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Theological Mood and Method, 1537

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# A Conversation Between Pasquil and German: Theological Mood and Method, 1537

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Like the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles were forged for use in confessional confrontation and were the product of a complex political-ecclesiastical situation. Luther composed this confession of faith not for himself but at the request of his prince. Elector John Frederick of Saxony ordered the summary of the chief articles of faith as a position paper to be used in possible negotiations with representatives of the Roman party after Pope Paul III promulgated a bull of convocation for a general council in June 1536. The Smalcald Articles were but one literary reaction to the papal bull of convocation. Other writings by Luther's fellow believers reveal more about the mood of the Lutheran camp when it first faced the papal challenge of the convocation of the council which many Lutherans had so long demanded. This study presents one such document, *A Conversation Between Pasquil and German on the Forthcoming Council at Mantua*. This tract helps detail and explain the suspicion with which the followers of Luther regarded the council of Paul III, scheduled for the city of Mantua; it also shows how the theologians of the 16th century presented arguments of an ecclesiastical-political nature to the public.

From 1518 Luther had on occasion called for a general council to determine his own case and to solve the problems which were afflicting the church of his time.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> After his confrontation with Cardinal Ca-

Evangelical princes had expressed interest in participating in a general council in the introduction to the Augsburg Confession.<sup>2</sup> Papal partisans, especially among the Germans, also placed great hope in a reforming council, for they viewed it as a device to counter the growing Evangelical party and to end the abuses rampant in the church of their time.<sup>3</sup> But the defenders of the institutional status quo in Rome successfully avoided and evaded the rising demand for a reform council throughout the pontificate of Clement VII (1523—1534). The elec-

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jetan in Augsburg in 1518, Luther prepared an appeal to a general council but did not want it to be distributed unless he was placed under the ban. His printer, perhaps zealous for profit, released the *Appellatio F. Martini Lutheri ad Concilium*, which was dated Nov. 28, 1518, on Dec. 11, 1518; see *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, (henceforth abbreviated WA), (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883—), II, 34—40, and, for the discussion and background of this appeal, Ernest Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp. 344—70. In 1520, in his *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, Luther also suggested that a general council might prove helpful for Christendom, WA 6, esp. 413, 437.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 5th edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 47, 12—49, 14; *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 26—27.

<sup>3</sup> The great Tridentine scholar Hubert Jedin details Roman Catholic agitation for a general council at various points in "Book Two" of his *A History of the Council of Trent*, translated from the German by Ernest Graf, I (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 166 to 581.

tion of Alessandro Farnese as Pope Paul III in 1534 brought a supporter of the idea of a general council to the highest level of the Roman hierarchy. In consistories on Oct. 17 and Nov. 13, 1534, the new pope announced his intention of calling such a council. In early 1535 he summoned to Rome Peter Paul Vergerio, papal legate to the court of Ferdinand, brother of Emperor Charles V and king of the Romans. Vergerio and Paul III conferred on the situation of the Roman party in Germany where both Evangelicals and those loyal to Rome were becoming increasingly exasperated at the papacy's delay in calling a council. Vergerio was then sent to obtain the assent of the Germans for a council and for its site; at the same time envoys were sent on similar missions to Emperor Charles V in Spain and the King of France. The pope suggested four possible locations for the council: Mantua, Turin, Piacenza, and Bologna. As he toured Germany, Vergerio collected a variety of reactions, mostly equivocal, to the pope's suggestions. On this journey he met with Luther and Bugenhagen in Wittenberg.<sup>4</sup>

In April 1536 Charles V visited Rome. During his stay there the pope made the decision to call a general council in the northern Italian city of Mantua, which was a fief of the emperor. On April 8 seven cardinals, assisted by three former legates to Germany — Aleander, Rangoni, and Vergerio — were charged with the composition of a bull of convocation for the council. The emperor's chief counselors, Granvella and Cobos, were also consulted in the preparation of its text. At Vergerio's insistence the formula "on the model of the earlier councils" was dropped from the de-

scription of the forthcoming council because the phrase was objectionable to the Evangelicals. Thus, at this time some in the Roman party expected or hoped that the Evangelicals would take part in the council.

The first draft of the bull was read in consistory on May 5 and was ratified in its final form on June 2, 1536. Twenty-six cardinals signed it. The bull *Ad dominici gregis curam* summoned the general council to Mantua on May 23, 1537. It stated the council's purpose in the traditional terminology of conciliar goals: the extirpation of errors and heresies, the reform of morals, the restoration of peace in Christendom, and the preparation of a great expedition against the infidels.

Two factors prevented the assembling of the council at Mantua on May 23, 1537. Francis I, king of France, refused to allow French representatives to attend the council while he was still at war with Charles V. The Duke of Mantua, Federigo II Gonzaga, demanded that the pope provide for a guard of five to six thousand men under the duke's command for the policing of Mantua during the council. This extravagant demand decisively turned the pope against convening the council at Mantua. The bull *Decet Romanum pontificem* explained why the council would have to be postponed until Nov. 1, 1537. By the end of August 1537 the papal court had definitely decided that Mantua would not be host to the council and asked the Doge to put a Venetian mainland city at the disposal of the council. Vicenza was offered; the council was scheduled for May 1, 1538, in that city. Although a small number of prelates did assemble in Vicenza, a bull of prorogation recessed the council before

<sup>4</sup> See Schwiebert, p. 740.

any formal sessions had taken place. It was not until Nov. 19, 1544, that the bull *Laetare Jerusalem* scheduled the council for Trent and promised an opening on March 15, 1545. The council did open Dec. 11, 1545.<sup>5</sup>

