

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

Vol. XXII.

OCTOBER, 1918.

No. 4.

LUTHER'S BREAK WITH ROME.

Leipzig, 1519. The storm which had been brooding over Europe, the clouds thickest over the Vatican at Rome, had pre-saged its coming by mutterings growing ever louder, and finally intermittent flashes of lightning and sudden vehement gusts of wind and rain followed, the harbingers of the breaking storm. Luther's Ninety-five Theses had flashed across the astonished heavens; then, in quick succession, two bolts of lightning which disturbed the Vatican—Cajetan and Miltitz's failure to return to Rome with the evidence of Luther's recantation in their possession. But still the Pope did not realize the magnitude of the danger which threatened the hierarchy. Tetzel had failed, Cajetan had failed, Miltitz had failed, but the man was left who was sure to crush this upstart of a monk and make an end of him—Dr. Eck. Rome looked for an abrupt ending of the disturbances which had been raised by the Wittenberg monk; in 1519 the storm broke in all its fury. 1519 is the great year in the life of Luther, it is the turning-point of his eventful career. Up to Leipzig Luther still had a vestige of faith left in the Pope; after Leipzig we see how the bond between Luther and the Church of Rome had been severed beyond any power to knit it together again. At Leipzig Luther did what no man before him had dared to do—he denied the right of the Pope to call himself the Vicar of Christ, the infallible head of the Church. He dared to express the opinion that church-councils were liable to err, as well as their head, the Pope. He dared to say, "The Scriptures stand above the church-fathers." He

dared to say to Rome, You are a falsehood from the head downward!

Would we have a true conception of the value of Leipzig, we must first come to an understanding of the position Luther then occupied, and the foe he was forced to combat. Luther stood alone. He braved the thunders of Rome, and no man dared to stand openly with him as yet. His cause was looked upon secretly by many as a good cause, but a foredoomed one. Rome was regarded as invincible. Fear, no doubt, likewise crept into the heart of Luther, such a fear as every brave man experiences. But the courage of his convictions, that according to Holy Scriptures he was right, sustained him and bore him up; and if ever man needed courage for his undertaking, it was Luther. His enemies were wily, drilled in the school of sophistry, Jesuits before the time of that order. But Luther was likewise drilled in sophistry; God had schooled him in error that he might fight error and defend the truth. Tetzl, the unabashed swindler; Cajetan, of unreasoning, dictatorial mien; Miltitz, the Janus-faced, all had vainly pointed their lances against the Eremite Luther. And now a foe appeared who was far renowned above these, one skilled in the art of debate and wise in the lore of the church-fathers, ancient and modern.

John Eck, whose real surname was Maier, was born in the village of Eck, Bavaria. At the age of twelve he already entered the university of Heidelberg, and a year later he was studying in Tuebingen. In 1501 we find him in Cologne; in the following year he continued his theological studies at Freiburg. As time passed, he was ordained a priest, then created Doctor of Theology. In 1515 he took part in a debate at Bologna, in 1516 in one at Vienna.

A contemporary writer¹⁾ characterizes Eck as a solid, well-built man, full-chested and rough-voiced, the lineaments of his face being those of a butcher or a pirate rather than those of

1) Mosellanus.

a theologian. He continues: "Eck has an excellent memory. Were his sense of judgment equal to it, he would be a masterpiece of Nature's handiwork. However, he lacks the faculty of keen insight and judicial acumen, without which all other parts are practically useless. And it is due to this that in his debates he advances numerous arguments, passages from Holy Writ, quotations from the church-fathers, without any sense of fitness; not noticing in the least that the most of what he adduces proves nothing at all, or, correct as it might be in its true place, it does not apply at all to the point in question; or how some of his arguments are dragged in, so to speak, by the very hairs. His aim is to confuse the minds of the audience by the abundance of his proofs, believing the majority to be of such slow perception that he can thus deceive them, and leave them under the impression that he is the victor. He possesses, besides, an incredible audacity, which he craftily hides under a marvelous subtlety. For no sooner does he notice that his audacity has involved him in the toils of his opponent than he at once endeavors to switch over to a different subject, be it ever so abrupt. He does not even hesitate to clothe the argument of his opponent in a different set of phrases, and then palm it off as his own; while at the same time, knave that he is, he will impute his own incongruous ideas to his adversary, so that a person might be tempted to imagine him a philosopher who even outranks Socrates." This was the man who opposed Luther at Leipzig.

