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LUTHER'S VIEWS ON LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

We say and pray in our general church prayer that the Lord of lords would graciously preserve our country unimpaired in its liberty. The most precious of the liberties of our country is religious liberty, or freedom of conscience. The first seeds of this liberty were brought to this country by spiritual descendants of Doctor Martin Luther. In the twenty-eight resolutions drawn up at Stockholm, August 15, 1642, by Oxenstierna, the chancellor under Gustavus Adolphus, and others for the proper regulation of the Swedish colony established in 1638 on the banks of the Delaware, the colonists were charged not to disturb the Holland colonists who might settle among them "in the indulgence granted them as to the exercise of the Reformed religion." Such an instruction would not have been possible if Luther had not lived in the sixteenth century. Says Peter Bayne, LL. D. :¹⁾ "Anglo-Saxondom thanks Luther, next, for freedom of conscience. For more than a thousand years it had been the law of Europe that the heretic should be put to death; and the death assigned to heresy was fire. Hating and fearing heresy with an intensity of emotion which in our age the most imaginative can but feebly realize, Luther . . . declared that this method of dealing with the heretic was wrong from top to bottom. Were it otherwise, he said, the hangman would be the best theologian." The Reformed theologian Schaff

1) Martin Luther. His Life and Work, vol. I, p. 8. Cassell and Company, 1881.

declares: "Luther's bold stand at the Diet of Worms, in the face of the Pope and the Emperor, is one of the sublimest events in the history of liberty. If liberty, both civil and religious, has since made progress, it is due in large measure to the inspiration of that heroic act."²) "On this, as on so many other subjects, Luther was in advance of all his contemporaries, and, as Schaff further admits, 'has left some of the noblest utterances against coercion in matters of conscience, which contain almost every essential feature of the modern theory on the subject.'"³)

The THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY presents some of these utterances in an English translation. They are arranged in chronological order. The translation has been made from the St. Louis edition of Luther's complete works.

Luther's written reply to Cajetan at Augsburg, October 14, 1518: "Only that I be not compelled to do anything against the conviction of my conscience." (Vol. XV, 584, 57.)

Letter to Cajetan, Sunday, October 17, 1518: "I should most willingly . . . recant everything if in any way my conscience would permit it. For I know that I ought to yield to no man's command, advice, or favor to such an extent as to say or do anything against my conscience." (XV, 591, 7.)

"To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," published about the middle of August, 1520: "Therefore it is a mischievous invention, and they are not able to produce a single letter to prove that it rests with the pope alone to interpret the Scriptures or to approve their interpretation; they have assumed the right to themselves. . . . Besides that, we are all priests, as I have said, and have all one faith, one Gospel, one sacrament; how, then, should we not also have the power of tasting and judging what is right or wrong in matters of faith? What becomes of St. Paul's words, 1 Cor. 2, 15: 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man;' and also 2 Cor. 4, 13: 'We having the same spirit of

2) The Lutheran Cyclopedia, p. 407 f.

3) Ibid.

faith'? Why, then, should we not perceive, as well as an unbelieving pope, what agrees or disagrees with faith? . . . We should overcome heretics with books, not with fire, as the old Fathers did. If learning consisted in overcoming heretics with fire, the executioners would be the most learned Doctors on earth." (X, 278, 22. 23. 130.)

Letter to Spalatin at Worms, January 16, 1521: "You see what Hutten seeks." (Hutten had requested that Spalatin sound the Elector whether he would permit him and Sickingen, in case of need, to seek shelter in his domains, and thus aid and abet them in their plans to overthrow the papacy with fire and sword.) "I would not have any one contend for the Gospel with violence and bloodshed: thus I have written to the man. By the Word the world has been overcome; by the Word the Church has been preserved; by the Word also it will be restored: and Antichrist also, as he rose without hand, so will he be destroyed without hand by the Word." (XV, 2506, 2.)

Luther's reply at Worms, Thursday, April 18, 1521: "Unless I be convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures, or by evident reason,—for I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone, since it is evident that they have often erred and contradicted one another,—I am vanquished by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience is bound in the words of God; I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither safe nor honest to do anything against conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me! Amen."

To the Archbishop and Elector of Treves Luther said at Worms, April 25, 1521: "The pope is not judge in matters pertaining to God's Word and faith; but every Christian man must see and judge for himself, even as he must live and die according to it; for faith and God's Word are the property of every one in the whole congregation. This I proved by St. Paul: 'If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace,' 1 Cor. 14, 30. From this passage it plainly appears that the master ought to follow the scholar

if the latter has a better opinion supported by the words of God." (XV, 1915, 8.)

Letter to Melancthon, about the middle of May, 1521 (XV, 1907): "I hear that at Erfurt they are resorting to violence against the dwellings of priests; I am surprised that the city council permits it and connives at it, and that our friend Lang does not speak against it."

