

ANOTHER QUINCENTENNIAL

The Diet and Edict of Worms (1521)

by THEODOR DIETER

On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo X issued the bull *Exsurge Domine* and named forty-one sentences that had been taken from Luther's writings and which Luther was now to revoke.¹ Not all quotations were correct,² and the sentences were torn from their context. They address indulgences, purgatory, penance, sin, faith in the sacraments, the treasure of the church, papacy, and the freedom of the will. The censure at the ends says: We "condemn, reprobate, and reject completely each of these theses or errors as either heretical, scandalous, false, offensive to pious ears or seductive of simple minds, and against Catholic truth."³ It is not clear which kind of criticism refers to which thesis. In any case, the errors are condemned, and all the faithful are obliged to regard those theses "as condemned, reprobated, and rejected."⁴ Luther is asked to recant these errors publicly within sixty days of the publication of the bull. Should Luther refuse to do so, he and his followers should be declared notorious heretics and their memory erased from the community of Christians. No one would be allowed to have fellowship with him; rather, he and his followers were to be taken prisoner and delivered to the Roman see. But instead of recanting, Luther defended and sharpened his views, and eventually he burnt the bull on December 10, 1520.

Thus, the excommunication of Luther became effective on January 3, 1521, through the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*.⁵ The pope, as the supreme judge of the church, had pronounced his judgment on Luther; now it was up to the emperor and the princes to execute this judgment. According to the laws of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, each ecclesial excommunication had to be followed by the corresponding measures by the temporal authorities.

The newly elected emperor (June 25, 1519), crowned on October 23, 1520, was now in the center of the question of how the ban against Luther would be executed in the German empire. The first of six questions that the electoral prince of Cologne asked him at the solemn coronation in Aachen was: whether he was prepared to preserve the traditional faith, protect the church and clergy, show reverence and devotion to the pope and the Roman Church. Also in all other ruler's oaths, which he had already sworn when he took possession of the other parts of his great empire, he publicly committed himself to protect the church and the true faith.⁶ In the territories where he was a sovereign ruler writings of the heretic Luther were burnt, as in the Netherlands, in Liège, Louvain, later in his presence also in Aachen after his coronation, in Cologne and in Mainz in November 1520. In Germany, Charles was dependent on the cooperation of the electoral princes, the other princes, and the magistrates of the imperial cities; thus, he needed to seek consensus with them, or at least be cautious if he wanted to impose his will on them. This constellation full of tensions determined the Diet, which the emperor opened in Worms on January 28, 1521, and which lasted until May 25.

In his election agreement, Charles had promised that the edict of outlawry would not be imposed on a man or a city without them being heard, and an inhabitant of the empire would not be brought before a foreign court. In a letter to the emperor, the Saxon electoral prince, wishing to protect Luther, wrote:

My request that nothing be done against Luther before he has been heard is made for the purpose that the truth and whether Luther is wrong in his writings may come to light, for Luther has offered to come here with safe conduct and to be interrogated by equal-ranking, honorable, and impartial judges and, where he would be overcome by Scripture, to be submissively rebuked.⁷

This request seemed to be a natural course of action, in normal legal proceedings, but not in this case. The verdict had already been pronounced, and by the highest authority on earth. If the electoral prince nevertheless demanded that a disputation be held to clarify the question of whether errors were found in Luther's writings, then, even without explicitly saying so, he was questioning the

authority of the pope as the supreme guarantor of the truth of the faith. With *Decet Romanum Pontificem* the pope had declared Luther a heretic; the bull was posted on many churches in Germany, it was preached about, and yet the prince declared the matter open! The electoral prince had asked Erasmus for advice on this matter, and the latter probably told him the same thing that he wrote to the university rector after Luther's books were burned in the university city of Leuven in the wake of *Exsurge Domine*:

I have never approved, and I never shall, the suppression of a man in this way, by public uproar, before his books have been read and discussed, before a man's errors have been pointed out to him, and before he has been refuted with arguments and with evidence from Holy Scripture . . . The burning of his books will perhaps banish Luther from our libraries, whether he can be plucked out of human beings' hearts, I am not sure.⁸

This shows that in those days papal decisions and declarations were not simply taken as the last word in a controversy.