What induced Eck to champion the cause of Rome at Leipzig? The matter came to pass in this wise: In the year 1517 Eck and Luther had corresponded with each other in a friendly manner. This year saw the appearance of Luther's Ninety-five Theses. In the following year, Eck, plagued no doubt by vanity, broke off the friendly relations between himself and Luther, and even attacked Luther's theses in his so-called "Obelisks." These articles were not printed, but hand-written copies of them were surreptitiously disseminated. A friend of Luther supplied him with a copy of Eck's articles.

Luther answered with his so-called "Asterisks," written in the same year. Eck had called Luther a heretic, a Bohemian, and an abominator of the Pope. But Eck now awoke to the fact that he had let himself be carried away too far by his envy of Luther. He heard that Carlstadt intended to attack him in print. He besought Carlstadt to desist from his intention. Why did he do so? Because Carlstadt was a friend of Luther, and he knew Carlstadt would make mention of his, Eck's, attack upon Luther. But Eck's letter arrived too late. Carlstadt had already published his attack upon Eck. In this attack he likewise bared Eck's duplicity in dealing with Luther. Eck was forced to answer. He did so in the form of antitheses, and furthermore, he challenged Carlstadt to a debate. He challenged Carlstadt, but he meant Luther. During all this time he still posed as Luther's friend. He even sought Luther in his hotel at Augsburg, where the latter had put up while awaiting his hearing before Cajetan, and asked Luther to suggest a city where the debate between Carlstadt and himself might take place. Leipzig, which Luther suggested, was agreed upon.

In December, 1518, Eck and Luther petitioned the faculty of the University of Leipzig to grant the permission of holding a disputation. But it was only after six months, filled with altercations and fruitless conferences between the archbishop of Merseburg and the faculty of the University of Leipzig, that the debate was assured. To a great extent this was due to Duke George, who spoke a weighty word in season.

Late in December, 1518, Eck issued twelve theses, which, according to his announcement, he would defend against Carlstadt. Eleven theses treated of the indulgences, the twelfth of the supreme authority of the Pope. Imagine Luther's surprise when he read these theses, which appeared nominally against Carlstadt, but in reality were all directed against him! The evidence is plain. In the 22d of his Ninety-five Theses Luther had remarked that the Church of Rome at the time of Gregory the Great had not been superior to other Churches, at least not

superior to the Greek Church. In a letter to one of his friends,²⁾ Luther gives expression to his surprise that Eck had attacked him and vented his animosity upon him. He writes: "Dr. Eck, who besought my help in Augsburg that he and Carlstadt might meet in Leipzig and settle their differences, has finally gained his object. But take note of the duplicity of the rogue; he takes my theses and tears them to pieces with the greatest fury, and the theses of him with whom his disputation is to be he does not even touch. It seems as though he sought to perform a comedy. I am forced to defend myself and to offer battle to this fellow." Eck might have looked upon it as a comedy, but it turned out to be a tragedy of the deepest dye for the Church of Rome. Luther immediately issued twelve antitheses to those set up by Eck. Eck answered with a second set of theses, thirteen in number. In the writing accompanying the theses he explains why he attacked Luther instead of Carlstadt. He declares Carlstadt to be nothing more than Luther's protagonist. He devotes but one thesis to Carlstadt, the seventh; the rest are all directed against Luther. Luther answered in May, 1519, with thirteen theses. The thirteenth is the famous one which reads: "*That the Church of Rome is superior to all other Churches is proved only by means of the impotent decretals of the Popes of Rome, which have originated in the last four hundred years; opposed to them is the proven history of the last eleven hundred years, as well as the text of Holy Writ and the decree of the Council of Nicaea, the most authoritative of all.*" In August of the same year Luther issued his "Exposition of the Thirteenth Thesis." With keen, incisive judgment Luther refutes the arguments of those who hold that the Pope is the supreme ruler of the whole Church by divine authority. He bases his arguments above all upon the Scriptures, but also adduces testimonies of the first Church.

And now the memorable debate drew nearer. The preliminaries were arranged and agreed upon by Luther and Eck

2) Sylv. Egranus, February 2, 1519.

on June 26, 1519. Carlstadt was successful in gaining his point that the minutes of the proceedings should be recorded by notaries, and acquiesced that these records should be submitted to a board of theologians, who were to act as arbiters. Luther first signed this agreement on the 4th of July, but added the stipulation that the records were not to be sent to the Roman Curia, and likewise reserved for himself the right of appeal to a general church council. On the 14th of July the University of Erfurt was finally agreed upon as the board of arbiters.