The first papal bull of convocation, issued in June 1536, thrust a dilemma upon the leaders of the German Evangelicals, the theologians, and the princes of the Empire. On the one hand, the Evangelicals had called for a free, general council to act on the moral and theological crises facing the church. On the other hand, the followers of Luther were convinced that any council convoked and arranged by the pope would be neither free nor general. John Frederick, successor of Frederick the Wise and John the Steadfast, reacted negatively to the prospect of Evangelical attendance at a papal council, but in the summer of 1536 he inaugurated studies of how his party should meet the summons to attend the gathering scheduled for Mantua. He requested a theological memorandum detailing which doctrines could be discussed and which were above discussion, should the Evangelicals be able to meet in dialog with the Roman party in the new ecclesiastical situation that had resulted from the papal call to council. Luther's Smalcald Articles answered this request.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> These details have been taken from Jedin, I, 288—354; see Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes, From the Close of the Middle Ages*, ed. Ralph Francis Kerr, XI (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., 1912), 41—132.

<sup>6</sup> More complete background material for the Smalcald Articles may be found in WA 50, 161—91, and in Hans Volz's two studies, *Luthers Schmalkaldische Artikel und Melancthons Tractatus de potestate papae: Ihre Geschichte von der Entstehung bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gotha: Leopold Kletz Ver-

When the political leaders of the German Evangelical party met at Schmalkalden in a regular meeting of the Smalcald League on Feb. 8, 1537, the summons to the Council of Mantua headed the list of immediate concerns. The papal legate charged with calling all Germany to Mantua, Peter van der Vorst,<sup>7</sup> appeared at the meeting. He received rather abrupt treatment from John Frederick, who refused to accept the papal summons to council. The other Evangelical princes supported the

lag, 1931), and *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte von Martin Luthers Schmalkaldischen Artikeln (1536—1574)* (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter und Co., 1957). An overview of Evangelical reaction to the first bull of convocation issued for what would become the Council of Trent and also to the proceedings of that council itself is found in Robert Stupperich, "Die Reformatoren und das Tridentinum," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 47 (1956), 20—63. More specific studies of the Saxon reaction to the 1536 bull of convocation are found in H. Virck, "Zu den Beratungen der Protestanten über die Konzilsbulle vom 4. Juni 1546," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 13 (1892), 487—512, and in Ernst Bizer, "Die Wittenberger Theologen und das Konzil 1537: Ein ungedrucktes Gutachten," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 47 (1956), 77—101. The former article is based chiefly on material found in *Corpus Reformatorum*, III.

<sup>7</sup> Peter van der Vorst, son of a counselor of Brabant, studied law and accompanied Adrian Floriszee Boeyens, later Pope Adrian VI, to Spain, where he served in the royal government. He was ordained, became an auditor in the Rota at Rome at the recommendation of Charles V, and was appointed bishop of Acqui in Savoy in 1534. A jurist who spoke the German language, van der Vorst was particularly suited to serve on the delicate mission of summoning the Germans to the projected council. He entered the empire at Trent on Oct. 13, 1536, traveled to Vienna to visit King Ferdinand, then continued his journey through Germany. For details of the journey, see Pastor, XI, 80—84, 89—92. Jedin describes his encounter with the Evangelical princes, I, 317 to 322.

elector of Saxony and refused interviews to van der Vorst. Jedin quotes a statement issued by the league on the papal council:

We are unable to alter our view of the Pope's intentions and to accept the Council since acceptance would be the same as submitting in advance to the verdict which surely will be pronounced. . . . The freedom of the Council does not consist in the possibility of a free expression of opinion but in the Pope being debarred from the presidency. By a Christian Council we mean one whose only standard is Holy Scripture. This was the meaning of the earlier decisions of the Diet and from these we will not depart. The Diet's demand for a German locality for the Council conforms to the practice of the ancient Church, when theological controversies were decided in the place of their origin. Mantua is suspect by the mere fact that the Duke's brother is a Roman cardinal. We do not doubt the Emperor's good intentions, but he will be as powerless to give them effect as was the Emperor Sigismund at Constance. We are not going to walk into the Pope's trap; for us Mantua is unacceptable. If the Pope prevents the assembly of a free Christian Council in Germany, we protest before God and the whole of Christendom that we are not responsible for the consequences, and we reserve our complete freedom of action.<sup>8</sup>

For nearly 20 years the Lutherans had been calling for a general council. Now, when the Roman party finally offered a council, the Lutherans rejected it. Explanations were in order. Jedin asserts that a conciliar condemnation would have won back the great majority of the German people to the Roman obedience;<sup>9</sup> if this is

<sup>8</sup> Jedin, I, 321—322.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 580. Jedin operates with this assumption but does not carefully construct a detailed case for it.