Affirming the authority of the pope, the papal special nuncio Girolamo Aleander strongly opposed any invitation of Luther to Worms. Nevertheless, the fear of the imperial advisers was this: "A condemnation of the heretic by Charles V alone, out of his own power and on the basis of the papal bull of excommunication, would have been seen as a breach of the constitution of the empire and would have caused uproar in view of the anti-Roman mood in Germany."⁹ At the time of the Diet in Worms, there were already more than 600,000 copies of Luther's works among the people. This had to be taken seriously. Thus, despite Aleander's attempts, in a letter dated March 6, 1520, the emperor asked Luther to come to Worms.¹⁰ In it, Luther was not addressed as a heretic, but as "Venerable, Dear, Pious."¹¹ The letter did not speak of a revocation, which Luther was to perform, but indicated that the estates of the Diet wanted information about the books Luther had written. Safe conduct was emphatically guaranteed, and a letter of consignment was enclosed.¹² While he could not prevent the emperor from calling Luther to Worms, Aleander had to make sure that no disputation would take place at the meeting, but that Luther would only be asked to revoke his writings. On the other side, the Saxon Elector

did not take any precautions to ensure that a disputation could have taken place by impartial scholars. What he could have expected in the best case remains unclear. For Aleander, it was only a matter of a yes or a no to the demand for revocation, and he expected the latter answer. In addition, he had to prevent Luther from “misusing” the Diet for his propaganda. In fact, parallel to Luther’s invitation, the imperial court prepared a mandate against him, after two drafts of such a mandate had already been rejected by the imperial estates.

Luther’s journey to Worms became a triumphal procession for his cause. On April 17, he stood before the emperor and empire for the first time. Luther made a disappointing impression. To the first question asked him, whether the books before him were written by him, he answered yes; to the second question, whether he would revoke the views expressed in them, he reacted hesitantly and uncertainly, asking for time to think about them. This was a surprise to all who were present at the interrogation, but in view of the letter of invitation to the meeting, which reads differently, and Luther’s repeatedly declared willingness and expectation to answer in free disputation, this may be understandable.¹³ Luther’s second appearance is well known. He refused to recant because his conscience was “caught” in the words (plural!) of God. Precisely because his conscience was bound by the words of God, he had to demand freedom, that is, respect for his conscience. But Luther also knew that it was *his* knowledge of the words of God that bound him, and as a human being he could err.¹⁴ Therefore, he had to be prepared to subject his knowledge to a test. Because no disputation had taken place in Worms, let alone any testing by a group of impartial theologians, no revocation could be expected from Luther. A revocation would have presupposed that Luther had been taught better by scriptural arguments so that he would have been able to correct his previous understanding. This became a standard legal argument of Saxon politics when it later defended Luther’s refusal to recant.

Until his encounter with Luther at the Diet, Emperor Charles V did not seem determined to take consistent action against Luther. This changed at the latest during Luther’s second interrogation. The next day, Charles responded with a short speech, composed by hand, regarding Luther’s refusal to recant, a very impressive confession by

the 21-year-old emperor.¹⁵ He saw himself in a long line of kings and emperors, all of whom shared and defended the Church's faith, the faith that Luther attacked. Therefore he wanted to hold on to this faith in everything. And he stressed: "It is certain that a single monk errs in his opinion which is against what all of Christendom has held for over a thousand years to the present. According to his [Luther's] opinion, all of Christendom has always been in error."¹⁶ And the emperor boldly announced: "To settle this matter I am therefore determined to use all my dominions and possessions, my friends, my body, my blood, my life and my soul."¹⁷ Charles was convinced that he received his kingship to defend and protect the Catholic faith; this was part of the *raison d'être* of his kingship. With regard to Luther he said: "After the impertinent reply which Luther gave yesterday in our presence, I declare that I now regret having delayed so long the proceedings against him and his false doctrines. I am resolved that I will never again hear him talk."¹⁸

