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## Why Was Luther Detained at Worms after His Hearing Before the Diet?\*

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### 1. The Morning after the Great Speech.

Luther's answer "without horns and teeth" at the conclusion of his great speech before the Diet on April 18, 1521, created a fearful dilemma for the Romanists at Worms. That evening, while Luther sat, surrounded by admiring friends, in his room at the hostel of the Knights of St. John and his tense mind relaxed in cheerful conversation, agitated consultations took place elsewhere. His answer, upon close scrutiny, appeared to his adversaries a plain challenge. Luther had to the end withstood the vehement pressure of his examiner Eck for the coveted monosyllabic answer to the question whether he would recant. He had said neither yes nor no, but he had solemnly declared himself ready to say either yes or no after a proper argument. The opposition could not charge Luther with sullenness or contumacy; he had not refused recantation, but had practically paved the way for it by the only process that would have been honorable to himself and his adversaries. They saw clearly the intention which Luther afterwards acknowledged in several letters, to bring on a discussion "with a doctor or fifty who were to overcome the monk in an honest argument."<sup>1</sup> The intolerable situation which Aleander had always foreseen and pointed out as dreadful to a conscien-

\* The substance of this article was read at Union Seminary, New York, December 28, 1925, at the annual meeting of the American Society of Church History.

1) XV, 1936. 1902. 1904. — In this contribution the St. L. edition of Luther's Works is cited by simple Roman and Arabic numerals, for volume and column. RA stands for *Reichstagsakten*; DTC, for Dau, *At the Tribunal of Caesar*; HAL, for Hausrath, *Aleander und Luther*; EE, for Erlangen Edition; BAL, for Brieger, *Aleander und Luther*; EB, for Enders, *Briefwechsel*, in Erlangen edition of Luther's Works; FU, for Foerstemann, *Urkundenbuch*; FNU, for Foerstemann, *Neues Urkundenbuch*.

tious Romanist had actually arisen after Luther's speech at the Diet: the Pope's decision was to be debated at the Diet and the Diet turned into a council.

Such a procedure the Romanists were resolved not to permit. But they felt that to issue a peremptory order to Luther to return to Wittenberg that same evening would only increase Luther's prestige and their own shame. Luther must not be permitted to leave Worms unrefuted and unconvicted, glorying that he had called his prosecutors' bluff and that they still owed him an answer. Something must be done at least that looked like an effort to refute Luther. His writings, indeed, must never be formally debated on the floor of the Diet; for if that were done, the argument would inevitably turn out an indictment of the papacy. Accordingly, a middle course was chosen, a compromise between fairness and propriety, on the one hand, and cunning and tyranny, on the other: Luther was to be granted a further hearing before a commission, to which hearing the general public was not to be admitted. The measure plainly revealed the perplexity of its devisers and the great moral and tactical victory which Luther had won by his speech.

It was still early in the morning, half past eight (so stated in a letter to Duke William of Bavaria),<sup>2)</sup> on Friday, April 19, when a meeting of the Electors took place at the *Bischofshof*, where the Emperor lodged. Many persons of princely rank were in attendance, and presently also the inevitable Aleander made his appearance. The young Emperor must have spent a busy night; for he opened the meeting with the heroic proposition to cut all negotiations with Luther short by sending him home and then issuing a decree of outlawry against him; and when the Electors asked him to delay the execution of this plan until they had fully considered it, Charles V had a document in French read to them, composed by himself during the night.<sup>3)</sup> In this document the Emperor declared that all his ancestors had been loyal adherents of the Catholic faith, and he intended to walk in their footsteps. To allow a single monk to contradict the decrees of the Council of Constance and the uniform tradition of the Church would be intolerable. He would not suffer the suspicion to fall upon his administration that he was fostering heresy. After the stubborn attitude which he had seen Luther assume on the preceding day, he had regretted having been so tardy in taking measures against

2) RA, II, 853.

3) RA, II, No. 83; BAL, 153; FNU, p. 75.

him. Under no condition would he grant him a further hearing, but was resolved to send him back with the safe-conduct which he had promised him, forbidding him, however, to preach to the people on his way home, lest he excite a tumult. After that he would proceed against him as against a convicted heretic. Let the Diet now do what it had promised before Luther's citation to Worms, *viz.*, rise in defense of the true faith.

