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H. R. Klann

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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# Luther on War and Revolution

By H. RICHARD KLANN

**S**ECULAR AUTHORITY, according to Luther, is in a sense the extension of patriarchal authority to the community. As such it is part of the present order of creation, by which Luther meant the conditions of human activity and existence in history. However, its constitutional form, like all other political settlements within the frame of Moral Law, was for him a matter of human expediency. For his part, Luther was content to accept the political settlement of his time.

The assignment of secular authority is to provide for the peace and general welfare of the community. It must have the power as well as the resolution vigorously to defend the community against its internal and external enemies. Luther was no pacifist. But he rejected an aggressive or preventive war unconditionally on moral grounds.

Secular authority is also limited by its assignment. Its authority does not extend beyond the physical existence of its subjects. If secular authority becomes totalitarian, that is, if it assumes also spiritual and moral authority and functions, it has thereby, in principle, renounced its claims to the obedience and loyalty of its subjects. According to Luther, it has become a tyranny.

However, Luther's thinking on the practical problems of war was also determined by his acceptance of the feudal system.<sup>1</sup> A feudal inferior may not resist a feudal superior. A feudal lord or prince may defend himself against a feudal equal. It should be stated that the limitations of the feudal system, which Luther accepted as moral obligations, must be distinguished from his firm belief in the right of national or territorial self-defense. As soon as the Lutheran jurists were able to convince Luther and his fellow theologians that the lesser magistrate, and indeed any individual, has the right of self-defense "in view of public violence," the Reformers conceded the right of resistance even against the emperor, as the discussion will disclose later on. But, unfortunately, this position was not developed beyond the immediate need, and

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, *Works*, trans., Philadelphia ed., 1931, V, 34 ff.

after 1555, when the Lutheran Reformation finally received complete legal recognition at the Diet of Augsburg, this doctrine receded into limbo. But the French Protestants, remaining a persecuted minority and dependent upon the nobility of France, continued to urge the rights of the lesser magistrate. Likewise John Knox of Scotland, in his struggle against Queen Mary, successfully persuaded the Protestant Scottish nobles of their duty to oppose their Roman Catholic queen. It should be distinctly understood that Luther's position is not one of unconditional obedience to a government. He grants the right of revolution to the lesser magistrate. In line with this view, Lutherans were able to support both the American colonies in 1776 and the Confederate States in 1861.

Luther's conclusions on the subject of war and revolution developed in view of particular situations, as for instance, the Peasants' War, the war against the Turk, and the pyramid of feudal relations in Europe, which was potentially dangerous to a stable peace. Questions of war and revolution were discussed especially between the years of 1523 and 1539. This study will deal briefly with the essentials of the record of these discussions.

The question of armed resistance against the emperor and allied princes was debated by Luther and his associates at various times between the years 1523 and 1539, whenever the threat of war with the Roman Catholic party in Germany arose.

An opinion was given in 1523 by Luther, Melanchthon, and Bugenhagen on the question of whether a prince may defend his subjects against persecution for the sake of their faith by means of war, either against the emperor or against other princes of the empire.<sup>2</sup>

Luther constitutes the following points: (1) Elector Frederick has so far remained neutral as concerning the Reformation movement in view of his lay status, although willing to yield to the truth. This neutral attitude cannot allow him to engage in war for the sake of this matter. He is obliged to yield to the imperial will and permit imperial persecution of the Lutherans in his lands also. By God's grace and his election the emperor has become the elector's lord.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Louis ed., 1910, X, 572 ff.

(2) But if in the interest of saving the Reformation movement the elector wants to resort to war, he must first abandon his neutral attitude and confess himself an adherent of the Reformation. Second, he must conduct the war not in the defense of his own subjects, but as a "foreign friend," coming from a "foreign country" (that is, a country not within the empire, a condition which Frederick could not possibly fulfill). Third, the elector must have a special call of the Spirit for this undertaking, for otherwise he is bound to yield to his feudal superior, the emperor, and be willing to die, along with other Christians, for the sake of the faith which he confesses. Fourth, but if other princes, without the emperor's command, attack the elector, the usual procedure of first offering peace and, if refused, of waging effective war, ought to be followed.