true, the Evangelicals must have felt a great need for justifying their refusal to accept the papal summons to council. One such justification is the popular pamphlet, *A Conversation Between Pasquil and German on the Forthcoming Council at Mantua*, which was printed in Latin and in two German editions. A copy of one of the German editions, in the private library of Arthur Carl Piepkorn, St. Louis, Mo., provides the basis of this translation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tschackert, "Pasquilli de concilio Mantuano iudicium, eine bisher unbekannte Schrift des Antonius Corvinus vom Konvente zu Schmalkalden 1537: Festgabe zur Feier seines 400 jährigen Geburtstages am 27. Februar 1901," *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift (Luthertum)*, 12 (1901), 213—19, discusses the pamphlet; see Tschackert's *Analecta Corviniana: Quellen zur Geschichte des niedersächsischen Reformators Antonius Corvinus (†1553)* (Leipzig: Verlag von M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1910), pp. 26—30. The Latin version was published with another treatise by an unknown author; its title reads *PASQVILLI/DE CONCILIO MAN-/tuano Iudicium./QVERIMONIA. PAPI-/starum ad Legatum Pon-/tificium in comicijs/Schmalkaldianis./Mantua vae miseris nimium vicina Papistis./MDXXXVII.* Tschackert used what he thought was the only available German edition of the pamphlet, an 8-leaf tract with the following title page: "Ein unterredung/zwischen dem Pasquillen/und Deudschen, von dem zukünftigen Conci-/lio zu Mantua./Psalm CXXIII./Gelobet sey der HERR, das er uns/nicht gibt zum raube jnn jre zene./MDXXXVII." This pamphlet is listed by Arnold Kuczynski, *Thesaurus libellorum historiam Reformationis illustrantium* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1870), p. 237, number 2654. Professor Piepkorn's copy is a different edition from that used by Tschackert. It consists of 11 pages, 13 by 18 centimeters. The title page reads: "Ein vnderredung zwi-/schē dem Pasquillen und Deut-/schen von dem zukünftigen Concilio zu/Mantua.//Psalm CXXIII./Gelobet sey der Herr, das er uns nicht/gibt zum raube jnn jre zeene./MDXXXVII." This pamphlet is listed by Kuczynski, p. 237, number 2653. There are minor differences between the German and Latin versions; for instance, the German version contains some coarse phrases

The title page of *A Conversation* bears no author's name. Paul Tschackert has determined that Anthony Corvinus, a theologian on the staff of Philip of Hesse at the meeting at Schmalkalden in February 1537, wrote this dialog. Corvinus referred to a "pamphlet which was written by me at Schmalkalden" in a letter to a Hessian official, Henry Lersener, dated July 13, 1537.<sup>11</sup> According to the letter, the Wittenbergers had arranged for the printing of the pamphlet at Eastertime (April 1), within a month after the adjournment of the Schmalkalden assembly. Tschackert associates the pamphlet mentioned by Corvinus in this letter with *A Conversation* on the basis of a note jotted in a 16th-century hand on a copy of the Latin edition that was found in the library of a Zwickau school.<sup>12</sup>

The task of writing such a pamphlet against the Council of Mantua fell to Corvinus at least in part because of his close association with Philip, landgrave of Hesse, after John Frederick of Saxony the most prominent Evangelical political leader. Corvinus (Latinized form of "Rabe") was born Feb. 27, 1501, at Warburg-on-the-

which are absent in the Latin. Tschackert, "Pasquilli," pp. 217—18, asserts that the Latin version is the original. Jedin agrees, I, 335, note 5. Neither presents a case for the priority of the Latin.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tschackert, ed., *Briefwechsel des Antonius Corvinus* (Hannover und Leipzig: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1900), pp. 33—34, number 42. The letter says that the poem attached to the tract was written by Corvinus' friend John Stigel, the Wittenberg poet. Tschackert, "Pasquilli," p. 217, attributes the poem which precedes the text of the tract in the German version to Corvinus himself. Tschackert believes the letter refers to the Latin version of the tract, which evidently contains a different poem, by Stigel.

<sup>12</sup> Tschackert, "Pasquilli," pp. 214—15.

Diemel. He entered Loccum cloister in 1519 as a novice and was expelled from the monastery at Riddagshausen because he was a follower of Luther in 1523. After a stay in Marburg, he went to Goslar in 1528, where at von Amsdorf's recommendation he became pastor; the next year he assumed the pastorate in Witzzenhausen-on-the-Werra in Hesse. His extracongregational missions included an attempt to convert the captured Anabaptists after the capitulation of Münster in 1536. He served as a spiritual adviser to Philip of Hesse, and in that capacity accompanied his prince to conferences at Schmalkalden, Hagenau, Worms, Regensburg, and Nürnberg. Corvinus signed the Smalcald Articles. In 1539—1542 he took part in the reforms of Nordheim, Lippe, Hildesheim, and Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel; after 1542 he became the superintendent of the Lutheran Church in Calenberg-Göttingen, serving the Duchess Elizabeth as spiritual adviser. Her son, Erich, imprisoned him because of his opposition to the Augsburg Interim in 1549; at his release his health was broken, and he died soon thereafter.<sup>13</sup>

With other Hessian theologians Corvinus had signed a memorandum in the latter half of 1536 on the proposed council

<sup>13</sup> For further biographical information on Corvinus, see Paul Tschackert, *Antonius Corvinus: Leben und Schriften* (Hannover und Leipzig: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1900), and Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Antonius Corvinus, ein Märtyrer des evangelisch-lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1892). Bibliographical information is provided by Georg Geisenhof, *Bibliotheca Corviniana: Eine bibliographische Studie* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964; a reprint of the edition published at Braunschweig by Albert Limbach in 1900). Because Geisenhof's bibliography was prepared before Tschackert identified Corvinus as the author of *A Conversation*, Geisenhof does not discuss this tract.

at Mantua. These theologians concluded that a free, general council was necessary to preserve the unity of Christendom and hoped that such a council, like the councils called by the Roman emperors in the ancient church, might stem the tide of schism and (Roman) heresy. But the memorandum insisted that such a council ought to be held in Germany since Mantua could provide no safety for German princes. The Hessians denied that a truly free council could be conducted under the presidency of the pope. The Evangelical estates ought not subject themselves to the decisions of the papal council but should inform such a council that the estates would appeal its decisions to a future free and general council.<sup>14</sup>

Corvinus continued to argue against the papal council in his own tract, *A Conversation*. This pamphlet fits in with two other literary productions that issued from Corvinus' pen during 1537. Jedin attributes to him the brief pamphlet entitled *Beelzebub to the Holy Papal Church*, printed in late 1537.<sup>15</sup> This satirical attack on the Roman party accuses the pope of arranging the council at Mantua only so that he might "eradicate and destroy the Galilean with his Lutherans." Corvinus also wrote *Concerning the Power and Authority of Councils* in August 1537.<sup>16</sup> This 53-page discussion, cast in dialog

form, addressed itself to a pamphlet by a Roman propagandist of Frankfurt-am-Main, John Dietenberger.<sup>17</sup> *Concerning the Power and Authority of Councils* provides more substantial and detailed, as well as more theological, arguments than the other two pamphlets. It discusses the nature of a free, general council and defends the decision of the Smalcald League to reject the papal summons to Mantua.

