalf of the Church, and all that was at stake, beyond the horizon. He was to have many visitors, among them his most intimate enemy, the Devil.

When his books arrived he decided to get on with his translation of the Old Testament prophets. For some time he had been struck by the resemblance, as he saw it, between the story of Gog and Magog in the Book of Ezekiel, and the Turkish invasion, and he expounded this—in a preface with an apocalyptic emphasis in his thought which was to increase from this time onward. Then he went back to translating, sadly missing his collaborators in what had become a team enterprise. For him this was a solemn work to be done slowly, with caution and with reverence, and he had begun to clarify his own principles in the work. Here, on the Coburg, he wrote his famous “Open Letter on Translation”, a little work still required reading in many German departments in many universities.

In translating Job, Master Philip, Aurogallus and I laboured so that sometimes we scarcely handled three lines in four days... now anybody can run his eyes over three or four pages without once stumbling, without realising what boulders and clods had once lain where he now goes along as over a smoothly planed board. One purpose of the letter was to defend his use of “sola fide”—“allein” “by faith alone”—in his translation of Romans iii. 28. and it brings him to expound the characteristics of the German language:

We do not have to enquire of the literal Latin, how we are to speak German... rather we have to ask about this from the mother in the home, the children in the street, the common man in the marketplace... we must be guided by their language, the way they speak... then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.

A few years ago the government in Eastern Germany put on an impressive exhibition about Luther in the castle of the

3 L.W., 35. 188.
4 Ibid. p. 189.
Wartburg: they were not interested in him as a theologian, or prophet or Christian, but as a great linguist, a poet, a shaper of the German language. It was an impressive tribute, but it would not have satisfied Luther:

Ah, translating is not everyone’s skill... it takes a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing Christian, a trained, informed and experienced heart.¹

Hand in hand with translation went exposition. It is hardly possible to exaggerate how much the Psalms meant to him, and during these weeks he dictated expositions to Veit Dietrich which culminated in two small masterpieces, composed when events in Augsburg were coming to a head—Psalm 118, his beloved “Confitemini”—his very own psalm, a line of which he himself set to music and had painted on the wall of his room, with its triumphant:

> it is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in Princes

its defiant:

> I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord

and, above all, its affirmation of the kingship of the risen Christ:

> The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.

And then the short Psalm 117 which came as a cry of appropriate thankfulness when the Protestants had witnessed a good confession.

But as in 1521, so now, he overdid things. Flung back upon himself, old “Anfechtungen” returned. He again suffered from the change of diet and claimed to be half poisoned by the local beer. Then came headaches, caused in part by eye strain though the pair of spectacles hastily provided by Christian Düring were worse then useless. There was an unhealed ulcer on his leg, and intermittent pain from the stone. And now he had to put up with noises in the head and fits of dizziness. He wrote to Melanchthon on 12 May:

> I felt a loud buzzing and roaring like thunder in my head, and had I not stopped would fainted and so I was useless for two days... my head has shrunk into a short chapter which by degrees is likely to dwindle into a tiny paragraph and then come to a full stop... that same day that I had your letters, Satan

¹ Ibid. p. 194.
turned up. Veit and Cyriac were away and I was all alone . . . and Satan at least 
won this advantage that he made me leave my room and seek for company.¹

The Elector’s physician, Dr. Lindemann, a kinsman of 
Luther through his mother, sent some medicine to support 
his heart and the not too helpful comment: “It seems likely 
that you have been studying too hard “. In these months, 
then, a great deal of time had to be spent in frustrated idleness, 
mooching about, or composing, playing and singing musical 
tunes. Then the visitors began to come. At first he was 
glad to see them: old school friends, citizens of Nuremberg 
anxious to excuse themselves because the city had refused to 
let Luther stay there rather than on the Coburg. That splendid 
female dragon, the Lady Argula von Grumbach, who gave him 
a long lecture on how his wife should wean her baby Magdalena. 
But soon all sorts of curious visitors arrived to steal away the 
best hours of the day until he had to ask the Elector to ban 
visitors to the Castle. And, as we have said, among those present 
was the Devil. Chesterton once said that inside every fat 
man there is a thin man trying to get out—and inside Luther 
there was one gaunt and worn. To Melanchthon he made a 
revealing remark: “I am vulnerable in private affairs, but not 
in public ones: you are vulnerable about public affairs but 
strong where private temptations are concerned “. But letters 
came and went and the castle became a clearing house for news 
and gossip. Early on there were domestic tragedies. Justus 
Jonas’s baby died, and even Luther shrank from breaking the 
sad news, for the family had already suffered many things. 
Then came the news that Luther’s father had died. A few 
weeks before Luther had written the old man a loving letter, 
which in itself explodes the nonsense of Erik Erikson and John 
Osborne of some love-hate relation between them.