Charles recognized the need to reform the church; but, unlike Luther, for him this reform was connected with the fight against heresy as he understood it. Seven years later he said in a speech to his advisers:

To tell the truth, the goal of my trip to Italy is to force the Pope to hold a general council in Italy or Germany, against the heresies and for the reformation of the church. I swear to God and to His Son that nothing in the world oppresses me as much as Luther's heresy and that I will do my utmost to ensure that the historians who tell of the origin of heresy in my days also add that I have done everything against it; yes, I would be reviled in this world and condemned in the hereafter if I did not do everything to reform the Church and to destroy the accursed heresy.¹⁹

This shows the seriousness and energy of his fight against the Lutheran Reformation. Now the way was open for the nuncio Alexander to formulate the text of the edict against Luther at the Diet. The text was finished on May 8th in Latin and German. It received this date according to the notarization order of the emperor. However, the emperor did not sign the edict until May 26. He wanted to submit it to the imperial estates more for information than for approval; this did not happen until after the end of the Diet on

May 25, 1521. Some princes had already left before that date, and for those estates still present, electoral prince Joachim of Brandenburg declared their approval without discussion. The date of May 8 gave the impression that the Diet had officially approved it. But the emperor could have issued the edict out of his own power. In any case, it came into being lawfully, although Luther did not agree.²⁰

Before his premature departure from the Diet, Luther's electoral prince asked the emperor not to send the expected mandate against Luther to Electoral Saxony. The emperor agreed to this, and since it was not published in the very territory where Luther lived, the Edict of Worms was not put into effect there. A peculiar irony of the history of the Reformation! Certainly, Luther's freedom of movement was restricted by the edict, yet he was less affected by it than were his followers outside of Electoral Saxony. The Nuremberg Imperial Diet officially adopted the Worms edict into its final document (*Reichstagsabschied*) in 1524 and issued a mandate to execute it, but with the ambiguous addition that the estates should follow the edict "as much as possible."²¹ Luther, annoyed by this, published the Worms edict as well as the Nuremberg mandate with short critical remarks.²² In 1526, the Diet of Speyer allowed the estates to carry out the edict as they "hope and believe they can answer for it before God and imperial majesty."²³ But at the second Diet of Speyer in 1529, the majority decided that the Edict of Worms should again be strictly enforced. The estates that adhered to the Reformation protested against this and confessed that the relevant provisions concerning the edict had been passed "against God and his holy word, the salvation of all our souls and good conscience" and were therefore considered invalid by them.²⁴

The Edict of Worms

The beginning of the edict resembles the confession of the emperor as his response to Luther's final statement. It is said that the imperial office has two great tasks: to enlarge the empire, inherited from the ancestors, and to keep the Christian faith pure against heresies. This responsibility is all the greater for Charles, because none of his ancestors possessed such a wealth of power. To give space to

heresies would violate both the conscience and the glory of the emperor. The heresies that have arisen in Germany in the previous three years have already been condemned by councils, which of course means that they must not be debated. Thus the widespread demand to “hear” Luther, to have him present at the Diet, to offer him the opportunity to explain and defend his views in a disputation and to try to refute them, is in fact meaningless. The matter is already decided and needs no further disputation: “[I]t is plain to you all how far these errors and heresies depart from the Christian way, which a certain Martin Luther, of the Augustinian order, has sought violently and virulently to introduce and disseminate within the Christian religion.”²⁵ The edict describes the consequences if the authorities did not fight against the heresies quickly and energetically: “disorder, and mighty dissolution and pitiable downfall of good morals, and of the peace and the Christian faith” would follow.²⁶