Of Confession, June 1, 1521 (XIX, 832, 33. 71. 75—77. 86): "The civil government does not undertake to govern men's consciences; it deals only with temporal goods. . . . For in the conscience God wants to be alone and to have His Word rule alone; here there must be freedom from all commandments of men. . . . As our first proof we adduce the saying found in the legend of St. John the Evangelist: *Non placent Deo coacta servitia*, Forced or unwilling service is not pleasing to God. And even if this legend did not say so, Scripture teaches it throughout.—Though He demands the observance of His laws and requires it of every one, still He takes no pleasure in those who observe them reluctantly, by constraint, from fear of punishment, and not freely and willingly. . . . But if He does not wish to have His Law kept with reluctance and by constraint, how much less will it please Him if men are compelled to accept His counsel and promises which are not divine demands!—It is far more tolerable that people be compelled to observe His laws than that they be compelled to accept His counsels and promises. Take an example: Suppose some rich person should obligate himself by a promise that on a certain day he would give to all needy persons a good garment which would be useful to none but the individual recipient himself; but seeing that they refused to accept it, you fool, prompted by your kind intentions, thought you would help matters by urging and constraining them to receive it, knowing full well that they would not keep it, but throw it into a corner; what sort of service do you miserable wiseacre suppose you were doing the rich man whom you wished to help dispose of his substance in such a foolish manner? He would

suppose you to be insane or his greatest enemy; for the saying is true, You cannot give to any one without his will and consent, but you can take away from him without his thanks. Behold, this is precisely what you senseless, raging pope and your sect are doing, you worst enemies of God! . . . Likewise I would preach faith and baptism; I would, however, compel none to receive it, but would accept all that would come of their own accord. In the same manner I would preach the grace of the Sacrament of the Altar, but leave it free, compelling none to partake of it."

During Luther's stay at the Wartburg, the Zwickau prophets came to Wittenberg, and, together with Carlstadt, held their iconoclastic orgies. In a letter to Spalatin, dated January 17, 1522 (XV, 2606), Luther says in reference to these "heavenly prophets": "Still I should not like to have them put in prison, particularly by those who espouse our cause. . . . See also that our prince does not stain his hands with the blood of these new prophets."

On his return to Wittenberg he preached a course of eight sermons on the crisis, March 9—13, 1522. (XX, 17, 3—6; 8—10.) "The mass is an evil thing, and God hates it, in that it is celebrated as if it were a sacrifice and meritorious work; therefore it ought to be abolished. Nevertheless, love should not proceed harshly in this matter, removing the mass by force. It should be preached, it should be written and declared that the mass, celebrated in such manner, is a sinful thing; however, no one should be taken by the hair and pulled away from it; but the matter should rather be left to God, and we should let His Word work alone, without our concurrent effort or labor. Why? Because I do not hold in my hand the hearts of men, as the potter holds the clay, to do with them as I please; even as God holds all men's hearts in His hand to convert or to harden them, Jer. 18, 6; Rom. 9, 21. I can come no further with the Word than into the ears; into the heart I cannot come. Since faith cannot be poured into the heart, no one can nor should be forced or compelled to it; for God does

that alone, quickening the Word in men's hearts when and where He wills, according to His divine knowledge and good pleasure. Hence we should give free course to the Word, and not add our efforts to it. We have *jus verbi*, and not *executionem*, that is, we shall preach the Word, but leave the result to God alone.

"But if I act hastily, purposing to abolish this abuse of the mass by violence, there will be many who must join in the movement without knowing whether it be right or wrong, saying, I do not know what to think of it; I had to follow the congregation, the multitude, and force; thereby they get an erring, uneasy conscience of which they can afterwards hardly get rid again. And the compulsory law produces merely a sham, an outward show, apery, and a human ordinance, which begets seeming saints, hypocrites, and dissemblers. For sincerity of heart, and faith, and love are wanting. Where these three elements are lacking in a deed, it may be ever so righteous and good, it will amount to nothing; I would not give the stem of a pear for it.

"We must first win the people's heart; and this is done when I use the Word of God, preaching the Gospel, telling the people their error, and saying, Dear sirs, dear priests, dear papists, abandon the mass; your way of celebrating it is not right, you are sinning thereby and provoking God's wrath; I have now told you. I would, however, make no laws for them, nor insist on a common order. Whoever would be willing to follow, would follow; whoever would be unwilling, would stay away.

"If this were done, the Word would to-day fall into this man's heart, to-morrow into another's, and cause him to surrender now and judge himself guilty of having erred in this matter, and he would go his way and abandon the mass of his own accord. Thus God would effect more by His Word than if you, and I, and the whole world were to combine all power. For by the Word God conquers the heart; when the heart is conquered, you have won the whole man. Then the thing must finally fall and cease of itself. . . . I do not say this because

I wish to establish the mass again; no, let it lie in God's name; since it is fallen, let it be fallen. However, this we must bear in mind, and constantly preach it, that faith must not be seized and bound, nor by any kind of order joined to any work. Follow this rule and none other! By such storming and violence you will not effect your object; mark my words! . . .

"In brief, I will preach it, I will declare it, I will write it, but none will I force and constrain by violence; for faith must be voluntary and unconstrained, and must be embraced without compulsion."

Letter to Nic. Hausmann, March 17, 1522 (XV, 2011): "See that you do not permit any innovations to be introduced by a common order or by violence; by the Word alone those things must be attacked, overthrown, and abolished which our people have undertaken to abolish by force and violence. Thus Satan has driven them. . . . I denounce and reject by the Word alone. Whoever believes may believe and follow; whoever does not believe may disbelieve and go his way. For to faith, and whatever pertains to faith, no one must be compelled, but rather drawn by the Word, so that the willing believer comes of his free will."