Our faith is sure, and we do not doubt that we shall shortly see each other 
again in the presence of Christ. For the departure from this life is a smaller thing 
than if I moved from you in Mansfeld to here, or if you moved from Wittenberg 
to Mansfeld . . . it is only a matter of an hour’s sleep and all will be different.

Let us sleep contentedly in Christ’s peace, until he comes again to wake us 
with joy.²

¹ W.A., Br. 5. 317.24. ² L.W., 49. 271. 270.
When the fatal news came, Luther said not a word but grabbed his Psalter and withdrew from company for two days, weeping himself out, as his young man said. It was because of his own sensitiveness that he was able to help others, and during those next weeks he wrote three fine letters of spiritual counsel to the neurotic Jerome Weller, always dangerously in the dumps, letters which were passed from hand to hand and became justly famous.

Then there is what we might call the Uncle Remus, Walt Disney side of Luther. There was his project, not quite finished, to do a better German edition of Aesop’s fables which he much loved (as he did all German proverbs and folk lore) and which he thought he might read to the children after supper, quizzing them about each fable. When Kate Luther had a portrait done of their little Magdalena it gave him endless delight: I didn’t know the little baggage was so dark", and it did him more good than Dr. Lindemann’s medicine. And there is the famous letter to his son Hans:

My Dear Son,

I'm glad you are doing well at your studies and saying your prayers . . .

I know of a pretty, and very pleasant garden. Lots of children play there, wearing little golden coats, and they pick splendid apples and cherries and greengages and plums under the trees: they sing and jump around and have great fun. They have little ponies to ride and the reins are of gold and they have silver saddles. I asked the owner of the garden whose children they were? He said "Ahh, well, you see those are the ones who do their homework and say their prayers". Then I said "Sir, I have a little son whose name is Hans Luther. Could he come into that garden and eat those apples and pears, and ride the ponies and play with the children?". The man says that he can indeed—if he says his prayers and does his homework—and his friends Lippius and Jost—they will get whistles and guitars and all kinds of instrument, and they will dance and shoot with crossbows . . .

When Luther looked out on the first morning, and saw scores of jackdaws strutting up and down it suggested a lively parable of the coming Diet:

Here [he wrote to Spalatin] we came right into the middle of a Diet of Birds—with untiring voices declaiming their views and edicts into the air . . . they do not live in those holes you call palaces, they live under the open sky: they show

2 L.W., 49. 321; W.A., Br. 5. 377-8.
contempt for gold and silver—they have but one life style—all are dressed alike in black, all make the same music and sing in unison though with a pleasant difference between the older and younger ones—I have not yet seen or heard their Emperor . . . as far as I could understand they have decided unanimously to make war this year on the barley and the crops of summer and winter wheat and all the best fruits—they are a crafty and cunning lot, very skilled in thieving and robbing etc. etc.

From the Kingdom of the Jackdaws, the Fifth Hour. Martin Luther.

Luther wrote a note of encouragement to Chancellor Brück at the very moment when in, fact, the Saxon layman was acquitting himself manfully at Augsburg:

I have lately watched two miracles . . . the first as I looked out of the window, the stars in the sky and the whole lovely vault of heaven—but I saw no pillars on which the Great Architect had fastened them, yet the heavens did not fall . . . and then I saw great thick clouds like a great sea, moving over us, but I saw no ground on which they were resting or fastened, nor any tubs in which their rain was to be caught . . . and yet they did not fall on us, and as they passed a rainbow lit up both the earth and the roof.

So, said Luther, we ought not to be anxious:

As though God could forget us without having first forgotten himself.

In the end, peace does not lie in the hands of the Emperor and his advisers.

Our rainbow is weak: their clouds are mighty, but in the end it will be seen whose melody is played.

The thought of children and the young people seems to have been a comfort to Luther in these days and he passed on the thought to his Prince:

Surely your Grace’s territory has better pastors and preachers than any other territory in the whole world—and so the young people, boys and girls, grow up so well instructed in the Catechism and the Scriptures that I am deeply moved when I see that young boys and girls can pray, believe, and speak more about Christ than they ever could in our monasteries, foundations and schools in times past . . . your Grace’s land is a beautiful paradise for such young people—it is as if God were saying “To you, my dear Duke John, I entrust this fine paradise . . . and I give you the honour of being my gardener and caretaker”.