To what extent Glapion, the Emperor's confessor, must be credited with this determined stand of Charles V remains a matter of conjecture. If the Emperor acted independently of any outside influence, his declaration revealed the bigoted zeal inculcated upon him by his stanch Catholic educators, the Dominicans and Franciscans, who had molded the character of the boy Charles. The stern decision of the hitherto pliant and yielding young monarch was a surprise to all. Jerome de Medici reports to Frederick Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua: "And so he had a letter read which was by his own hand; and one of his secretaries who was present when he wrote it testifies that it was written by His Majesty without having consulted any person." 4)

The German princes had to have the Emperor's French declaration translated to them. When they understood it, they turned pale like dead men. So Aleander reports, who had received his first glimpse of the real character of Charles V, and now broke forth in a hymn of praise over this pious monarch, declaring that, after all, the citation of Luther had been the only correct procedure. At Rome a solemn consistory was assembled on May 11 to hear the Emperor's statement, sent thither by the Emperor himself. 5)

Aleander began writing a report to Rome, upon information from Eck, that the Electors had given their consent to procedures against Luther. 6) This was the truth; with four votes against two a resolution had been adopted to burn Luther's books at once, to send him home, and then to outlaw him. 7) The Electors' consent had been given reluctantly. Fuerstenberg states that they had advised against executing the Emperor's plan, because that would cause rioting and sedition. 8) Even a good Catholic like Duke Louis of Bavaria, in a letter to his brother William, showed that he felt

4) RA, II, 855: "Et cosi feco legere una littera, quale era di sua propria mano; et ni afferma un suo secretano, qual era presente quando la scrisse, esser stata composta da sua Maesta scuza conontta di persona alcuna."

5) Balan, 214.

7) RA, 596.

6) RA, II, 867.

8) RA, II, 869. 872.

worried over the prospect that the Emperor would stick to his resolution.<sup>9)</sup>

There was reason for worry. A distinct feeling of unrest had pervaded the city of Worms for some time. Cochlaeus wrote that the Lutherans were blaming the boy Emperor for being a tool of the bishops.<sup>10)</sup> Placards were found posted at street-corners, some of which took Luther's side, while others spoke out against him.<sup>11)</sup> Wild and noisy scenes were enacted in the streets at night. Fuerstenberg found a threatening bulletin affixed to the city hall, to this effect: "Having covenanted and sworn not to forsake righteous Luther, four hundred noblemen stand pledged and serve notice on the princes and the gentlemen from Rome, principally, however, on the Bishop of Mayence, that we intend serious hostility, because we perceive that honor and divine right are to be suppressed after all, and tyranny is to be practised with the aid of priests, though no names are revealed. This writing is paltry, but it intends great damage. A war will be launched with 8,000 men." The poster was signed: "*Bundschuh, Bundschuh, Bundschuh.*"<sup>12)</sup> Another report mentioned that even 100,000 stood ready to rise in defense of Luther.<sup>13)</sup> It was rumored that the slogan "*Bundschuh*" had been heard in the streets at night,<sup>14)</sup> and that in the Emperor's room a note had been picked up containing these words: "Woe to the land whose king is a child!"<sup>15)</sup> George Vogler, the secretary of Margrave Casimir, interpreted the placard at the city hall as a warning to the Emperor not to condemn Luther unheard, or 400 noblemen, able to muster 8,000 men, mounted and unmounted,

9) RA, II, 869.

10) *Commentaria de Actis et Scriptis Lutheri*. Mayence, 1549, p. 36.

11) Erl. Ed., Op. Lat., VI, 16.