Obviously, Luther followed his understanding of feudal law and viewed the elector as a subject of the emperor and hence in duty bound to refrain from a war which must be interpreted as rebellion. The elector was the premier prince of the empire, and Luther hardly expected Frederick the Wise to pretend that he did not belong to the empire for the sake of being able to fight the emperor on equal terms. Nor was it likely that Frederick, by nature extremely cautious, would suddenly claim a special call from God to defend the Reformation. Apart from the fact that in the previous year Luther had denied the elector the right to assume the obligation to defend the Reformation, Luther would also have demanded signs and miracles of him if the elector had been inclined to make such a claim.<sup>3</sup>

Melanchthon and Bugenhagen agree with Luther that Christians ought to be willing to endure persecution, but Bugenhagen feels that the government is nonetheless obliged to defend its subjects against persecution. A distinctive element in Melanchthon's and Bugenhagen's separate opinions is their insistence upon the consent of the subjects of a prince if the latter decides to resort to war.<sup>4</sup>

At the Diet of Speyer, in the spring of 1529, the emperor felt himself to be in the position, because of his recent victory over Francis I and his temporary agreement with the Pope, to issue an

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<sup>3</sup> Parallel to Luther's demand for signs and miracles when the "heavenly prophets" of Zwickau claimed a special call from God.

<sup>4</sup> St. L. ed., X, 574, 575.

edict which was intended to arrest the progress of the Reformation and to curb the control of the princes over ecclesiastical property in Germany. Philip of Hesse proposed they meet the imperial threat by the formation of the Protestant League of Torgau, which would combine politically all anti-Roman Catholic elements in Germany and Switzerland. Upon Luther's advice, Saxony did not join the League. In a personal letter to the elector (John, brother of the late Frederick the Wise), written shortly after the Marburg Colloquy, and dated November 18, 1529,<sup>5</sup> Luther explained that he was constrained to advise against the proposed alliance because he believed it would involve the Reformation movement in a war. He would rather "be ten times dead than to have it on his conscience that the Gospel became the cause of disaster and shedding of blood."<sup>6</sup> Elector John is not to be anxious about the danger threatening him, because Luther was convinced that the emperor's intentions would come to nothing. The Evangelicals will achieve more with prayer than the opposition with threats. But if the emperor were to insist, as Luther does not believe he will, upon the surrender of the leaders of the Reformation, the elector is not to expose himself to attack, for Luther proposes in that contingency to surrender himself.<sup>7</sup>

For Your Princely Grace shall defend neither mine nor anyone else's faith, nor can you do it; but each one must himself defend his faith; each one must believe at his own peril, not at another's, if it comes to the point that our liege lord, the emperor, attacks us.<sup>8</sup>

In another letter written to Elector John, dated March 6, 1530 (a few weeks before the meeting of the Diet at Augsburg), Luther states that he consulted with Jonas, Bugenhagen, and Melancthon on the question of whether it is possible to conclude that resistance to the emperor is permissible on the basis of the imperial or secular laws, in view of the fact that the emperor is obliged by the oath of his office not to attack his vassals by force of arms.<sup>9</sup>

Luther reports the consensus that a Christian may not resist his government regardless of whether it is just or unjust. If resistance

<sup>5</sup> St. L. ed., X, 552—555.

<sup>6</sup> St. L. ed., X, 553.

<sup>7</sup> The Diet of Augsburg of 1530 voted that the Lutherans must return to Roman Catholicism by April, 1531, or be suppressed by force.

<sup>8</sup> St. L. ed., X, 555.

<sup>9</sup> St. L. ed., X, 544—549.

were ethically permissible in one case, it would become so in all cases, with the result that no government could maintain itself in principle.

