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ORIGEN AGAINST CELSUS.

It must be a welcome opportunity to all Christian teachers and preachers at least, and to all students of theology, if not to all Christians, to gain a closer vision of the first elaborate attack upon Christianity preserved to us, to which, as far as we know, any scholar and thinker of the pagan world condescended. We see in Tacitus (*Annals* 15, 44) and Pliny (*Epp.* 10, 96) with what haughty contempt such leaders of culture referred to the humble and despised sect, and with what consummate ignorance, we may add. This was during the reign of Trajan (98—117 A. D.). Under the Antonines a Greek philosopher, Celsus, published a special treatise against the Christians. The allusions to the distressful and troublous situation of the empire, when Celsus wrote, the great war on the Danubian frontier which Marcus Aurelius was compelled to undertake in 178, which he carried on in 179, and in which he died without bringing it to completion, in 180—this era best fits the allusion by Celsus. In 177 had occurred the terrible persecution at Lyons and elsewhere: Celsus intimates (VIII, 68) that the Christians are not sincerely loyal to the emperor; he says outright that, "if all [the subjects of the Roman empire] were to do the same as you [the typical Christian], nothing will prevent him [the emperor] from being left alone and desolate, and things on earth fall under the control of the most wicked and most savage barbarians [the Marcomanni], and no rumor left either of your own worship [the Christian] or of true philosophy." I do not share the view of many scholars, even of Origen himself in the earlier part of his treatise, that this

LUTHER'S STRUGGLE IN BEHALF OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.*

In the Old Testament Church a jubilee was celebrated every fifty years, on which occasions all property was restored to its original owners. We are this year celebrating a jubilee to commemorate the great restoration of four hundred years ago, the restoration to the Church of its most precious possessions

* This discourse on Heb. 10, 19—22 was intended for the year of the jubilee, but its publication was unavoidably delayed. D.

through Martin Luther. We are not alone in celebrating this event. All Protestant sects and many unbelievers are joining us in this festival. It is only fitting and proper that they should do this, for the whole world owes Luther a debt of gratitude which cannot be too highly estimated. It was Luther who first advocated schooling for the common people, and laid the foundation of our modern school system; it was Luther who broke the spell of medieval stagnation and hide-bound tradition, and became the champion of free thought, speech, and action; it was Luther who reestablished the correct view of the powers of government and Church, and made possible the Constitution of the United States. Every well-informed and thinking man must acknowledge this, even though he does not realize the full extent of the benefits conferred upon the world through Luther's reformation. Yea, even the Catholics of to-day, in spite of the slander and contumely which they heap upon Luther, are indebted to him for all the advantages which they enjoy over their medieval ancestors. A learned Catholic has said: "If Luther had not come, the bishops and priests would in the end have forced the people to devour hay like cattle." Practically all modern progress and enlightenment is due, directly or indirectly, to Luther and his work.

But that is not the cause for our rejoicing and thanksgiving. All these temporal benefits and advantages, grateful as we are for them, did not induce us to make this year of 1917 a festal year, a year of jubilee. No, we Lutherans, and all true Christians, have much greater cause for rejoicing. We celebrate the great spiritual gift which through Luther was bestowed upon us. For Luther opened the way to the Throne of Grace, reestablished filial relations between the sinner and God, and disclosed the everlasting love of the Father in Christ Jesus. That is the one great blessing of the Reformation, beside which all others pale into insignificance. And that is also the one great reason for our celebration: the reopening of the approach to the Throne of Grace through Martin Luther.

Free and unlimited bestowal of God's grace is the highest

privilege that we Christians enjoy. Direct communication with God, the right to approach Him at all times, not in fear, but in filial love and trust — what greater bliss and happiness could we desire? In the days of the old dispensation God's people did not enjoy such free access. Then only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies to plead for the people and offer propitiation for their sins. But Christ came and made Himself the propitiation for the sins of the world, effecting a complete reconciliation between God and man. All obstacles were thus removed, and the way to the Throne of Grace was again open to all. The Christian no longer needed a priest to act for him. The Christians were themselves a royal priesthood. They were no longer strangers and foreigners, but of the household of God.

Surely no greater misfortune could befall the Christians than the loss of this privilege, and the obstruction and closing of the way to grace. This is just what happened under the papacy. The Pope could not, indeed, move God to change His mind, to rescind His promises. But he spread broadcast the belief that there was no free access, that the Old Testament style was still in force, that he and his priests must intercede with God for the people. But had not Christ said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden," and is not the Gospel full of such gracious invitations? How, then, could the Pope bar the way? To be sure, while the Gospel was preached, it was impossible for him to do so. But the wily Antichrist abolished the Gospel. Year after year, century after century, the bright light of the Gospel was dimmed, until finally it was completely hidden, and the Church had taken its place. The sinner could no longer approach God, no longer come unto Christ, but must fear Him as a stern and relentless Judge. The priest must negotiate between them, the Church, with its accumulated stores of holiness, with its sacrifice of the Mass, must intercede, must propitiate the angry Judge. The Church would do this only in return for implicit obedience on the part of its members. The priest had absolute power over the souls of men, and the sinner, in order to escape divine wrath, must

observe the mandates of his priest and bishop in all things. He must do penance for his sins, he must cry to the saints, above all, he must pay, much and often. Even though the people saw the loose and immoral life of the clergy, they had to submit themselves, for the latter held the power of life and death over them, and could with a word close the doors of heaven, and consign them to everlasting perdition. Thus did the priests tyrannize the poor souls, thus were the consciences bound to the Church. No one could be certain that his sins were forgiven, certain of a gracious God. Instead of seeking refuge with God against all enemies, as we do, every one must take refuge with the Church before the awful wrath of God. Even after death the poor sinner could not shake off the tyranny of the priests. For when he died, he still had to endure the torments of purgatory from which only the intercession of the Church, bought at top market prices, could deliver him.

