

LUTHER AT THE DIET OF WORMS

1521

Translated by Roger A. Hornsby

INTRODUCTION

Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms was in many ways the most dramatic public event of his career. Its religious and political significance was immediately apparent to all his contemporaries and resulted in a great many reports from both friends and foes of the Reformation.

In order to present as comprehensive a picture as possible we have translated the most complete document prepared by the friends of the Reformation (pp. 105 to 123) and the report of the papal nuncio Aleander (pp. 123 to 130) who was the master mind behind the opposition to Luther at Worms and who had played an important part in the futile attempts to prevent the reformer's appearance at the diet.

The authorship of the first report has not been established. It has been attributed to Luther himself, to Spalatin, to Bucer, and some others. For many reasons Paul Kalkoff's suggestion deserves attention. He believes that Luther's friend and companion, Justus Jonas, wrote the report with the help of Luther, Schurf, and Amsdorf.

Aleander's report is based largely upon the minutes of Johann Eck, the secretary of the archbishop of Trier. Eck (not to be confused with the Dr. Johann Eck who had opposed Luther at Leipzig) had been selected to act as Luther's interrogator because his record showed unwavering support of the sale of indulgences. While at first Glapion, the father confessor of Emperor Charles V, had been designated to question Luther in public, the fact that he was a French Franciscan made his selection too obviously prejudicial to the cause of the Reformation. Eck was equally reliable as far as the supporters of the papacy were concerned and he was a lawyer and a German.

This means that our reports are prepared by partisans on opposing sides of the issue. Yet a comparison shows such wide and surprising agreement that it appears possible to establish fairly accurately what actually transpired.

Our translation, prepared by Dr. Roger Hornsby of the State University of Iowa, is based upon the critical text in WA 7, 814–857.

LUTHER AT THE DIET OF WORMS

In the Name of Jesus, 1521

The Account and Actions of Doctor Martin Luther the Augustinian at the Diet of Worms

On the third day after Misericordias Domini Sunday [April 16], Doctor Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk by profession, traveled to Worms in the year of our Lord 1521, summoned by Emperor Charles V, king of Spain, archduke of Austria, etc., who in the first year of his reign held his first royal assembly in this city. Dr. Martin had proposed for debate at Wittenberg, a city of Saxony, certain propositions against the tyranny of the bishop of Rome, which were attacked in the interim and burned by many, although they were confuted by no one either by the Scriptures or by reason. Because of this, the affair began to tend toward unrest, for the people were supporting the cause of the gospel against the clergy. Therefore, it seemed advisable, at the instigation of the Roman legates, for him to be summoned by an imperial herald, letters of safe conduct having been granted for this purpose by the emperor and the princes. He was summoned. He came and

stayed at the house of the Knights of Rhodes, where he was hospitably received, greeted, and visited through the entire night by many counts, barons, gilded knights, and nobles, both ecclesiastical and lay.

On the day after his arrival, the fourth day [after Misericordias Domini Sunday; April 17], Ulrich von Pappenheim, a nobleman and master of the imperial cavalry, sent by the emperor, came before luncheon and showed Dr. Martin the order of Charles, appointed four o'clock in the afternoon as the hour of the audience, for which he had come, before his imperial majesty, the electoral princes, electors, the dukes, and the rest of the imperial estates. As was proper, Dr. Martin readily accepted this order.

Immediately after four o'clock on that day, Ulrich von Pappenheim came and with him Caspar Sturm, imperial herald for Germany, who had summoned Dr. Martin at Wittenberg and brought him to Worms. These two invited him and accompanied him through the garden of the house of the Knights of Rhodes into the quarters of the Count Palatine. To avoid any possible annoyance at the hands of the throng, gathered in great numbers along the customary route to the imperial palace, he came into the audience hall through some side streets, as if by stealth. However, he did not escape the notice of many who were barely held back by force from entering. Many climbed to the roof tops in their eagerness to see.

Now when he stood in the presence of his imperial majesty, the electoral princes, electors, and the dukes, in short, all the imperial estates who were then in attendance upon the emperor, Dr. Martin was warned by Ulrich von Pappenheim not to say anything without being asked.

Then Johann Eck, general secretary of the bishop of Trier, the speaker for his imperial majesty, made the same statement, first in Latin, then in German, as follows: "His imperial majesty has summoned you here, Martin Luther, for these two reasons: first, that you may here publicly acknowledge if the books published so far under your name are yours; then, whether you wish all these to be regarded as your work, or whether you wish to retract anything in them."

Thereupon Dr. Jerome Schurff, a Swiss from St. Gallen, who stood with Martin, cried in a loud voice: "Let the titles of the books be read." Here the secretary of Trier recited by name those books of Doctor Martin which had once been printed at Basel, among which were listed the *Commentaries on the Psalms*, the little book *On Good Works*, the *Commentary on the Lords Prayer*, and other Christian books which were not controversial.

After this Dr. Martin made the same statement in German and Latin in reply to the questions:

"Two questions have been put to me by his imperial majesty: First, whether I wish all the books bearing my name to be regarded as my own work; second, whether I intend to stand by them or, in fact, retract anything from those which have been published by me till now. To these two questions I shall respond, briefly and to the point [and to the best of my ability]. First, I must indeed include the books just now named as among those written by me and I shall never deny any of them.