Letter to Nic. Hausmann, March 26, 1522 (XXIa, 385 f.): "We deal with these matters by means of the Word alone, teaching what the Gospel contains concerning the mass and communion, and forcing none to abstain from it, or to take part in its celebration. Let every man's conscience see to it that he respond to the Gospel, till all grow and all become Evangelical."

To the city council of Altenburg, April 28, 1522 (XXIa, 397): "If they should say that it is not for us to judge which is the Gospel, or that it has not as yet been decided by a council: this we do not concede to them; for Scripture does not authorize a council, but each and every Christian to judge of doctrines, 1 Cor. 14, 29, and to know and avoid the wolves, Matt. 7, 15, and does not refer to what others decide, even though they were angels, but to every one's conscience; for every one must

believe for himself and know the difference between true and false doctrine; for 'he that believeth shall be saved.'"

Sermon on the 8th Sunday after Trinity, Matt. 7, 15—22 (XI, 1394, 3. 4 ff.): "Christ, our Lord, here commands and authorizes all Christians to be judges of all doctrine, granting them the right to decide what is right or wrong. Among the false Christians this point of doctrine has been changed and perverted for us for nigh unto a thousand years so that we had no right to judge, but simply had to accept without any examination what the pope and the councils decided.

"Now the Gospel under consideration completely overthrows popery and all councils; for we are not obliged to observe what the pope commands and what men decree. Hence I say once more, Grasp well this Gospel; for neither the pope nor the councils, nor any one is given authority to decree and decide what is faith. For Christ says, 'Beware of false prophets!' Either the Gospel must be lying, or else the pope and his councils. Christ says: We have the right to judge all doctrines and whatever we are commanded to do or not to do. Here the Lord is not speaking to the pope, however, but to all Christians. And just as the precept, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,' is given to all, even so these words, 'Beware of false prophets!' exclude no one. Whence it clearly follows that I may indeed judge of doctrine.

"Hence I am to say, Pope, you and your councils have made decrees; now I have the power to judge whether or no I may accept them. Why? Because you will not stand and answer for me when I must die, but I must see for myself where I stand, that I may be certain.

"For you must be so certain that it is God's Word as certain you are that you are living, nay, even more certain; for on this alone your conscience must rest. Even if all men should come, yes, the angels too, and all the world decide something, if you cannot grasp nor form the judgment, you are lost; for you must not base your opinion on the pope nor on any one else; you must be able to say for yourself, This God

says, that He does not say; this is right, that is wrong; otherwise it is not possible for you to stand.

“For if in the hour of death you rely on the pope and the councils, saying, The pope has said this, the councils have decided that, the holy Fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, have so voted, then the devil can soon make a loophole and insinuate the question, What if this be false? What if they had erred? When you experience such a temptation, you have already been overcome. Therefore you must play it safely, so that you may boldly and confidently say, This is God’s Word; on this I will risk my life and a thousand necks, if I had them. . . .

“They begin to say, however, But how can we know what is God’s Word, and what is true or false? We must learn this of the pope and councils. Never mind! Let them decide and declare what they like; but I say, You cannot put your confidence in that nor satisfy your conscience, you must decide for yourself; your neck is at stake, your life is at stake. Therefore God must say to your heart, This is God’s Word; otherwise there will be no decision.”

To the church at Erfurt, July 10, 1522 (XIX, 962, 10): “Do as St. Paul says (Tit. 3, 10. 11): ‘A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted.’ Teach with simplicity and give an account of your faith with gentleness. Whoever does not follow let him refuse to follow; whoever seduces may seduce; whoever creates a stench may create a stench still; whoever hallows may hallow still. You are excused; God will judge right; you can give to no man without his thanks. — I pray also, my dear brethren, that you would earnestly see to it that no disturbance be raised by our people, nor any occasion be given for it. There are many mischievous people who mean to aid the cause of the Gospel with swords and fists, and suppose they have done all when they abuse and harm priests and monks. They know not, however, that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places. Satan is a spirit, having neither flesh nor bones; wherefore he cannot be hurt with iron or fists. We must first wrest men’s hearts

from him by the Word of Truth, that being our sword and fist which none are able to resist: with this weapon the friends of Christ cleave Behemoth in twain. See by what means I have discomfited popery and the papal hierarchy, which heretofore appeared so frightful to all the world, when people were singing, Who is able to make war with the beast? For it had power to make war even with the saints and to overcome them. (Rev. 13, 4. 7.) Yet I have never lifted a finger against it, but Christ slew it with the spirit of His mouth."

Letter to the church at Leisuig, January, 1523 (X, 954, 6): "No one is to be forced to believe and to receive the Gospel."

"That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Authority to Judge all Doctrine," etc., 1523 (X, 1540, 3): "In this matter of judging doctrine, inducting and deposing teachers or pastors, we must pay no attention whatsoever to human tradition, law, ancient custom, usage, etc., whether it be established by pope or emperor, by princes or bishops, whether half the world or the whole world have so held, whether it have obtained one or a thousand years. For the soul of man is eternal, transcending all that is temporal; wherefore it must be ruled and held only with the eternal Word. For it is quite outrageous to rule men's consciences in matters divine with commandments of men and long-standing custom. . . .

"The word and doctrine of men have declared and ordained that the matter of judging doctrine should be left to the bishops, the learned, and the councils alone; that their decisions should be judged to be true and articles of faith, as their daily boasting about the papal canons sufficiently proves. For one can hear next to nothing out of their mouth besides this boast, that the right and authority to judge what is Christian or heretical belongs to them, and that the Christian layman ought to await their decision and abide by the same. This boast, by which they have terrorized the whole world, and which is their highest rock and confidence, behold, how insolently and foolishly it runs counter to the law and Word of God!