In *A Conversation* Corvinus summarized the case of the Evangelicals against attendance at the council called for Mantua. He put the case into the mouths of two characters, Pasquil and German, and presented his arguments simply and graphically. He evoked latent popular suspicion of the Roman party to aid him in convincing his readers that the Evangelicals were taking the proper course in rejecting the papal council. German is a simple fellow. He acts as a "straight man" for Pasquil. For

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*sen, zubalten/ schuldig sey, gründlicher bericht,/Dem Concilio zu Man-/tua, unnd einem genant der Dietenberger,/zu gefallen geschriben, durch/D. Anto. Corvinum,/Und ietzt newlich Anno MDxxxvij./im Augst aussgangen.* This tract is on microfilm at the Foundation for Reformation Research, St. Louis, Mo.

<sup>17</sup> John Dietenberger (ca. 1475—1537), a leading Roman Catholic propagandist of the early years of the Reformation, received a doctorate in theology from the University of Mainz in 1515. He returned to parish and monastic duties, including service as prior in Frankfurt-am-Main (1520—1526) and in Koblenz (1527—1532); in 1532 he became professor of theology at Mainz. In addition to a number of controversial works, he wrote a series of postils. Hermann Wedewer, *Johannes Dietenberger, 1475—1537: Sein Leben und Wirken* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herderische Verlagshandlung, 1888), pp. 204—5, argues that Corvinus' citations in *Von der Concilien Gewalt* indicate the Hessian reformer was using Dietenberger's 1529 tract, *Fragestück an alle Christglaubigen Johannis Dietenberger*, dedicated to the city of Frankfurt-am-Main.

<sup>14</sup> Tschackert, *Antonius Corvinus*, pp. 43 to 46; see Stupperich, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Jedin, I, 335. *Beelzebub an die Heilige Bepstliche Kirche* is reprinted in Oskar Schade, *Satiren und Pasquille aus der Reformationszeit*, II (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966; a reprint of the second edition, Hannover, 1863), 102—4, with notes on 309.

<sup>16</sup> *Von der Concilien Ge-/walt und Autoritet, warin dieselbige/stehe, wie fern sie sich strecke, unnd wie/fern man, was sie beschlies-*

example, he innocently suggests that the pope was a "fine pious man" who was trying to enlist the Germans so that he could accomplish something; this provides the occasion for Pasquil's attack on Pope Paul III. Perhaps Corvinus hoped to add a touch of realism to his dialog by placing an occasional oath and coarse expression in the mouth of German.

The other character is named Pasquil, which means "pamphleteer," although Tschackert sees further significance in the name. In Rome a statue named "Pasquino" was often decorated with antipapal expressions. Tschackert interprets the name Pasquil as "little Pasquino"; he thus attributes to the name an anti-Roman nuance.<sup>18</sup> Pasquil has been in Rome for some time as the conversation begins. Unlike German, he lacks any naïveté about virtue in Rome. He has seen all its vice and knows the gossip of the city. Pasquil has the facts; he applies logic to them and states the conclusions to which the author hopes to bring his readers.

Pasquil appears to be a member of the Roman party. But his strong condemnation of the moral vice in Rome and of the papal plans for a council seem to reflect a partisan Lutheran evaluation of those plans if not also of the level of Christian living in the papal city. For Pasquil does storm against the papal party. He condemns it throughout for a host of sins and is especially vehement when he is discussing the papal council. That council he regards as a trick and a means for subverting the Lutherans by deceit and force. A loyal Roman Catholic might well have denounced the moral

degradation evident in Rome in such strong terms in 1537. It is less likely that such a person would have been so strongly suspicious of the proposed council.

Corvinus set his case against the papal council in the midst of general criticism of the morality of the papal court and city. Such criticism added force to the negative, anti-Roman arguments which Corvinus was using against the Council of Mantua, for this moral criticism was credible in the minds of the German masses. Corvinus' position became more acceptable to the common man because he was already convinced of the treachery of the Roman ecclesiastics.

According to Pasquil, the papal party intended only to preserve its own privileged position to the greatest extent possible, regardless of what effect that might have on the Gospel. Hesitating to use force openly at first, the Romanists wanted to use the council to condemn the Lutherans. This condemnation had already been decided upon, Pasquil maintained, and so the appearance of the Lutherans at the council would not change anything.

The council, German finally saw under Pasquil's guidance, would serve only to fool the people, especially Emperor Charles V. The emperor had long prodded the pope to call a council to settle the religious question which had split his empire and which he had been unable to settle by several edicts and warnings to his Evangelical princes.<sup>19</sup> Corvinus depicted the emperor

<sup>18</sup> Tschackert, "Pasquilli," pp. 213—214; see Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, edited by Moritz Heyne, VII (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1885), col. 1482.

<sup>19</sup> The Introduction to the Augsburg Confession, 15—24, mentions Charles V's interest in a general council, *Bekennnisschriften*, 47, 12—49, 14; *The Book of Concord*, pp. 26—27. Jedin also traces the efforts of Charles to secure a general council at various points in his "Book Two," I, 166—581.

as a pious and good man who was being deceived by the clerics of the Roman party. The council had been planned by the pope, according to Pasquil, to push the good emperor into a program of violent extermination of the Lutherans. In his comments on Charles V Corvinus reflects the hope and the necessity of the Smalcald League. The Evangelical princes greatly feared any increased hostility from their constitutional lord and were anxious to prevent his turning to the use of force in the battle against Luther's ideas which he had been waging since the Diet of Worms in 1521.