The text then describes what the pope did; in several places in the edict one finds shorter or longer narratives about the mildness and patience with which pope and cardinals, emperor and princes treated Luther to induce him to repent. To be a heretic, one must not only publicly express opinions that conflict with the teaching of the Church, but must also, when warned of heresy, persevere with one’s opinion.²⁷ Those reports about the proceedings against Luther have the goal to show that the Roman side did everything to preserve Luther from his road to ruin, that therefore the responsibility for what is to come lies solely with Luther and that the trial against him was formally correct. The fact that Luther had not obeyed the summons to Rome and had not recanted despite many Roman efforts has made strict measures inevitable. Thus, finally, the pope declared Luther to be the “son of disobedience and wickedness and a divider and heretic who is to be avoided by all.”²⁸ Since no formal objections can be made to the proceedings, now they are rightly cracking down on Luther. By sending the bull to them, the pope has asked the temporal authorities to execute the measures announced in it against the heretic and to fulfil their duties.

The edict complains that not even the condemnation by the bull and its execution by burning books have made Luther recant or ask

for absolution; rather, he has added with his further books “bad fruits of his perverse mind and spirit.”²⁹ This refers to “On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church.” The edict here goes far beyond *Exsurge Domine* and, although it is the document of temporal authorities, it declares Luther’s view of the sacraments to be heretical as deviating from tradition (Lateranense IV). It mentions Luther’s denial that there are seven sacraments, his “defilement” of the “indissoluble bond of marriage,” his understanding of last unction as a “mere invention,” communion under both forms as with the Bohemians, the problematization of confession so that it can no longer give comfort to burdened hearts, his contempt for the priestly office and his “scurrilous and shameful words” against the successor of Peter.³⁰ And he denies free will. The mass confers benefit only on those who take part in it, not on the deceased.³¹

Especially does he impugn the authority of the holy fathers, as they are received by the Church, and would destroy obedience and authority of every kind. Indeed, he writes nothing which does not arouse and promote sedition, discord, war, murder, robbery and arson, and tend toward the complete downfall of the Christian faith. For he teaches a loose, self-willed life, severed from all laws and wholly brutish; and he is a loose, self-willed man, who condemns and rejects all laws; for he has shown no fear or shame in burning publicly the decretals and canon law.³²

Aleander had tried to show the imperial estates that Luther’s teaching would lead to turmoil and discord. To avoid such conflicts was an outstanding concern of all participants in the Diet. The repeated indication that a harsh action against Luther could lead to an uprising of the “common man” might have served for some as a proof of Aleander’s opinion while others would blame the Roman side for instigating the violence.

Particularly serious for many of Luther’s contemporaries was his denial of the authority of councils. When Luther stated in Worms, in his closing words at the second interrogation, that councils have erred, Charles V interrupted the imperial orator Johann von Eck and finished the interrogation: “That is enough: I do not wish to hear any more from someone who denied the authority of the councils!”³³ Luther had appealed to a council, and the emperor had

tried to urge the pope to hold a council; but if even the authority of councils was fundamentally in question, what sense would this make? Who then could be the judge in this conflict? Luther's general criticism of councils and of the Council of Constance in particular is especially emphasized in the edict.

The edict sees Luther "not as a human being, but as the evil enemy in the form of a man in a monk's habit."³⁴ Nevertheless, it is emphasized that the emperor and the Diet dealt with Luther with great patience and without applying the procedural rules in all their severity. This is described in detail: the gracious invitation to the *Reichstag*, the granting of a period of reflection after the first interrogation, the second interrogation with the refusal to recant, then three days of negotiations with Luther in small circles until the heretic's departure.³⁵

Before the measures against Luther and his followers are made known, the fact of his heresy and the judgment about him are stated: "Martin Luther still persists obstinately and perversely in maintaining his heretical opinions, and consequently all pious and God-fearing persons abominate and abhor him as one mad or possessed by a demon."³⁶ The edict is issued in praise of God, the protection of the Christian faith and the honor of the pope (as to goal) by virtue of the imperial office and its authority (as to competence) with the unanimous approval of the Diet for the execution of the judgment which the pope has proclaimed with the bull on Luther (as to object). With the edict, the emperor determined how Luther was to be regarded by all: "as a limb cut off from the Church of God, an obstinate schismatic and manifest heretic."³⁷ This is followed by the threat of punishment in case the provisions of the edict were violated. Afterwards the measures follow first against Luther, then against his followers, further against his books and those sharing his opinions.

