



*Heinz Schilling*

# MARTIN LUTHER

*Rebel in an Age  
of Upheaval*

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REBEL IN AN AGE OF UPHEAVAL

HEINZ SCHILLING

translated by

RONA JOHNSTON

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Palma sub pondere crescit  
For Ursula et cetera familia



## Acknowledgements

Looking back now this book is complete, I recognize above all my debt of gratitude to Detlef Felken, who years ago first tempted me to tackle a biography of Luther and then became an enthusiastic and a knowledgeable reader who unfailingly supported the project and provided his counsel. Without him, this book would not exist. In another way this statement is equally valid for my colleagues on the board of the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte (Society for Reformation History), of which I have been a member throughout a lifetime of research—first deputizing for Bernd Moeller, whose influence as president was so formative, then from 2001 to 2011 as president, and now again as an ordinary member. Without the interdisciplinary discussions that they encouraged, I would not have found my way from my initial home in structural history at Freiburg and Bielefeld to a biography of Luther, and to its theological component in particular. I am also grateful for fruitful contact with Reformation historians in Europe beyond Germany and in North America, facilitated in particular by more than a decade and a half as European editor of the journal *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* / *Archive for Reformation History*.

Following on from many generations of research on Luther and on the Reformation, today's biographer of Luther can draw on outstanding source editions and hundreds of articles and monographs—an obvious legacy, perhaps, but still deserving of grateful acknowledgement. Two contributions stand out, that of the editors of the Weimar Edition (*Weimarer Werkausgabe*) of Luther's works and that of Martin Brecht, author of the three-volume biography of Luther. Responsibility for this interpretation of Luther in the context of his own age and as he figures for us today is, however, entirely mine. I hope that this book will inspire interconfessional and interdisciplinary debate about Luther's historical significance and the worldwide impact of the Reformation, much as Brecht's work stimulated discussion of the loss of the Reformation, crushed historiographically between research on the late Middle Ages, on one hand, and on confessionalization, on the other. This

debate could provide a scholarly platform for the political commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, in 2017.

I thank Karin Heilmann for producing a typescript of the first chapter and for subsequent technical assistance in moving from manuscript to computer. Ruth Slenczka made her expertise available when it came to selecting the images. I wish also to thank Anja Wagner and Claudia Häßler, who as they tracked down literature and checked the citations, developed their own enthusiasm for Luther.

My wife read this book closely and critically and in debating how the text should be formulated embodied most effectively the role of a 'Mr Käthe'.

*Berlin, early summer 2012*

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# Abbreviations

LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> . Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 75 vols. Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955–.
WB	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel</i> [Correspondence]. 18 vols. Weimar, 1930–1985.
WDB	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Die Deutsche Bibel</i> [German Bible]. 12 vols. Weimar, 1906–1961.
Wrede, RTA II	<i>Deutsche Reichstagsakten unter Kaiser Karl V.</i> Edited by Adolf Wrede. New series, vol. 2. <i>Der Reichstag zu Worms 1521</i> . Gotha 1896; reprint 1962.
WT	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden</i> [Table Talk]. 6 vols. Weimar, 1912–1921.
WW	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe) Schriften</i> [Writings]. 73 vols. Weimar, 1883–2009.



## *Translator's Note*

My goal as translator has been to provide a text fully accessible to a reader who has no German. On a similar note Heinz Schilling resolved that this version of his text should carry a pared-down scholarly apparatus. Readers can turn to the original German edition (*Martin Luther: Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs*, C. H. Beck, 2012; 4th ed., 2016) for more substantial notes containing additional references to works in German and for a twenty-four-page, mainly German-language bibliography.

Schilling has used Luther's own words throughout his text to provide a 'direct route' to the 'uncontaminated' reformer. When possible I have drawn on existing English translations of Luther, primarily the original fifty-five volumes of *Luther's Works* along with additional volumes in that series published more recently (see 'abbreviations'). If the endnote associated with a quotation references a work in German, then the translation is my own; an endnote that cites a work in English also acknowledges the quotation's translation.

Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Luther insisted, 'Interpreters and translators should not work alone.' I am very grateful to Bruce Gordon and Christian Moser for their support, both scholarly and good-humoured, for my translation of this book. And I am grateful, too, to Yale Divinity School Library for providing a convivial setting and undaunted assistance for this undertaking.

RONA JOHNSTON

*New Haven, Connecticut, June 2016*



# Prologue

All the epochs when faith rules, in whatever form, are splendid, heartening, and fertile for contemporaries and posterity.

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,  
The West-East Divan, Notes and Essays,  
'Israel in the Desert'<sup>1</sup>*

## Living in an Age of Faith and an Age in Transition

Martin Luther, the Wittenberg reformer, lived in 'an age ruled by faith', as Goethe would have it. Indeed, thanks to Luther, as the medieval period gave way to the modern age, for more than a century religion dictated the path taken by Germany and Europe. Those years proved 'splendid, heartening, and fertile', but they could also be dark, disheartening, and destructive. The contradictions of his age were also Luther's own: he experienced lofty hours of triumph, hopeful that all the world could be convinced, and bitter weeks in which Satan and his dark forces attacked both the reformer and his achievements. But Luther never doubted that God had called him to be his prophet.

Not that religion was lacking in the world into which Luther (or rather Luder, his surname for the first decades of his life) was born, on 10 November 1483 in Eisleben, in the county of Mansfeld, in central Germany. The final decades of the fifteenth century were consumed with concerns about belief and the church. That preoccupation was an expression of the unsettling tension created by the juxtaposition of the bold and worldly Roman papacy and the needs of a laity that no longer believed the clergy's promises about salvation and struggled to find a way to truth and redemption. Luther would provide that troubled laity with reassurance in the form of a well-anchored religion that each individual could grasp as his or her very own.



The Roman Catholic Church owes its own debt to Luther. Without the challenges from the Wittenberg reformer, the Church would surely not have freed itself so decisively from the worldliness of the Renaissance papacy and found its way into an age in which faith came first. New attitudes were already stirring within the Roman Church, but only the rebellion of the Augustinian monk inscribed faith and religion into the coming age and made them dynamic, world-changing forces.<sup>2</sup> While for many people this innovation meant freedom and salvation, for many others it meant devastation and damnation. Relentless confessional intolerance characterized the period after the Reformation for several generations, producing internal social tensions that erupted in bloody persecution and not infrequently even in the chaos of civil war. Externally, too, irreconcilable interpretations of the church and the world contributed decisively to the outbreak of the self-destructive wars in which competition between the European powers climaxed at the end of the Reformation century.

Goethe's enthusiasm for ages ruled by faith and, even more, his complementary want of enthusiasm for 'all ages in which lack of faith claims a paltry victory', characterized by 'illusionary lustre . . . and unfruitfulness', are hardly plausible to our secular world today. But that discomfort serves us well as we explore Martin Luther's biography a full 500 years after his Ninety-Five Theses were made public, on 31 October 1517. Only when we recognize that Luther and his contemporaries did not understand 'religion' and 'church' as part of the private sphere, as we do today, but as forces that completely embraced private as well as public life—both society and politics—will we be able to wrap our minds around why his theology presented such a challenge to the rulers of his day and why millions of people received that theology—which is hardly easy—with such great rejoicing. A risky comparison perhaps, but one worth making: the fear experienced in Luther's day because faith did not bring certainty is not unlike the fear we face today in the face of uncertainty about the direction financial markets will take and whether world peace is possible.

For centuries authors depicted Luther as the forerunner of their own age and as a trailblazer for the modern period. As each centenary came round, a new generation found its own Luther: in 1617, on the eve of the Thirty Years War, he was Luther the warrior, who would defend the Protestant world from the counter-revolutionary threat of those in thrall to Rome; in 1717, against the background of the early glimmerings of the tolerance and secularism of the Enlightenment, he was a more peaceable and open-minded

Luther; in 1817 and 1917, he was Luther the nationalist, hero of the religious profundity of the Germans and a protective shield against infiltration from the west by a Romance civilization that was vilified as superficial and lightweight. None of these Luthers had much to do with the historical Luther. Each time the relevant national or local centenary committee celebrated, to quote Goethe again, 'the spirit of the good men themselves'.

Now is the time to break away from the cult of remembrance and present Luther and his thoughts and actions, and the thoughts and actions of his contemporaries, as what they truly are for us today—witnesses to a 'world we have lost' or, rather, a world that is no longer ours and that therefore forces us to confront something very different. Luther thought and acted as a 'man between God and the devil', but we are seeking to understand that man from a world that no longer knows the devil, and if it knows God at all, then only in ways that would have been incomprehensible to Luther.<sup>3</sup>

History can emancipate us. Where we too readily accept the present as it is, history holds up a mirror and forces us to look at a different world of thoughts and actions. History relativizes today's impulses, just when we seem willing to believe there are no alternatives. If we confront what is very different in our own past, then we will recognize that not only our material circumstances but also human thought and emotions are essentially mutable. This book is not about a Luther in whom we can find the spirit of our own time; this book is about a Luther who was different, a Luther whose thoughts and actions are out of kilter with the interests of later generations, no matter how often they have been employed to legitimize actions in the present, and will continue to be employed to that end.

Luther's world is not our world, but that distinction does not mean that these worlds are unconnected. As we look for lines that run from Luther and the era of the Reformation through the modern age and up to today, we must be careful to ensure, however, that we do not try to make Luther one of us. We must also differentiate between intended and unintended outcomes. Luther's impact on his own age is to be held distinct from his historical impact through the ages. Over the centuries the reformer and his work have been interpreted in light of the perceptions and with the terminology of each new age. These accumulated layers of reception must be removed with all the care of an archaeologist in order to be able to read the original artefact.