"As for the next question, whether I would likewise affirm everything or retract what is supposed to have been uttered beyond the testimony of Scripture: Because this is a question of faith and the salvation of souls, and because it concerns the divine Word, which we are all bound to reverence, for there is nothing greater in heaven or on earth, it would be rash and at the same time dangerous for me to put forth anything without proper consideration. Since without previous deliberation I could assert less than the cause demands or more than accords with the truth, I might in either case come under Christ's judgment when he said, 'Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven' [Matt. 10:33]. For this reason I beseech your imperial majesty for time to think, in order to satisfactorily answer the question without violence to the divine Word and danger to my own soul."

After this the princes began a consultation which the secretary of Trier reported as follows:

"Although you, Martin, have been able to learn well enough from the imperial order why you have been summoned, and, therefore, do not deserve to be granted a longer time for consideration, yet, out of innate clemency, his imperial majesty grants one day for your deliberation so that you may furnish an answer openly tomorrow at this hour—on this condition: that you do not present your opinion in writing, but declare it by word of mouth."

After this Dr. Martin was led back to his inn by the herald. In this affair, what happened between his departure to obey the order of the emperor and his appearance in the assembly of the princes ought not to be omitted. Luther was admonished by various voices to be brave, to act manfully, and not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather revere Him who is able to cast both soul and body into hell [Matt. 10:28]. Again, “When you shall stand before kings, do not think about what you are saying, for it will be given you in that hour” [Luke 12:11–12]. One of the bystanders shouted, “Blessed is the womb that bore you” [Luke 11:27].

Thus was that day spent.

After four o’clock in the afternoon on the following day, the fifth [after Misericordias Domini Sunday; April 18], the herald came and conducted Dr. Martin to the court of the emperor where, because of the pre-occupation of the princes, he remained until six o’clock, waiting in a great throng of people, becoming exhausted because of the crowd. When the assembly was seated and Martin stood up, the secretary spoke up in these words:

“His imperial majesty has appointed this hour for you, Martin Luther, because you admitted that the books which we named yesterday are yours. Moreover, upon the question of whether you wished any of them to be withdrawn, or whether you approved all which you have published, you requested a period for deliberation, which now has come to an end, although by right you ought not to have sought a longer period for consideration. You knew at that time why you were summoned. Moreover, it is generally agreed that the obligation of faith is so certain for all that anybody, whenever he is asked, should be able to give his certain and constant reasons, not least of all you, so great and so learned a professor of theology. Come then; answer the question of his majesty, whose kindness you have experienced in seeking a time for thought. Do you wish to defend all your acknowledged books, or to retract some?” This the secretary said in Latin and in German, more forcefully, however, in Latin than in German.

Dr. Martin himself replied in Latin and German, humbly, quietly, and modestly; however, not without Christian boldness and firmness, and in such a way that his adversaries would have desired a more abject speech and spirit. For they looked most eagerly for a recantation, some hope of which they had conceived from the request for time to deliberate.

The Speech of Dr. Martin Luther before the Emperor Charles and Princes at Worms on the Fifth Day after Misericordias Domini [April 18] In the Name of Jesus

“Most serene emperor, most illustrious princes, most clement lords, obedient to the time set for me yesterday evening, I appear before you, beseeching you, by the mercy of God, that your most serene majesty and your most illustrious lordships may deign to listen graciously to this my cause—which is, as I hope, a cause of justice and of truth. If through my inexperience I have either not given the proper titles to some, or have offended in some manner against court customs and etiquette, I beseech you to kindly pardon me, as a man accustomed not to courts but to the cells of monks. I can bear no other witness about myself but that I have taught and written up to this time with simplicity of heart, as I had in view only the glory of God and the sound instruction of Christ’s faithful.

“Most serene emperor, most illustrious princes, concerning those questions proposed to me yesterday on behalf of your serene majesty, whether I acknowledged as mine the books enumerated and published in my name and whether I wished to persevere in their defense or to retract them, I have given to the first question my full and complete answer, in which I still persist and shall persist forever. These books are mine and they have been published in my name by me, unless in the meantime, either through the craft or the mistaken wisdom of my emulators, something in them has been changed or wrongly cut out. For plainly I cannot acknowledge anything except what is mine alone and what has been written by me alone, to the exclusion of all interpretations of anyone at all.

“In replying to the second question, I ask that your most serene majesty and your lordships may deign to note that my books are not all of the same kind.

“For there are some in which I have discussed religious faith and morals simply and evangelically, so that even my enemies themselves are compelled to admit that these are useful, harmless, and clearly worthy to be read by Christians. Even the bull, although harsh and cruel, admits that some of my books are inoffensive, and yet allows these also to be condemned with a judgment which is utterly monstrous. Thus, if I should begin to disavow them, I ask you, what would I be doing? Would not I, alone of all men, be condemning the very truth upon which friends and enemies equally agree, striving alone against the harmonious confession of all?