We strictly order that [. . .] you shall refuse to give the aforesaid Martin Luther hospitality, lodging, food, or drink; neither shall anyone, by word or deed, secretly or openly, succour or assist him by counsel or help; but in whatever place you meet him, you shall proceed against him; if you have sufficient force, you shall take him prisoner and keep him in close custody; you shall deliver

him, or cause him to be delivered, to us or at least let us know where he may be captured. In the meanwhile you shall keep him closely imprisoned until you receive notice from us what further to do, according to the direction of the laws. And for such holy and pious work we will indemnify you for your trouble and expense.³⁸

Luther is made an outlaw, cut off not only from the ecclesial but also from the secular community. He should be captured if possible, but no license to kill is granted. It would then be up to the ecclesial and temporal authorities to decide what to do with a captured Luther.

In like manner you shall proceed against his friends, adherents, patrons, maintainers, abettors [. . .] and followers. And the property of these, whether personal or real, you shall, in virtue of the sacred ordinances and of our imperial ban and over-ban, treat in this way; namely, you shall attack and overthrow its possessors and wrest their property from them and transfer it to your own custody and uses; and no one shall hinder or impede these measures, unless the owner shall abandon his unrighteous way and secure papal absolution.³⁹

The prospect of being able to appropriate and use the property of the outlaws was of course a strong motive to take action against these people. The protection of property belonging to a community does not apply to those who have been excluded from the community.

Consequently we command you, each and all, under the penalties already prescribed, that henceforth no one shall dare to buy, sell, read, preserve, copy, print, or cause to be copied or printed, any books of the aforesaid Martin Luther, condemned by our holy father the Pope as aforesaid, or any other writings in German or Latin hitherto composed by him, since they are foul, harmful, suspected, and published by a notorious and stiffnecked heretic. Neither shall any dare to approve his opinions, nor to proclaim, defend, or assert them, in any other way that human ingenuity can invent, notwithstanding he may have put some good in them to deceive the simple man.⁴⁰ [The text continues:] For just as the very best food, when mixed with a drop of poison, is shunned by all human beings, how much more shall such writings and books, in which so much poison for souls and damnation is contained, not only be shunned by all of us, but also be removed from the memory of all human beings and destroyed, so that they can harm no one or kill eternally. For all what has been well written in his [Luther's] books, was already formerly indicated many times

by the holy fathers, who were accepted and approved by the Church. There it can be read and held without having to worry or be suspicious of any evil.⁴¹

It is thus well recognized that in Luther's writings some good insights are to be found, but this good does not cancel out the bad; rather, the poison for the soul contained therein does not permit Luther's books to be read because of the good in them. These books, and with them their fatal ideas, shall be completely erased from the memory of human beings. Here, then, we are concerned with a *damnatio memoriae* ("condemnation of memory") not of Luther's person, rather of his books and ideas. To this end, the emperor commands all worldly authorities in his domain, under threat of punishment, to order in their area of responsibility that "Luther's poisoned writings and books, because they cause so much turmoil, damage, division and heresy in the Church of God, are to be burned with fire, or in one way or another completely removed, destroyed and annihilated."⁴²

The thoughts of Luther may also not be spread by other authors. No books may be written, printed, painted, sold or purchased which contain anything "which gives rise to error in our holy faith and contradicts what the holy Christian Church has hitherto held, as well as hostile writings and calumnies against our holy father, the pope, prelates, princes, high schools and their faculties and other honorable persons, and what leads away from good morals and the holy Roman Church."⁴³ Thus, any criticism of the Church is prohibited. A special commandment goes to the judicial authorities, who are to ensure that the aforementioned prohibition is enforced.