The uncontaminated Luther can be discovered above all in his own words. We find our subject's thoughts and actions relayed to us in his

writings to an extent that few other biographers can enjoy. Luther's influence came from his words, both written—in letters, manifestoes, pamphlets, and theological treatises, for example—and oral—in sermons, lectures, and discussions that have largely come down to us in transcripts made by members of his audience. This book therefore frequently cites Luther, translated for accessibility into modern English.<sup>4</sup> Luther's writing was colourful and imaginative, even earthy, with an unbridled energy. By taking this direct route to Luther, we can circumvent a dense forest of later writings to get straight to the positions he adopted in the ecclesiastical and political debates of his own time. We can then avoid the risk of being distracted by those who over the years have sought to defend or attack our subject—only a few decades ago, for example, it was suggested that Luther entered the monastery because he had committed a murder.

A focus on Luther's writings is not without its complications. Not because they are hard to comprehend or because the accuracy of the available texts is in question—the great Weimar Edition offers a very dependable go-to resource for Luther's works, and can be consulted along with other part editions and translations, especially into English. Additionally, since the mid-twentieth century church history has been more broadly framed, ensuring that engagement with Luther's theology is now far less likely to risk losing sight of Luther the man. The problem lies rather in the sources themselves, particularly the works that appear to contain personal testimony, where it is all too easy for the reader to feel he or she is in the presence of the real Luther. Ten or twenty years often lay between, at one end, the emergence and development of Luther's theology and the associated key episodes in the Reformation and, at the other, Luther's recorded narrative of these events. As recent research into the human memory has highlighted, Luther's accounts would have been conditioned by that time delay. Above all, his perceptions were shaped by a post-Reformation self-consciousness and adopted a deliberate self-stylization that the Augustinian monk of 1520 would not have recognized. This later Luther was the author of his principal personal testimony, written in 1545 and found in the preface to the first volume of his works in Latin, but he also constructed the earlier narrative that appears in the preface to his commentary on the Book of Daniel, published in 1530.<sup>5</sup> Even greater is the challenge presented by Luther's 'Table Talk', which has profoundly influenced the popular image of Luther for centuries. Luther did not compose these works himself or even authorize the versions that appeared. They contain transcriptions of his words made by

his pupils—sometimes recorded as he spoke, but sometimes written down subsequently—and they present, in exaggerated form, Luther as his acolytes perceived him: here we find Luther the theologian and pastor whose evangelical teachings and words of pious edification were to be preserved for future generations, or Luther the rebel against the papacy and scholasticism, an image in accord with the interpretation of Johannes Aurifaber, the last of his secretaries who in 1566 published the first collection of Luther's Table Talk.

In order to explain Luther in the context of his own time and, vice versa, his times through his biography, this work draws more heavily on Luther's contemporaries than is usual in biographies of Luther written as church history. Without doubt Luther made a defining contribution to the secularizing tendencies that emerged in Germany and Europe in the sixteenth century, yet equally certain is that Luther was himself a product of a long-term process of transition. For as historians are increasingly aware, this 'new age' did not come into being somewhere around 1500; it had roots that reached back well into the late medieval period. Each historical personage, including Luther, has a double character, formed by his own context and formative of his own context. The chronological perspective on Luther's life and actions can be broad, stretching from the late Middle Ages up to and into the Confessional Age, which followed on from the Reformation. And as the work of an early modern historian, this account of Luther will not depict the institutions and individuals who refused to fall into line with him as adversaries simply unwilling or unable to recognize truth. Individuals who opted for the old church—Emperor, popes, and Catholic reformers; princes, theologians, and humanists, especially Erasmus of Rotterdam—must be understood on their own terms, with respect for their intellectual, cultural, political, and social worlds.

With prophetic authority Luther the rebel forced his age to act on fundamental existential questions about religion and faith. For Protestants both then and now, he was and continues to be a hero who shaped the course of history, opposing the great and the powerful and expecting them to follow him. He was the man of his own defiant words 'Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, God help me, Amen', words spoken before the Emperor at Worms in 1521 and immediately sent out into the world as Reformation propaganda. But now is the time to recognize that his opponents too, and in particular Charles V, the young Habsburg Emperor had their own truths,

which held them similarly captive and by which they, like Luther, had to abide. Only when we do historical justice to the alternatives to Luther's Reformation will we be able to understand the age of the Reformation, which was so much the work of Luther, as an era of 'splendid, heartening, and fertile' wrestling to ensure that true faith could rule.

# PART ONE

Childhood, Education,  
and First Years as a  
Monk, 1483–1511



# I

## 1483—New Departures for Christendom

The eleventh of November is the feast day of Martin of Tours. Legend tells us that in deepest winter Martin of Tours, a Roman cavalry officer, encountered a beggar at the gates of the town known today as Amiens; Martin split his cloak and gave one half to the poor man before him. Since ancient times Latin Christianity has marked the saint's day with Masses and pious contemplation. Children would sing, receiving in return tasty treats that included a crescent-shaped sweet pastry named after Saint Martin; adults marked the day by eating goose. At the end of the nineteenth century it became common to hold an evening procession, with Martin, mounted on his horse, leading a lantern-lit parade.

Their contemporaries would not have been surprised to learn that when mining entrepreneur Hans Luder and his wife, Margarete, had their son baptized on 11 November—the baby had been born the previous day—they followed established practice and had the child named after the saint fêted that day. Their son was now Martin Luder. Luder was the original family name, employed at various significant moments in the young man's life before being emphatically changed to 'Luther' in the course of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Martin was baptized in the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the Bridge District of Eisleben, a mining town in the county of Mansfeld. Having moved to Eisleben from Thuringia, Hans Luder and his wife (Figures 1 and 2) had recently acquired a modest home in this part of the city, which was largely populated by poorer and middling artisans.

With no parish record book or account from either Luther or his parents to tell us otherwise, we can assume that the baptism would have been carried out by the local parish priest, Bartholomäus Rennebecher. Luther's godparents were likely drawn from relatives who lived locally—including his uncle on his





**Figures 1 and 2.** Hans Luther (1459–1530) and Margarete Luther (1460–1531), parents of Martin Luther, by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), oil on panel, 1527.

mother's side, Anton Lindemann, who was *Bergrat* in the county of Mansfeld, an administrative official for mining appointed by the ruler—and possibly also neighbours with whom his parents were friendly. The year of Luther's birth is not certain, however. When Luther's leadership of the Reformation brought him fame and the German public became eager to know more about the reformer's background, Luther's mother, already in her sixties, recalled that her son had been born shortly before midnight on 10 November. She was unable to specify the year, which was not at all remarkable for a time in which birth and baptismal records or documented family trees were still largely unknown. Luther was much more definite: 'I was born in Mansfeld in 1484', he wrote, 'that is certain', but he had no official record to back up his statement. Philip Melancthon, his colleague in Wittenberg and his first biographer, proposed 1483 as the year of Luther's birth, and his suggestion quickly became accepted fact.

## New Empires

In 1483 Christendom was changing. (Europeans used the term 'Christendom' in identifying themselves both then and for generations to come.) In the west, for decades Portuguese and Castilian caravels had been setting sail in hope of finding new routes to the spice-filled lands of India. The old routes, via the eastern Mediterranean and then by land through the Levant, had become

increasingly risky as the Ottomans advanced into Asia Minor and the Near East. Iberian expansion to new shores was accompanied by a sense of mission, for as the treasures of those who lived in these new lands were acquired, their souls too would be saved.

Under the leadership of the Infante Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), who was also one of the foremost mathematicians and astronomers of his time, the Portuguese first went south, sailing along the coast of Africa. In the 1480s Christopher Columbus turned his gaze west, looking beyond the Azores and the Cape Verde islands, which had been known of for over a generation. Columbus was in no doubt that the world was round, and therefore at the beginning of 1484, only a few months after the birth of the later reformer, he laid out for John II, king of Portugal, his plan to search for a sea route to India by sailing west, across the completely unknown Atlantic. If the Portuguese had not been so committed to continuing their exploration of the coast of Africa and if deaf ears had not been turned on Columbus at the Castilian court, then America might well have been discovered very soon after the birth of Martin Luder.

We cannot easily evaluate what of these new worlds would have reached the circles in which the young Martin was growing up. Certainly educated Germans were very well informed. Martin Behaim, a merchant from Nuremberg, even made his way to the Portuguese court and took part in an expedition that in the early 1480s travelled south along the African coast as far as the mouth of the River Congo. During a stay in Nuremberg attending to personal affairs, Behaim fed his geographical knowledge into the creation of the famous Behaim Globe, one of the first spherical representations of the world and now in the German National Museum in Nuremberg. Yet the home in which Martin grew up appears to have known little, if anything, of the newly discovered worlds and to have had very limited contact with the colonial wares that were soon streaming back to Europe. Archaeologists recently carried out a highly productive excavation alongside the house in Eisleben owned by Luther's parents. Not a single household object, textile remnant, or food-related remain that had originated outside Europe and was contemporary with the Luders was found. A similar absence also characterized Luther's own household at the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg a quarter-century later.

In the seafaring nations of south-western and western Europe, interest in overseas worlds, including their religious and political make-up, was not limited to intellectuals such as theologians, humanists, geographers, and

biologists, for the broader public also proved eager for information. Yet right up until his death, Luther's sense of the world remained focused on the European continent, with remarkably little engagement with these new worlds. In the 1520s, in an epistle and a sermon he addressed an apparent contradiction, noting, 'many a heathen island has since been discovered, where the Gospel has never been preached. Yet the Scriptures say: "Their sound went out into all the earth."'”<sup>2</sup> In *Supputatio annorum mundi*, a chronological table published in the 1540s, Luther interpreted illnesses that had reached Europe from newly discovered islands as a sign of the end of the world.<sup>3</sup> As Europe grasped at other continents, only the missionary and eschatological implications were of interest to Luther.