Against imperial and canon law Luther maintains that the feudal contract must be observed by the Christian subject, even when it is violated by the feudal superior. The emperor must be obeyed unless the electors can agree to depose him.

Sin does not abolish authority and obedience, but punishment does, that is, if the empire and the electors unanimously deposed the emperor, so that he could no longer remain emperor. Otherwise, as long as he remain unpunished and emperor, no one ought to refuse to obey him or to resist him. That would constitute treachery, revolution, civil war.<sup>10</sup>

Nor may the princes argue that their office requires them to defend their subjects against injury:

The subjects of all princes are always also the subjects of the emperor, even more so than the princes. It will not do to propose that anyone can defend, by force, the subjects of the emperor against the emperor, their lord, just as little as it would be fitting for the mayor of Torgau to presume to defend the citizens by force against the elector of Saxony, as long as he remains elector of Saxony.<sup>11</sup>

What should be done in view of the reasonable certainty that the emperor will proceed to suppress the Reformation after the Diet of Augsburg? Luther advises that the princes should allow the emperor to persecute the Evangelicals within their territories. Each Christian will have to answer for his faith and confess it at the risk of life and property without involving the princes. But the princes are to refuse obedience if the emperor insists that they persecute their own subjects. They must not become partakers of evil, but obey God more than men.<sup>12</sup>

If the Christians will thus risk everything and depend solely on God's grace and protection, He will surely find the necessary means to preserve the Gospel among them, as He has done since the beginning of the Church. To defend the Gospel against the

<sup>10</sup> St. L. ed., X, 546.

<sup>12</sup> St. L. ed., X, 547, 548.

<sup>11</sup> St. L. ed., X, 547.

persecution of secular authority is evidence of a false faith, which does not trust God but the wits of men.<sup>13</sup>

Even if armed resistance to the emperor were permissible, Luther concludes that the cost in blood would hardly warrant it. The emperor would resist. And if successfully deposed, civil war would undoubtedly ensue over the question of who is to succeed him. No doubt, Satan would love this sort of game.<sup>14</sup>

The confessional victory of the Diet of Augsburg, held in 1530, did not achieve for the Lutheran princes and cities the desired imperial recognition of the Reformation. Charles V moved slowly, but on November 19, 1530, he finally issued the edict which was designed to end the confessional split and to return the Lutherans forcibly to the Roman Catholic fold.<sup>15</sup>

In this dangerous situation Luther issued his *Warning to his dear Germans*, published in January, 1531.<sup>16</sup> He writes that his prayers and faithful admonitions to the clergy and secular estates during the diet appeared to have been totally in vain. Instead of promoting peace, the diet has taken steps which threaten civil war, perhaps rebellion. The Roman Catholic party should not depend on the hope that Luther's doctrine of nonresistance to the emperor will effectively restrain the adherents of the Gospel. The threat of civil war being very real, Luther wants his own position to be fully understood.<sup>17</sup>

He will continue to counsel peace and nonresistance, but he wants it to be known publicly that any attack on the part of the Roman Catholic party very probably will be resisted because of the enormity of the injustice. And if that were to happen, he would not be silent, but treat the aggressors as he did the rebellious peasants. Resistance against such an attack, once undertaken, he will not call rebellion but a just war, because both natural and imperial law would be on the side of the Lutherans.<sup>18</sup>

Since he has become the "prophet of the Germans," Luther

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<sup>13</sup> St. L. ed., X, 548. Luther suggests that the advice of Is. 30:15 be taken. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

<sup>14</sup> St. L. ed., X, 549.

<sup>16</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1624—1665.

<sup>15</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1596—1616

<sup>17</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1626—1629.

(text of the edict).