At this time he wrote one of the finest sixteenth-century tracts about education, his sermon addressed to parents “On Keeping

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1 L.W., 49. 293. 2L.W., 49. 395; W.A., Br. 5. 530. 19 ff. 3 Ibid. 532. 76. 4 L.W., 49. 307. 20 May, 1530.
Children in School 1. He saw with deep concern one result of the anti-clerical ferment of the time, the contempt into which sound learning had fallen, and as much as Melanchthon he feared that the concern for self-interest and the avarice of the age could lead to a relapse into barbarism:

If the Scriptures and learning disappear, what will remain in our German lands but a disorderly and wild crowd of Tartars and Turks, indeed a pig sty and mob of wild beasts.2

At one end he blames the common people, whom he never romanticized:

I see them withdrawing their children from instruction and turning them to making a living or caring for their bellies.

At the other end is the kind of ruler who thinks that all a young nobleman needs to know is how to put two legs over a horse. But

God has not given you your children ... simply that you may do with them as you please, or to train them simply to get on in the world.3

He goes on to describe the dignity and importance of the pastoral, teaching and preaching office of the Christian ministry:

Even if you were a king, you should not think you are too good to give your son, and train him for this office and work, even at the cost of all you have.4

And he was heard: what Wittenberg did for the training of a new and better kind of ministry was far in advance in time and method of what went on in, say, the English Reformation for another fifty years. The statistics are impressive and startling of the young men who in Germany in the next generations were to offer for the ministry, often following as sons of the manse in their fathers' footsteps.

But he does not therefore disparage the offices of common life and temporal government:

Temporal government is a glorious ordinance and a splendid gift of God who has instituted it and wills it to be maintained as something men cannot do without —if there were no such thing as civil government each would devour the other as the wild beasts do. Do you not think that if the birds and beasts were to see the civil order which exists among men they would say, if they could talk "O men! compared with us you are not men but Gods. What security you have for

1 Eine Predigt, dass man Kinder zur Schule halten sollen, W.A., 30.2. 509 ff.; L.W., 46.
2 L.W., 46. 217.
3 Ibid. 222.
4 L.W., 46. 228.
your lives and your possessions whereas among us no one is safe not even for a moment from one another in regard to life, home, or food. Shame on you for your ingratitude''.

The professions of law and medicine each have their great contribution to the life of men, nor will Luther take a purely utilitarian view of education. Simply to be educated is its own reward:

I shall say nothing here about the pure pleasure a man gets from having studied, even though he never holds an office of any kind, how at home by himself he can read all kinds of things, talk and associate with educated people travel and do business in foreign lands.

And he ends by putting the responsibility on the shoulders of governments:

If a government can compel its subjects to carry pike and muskets... how much more should it compel its subjects to keep their children at school. For here there is a worse war on, a war with the very devil who aims secretly to sap the strength of cities and principalities until there is left... only an empty shell of useless people.

One other treatise concerning human relations he wrote at this time, a long discussion about the laws concerning betrothals and marriages, a theme which would preoccupy him for the next fifteen years and find its climax in his set-to with the lawyers at the end of his life.

But there was yet another set of writings which dealt with Reformation and these were a running commentary on the events in Augsburg. They were like salvoes of gunfire. Every now and again, from beyond the horizon, came a whirring in the air, and the crrrrrump of an explosion, often disconcerting his friends, but often too on target. The image might have pleased him, for in his exposition of Psalm 118 he likens the Word of God to artillery:

Do you not see the gun being loaded? Don’t you believe that prayer will discharge that gun—and its missile? Perhaps it will be the Turk, or some other judgment or plague from God, bringing death and destruction. The explosion will make bishops, lords, priests, lackeys and monks to take cover, and their screams will echo in heaven and resound on earth... He shot down the obstinate Jews with the Romans, the Romans with the Goths, and the Wends, the Chaldaeans with the Persians and the Greeks with the Turks—He will find a missile for us Germans, too, and it will be on target.

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1 L.W., 46. 209 ff., 237-8. 2 Ibid. 243. 3 Ibid. 256. 4 L.W., 46. 259 ff. 5 L.W., 14. 74.
The first missile was his "Admonition to the clergy assembled at Augsburg".\footnote{L.W., 34. 9 ff.; W.A., 32. 2. 237 ff.} It was a manifesto recalling his earlier address "to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" (1520) and it begins by affirming two ways in which: though absent from the Diet, he is none the less, present:

In addition to my spiritual presence... through my prayers and entreaty to God, I have undertaken to be with you also in writing with this mute and weak embassy.