Martin Luther was not alone in wrestling with the world's religious and ethical foundations, and the public debate unleashed by his Ninety-Five Theses and by his appearance before the Imperial diet was also not unique. In Spain, too, theologians felt challenged to adapt ecclesiastical institutions and Christian spirituality to the new, game-changing circumstances. In a manner very similar to that of Luther for Germany, in Spain two Dominican monks, Antonio de Montesinos (c.1475–1540) and, in particular, Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), forced political figures and the public to participate in a fundamental debate about the very nature of Christendom and its presence in the world. Yet the impulses in each location differed: in Germany, Luther the monk from Saxony responded to an inner tormenting of his soul; in Spain, Las Casas and his supporters were outraged at the dishonourable reality of missionary and colonial activities, which included, at their most extreme, the enslaving of Black Africans.

Building on attempts by Pope Alexander VI to umpire, in 1494 the Treaty of Tordesillas had divided up the newly discovered worlds between the Portuguese and the Castilians. For many generations to come, the people of the Iberian Peninsula would carry the weight of European expansionism and the extension of Christendom. These societies provide strong evidence that powerful creative and transformative forces were at work also within Latin Christendom. The upheaval that from a German Protestant point of view is all too often ascribed only to Luther and the Reformation was also experienced elsewhere, and it pre-dated the Reformation. Since the death of John II of Aragon in 1479, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, who had married in 1469, had ruled together over their united kingdoms, which would eventually come to be known simply as 'Spain'. Isabella and Ferdinand were 'the Catholic Kings' (*Los Reyes Católicos*), a title given to

them by Pope Alexander VI. In January 1492 their army conquered Granada and with it the last bastion of the Arabs and Islam on the Iberian Peninsula. Within little more than a decade the Catholic Kings had completed the Reconquista begun centuries earlier. Spain was now again entirely under Catholic rule. At the same time Ferdinand cemented his family's claims to the kingdom of Naples-Sicily, not least through a marriage alliance with the rulers of Austria that would have a profound long-term bearing on the history of Europe.

The upheaval in the Iberian Peninsula extended to religion and the church. Just as individual lands were brought together into the new Castilian-Aragonese political unit that made up Spain, so too the church, spirituality, and learning also were reconfigured. Reform of religion and culture was part of the invigoration of the society of the new state. Improvements introduced by three archbishops, Hernando de Talavera, Pascual de Ampudia, and Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, in the course of the first two decades of the sixteenth century were designed to renew religion and reform the church. Their innovations launched the national church of Spain of the modern age. While for Luther and the German Reformation reform meant confrontation with the papacy, in Spain reform came in deliberate partnership with Rome. This renewal made a Protestant Reformation of the kind advocated by Luther superfluous in Spain. The Spanish proved immune to Luther and his Reformation, which they viewed unsympathetically, even with abhorrence, as 'the German plague'.

Luther's world view was also distinguished from the Iberian experience of transition into the modern era in that his conception of Christendom was entirely focused on Europe. While for Spain Christendom now embraced the practical political experiences of a global project, for Luther mission remained a far more abstract theological problem. As a result, 'world mission' and the closely associated experience of globalization in early modern terms would long remain Catholic phenomena. This situation changed only when English and Dutch expansionist maritime interests, which were associated not with Lutheranism but with the Reformed version of the Reformation, entered the fray. The Spanish also expressed their religious self-assurance in their renewed piety, its heavens filled with baroque saints, as they expanded into new worlds. In the first half of the sixteenth century the overseas merchants of Seville donated an image for the altar at the Casa de Contratación, the administrative headquarters and principal cultural and religious institution for the Spanish overseas empire. The image (Figure 3) depicted the Virgin Mary spreading her



**Figure 3.** *The Virgin of the Navigators*, by Alejo Fernández, altarpiece painted for the chapel of the Casa de Contratación, Seville, 1531–1536.

cloak to give shelter, a representation that could be found throughout Europe at the end of the medieval period. The fearful evidently found great comfort in the idea that the broad cloak of the Mother of God could shield them from very real physical threats and protect their souls from harm.

Much like the Spanish conquistadors and traders, the mining entrepreneurs and mineworkers of central Europe were eager to believe themselves under the protection of the Virgin Mary and her sheltering cloak. That image could also be found—and was found particularly often—in the

Erzgebirge and the Harz mountains, where Luder would have seen the depiction as a child. He would also have been well aware of the intercessory powers of Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, who was a saint called upon particularly by mineworkers. On finding himself without shelter from a severe storm and greatly fearing for his life, Luder then a student, had every reason to call out to Anne for help; in return he promised that he would turn to a godly life in a monastery. The path that he subsequently took to fulfil his side of this bargain led Luther, and that part of Christendom that was prepared, or forced, to follow him, in a radical and new direction. They turned their backs on traditional forms of piety, forms that in Spain and in other European countries that remained Catholic safeguarded the transition into the modern age and into new worlds. For Luther neither the protective cloak of the Virgin Mary nor the intercession of any of the other saints provided an answer; he believed that each individual should encounter God directly and find personal reassurance in God's promise of grace.

The developments in south-western Europe were not the only upheavals to take place during Martin Luder's early years. Enormous changes were also afoot in the south-east. The fall of the ancient and revered imperial city of Byzantium/Constantinople to an army of Muslim Ottoman Turks created a new threat that haunted Europe for centuries to come, both militarily and emotionally. Over the next century and a half the Ottoman Empire advanced ever farther through the Balkans and into the European continent, with large areas of the Mediterranean and its African coast also soon under Ottoman control. Initially only Greek Orthodox were affected, but by the early sixteenth century Latin Christendom was also bearing the brunt of Ottoman expansion. During the reign of the highly energetic Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), both Venice and Hungary were threatened by the Ottomans. With victory over a Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohács in 1526, the Ottoman army had cleared the way into the plains of the Rivers Danube and Tisza from where the Ottomans could advance towards Carniola (Slovenia today), Styria, Carinthia, and Austria. In 1529 for the first time an Ottoman army laid siege to the Imperial city of Vienna, causing a psychological angst that would traumatize the German collective memory for centuries. With the fall of Rhodes in 1522, the eastern Mediterranean became to all intents and purposes a *mare clausum* of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans then used their bases on the North African coast as far as Tripoli as jumping-off points for an advance farther into the

western Mediterranean, which led to direct confrontation with the Spanish Empire and the rulers of Sicily and Naples, Spain's allies.

While events in the Iberian Peninsula and overseas hardly touched the central European world of Martin Luther, the Turkish threat in the south-east of the Holy Roman Empire was very present, even where no Turk was ever to be seen. We have good reason to assume that while still young, Luder would have heard of the 'scourge of Christendom'—in sermons, in discussions amongst friends and family, from one of many publications containing anti-Turkish propaganda. Unlike the newly discovered overseas worlds on the other side of the Atlantic, 'the Turk'—a simplistic and inflammatory term used by the reformer in describing the military and religious threat facing Christians—would eventually become a substantial theme of Reformation theology.

## Devotional Innovation and a Modernized Papacy

When Martin Luder was born, religion and church were in transition. New social groupings were emerging, both within religious orders and as a result of semi-religious lifestyles now available to the laity. And while the external appearance and behaviour of the Roman Papacy told a very different story, devotional forms were being transformed through a novel emphasis on interiority, the private, and individuality. Humanism and the *devotio moderna*, movements that put emphasis on reading by the individual and stimulated new devotional ideals, had been well received, in particular in highly urbanized north-western Europe and the coastal Low Countries, from where they had spread into the heart of Europe. Both women and men were encouraged to retreat into a corner with a good book and come to their own conclusions about the text by means of a spiritually framed reading that they were to conduct at their own pace. The Brethren of the Common Life, groups of men and women who lived together, have been placed on a scale somewhere between the medieval religious orders and the communal Christianity of the Reformation. Through such communities, new devotional forms and new reading practices also made their way into priestly circles, for their membership was both lay and clerical. A piety and spirituality shared by both laity and priest thus emerged in many locations, a precursor of the concept of the priesthood of all believers for which Martin Luther would soon advocate. Similar evidence can be found of other far-reaching

innovations out of which historians believe the modern age developed, yet their origins have often been ascribed to the Reformation. Come the Reformation, neither Max Weber's 'inner-worldly asceticism' nor his related 'Protestant work ethic' was entirely innovative. Similarly, interpretative theories characterized as the 'civilizing process' and 'social discipline' have roots in urban and ecclesiastical communities at the end of the medieval period.

The relationship between church and state had also seen legal, organizational, and institutional innovation, and here, too, changes anticipated the Protestants' later reorganization of the church. Diversity and particularism within Latin Christendom did not begin with Luther and his Reformation. As early as the fifteenth century, the revolutionary movement in Bohemia named after Jan Hus had broken away to found its own church, but in the Hussite church we have only the most dramatic expression of a widespread development that in the rest of Europe often followed a peaceful course. In fourteenth-century Germany, the duke of Cleves was already deemed, as one description had it, pope in his own lands.<sup>4</sup> In the fifteenth century the process that saw the universal church turned into territorial churches was driven on by 'concordats', treaties drawn up between the ruler of a territory and the Roman curia that conceded to the temporal ruler particular rights over the church in the ruler's own lands. The pre-Reformation national and territorial churches were boosted by the papacy's confrontation with the conciliar movement and with the oligarchy of bishops that bore the weight of that challenge to the papacy. Facing opposition from the bishops at the Council of Basel, Pope Eugene IV (1431–1447) turned to the temporal rulers, but in exchange for assistance in thwarting the bishops' demands, he had to renounce significant rights over the church in each of their territories. From the mid-fifteenth century, one concordat followed another—in 1448 the Concordat of Vienna with the Emperor, which was then expanded in the *Concordata Nationis Germanicae* to cover the German princes and their territories; in 1472 a concordat with France, which was expanded in 1516; in 1482 with Castile and Aragon; and commas around finally in the sixteenth century with Poland and Hungary and with the Scandinavian empires. On the eve of the Reformation the unitary church of Latin Christendom existed as an idea only. The reality was found in regional churches—created by concordat, distinct from one another, and largely independent—whether in the form of national churches, as in France, identified with Gallicanism, and Spain, or in the form of territorial churches, as in the German lands.