“Another group of my books attacks the papacy and the affairs of the papists as those who both by their doctrines and very wicked examples have laid waste the Christian world with evil that affects the spirit and the body. For no one can deny or conceal this fact, when the experience of all and the complaints of everyone witness that through the decrees of the pope and the doctrines of men the consciences of the faithful have been most miserably entangled, tortured, and torn to pieces. Also, property and possessions, especially in this illustrious nation of Germany, have been devoured by an unbelievable tyranny and are being devoured to this time without letup and by unworthy means. [Yet the papists] by their own decrees (as in dist. 9 and 25; ques. 1 and 2) warn that the papal laws and doctrines which are contrary to the gospel or the opinions of the fathers are to be regarded as erroneous and reprehensible. If, therefore, I should have retracted these writings, I should have done nothing other than to have added strength to this [papal] tyranny and I should have opened not only windows but doors to such great godlessness. It would rage farther and more freely than ever it has dared up to this time. Yes, from the proof of such a revocation on my part, their wholly lawless and unrestrained kingdom of wickedness would become still more intolerable for the already wretched people; and their rule would be further strengthened and established, especially if it should be reported that this evil deed had been done by me by virtue of the authority of your most serene majesty and of the whole Roman Empire. Good God! What a cover for wickedness and tyranny I should have then become.

“I have written a third sort of book against some private and (as they say) distinguished individuals—those, namely, who strive to preserve the Roman tyranny and to destroy the godliness taught by me. Against these I confess I have been more violent than my religion or profession demands. But then, I do not set myself up as a saint; neither am I disputing about my life, but about the teaching of Christ. It is not proper for me to retract these works, because by this retraction it would again happen that tyranny and godlessness would, with my patronage, rule and rage among the people of God more violently than ever before.

“However, because I am a man and not God, I am not able to shield my books with any other protection than that which my Lord Jesus Christ himself offered for his teaching. When questioned before Annas about his teaching and struck by a servant, he said: ‘If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong’ [John 18:19–23]. If the Lord himself, who knew that he could not err, did not refuse to hear testimony against his teaching, even from the lowliest servant, how much more ought I, who am the lowest scum and able to do nothing except err, desire and expect that somebody should want to offer testimony against my teaching! Therefore, I ask by the mercy of God, may your most serene majesty, most illustrious lordships, or anyone at all who is able, either high or low, bear witness, expose my errors, overthrowing them by the writings of the prophets and the evangelists. Once I have been taught I shall be quite ready to renounce every error, and I shall be the first to cast my books into the fire.

“From these remarks I think it is clear that I have sufficiently considered and weighed the hazards and dangers, as well as the excitement and dissensions aroused in the world as a result of my teachings, things about which I was gravely and forcefully warned yesterday. To see excitement and dissension arise because of the Word of God is to me clearly the most joyful aspect of all in these matters. For this is the way, the opportunity, and the result of the Word of God, just as He [Christ] said, ‘I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, etc.’ [Matt. 10:34–35]. Therefore, we ought to think how marvelous and terrible is our God in his counsels, lest by chance what is attempted for settling strife grows rather into an intolerable deluge of evils, if we begin by condemning the Word of God. And concern must be shown lest the reign of this most noble youth, Prince Charles (in whom after God is our great hope),

become unhappy and inauspicious. I could illustrate this with abundant examples from Scripture—like Pharaoh, the king of Babylon, and the kings of Israel who, when they endeavored to pacify and strengthen their kingdoms by the wisest counsels, most surely destroyed themselves. For it is He who takes the wise in their own craftiness [Job 5:13] and overturns mountains before they know it [Job 9:5]. Therefore we must fear God. I do not say these things because there is a need of either my teachings or my warnings for such leaders as you, but because I must not withhold the allegiance which I owe my Germany. With these words I commend myself to your most serene majesty and to your lordships, humbly asking that I not be allowed through the agitation of my enemies, without cause, to be made hateful to you. I have finished.”

When I had finished, the speaker for the emperor said, as if in reproach, that I had not answered the question, that I ought not call into question those things which had been condemned and defined in councils; therefore what was sought from me was not a horned⁷ response, but a simple one, whether or not I wished to retract.

Here I answered:

“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.

“I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”

The princes deliberated about this speech of Dr. Martin. When they had examined it the secretary of Trier began to tear it apart in this fashion: “Martin, you have answered more impudently than befits your person, and not to the point either. You have made various distinctions among your books, but in such a way that none of them contributes anything to this investigation. If you had recanted those which contain a large portion of your errors, no doubt his imperial majesty, in his innate clemency, would not have tolerated a persecution of the rest which are good. But now you revive those [errors] which the general Council of Constance, composed of the whole German nation, has condemned, and you wish to be refuted by means of Scripture. In this you are completely mad. For what purpose does it serve to raise a new dispute about matters condemned through so many centuries by church and council? Unless perhaps a reason must be given to just anyone about anything whatsoever. But if it were granted that whoever contradicts the councils and the common understanding of the church must be overcome by Scripture passages, we will have nothing in Christianity that is certain or decided. And for this reason his imperial majesty seeks from you an answer, simple and straightforward, either a no or a yes: Do you wish to regard all your works as catholic? Or do you wish to retract anything from them?”

But Dr. Martin nevertheless asked that his imperial majesty not allow him to be compelled to retract contrary to his conscience, captive to and bound by holy Scripture, without the clear arguments of those who spoke against him. If they sought an answer which was unambiguous, simple, and true, he had none other than what he had uttered before: Unless his adversaries by sufficient arguments would extricate his conscience, which was captured by those errors (as they called them), he would not be able to get out of the nets in which he was entangled. Whatever the councils agreed upon was not immediately true; further, the councils have erred and have often contradicted themselves. Moreover, the arguments of his contradictors were not convincing. He was able to show that the councils had erred: he was not able to retract that which the Scripture zealously proclaimed. He added at this place an exclamation, “God help me!”