Corvinus (and Pasquil) argued that attendance at the council in Mantua would do no good since the council's purposes were evil and its decisions had already been made. This argument was reinforced by Pasquil's brief discourse on the man who had convoked the council, Pope Paul III, a worse than average Roman sinner, and by his description of the papal legate who was delivering the summons to council in Germany, Peter van der Vorst, a papal official whose specialities were deception and drinking. Furthermore, the Evangelicals could not safely attend the council in Mantua; the example of John Hus illustrates what happens to those accused of heresy when they attend papal councils.<sup>20</sup>

This popular pamphlet avoids sophisti-

<sup>20</sup> John Hus (ca. 1369—1415), preacher and university professor in Prague, led the revival of Czech national and especially religious life at the turn of the 15th century. Pope John XXIII excommunicated Hus in 1411. His appeal to a general council brought Hus to the city of Constance, where such a council was meeting, in 1414. Although he traveled to Constance under the safe-conduct of the Holy Roman emperor, Sigismund, he was placed on trial, condemned as a heretic, and burned at the stake July 6, 1415.

cated theological analysis. It hammers home its charges that the proposed council is no more than a rigged assembly, the purpose of which is the quick condemnation of the Evangelical party without a hearing. It impugns the motives of the council's proponents and attacks the pope and his legate in simple terms which would sound convincing to the man on the street.

*A Conversation* does not address the larger and theoretical question of the usefulness or necessity of a free and general council. This concept Corvinus had supported in the memorandum of the Hessian theologians in 1536. *A Conversation* addresses only the immediate situation produced by the long-awaited convocation of a council by the pope. By attacking that council, Corvinus was not repudiating the idea of a general council altogether. He was challenging the right of a meeting arranged and governed by the pope to regard itself as a free and general council of the church.

The Smalcald Articles did not fulfill their immediate purpose as a confessional basis for discussion with the Roman party for a number of reasons. The princes of the Smalcald League declined to use them as their basis for negotiation with Rome;<sup>21</sup> and the papal council, delayed and transferred for some 9 years, began its work in a different ecclesiastical situation. But the hesitancy of the Evangelical party to enter into a council at this time is explained, if only in popular arguments, in this tract by Corvinus.

*A Conversation* also illustrates the way in which a theologian of Luther's age chose to carry his arguments on a vital topic to

<sup>21</sup> See WA 50, 176; Volz, *Schmalkaldische Artikel*, pp. 16—26, and *Urkunden*, pp. 145 to 175.

the people. As an experienced poet, Corvinus began his tract with a catchy verse, 13 rhymed iambic tetrameter couplets, designed to convey the desperate situation of Pasquil because he dares to report truthfully what is the state of the Roman Church; the poem further summons its German readers to the defense of their faith. Corvinus proceeds to present his argument in popular, simple dialog which drives home its few points with allegations based on the convictions which his readers already possessed concerning the Roman party. In mood and in method this tract gives insight into the developing Lutheran community and its relationship to the defenders of the papal position in the key decade of the 1530s.

*A Conversation  
between Pasquil and German  
on the forthcoming Council*

*at Mantua*

*Psalm 124*

*Praised be the Lord because He does not  
give us as prey into their teeth*

1537

Is it not a surprising thing  
That the truth cannot remain anywhere?  
Whoever speaks the truth gets nothing  
from it  
Except envy and hatred; these are his  
reward.  
So the good Pasquil is also complaining  
here;  
The truth is bringing him much ill will.  
Because he has spoken the truth,  
The pope has hounded him out of Rome.  
Because he uncovered the Romanists'  
Sin, shame, mischief, and knavish crafti-  
ness,  
They did not want to permit him to remain  
But commanded him to flee the land.  
Therefore he comes, trotting along,

And he brings you, Germany, fresh news.  
He seeks your confidence;  
He knows that you do not punish the  
truth.

If you are smart, take him in;  
Believe everything that he can tell you.  
May God avert what the pope, the cardi-  
nals,  
And the Roman mob have in mind.  
Do what God wants you to do;  
Do not allow the correct doctrine to perish.  
From morning to night you should protect  
The Word which God has given you.  
For God gives you the kingdom of heaven.  
I wish that for you and me alike.  
My intentions are good.

GERMAN AND PASQUIL

*German:* Hey there, Pasquil. Where are you going? Why are you running like that? What are you mumbling about to yourself?

*Pasquil* [continues to mumble to himself]: I really believe that the people in this godless city are madmen and fools. The pope is raving. The cardinals are shrieking. The bishops are parading around with flags flying. The monks have bumblebees in their heads. The priests have lost their minds. In short, the pope's whole gang is mad, raving, and foolish. Wherever you go in the whole city, you see them buzzing about and raging. Every street, every house, every corner is full of raving.

*G:* Hey there, Pasquil. Don't you hear? Are you deaf?

*P:* Who's calling me?

*G:* I'm calling you.

*P:* Well, take a look. My dear and pious fellow, good old German, is that you? I really didn't see you.

*G:* I believe that. But what is wrong with you that you are so downcast? You are usually so gay and witty.

*P:* I am really being quite foolish. Why should I want [to know] what the truth is? Well, I have some persuasive reasons for it. But for one pea I'd be ready to leave the city this moment.

*G:* Why?

*P:* Because of the madness of the pope and his gang, which I might be able to put up with if an extraordinary new evil were not hidden in their midst.

