tion and detailed exegetical proofs, were aimed at a specialized audience, for colleagues a chance to change, for students a chance to learn. But the official, academic world had not wanted to listen to him. By February 1520 the universities of Cologne and Louvain launched their condemnations of Luther's theology. Oh, wrongheaded academics!

It was not, however, just out of a sense of disappointment at the attitude of the universities that Luther turned to the general public. His reform manifesto for the German nation is not the continuation of the academic debate via other means; it is the result of his shattering realization that the Antichrist had made deep inroads into the Church.

There are two events which, taken together, reveal the new dimensions of what was probably Luther's most effective polemic tract. In February 1520 he was deeply shocked to read Ulrich von Hutten's edition of Valla's (†1457) treatise, which showed the famous Donation of Constantine to be a forgery. This very document had been invoked for centuries to prove the transfer of sovereignty over the Western world from the Roman Emperor Constantine to the pope; the so-called Donation of Constantine had been the Roman claim to supremacy over the Western world. Lies—all of it, nothing but Roman cunning! No longer could Luther suppress the conclusion that the Antichrist, the final adversary traditionally expected to appear during the Last Days, had already started his attack on the Church.[34]

WHILE LUTHER still hesitated to air publicly this awful sense of foreboding, a second event made it plain that his premonition was based on fact. In early June 1520 a tract written in 1519—the *Epitoma responsionis ad Lutherum*—claiming to be a concise refutation of all Luther's fundamental errors, reached Wittenberg. Luther was well acquainted with the author of this *Refutation*, the Dominican and highest-ranking curial theologian Silvester Prierias, for it was his expert opinion that had served as grounds for Luther's trial and had been enclosed with the official summons to Rome in August 1518.[35]

The crucial theological argument upon which Prierias' 1519 response to Luther hinged was the same as in 1518: the Church means the Church of Rome, headed by the pope, who is infallible and thus more authoritative than councils and even the Holy Scriptures themselves. There is no authority higher than the pope; and he cannot be deposed, "even if he were to give so much offense as to cause people in multitudes . . . to go to the Devil in Hell,"[36] as Prierias quoted from canon law.

†Throughout the text dagger precedes a death date.

Luther was appalled at this papal doctrine: "I think," he wrote to his friend Spalatin, "that everyone in Rome has gone crazy; they are ravingly mad, and have become inane fools and devils."[37] Lies are passed off as truth and, as in the case of the Donation of Constantine, even codified into law, and Scripture subordinated to papal authority—this is the ultimate anti-Christian perversion of the teachings of the Church.

This discovery left Luther no choice but to address the general public: The time of silence was over! Now he had to proclaim the state of emergency. In his response to Prierias, published in June 1520 "for the information of all Christians," he warned of the god-awful consequences that would arise from Rome's suppression of the Gospel. His every word vibrates with fear and trembling before this gaping threat of the final perversion of all order and virtue. No later Protestant will ever be able to imagine the full intensity of Luther's anguish: "So farewell, ill-fated, doomed, blasphemous Rome; the wrath of God has come over you."[38]

In the greatest of haste he completed his political manifesto, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.* The empire had to be roused; its assistance was needed if reforms were finally to be carried out so that the people's pent-up rage would not vent itself in the form of an unbridled, bloody uprising. Rome, it must be remembered, has a dual function here: firstly, it is the usurper of temporal rights, in particular with respect to the Holy Roman Empire. The horrid consequences of the Donation of Constantine[39] are sarcastically spelled out: "In name the empire belongs to us, but in reality to the pope. . . . We Germans are given a clear German lesson. Just as we thought we had achieved independence, we became the slaves of the craftiest of tyrants; we have the name, title, and coat of arms of the empire, but the pope has the wealth, power, the courts, and the laws. Thus the pope devours the fruit and we play with the peels."[40]

But Rome is also the gateway through which the Devil forces his way into the Church to launch his last campaign against Christ. The truth is turned against Christ, the office of the pope as the servant of servants is changed into the power of a ruler over rulers. However, the victorious Christ at God's right hand needs no vicar, for the ruler of the world in Heaven "sees, does, knows and is capable of all things"—without the pope. It is the suffering Christ who seeks representation on earth through "working, preaching, suffering, and dying";[41] this kind of vicar is called for. Where these two offices, sovereignty in Heaven and service on Earth, are interchanged, all Hell breaks loose, and the vicar of Christ is transformed into the Antichrist.

The worldly usurper is to be contained and combatted, if necessary by force. It is for this purpose that the temporal ruler is armed with the sword.