“For Christ declares quite the contrary, taking away from the bishops, the learned, and the councils both the right and the power of judging concerning doctrine, and giving it to every one and to all Christians alike, saying, John 10, 4. 5: ‘My sheep know my voice.’ ‘My sheep know not the voice of strangers.’

“Here you see plainly, indeed, to whom the right of judging doctrine belongs. Bishop, pope, learned men, and any one has the right to teach; but the sheep are to judge whether they teach the voice of Christ or the voice of strangers. What are those bubbles able to say against this who clamor and cry, Councils, councils! Why, you must hear the learned, the bishops, the majority, you must have regard to ancient usage and custom! Do you suppose God’s Word must give way to your ancient usage, custom, and bishops? Never! Therefore we let bishops and councils decide and declare what they like; but when we have the Word of God on our side, it must rest with us, and not with them, to say whether it is true or false, and they must yield to us and obey our Word.

“Here, methinks, you certainly see plainly enough what is to be expected of those who manage the soul with the word of men. Who fails to see now that all bishops, chapters, cloisters, and universities with all their members rave and rant against this clear word of Christ, in that they insolently take the right of judgment of doctrine from the sheep and arrogate it to themselves by their own wicked decree? Wherefore they are certainly to be held as murderers and thieves, wolves and apostate Christians, being openly convicted here not only of denying God’s Word, but likewise of ordaining and acting contrary to it. . . .

“Again Christ says, Matt. 7, 15: ‘Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves.’ Observe that here Christ grants the right of judgment not to the prophets and teachers, but to the scholars and sheep. For how could one beware of false prophets if he were not to consider, examine, and judge their doctrine? Fur-

thermore, the false prophets are in no way among the hearers, but only among the teachers. Hence all teachers must necessarily be subject to the judgment of their hearers.

"Again, the third statement is that of St. Paul, 1 Thess. 5, 21: 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good!' Note that here he will have no doctrine or decree held till it has been proved and recognized as good by the congregation that hears it. For this proving is not the business of the teachers; on the contrary, the teachers must first speak those things which are to be proved. Thus here also the judgment is taken from the teachers, and given to the scholars among the Christians."

"How Ministers are to be Chosen and Ordained," 1523 and 1524 (X, 1586, 65): "Christ teaches us that every one should consider his own welfare and salvation for himself, that he may know and be certain what to believe and whom to follow; that he is likewise a free, authorized judge of all that would teach him, being inwardly taught of God alone, John 6, 45. For you will not be damned or saved by another's doctrine, be it false or true, but by your belief alone. Another may teach and preach what he pleases, but it is for you to take heed at your greatest loss or gain what you believe."

When Luther's translation of the New Testament was eagerly bought and read everywhere as the most popular book of the day, Duke George of Albertine Saxony under severe penalties forbade his people to have it in their possession. This edict called forth Luther's excellent treatise on "Secular Magistrates: How Far They Must be Obeyed," 1523 (X, 395, 38 ff.): "The secular government has laws which extend no further than over body and property and whatever is external on earth. For over the soul God can and will allow no one to rule but Himself alone. Whenever the worldly power, therefore, presumes to legislate for the soul, it interferes with God's government, and only misleads and destroys the soul. This we purpose to make so plain that it cannot but be grasped, in order that our youngers, the princes and bishops, may see what fools

they are when they purpose to compel the people by their laws and commandments to believe thus or so.

“Although they are big fools, they must confess that they have no power over the soul. For it is evident that no man is able to kill or to quicken a soul, to lead it to heaven or to hell. And although they should refuse to believe this, Christ will certainly give sufficiently strong testimony to the truth of our statement, saying: ‘Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,’ Matt. 10, 28. Here, methinks, the soul is plainly enough taken out of every human hand and placed under God’s hand alone.

“Now tell me, how much wit do you suppose that chap to have who legislates where he has no authority whatsoever? Who would not judge him to be insane who would command the moon to shine when he wants it to shine? What a fine specimen of consistency if the citizens of Leipsic should want to impose laws on us at Wittenberg, or *vice versa*? They would certainly return thanks to such legislators by giving them snuff to clear the head and cure their cold. Notwithstanding, here our emperor and prudent princes are pursuing such a course of action, and permit pope, bishops, and sophists so to lead them, the blind leading the blind, that they command their people to believe, regardless of the Word of God, as they think fit; and yet claim to be Christian rulers; Heaven forbend!

“In addition, one may grasp it also by bearing in mind that every power should and can act only there where it is able to see, know, decide, judge, and bring about a change. For what sort of judge would he be who would blindly judge causes which he neither hears nor sees? Now tell me, how can any man see, know, try, judge, and change men’s hearts? For this is exclusively a prerogative of God. . . . For this reason it is vain and impossible to command or to compel one by force to believe thus or so. . . .