12) Fuerstenberg in Steitz, *Die Melanchthon- und Lutherherbergen*, Frankfurt, 1861, p. 51. Cochlaeus, *De Actis et Scriptis Lutheri*, ed. Paris, 1565, p. 33; Loescher, *Neueste Nachr.*, p. 167. *Bundschuh*, a shoe used chiefly by peasants during the closing period of the Middle Ages. It was large enough to cover the ankle and was fastened by straps across the foot. Since 1502 it became the name of a secret society of peasants, which was organized at Buchrain, in the bishopric of Speyer, for the purpose of resisting by force all governments except that of the Emperor. This society was the forerunner of the great Peasants' War. (Comp. R. Herold, *Der Bundschuh im Bistum Speyer vom Jahre 1502*. Greifswald 1889; also *Meyers Konversationslexikon*, s. v. "Bundschuh" and "Bauernkrieg.")

13) RA, 571.

14) Alexander, April 27. — Balan, 74. — Fuerstenberg in Steitz, 50.

15) Eccl. 10, 16. Fuerstenberg in Steitz, 51. RA, 873; Cochlaeus, Comm., 36.

would take up Luther's cause.<sup>16)</sup> Cochlaeus suspected either Hutten or the humanist Hermann von dem Busche, who was at that time loitering at Worms of being the author of these manifestoes, while Aleander surmised that the counselors of the archbishop of Mayence, who were for Luther, had prepared these posters to intimidate their master. Among the *savants*, however, an opinion was current that the whole affair had been concocted by the papists in order to furnish the Emperor a pretext for rescinding Luther's safe-conduct.<sup>17)</sup> This opinion was shared by Hutten,<sup>18)</sup> and the Ebernburg, as a rule, was well informed regarding the plans of the knights.

The ruse had its desired effect on Albrecht of Mayence. He would have had to withstand the brunt of any uprising, and he knew that the peasants in the Odenwald and Spessart mountains had long been restive and seditious. As Aleander had expected, the Archbishop was at once completely terrorized. In the early dawn of the morning he sent a message to the Emperor and the princes, warning them not to take measures that might cause a revolt. Charles laughed at Albrecht's fears and at the new Scaevola<sup>19)</sup> with his 8,000 conspirators. But there were others who thought that they were hearing a low rumbling underground, such as precedes an earthquake. Cochlaeus speaks of "*motus et murmura plebium*" (commotions and rumblings of the mob).<sup>20)</sup> Presently Elector Joachim, the brother of Archbishop Albert, waited on the Emperor, and the Brandenburg prince, who had hitherto been the most zealous promoter of the cause of the papists, now proposed that — for God's sake! — further negotiations with Luther be instituted. Joachim found Aleander, as usual, in the antechamber of the Emperor and communicated to the nuncio the unanimous opinion of the Electors that in view of the prevailing unrest of the people Luther must not be sent home with-

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16) Letter of April 27. RA, 559.

17) Walch, XV, 2310.

18) Letter of May 1.

19) C. Mucius, a noble Roman youth, gained his sobriquet *Scaevola* ("the left-handed") during the Etruscan invasion of Rome under King Porsena. He was chosen by lot from a band of conspirators to steal into the Etruscan camp and slay Porsena. By mistake he slew the king's secretary. Being instantly seized, he was put to the torture to force a confession from him, when he boldly thrust his hand into the fire and let it burn to show the king that he would reveal nothing. This heroism moved the king to pardon Mucius, who then told Porsena of the plot against him.

20) *Comm.*, 36.

out having had a hearing and without a real discussion of his grievances. This turned the scale in favor of Luther; the supreme council of the Empire took the stand which Luther had always taken and which Aleander had consistently opposed. Whatever seemed to have been gained by Luther's two hearings before the Diet now appeared worthless, and Aleander discreetly decided not to send his report of April 19 to Rome.

## 2. Five Useless Days for Luther.

Elector Joachim's proposition to begin negotiations with Luther was peremptorily rejected by the Emperor. But if the Emperor hoped to carry his point by showing firmness of purpose, he was speedily disillusioned. On April 20 the Estates submitted to him a request in French,<sup>21)</sup> to the effect that Luther be examined with reference to his teaching by three or four well-informed men, who were to make an effort to induce him to recant his teaching. The reason given for this request was, lest the common people might say the Estates had outlawed Luther without giving him a hearing and without convincing him or even indicating to him which of his teachings were regarded as heretical. In case Luther would not recant, the Estates declared that they would consent to having him published as an outlaw. Under these circumstances Charles had to maintain his position alone. He refused to take any personal part in further dealings, nor would he send a representative to the conference with Luther. The Electors had to wait till April 22 before the Emperor wrote them that he would give them three days to obtain Luther's recantation. In case Luther recanted, the Emperor promised to act as mediator between him and the Pope and to obtain the Pope's pardon for him. If Luther refused to recant, he was to betake himself out of Worms after three days. For a parting shot the Emperor remarked that he could see no reason why there should be any further argument with Luther, inasmuch as a holy council of the Church had long ago condemned his teachings.<sup>22)</sup>