*G:* But it seems to me that you cannot just leave Rome. And even though you want to put your staff in front of you and go away, I don't think that Rome can get along without your rebuke and admonition, unless you wanted to peep through your fingers and let the papists carry on with all kinds of infamy and vice in line with their wanton desires.

*P:* It often makes my heart ache that I have to suffer by seeing what kind of villainy they carry on. I would nail them to the wall, make fools out of them, and rebuke them plainly enough—if it would help. But what should a person do when they do not want to follow any advice or warning? I see that neither rebuke nor admonition seems to help. For they rage and rave so much that there is no remedy for that kind of affliction.

*G:* What kind of affliction?

*P:* My good fellow, you ask that! Even though you can count off all the rogues in this city as easily as you can count your own fingers!

*G:* If you are speaking of things in general, I know well that this city is a real hole of all kinds of sin and vice. But either my own sins deceive me, or you have just been complaining about some particular affliction.

*P:* That's a good guess. For is it not a particular affliction, a particular madness and evil, that people see the real truth before their eyes and comprehend it, yet persecute it and hate it the worst way?

*G:* Perhaps you are smelling mice! But so what if our dear Romanists have in mind some new kind of mischief beyond everything that has gone on before?

*P:* Would to God that it would not in truth be possible to make this accusation. I heard this very day what new ideas they are brewing, what plans they are laying, like the Jews against our Lord God, to suppress and destroy the pure, clear, plain Word of God.

*G:* So bloodthirsty?

*P:* Up to this time everything they have devised in regard to this matter has been generally bloodthirsty, but nothing on earth could be devised that would be more bloodthirsty than what they have decided to do now.

*G:* God forbid! But what do they have in mind, the fat pigs? I have often heard that treachery strikes down its own advisers and evil counsel often cracks those who plan it across the forehead. God grant that this will turn out that way for them, too.

*P:* They see that their hypocrisy and deceit has been uncovered and is out in broad daylight. They see that people have recognized their carnival masks and have pulled them off their noses; with those masks they have deceived the country and the people up to this time. They see that their tyranny, arrogance, and pomp is coming to an end. They see that the Lutheran teaching, as they call it, that is, the true Word of God, has permeated so deeply that they cannot suppress it or snuff it out. Therefore, they want to try their luck for the last time.

G: Perhaps, according to the proverb, as people say, the last luck of those who are defeated is that they have no luck to hope for anymore! But tell me, what do they want to do to my dear Germans?

P: With an open display of power, at first, they want to do nothing.

G: What then?

P: They will set up a general council.

G: That's first.

P: Yes, indeed. They are not very much concerned, and they don't worry about it a great deal if in God's providence the Gospel remains or if it perishes, so long as they have enough to fill their fat bellies, to stuff themselves, and to guzzle. They are only concerned with how they may enjoy themselves and how they may be held in honor by the poor, simple people.

G: In what honor? By God's own body<sup>22</sup> I believe that the Germans would sacrifice body and life before they would hold these scoundrels in honor any longer. That well I know the nature of my Germans.

P: Yes, my Romanists know them well, too. And so they will convoke and promulgate a council whether or not anyone attends it. That is something they have never desired from the first, nor do they want it or desire it at this time. But they want to teach the Lutherans, as they call them, a lesson, and either completely and thoroughly destroy and suppress them or at least root them out of other lands<sup>23</sup> and cut them off.

G: How could they do that?

<sup>22</sup> *samer bocks leichnam*. The expression "sam mir" or "samer" is an oath form; see Grimm, VIII, col. 1727.

<sup>23</sup> This refers to other lands besides Germany, so that the Evangelicals would be isolated in Germany.

P: You ask how? First, the Lutherans will either appear at such a council or stay away from it. If they appear, they will be condemned and outlawed with their case unheard. If they stay away, the papists will shout with joy and boast that they have won the contest.<sup>24</sup> Then they will try their hardest to embitter the praiseworthy, pious emperor in the worst fashion and inflame him against the poor, wretched, little Lutheran band.

G: Then the water will rise higher than the levee for sure! May God protect the pious Germans and not let it go that far. But do you think they would be such evil wretches that they would not abide by the safe-conduct which they might promise and give the Lutherans so that they might attend the council?

P: Oh, they would keep [such a promise] the way a barrel without a bottom holds something. Do you think that it is for no reason at all that they already established this principle in advance, that one may make a promise to a heretic but need not keep it?<sup>25</sup> You don't have to look very far for an example. Just think how they treated dear John Hus.

<sup>24</sup> Luther envisioned the alternatives facing the Evangelical party at a council in somewhat the same way. In the introduction to the Smalcald Articles he wrote: "In any case, we had reason to expect that we might be summoned to appear before the council or be condemned without being summoned." *Bekenntnisschriften*, p. 408, 2 ff.; see *Book of Concord*, p. 288, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Such a "principle" was discussed already at the Council of Constance in 1415; see Johannes Dominicus Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, 27 (Venice: Antonius Zatta, 1784), col. 791. Carol Josef von Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, 7 (Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1874), 227, argues that no conciliar decree has ever established this principle.

G: But if the meeting place and site of the council were laid in Germany, the Lutherans would not allow themselves to be condemned so quickly without a hearing.

P: Sure, a person wants it fixed and cooked the way he likes to eat it, my dear, pious German! They determined the place a long time ago — in Italy.

G: Where?

P: At Mantua.<sup>26</sup>

G: Ha, ha, ha.

P: Why are you laughing?

G: I see it all too well! They want to do like the wolf that invited a flock of geese as his guests in the green forest. He persuaded them that it was a beautiful, pleasant place where they could get a good mouthful of grass. When he had brought them there, he tore their throats open.