Above all, at the very apex of Christendom, changes were afoot that caused consternation and estrangement south of the Alps too. As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, rationalization, bureaucratization, and institutionalization had begun within the curia and the Roman Church. Some historians have identified in these processes a 'crisis of modernization' that provoked deep anxiety in Germany in particular. An enduring interpretation developed in the nineteenth century and associated in particular with the religious sociologist Max Weber proposed that the rebellion of an Augustinian monk in Saxony enabled the breakthrough of modernity; yet that same rebellion can also be interpreted as a reaction *against* modernizing impulses emanating from Rome.

The papacy's hard-fought victory over the conciliar movement achieved after the mid-fifteenth century told a similar tale. The pope, *pontifex maximus* and sovereign prince for he was spiritual head of the church and temporal head of the Papal States, was now liberated from conciliar participation in decision-making and became in effect the first quasi-absolutist ruler in Europe. This development, too, was the cause of great alarm and aroused great hostility. The pious could see, and indeed could not help but see, the extensive political authority of the bishop of Rome as an unscriptural despotism. With the occupants of Saint Peter's throne showing no sign that they intended to allay the distrust they had aroused—instead they appeared to take every opportunity to tell of their singular papal authority both in Rome and over Christendom—apprehensions about Rome and the curia grew rapidly, especially north of the Alps in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Assessing objectively, we can identify such discontent as a reaction not to the inactivity of popes who clung to tradition but to overly hasty papal attempts to respond to the demands of a new age. Such innovation could be found above all in the methods adopted to finance the increasingly colossal plans of the Papal States and the political and cultural representations of papal authority. The curia had been receptive to the ideas of Italian mercantile capitalism at an early date and proved something of a wizard at employing such modern financial methods.

By such means, by the end of the fifteenth century, Rome and the Papal States had become one of the leading centres of the Renaissance, with learning and the arts flourishing as almost nowhere else. Roman dominance was in part a result of the Turkish conquest of Byzantium in 1453, which had forced many leading artists and thinkers to flee to Italy, and to Naples and Rome in particular. For Luther, however, the 'Renaissance Popes' as they

became known, who were so enthusiastic about new scholarship and artistic creativity, were responsible for the rotten state of the church. The Augustinian monk from Wittenberg could make sense of their errors and sins and even their crimes only as the work of Antichrist. This judgement would seem to miss the mark with Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who became Pius II (1458–1464) and was profoundly influenced by humanism, but Luther had a point when it came to the line begun by Sixtus IV (1471–1484), with a run of popes dedicated to the exercise of power and the wholehearted enjoyment of life. For Alexander VI (1492–1503), of the Borgia family and the most decadent of all, even the most kind-hearted of Catholic theologians and historians can only find somewhat questionable comfort in the argument that the Roman Church's ability to survive such a man is surely evidence of its godly origins. Contemporaries knew his successor, Julius II, Giuliano della Rovere (1503–1513), primarily as a figure in full armour. In his biting satire 'Julius Excluded from Heaven', Erasmus of Rotterdam had Julius II rejected at the gates of heaven because Peter wished to keep his heaven free of such people. Leo X (1513–1521), Luther's opponent in the years in which the Reformation broke through, was a very different proposition. A member of the Medici family, bankers and entrepreneurs in Florence, and therefore the personification of the Roman alliance with merchant capitalism, Leo X was highly educated and had fine taste. With cheerful equanimity, Leo X brought Rome and Christendom to an apex of aesthetic representation—betraying in the process, in Luther's eyes, the salvific message of the Gospel.

## Particularism and the Early Modern State

The institutional and bureaucratic 'modernity' of the curia and the magnificent displays of art and power by the Renaissance papacy could not disguise that in the years before the Reformation, neither Christendom nor Europe was one single, undivided unit. Diversity was a hallmark of devotional practices and ecclesiastical Institutions, but particularism and the favouring of individual interests were also characteristic of both rulers and peoples as they sought to assert their power and pre-eminence. 'Nation battles with nation, city with city, faction with faction, prince against prince,' wrote Erasmus of Rotterdam in the first quarter of the Reformation century, continuing, 'the English are hostile to the French, for no other reason than that they are French. The Scots

are disliked by the British, solely for being Scots. Germans don't agree with French, Spaniards don't agree with either.'<sup>5</sup>

The political world was undoubtedly in transition. Political dynamics within individual territories were in flux, but externally too, in the relationships of these individual territories with each other and with the two universal powers, the pope and the Emperor, change was underway. The political and dynastic constellations that would be so critical for Europe at the moment of Reformation were already taking shape during Martin Luder's youth. Political theory which provided guidance, and potentially also discipline, for novel and exuberant political forces was also treading new ground, above all in Italy, where Niccolò Machiavelli laid the foundations for an innovative approach to politics that was freed from the constraints of Christian ethics. Just as new overseas worlds left no mark on Luther, so too such new political trends passed him by. Luther's political thinking was drawn in its entirety from Scripture—from the Old Testament in particular—and from Christian tradition, or at least those elements of Christian tradition that he accepted. In his political understanding, indeed particularly in his political understanding, we find Luther again an outsider, a man not of his own times.

From today's perspective we can distinguish causes and consequences of the many political innovations of the late medieval and early modern ages that would have been lost on their contemporaries. This advantage enables us to identify two overarching secular developments in particular: internally, within individual European territories, the early modern state began to take shape, while externally, within Europe more widely, transregional powers formed. Developments in Germany determined both Luther's personal experiences and his impact. Here the early modern state came to be identified not with the Empire as a whole, but with the individual territories of the Empire, with an additional distinctive form for the Imperial cities. As a result, for Luther, Electoral Saxony was key, and its rulers, the electors Frederick the Wise, John the Constant, and John Frederick, were the most significant political players. The struggle between the princes and the Imperial crown, represented by the Emperor and the German King, over how to accommodate these new political conditions and, in particular, the search for a balance between territorial interests and the interests of the Empire, would dictate both Luther's own fate and the fate of his Reformation.

The consolidation of the state internally and the development of broader European power constellations were closely linked. The situation for

Germany and its princes was unusual, for it involved an empire that did not function as a single state and the ambitions of an imperial ruler that played out on the broader European stage, well beyond the boundaries of the Empire. To join in the political power games of Europe and within the Empire, each player needed a territory or early 'nation state' at his back, yet at the same time success or failure in the European arena could advance or halt the internal consolidation of that state. As both internal state building and the elaboration of power constellations required clout and muscle, at the end of the medieval age the mood in Europe was distinctly bellicose, an atmosphere that was only intensified by the advent and impact of Luther's movement.

Around 1500 the pentarchy composed of the five powers at the heart of Italy—Naples, the Papal States, Florence, Venice, and Milan—which had ensured an equilibrium and relative peace, collapsed. Its downfall can be attributed in part to the Ottomans and in part to the Spanish and French. In 1494 the French king, Charles VIII (1483–1498), had crossed the Alps in order to secure the throne of the Kingdom of Naples for his own line in the face of competing claims from Spain, initiating a long period in which the battle for pre-eminence in Europe was fought out on Italian soil, and the Italian rulers, above all the pope and his Papal States had to fight their own corner both militarily and diplomatically. For Europe as a whole, the outcome was a rivalry between France and Habsburg Spain that would last for centuries. In 1495, in response to France's aggressive intervention in their own sphere of influence in Italy, Ferdinand of Aragon and the Habsburg Emperor, Maximilian I, agreed to a political alliance, which, as was usual, was to be sealed by a marriage involving the two families. The wedding the following year of Philip the Handsome, son of Maximilian, and the Infanta Joanna, daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, laid the dynastic foundations for the Habsburg–Spanish empire that a generation later, under Emperor Charles V (1500–1556), the oldest child of this marriage, would make every other ruler in Europe a lesser, or minor, power. With the Castilian possessions in the Americas and Asia in mind, Charles V could justifiably claim that the sun never went down on his empire. Back in Europe, however, the supremacy of the Habsburgs was never recognized. The principal challenge came from France: Charles V fought five wars with Francis I and Henry II and in the end had to admit defeat.

The European power constellation that came into being during the first decades of Martin Luder's life was dominated by the Ottoman and

Habsburg–Spanish empires, with all their alliances and rivalries, and would significantly influence the course of the Reformation. In the 1520s and 1530s the Emperor's attention was repeatedly redirected away from the Empire as he dealt not only with his kingly responsibilities within Spain but also with wars against the Turks and against his European rivals, in particular the kings of France and the pope, leaving him without the time to deal with the 'Luther affair'. The battles and diplomatic manoeuvrings of these decades are still etched on the historical consciousness of Europe. The Battle of Pavia in 1525 left a clear mark, as with his victory over Francis I, Charles V became, for a time, ruler of Milan; a similar mark was left by the Treaty of Madrid, which Charles forced on his prisoner Francis I, captured at Pavia in January 1526, and which very soon would be broken by France, with the agreement and absolution of the papacy.

The deepest scar was left by the famous, and notorious, Sack of Rome of May 1527. While at war against the League of Cognac (an anti-Habsburg alliance composed of France, the pope, Milan, Florence, and Venice), Habsburg troops, both German and Spanish, stormed the Holy City, to the horror of all Christendom. With Pope Clement VII besieged in the Castel Sant'Angelo, the troops plundered the defenceless city like barbarians. Nothing can portray the brokenness of the Christian world and the crisis of the medieval order more effectively than the self-destruction of the two universal powers, who had been tasked not with war and terror but with peace and reconciliation. Two decades later, a similar process played out for Germany and the Protestants: only a few months after Luther's death, the Emperor's victory in the Schmalkaldic War opened the way for Imperial troops to enter Wittenberg and for the elector of Saxony, John Frederick, to fall into the hands of the Habsburgs.