We for our part need no Diet, no council, no control: nor do we want any of these things from you, for we know you are unable to do better, nay, you cannot do as well as we can... we know how we should believe and what should be our manner of life, how we are to suffer and to pray, not that we are already perfect but we have the right guide lines.

His reply to the oft repeated Catholic charge that the Lutherans by their teaching provoked the revolutionary disturbances of the Peasant War is that the radicals are fiercest of all in their condemnation of Luther:

more hostile to us than to you and they accuse us of knuckling under and recanting... the fanatics have always scorned and persecuted my teaching more than yours.

Moreover, the Catholic bishops themselves were not displeased by Luther's attacks on the Pope and on the monastic orders:

I heard no weeping from the bishop or parish priest when I attacked the monastic life and monks began to disappear.

At this time, when his colleagues in Augsburg were concentrating on the common Christian tradition and were keeping awkward subjects off the agenda, Luther here recapitulates old grievances, Indulgences, the abuse of confession, the externalization of the sacrament of penance, and the sale of private masses. He turns to the established Catholic cry that the Protestants are innovators, bringing in new words and new usages in contradiction of perennial tradition:

I must here speak with those of you, dear sirs, who shout that no innovations should be allowed. Tell me, is not a private mass a most scandalous innovation?... what was the condition of your churches before our gospel came but a series of daily innovations rushing in one after another, in vast numbers like a cloud-burst—

Pilgrimages, abuse of excommunication, communion in one kind—
It is you who have unceasingly introduced false innovations and changes into Christendom. What is changed according to God's Word is no innovation—all customs must yield to it—God and His Word are older than you are. They will also be younger and newer than you are, for they are eternal. So the Word must alter and rule both old and new and must not let itself be altered and ruled by what is either new or old.

Luther attacked celibacy and defends the marriage of the Lutheran clergy. He then comes to the one astonishing concession which both Luther and Melanchthon were ready to make, to allow the old episcopal jurisdiction to continue if within it the evangelicals can continue their own ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care:

Since you cannot or will not perform the office of bishops and since you and all your scholars are truly not fit to preach and to comfort and judge consciences, then let us exercise your office, ... allow us to preach the gospel freely and serve the poor people who desire to be good.

We will let you stay where you are and allow you to go on being princes and lords for the sake of peace, and leave your properties undisturbed.

So we and the preachers would teach the gospel in your place—you would assist such administration with episcopal jurisdiction.

Luther then gives a list of the true priorities of a conciliar agenda, beginning with What Law is—what Gospel is—what Sin is—what Grace is—and ending with such practical themes as schools for children, hospitals and provision for the aged and the dying. Finally, and for good measure, he lists about a hundred Catholic customs which have resulted in superstition and abuse. These things might have been tolerated as children's toys and games—but when we old fools have to dress up and run around with such clerical pageantry, that is the very devil!

Well, there our case rests, he says:

We have prayed sincerely and offered to the uttermost all that could serve the cause of peace, seeking and desiring nothing else than the one comfort for our souls, the pure free gospel. Therefore we can boast with some confidence that the fault has not been ours.

Like all manifestoes it was simplistic to the point of occasional caricature, but by now Luther knew his German audiences. On 6 June a colporteur hurried through the night to get copies out on sale in Augsburg before some pirate printer scooped

1 Ibid, 39,
the market. Within hours five hundred copies passed from hand to hand, five hundred little Luthers abroad in the streets of the city, for the tract was as one Catholic admitted—Very Luther of Very Luther.

Other broadsides were less notable. Luther did not always write best sellers, and some of his writings were hasty and ephemeral. They were also long winded, as he admitted, and his tract “On the Keys” was of this kind, though it contains an amusing dialogue on the right and wrong use of the power of the keys, that binding and loosing which the Pope has turned into legalism, and which have become more concerned with the key which binds than with the freedom of forgiveness.