But only prayer and penance can overcome the Antichrist. Only God can protect the Church now, for the Last Days have begun. We can kill and wash our hands "in blood," but we will no longer be able to achieve anything trusting in our own strength. The introductory sentences of the *Address to the Christian Nobility* are the political consequence of this vision of history, a view which had to be thoroughly repugnant if not totally incomprehensible to the German nationalists among Luther's early supporters:

> Our first concern must be that we fully realize the seriousness of the situation: we should not undertake anything trusting in our strength or inventiveness—even if all the power in the world were ours. For God does not desire nor tolerate good works when begun through trust in one's own strength and reason. He strikes them down, there is nothing to be done, as Psalm 33(:16) says: "A king is not saved by his great army; a mighty man is not delivered by his great strength." For this very reason, as the historical record shows, our beloved Emperors Frederick I and II and many other German emperors feared around the world were so pitifully trampled on and forced down by the popes; they may well have relied on their own power more than on God: that is why they had to fall. And I am afraid that in our time that bloodthirsty warrior Julius II could get away with murder, because France, the Germans, and Venice relied upon themselves. The children of Benjamin destroyed twenty-two thousand Israelites because these had relied on their own strength (Judges 20–21).
>
> If this is not to happen to the noble blood of Charles, we must realize that we are not dealing here with mere men but with the prince of Hell, who likes to fill the world with war and bloodshed but can not be overcome by them.[42]

Thus Luther censures the very German emperors who were hailed by the young humanist movement as symbols of national identity. It is no coincidence that at this time the Hohenstaufens Frederick I and Frederick II received particular attention. Barbarossa, who in thirty-five years of imperial rule unified the empire as was never to happen again, was especially popular.

The spread of the Renaissance to Germany had strengthened its national fervor. Now medieval historical sources were being scrutinized so that Roman-Italian arrogance could be matched by pride in Germany's own history. Had Luther taken control of this national movement, he would have become the personal symbol of the struggle for freedom from Roman exploitation and oppression. And the Reformer did in fact awaken such expecta-

tions: "The liberation of the Germans is in Luther's hands!" Or so thought Ulrich von Hutten, champion of the national movement, as he strove to mobilize town and country. The strident tone of his commentary on the papal bull against Luther is unmistakably nationalistic:

> Here, you Germans, is the Bull of Leo X, with which he attempts to hide the Christian truth that has now come to light again. He wants to restrict and stay our freedom, so that it cannot recover and be revived in all its strength—our freedom, which after a long period of oppression is finally showing signs of life again. We will resist anyone who undertakes such a thing. Yes, we will publicly take steps long in advance to keep that person from succeeding and accomplishing anything in his restless passion and waywardness. By Immortal Christ, when was the time ever riper, when was there a better opportunity to do something worthy of a German? Everything indicates that there is more hope today than ever before of stifling this tyranny, of curing this disease. Pluck up your courage and you will achieve it! After all, it is not a question of Luther but of everyone; the sword is not raised against this one man alone, we are all of us under attack. They do not want their tyranny opposed, they do not want their deceit exposed, their strategy uncovered, their fury defied, and limits set to their wicked dealings.[43]

Luther did not go Hutten's way of German liberation through national mobilization. Exactly the same reason which later would make him reject the knight's revolt (1522) and the Peasants' War (1525) made him in 1520 already a critic of the young patriotic movement: *non vi, sed verbo*—not by force but by the power of the Gospel!

Later interpreters have concentrated on Luther's assault on the "walls of the Romanists" in the preface, and thus turned attention away from the national program in the main body of the pamphlet. Luther's primary concern, however, was his German manifesto; challenged to answer Prierias, he prefaced his treatise at the last moment with a program of theological principles, to show that the "Romanism" of Prierias blocked all reform of Church and empire.

> The Romanists have skillfully drawn three walls around themselves with which they have thus far protected themselves so that no one can reform them. Through this, the whole of Christendom has fallen into misery. The first: whenever pressed by worldly power, they raised the claim that worldly power has no legal hold over them, but that the spiri-

> tual is above the worldly. The second: if one tries to call them to reform on the basis of Holy Scripture, they counter that no one but the pope has the right to interpret the Scriptures. The third: if one threatens them with a council, they pretend that no one but the pope may convene a council. Thus they managed to steal the three rods of discipline so that they could stay unpunished within the secure fortifications of these three walls, at liberty to indulge in all manner of knavery and evil, as we see today. . . . May God help us and hand us one of the trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were toppled; thus we can blow down these straw and paper walls and loose the Christian weapons to punish sins, to expose the Devil's deceit, so that through punishment we may straighten out and regain His favor.[44]