To these words there was no reply from the secretary except a very few words to the effect that it could not be shown that the councils had erred. Martin said that he was truly able and willing to do that.

However, since darkness had by then come over the whole audience hall, each one departed to his home. As he departed from his imperial majesty and the tribunal, a large group of Spaniards followed Luther, the man of God, with jeers, derisive gestures, and much loud noise.

On the sixth day after Misericordias Domini [April 19], when the princes, electors, dukes, and the nobles of every rank who were ordinarily present at the assemblies, had met, the emperor sent this message, which he had written with his own hand to this council:

“Our ancestors who were also Christian princes, were nevertheless obedient to the Roman church which Dr. Martin now attacks. And because he is determined to move not even a hair’s breadth from his errors, we are not able with propriety to depart from the example of our ancestors in defending the ancient faith, and giving aid to the Roman see. Therefore, we shall pursue Martin himself and his adherents with excommunication, and use other methods available for their liquidation.”

However, because he did not wish to violate the agreement which had been granted and signed, he would therefore do his best that Luther might return safely from where he was summoned.

The electoral princes, dukes, and the imperial orders debated this judgment of Charles on the sixth day throughout the whole afternoon, and even on the whole of the Saturday which followed, and during this time Dr. Martin received no word from his imperial majesty.

Meanwhile, he was seen and visited by many princes, counts, barons, knights, nobles, and priests, both religious and secular, not to mention a number of the common people. These constantly besieged the residence, and their desire to see was never satisfied.

Two notices were also posted: one against the Doctor, the other (so it seemed) for the Doctor, although that one is thought by many who were well informed to have been done maliciously by his enemies, so that an opportunity might be found for breaking the safe-conduct, a thing which the Roman envoys most actively sought.

On the second day after Jubilate [April 22], before breakfast, the archbishop of Trier announced to Dr. Martin that on the fourth day after Jubilate he should appear at the sixth hour (before luncheon), in his presence, at a place to be designated in the interim.

On the Feast of St. George [April 23], after dinner, [a messenger] returned at the command of his prince, the archbishop of Trier, saying that on the next day at the hour recently designated, Luther should be present at the lodging of his lordship.

On Wednesday, the day after the Feast of St. George [April 24], obedient to the command, Dr. Martin entered the lodging of the archbishop of Trier, accompanied by the latter’s chaplain and the imperial herald and followed by those who had accompanied him here from Saxony and Thuringia, and some other very good friends. When he was before the archbishop of Trier, Margrave Joachim of Brandenburg, Duke George of Saxony, the bishops of Augsburg [Christopher von Stadion] and of Brandenburg [Jerome Scultetus], the master of the Teutonic Order [Dietrich von Cleen], Count George of Wertheim, Dr. Bock of Strassburg, and Dr. Peutinger, Dr. Vehus, chancellor of Baden, began to speak and declared: He [Luther] had not been called to this meeting to enter upon an argument or debate, but only out of Christian charity and clemency had the princes sought permission from his imperial majesty to exhort him kindly and fraternally. Next, although the councils had set forth varying views, they did not contradict one another. But even if the councils had erred greatly, they had certainly not thereby destroyed their authority to such a degree that anyone should wish to rely on his own interpretation in opposition to them. Adding many things concerning the centurion [Matt. 8:5–13] and Zacchaeus [Luke 19:2–10] about human institutions, ceremonies, and decrees, and affirming that all these things were sanctioned for the repression of vice according to the temper and vicissitudes of the times, he said that the church was not able to exist without human institutions. The tree is known by its fruit [Matt. 12:33]. Moreover, it is said that many good things are the result of laws. And St. Martin, St. Nicholas, and many other saints had taken part in councils. Further he said that his [Luther’s] books would excite great disturbances and unbelievable confusion. The common people were using his book, *The Freedom of a Christian*, to throw off the yoke, and to strengthen disobedience. Now we are far from the time when those who believed were of one heart and soul [Acts 4:32]. Therefore, laws are necessary. Moreover, it must be considered that although he [Luther] had written many good things, and without doubt with a fine spirit, such as *Of Threefold Justice* and others, the devil was using this fact and working through secret snares, so that all his works might be condemned in perpetuity. He would be judged from these he had written last, just as a

tree is known not by its flower but by its fruit. There he [Vehus] added the quotation about the destruction that wastes at noonday and the pestilence that stalks in darkness and the arrow that flies [Ps. 91:5–6]. The whole oration was an exhortation, full of rhetorical commonplaces about the usefulness and wholesomeness of laws, and, on the other hand, the dangers to conscience and safety, both public and private. As in the beginning, so in the middle and the end, he asserted the same thing, that this admonition was the result of the most kind attitude and singular mercy of the princes. In closing he added threats in a final speech, saying that if [Luther] persevered in his position, the emperor would proceed against him, exiling him from the empire and condemning his works, and he reminded him again that he should think about these things and weigh them.