The debate itself lasted for nearly three weeks, from June 27th to July 15th. Eck and Carlstadt debated from June 27th to July 3d upon the question whether the free will of man is the agent as far as the good or bad actions of man are concerned. Carlstadt defended the negative. But it is not our intention to dwell upon this part of the debate. The part of paramount interest is the debate between Luther and Eck. It lasted from July 4th to 14th. Momentous days were these, in which the Wittenberg monk denied the right of the Pope to call himself the divinely appointed head of the Church. The theses treating of purgatory, indulgences, and penitence were dealt with much shorter, although in defense of his view of penitence Luther gave inklings of what he had found to be the only way for a sinner to be justified in the eyes of God—grace, and the acceptance of this grace, manifested in Christ Jesus, by the sin-stricken sinner.

What impression does Eck make during this debate? We must remember, Eck as well as Luther recognized the Bible as the Word of God. But while Luther clings to the words of Scripture as the first cause of the doctrines of the Church, Eck is a veritable slave to the interpretations delivered by the church-fathers, and the *glossa ordinaria* is to him the *ne plus ultra*. Eck is the picture of a man who is lost when he has by chance strayed out of sight of his own chimney-stone. The traditions of the Church, the writings of the church-fathers, the decrees of the councils, and the decretals of the Popes are

his refuge, into whose welcome arms he flees when he is hard pressed by a clear passage from Scripture which admits of but one meaning, and this meaning against him. Whenever Luther staggered him by an argument, delivered like a blow straight from the shoulder, backed by the strength of Holy Writ, sanctimonious Eck begins: "I have adduced Jerome, Cyprian, St. Bernard, Chrysostom, the holy Leo, etc., to prove my contention, and does the worthy father really mean to tell me that he understands the Scriptures better than they? Is it not heresy, Bohemian poison, to think you understand the Scriptures better than the Pope, the councils, the doctors at the universities? Wonderful, indeed, would it be that God should have revealed this to the worthy father alone, and withheld it from the saints and martyrs." Authority is everything to Eck. He says: "I believe authority (*auctoritatem*) to be the greatest thing in theology, and that it is commanded us to obey those who sit in the seat of Moses." That was the reason why the Greek Church, according to Eck, fell into error; for since they severed themselves from the Roman Church, they came to be such people at the same time who had left the faith in Christ; for by refusing the Pope obedience, they had become a body without the infallible head of the Church. Eck's fundamental error was that he interpreted Scriptures by the writings of the church-fathers and the saints, the decrees of the councils, and the encyclicals of the Popes, instead of interpreting these writings and examining them by means of the Scriptures. Holy Writ, instead of being queen and judge, had become to be the kitchen-scullion in the hands of the sophists of Eck's type.

To be sure, Eck likewise adduced some Scripture-passages; but instead of proving with them what he endeavors to prove, he buries the passages under a mass of testimonies of the church-fathers, which should interpret the passages that they prove the Pope to be beyond doubt the successor of Peter, the first vice-regent, and the visible head of the Church upon earth. The Scripture-passages are only so many blinds, under whose cover Eck brings in his well-beloved saints and fathers. It might

be remarked in passing that much of the evidence introduced by Eck, especially several quotations from Jerome, favored Luther. Eck's lack of judgment prevented him from seeing this.

The main passage upon which Eck based his contention that the Pope was Christ's Vicar was Matt. 16, 18: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." Christ has done this (*i. e.*, built His Church upon Peter), says Eck, that there might be unity in the Church. He made Peter the prince among the apostles, that the Church might have one supreme ruler, to whom the rest could have recourse, as the uppermost tribunal in cases of difference. To Eck "it is plain that in case of doubt the authority of the Church of Rome serves to give assurance and certainty of faith." Of course, Eck endeavors to prove that the passage means what he wants it to prove by a truly amazing mass of quotations from the patristic literature. In the course of the debate he had once remarked that "we should not trust to our opinions, but in those of the holy fathers." This much we must admit, Eck in this instance followed his own words. The man was a veritable peripatetic compendium of the authoritative writings of the Church. References to St. Ambrose, Cyprian, Augustine, Clement, Marcellus, Julius, Pelagius, Nicholas, Agatho, Simon, Vigilius, etc., etc.; to the Canons of the Church, the decrees of the holy councils, the decretals of the Pope, all flow from his lips at the least instigation in a profundity that dazes the mind. To him the Pope's voice is Christ's voice. Hear his words: "As dutiful children they [the bishops] lend their ear to the Pope of Rome, and in him hear Christ." The Pope is infallible or nothing to Eck. Hear his words: "212 Popes have sat upon the chair at Rome, and before their deposition not one of them ever erred in a decree regarding faith, or rendering judgment in a point regarding faith." There is one argument of Eck which is so audaciously naive that I cannot refrain from reproducing it. He intends to prove that Peter ordained the other apostles to bishops, and hence was the supreme head. He says: "Matthias and the apostles were bishops and were not ordained by Christ, neither

did they ordain themselves; therefore they were ordained by none other than Peter, whom Christ had installed as the shepherd." *Ergo*,—but the reader may draw his own conclusion.