## Population Growth and Mercantile Capitalism

The economy, too, was in transition and, figuratively, so also was the population. Economic historians talk of the 'long sixteenth century', which began everywhere at some point towards the end of the fifteenth century, although in different regions of Europe at different times, and extended into the first third of the seventeenth century. Although population growth occurred throughout this period, during the early phase this increase was fast, even explosive, while by the second half of the Reformation century it had slowed

markedly. The increase in population brought new impulses to manufacturing and trade. Demand for food leapt, as did demand for items in daily use, especially cloth and household goods. At the same time a market for luxury produce sprang up and expanded, with greater consumption of expensive food and drink. The princely rulers with their courts and the nobility in their rural landholdings were the principal consumers of such luxury goods, but they were joined by a smaller number from the upper social strata in the towns and even, in regions such as Friesland and Tyrol, by gentleman farmers.

‘Princes who drink and princes who play’—this caricature of sixteenth-century rulers has a good portion of truth to it. Some literally drank themselves to death. The extant lists of food and drink consumed at banquets that might last days, even weeks, provide a sense of the vitality and lust for life associated with a Renaissance spirit that could also be found in Germany. Such indulgence is hardly imaginable today. The vast majority of the population, however, lived in far more modest circumstances, many even in poverty. They could make little sense of economic pressures that posed a very real threat: at the beginning of the 1530s, only a few years after thousands had died in the Knights’ Revolt and Peasants’ War, commentator Sebastian Franck (1499–1543) would describe the towns as being ‘so full of people that no one can make a living’.<sup>6</sup>

We have little precise data for this pre-statistical era, and certainly none for Europe as a whole. Estimates suggest that in the course of the sixteenth century the population of Europe increased by more than 25 per cent, from around 82 million to 107 million, but with very marked regional variation. The more heavily populated areas grew more quickly and the concentration of trade and manufacturing continued. Both the scale of the growth of the population and contemporaries’ experience of that upward trend therefore depended upon location.

Undoubtedly, such marked population expansion had a social impact and influenced attitudes. No longer were adequate food supplies guaranteed. A failed harvest could mean famine; famine could mean malnutrition; malnutrition could leave the population exposed to illness and epidemics. Also part of the mix were price increases, a fall in the value of coinage—owing not least to the much greater supply of silver from South America from the middle of the century on—and, finally, a lack of employment in urban centres. By the end of the Reformation century, society throughout Europe was more polarized: the small group of the rich were becoming

richer and were eager to display their wealth, while the army of the poor grew rapidly in size, with their very survival now regularly in doubt. If some form of class structure developed at all before the emergence of the industrial society of the nineteenth century, then it was in the long sixteenth century. In light of the impact of economic conditions, good grounds exist for the frequent identification of this period as early bourgeois. Albrecht Dürer's woodcut 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' (Figure 4) tells us that economic problems and the concomitant fear of starvation, epidemics, war, and mass death could already be found at the beginning of the century.

Concurrently and in close connection to these economic conditions, something not unlike a Europe-wide economic system came into being for the first time. Individual regional economies, which had previously been largely independent, became increasingly interdependent, although Immanuel Wallerstein's identification of a tightly interwoven 'Atlantic world economy' for this period may be a step too far.<sup>7</sup> The Mediterranean and northern Italy had been the economic powerhouses of Europe, but this role was gradually taken up instead by the Atlantic communities of north-western Europe. This relocation of Europe's economic heartland, which would prove of profound historical significance, was already apparent in Luther's lifetime, and from the mid-sixteenth century a more modern economic triangle formed by the Netherlands, northern France, and England took shape. Economic historians have identified in the growth of shipping in the North Sea and the Baltic the first transport revolution of the modern age. The impetus was provided only in part by the discovery of the Americas; far more significant were the growth in the population of western and central Europe and the increased demand for food and goods. Additionally, the advance of the Ottomans had disrupted trade in the Levant.

The exchange of goods between western Europe and the Baltic grew dramatically, primarily as the work of Dutch merchants, whose ships sailed through the Danish Straits in their hundreds each year, transporting eastwards tapestries, altar pieces carved in Antwerp, and other high-value products of the workshops of western Europe, and carrying back the raw materials of the Scandinavian and Baltic lands that were in such high demand in the highly populated and economically active areas of central and western Europe—timber and pitch for the rapidly expanding shipbuilding industry, as well as honey, wax, and amber, but above all grain from the broad plain of the river Vistula. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, this 'mother trade', as the Dutch termed their exchange with the Baltic, was supplemented by



Figure 4. *The Four Horsemen*, from *The Apocalypse* by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), woodcut, 1498.



trade that reached west, to the New World via Seville and the Atlantic. The medieval trading axis that ran north–south through the principal trading stations and trading routes of Europe was very evidently being replaced by a new axis that ran east–west, through northern and north-western Europe and across the Atlantic, with its most important transit points, where goods were exchanged and reshipped, in the Netherlands, northern France, and England.

Contemporaries could not have been aware of the origins and long-term implications of such shifts. And in any case, the old economic centres did not suddenly cease to exist: Venice remained an important trading hub into the seventeenth century. The early mercantile capitalism of southern Germany and the closely associated mining industry of the Harz and Erzgebirge regions and the Alps emerged only at the end of the fifteenth century. For four or five decades around 1500 the European economy was much influenced by the southern and central German lands, largely under the sway of the trading houses of southern Germany. The greatest and most renowned of these was run by the Fugger family, who in the first third of the sixteenth century under Jakob Fugger the Rich spread their business interests throughout Europe and developed close ties with the princely rulers of their age, including both popes and Emperors. The success of such trading houses rested on four pillars: long-distance trade, mining in the Alps and the Carpathians, banking on a grand scale, and distribution, which involved the decentralized organization of commercial mass production, mainly in textiles. Sitting in his grand townhouse on the Wine Market in Augsburg, Jakob Fugger directed a global enterprise that included mines in the Carpathians, the Erzgebirge, and the Alps as well as a European monopoly of alum and quicksilver, and a trading network that at times reached even to the New World. Increasingly frequently the Fuggers acted as bankers for the rulers, courts, and states of Germany and Europe, and for the Habsburgs in particular, for whom in one decisive moment they were able to secure the Imperial crown. In 1519, following the death of Emperor Maximilian, the Habsburgs turned to the Fuggers when they needed to raise funds to entice the German electors away from the candidacy of the French king, Francis I, and ensure that they voted instead for Charles, king of Spain and a Habsburg grandson of Maximilian.

The politics and culture of the Empire in the first third of the sixteenth century were largely powered by the strong economy. Even the success of the Reformation is hard to imagine without the riches and political weight of Luther's princely ruler, Elector Frederick the Wise, which in turn were a

product of mining and flourishing trade and manufacturing in his territory. Only in the middle decades of the sixteenth century, as trade with Italy declined markedly and the first great state bankruptcies occurred, in particular in Spain and France, shocking the financial world, did the age of the early capitalist family enterprises of southern Germany reach its end. With whole fleets now sailing to Europe laden with South American silver, silver mining in Germany became unprofitable and the mining boom was halted, not only in Saxony but also in Bohemia, the Harz mountains, and the Alpine lands. During the last weeks of his life, Luther would be preoccupied with the repercussions of this downturn in Mansfeld, the territory in which he had been born.

## A Century of Learning and the Arts

The intellectual world, the cultural world, the world of learning—they, too, all waxed and waned. The invention of printing in Mainz around 1450, when Johannes Gutenberg was the first to use moveable metal type, would prove to have been revolutionary but had not reached its full potential before the Reformation. That world-changing event was still in its infancy—it was the age of incunabula, of expensive single-page printings and unique editions such as the renowned forty-two-line Gutenberg Bible of 1454. The mass production of books arrived only with the Reformation, and with the pamphlet wars and publication of Luther's bestsellers, above all his renowned Luther Bible.

Humanism and the Renaissance advanced through Europe, impelled on to almost dizzying heights by the relocation of Byzantine learning to Italy and by the Renaissance court of King Matthias Corvinus in Hungary. North of the Alps such innovation initially took only baby steps, and sometimes made no progress at all: for example, the medieval Gothic style remained de rigueur for more upscale homes, council chambers, and churches. In 1499 the Sforza dukes of Milan, relatives of Emperor Maximilian I through his second wife, Bianca Maria, sent sculptors from Lombardy to the Emperor. Together with Jacopo de Barbari, from Venice, and Adriano Fiorentino, from Florence, these new arrivals planted in central Europe the seeds that would bloom as the art of the Northern Renaissance. Nevertheless, Maximilian's court was no Renaissance court. His style has been aptly summarized as an amalgam of the imagery of medieval Germany and the

costumes and staging of ancient Rome.<sup>8</sup> The Fuggers saw things differently, however, and they had both the courage to adopt the visual language of the Renaissance and the money to realize their building conceits. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, they had a triumphal private chapel in the style of the Florentine Renaissance erected in the chancel at the west end of the church of Saint Anne in Augsburg. The chapel was decorated with individual sculptures of the directors of the family firm, Ulrich and Jakob, from models provided by no less a figure than Albrecht Dürer, who during these decades emerged as the leading artistic personality north of the Alps. First in line behind Emperor Maximilian in bringing Renaissance architects and artists to Germany was Luther's own ruler, Elector Frederick the Wise, who sought to endow his court with something of the most up-to-date lustre and prestige of the Italian courts.