“Besides, it is at every one’s own peril how he believes, and he must see for himself that he believe aright. For as little as another can go to hell or to heaven for me, so little

also can he believe or disbelieve for me: and as little as he can open or shut heaven or hell for me, so little also can he force me to believe or not to believe. Since, then, it is at the peril of every one's conscience how he believes or disbelieves, and no prejudice is thereby done to the secular power, the latter should also be satisfied and mind its own business, letting people believe thus or so, as they can and like, and urging no one by force. For faith is essentially a free work, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a divine work in the spirit; how, then, should external force be able to produce and extort it? Hence the common saying, which is found in Augustine also: To faith no one can and should be forced.

“Moreover, these blind, wretched people do not see what a vain and impossible task they are undertaking. For however severely they command, and however vehemently they rage, they can at all events make the people do no more than follow them with the mouth and with the hand; the heart they certainly cannot constrain, though they should tear themselves to pieces. For true is the proverb: Thoughts are free. . . .

“You say, But civil authority does not compel them to believe, but restrains only outwardly, lest the people be seduced by false doctrine; how else could heretics be restrained? I reply, This the bishops should do; to them this office and work has been committed, and not to the princes. For heresy can never be repressed by force; that calls for a different management, this being a conflict and controversy unlike that in which the sword is used. The Word of God must contend here; if that prove ineffectual, the thing will assuredly remain uneffected of temporal power, though it bathe the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual thing which one cannot strike with steel, nor burn with fire, nor drown in water. Only the Word of God is here, however; that is sufficient, as St. Paul says, 2 Cor. 10, 4. 5: ‘The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.’

"Besides, there is no greater strengthening of faith and of heresy than when people proceed against it without the Word of God with mere force. For it will be held for certain that such power has no righteous cause, and deals contrary to justice, because it proceeds without the Word of God, and knows of no other resort than main force, as irrational brutes do. . . .

"Behold, then, what fine, prudent younkens these are! They mean to expel heresy, but go about it in such a way as only to strengthen the adversaries, laying themselves open to suspicion and justifying the former. If you wish to expel heresy, you must hit on a way by which, above all things, you pluck it out of the heart, and remove it root and all with right good will; by force you will not achieve this, but only strengthen it. What will it profit you, then, if you strengthen heresy in the heart, and weaken it only outwardly on the tongue, and make people tell lies? The Word of God, however, that enlightens the heart; and thus all heresies and errors pass out of the heart of themselves." (See also: "Of Adoring the Sacrament," 1524, XIX, 1321, 35.)

At the end of 1524, "Luther suddenly abandoned his views on the freedom of conscience," says A. F. Pollard, in "Cambridge Modern History," vol. II, p. 194. And an English Socialist writes: "Before the Peasants' War, when struggling to assert himself, Luther taught that heresy could not be repressed by force, that no fire could burn it, and no water drown it. Yet so soon as Luther saw other sectaries springing up around him, and claiming the same privilege as himself, he declared that as rebels to the State they deserved punishment, even banishment and death. This, then, is Luther's doctrine: The State is the head of religion, and *all* sectaries are rebels to the State." (Karl Pearson, M. A., formerly Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, in "The Ethic of Freethought," London, 1888, p. 232.) This writer evidently permitted himself to be blinded by his love for the Socialists of the sixteenth century, "the peasant robbers and murderers."

In a letter to Lazarus Spengler, of Nuernberg, dated February 4, 1525 (XXIa, 715), Luther says: "In reply to

your question as to how they [Thomas Muenzer and his followers in Nuernberg] should be punished, I, too, hold that they are not guilty of blasphemy, but I regard them just as the Turks and apostate Christians on whom secular magistrates are not to inflict punishment, particularly no corporal punishment. But if they should refuse to recognize and obey the secular magistrate, then everything is forfeited whatever they are and have; for in that case they assuredly meditate revolt and murder, and it is the duty of the secular magistrate to take cognizance of the matter." A few months later the Peasants' War came upon the country with all its horrors.

Sermon preached on the 5th Sunday after Epiphany on Matt. 13, 24—30; published in February, 1525, and republished in 1540 (XI, 504): "This Gospel teaches what attitude we are to maintain toward these heretics. We are not to root them out or destroy them. Christ plainly says here, 'Let both grow together.' We should use nothing but the Word of God here, because in regard to this matter it so happens that he who errs to-day, to-morrow may get into the right way. Who can tell at what time the Word of God will touch his heart? But if he be burned at the stake or deprived of his life in some other way, it is thereby made impossible for him to get into the right way. He is thus cut off from the Word of God and necessarily lost, whereas he might otherwise have been saved perhaps. In that case there comes to pass what the Lord says here in our text, *viz.*, while they gather up the tares, they root up also the wheat with them. That is, now, a most horrible thing in God's sight, and can never be justified. See, therefore, what insane people we have been so long a time, in that we meant to force the Turks to believe with the sword, the heretics with fire, the Jews by slaying, and gather up the tares by our own power, as if we were the people who are able to rule over men's hearts and minds, and as if we could make them godly and righteous, which only the Word of God can do. By killing them, however, we separate the people from the Word, so that it cannot possibly exert its influence on them, and thus make ourselves guilty of a double murder at once, so

far as we are concerned, inasmuch as we inflict temporal death on the body and, at the same time, eternal death on the soul, saying besides that we had done God service, and think we had earned a special reward in heaven. Therefore this passage should fairly frighten the inquisitors and manslayers (if they had no brow of brass), even if they had real heretics before them. But now they burn real saints, and are heretics themselves."