A censorship provision follows. In drafting the edict, Aleander was proud that he had in this way, without being allowed to name it, introduced the bull *Inter sollicitudines* of May 4, 1515,⁴⁴ into imperial law.⁴⁵ "No printer [. . .] may begin to print books or writings containing anything that concerns the Christian faith to a lesser or greater extent without the consent of the local bishop or his representative or deputy and without the consent of the theological faculty of one of the nearest universities."⁴⁶ This censorship provision also applies to all other books, whatever their contents, which may

be printed only with the consent of at least the local bishop or his deputy. This will be a threat to all printers in the future.

The Edict of Worms ends with the words: "So that all that [has been determined in the edict] may be realized and believed, we have sealed this letter with the imperial seal. The letter is given in our and the Holy Kingdom city of Worms, on May 8th of the 1521st year after Christ's birth, the second year of our Roman Empire and the sixth year of all [our] other empires."⁴⁷

Commentary

By its origin, the Edict of Worms became a document of the crisis of church authority. With the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem* Luther was expelled from the church because of heresy. This was a decision of the highest ecclesial judge, but this decision was not, as was to be expected according to the law, automatically followed by the emperor making Luther an outlaw; rather, the Saxon electoral prince demanded to "hear" Luther in Worms in order to bring the truth about him to light. Simply by doing so they called into question the authority of the Roman judgment. The frequent abuse of the heresy accusation in the Middle Ages had already contributed to this loss of authority. "After all, the exercise of ecclesiastical teaching authority was used early on as a means of fighting all kinds of opponents—for example in disputes between monks and overly free teachers, between world clergy and mendicants, between Dominicans and Franciscans and within the mendicant orders."⁴⁸ The papal nuncio Aleander wrote in a letter on February 8, 1521: "But now all Germany is in great turmoil; nine tenths are raising the field cry 'Luther!,' and for the remaining tenth, if they are indifferent to Luther, the slogan is at least: 'Death to the Roman court!'"⁴⁹ Even though this may be exaggerated, the mere fact that so many people shared Luther's ideas, which the Roman magisterium had declared to be heretical, demonstrates how many had emigrated from the domain of papal authority. Under these circumstances it would not lead to conflict resolution simply to appeal or refer to papal authority. Thus, many participants of the Diet in Worms were in favor of offering a hearing to Luther as eventually happened in April of 1521.

Even if finally Nuncio Aleander formulated the edict in the sense of *Exsurge Domine* and *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, the fact that it did not come into force in Electoral Saxony where Luther lived shows that the doubts about papal authority and the opposition to it could not be removed by the threat of violence.

This crisis of authority is reflected in the ambiguity and even self-contradiction of the demand that Luther should be “heard” at the Diet. On February 19, 1521, the imperial estates rejected the draft of an imperial mandate against Luther and demanded, with a view to the “common man,” that Luther should appear at the Diet with safe conduct and be “heard” by some learned and knowledgeable people. The theological conflict was by no means to be disputed; Luther was only to be asked whether he wanted to insist on and persist in his published writings and articles which are “contrary to our holy, Christian faith, which we and our forefathers have hitherto held, and to insist on it.”⁵⁰ The condemnation of Luther is thus presupposed. Relief is only promised in the case of revocation. Thus, it is not clear what the purpose of this invitation to “hear” Luther should have been. Luther had the possibility to recant in Wittenberg, too. Or was this just a tactic to persuade the emperor to invite Luther, which was then expected to have its own dynamic? After the Imperial Diet in Nuremberg in 1524, Luther pointed out in his aforementioned publication of the Worms edict and the Nuremberg Mandate that the Imperial Diet had made two contradictory decisions: First, “I am to be treated in accordance with the outlawry that was imposed on me in Worms, and this commandment is to be carried out strictly, and in addition to this, the opposite commandment is to be accepted, that one should first of all negotiate at the future Diet what is good and bad about my teaching. There I am condemned *and* spared for the coming trial.”⁵¹ This shows that on the one hand the estates were clinging to the traditional ecclesiastical jurisdiction and its realization by the temporal authorities, and yet some of them also realized that all this had become fragile, because the old procedures were not appropriate for addressing what was new in Luther’s theology. This widespread impression of impropriety took away the inner strength of the conventional procedures in dealing with heresy. The Edict of Worms

itself conceals this; the failure to implement it everywhere in the German Reich shows it clearly.