Dr. Martin answered:

“Most clement and illustrious princes and lords, for that most clement and kind will of yours from which this admonition proceeded, I thank you as humbly as I am able. For I know that I am by far too lowly a man to be warned by such great princes. I have not censured all councils, but only that of Constance because of the most powerful reason that it condemned the Word of God, which is shown in its condemnation of this proposition of John Huss: ‘The church of Christ is the community of the elect.’ This statement the council at Constance condemned and thus the article of faith: ‘I believe in the holy catholic church.’ ”

He [Luther] did not refuse to pay with his life and blood, provided he were not reduced to the point where he might be compelled to retract the clear Word of God. For in its defense it is necessary to obey God rather than man [Acts 5:29]. Moreover, there are two kinds of offenses, one involving charity and the other faith. Offenses against charity depend upon morals and life; those involving faith or doctrine depend on the Word of God and cannot be avoided. For it is not in his [Luther’s] power, that Christ should not become a “stumbling-stone” [Isa. 8:14–15; Rom. 9:32–33; 1 Pet. 2:8]. If the faith were truly preached and magistrates were good, one law, informed by the spirit of the gospel, would be sufficient and human laws useless. He knew that magistrates and men in power must be obeyed, even those who live evil and unjust lives. He knew also that private opinions should give way, for that is also taught in his writings. If only he would not be forced to deny the Word of God he would show himself in all other things most obedient.

When Dr. Martin had withdrawn, the princes talked together about what they should order to be done with the man. Therefore, when he was recalled into the chamber, Doctor [Vehus] of Baden pressed upon him again his former arguments, urging that he should place his writings under the judgment of the emperor and the empire.

Dr. Martin replied humbly and modestly: He did not allow nor would he ever allow it to be said that he avoided the judgment of the emperor, the princes, and nobility of the empire. For so far was he from scorning their judgment that he would permit his works to be examined minutely and severely, on the condition that it be done by the authority of holy Scripture and the divine Word. For the Word of God was so clear to him that he was unable to yield unless taught better by the Word of God. For St. Augustine writes that he had learned that only those books which are called canonical should be given the honor of belief in their absolute truth, and that he believed the rest of the learned fathers, no matter how holy and sanctified, only if they wrote the truth.

St. Paul had written on this same point to the Thessalonians: “Test everything; hold fast what is good” [1 Thess. 5:21]; and to the Galatians: “Even if an angel comes from heaven and preaches something different, let him be accursed” [Gal. 1:8], and do not believe him. He [Luther], therefore, besought them all the more not to violate his conscience, bound as it was by the chains of Scripture and the holy Word, by forcing him to deny that clear Word of God. And in order to prove agreeable to them personally and before his imperial majesty, he said that in other respects he would do everything most obediently.

The margrave, elector of Brandenburg, asked him when he had finished whether he had said he would not yield unless convinced by holy Scripture. Dr. Martin answered, “Yes, most clement lord, or by the most clear and evident reasons.”

So when the conference broke up, and while the rest of the princes were going into the diet, the archbishop of Trier, accompanied by his secretary, Johann Eck, and Cochlaeus, summoned Dr. Martin into the

dining room. With Martin were Jerome Schurff and Amsdorf.¹⁶ The secretary began to argue, in the manner of a casuist, that heresies are almost always born from holy Scripture, like that of Arius which arose from the statement, "The Father is greater than I" [John 14:28], and again, from this passage of the gospel, "Joseph did not know his wife until she had borne her first-born son" [Matt. 1:25]. Then he went so far as to try to overthrow the proposition that the catholic church is the communion of saints. He even dared to make wheat from tares and limbs from the excrement of the body. After he proclaimed these and similar ridiculous and futile arguments, Dr. Martin and Dr. Jerome Schurff reproved him soberly, saying that the arguments did not contribute to the matter at hand. Sometimes Johann Cochlaeus interrupted noisily and tried to persuade Dr. Luther to give up what he had begun, and from now on refrain completely from all writing and teaching. At last they departed. The archbishop of Trier wished that they would return after dinner. But the secretary and Cochlaeus did not agree.

After dinner Cochlaeus accosted Dr. Martin in his lodging with the most offensive arguments, in which he was properly restrained by Jerome [Schurff], Jonas, and Tilemann [Conradi]. He did not hesitate to demand that Luther renounce his safe-conduct and debate publicly with him and he exhorted him to recant. Dr. Martin, because of his extraordinary kindness and modesty, dealt gently with the man and warned him, as he was about to go, that he should not yield too much to passion and that since he was going to write against him [Luther] he should offer the authority of divine Scripture; for otherwise he would accomplish nothing.

In the evening the archbishop of Trier announced to Dr. Martin through an emissary, Amsdorf, that his safe-conduct had been extended two days by the emperor so that he [the archbishop] could in the meantime confer with him. Therefore, on the next day Dr. Peutingen and Dr. [Vehus of] Baden would come to Luther and indeed he himself would confer with him.

In the forenoon on Thursday, the Feast of St. Mark [April 25], Peutingen and [Vehus of] Baden attempted to persuade Dr. Martin that he should leave the judgment of his books simply and absolutely to the emperor and the empire. He answered that he would do and endure everything if only they supported themselves by the authority of holy Scripture, for he would trust in nothing less. For God had once spoken through the prophet, "Put not your trust in princes, in the sons of men, in whom there is no help" [Ps. 146:3]. And again, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man" [Jer. 17:5]. And when they pressed him harder he answered that nothing ought less to be entrusted to the judgment of men than the Word of God. Thus they left him, asking him to think over a better answer, and saying that they would come back after luncheon.