You gamble with God’s word like a rogue. You treat Christendom and poor sinners as though they were an old worn out pack of cards.¹

But the keys Christ gave to Peter are intended to comfort, heal and save:

They demand faith in our hearts, for without faith you cannot use them with profit... for God’s Word and keys are holy. They sanctify those who believe in them.²

Towards the end of the Diet discussion centred on private masses. On this point the Catholics stood firm, and on 30 June Luther wrote to John Brenz that behind this attitude stood the old lies about purgatory. So he wrote a short polemical tract, “The recantation of Purgatory Pickpurse”³, which expounds the abominations connected with the doctrine, and the texts of scripture alleged in support of it, as well as the ugly undercurrent of fear, greed and venality. More effective than the tract may have been the anecdote which he put in the preface of his exposition of Psalm 117 about his visit to St. John Lateran on his youthful trip to Rome:

I was almost prostrated by the thought that my father and mother were still alive because I could... have redeemed them from purgatory with my Masses. But it was too crowded, and I could not get in. So I ate a smoked herring instead!⁴

¹ L.W., 40.344; W.A., 32. 2. 428.
² Ibid. 375.
³ W.A., 30. 2. 360 ff.
⁴ L.W., 14. 6.
It is time to look at the Diet from the other side of the hill.\(^1\) Anxious to make a loyal impression, the Saxon Princes, the Elector John and the young John Frederick, turned up first of all the delegates. But Charles V was in no hurry and consulted with the Catholic princes in Innsbruck. He also talked at length with the Cardinal Campeggio, Cardinal Protector of Germany. He had just come from England where he had played Tweedledum to the Tweedledee of Cardinal Wolsey in the matter of the divorce of Henry VIII.\(^2\) The two men had much in common, both were skilled in diplomacy and great accumulators of benefices and children.

They were both interested in reform of the Church, as long as it did not touch their own little vulnerabilities. Campeggio under-estimated the seriousness and integrity of the Reformers, as was shown by his early attempt to bribe Melanchthon back into the Catholic church. He was a martyr to gout, which handicapped his movements. But he was implacably opposed to the Protestants and prepared as a last resort to counsel open war. The Imperial train entered Augsburg on 16 June. There was an atmosphere of fear and suspicion on both sides. The city had hired hundreds of security guards and thrown chains across the streets. The well-intended gestures alarmed Charles, who first insisted that they be disbanded and then proceeded to hire them himself. In the first days, attempts were made to divide the Protestants among themselves by offering concessions in matters of private and dynastic interest.

The most politically minded, and the most militarily aggressive, of the Protestant princes was the Landgrave Philip of Hesse.\(^3\)

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Though genuinely and determinedly evangelical, he came to Augsburg involved in a number of political ploys: a quarrel with the Count of Nassau about the territory of Katzenellenbogen, an attempt to put back into Württemberg its Duke Ulrich, who had been driven out by the Habsburg-dominated Schwabian League, and an anti-clerical war against the Bishops of Würzburg and Bamberg. There was also a dangerous friendship with Duke Henry of Brunswick, his kinsman (Luther’s later “Jack Pudding”). In a garden at Augsburg Philip, perhaps in his frequent cups, seems to have suggested hi-jacking the Emperor and a military coup against the Catholics. But Henry was preoccupied with his own feud against the city of Goslar and in these days had the Goslar delegates shadowed, then kidnapped, town seals and all, and thrown into prison where they rotted and died. Of all the Protestant princes he was the most unstable and made extraordinary plans with his wife, in case he had to leave Augsburg suddenly.

At the opening Mass of the Holy Ghost he roused sarcastic comments by appearing and disappearing at such liturgical moments as won his agreement or disagreement. Charles V noted in his own diary that the most dangerous men in Augsburg were the preachers and the theologians whom the Protestant princes had brought with them. A minor crisis arose when the Emperor banned all sermons and this ran into trouble, not from the preachers, who are not generally averse to escaping the preachments of others, but from the laymen. Philip of Hesse recklessly defended the preachers, and George of Brandenburg kneeled down before the Emperor and said that rather than that the Word of God should be bound, the Emperor might cut off his head there and then: to which the embarrassed Emperor stammered in his bad German—“No, no, Not cut 'ead off. Not cut 'ead off.” In the next days some of the Catholic councillors came to understand that the Protestant Princes were not to be bribed or browbeaten, and perhaps, historically speaking, it is the faith and courage of the Protestant laymen which is more impressive than the writings of the theologians.

On the Catholic side, beside Campeggio and his party, there was the old team of theologians, John Eck, Cochlaeus and John
Faber. On the Protestant side Melanchthon, was assisted by Spalatin and Jonas, and John Brenz, while the Strasbourg theologians Capito and Bucer kept in the background, and very much in touch with Philip of Hesse, who at this time was secretly preparing to join the Burgrecht, the alliance which Zwingli hoped to turn into a great Protestant and anti-Habsburg league of states and cities.