P: Indeed, whoever thinks otherwise of them will be greatly deceived.

G: What will happen if the Lutherans are reluctant to expose themselves to such a danger and do not agree?

P: Then the papists will take great pains, as I have said before, to stir up the emperor against them.

G: I maintain that the pious, noble emperor is too gracious and God-fearing to be persuaded to shed innocent blood.

P: Concerning his imperial majesty himself, I indeed believe that he is well disposed toward Germany. Again, I do not think that he wants to attack the Germans be-

<sup>26</sup> Mantua had been chosen as the location for the council because it was both an Italian city and an imperial fief. Mantua is located in the Po Valley in Lombardy, southwest of Padua. Its duke, Federigo II Gonzaga, owed allegiance to Emperor Charles V. Thus both the pope and the empire were supposed to be able to be happy with the site.

cause of this matter. But there are so many malicious deceivers, so many secret scoundrels among the priests and monks, so many Mister Johnnies in little red birettas,<sup>27</sup> around him. They will keep pounding his ears day and night and not give him any peace until they have stirred him up, especially against the poor Lutherans.

G: May God punish such vipers and snakes, and likewise may our Lord God inspire the pious emperor with another line of thought. For the passage is surely not a lie: "God has the king's heart in His hand, and He guides it in the direction He wants him to go."<sup>28</sup>

P: I do not doubt that our Lord God will not help the one who is strongest, but the one who has a good and right cause. But I hear that the Germans, even though they call themselves Evangelical, are doing many things that would be better left undone. For that reason, if I knew that they would regard me kindly, even though I would on occasion tell them what is bad about them, I might indeed go to them and the papistic assheads could have things the way they want them.

G: My dear Pasquil, just come along with me. I will stand good for any damage.

<sup>27</sup> The term "Herr Johan" may be the equivalent of "Meister Hans," which in turn is a euphemism for the executioner (as in the Large Catchism, Decalog, 231) or for the devil (Grimm, VI, col. 1961).

<sup>28</sup> Prov. 21:1, where the Vulgate reads: "Sicut divisiones aquarum, ita cor regis in manu Domini: quocumque voluerit, inclinabit illud." The tract renders the last nine words: "Des Künige hertz hat Gott in seiner hand, und wo er hin will, da wendet ers hin." This differs slightly from Luther's 1524 translation of the whole verse: "Des Königs hertz ist ynn der hand des HERRN wie wasser beche, Und er neygets wo hyn er will," WA, *Deutsche Bibel*, 10, 2, 68.

The Germans, no matter what they are like, love the truth. It is true that they like to drink one more, to carouse and guzzle; they like fun. But none of them is so coarse or stupid that he would not allow himself to accept direction if someone were to remind him that he had not behaved himself as he should have. But what is your most important and decisive reason for turning away from Rome?

P: You know that I said before that the madness and evil of the city of Rome has caused me to do this. But there are two reasons beyond this. First, if I would openly rebuke their villainy and roguery, their shame and vice, and bring it into the light of day, they would indeed be my enemies; they will say that I too have become a Lutheran, and they will make an attempt on my body and life. Therefore, if I want to save my skin, I must run from them.

G: Indeed, that is reason enough.

P: Now listen to the other reason too. You know what once happened to Sodom and Gomorrah; the good and pious Lot warned them a long time that they should stop sinning.<sup>29</sup> But it would not help. Our Lord God came and punished them body and soul. The same thing is going to happen to the city of Rome, I fear; alas, for there is no measure, no end, no counting such inhuman, unheard of vice and immorality. No rebuke or admonition helps at all.

G: You have good reasons for it. Go away [from Rome]. But my friend, tell me, what sort of fellow is the pope?<sup>30</sup> I hold that he

is a fine, pious man who, because he cannot bring about a reformation at Rome, is probably enlisting the Germans just to have something to work with!

P: He is like all the popes have been from the beginning. Therefore, he has no good intentions at all.

G: What do you mean?

P: He will issue a public proclamation in which he will promise a reformation of the Roman Church. But he will not mean it seriously; instead he will sell the emperor a fox's tail<sup>31</sup> so that it will look as if he had a better case than the Lutherans.

G: He seems to be a rotten good-for-nothing, as I hear it.

P: That you will really say when you hear

of a prominent Roman family, he became a cardinal in 1493 (for the circumstances, see note 33 below) although he was not ordained to the priesthood until 1519. He rose in the service of the papacy, was almost elected pope in 1521 and again in 1523, and upon assuming the papal duties became the first "reform pope." His moral background was not such that he might have been expected to push reform vigorously, for he fathered four children and made two of his grandsons cardinals. He loved to hunt; he was fond of the pomp and glory surrounding the papal office; he was a patron of the arts and was accused of encouraging semipagan artistic expression. Nonetheless he had become convinced of the necessity of calling a general council during his period of service under Clement VII, and he appointed as cardinals men who were dedicated to the reform of the church, such as Reginald Pole, John Fisher, Giovanni Pietro Caraffa, Girolamo Aleander, and Gasparo Contarini. For a biographical sketch and bibliography see C. L. Hohl, Jr., "Paul III," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 11, 13—14; see Pastor, XI, esp. 14—41.

<sup>31</sup> Probably "to flatter" or "to ingratiate himself with." For "den Fuchschwanz verkaufen" Alfred Götze, *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar*, 5th edition (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter und Co., 1956), p. 91, gives the meaning "schmeicheln" (to flatter).

<sup>29</sup> The story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is found in Genesis 19.

<sup>30</sup> Paul III (1468—1549), born Alessandro Farnese, was elected pope in 1534. A member

first how he got his cardinal's hat and then how he became pope.

G: I know that election to such an important honor usually comes with money through begging or buying. Perhaps he also got it in this way.