After luncheon they returned and attempted in vain the same thing as in the morning. They pleaded with him to at least submit his case to the judgment of some future council. And he granted this, but on the condition that they show him the parts excerpted from his books for submission to the council, and that they judge them by the testimony of Scripture and the divine Word. Upon leaving Dr. Martin they told the archbishop of Trier that he had promised to submit some parts of his works to a council and that meanwhile he would be silent about them. But Dr. Martin had never even considered this, as he had always up to this time refused to either deny or to cast aside whatever concerned the Word of God.

Therefore it came about, through the work of God, that [the archbishop of] Trier summoned Dr. Martin to hear him personally. And when he saw that the situation was different from that which the doctors had reported, he declared that this could not have been corrected unless he himself had heard him say it. Otherwise he would have gone immediately to the emperor and told him what the doctors had reported.

After all witnesses had first been dismissed [the archbishop of] Trier discussed most kindly with Dr. Martin about submitting to the judgment first of the emperor and the empire and then of a council. In this conversation Dr. Martin hid nothing from [the archbishop of] Trier, showing that he could not safely entrust such an important matter to those who, approving the judgment and bull of the pope, attacked and condemned with new commands him who was summoned under a safe-conduct.

Then after Luther's friend was admitted, [the archbishop of] Trier asked Dr. Martin for means with which he might meet the situation. Luther answered that there were none better than those of which Gamaliel had spoken in Acts 5, according to the witness of St. Luke, "If this is the counsel of men, this work will be overthrown, if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it" [Acts 5:38–39]. This the emperor and the

imperial estates could write to the Roman pontiff. For he [Luther] knew that if his work were not from God, within three years, or even two, it would perish of its own accord.

To [the archbishop of] Trier, who asked what he would do if some articles were selected for the purpose of submitting them to a council, Luther answered that he would accept, provided that they were not those which the Council of Constance had condemned. [The archbishop of] Trier said that he feared that those would be the very ones. Then Luther said, "About these, I am unable and unwilling to keep silent, for I am certain that by those decrees the Word of God was condemned and I would rather lose my life and head than desert the clear Word of God."

When [the archbishop of] Trier saw that Dr. Martin would never submit the Word of God to the judgment of men, he dismissed him in a kindly manner, and when asked [by Luther] if he would obtain permission from his imperial majesty to leave, he answered that he would properly care for the matter and would report back.

Not long afterward, the secretary of [the archbishop of] Trier, in the presence of the chancellor of Austria and Maximilian,²⁰ the imperial secretary, read to Dr. Martin in his lodging the emperor's decree:

"Because, although he has so often been warned in vain by the emperor, the electors, the princes, and the estates, he is unwilling to return to the heart and unity of the catholic faith, it remains for the emperor as defender of the catholic faith to act. Therefore, it is the command of the emperor that within twenty-one days from this time, he return to his home under a safe-conduct passage and with his liberty secured, and that on the journey he not stir up the people either by preaching or writing."

The most Christian father, answering very modestly, began thus:

"As it has pleased the Lord so it has happened. Blessed be the name of the Lord [Job 1:21]. First of all to his most serene majesty, to the prince electors, the princes, and the rest of the imperial estates, I give most humble thanks for a favorable and kind audience and for the safe-conduct which has been kept and is to be kept. For I have desired nothing in all this except a reformation according to holy Scripture, and this I have urgently demanded. Otherwise I will endure all things for his imperial majesty and the empire: life and death, fame and infamy, reserving nothing at all for myself except only the right to confess and testify to the Word of the Lord. I most humbly commend myself and subject myself to his imperial majesty and the whole empire."

Therefore, on the next day, that is, the sixth day after Jubilate [April 26], after he had paid his respects to his supporters and friends who had visited him frequently, he left after breakfast, at about ten in the morning, accompanied both by those with whom he had traveled there and by Dr. Jerome Schurff, the lawyer of Wittenberg. Caspar Sturm, the herald, after a few hours followed him and found him at Oppenheim and accompanied him according to the verbal order of Emperor Charles.

And so may God for a very long time preserve for his church and his Word this most godly man born to defend and teach the gospel. Amen.

The Minutes of the Trial of Luther before the Diet of Worms Dr. Johann Eck, Doctor of Arts and Laws, Secretary of [the Archbishop of] Trier

(Let the Notary attest the forms)

The designated notary, in a clear and understandable voice, spoke first in Latin then in German, by order of his holy imperial majesty, and stated what follows in substantially these words:

Martin Luther: His holy and invincible imperial majesty, on the advice of all the estates of the Holy Roman Empire, has ordered that you be called here to the throne of his majesty so you might retract the books edited and published by you in both Latin and German, as well as the contents of these same books; also so you might in like manner recant their violence, form, and tenor according to the earlier order decreed by his majesty and properly brought against you. Wherefore, I ask you in the name of his imperial majesty and of the princes of the empire: First, do you acknowledge that these books here (a bundle of his books and writings in Latin and German was shown him) now named publicly to you one by one, which are published with your

name as author, are yours; do you recognize them as your works or not? Next, do you wish to retract and recall them and their contents or to cling to them henceforth and to insist on them?