In order that this mystery of iniquity, this gigantic fraud, might not be discovered, the Bible, the only means of discovering it, was removed from the eyes of the common people. Any one who dared voice a protest and bear witness to the truth was cruelly persecuted. When finally matters grew so bad that every one called for a reformation, how was it accomplished? The Pope called a synod to discuss the matter. This synod began operations in a most auspicious manner by burning the one man who could have been most helpful in carrying out a reformation: John Hus. The Pope, John XXIII, was really deposed, because even the debauched priests were ashamed of him. The new Pope promptly sent the synod home and ended the reformation. Things remained just as they had been, the same slavery obtained as before.

This picture is not exaggerated. Every one that knows conditions in the Catholic Church will concede that the same holds good, *mutatis mutandis*, to-day. The priests still ride and hound the people, and tyrannize their consciences, as much as they ever did. The great majority of the laity, of course, then as now, cared little. They paid as much as was required,

and no more, observed the rules of the Church as far as they were compelled to, in order to keep the priests at their distance, and for the rest lived securely and much as they pleased, only taking care to set aside a sufficient amount of money to pray them out of purgatory. But an anxious soul, earnestly concerned about his salvation, could by this system only be driven to despair.

Such an earnest soul was Martin Luther. If there ever was a man who really tried earnestly to keep all the commandments of the Church, to do everything that was required of him, that man was Luther. Still he found no peace. In spite of his holy life, in spite of his penances and prayers to the saints, he lived in constant dread of God and His judgment. Then one day he found a Bible in the recesses of the convent library. That was his salvation. He read, and as he read, the veil of error was lifted from his eyes, and he beheld for the first time the clear, pure light of the Gospel. The peace which he had been seeking in vain he found in Jesus. The way to the Throne of Grace was revealed to him. Through the vicarious atonement of Him who said, "I am the Way," he was assured of grace and full pardon for all his sins. This assurance gave him joy and comfort, and in his gladness he wished to tell others, who were still languishing under the tyranny of the Pope and his hierarchy. Luther did not set out with the purpose of reforming the Church, or of founding a new Church. He had experienced divine grace, he was at peace with God, and freed from all human tyranny, and he now wanted to lead other poor sinners, who were still in ignorance of the wonderful Gospel-message, to the knowledge of the same. Out of the fulness of his heart his mouth spoke. And the Lord guided and protected him, and signally blest his work. Other reformers had arisen before Luther, but all had failed. The papacy was too strongly intrenched in the consciences of men. By means of the so-called sacrament of the Mass the Pope had succeeded in intruding himself between God and man, and thus attained divine authority. Luther, however, standing squarely upon the Scriptures and

secure in his position, continued to preach the Gospel of Christ. He had chosen the right weapon, the only weapon that could prevail against the Pope and his minions. With the shining light of the Gospel turned upon it, the iniquity of popery could no longer remain concealed.

The Church of Rome realized this, and promptly resorted to its dread weapon, the ban. Luther was excommunicated for preaching the Gospel. But this only encouraged him, for now he recognized the Pope as the true Antichrist, the arch-foe of Christ and His Word, who wilfully and maliciously kept sinners from Christ, and persecuted those who dared preach the true Gospel. His writings became veritable hammer-blows, aimed at the powerful structure of popery, and causing the Roman hierarchy to tremble in its foundations. And the Lord was with him, prospering his work and crowning it with success. He led the young Augustinian friar to the chair of theology in Wittenberg, made the powerful Elector Frederick of Saxony his friend and protector, and caused his writings to spread with lightning speed to the ends of the earth, "as though the angels themselves had been the heralds."

It is often claimed that Luther was too sharp and violent in his denunciation of popery, that his language is altogether too strong and vehement. Critics that raise this claim do not understand Luther or his works, as so frequently critics have not the faintest understanding of the thing they criticize. They have no conception at all of the essence of the controversy, having not found the way to the Throne of Grace themselves. Luther knew whereof he spoke. He had experienced all the anguish of soul, the terrors of conscience, that only a terrified and despairing sinner could feel. He realized that the Pope, with his malicious and damnable teachings, was driving millions of sinners whom Christ had redeemed with His blood, into the same anguish and despair. He knew that grace was free to all. He pitied the poor souls who did not know it, and the brazen effrontery of the Pope, who kept them in ignorance, roused his anger. That a mere man dared to annul the promises

of God, dared to make conditional what the Son of God had made free for all, inflamed him to holy wrath, and was the prompting motive for all his scathing denunciations of the Pope and the Roman hierarchy. If we bear this in mind, and consider the terrible woe into which the Pope had plunged all Christendom, we shall not consider Luther too harsh and inconsiderate, but heartily agree with everything he says, and we shall thank God for this man, who discovered the mystery of iniquity, rekindled the beacon light of His Word, and opened again the way to the Throne of Grace.

St. Louis, Mo.

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