The conversations began in some secrecy, for the Emperor wisely sought to avoid the public arena. Melanchthon continued with the preparation of a Protestant statement. As William Maurer has shown in the first of a series of studies of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon kept very close to Luther, and his starting point seems to have been the striking confession of his own faith which Luther had appended to his eucharistic treatise of 1538 and which set out the gospel of grace against the background and in the context of the classic statements of faith in the Trinity, and the Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology.

Melanchthon had also brought with him a series of articles, beginning with the Schwabach articles debated at the Marburg Conference of 1529 and a more mysterious set of Torgau articles worked out in April by the Wittenberg theologians. It was clear that any confessional statement must have two parts: one designed to show that the reformers were no innovators, but defending the one common Christian faith of the whole church. The other, more complex would deal with the so called abuses, communion in both kinds, marriage of the clergy, abolition of private masses and episcopal jurisdiction. When Melanchthon arrived in Augsburg he saw a copy of 404 articles which John Eck had presented to the emperor, all of which were heretical doctrines taken from the writings of Luther and of Zwingli. The preamble, skilful and eirenical, may have been the work of Gregory Brück. But in the main it was the masterpiece of Philip Melanchthon. He regarded it as his own and, though it became an official document, he felt free to tinker

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1 Wilhelm Maurer, Historischer Kommentar zum Confessio Augustana, Bd. 1, Gütersloh, 1976.
2 L.W., 37, pp. 360 ff.
with it and revise it in later years. The first part of the Con-
fession was a lucid, temperate exposition of the gospel, beginning
with the Holy Trinity and the affirmations about the Incarnation.
Its exposition claimed to expound the faith of the whole church,
even of the Roman church if that church were to be judged by
the old Fathers. It had notable omissions (doctrines of purgatory
and any discussion of Papal jurisdiction)—while it was plain
for the sake of peace and unity, Melanchthon was concerned to
draw away from the Reformation left—from the Rhineland
and Swiss theologians who denied the Real Presence, and the
Anabaptists sonorously denounced again and again.

It had been hoped that the document would be presented
in a plenary session, but eventually the Emperor reluctantly
agreed it should be read at a meeting of the Estates of the Empire
in the Chapter House of the Bishop’s Palace, and this took
place on 25 June 1530 between four and six of the afternoon,
being read in German by the Saxon Chancellor Dr. Christian
Bayer, and a Latin version handed over by Gregory Brück.
No original copy of either has survived. Perhaps few understood
or grasped the importance of the occasion, though it is clear
that many Catholics were impressed and even astonished at the
moderation and reasonableness of the Protestant statement.
A committee of Catholic divines was at once told off to refute
it but their initial draft was so polemical that Charles told them
to go away and write something fuller of eirenical possibilities.

Meanwhile, what of Luther? Early in May Melanchthon
had sent him a draft of the Confession, but probably not the
whole document and perhaps only one part of it. But of this
Luther wrote to Duke John:

> I have read through Master Philipp's Apologia which pleases me very much
> [die gefellet mir fast wohll. I have nothing to improve or change in it, nor would
> it be fitting for me to do so, for I cannot walk so delicately.]

Whether Melanchthon heard of this, and took it as a criticism,
which it was not, or simply because, immersed in the exhausting
series of meetings, conversations and debates, while keeping
an eye on the always dangerous political happenings, or perhaps
from the sheer agony of bringing to birth the right kind of

1 L.W., 49. 297 and notes ad loc.; W.A., Br. 5. 319.
document, at this point he stopped writing to Luther, as did also Justus Jonas and Spalatin, so that for Luther there followed a time of excruciating frustration.¹

At first he was only alarmed and anxious, then annoyed, and finally deeply hurt and wildly angry. Other people were getting letters—messengers came and went, but only with the vague comment “Splendid. They’re all doing well.” He wrote to them thirsting for news and saying that the absence of news was tormenting him. Then he wrote more huffily saying that he, too, knew how to be silent and that he would write no more, and finally he worked himself into such a state that when at last letters arrived, he refused to look at them.