Philosophy, literature, and education were also in transition. The conflict amongst theologians over the primacy of the *via antiqua* or the *via moderna*, which gave precedence to experience and promoted empiricism, had been put to rest, with universities usually offering courses based on both the old and new methods. Wittenberg was, however, an exception, for here instruction was restricted to the *via antiqua*. Humanism, which called for a return *ad fontes*, 'to the sources', and challenged all authority that was only assumed, was also on the advance. In Cologne, however, the Dominicans ruled, holding high the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas and, as men of the Roman Inquisition, denouncing any deviation from Christian orthodoxy. They faced a new front composed of German humanists, some of whom were members of ecclesiastical institutions, but some of whom were not. With biting satire, humanists pilloried the empty babbling of stale scholasticism and the stubbornness of the Dominicans at Cologne, who refused to engage the new spirit of unbounded questioning and investigation. For the humanists the imperatives of this new age were to be met not by increasingly incomprehensible sophistic interpretations of tradition but rather by renewed and expanded knowledge that would come from unbiased examination of the sources.

At the beginning of the new century, Johannes Reuchlin, a humanist, was attacked for his study of Hebrew and his support for the publication of Jewish sources. Ulrich von Hutten and Crotus Rubianus, a fellow humanist, sprang to his defence with their text *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, which they published anonymously. The 'men of darkness' of the title would become

proverbial in Germany for any enemy of progress. Overnight the work aroused a public debate in the Empire, as argument and counterargument—often finding their audience through printed pamphlets—highlighted the backlog of reform in education, the church, the state, and society and suggested how it might be tackled.

Although European humanism was undoubtedly an international movement, its early nationalistic emphasis served to intensify intellectual and cultural tensions. Examples can be found in the rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania* and in the Celtic, Batavian, and Gothic origin myths that proved so popular in these very decades. Disputes such as that involving the Dominicans in Cologne could be packaged as an attempt by the German peoples to free themselves from infiltration by Rome and exploitation by the curia. Today we know such claims to have been largely groundless, and the relationship between curia and Empire in the fifteenth century has been characterized as 'unmistakably loose'.<sup>9</sup> Amongst all the peoples of Christendom, the Germans had perhaps least reason to complain that their wealth was flowing to Rome, yet contemporaries remained convinced, and the next generation would celebrate Luther as the German Hercules who, as depicted on a well-known woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger (Figure 5), with a cudgel cut from ancient German forests, took out the Dominicans of Cologne and Jakob von Hoogstraten, papal inquisitor and the greatest of all enemies of progress, thus freeing the German church with a single blow from the bloodthirsty toadies of Rome.

The humanists lacked for neither drive nor optimism. That spirit is relayed in a much-cited celebratory cry by Ulrich von Hutten from 1518: 'Oh this age! Oh these letters! It is such joy to be alive!'<sup>10</sup> This new generation of intellectuals and writers embodied more than any other grouping the upsurge of a new age. What they lacked in numbers, they made up for in industry, and their contribution as propagandists can hardly be overstated. They threw their weight behind the theological and ecclesiastical rebellion initiated by Luther, adding greatly to the momentum carried by the movement. The self-confidence of the early modern individual, seen a century earlier in architects such as Peter Parler or painters such as Jan van Eyck, reached its first high point. In Germany that self-confidence also had religious connotations—as can be read from the similarities with images of Christ in Dürer's famous self-portrait of 1500 (Figure 6). Luther's grandiose entry with his self-identification as prophetic restorer of the church was



Figure 5. Martin Luther as Hercules Germanicus, by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8–1543), woodcut, c.1519. Luther has the pope suspended from his teeth as he holds inquisitor Jakob von Hoogstraten by the neck.



**Figure 6.** Christ-like self-portrait with fur-trimmed robe, by Albrecht Dürer, 1500.

another example of this prevailing attitude, even though the Luther cult would subsequently give much energy to endowing the momentous ‘Here I stand’ moment with an air of exceptionality.

### **Upturn in Germany**

News of events overseas, in the Balkans or in Rome, would certainly have reached Germany. Educated individuals such as Martin Behaim, whom we have already encountered, and south German merchant families such as the Welsers or the Fuggers took part in new discoveries and sought to exploit the opportunities they presented. The magnificence and excesses of Rome were as well known as the brutality of the Turkish army. Initially, however, the direct impact on central Europe was very limited. The Renaissance advanced only slowly beyond the Alps and to the north—carried first into the towns of southern Germany on the back of trade with northern Italy and only arriving in central Germany a generation later. Martin Luder grew up surrounded by the Gothic and later, in Erfurt and Wittenberg, his environment was entirely that of an earlier age. Even the new castle at Wittenberg that Elector Frederick had begun building at great expense in the 1490s, employing the most sought-after craftsmen and artists, was at heart late Gothic; only here and there could signs of the

early Renaissance be detected. Luther's first personal encounter with the Renaissance came on his visit to Rome in late 1510 and early 1511, charged with carrying out business for his religious order. However, he only became aware of the threat that Rome and the Renaissance papacy posed to Germany some years later, when Leo X and Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg looked to finance both their building projects and their accumulation of power in part by the sale of an indulgence in Germany, with the collection of the Peter's Pence.

Innovation was not a foreign import that arrived in Germany in the decades around 1500. Change came from within, admittedly less spectacular than elsewhere, but all the more sustainable and with all the greater impact on the everyday lives of the population. A new dynamism, previously unknown, took hold of the economy, politics, and education. Luther and his evangelical teachings were without doubt original, but they were also a product of this upsurge. The rapid spread of these new ideas was only possible because of the printed book, still in its youthful phase. Today this period of intensified communication is often termed the first media revolution. Yet it is unlikely that Luther would have held his own before the leading figures of the Empire or set the wheels of Reformation turning if the German economy had not been flourishing—above all the mining industry in the Harz and Erzgebirge mountains—and his success was only possible because just a few decades earlier the early modern territorial state had begun to take shape. In the critical moment at the Imperial diet at Worms in 1521 when Luther refused to recant, and afterwards, condemned and no longer protected by the law, everything depended on the protection provided by his Saxon prince, whose authority in turn stemmed from his well-financed early modern state.

During Luther's lifetime, Italy's economic dominance would be succeeded by a 'German age' in the economic history of Europe, with three particular centres of growth: southern Germany with its family firms involved on a worldwide scale in banking, textile supply, and mining; the North Sea and Baltic, with a marked increase in shipping as well as in cultural exchanges; and central Germany and Saxony, where the focus was on mining but which also profited from the increase in long-distance transport by land. While transportation hubs such as Erfurt and Zwickau blossomed, the advantage was felt most in the mountainous areas of the Harz, Thuringia, and Saxony, where older towns expanded rapidly and new settlements such as Annaberg, Marienberg, and Schneeberg sprang up.

As a result the population in central Germany increased and became more concentrated on particular locations. Village records indicate that the rural population grew especially quickly. In 1445 there were 1,143 peasant families in the 107 villages in the region of Dresden, but by 1550 there were 1,851; in Pirna and Frauenstein the population had grown from 125 to 201 and from 383 to 597 respectively. The actual rate of growth was much higher than these figures alone suggest, for a large number of villagers moved to towns. The percentage of the population that was urban also grew greatly, and in the mining areas of the western Erzgebirge over half the population lived in towns.

The primary beneficiaries of the wealth generated by mining and related industries and by long-distance trade were the local rulers—the electors and dukes of Saxony and, to a lesser extent, the counts of Mansfeld, whose lands were small and divided amongst family members. Although the Saxon lands were ruled by two branches of one family—the principal towns of the electoral Ernestine branch were Wittenberg and Torgau and the principal towns of the ducal Albertine branch were Meissen and Dresden—both parties benefited from the mining wealth, on the basis of which they constructed early modern territorial states that soon proved to be the most modern and most efficient in the Empire. The Saxon rulers had already claimed significant authority over the affairs of the church in their own lands, and they threw themselves into the intellectual and spiritual renewal of religious life. Indeed, the competition between the two lines of the family was most marked when it came to ecclesiastical matters: Elector Frederick, Luther's ruler, assembled a collection of relics that made Wittenberg a centre of the sacred and subsequently offered his protection to the Reformation that had come into being at his own university; Duke Georg was equally engaged with reform of the church and devotional life in his own lands, but he decided against the new theology that emerged from Wittenberg and became a bitter opponent of Luther, not because he was personally less interested in religion than his electoral cousin or because he believed reform of the church to be unnecessary—rather because he did not believe the radical transformations advocated in Wittenberg to be the correct way forward. In some ways his piety was more 'modern' and closer to Luther than that of his relic-collecting cousin, for Duke Georg favoured a Christ-focused religious experience and distanced himself from devotional practices that spilled over into pilgrimages and relics. His advocacy of lay education has drawn comparisons with Erasmus and he sought a growth of



lay piety and a greater sense of the Christian in everyday life, in particular within the booming towns of the Erzgebirge, where social pressures were especially acute.

## Unease and Insecurity

No other generation in Germany has likely been so preoccupied with death and salvation as was that of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. We can learn of its anxiety from personal testimonials and church endowments, but we can also see it in paintings and sculptures and read of it in theological and philosophical texts. For the large majority of Luther's contemporaries, the mood was set not by the secular optimism about the future that was typical of humanists but by a deeply rooted religiosity out of which emerged uncertainty about the very nature of life after death. Almost everyone believed that there *would* be a continued existence after death; at issue was the form that this existence would take. Where today people might focus their anxieties on currency markets or stock prices or on the worldwide economy and global politics, on which they believe their well-being to depend, at the beginning of the sixteenth century many people, intellectuals as well as the so-called simple folk, thought much about the transience of earthly existence and about life after death. In the visual arts and in literature these concerns found new introspective expression in, for example, the great Dances of Death on the walls of churches, monasteries, and cemeteries, but above all in a personal and private sense of the omnipresence of death, as seen in the moving boxwood relief entitled 'Death and the Maiden' by Hans Schwarz (Figure 7). The fears of the age made an appearance in grotesque form too, in what we might term the surrealist paintings of the Dutchman Hieronymus Bosch. Behind this agonizing engagement with death lay not fear of a cold and empty nihilistic hereafter but persistent uncertainty about what would come after physical death—reconciliation with God or the never-ending torments of the abyss of hell?