In a sharp comment on the mandate of the Nuremberg Reichstag in 1524, which was issued in the name of the emperor, Luther wrote:

Here you see how the poor, mortal sack of maggots, the emperor, who is not for a moment sure of his life, brazenly boasts that he is the true, supreme protector of the Christian faith. The Holy Scripture says that the Christian faith is a rock stronger than the devil, death and all power (Matthew 16:18) and a divine power (Rom 1:16). And such a power should be protected by a child of death, whom even a scab or pock can tie to bed?⁵²

Had Luther with these strong words also considered how much he owed the preservation of his very life to the protecting hand of his electoral prince? In these words, Luther may have underestimated the role of the princes and magistrates in promoting and protecting the Reformation movement in some areas or in its suppression in others, as in Austria or Slovenia. With regard to the Edict of Worms, it is particularly evident that Frederick the Wise, through clever politics and diplomacy, managed to prevent the edict from being put into effect in electoral Saxony.

When it comes to the edict, we always have to consider Emperor Charles V. Luther's words just quoted bring to mind what biographer Heinz Schilling wrote about the emperor's life record:

Tragic is the contrast between pretended majesty and his performance as a ruler. In the end, the Emperor had missed the goals that he had pursued throughout his life as a mission received from God. Instead of the new peaceful order for the Holy Roman Empire and Europe, Germany was torn apart internally, and the European powers were facing each other more hostilely than ever before. Instead of the longed-for unity and integrity of the church, Christendom had fallen into the fundamental enmity of the denominations. The Church, for him and his house the only holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church had become a particular church [. . .] The first emperor of a world empire had to capitulate to the centrifugal forces of the new age and admit to himself that his world had been shattered. Wherever he wanted to create harmony, law, and order, he became a party, in the struggle for the political order of Europe as well as in the struggle for reform of the church. [. . .] In only five years, the wheel of

Fortune had torn him down from the height of the victorious emperor, who in 1547/48 dictated his terms to the defeated at the ‘harnessed Reichstag’ of Augsburg, into the misery of a refugee.⁵³

Luther’s words seem to have a prophetic dimension. The emperor did not preserve the unity of the empire and was unable to achieve the reform of the church as he thought it should be. This also applies to the Edict of Worms. But even the pure word of the gospel, which Luther was convinced had been brought back to light by the reformers, did not lead to the reform of the whole church. Thus, the Edict of Worms has become a document of the division of Christianity and Europe.

FOR FURTHER READING

- Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to the Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985.
- Armin Kohnle, *Reichstag und Reformation: Kaiserliche und ständische Religionspolitik von den Anfängen der Causa Lutheri bis zum Nürnberger Religionsfrieden*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001.
- Geoffrey Parker, *Emperor: A New Life of Charles V*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019.

NOTES:

1. *Dokumente zur Causa Lutheri (1517–1521)*, part 2: *Vom Augsburger Reichstag 1518 bis zum Wormser Edikt 1521*, eds. Peter Fabisch and Erwin Iserloh (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991), 364–411 (hereafter cited as Fabisch/Iserloh). Parts of the bull are translated into English: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo10/11oexdom.htm>.
2. See Heinrich Roos, “Die Quellen der Bulle ‘Exsurge Domine,’” in *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Johann Auer and Hermann Volk (Munich: Karl Zink, 1957), 909–926; Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, “Martin Luther and the Bull *Exsurge Domine*,” *Theological Studies* 30 (1969), 108–112.
3. Fabisch/Iserloh, 388.
4. Fabisch/Iserloh, 388.
5. Fabisch/Iserloh, 435–467.
6. Heinz Schilling, *Karl V: Der Kaiser, dem die Welt zerbrach* (Munich: Beck, 2020), 101 (hereafter cited as Schilling, *Karl V*).
7. *Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.*, vol. 2, ed. Adolf Wrede (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1896), 471.5–11 (hereafter cited as RTA).
8. Quoted from Geoffrey Parker, *Emperor: A New Life of Charles V* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 118 (hereafter cited as Parker, *Emperor*).