Since this question was separated and divided into two parts for Luther, he answered the first part of the question, that the books, writings in Latin and German, shown to him and just read by title, were his, published at his residence, and that he acknowledged his offspring and would always acknowledge them (and he said in a somewhat lower voice, though still understandable, that some others, furthermore, which were not named were his): To the second part of the question, whether he wished to retract them and their contents and proclaim their recantation, he began to contrive excuses and to seek an escape. He said that he was prepared to yield and to accede to anyone seeking to instruct him from holy Scripture, and since this had not happened to him up to this time, although he had published so often, and since it was a question about a difficult and hard, not to mention a most important, matter (since it was about faith), he was not able to answer extempore and without forethought. Moreover, he asked most humbly that time be given and allowed him to think things over.

While these things were done and thus acted upon, his holy imperial majesty, with the counsel and agreement of all the electors and the other princes, both ecclesiastical and lay, and of the estates of the empire who were present in great number, wished through the celebrated Johann Eck to warn him kindly and gently in the beginning that he should keep in mind the unity of the holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and the general peace and quiet of the Christian commonwealth, and that he should not contrive to rend apart what he ought to respect, venerate, and adore. He should be unwilling to trust in his own opinion and in sacred texts twisted to suit his own understanding, and moving among questionable doctrines and discoveries both foreign and his own, to overturn the whole Christian religion, to arouse the world, to confuse the lowest with the highest, and to seduce so many godly minds and souls. He should consider how deeply he is now involved in his own inextricable errors, how difficult, indeed even impossible, it is to rectify them, and how many with his self-assured spirit he, unhappily, has seduced to danger and loss and sent to hell. He should desire, therefore, to come to his senses again and to return to the heart of the faith, and acknowledge and recant his errors. And if he should do this, his majesty on his part promised the hope of pardon and grace, and also that he would obtain those favors easily for him from the most holy [Father]. If, on the other hand, persevering wantonly in his errors, he should not listen to this sound exhortation, his majesty on his part wished to have it made clear publicly, on behalf of the faith by which he had been bound and held to the holy mother church and to the Christian religion, that he would defend the majesty of his and the holy apostolic throne through law. And he should consider what evil and what end would await him afterwards.

Now he had sought an opportunity for deliberation about the second part of the question. Of course he should not have asked this at all, and he certainly does not deserve to obtain it, for the nature and condition of the matter about which he is disturbed has been brought to his attention, for, even in the earlier order issued against him, a revocation which had to be made by him of his works, specifically and by name, and their contents, was introduced and declared to him. Therefore, because he has known for a long time why he was called and what had to be done, he should not drag out with further delay a matter so dangerous and so much at variance with custom. He ought, moreover, to have come here having finished his deliberation on this serious matter. Nevertheless, so that he may not seize the opportunity of complaining, in any way, that action had been taken too hastily, his majesty in clemency wishes to grant the requested deliberation and wishes further to have set and appointed, for making evident and known his deliberation, the following day at the fifth hour after noon, just as his majesty set and appointed that same day and hour for him to accomplish the things demanded.

There was a recess for the day. And after they turned from this to some other business, they adjourned.

When he arrived on the appointed day (let the notary continue) the distinguished secretary, by order of his sacred and invincible majesty, began to speak to him again in the following fashion in Latin and in German:

“Yesterday evening, Martin, you felt that it was burdensome because of the importance of the matter (as you then stated), to answer immediately and extempore that part of the interrogation concerning whether you wished to retract and revoke, together with their contents, the books named to you yesterday from the

list, books in Latin and German, edited and published by you and acknowledged to be your works, although in matters of faith and of things in which there lies a danger to souls no delay ought to be given, and especially to men trained and learned in holy letters (the interpretation of which you claim for yourself alone). You ought to be prepared to satisfy anyone demanding a reason about what constitutes your faith and hope. Nevertheless, his sacred and invincible majesty, through his innate mildness and kindness, granted you the opportunity for deliberation and appointed and set this day and hour for that declaration. Thus his imperial majesty and all the estates of the empire look forward and will listen attentively to that.”

To these words, Martin answered, requesting them, first of all, to listen kindly to him for the sake of justice and the cause of truth, and then asked to be forgiven if he addressed anyone with less than his appropriate title. If he erred in any way against the customs of courts, they should overlook it, for he was a monk not acquainted with royal courts but with the cells and chambers of a monastery. Later he answered with a rather long digression the questions put to him in the name of his imperial majesty. (This answer, since he took some time to deliver it, and committed it to writing, and since a copy of it was made by me, I have caused to be inserted in this document.) [Here follows text given in this translation, pp. 109–112.]

However, when Luther had finished speaking, the distinguished secretary, at a signal from his holy imperial majesty, began:

“By rights, Luther, you have every reason to think yourself favored, because you have spoken before so kind an emperor, who listened to you for some time with more moderation than you showed in your speech. Do you believe that this most godly ruler heard with equanimity and favor all that which you, with more violence and with greater bitterness than becomes your religion or profession, have used to attack the supreme pontiff? Look how little moderation there is in you, how temperance or modesty is lacking in you! Moreover, what about your deliberation concerning what you were to say: whether or not you wished to retract and to revoke those books which you have acknowledged as your own, together with their contents? You complain that you are treated unjustly if you are compelled to revoke all at once and without discrimination, since not all are of the same sort and kind. You have divided them into three kinds, for there are some in which you have treated simply, sincerely, and evangelically, matters of morals and faith, so that they are regarded as harmless even by your enemies; indeed, even the apostolic bull, otherwise harsh and cruel, considers some of them inoffensive. If you retracted those, you would be doing nothing other than damning those which friends and enemies alike approve. There are others of the kind in which you attack the pope and papal affairs, as you say, and tear apart their morals, vices, abuses, tyranny, and other things of that nature. You say that it is not proper for you to recall these lest you seem to have strengthened the tyranny. The third group are the books which you have written against those who are striving to defend the Roman tyranny and to destroy your own godly doctrines. These are the basis for the dispute. If you should revoke these, the result would be that the Roman tyranny might, with your patronage, rule more violently than it had ever ruled before.