How can I receive the grace of God? What about my personal salvation? Such questions appear to have preoccupied many people living north of the Alps, and those living in Germany in particular. Luther's answers would set history on a new course. Italy, however, seems to have been little touched by such transcendental musings. In Italy the search for stability, security, and order was understood primarily in secular terms. At this time Machiavelli of



**Figure 7.** *Death and the Maiden*, by Hans Schwarz (c.1492/93–after 1532?), boxwood, Augsburg, c.1520.

Florence, the most committed of all secular advocates, developed his own political model, free of all moral considerations, which showed no interest in the world to come. North of the Alps, however, people had access to a well-stocked arsenal of devotional and redemptive activities as they sought to combat both their uncertainty and their fears. For protection they turned above all to the Mother of God, whom they thought most likely to be able to plead their case successfully in the heavenly court. The image of the Madonna with her protective cloak was one of the most loved motifs of the age, along with the Dance of Death. At the same time as the cult of saints bloomed, endowments and confraternities also proved very popular. Both provided a form of life insurance, although, admittedly, for life *after* death.

An endowment was made to ensure that after death Masses would be said for the soul of the individual who had made the endowment; confraternities had similar purpose but in communal form, with intercessions made by the living for the deceased members. The age of the pilgrimage had reached a high point, with thousands of the faithful taking part every year. They went, for example, to the 'Beautiful Virgin' (*Schöne Maria*) in Regensburg, a votive image that had proved its miraculous power in 1519, when a Regensburg craftsman made a wondrous recovery after a very serious accident. A contemporary chronicle tells of the pilgrimages that quickly followed:

In the first three years after the chapel was founded 25,374 Masses were read. Whole parishes joined together and came from ten, twenty, or even more



**Figure 8.** *The Beautiful Virgin of Regensburg* (*Schöne Maria von Regensburg*), by Albrecht Altdorfer (1480 or earlier–1538), painted following the miracle of 1519.

miles away in order to make an offering to the Mother of God and to ask for her intercession. As a pilgrimage procession made its way during the night through villages, accompanied by singing and much noise, women jumped up and joined the procession and not infrequently they were still dressed only in their nightclothes.<sup>11</sup>

The image of the ‘Beautiful Virgin’ was copied by Albrecht Altdorfer soon after the miracle (Figure 8) and sold in its thousands as a woodcut that decorated the homes of pilgrims.

The mass hysteria of this age could also have a dark side, as the Regensburg pilgrimage also illustrates. The origins of this pilgrimage site are found in a Jewish pogrom, and the man so miraculously healed had been injured while at work destroying a synagogue. The pogrom had begun immediately after the death of Emperor Maximilian I, when the Imperial protection afforded the Jews of the Imperial towns and cities, in exchange for a payment, was lifted. In this situation the Jews became scapegoats for Christian fears and

uncertainties, both material—a particular reality in the Imperial city of Regensburg in light of its stagnant economy—and, especially, spiritual. In other areas of Europe too—in Trent, for example, in 1474/75—in the decades around 1500, Jews fell victim to the eschatological pursuit of salvation by their Christian neighbours, who accused Jews of desecration of the host or even the ritual murder of Christian children to give grounds for their gruesome punishment. The belief that the end of the world was near was heightened by the apparently unstoppable advance of the Turks. For most contemporaries the attempt by the Christian states to keep the Turks at bay was only superficially a contest over political power and economic dominance, for in their eyes it was the End Times fight to the death between Christ and Antichrist, between the heavenly hordes and the forces of darkness.

Anxieties about salvation also caused tensions within the church. The decades around 1500 saw strong anticlericalism, in particular within aspirational urban society, where it flourished amongst humanist thinkers, writers, and artists. They found endless opportunity to poke fun at, and pour scorn on, poorly educated Mass-reading priests and their pointless magical incantations, and on avaricious prelates, lecherous monks, and all-too-willing nuns. They relayed their contempt to a broader public in mocking treatises, woodcuts, and paintings that were both detailed and barbed. Criticism of Rome and of the carryings-on at the court in Rome was pronounced in Germany, especially amongst those with political influence, and the Imperial estates for years had been drawing up a catalogue of grievances about unwarranted practices within the church. The ‘Complaints of the German Nation’ (*Gravamina nationis germanicae*) were much debated at Imperial diets, and everyone looked to the Emperor, as the temporal head of Christendom, to remedy the situation. This anticlericalism was not in any way like the essentially modern and even atheistic anticlericalism that rejects wholesale the salvific claims of the church. The opposite is very much the case: wretchedly educated and morally bankrupt clergy were disparaged precisely because they were so far from the model of the honourable and conscientious priest. The anticlericalism of the age of the Reformation was an expression of the desire for a better church and for a safe path to eternal salvation tended by capable clergy.

The circumstances of his own age tell us little about the essentials of Luther’s theology. His thoughts emerged from, and would be shaped

by, that context, however, and that context also provided the social and political scaffolding of his Reformation. Above all, these circumstances help us make sense of Luther's life and work, for they show us that the reformer not only brought about change but was himself also a product of transition.

## II

# Childhood and Youth

### Son of a 'Poor Hewer'?

Bathed in the spotlight of national and international attention, Luther's later life was revealingly exposed. By contrast, his early years in the midst of his family in Mansfeld and subsequently at school in Magdeburg and Eisenach remained largely in shadow. The reformer's account of his childhood, found primarily in his Table Talk, was subject not only to not-unexpected memory lapses, but also to a desire for self-representation often found in individuals who believe they have a starring role to play in history itself, which for Luther meant a leading part in the narrative of salvation. All the more welcome, then, is the contribution of archaeologists employed by the state of Sachsen-Anhalt who recently have made valuable discoveries about the daily life of the Luder family in Eisleben and Mansfeld. We can also be grateful that economic and social historians are now able to paint a far more accurate picture of the agriculture and mining in the district from which the reformer came.

The first decade and a half of Martin Luder's life was spent in the midst of the mining boom in the Harz mountains. His childhood was shaped by the everyday experiences of a young entrepreneurial family absorbed in making the most of the economic opportunities and in attending to the needs of a growing family. Later Luther would delight in framing his account of his birth and ancestry in traditional language. He would relate that he was the son of a 'poor hewer', himself 'the son of a peasant', who had moved to Mansfeld, where he had become involved in mining.<sup>1</sup> The reality was rather different. On his father's side, Luther's family had been settled in the Thuringian village of Möhra, south of Eisenach, for generations. His grandfather Heiner Luder counted among the more privileged peasants within the village; these men had no local feudal superior but rather, as free peasants, paid their dues directly

to the elector of Saxony, their territorial lord. With their enhanced legal and social status, these Thuringian peasant farmers were not like unfree peasants in other parts of Germany who were closely tied to the land and to a local feudal lord. The Luders were not especially wealthy, but we can trace their ties to a good number of substantial and productive landholdings in and around Möhra. When resident at the Wartburg in 1521, Luther would roam through the neighbouring Thuringian Forest and came away with the impression that his extended family were to be found everywhere. Their legal standing entitled these Möhra peasants to pass on their landholdings freely, and traditionally those possessions were inherited, undivided, by the youngest son. The territorial ruler and his administration were some distance away, in Torgau, Weimar, or Wittenberg. Before 1513 there were no official regulations in place for the Wettin's south-western possessions. As a result the peasants of Möhra were well used to extensive communal self-government. Financial matters, village business, and local agricultural affairs such as the use of common lands were regulated in the interests of the more substantial peasantry, with no regard for the lowest levels of the peasantry who did not own their tenantry.

As the oldest of four sons, Hans Luder (1459–1530), father of the reformer, was not in line to inherit his father's landholding. Unless he was prepared to remain unmarried and work for his youngest brother, who would inherit from their father, he would have to move elsewhere and find a means of support other than farming. In 1479, aged twenty, Hans Luder married Margarete Lindemann (1460–1531), who was of a similar age; evidently he had resolved to follow the path of independence. The challenges of a new beginning and years of uncertainty lay before Luder and his wife, but they did not have to face these early years without either means or assistance. Substantial evidence suggests that the flourishing of the agricultural economy in the late fifteenth century meant that the eldest son of this Möhra family could be provided with a certain capital. Hans Luder's father's interests may have reached beyond farming, and it is possible that he also operated a copper mine, perhaps even on his own land, for Möhra lay in the area around Suhl where copper shale could be found. In that case, Hans Luder could have arrived in Eisleben with not just capital to invest but also personal experience in mining.