Letter to the city council of Danzig, May 5, 1525 (XXIa, 741): "But in particular, see that you are not taught to bear rule according to the law of Moses, and much less according to the Gospel. . . . The Gospel is a spiritual law, according to which rule cannot be borne, but every one must set it before himself to see whether or no he shall do what it says. And no one can and ought to be forced to accept it, even as no one can and ought to be forced to believe; for it is not the sword, but the Spirit of God that must teach and bear rule here. . . . The Gospel requires willing hearts that are led by the Spirit of God." See also the letter to the Christians in Livonia, June 17, 1525 (X, 259, 6).

"An Admonition to Peace," May, 1525 (XVI, 50, 9): "Secular magistrates must not interpose any prohibition as to what any one wishes to teach or believe, be it Gospel or falsehood; it is enough that they forbid the teaching of revolt and disturbances."

An open letter on the severe treatise against the peasants, 1525 (XIX, 40): "Who has ever heard that a person could be forced to do good or evil? Who is able to coerce a man's will?"

Letter to Spalatin, November 11, 1525 (XXIa, 807 f.): "Our princes do not compel to faith and the Gospel, but suppress external abominations. Since they [the papists] themselves, then, confess that princes have authority in external things, they condemn themselves. For princes must suppress public immoralities, as perjury, manifest blasphemies of God's name, such as these are, thereby compelling to no action, however, whether those who are being restrained believe or not, nor

yet when they revile in secret or not. For we are speaking of public revilings and blasphemies by which they blaspheme our God. This, I say, we must suppress if we can; if we cannot, we are compelled to permit it. Here no one is as yet compelled to faith or the Gospel; no one is compelled to an impious opinion of the heart, which they would do if they could."

At Augsburg, in 1518, the envoy of Cajetan, Urbanus de Serralonga, asked Luther, "What would you do if the pope and his cardinals were in your power?" "Treat them with respect," was Luther's reply. Carlstadt was one of the "other sectaries springing up around" Luther. Let us see whether Luther declared that he "deserved punishment, even banishment and death."

Letter to John Brismann in Koenigsberg, August 16, 1525 (XXIa, 772): "The unhappy fellow [Carlstadt] has been kept at my house in secret and safety [eight weeks]. Now the wide world is too narrow for him: he is everywhere so pursued that he has been compelled to beg his enemy for protection. I have treated the fellow as humanely as I possibly could, and have assisted him; however, he persists in his opinion, although convicted, as is the wont of this sort of spirits. Do you, therefore, beware of him and his doctrine!"

Letter to the Elector John, September 12, 1525 (XXIa, 779): "I write this, because I sincerely pity the poor man, and Your Electoral Grace well knows that mercy is to be shown to the miserable, especially to the innocent" [Carlstadt's family].

Letter to the Elector John, November 22, 1526 (XXIa, 895 f.): "Doctor Carlstadt has importuned me to intercede for him with Your Electoral Grace that he may be permitted to live at Kemberg, because the malice of the peasants makes it impossible for him to stay in the villages. I humbly beseech Your Electoral Grace to grant him this favor, although Your Electoral Grace has already done much for him and incurred much unfavorable comment on his account. He must answer for his soul; to his body and his own we should do good."

Letter to Nic. Gerbel, July 28, 1528 (XXIa, 1181): "Carlstadt, the viper in our bosom, is merely muttering, but does not dare to come out openly" [in favor of Zwingli].

Letter to the Elector John in regard to the abolition of the papal ceremonies in the collegiate church at Altenburg, February 9, 1526 (XXIa, 836): "Therefore you may graciously desire them either to desist altogether, or else to have their doings privately, without scandal to others. . . . If these abominations could or would be kept up without Your Electoral Grace's patronage and support [from the public treasury], you would be wholly without blame, and would have to let it continue. . . . The other reason is this: A secular ruler cannot permit his people to be led into dissension and discord by antagonistic preachers, because of the fear that it would eventually lead to disturbances and riot, but at one and the same place there shall also be the same kind of preaching. With this argument they at Nuernberg silenced their friars and closed the cloisters. . . . Lest they should say, however, that they were being compelled to faith, it should be intimated to them that such is not the intention, but that only their public scandal is forbidden, which they are not able to maintain by themselves, and concerning which they are obliged to confess that it has no warrant in Scripture, and yet mean to maintain the same wantonly to ruin other souls and to harm the country and its inhabitants, also to the disgrace and reproach of God and His Gospel. Let them be satisfied that they are allowed to stay in the country and to enjoy life and property, protection and honor, and that they may worship and serve in private whomsoever they like and as many gods as they like; publicly they shall not thus blaspheme the true God and seduce the people, unless they prove from Scripture that they have a right so to do."

Letter to the Christians at Erfurt, November, 1527 (X, 1524, 1): "God forbid that I should presume to have authority over other preachers, to be their judge or ruler, lest I also establish a papacy; but I will commit them to Christ, who only shall rule over His preachers in Christendom. . . . This,

I fear, is the reason why God is permitting you, despite this great light, to be troubled by that preacher of darkness, Doctor Conrad Klingen, the Franciscan, and does not give your city councilors courage to take action that the discord between the preachers be composed by causing them to hold a discussion and obliging those who cannot prove their views to keep silence, as other cities, Nuernberg and the like, have done. For it certainly is expedient for no city that public agitators and preachers be permitted to create discord among the people. One party should give way, whether it be the Evangelicals or the Papists, as Christ teaches, Matt. 10: 'In whatsoever city they refuse to hear your words, depart out of that city, and shake off the dust of your feet.' From him that refuses to hear us we are easily and soon parted."