P: No. He used much more abominable and despicable measures to help himself to it.

G: My friend, like what?

P: They say that he had a very beautiful sister. When Julius the Second<sup>32</sup> was pope, he loved her very passionately, and he was uncertain how he might bring her to himself to pursue his immorality with her, for her parents kept a watchful eye on her. So he prevailed upon Paul, the present pope, to summon his sister to him. Therefore he made him a cardinal.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Julius II (1443—1513), born Giuliano della Rovere, was elected pope in 1513. His uncle, Sixtus IV, made him bishop of Carpentras in 1471, and in the course of time he acquired seven additional bishoprics. His papacy was dedicated to recovering the territories which had been lost to the papal government, achieving financial solvency for the papacy, strengthening the papal administration, eliminating simony, and reducing nepotism. He used conquest, diplomacy, and external pomp and glory to enhance the authority of the papacy. Although his reputation as a warrior exceeds his fame for other accomplishments, he was a patron of the arts like other popes of his time. His interest in reform made little impression because of the Fifth Lateran Council's interest in other matters (it met 1512—1517). Although he was a worldly pope, he was not guilty of the accusation leveled at him here by Pasquil (see note 33 below). For a biographical sketch and bibliography, see D. R. Campbell, "Julius II," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 8, 52 to 54.

<sup>33</sup> Although Pastor (V, 417—18, see XI, 14) does not detail the incident, he confirms the substance of Pasquil's bit of gossip. However, the pope involved was not Julius II but Alexander VI, Rodrigo Borgia. Pastor simply

G: God's liver confound you! The present pope helped his own sister become a whore! So that he would become a cardinal.

P: So they say. And the Italians say it themselves.

G: So he'd make a better pimp than a pope. But tell me, my friend, how did he become pope?

P: Although it is an unlikely calling, nevertheless I think he would not have come to it without some Italian and especially Roman manipulation and craftiness.<sup>34</sup>

G: Who would believe such a desperate villain and appear at such a pretense of a council, when he engages in such unsavory mischief and when no reliability or trustworthiness is to be hoped for from him? But how is it possible to believe that they will do anything for the benefit of the

relates that Farnese was nominated for a cardinal's hat because of "an unlawful connection between Alexander VI and Farnese's sister, Giulia (*la bella*)."<sup>34</sup> He cites letters from Alexander to his friends concerning Giulia as evidence for the pope's affection for this already married woman. Pastor does not spell out the activity or position of Alessandro Farnese in their relationship but only suggests that their relationship caused Giulia's brother to become a cardinal.

<sup>34</sup> Pastor (XI, 10—12) suggests several reasons which contributed to the election of Farnese as pope in 1534. His age and feeble health promised a brief reign as pontiff. He had served the papal court long and with distinction. His natural intellectual gifts were great. His predecessor, Clement VII, had expressed a personal desire that Farnese succeed him. Farnese had carefully steered a course between factions which had developed in the college of cardinals; he did not belong to the Italian, the French, or the Imperial party. Furthermore, he had placed himself on the side of those who were calling for a council and thus for the reform of the church; by so doing he commanded the votes of those who favored a council.

Christian church when they are stuck in such abominable sins and vices up to their ears and are so hardened and blinded that they do not even know what kind of madness and evil they should engage in?

*P:* That is true and certain. Even if such a council were to be attended by someone whom they themselves do not want there, they would deal neither with God nor with His holy Word nor with the Christian church. Instead they would busy themselves day and night with how they might avenge themselves against the Lutherans, who have given their pomp, their deceit, and their priestly abomination so great a blow. Their hearts would be directed to this end alone, that the Lutherans might be cast down and that they themselves might again achieve a place of honor, without consideration for what is Christian or unchristian.

*G:* But what is a person to do in this case?

*P:* There will soon be a meeting at Schmalkalden. There the confederates of the holy, Evangelical doctrine will come together. The pope will send his legate there. He will present the kind of document I mentioned above and propose that they go to the council. If the Germans are fools and appear there, they already are done for.

*G:* Whom will the pope send?

*P:* A man called the bishop of Acqui,<sup>35</sup> a wet bird, who has a long, red Judas beard. He is a good guzzler and drinking companion. I personally have seen him empty a whole tankard of beer in one swallow. He says he learned that in Germany while he was traveling around in the embassy of the pope. He also has other skills. He knows how to wield a fox's

tail.<sup>36</sup> He is a past master at lying, deceiving, defrauding. That's the very man the pope will be sending.

*G:* Indeed, as I hear it, nothing good will come out of the council. For so people have been talking about it for a long time. Now it is out in the open. They themselves do not want a council. They are proceeding with their trickery to put one over on the people.

*P:* Romanists remain Romanists; they will never be anything else. Whether there is a council or not, they will not stop their villainy and mischief. It is pointless to think that they will. Therefore, I would advise the Germans to hold to the holy Word of God with which God has enlightened them. They should let the Word be preached and proclaimed on all occasions with complete diligence and seriousness so that He will graciously allow it to remain among them. The Romanists can rage and rave as much as they ever want to, but they will not change God's Word. For it must remain forever. They have therefore fallen, God be praised, and they shall never rise again.

*G:* May God grant a happy outcome. But what shall we do now, Pasquil? It is almost evening. Follow me; we will go to the nearest tavern. They have good beer there. I will pour you a mug or two. For if you want to be with the Germans, you must learn how to drink.

*P:* I will go with you and get acquainted with the Germans. There I can speak as boldly as I want to.

*G:* Come on. We shall go in God's name to our beer.

Oregon, Wis.

<sup>35</sup> See note 7 above.

<sup>36</sup> That is, "to flatter." See note 31 above.