Though the language of Luther's programmatic *Address to the Christian Nobility* is belligerent, its militancy is that of biblical truth which, once revealed, will bring down the walls of Rome. Here is not a hero speaking, but a prophet of repentance, leading the nation not to victory but to the confessional, to see to it that through chastisement we are "reformed."[45] Punishment leads to the expiation of sins, and reform means the reestablishment of justice in Church and world—in a Church that listens obediently to the Word of God, in a body politic that casts aside "what is against God and harmful to man's body and soul."[46]

The German event is not the achievement of national glory, but rather repentance and reform. Could so radical a Reformation have any hope of succeeding, could it ever prevail politically? Without any undertone of resignation, Luther's answer was "no." His concern was not the possible, but the necessary. And necessary is now, above all, sober enlightenment through the Scriptures, "and for the Christian nobility of the German nation, true spiritual courage to succor the poor Church." For "this is what the Scriptures are all about, that in spiritual matters concerning Christians and Christendom, the only thing that counts is God's judgment; never has any Christian concern been approved and supported by the world, but its resistance has always been too great and strong."[47] This is certainly not the inspiring manifesto of a national hero, nor that of a prophet promising success.

The Reformer has two reasons for keeping his distance from the national movement. Weapons cannot liberate Germany! The great emperors did not achieve their goals and failed to accomplish their historical duties because they trusted in their armies and not in God. And furthermore: the national future is already past! History has progressed so far that the Last Days are

quickly approaching and the future can thus bring victories only in the form of blood and tears. To the end of his life, Luther clung to this view; his national program for "his beloved Germans" was one of repentance, repair, and reform, with no prospect of a golden age until after the Second Coming.

Like innumerable contemporaries, Ulrich von Hutten had above all heard Luther's call to liberation and did everything in his power to make it come true. He thought he had virtually reached his goal when he was able to report to Luther in late 1520 that the weapons were at the ready to support and advance their common cause.[48] The effect of Luther's rejection of the German movement can hardly be overestimated. The national cause had united so many patriots; Hutten, a highly original thinker and well-informed writer and poet with a talent to rouse people from their political apathy, was only one of many distinguished men.

The patriotic movement was not a child of Luther's time. At the beginning of the century, the "German arch-humanist" Konrad Celtis (†1508) had already extolled the Roman historian Tacitus as a farsighted visionary who had created a monument to the Germans with his *Germania.* Hence Italy was not alone in possessing an ancient history, Germany had one too! By discovering the German Middle Ages and trying to link the virtues of the ancient Germans with the illustrious history of the German emperors, the humanists tried to lay the foundations for a historically based sense of national pride. All that was missing was a war of independence and a rousing national hero to personify the ideals of unity and freedom for a burgeoning nation. Martin Luther could have become a German William Tell, Joan of Arc, or George Washington had he only chosen to. How momentous the welding of national uprising with religious war in a single figure could be is well demonstrated by William of Orange, the Netherlands' champion of independence and autonomy.

It is impossible to tell whether Luther as a hero of national liberation could have provided and preserved the necessary sense of national cohesion in the face of such powerful counterforces. There were indeed massive obstacles in the way of the German cause: even in the sixteenth century it was clear that a German national state with the ambitions of a medieval empire was a danger to European stability. Moreover, the Hapsburg imperium lived by the grace of a loose federation of many different peoples and would not have stood for the homogeneity of one nation at its center. And further, the federal structure of an empire demands from those dedicated to a national vision greater education, farsightedness, and patience than is required in a centralized monarchy like France.

Decisive for Luther's long-range influence was his refusal to accept the widely desired alliance of St. Paul with Tacitus, of a renewal of faith with the birth of a nation. Programmatically and prophetically, he tried to urge his "beloved Germans" into a unity of faith and purge them of that nationalism which dreams of the union of religion and blood. With his catechism and Bible, he taught the people to pray and write in German, not to propagate the uniqueness of the "German spirit" but to set an example for the many nations of Christendom to imitate. The national council Luther demanded in 1520 would have assembled in Speyer in 1524—on November 11, the day of his baptism—had the emperor not explicitly forbidden it. Never had a German national church been so close to realization. The Reformer would, however, have condemned any identification of Church and nation as running counter to the will of God: equating God's people with a state or nation, be it Germany or Rome, not only perverts the Gospel, it also threatens world peace. For us Luther is "modern" insofar as he promoted an ecumenical pluralism and warned against resolving spiritual questions by government pressure, let alone by armed force.

In his own time there were many who thought him outdated. And indeed: as a political prophet in the war council of the rebellious knights or in the camp of the revolutionary peasants, he would have become a national leader. In the short term, imperial unification under this kind of national hero would have benefited Germany most at the dawn of the modern era. But it would have been a betrayal of the Reformation. Luther as a German was a hindrance and burden for a nation trying to find its identity. He refused to become a folk hero, and by refusing became himself a German event.