Additionally, Margarete's relatives reached out a helping hand to the young couple. Through his mother, Martin Luder belonged to a socially ambitious family, a connection that is often overlooked by historians and

genealogists who traditionally have paid little attention to the maternal line within the reformer's family tree, concentrating instead on his paternal ancestry. Luther's maternal grandfather, Johann Lindemann, was a member of the citizenry of Eisenach entitled to sit on the town council, a grouping in the agrarian and manufacturing region of the western Thuringian Forest with many ties to the substantial peasantry who made up the rural elite. The marriage between Hans Luder, son of a peasant, and Margarete Lindemann, daughter of a burgher, was in no way out of the ordinary. It was equally unremarkable that the wife's family would have a hand in the lives of the young couple and their children. Margarete's older brother, Anton Lindemann, played a particularly significant role, for through his appointment by the counts as *Bergrat*, Lindemann was involved in the administration of the prosperous mining industry in the Harz county of Mansfeld, and he even ran his own smelting works. Copper mining closer to home in Eisenach-Möhra did not offer the young couple a secure long-term income, for the poor-quality copper was not a promising prospect. By contrast Mansfeld copper, centred on Mansfeld and Hettstedt, was of the highest quality. Making all possible efforts to promote their lands, the counts issued a manufacturer-friendly mining ordinance and arranged for the introduction of the most modern technologies, such as a process involving the use of lead as a catalyst that allowed silver to be separated out from the raw copper. Wishing to be sure that their potential ventures were legally sound, investors required an agreement be in place with the electors of Saxony, who were of long-standing influence in the Harz region. On 6 May 1484, after negotiations lasting several months, a settlement was reached in Leipzig. We have good reason to believe that in summer 1483, as *Bergrat* at Mansfeld, Hans Luder's brother-in-law Anton Lindemann would have known of the imminent agreement and could have informed his relatives in Möhra of both that settlement and the opportunities it represented for someone minded to invest; he had, we would say today, an insider tip. And indeed, in summer 1483 his sister and brother-in-law moved to the county of Mansfeld, followed soon after by Klein-Hans (Small Hans) Luder, a younger brother of Hans' who was similarly excluded from inheriting from their father.

With Margarete's pregnancy well advanced, the Luders moved into a house in Eisleben in the Bridge District, the home of many artisans. With some 4,000 inhabitants, Eisleben would not have seemed so alien to the young couple from Eisenach, who would surely quickly have felt at home in their new surroundings. Yet while the solid leading citizens of the former



Thuringian residence town of Eisenach looked to the past, Eisleben looked to the future, with expansive construction enlarging the footprint of the town, growing engagement in mining itself and in the manufacturing associated with mining, and mining and foundry workers who brought new life, and also unrest and danger, to the towns of Mansfeld county. Smelting masters were prepared to assume the risks of investment in capital projects, and while they might make speedy returns, they not infrequently quickly found they had lost everything. Hans Luder was not going to miss out on the opportunities available to him and soon established the necessary business connections. In Hans Lüttich, who came from an established local family of foundry masters, he found a suitable partner and joint investor.

It soon became evident that mining in Eisleben itself offered no opportunities for new investors: the *Erbfeuer* mining rights were privately owned, and the *Herrenfeuer* rights, which were leased by the counts of Mansfeld, were all also securely held by existing businesses. In spring 1484 Hans Luder and his partner leased from the ruler mining rights, as *Herrenfeuer*, in the nearby town of Mansfeld. With 3,000 inhabitants Mansfeld was only three-quarters the size of Eisleben, but it was more strongly associated with mining and agriculture. With the ruling counts' imposing castle of Mansfeld towering over the town, Mansfeld was strongly influenced by the court and administration of the small territory. The main street ran from the church square to the lower town gate, from where it led up to the castle and to the copper shale deposits. In the immediate vicinity of the main street lived court administrators and families involved in mining. The Luder family occupied a substantial property with more elegant buildings to the front and stabling and other outbuildings behind, and with an extensive kitchen garden with vegetables, fruit, and even grapevines.

The extensive and utilitarian character of the Luders' physical footprint in Mansfeld tells its own story. Supplies for mining and smelting had to be stored and the horses needed for the process of drying out the mineshafts stabled. The family's business interests also rested heavily, however, on agriculture and livestock, which provided a reliable income and therefore also some protection against the risks of mining. Finally, Hans Luder also made good use of the possibilities offered by the capital market, which expanded rapidly in the early sixteenth century. He lent out his surplus funds at interest, with the counts of Stolberg-Wernigerode and various ecclesiastical institutions amongst his debtors. As is always the case in an overheated economy, the remarkable possible profits came with substantial risk, a reality Hans Luder would eventually

discover, although only towards the end of his working life, and his heirs still inherited the property he owned and 1,250 gulden in cash. But Martin's younger brother Jakob, who took on his father's business and the parental home, would be overwhelmed by the crisis in the Mansfeld mining industry and landed in severe financial difficulty.

Martin's childhood in Mansfeld was shaped by his father's success in business and by the rapid improvement in the family's social status that accompanied that economic achievement. Hans Luder became a significant presence in Mansfeld and, as was typical in late medieval towns, his standing brought with it public office. As early as 1491 he was one of the four *Vierherr*, representatives of the local citizenry responsible for the administration of the town together with the town council. As a matter of course this position would have brought Luder into contact with the nearby court and territorial administration. The office of *Vierherr* included ecclesiastical responsibilities, in particular at the town church of Saint George, located very close to the family property. There Luder would have represented the citizens of the town at the dedication of altars, in events related to the fabric of the church, including the building itself, and in the trade in indulgences that was already flourishing in the 1490s.

Luther later recorded that his father had avoided one cleric's insistent urging that he make financial contributions to the church by pointing to his responsibility for his large family.<sup>2</sup> That response is in keeping with the character of a hard-working and thrifty mining entrepreneur with his feet firmly on the ground at a time when secular and secularizing trends were developing precisely in economic and financial affairs. A possible anticlericalism can also be read from Luther's account. Hans Luder was certainly, however, neither anti-religion nor anti-church. He located himself fully within the new religious impulses when he joined a fraternity, Unserer Leiben Frauen Gezeiten im Thal Mansfeldt founded in 1502 and made up of local dignitaries and when he took part in the activities, largely involving social welfare, of the fraternity of Saint George at the town church.

There was also nothing unusual in Luder's plan to ensure the improved status of his family by having his oldest son study law. Legal study ranked alongside a career in the church as a prime means to social advancement. With princely rulers and town magistrates requiring increasing numbers of legal scholars and administrative personnel, law studies could be a first step up the social ladder and might take the climber even as far as ennoblement. Very soon after, in the 1520s and 1530s, during the period of unrest that

accompanied the Reformation, lawyers were increasingly likely to be among the families that dominated the councils of north and central German towns, and in subsequent generations they formed the core of early modern territorial bureaucracies. For Luder, a mining and metalworking entrepreneur with no family tradition of education, the conviction that his oldest son should study law would also have been fostered by the university attendance of members of the Lindemann family, a path they had followed as a matter of course: Johann and Kaspar Lindemann, sons of an elder brother of Margarete and therefore cousins of Martin, had studied law and medicine respectively and both entered princely service, as a councillor and as personal physician to the Saxon elector. The closeness of the family ties is evident in the presence of Kaspar Lindemann at the first and most challenging of the disputations that Luther the reformer faced, against Johannes Eck at Leipzig in 1519. A similar model was also provided by the Drachstedt family, friends of the Luders' in Eisleben who also ran a smelting works. The Drachstedts' son Philip held a doctorate in law and rose high, becoming a princely councillor and assessor at the Imperial Chamber Court. Well aware of the lack of security provided by his own business, Hans Luder the Mansfeld master smelter would have taken note of such careers and wished his own oldest son to follow a similar path. This makes all the more understandable his deep disappointment and anger when Martin ended his law studies, extinguishing his family's hopes of further social advancement.

### **Strict and Uncompromising: Everyday Life in Mansfeld**

House and home were the domain of Luder's mother, who was therefore the dominant influence on the everyday experiences of her children and family. In the early years, when the young family was still unable to afford servants, she also shouldered the physical responsibilities of the household. While we have good reason to correct the romanticized picture of Luther's father's having pulled himself up from nothing, we have no reason to doubt Luther's memory of his mother's collecting wood in the forest and carrying it home on her back.<sup>3</sup> Money would have been short in the Luder family, for all resources were to be invested in the family's business interests, which is not to say that Martin's childhood was scarred by poverty, but it was

marked by thriftiness and a certain meagreness. Later too, as business flourished, Luder's mother's contribution remained vital to the growing family. Again the picture is a little blurry, for we do not have an exact headcount for Martin Luder's siblings. We do know for certain that he had one brother, Jakob, and three sisters who reached adulthood, but we also have references to other siblings who died as children. Luder's mother would have introduced the children to religion. We know little of her own piety and spirituality other than a brief comment by Martin Luther in which he stated that his mother was superstitious and feared witches and demons. We are therefore left to conclude that Martin Luther's religious upbringing was likely much as was standard for the time, dominated by popular religion and focused on the veneration of the saints and the omnipresent works-based devotional practice.

Ignoring the lack of evidence to support their theories, psychologists have felt drawn, and still feel drawn, to interpreting the childhood experiences of the reformer and arguing for their significance for his subsequent thoughts and actions. Erik H. Erikson, an American psychoanalyst, explained the Reformation as an anti-authoritarian protest by the 'Young Man Luther'<sup>4</sup> against his father, basing his psychoanalysis on the reformer's own words, and in particular on memories of his childhood voiced twenty years later. One of these statements concerned his relationship with his father: 'My father once whipped me so severely that I ran away from him, and he was worried that he might not win me back again'; the other, his relationship with his mother: 'For the sake of a mere nut my mother beat me until the blood flowed. By such strict discipline they finally forced me into the monastery; though they meant it heartily well, I was only made timid by it.'<sup>5</sup> Even if Luther himself saw a connection between his experience of parental disciplining and the merciless image of God that led him to flee to the monastery, we must be wary of finding methodological equivalence between a reminiscence recounted at the dinner table and the utterances of today's middle classes on the psychoanalyst's couch. The circumstances in which Luther and his contemporaries lived and the well-being of their souls were determined by needs and fears and expressed in images and imaginings that were all foreign to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to the individuals on whom Freud and his successors developed their interpretative tools and models. Luder did not grow up in a society characterized by excess and consumption, let alone in a permissive society. Due to the harsh climate few walnut trees grew in the east of Germany, and those few trees bore little