Thus it happened that in spite of the wrath of the nuntii, the excommunicated heretic of Wittenberg tarried at Worms; and Cochlaeus reports that crowds of people with a grievance came to incite him to still greater rebellion.<sup>23)</sup> Even the princes who so far had kept aloof began to visit Luther. Spalatin's account<sup>24)</sup>

21) Balan, 71. 188 a. Ra, 598.

22) Fuerstenberg, RA, 872.

23) *Comm.*, 37.

24) *Annales*, 49.

states: "Many princes, counts, lords, knights, noblemen, priests, monks, and laymen called on him, not to mention the common people. They constantly besieged his dwelling and could not see enough of him." Among the callers, Spalatin mentions in particular Philip of Hesse, William of Brunswick, and William of Henneberg. Spalatin also records the fact that whenever Luther appeared in public, he caused a greater sensation than all the princes and lords.<sup>25)</sup> The Landgrave of Hesse rode up to the hostel of the Knights of St. John and entered Luther's room with the cheerful greeting, "My dear Doctor, how are you?" Luther returned the cheerful reply, "Most gracious Sir, I hope that everything is turning out for the best."<sup>26)</sup> Of Luther's teaching the young Landgrave seemed to know no more than this, that Luther, under certain conditions, would sanction bigamy.<sup>27)</sup> Twenty years later that became a serious issue between him and Luther. Luther remarks: "His courtiers had insinuated that to him. But I laughed and said, 'O no, my gracious lord, your princely grace should not talk thus.' But he soon took his leave and, giving me his hand, said, 'If you are right, Doctor, may God help you!'"<sup>28)</sup>

How deeply the masses were stirred by Luther's presence at Worms is illustrated by an anecdote which Selnecker has recorded on the authority of Caspar Storm, who supervised the callers that were coming and going at Luther's inn. The "godly Jews"<sup>29)</sup> of Worms sent two delegates to Luther to present him with several bottles of good wine and to ask his opinion regarding some passages of the Old Testament on the meaning of which they were not agreed. But to the great amusement of the gentlemen who happened to be with Luther at the time, the Jewish delegates began to quarrel with each other, and thus their conference with Luther broke up.<sup>30)</sup>

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25) Oelhafen, the city counselor of Nuremberg, wrote home: "Whenever the monk walks down a street, crowds of people are standing and looking after him, and there is a great ado and much talking about him." (Riederer, *Nachr. z. Kirchengelahrten- und Buechergeschichte*. Altdorf, 1761. 4, 96; RA, II, 854.)

26) Bindseil, *Coll.*, III, 261; Walch, XV, 2247; Cordatus, *Tagebuch*, Ausg. v. Wrampelmeyer, No. 1000.

27) Comp. Erl. Ed., Op. Lat., V, 98—100.

28) XV, 1891.

29) See DTC, 237.

30) Selnecker, *Vita Lutheri Disput. Subj.* J. F. Mayer. Wittenb., 1687, 109.