And how did Luther meet these onslaughts of Eck? Time and again he rejected quotations adduced by Eck as proving nothing, or not referring to the point in question. He fought Eck to a standstill on his own ground, the patristic writings. But Luther wanted it proved that the Pope was the supreme head of the Church by divine right, by passages from Scripture. Eck sidled around the Bible to such an extent the first days, and adhered so close to his holy fathers, that Luther finally exclaimed: "I desired Dr. Eck to answer me and prove by divine right what he avers, and all at once he forgot himself and drifted into the testimonies of the church-fathers, which we have dealt with to the greater part, and have seen that they have expressed different opinions at different places, and oftener in my favor than in Dr. Eck's." It was then that Eck had recourse to Matt. 16, 18. Luther's answer was that Scripture states 1 Cor. 3, 11: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And in regard to the passage adduced by Eck: "The Lord in His answer had reference to nothing else than the words of Peter, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'; for upon this article of faith the Church is founded. Hence Christ founded the Church upon Himself." He showed furthermore how Christ had put the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" to all apostles, and that Peter answered for all the apostles. He called Eck's attention to the fact that Christ said, "I will build My Church," the verb being in the future tense. But, continues Luther, if there is a promise in the passage, "Thou art Peter—," we must go to the place where the promise is fulfilled, John 20, 22; but here Christ says to all apostles: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," etc. Luther concluded his argument upon this point with the words: "For three days he [Eck] has promised me to prove his point by showing that the Pope has his authority by divine right, and he has adduced not one testimony from Holy Writ except Matt.

16, 18; and we have seen that this passage has been expounded in many different ways by the holy fathers, and that the greater part and their opinion are upon my side."

Eck now tried to prove his point by John 21, 27, "Feed My sheep." He contended that Christ here gave Peter a right and superiority over the other apostles, making him the prince. Luther showed how the Greek word for "feed" meant to take loving care of anything, and to see that it be not in want of any important thing. Hence the words quoted by Eck were a command by Christ to Peter to faithfully perform the work of an evangelical preacher. Luther showed how Paul, in order to do away with schisms in the Church, does not recognize Peter as the head of the apostles, but does away with the recognition of Peter, Apollo, and himself, and leaves Christ only, 1 Cor. 3, 4 ff. He called Eck's attention to Gal. 2, 8, 9 ff., and said to Eck: "Did I care to take my stand upon this passage, neither the worthy doctor nor any other person could take any other meaning from it than this, that the apostolate of Peter by divine right did not extend over any other country except Judea."

The climax, however, came when Luther confessed that some of the articles taught by Hus were Christian; that the Pope was liable to error, and that a church-council could err. On the second day of the debate Eck stamped the article of Wyclif in which he said it was not necessary to man's salvation that he believe the Roman Church to be superior to all, and the article of Hus, that Peter never was or now is the head of the Church, as heresies. These straws showed from which quarter the wind was blowing. Eck wanted to extract a damning testimony from Luther to the effect that he held the same views. Luther answered that some of the articles of Hus and the Bohemians were Christian and evangelical; that the opinion of a layman has more weight than that of the Popes or a council, if he base his opinions upon better grounds than they; that the Popes were but men, and not gods, and were to be looked upon as such; that it is not necessary to salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others. Finally Luther

openly declared that church-councils had erred and could err. Here was what Eck sought. He was appalled. No doubt, he expected a terrible visitation to blight Luther as he stood there and uttered such heresies. It was an axiom with Eck, as he took pains to mention, that a decree of a church-council rightly assembled, in matters regarding faith, could only be the truth, and that it was impossible for a council to err. When, therefore, Luther spoke so lightly of the Pope and the councils, when he said that "you may adduce a council as much as you care to, a divine right does not follow from it"; when he said that Pope and church-councils and church-fathers were but men, and were to be examined as such; when he even dared to call a decision of a council wrong, yea, to claim that a council could err, Eck threw at the head of Luther: "When I said to-day it is a Hussite article to say obedience to the Church of Rome is not proved by any passage from Scripture, he curtly answered: The article is not a heretical one. I now take the right to attack the worthy father, and I say to him that it is a damnable article, and he holds it; hence he believes a damnable and rejected article." Later on he even made the statement: "This I tell you, worthy father, if you believe a council rightly assembled can err, you are to me as a heathen and a publican."