<sup>18</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1629—1633.

intends to give his dear Germans some Christian instruction on the issues, so as to meet the eventuality that the Papists might succeed in their plans of stirring up the emperor and the Roman Catholic princes against the Lutherans. In this way he will discharge his duty as a public teacher of the Gospel and keep a good conscience.<sup>19</sup>

Luther's counsel to the Germans consists of the admonition to refuse military service or assistance to any plans of the emperor to make war upon the Lutherans. To obey the emperor in this matter would constitute disobedience to God and involve the eternal loss of one's soul. He intends to show that the emperor, in the event that he undertakes such a war, would contravene not only the will of God, but his own oath of office, the constitution of the empire, and the existing feudal contracts.<sup>20</sup>

Luther continues his tract with an analysis of some of the events of the previous diet and of the issues of the Reformation. His polemic is a powerful piece of psychological warfare designed to destroy the enemies' will to fight and to gain the sympathy of those who might be inclined to remain neutral. But his chief point is nonetheless clear: in accordance with Acts 5:29 the emperor is not to be obeyed in this case. Yet Luther will have this understood: to his own side he counsels neither rebellion nor even resistance. If blood flows, it shall be on the heads of the aggressors.<sup>21</sup>

Luther's letter to Lazarus Spengler, counselor of the city of Nürnberg, dated February 15, 1531, was intended to assure his friend that Luther's reported change of mind regarding resistance to the emperor was erroneous.<sup>22</sup> He explains that the negotiations at Torgau concerning the question resulted in a sharp dispute, because the Reformers insisted against the Protestant jurists that

<sup>19</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1641.

<sup>20</sup> St. L. ed., XVI, 1642.

<sup>21</sup> The same judgments on the issue of civil war and resistance to the emperor are repeated in Luther's *Gloss on the Imperial Edict*, published subsequently to his *Warning*, with the important reservation that his writings are not directed against the emperor's person, but against those who act treacherously against the Lutherans in his name. St. L. ed., XVI, 1666—1700. Toward the end of April, 1531, Luther replied in a vigorous tract (*The Assassin of Dresden, Composed for the Rescue of the Warning to the Dear Germans*, St. L. ed., XVI, 1701—19) to Duke George, his enemy in ducal Saxony, who charged that Luther had urged revolution, and that the Lutherans should therefore be suppressed by force. Luther denied the charge most emphatically.

<sup>22</sup> St. L. ed., X, 570—573.



the legal axiom "Force may be repelled by force" is not sufficient to allow war upon the emperor. Thereupon the jurists quoted the imperial law as saying that "it is permitted forcibly to resist the government in notoriously unjust matters."<sup>23</sup> Luther replied that he did not know of the existence of such a legal provision. For if the emperor were actually thus limited, Luther would not presume to change the imperial law, but would agree to the following syllogism: "Whatever Caesar has established, or Caesar's law, is to be observed. However, the law establishes that he is to be resisted in such a case. Hence he is to be resisted, etc."<sup>24</sup>

Luther adds that he has always taught the major premise that secular authority is to be obeyed in political matters, but never the minor premise, because he does not know whether it is true. Consequently the theologians referred the matter back to the jurists for further evidence, which they so far had failed to produce. If the jurists could prove the truth of the minor premise, Luther, as a theologian, would not refuse to acknowledge the validity of such constitutional law, which goes beyond both the natural and divine law. But since the jurists had so far failed to offer further proof, the theologians retained their former opinions about nonresistance to the emperor.

Evidently this letter aroused some speculation in Nürnberg. A month later (March 18, 1531) Luther answered another inquirer as follows:

We have referred the matter to the jurists. If they conclude, in line with the opinion of some, that the imperial laws teach resistance, as the equivalent of self-defense, we do not intend to oppose such a secular law. But as theologians we must teach that a Christian may not resist, but must endure everything. Nor may he offer the maxim: It is permitted to repel force with force. We will allow the laws of the jurists to stand, that a Christian may resist, not as a Christian, but as a citizen and member of the body politic. We talk of members of Christ and of the Church. Of course we know that a Christian may wield the sword and a secular office as a citizen and member of the body politic. We have written of that often. But that we should presume to give