9. Volker Reinhardt, *Luther der Ketzer: Rom und die Reformation* (Munich: Beck, 2016), 149.
10. *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, *Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930ff.); 2:280.1–21 (hereafter cited as WA Br).
11. WA Br 2:280.3.
12. WA Br 2:280.1–281.32.
13. Geoffrey Parker says that “Luther had indeed received advance notice of the two simple questions (Parker, *Emperor*, 121),” but this does not seem to be so clear. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to the Reformation 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 453, 455.
14. *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 73 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 7:834.11–23 (hereafter cited as WA).
15. See Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1964), 94 (hereafter cited as Hillerbrand).
16. Hillerbrand, 94.
17. Hillerbrand, 94.
18. Hillerbrand, 94.
19. Quoted from Schilling, *Karl V.*, 136.
20. For Luther’s denial, see WA 19, 276,8–25; for the legal aspects, see Armin Kohnle, *Reichstag und Reformation: Kaiserliche und ständische Religionspolitik von den Anfängen der Causa Lutheri bis zum Nürnberger Religionsfrieden* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 12f.; 100f. (hereafter cited as Kohnle, *Reichstag*).
21. Quoted from Kohnle, *Reichstag*, 218.
22. WA 15:254–278.
23. Quoted from Kohnle, *Reichstag*, 269.
24. Quoted from Heinrich Bornkamm, “Die Geburtsstunde des Protestantismus,” in *Das Jahrhundert der Reformation: Gestalten und Kräfte* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1983), 160.
25. Hillerbrand, 95.
26. Hillerbrand, 95.
27. See Richard J. Serena, “The Excommunication of Martin Luther: *Exsurge Domine* (1520) and *Decet Romanum Pontificem* (1521),” *Lutheran Quarterly* 34:2 (Summer 2020): 194–208, 195.
28. RTA 2:645.10f.
29. RTA 2:646.3f.
30. Hillerbrand, 98.
31. Hillerbrand’s translation of this sentence (98) is incorrect: “And he writes that the mass confers no benefit on him for whom it is celebrated.”
32. Hillerbrand, 98.
33. Quoted from Parker, *Emperor*, 122.
34. RTA 2:648.10f.
35. RTA 2:648–652.
36. Hillerbrand, 99.
37. Hillerbrand, 99.
38. Hillerbrand, 99.
39. Hillerbrand, 99f.
40. Hillerbrand, 100.

41. RTA 2:655.23–32.
42. RTA 2:656.6–9.
43. RTA 2:657.5–10.
44. See *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des Römischen Katholizismus*, eds. Carl Mirbt (1st–5th edition) and Kurt Aland (6th, completely revised edition), vol. 1 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), 497 (no. 784).
45. Fabisch/Iserloh, 542f., fn. 58.
46. RTA 2:658.2–9.
47. RTA 2:658.24–659.2.
48. Ulrich Köpf, “Die Ausübung kirchlicher Lehrgewalt im 13. und frühen 14. Jahrhundert,” in *Gewalt und ihre Legitimation im Mittelalter*, ed. Günther Mensching (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 155.
49. *Die Depeschen des Nuntius Aleander vom Wörmser Reichstage 1521*, trans. and commented on by Paul Kalkoff (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1886), 43.
50. RTA 2:516.14f.
51. WA 15:254.15–19 (emphasis added).
52. WA 15:278.1–7.
53. Schilling, *Karl V.*, 10–12.