Eck still abided by the fathers. His whole force of argumentation is summed up in one of his answers: "I have proved by means of the holy fathers, the Popes, and the martyrs the consensus of the councils and the universities; therefore it is proved by divine authority that there is a supreme authority in the Church. But the worthy father attaches more weight to his interpretation than to those of the holy fathers, the Popes, and the councils, although the council assembled at Costnitz damned an article of the same import held by Hus as a heresy."

The blow had fallen, but Luther stood firm. The decision had come to him, and he had met it like a man, a true Christian. Let us inscribe upon our hearts the words he uttered when he answered Eck upon his charge of heresy: "The statements of all writers are to be judged according to Holy Writ, whose

authority is greater than the reasoning power of the whole human race. Not that I would condemn the opinion of the reverend fathers, but I follow those that cling most closely to Scriptures, and above all things, if Holy Writ is clear upon a certain point, I adhere to it." Noble words, that still ring in the air, and still hold at bay the might of Rome.

The entire difference between Luther and Eck, and for Eck we can say the Roman Church, is plainly shown in a remark of Luther's toward the end of the debate. He says: "As usual, Eck interprets the passages of Holy Writ by means of quotations from the fathers; yea, he even uses it to prove his interpretation of these fathers, whereas the opposite should be the case; the writings of the fathers must be interpreted by means of Holy Writ, and must be judged according to it."

Luther's final words are worthy to be treasured by every true theologian. They show on what basis this man waged his war against Rome, and from what source he drew his strength and courage to preach Christ as the true Head of the Church and the only Way to life. The words follow: "I am sorry to see that the worthy doctor penetrates Scriptures as deep as a water-spider the water; he rather seems to shun them, as the devil the crucifix. And therefore, with all due respect toward the worthy fathers, I prefer the authority of the Bible."

The debate between Luther and Eck ended July 14, and was practically the end of the disputation, although Eck and Carlstadt debated until the evening of the 15th upon the question of the "Free Will of Man."

After the debate was declared closed, Eck, of course, claimed the victory. History, however, does not record a costlier victory, if Eck is to be called the victor. Contrary to his expectation, the respect of the people for Luther grew apace. Eck, therefore, took all pains possible that the doctrines of Luther should be damned at Rome, as well as by the theological faculties of the universities. This the faculties did. The University of Cologne, under Hoogstraten, took the lead. They had received a book containing one of Luther's writings, sent

to them by the University of Louvain. They damned the doctrines advanced by Luther, denounced the book as fit food for the fire, and demanded that Luther be compelled to recant. The University of Louvain followed with its damnatory sentence, as did the University of Paris later on. The latter university took for the object of its wrath "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," which Luther had written in the mean time. Although Luther accompanied another of his famous writings of this great period of his life, "The Freedom of a Christian Man," with a letter of respect to the Pope, still it can be plainly seen that the rupture between Luther and Rome is to be dated from Leipzig. For in the following year, when Eck, successful in his mission at the Vatican, returned from Rome with the Pope's bull, in which Luther was damned as a heretic and commanded to recant within sixty days, and his writings to be burned, Luther writes: "I am much bolder since I know the Pope to be the Antichrist and Satan's seat." How Luther burned the bull and refused to recant is too well known to be mentioned at length.

Worms followed Leipzig, but the decisive step had already been taken by Luther. How he met Worms has become a famous passage in history. But Luther could not do otherwise, for he who had said Leipzig was forced to say Worms, if he was to remain true to his Master and to himself. Worms therefore but ratified and sealed the issues of Leipzig.

In Eisleben, where Luther first saw the light of day, and where he closed them after a stormy, battle-riven life, stands the Siemering Luther Memorial. One of the four reliefs portrays Luther in his debate with Eck. The date 1519 is carved in the background over a figure of Christ upon the cross. Eck is slippery sophism incarnate as he stands before Luther with upraised forefinger, his one hand fondling a roll of parchment representative of the church-fathers. Luther, with mouth and jaw drawn in determined lines, in his eyes the light of an implicit faith in the justice of his cause, has clasped the Bible to his breast. The left hand holds it in a tight grasp, while

the right hand is folded into a fist, and lies in an attitude of defense upon the cover of the sacred book. The sculptor has caught the spirit of Luther, and perpetuated it in the enduring stone. And what more can we say of Luther? Adherence to the Bible, and the readiness and courage to defend the Word of his Master at all times, — what more can be said?

NOTE. — Most of the quotations cited by the author have been taken from the St. Louis edition of Luther's Works, Vol. XV. Vol. XIII has likewise been drawn upon for some of the material.

Anamoose, N. Dak.

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