<sup>23</sup> *In notorie injustis violenter resistere potestati.*

<sup>24</sup> *Quicquid statuit Caesar, seu lex Caesaris, est servandum. Sed lex statuit resistere sibi in tali casu. Ergo resistendum est, etc.*

advice to the "political member" concerning this resistance, that our office will not permit. Nor do we know their law. They must take it upon their conscience and see to it whether the law is on their side to resist authority as members of the body politic.<sup>25</sup>

Luther continues that if a constitutional law permitting resistance to the emperor actually exists, the Protestant League is undoubtedly a valid alliance. But as a theologian Luther does not feel it to be part of his office to advise in such political matters. The question is elaborated in a brief opinion of Luther's given at the same time. He states that if the issue of resisting the emperor is to be argued on the basis of constitutional law, he must refrain from giving an opinion. Luther is convinced that such a constitutional provision must be accepted, but how it is to be applied is a question which is beyond his competence as a theologian. Since the imperial constitutional law is within the competence of the jurists, let them decide.<sup>26</sup>

A letter written by Bugenhagen, dated January 20, 1547, refers to the debate and to a letter from Melancthon on the subject,<sup>27</sup> stating that the theologians and the jurists of Wittenberg had come to an agreement on the question of resistance against the emperor, having decided the question in favor of the existing imperial laws, "because it is a secular matter which deals with murder and unjust violence."<sup>28</sup>

The Holy League of Nürnberg, formed July 10, 1538, and consisting of Roman Catholic princes, appeared to threaten the Lutherans with war. Early in 1539 Elector John Frederick requested Luther's opinion on the issue of resisting this alliance of princes which professed to be acting in the emperor's name. The request was answered immediately by a letter addressed to Chancellor Gregor Brück.

Luther presents three points: (1) The elector has no feudal superior, except the emperor. (2) Hence he may legitimately defend his realm and subjects against the invading princes whose status is not different from that of ordinary murderers against whom secular authority as God's servant must use the sword, if

<sup>25</sup> St. L. ed., X, 568, 569.

<sup>26</sup> St. L. ed., X, 558, 559.

<sup>27</sup> St. L. ed., X, 544 (Bugenhagen was in Lübeck from 1530 to 1532).

<sup>28</sup> St. L. ed., X, 548—552.

necessary. (3) If these "murderous princes" claim to be making war in the name of the emperor, who had negotiated a truce with the evangelical princes, they must prove such authorization; otherwise it must be assumed that the truce still stands. In reality there can be no doubt, on the face of available evidence, that the Roman Catholic princes are in fact using the emperor as a shield for their own designs. Therefore any attack by these princes ought to be regarded as a revolt against the empire and the emperor and is to be vigorously resisted. Meanwhile, diplomatic moves such as appellations and protestations to the emperor are possible. These ought to delay matters and perhaps give rise to a new situation.<sup>29</sup>

However, Luther rejects a preventive war without qualification. The Smalcaldic League may under no circumstances attack first, but must wait until attacked by the Roman Catholic princes. Luther's major emphasis against a preventive war is upon the involvement in moral guilt which such a step would mean for the Protestants. Furthermore, a preventive war prejudices a case which the lack of some overt act on the part of the enemy has not yet made ready for judgment. Such a decision would also be a grave political error, for it would permit the Roman Catholic party to claim the protection of the emperor against the Lutherans, not to mention that the ensuing civil war would mean the ruin of Germany.<sup>30</sup>

If Landgrave Philip of Hesse insists on waging a preventive war, he should be given no assistance, and the Smalcaldic Alliance ought to be considered as abrogated. However, if any of the Allies are attacked by the Holy League of Nürnberg, Saxony would be obliged to come to their aid.<sup>31</sup>

The year 1539 was one of grave decisions. The issue of resisting the encroachments of other princes was decided. But the major question, whether the Lutheran princes and cities could lawfully resist the emperor, stirred up a great debate in Lutheran ranks. Early in the year the jurists of Wittenberg presented the theologians with an opinion, based upon their investigation of the constitutional law of the empire as well as of juridical procedure, stating that

<sup>29</sup> St. L. ed., X, 549—551.