The mystery was never explained. The excuses certainly did not add up. Jonas blamed the postmen. Spalatin said letters had been lost. Melanchthon said he was too worried about the possible defection of Philip of Hesse to do any writing. But between close friends it was insensitive and thoughtless. When the letters began to pour in, it was soon mended, and Luther was soon at work, as often, comforting his friend who seemed to spend so much of his time, like Alice in Wonderland, swimming about in a pool of tears. He reassured him of the worth of his Apology: “Yesterday I re-read your whole Apologia and was tremendously pleased with it.” Only he thought that Melanchthon was seeking to avoid the inevitable scandal of the Cross, in hoping for political success and worldly peace. To others, like Conrad Cordatus, he expressed his joy at this public testimony:

I am tremendously pleased to have lived to see this moment when Christ by his staunch confessors has publicly been proclaimed in such a great assembly by means of this really most splendid confession. And so the word is fulfilled. I spoke of your testimonies in the presence of Kings.²

Next came the difficult subject of possible concessions. John Eck produced a memorandum of astonishing moderation in which he accepted the meaning of “sola fide”, though he thought the phrase should not be used before the common

¹ It should be noted that for Zwingli at this time there was also considerable anxiety at the lack of news from Philip of Hesse (R. Hauswirth, op. cit. p. 216).
² L.W., Letters 2. 49. 354.
people, while about sin and the bondage of the will he moved
much nearer to Lutheran doctrine. Philip asked Luther
what concessions could be made for the sake of peace and "for
the sake of our Prince, if he be in danger"? Luther wrote
back not very helpfully: "We can concede everything but the
gospel"—for, in fact, all the practical abuses touched matters
of faith, and Luther was convinced that the time for argument
was over. They had made their witness; no further agreement
was conceivable. In the first days of July he wrote them a
forthright and characteristic letter full of faith in God but
with the refrain—"And now, home, home! Come home."

It was easier said than done. Cardinal Campeggio was
prepared to try negotiation and wrote to Rome to ask whether,
until a Council met, communion in both kinds and marriage
of the clergy might be permitted to the Lutherans.

Melanchthon spent hours and days going from one to
another, defending his work in committees, seeking to make
concessions for the sake of peace, not perhaps realizing how
slippery was the ground, until angry letters began to come to
Luther from Nuremberg that Melanchthon was betraying the
gospel, saying that he did not differ in any fundamental from
the Roman church, and apparently willing to accept the papacy
and episcopal jurisdiction as a matter of human law. Then the
Catholic confutation of the Confession was read out, and the
Protestants were refused a copy. And when they got hold
of it and Melanchthon prepared his brilliant Apology, the
Emperor refused to receive it. So it was all to be settled along
the traditional lines for dealing with heretics. The Emperor
pronounced that in the Confutation, the Protestant case had
been more than fully met. All that could be granted was an
interval before the Protestants formally accepted it.

Then came sensation and panic in both camps. Philip
of Hesse, in disguise, crept out of Augsburg by dead of night
on 12 August. He had had an astonishing time pursuing two
or three separate political intrigues and in one evening had
lost 10,000 guilders in gambling. His wife was ill, and some
weeks previously he had arranged that she should re-date her
letter to give him an excuse to come home. On 1 August he
wrote an astonishing epistle:

Dear Wife, My loving wish is that you continue to appear ill and generally behave as though it is really very serious—keep away from people as though it were a critical illness and when you arrive in Cassel, let the "illness" get worse and worse.¹

One reason why he wanted "out" was that his secret alliance with Zwingli was almost concluded.

The effect on the Emperor was drastic. He feared a military coup. The gates were closed and all highways guarded by road-blocks of armed men. But this meant the Saxons had to stay, amid wild rumours. An attempt was made to keep negotiations going until the Emperor decided what to do and a final committee of fourteen, reduced to six, involved Melanchthon and Spalatin from hour to hour. The firm refusal to submit made in a great speech by Brück on 5 August now raised serious questions.

Like Moloch in another Great Consult, Duke Joachim of Brandenburg headed the extreme Catholics and his sentence was for open war—a speech which thoroughly alarmed the moderates and for which some of them apologized. But most of the Catholic princes made it plain they did not want war. The Turks and many other political involvements made the Emperor himself reluctant to take the final step. In the end the great Diet having hardly begun with a bang, finished with a whimper, after first John Frederick and then the Elector John had departed, while a Recess forbade any innovation and gave the Protestants until the following April to submit.

Luther saw quite clearly that there would be no agreement by conciliation or by compromise. He thought there were two possibilities. The first was one which he had long taken seriously but which historians have never considered sufficiently—the possibility of a massive anti-clerical warfare against the church, in which Protestant and Catholic clergy would alike perish. It was this kind of ferment of which ¹Crundmann, op. cit. pp. 78 ff. She provided nine children for him, though he later claimed it had been a mere marriage of convenience, and that he had never loved but had always disliked her. In some ways the monogamy of Philip of Hesse presents more ethical problems and is more to his discredit than his bigamy a decade later.
ominous signs on his way to Worms in 1521, and it added a new
dimension to the campaign of the German Knights under Von
Sickingen in 1522 and to the Peasant uprisings of 1525. Alter-
natively, there might be the beginning of Wars of Religion.
With these dire prospects the Protestants at last began to take
effective measures for a defensive military alliance such as
Philip of Hesse had all along desired. The result was the
Schmalkaldic League.