"Against the Anabaptists," February, 1528 (XVII, 2188, 3): "Still it is not right, and I am sincerely sorry, that those wretched people [the Anabaptists] are so miserably murdered, burned, and cruelly slain. Everybody should be allowed to believe what he likes. If his belief be wrong, he will receive sufficient punishment in eternal hell-fire. Why, then, do they want to inflict on them temporal tortures also, so long as they merely err in faith, and are not seditious withal or otherwise resist the powers that be? Good God, how easily does it not happen that a person errs and falls into the snares of Satan! They should be resisted with Scripture and God's Word; with fire little will be achieved."

Letter to Wenceslaus Link, July 14, 1528 (X, 1533, 2 f.; cf. XXIa, 1403): "You ask whether it be lawful for the magistrate to kill false prophets? I am tardy to the sentence of death, even where it is abundantly merited. . . . For this reason I will and can in no wise advise nor admit that the magistrate have power to punish false teachers with death: it is enough that they be banished."

On April 19, 1529, the Protestants stated in their "Protest" that "in matters pertaining to God's honor and our souls' salvation every one must stand alone before God, and give an account of himself." "This "Protest," the "Magna Charta of

civil and religious liberty," had the full approval of Luther. (See De Wette, "Letters of Luther," III, 438—441.)

In the preface to his Small Catechism, 1529, Luther writes: "For although we cannot and should not force any one to believe, yet we should train and urge the masses to know what is right and wrong among those with whom they dwell and wish to make their living. For whoever would dwell in a city should know and observe the city laws which he wishes to enjoy, whether he believe or be at heart a hypocrite or knave."

Letter to Thomas Loescher, August 26, 1529 (XXIa, 1349; De Wette I, 326): "As to what you write about those blaspheming despisers [of the Gospel], this is my opinion: Even as no one is to be forced to believe and to accept the Gospel, so it is not to be permitted under the same magistrate that they blaspheme; but having been summoned, they are to be heard and to hear; and if they are not able to give an account, nor want to believe, they should also be bound over to complete silence; and a hotbed of sedition shall not be maintained. For whoever will contradict should do so publicly, and either publicly or privately he should be held in check by the authority of the magistrate." Compare also the letter under the same date to Joseph Levin Metzsch, X, 1686.

To the Elector John, November 18, 1529 (X, 552, 1): "We would prefer to die a hundred deaths to having our conscience reproach us that our Gospel had been the cause of any bloodshed or damage done on our account."

Sermon on 1 John 3, 21, A. D. 1529—1530 (IX, 1591, 68): "But with unbelief civil government has nothing to do."

"An Admonition to Receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord," 1530 (X, 15): "If any one wants to deny Christ, and become unchristian and remain an unbeliever, we let him alone, without laying constraint on him, nor do we bother ourselves about him, except that we say to him: 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' He will meet his judge and constrainer without fail; we are excused and have done our duty."

Exposition of the 82d Psalm, 1530 (V, 717, 52 f.): "Here the question arises whether they [the secular rulers] should also repress and punish heresies, since no one should and can be forced to believe. Here we must answer: First, some heretics are seditious, who publicly teach that no magistrate should be tolerated; likewise, that no Christian may hold a magisterial office; also, that one should possess no property, but desert wife and children, forsake house and home, or hold and have all things in common. Such are straightly and without any doubt to be punished by the magistrate, inasmuch as they openly oppose the civil laws and the powers that be, Rom. 13. For they are not simply heretics only, but as seditious they attack the powers that be, and their government and order. . . .

"Secondly, if any would teach contrary to a known article of faith which is clearly established in Scripture and received the world over by all Christendom, such as the children are taught in the Creed; *e. g.*, if any one would teach that Christ is not God, but a mere man, and the same as any other prophet, as the Turks and the Anabaptists hold: such should not be tolerated either, but punished the same as public profaners, for they, too, are not simply heretics only, but public blasphemers. Now it is clearly the duty of the magistrate to punish public blasphemers, as those are punished who in other respects curse, swear, reproach, revile, rail, slander, defame, etc. For such teachers dishonor the name of God by their blasphemy, and deprive their neighbor of his honor before men. Likewise the magistrate should also punish, or at least not tolerate, those who teach that Christ had not died for our sins, but that every one must render satisfaction for them himself. For that is also public blasphemy against the Gospel and a commonly received article of faith confessed by us in the Creed, where we say: 'I believe the forgiveness of sins,' and, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, who died, rose again,' etc.; likewise, whoever teaches that there is no resurrection of the dead, and no life everlasting nor hell, and the like; as the Sadducees and Epicureans taught, who are multiplying at the present time also among the great wiseacres. For by such action no one is forced to believe, for

he can still very well believe what he pleases. Only his teaching and blaspheming is forbidden, by which he means to take from God and the Christians their doctrine and Word, and wants to do this to their injury while enjoying their protection and sharing all their secular privileges. Let him remove to a place where there are no Christians, and do it there.