<sup>31</sup> St. L. ed., X, 553.

<sup>30</sup> St. L. ed., X, 552.

resistance to the emperor was fully justified by law if the emperor violated the constitution of the empire.<sup>32</sup>

Upon receipt of this opinion of the jurists, Luther, Jonas, Melancthon, Spalatin, and other theologians replied that if the constitutional laws of the empire permit resistance to the government (in this case, the emperor), it is undoubtedly right to accept such laws. Moreover, the present dangerous situation may require self-defense on the part of the Lutheran princes not only on the ground of the permissive qualifications of the imperial constitution, but also "because of duty and the necessity of conscience." However, Luther and the other theologians are aware that this opinion contradicts their usual doctrine that the government is not to be opposed. Here they plead ignorance of the constitutional laws which permit resistance.<sup>33</sup>

In another important opinion on the subject of resistance to the emperor,<sup>34</sup> signed by Luther, Jonas, Bugenhagen, Amsdorf, and Melancthon, the theologians admit that the question of resistance to the emperor has been the source of much dispute among them. However, they were unanimously agreed that

since the Gospel is a doctrine concerning the spiritual and eternal kingdom in the hearts of men, which does not on that account reject the external or secular government, but rather confirms it and praises it highly, it follows that the Gospel permits any natural and equitable protection and defense, such as may be provided by natural law or the secular government. This is most important. For on this basis one must conclude also that the manifold secular orders are pleasing to God, and therefore may be used by Christians. . . . Therefore we say that the Gospel does not nullify constitutional or political laws.<sup>35</sup>

In this case we conclude that a prince is obligated thus, and pre-eminently so, to protect the Christians as well as the true external worship of God, just as a prince is obligated to protect a pious subject against unjust violence in an ordinary secular matter.<sup>36</sup>

The theologians view such efforts on the part of the princes as being on the same level as any good work which a Christian may do for his neighbor.

<sup>32</sup> St. L. ed., X, 558—561.

<sup>35</sup> St. L. ed., X, 562—567.

<sup>33</sup> St. L. ed., X, 562, 563.

<sup>36</sup> St. L. ed., X, 562.

<sup>34</sup> St. L. ed., X, 564.

There can be no doubt that it is proper for princes to protect Christian subjects as well as Christian doctrine and true external worship.<sup>37</sup>

And again:

Therefore princes are under obligation to plant and to preserve the true doctrine in their territories. . . .<sup>38</sup>

What does this mean in view of the contemporary situation vis-a-vis the emperor? The theologians give a consistent answer. Since the Gospel confirms secular governments, the relation of the princes to the emperor must be determined on the basis of constitutional law. This permits appeals to a general Christian council in matters regarding the Christian faith. If the emperor ignores this constitutional right and instead proceeds by force of arms against the princes, such action should be considered a "notorious injury" and as such resisted under the laws of the empire. The theologians refer again and again to examples from the Old Testament and history, especially to the case of Constantine and Licinius.<sup>39</sup> Their conclusion is that "public injuries relieve the subject of any oaths or treaties."<sup>40</sup>

The fourth, and last, formal opinion of the Wittenberg theologians on this issue (signed by Luther, Jonas, Bucer, and Melancthon) is even stronger.<sup>41</sup> Defense against another government is not only permitted, but commanded.

There are two questions: The first, whether the government is obligated to defend itself and its subjects both against princes of equal rank and against the emperor, especially concerning this religious issue. We have previously given our answer and opinion on it, and there is no question that this is the divine truth which we are obliged to confess to the point of death: namely, that defense is not only permitted, but certainly and seriously commanded to every secular authority. It owes God this service, to defend and to protect itself, if anyone, whether secular authority or others, undertake to compel it to accept idolatry and forbidden forms of worship. That is, to defend itself if anyone proposes to do unjust violence to its subjects.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> St. L. ed., X, 563.