Bucer<sup>31)</sup> was very busy during these days making reports to Hutten about Luther's doings and conveying a letter from Luther to the knight. Hutten did not delay his answer. He wrote that he was bursting with rage because Luther was not permitted to argue in defense of his teaching at the Diet. "Most invincible evangelist," he writes, "I see that bows and arrows, swords and guns, are needed to subdue the wrath of these devils." With this virtuous explosion the doughty knight, no doubt, believed that he had delivered a crushing blow to Luther's adversaries. To Luther himself he accords unstinted praise. Many had come to him, he says, expressing anxious concern about Luther's steadfastness. "If he only maintains his ground! If he only gives a manly answer! If only he is not intimidated!" To every one of these he had replied with supreme confidence, "Luther will be Luther!" and he had not been disappointed in his confidence.<sup>32)</sup> The knight manifests considerable embarrassment in explaining why in these critical days he keeps himself at a distance from the man whose image, alongside of his own, he loves to place on his polemical writings. He states that he would indeed consider it a great achievement if he could inaugurate some disturbance, some commotion, some riot; but Sickingen is always interfering with his heroic endeavors. His friends, Hutten thinks, are overcautious; from fear that he might attempt too much they force him to remain inactive. If it were not for this, he would have given the red hats something to think about by appearing before the very walls of Worms. We can understand that a sober head like Sickingen's beheld in the blustering of the knight nothing but the bravado of an irresponsible enthusiast. Still, Hutten threatens, it will not be long before he will break forth, and then Luther will see that he will not act truant either to the spirit which God has roused in him. "My dearest father," he expostulates with Luther, "yield not; remain unshaken! Let them bawl, cry out, and rave, but do you step fearlessly before the monster. You will not lack champions to defend and avenge you." He expresses an ardent desire to see Luther, "whom he loves so dearly," and asks Luther to keep him informed regarding anything that may happen to him. Once more, shortly before his departure from Worms, six days later, Luther sent Hutten a few lines, which moved the knight to tears.<sup>33)</sup>

31) "Butzer, der in diesen Tagen sein Talent zum theologischen Botenläufer ausbildete." Hausrath in HAL, 280.

32) Letter of April 20.

33) Boecking, 59—62.

Sickingen, too, was hoping for a visit from Luther before the latter would return home.<sup>34)</sup> His connection with this powerful knight in the immediate vicinity of Worms gave Luther a strong backing over against the friends of Aleander, who were still proving from the canon law that Luther's safe-conduct must not be kept. Spalatin even sought, through Bucer, to calm Sickingen; for he feared that the latter might declare that there had been enough talking, and now there must be action.<sup>35)</sup> But it was soon made plain to Spalatin that the shrewd *condottiere* at the Ebernburg contemplated none of the terrible things which Spalatin anticipated; for Sickingen soon entered the Emperor's service.

Meanwhile Luther's speech in the Diet was circulating in manuscript copies in Worms. It had either been worked up from the notes which Luther had jotted down before he went into the Diet on April 18 or had been prepared by Luther after he had come out of the famous session of the Diet. Soon the speech appeared also in print, together with an account of the entire proceedings at the Diet during Luther's address. Aleander procured a copy of this print, which he forwarded to Rome later.<sup>36)</sup>

Many transactions regarding Luther took place while the curtain was down upon the stage. Hutten hints at *secret* conferences with Luther which are taking place at Worms and claims Luther himself as his informer. He refrains from offering Luther any advice, because he — noble heart! — is confident, and all the friends that are with him are also confident, that Luther himself knows best the way he must pursue.<sup>37)</sup> Most likely Hutten was referring to messages which were passing on the quiet between Luther and Glapion. Aleander<sup>38)</sup> states that Glapion sent word to Luther that if he would recant such of his theses as had already been condemned as manifest errors, the rest of his affairs could easily be adjusted and disposed of. Glapion even announced his visit to Luther, but in the end stayed away.<sup>39)</sup> Fuerstenberg, however, asserts that Armstorff and Glapion had made an attempt to approach Luther, but had been prevented from doing so by "Luther's people."<sup>40)</sup>

34) Hutten's letter; EB, III, 126.

35) "Quod scriptum satis, nunc cogitandum, ut tandem aliquid agatur." Comp. *Sickingen*, von Ullman, 178.

36) Balan, No. 68, 177.

37) Hutten's letter of April 20. EB, III, 126.

38) Dispatch of April 27. BAL, 165.

39) RA, 62.

40) RA, 873. April 24.

Such were the wearisome experiences that filled Luther's sojourn at Worms until Jubilate Sunday (April 21) and two days after. Before supper on Tuesday, April 22, the Archbishop of Treves sent two priests to Luther with the message that he would be given another hearing regarding his doctrine.<sup>41)</sup>

*(To be continued.)*

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