“In the third place, if it happens that in a parish, city, or dominion the Papists and Lutherans (as they are called) get to brawling and preach against each other with regard to some points of doctrine, both sides claiming to have the Scriptures on their side, I should still be unwilling to suffer such dissension, and my Lutherans also should willingly retire and keep silence if they noticed that people were unwilling to hear them, as Christ teaches Matt. 10, and wait to have themselves constrained to preach, as I do. For I quit without much ado if they are unwilling to hear me, and all my preaching and writing I had to do by constraint. But if neither party is willing to yield and keep silence, or perhaps cannot do so for reasons of office, then the magistrate should take action and hear the matter, and whichever side does not prove its point from Scripture should be bound over to silence. For it is not expedient that antagonistic preaching be permitted to prevail among the people of a parish, because it results in divisions, disturbances, hatred and envy, in other secular matters also.

“By none of these things is any one forced to believe, but the peace of the congregation is secured against those headstrong chaps.”⁴⁾

Exposition of the 118th Psalm, June 13—26, 1530 (V, 1189, 25. 75): “The true Christian Church preaches the Word

4) As the purpose of this contribution is not to vindicate, but to present, Luther's views on freedom of conscience, we cannot enter into a detailed discussion of the foregoing quotation. We can merely suggest, first, that the reader study the opinions of eminent American jurists on the subject of blasphemy, and, secondly, that he bear in mind that Luther, who was a most practical man, wrote in Germany, not in the United States, in the sixteenth century, not in the twentieth. Both, place and time, — it was a time of tremendous changes and peculiar conditions, — necessitated the policy advocated by him.

of God, and forces no one to receive it; the person that refuses to believe it she lets alone, and withdraws herself from him, as Christ teaches Matt. 10 and 18, and as St. Paul does throughout the book of Acts, consigning them to God's judgment.

"We kill none on account of their doctrine, nor do we spoil any of their worldly goods, but let every one believe what he pleases; we do not lay constraint on them, we do not urge them by violence; we let the powers that be punish revolt, disturbances, and dissension, nor is it our purpose or plan to injure any one: but rather do we prevent all these things wherever and by whatever means we can possibly do so; we inculcate and preserve peace most zealously, and, on the other hand, suffer murder, bloodshed, poverty, and persecution most horribly, all these things being signs of a true spirit."

Comment on Matt. 7, 15, November 9, 1530; published in 1532 (VII, 625, 94): "Though dealing with a high hand, they can but take my life and goods; but my heart and faith they cannot take away from me by force."

"An Epistle of Warning to the People in Frankfurt-on-the-Main," A. D. 1533 (XVII, 2017, 22): "We force no one to confession, as all our writings attest; whoever does not want it, let him forbear; even as we do not care if any one will not have our Catechism and doctrine. In this no one constrains another. For, thank God, we are sufficiently taught that Christ, our Lord, will have no haughty, headstrong chap in His kingdom. Why, then, should we bring such haughty spirits into His kingdom by force?"

Letter to Lorenz Castner and his associates in Freiberg, February 11, 1536 (XX, 1758): "The magistrates would do well to attend to the matter, and bind this spirit over to silence. For he would like to plunge you at Freiberg into disaster."

Letter to King Christian of Denmark, December 2, 1536 (XXIb, 2127): "I am pleased that you have extirpated the bishops (who can not cease from persecuting God's Word and troubling the secular government)."

Letter to Melancthon, April 8, 1540 (XXIb, 2445): "For although we poor sinners walk in the sinful flesh, still we are

pure from blood, yea, we hate those bloody men and the god of blood who possesses and drives them."

Against Hans Wurst, A. D. 1541 (XVII, 1326, 30): "No one can deny that we do not shed blood, murder, and hang people, and take revenge, as indeed we might have done and still might do."

Sermon on the Gospel for the 23d Sunday after Trinity, Matt. 22, 15—22; published in 1544 (XIIIa, 968, 16 ff.): "Caesar [the government] should not disturb in any way the government of God, and not prevent the people from rendering unto God the things which they should render to God. . . .

"If the secular rulers, however, should undertake to do this, the subjects should not obey them, but rather suffer whatever sufferings this may entail. . . .

"God will place body and goods, house and home under the power of Caesar, that only the heart be reserved to Himself and He may rule in the heart by His Word and Spirit." (Comp. XIIIa, 721, 21. 22.)

In his very last sermon, preached at Eisleben, February 15, 1546, three days before his death, the great champion of private judgment and liberty of conscience declared once more (XII, 1260, 14): "I allow that the emperor, king, pope, cardinal, princes, and lords are prudent, and wise; but I will believe on my Lord Christ alone: He is my Master and Lord whom God has directed me to hear and to learn of Him what is true, divine wisdom. Whereat the pope and his partisans cry out: Nay, nay! you ought not do so; you ought to obey the rulers, and do what we bid you. True, say I, this I should do, but you must first agree with the Lord who here says: 'All things are delivered unto me of my Father,' etc. Therefore, dear pope, emperor, king, lord, and prince, do not come at me thus: I will gladly hearken to you in the worldly government, but your claim to sit in Christendom as lord, and to have authority to decide what I should believe and do, this claim I deny; for you wish to be prudent and wise in a matter where you are a fool, and where nothing has been revealed to you. For here is the Lord whom alone we should hear in these matters, as He also

says in this passage: 'Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.' . . .

"This, and much more, might be said on this Gospel, but I am too feeble; let this suffice. God give us grace that we receive His precious Word with thanksgiving, and increase and grow in the knowledge and faith of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and continue steadfast in the confession of His holy Word unto the end. Amen."

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