<sup>38</sup> St. L. ed., X, 564.

<sup>39</sup> St. L. ed., X, 564—566.

<sup>40</sup> St. L. ed., X, 567.

<sup>41</sup> St. L. ed., X, 566—569.

<sup>42</sup> St. L. ed., X, 566.

This conclusion is again supported by passages and illustrations taken from the Old Testament. But Luther is prepared to go much further. He affirms the right of revolution against a government in the event of public violence or injury to an individual or group on the basis of natural and positive law:

And just as the Gospel confirms the office of secular government, so it also confirms natural and positive law, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 1:9: "The law is given to the unjust." There is no doubt but that each father is obliged, according to his ability, to protect wife and child against public murder. There is no difference between a murderer who is a private person and the emperor, if he, stepping outside his calling, proceeds to use unjust violence, or especially public, or notorious, unjust violence. For by natural law public violence nullifies all duties between subject and government. . . . All this is without a doubt both right and Christian. We are obliged to confess this in all danger and in death. But all this is to be understood as concerning defense. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Luther can make no room in his theology for aggressive war. Nor will he allow preventive war to stand as an ethically right procedure against a known and dangerous foe. The princes are indeed not obliged to wait until the enemy moves troops into their territories, but may proceed to attack the Roman Catholic princes as well as the emperor as soon as they (the Lutherans) have been put into the ban of the empire. However, the ban was a well-known procedure and the equivalent of a formal declaration of war.<sup>44</sup>

But Luther is by no means willing to conclude that the princes ought to make use of this right. They are to examine the political situation closely to see whether the problem cannot be met without a resort to war.<sup>45</sup>

It may be argued that the pressure of the princes and of the jurists upon Luther and the other theologians forced the latter to yield on this point. Perhaps a case can be made for this. In a letter to John Lübeck, pastor at Cottbus, dated February 8, 1539, Luther appears to say that he gave in to the arguments of the jurists on the basis of their evidence, although his inclination would be to

<sup>43</sup> St. L. ed., X, 567, 568.

<sup>45</sup> St. L. ed., X, 569.

<sup>44</sup> St. L. ed., X, 569.

give different counsel.<sup>46</sup> At any rate, he will not repudiate his opinion to Elector John, given almost ten years ago, nor his admonition of 1522 against insurrection and rebellion. However, he has been persuaded that natural law and the constitutional law of the empire permit resistance to the emperor. In a lengthy review of the reasons, both Scriptural and legal, which led him to accept this position, Luther concludes that no usurpation of power on the part of the emperor can be tolerated.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he will continue to advise Pastor Lübeck to teach his parishioners not to be revolutionists, but to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." Perhaps Luther did feel that the reasons which in his mind were sufficient to warrant resistance against the emperor might become a dangerous implement in the hands of the masses. The peasant revolt taught him to fear social chaos, which he considered the inevitable consequence of any revolution.

The patent fact, however, is that Luther placed his signature to the documents cited, not to mention the autographed letter to Lübeck of Cottbus. It is therefore more nearly accurate to say that while Luther would have preferred martyrdom, he was fair enough to admit the validity of the arguments presented by the Lutheran jurists. Nor was his concession to the jurists the matter of a moment. Several months later, in April, 1539, Luther proposed 91 theses on the words of Jesus: "Go and sell what thou hast, and follow Me." Of these theses, 67—70 deal with the issues of resistance to secular authority. Clearly, Luther taught his new conviction to his students.<sup>48</sup>

New York, N. Y.

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<sup>46</sup> St. L. ed., X, 554—559.

<sup>48</sup> St. L. ed., X, 576—585.

<sup>47</sup> St. L. ed., X, 558.