Towards the very end of the Diet Luther had written a
beautiful tract about the devotional meaning of the Eucharist
and the importance of frequent communion. It was an un-
expectedly eirenical document, highly praised by Blaurer, the
reformer of Constance, and it delighted Martin Bucer, who
after many rebuffs had succeeded in drawing closer to Luther
during a visit to the Coburg. So at last there seemed to be a
drawing together of Protestant ranks, and the prospects of an
alliance seemed brighter than a few months ago.

On 14 September Duke John Frederick of Saxony, who had
left the Diet early, stopped at the Coburg and was startled to
be greeted by a bearded man ("Junker Georg Redivivus")
who turned out to be Martin Luther. There had been a little
tension between them about the lack of manners of the young
Prince, and perhaps this prompted the gift of a gold ring,
inscribed with Luther’s arms—but it slipped off his fingers
and Luther commented wryly that lead fitted him better than
gold. When the Prince invited Luther to accompany him,
Luther asked to be excused. He must wait, he said, for Philip
and wipe the sweat from him. So after all the ups and downs,
the two comrades were reconciled and though no witness of
their meeting has survived, we must imagine clasped hands,
smiles and tears.

Luther always had a certain German mystique of devotion
towards the Emperor. He hated violence and war, and for
him the use of force was always thought of as a very last resort.
The Christian ought to suffer injustice, even tyranny. But
now Luther and his friends (but not the theologians of vulnerable
Nuremberg) let themselves be convinced by the politicians
and the lawyers that the very constitution of the Empire allowed
of resistance, and he wrote a memorandum to the effect that:

now there is a danger that any day incidents may occur as a result of which one has to defend oneself immediately, not only because of the secular law, but because of the duty and distress of conscience. Therefore it is fitting to arm oneself and to be ready to meet force.¹

Those have, I think, over-simplified who have found in Luther the beginnings of the right of resistance by inferior magistrates, though the City of Magdeburg was to make an outright declaration of the duty of armed resistance. Luther's correspondence with his Prince in the early 1540s about the situation in Saxony in relation to Duke Henry and Maurice of Saxony, shows how reluctant he always was to encourage any kind of military action, still less pre-emptive war.² Those last years of his life saw indeed a greater stress on apocalyptic, and in 1539, as Rudolf Herrmann has shown in a famous essay, he came to think of the Pope as a mad dog, a rabid werewolf (as St. John Fisher had called Luther twenty years before). And the Emperor therefore became "miles Papae". Not that Luther was what we should call a pacifist, even of the Erasmian kind, and he regretted he was not able to enlist and fight against the Turk. With the Augsburg Confession³ a new age began, and it was the first of many such documents to emanate from the Protestant churches, some of which borrowed from Melanchthon's majestic summary, but most of which were constrained to supplement it to deal with its omissions.

It was rooted in particularity, a document signed at a German diet by a handful of Princes and cities. Yet it had in it a deeply catholic and ecumenical significance, shown not only by its influence on other confessions of the Reformation, but perhaps most recently and clearly in the suggestion (taken seriously in ecumenical circles) that on its 550th anniversary in 1980, the

¹ L.W., 49, 2. 432.
Catholic church should "recognize" it as a Christian confession. The suggestion has already given rise to theological discussions of an ecumenical kind, and to a small literature. "Res nostra agitur". It was, as we have noted, a triumph for the laity, for it was in their name that it was signed and it was laymen who spoke it out. But it would be truer to see in it a new variation in the ancient relation of spiritual and temporal men, a new alliance between the godly magistrates and the Preachers of the Word. We do well to finish with the little group of Princes and their servants, with the not less dignified representatives of Imperial cities, at their head as spokesman Gregory Brück, men who would bow before God but not before any lesser being when the Gospel itself was at stake. Luther had summed it up very well and the text he applied was put on the title page of their confession when, despite the Imperial ban, it went out into all the world—

Et loquebar de testimoniis in conspectu Regum at non confundebam.
They shall speak of thy testimony before Kings, and shall not be put to shame.