“In these divisions, Martin, you have not distinguished between your dogmas and books sufficiently, since those which you have published after the decree of the supreme pontiff are far more abominable and execrable than those written earlier, and deserve to be condemned, since in them you proclaim as catholic truths the long since rejected heresies of John Huss, and at the same time undercut and weaken the whole authority and majesty of councils. Furthermore, you have not sufficiently answered my questions. Granted that some of your books do not contain harmful doctrine (something which we, however, do not concede): remove the diseased and poisoned dogmas, remove the godlessness, remove the heresies and the approval of heresies, remove those things which damage the catholic faith; no harm will come from that which is sound. His holy imperial majesty will deal most graciously with them if you change your mind, and he will intervene with the supreme pontiff that that which is sound is not destroyed and suppressed with that which is not sound. If, however, you continue to persist in your notorious errors and heresies, as you have begun to do, there is no doubt that all memory of you will be wiped out; all that is sound and unsound will be condemned together with its author. And this is neither new nor unheard of, since in ancient times the books of the Arians and the Montanists,²⁶ of the Photinians, and likewise of the Nestorians²⁸ and Eutychians, and other heretics

were burned although they contained much godly and catholic religious thought. For no doctrine is more effective in deceiving than that which mixes a few false teachings with many that are true.

“However, Martin, you finally retreat and flee to the place to which all heretics have been accustomed to retreat and take refuge. Of course you say that you are prepared, since you are a human being who is able to slip and fall, to accept instruction out of the holy Scriptures, from anyone at all, high or low. However, up to this time there has been no one (justly, I should think) who has attempted to do what you say, except all the heretics who have always done the same thing; and you, just like them, wish holy Scripture to be understood according to your judgment and the workings of your mind. You have come as a spokesman of great, new heresies as well as those long since condemned; for many of the things which you adduce are heresies of the Beghards, the Waldenses,³⁰ the Poor Men of Lyons, of Wycliffe and Huss,³² and of others long since rejected by the synods. Is it proper to question again, to drag into dispute, those matters which the Catholic church has judicially settled, matters which have turned upon the usages, rites, and observances which our fathers held with absolute faith, on behalf of which they would have endured all sorts of punishment, all torments, and for which at last they would rather have endured a thousand deaths than to have fallen away from in any way at all? Do you want us to stray from the path which our fathers faithfully trod?

“What will the Jews say upon hearing these things, what the Turks, what the Saracens, and the other sects who are opposed to our faith? How they will break into laughter, how they will mock, that now we Christians argue whether up to this time we have believed what is right. Do not, I entreat you, Martin, do not claim for yourself that you, I say, that you are the one and only man who has knowledge of the Bible, who has the true understanding of holy Scripture, to which understanding the most holy doctors toiling night and day in the exposition of Scripture, have attained through great labor and effort. Do not place your judgment ahead of that of so many distinguished men. Do not regard yourself as wiser than all others. Do not cast doubt upon the most holy, orthodox faith which Christ, the perfect lawgiver, instituted; which the apostles spread through the whole world; which the miracles made clear; which the martyrs confirmed with their red blood. And later, holy doctors, discussing the obscure passages of the prophets, and unveiling the greatest mysteries of both the New and Old Testaments, and with good arguments disputing against heretics, have more amply ascertained it. The result of the holy councils has strengthened it. What the doctors have discussed as doctrine the church has defined as its judgment, the faith in which our fathers and ancestors confidently died and as a legacy have transmitted to us. We are forbidden to argue about this faith by the law of both pontiff and emperor, and since, among many, reasoning and disputing never ends, both are going to judge those who with headlong rashness refuse to submit to the decision of the church. Punishments have been provided and published.

“In order to save time, I purposely pass over the rest of what you said, Martin, as not being pertinent to the matter at hand.

“Therefore it is futile, Martin, to expect a debate of those things which according to the faith you are bound to believe as certain and clear. Wherefore, I think this same question must again be pressed and renewed, that you answer sincerely and candidly, not ambiguously, not dialectically, whether or not you wish to recall and retract your books and the errors contained in them, which have been disseminated by you.”³⁴

When Luther had given his answer, and since all were worn out by the crowd and the heat and were preparing to depart, the distinguished secretary shouted a few last words because of the shortness of time:

“Lay aside your conscience, Martin; you must lay it aside because it is in error; and it will be safe and proper for you to recant. Although you say the councils have erred you will never be able to prove it, in matters of faith at least, and even in matters of morals I fancy it will be with much difficulty.”

Here Martin shouted back that he was able to prove these things.

Then there was a recess.¹

¹ Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 32, pp. 101–130). Fortress Press.