

PROBLEMS OF AUTHORITY
IN THE REFORMATION DEBATES

G. R. EVANS

Lecturer in History, University of Cambridge



Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Victoria 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1992

First published 1992

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Evans, G. R. (Gillian Rosemary)
Problems of authority in the Reformation debates / G.R. Evans
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0 521 41686 8 (hardback)
1. Authority (Religion) – History of doctrines – 16th century.
2. Reformation. 3. Christian union. I. Title.
BT88.E92 1992
262'.8'09031–dc20 91-33100 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41686 8 hardback

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Introduction

The confession of Christ as Lord is the heart of the Christian faith. To him God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men with God and with one another. To bring this *koinonia* to perfection is God's eternal purpose. The Church exists to serve the fulfilment of this purpose when God will be all in all.¹

Christian authority is Christ's authority. The debates on authority which rent apart the Church in the West in the sixteenth century turned again and again on whether Christ's sovereignty was being set at risk in the Church's life; and whether his Word, Holy Scripture, was being disregarded or overridden by those in authority in the Church.

The chapters which follow look first at sixteenth-century concerns over the authority on which Christians believe matters of faith. As textual scholarship investigated Greek and Hebrew and raised the possibility that there ought to be emendations, Scripture itself could no longer be looked upon, in an uncontroversial way, as a text to which one could simply point. The testimony of the authorities other than Scripture with which everyone in the West had been familiar for generations, ceased to be uncontroversially acceptable to many Protestants, and qualifications hedged about the use even of the Fathers. Proof by reasoning, which had reached a high point of sophistication in the late Middle Ages, and in which there had normally been embedded authorities to support propositions, underwent revolutionary attack.

These are in part epistemological matters, in part critical and methodological, and they must stand behind any enquiry into the content of a theology of authority in salvation and its relationship to authority in the Church. We have both the advantage of hindsight to help us judge whether a difference of sixteenth-century opinion was merely about language; and the disadvantage that we cannot now enter into the sixteenth-century situation without making some effort of intellectual fellowship. But if we have been quarrelling even in part about the

¹ ARCIC I, Authority I.1.

interpretation of words and the implications of arguments, there can be no more essential task than to try to understand the doctrine of logic and language with which sixteenth-century thinkers were working when the Protestants' Confessions and the Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent were framed.

In succeeding chapters we come to a series of areas of major concern throughout the sixteenth-century Church in the West. By what authority can the Christian know himself to be accepted by God, and forgiven for his sins? Has he any power to help himself? Is authority vested in some way in the Church to help him? Does the Church have authority to 'bind and loose', to 'reconcile' the penitent to God when he falls into sin again and again, and repents, or to deny him reconciliation if he does not repent? What authority does baptism carry in God's eyes? Is it necessary for salvation? What happens in the Eucharist? Does the priest who says the words of consecration have authority to make the Eucharist effective on behalf of those who are present? Of those they love who are not present? How is authority to be understood and exercised in the day-to-day running of the Church? Who has authority to make someone a minister to others? Is authority in the Church properly hierarchical? Ought there to be one minister with authority over the whole Church, and if so, exactly what are his powers and responsibilities? Who has authority to make decisions about matters of faith and order? How can decisions be made when the Church is divided?

All these are intimately interconnected areas of authority. They form a single system. That must be so if Christ is Lord and communion his purpose. The difficulty, in the sixteenth century and today, is to see them as a unity.

i. THE AGENDA

The Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz (1522–86) spent a period in his thirties as ducal librarian at Königsberg. This gave him an opportunity which had not come his way before as a university lecturer to sit down at his leisure with a good library and take stock of his habits of study. He says that he began by reading the books of the Bible through in order, comparing 'all the various versions and expositions, old and new, that were in the library'. This sort of textual criticism, involving the comparison not only of interpreters, but also of differences in readings and translations, was something relatively new. Chemnitz's method was to make a note of 'anything that seemed memorable or remarkable', 'on paper arranged for

this purpose'. Secondly, he read the writings of the Fathers, and again he noted what caught his attention. Then he 'diligently read' more recent authors, those who drew attention to 'fundamentals' of doctrine as 'purified' by the reformers. He concentrated, he remarks, chiefly on those who wrote 'polemical treatises on the controversies of our time'. (He specifies the arguments of the 'Papists, Anabaptists, Sacramentarians'.) He made notes of the ways their explanations and solutions were arrived at and tried to determine for himself 'what solutions were the best'.² Here, as in his study of the Bible, new possibilities were added to the old, and Chemnitz was consciously trying to work his way from foundation texts to the conclusions of modern scholarship.

He tried to reduce the mass of material to manageable working matter by systematically making extracts, with a scholarliness only perhaps Robert Grosseteste matched among the mediaeval compilers of *florilegia*.³ He was influenced, as earlier generations had been, by contemporary fashions in theological debate. In the commentaries written on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* generation by generation since the twelfth century, such changes of fashion are apparent not only in the opinions which are advanced and the terms which attract particular notice, but also in the topics which receive special attention. Similarly, when Martin Chemnitz was struck by a sentence or two in his reading, or by a particular argument, he was noting matters of topical concern for his generation, and looking out for 'purified doctrine', as Lutheran scholarship had come to understand it.

He did so on the basis of two sets of ideas, one perhaps more consciously in his mind than the other. The first was a mediaeval heritage. The general shape of the syllabus of 'systematic theology' had been more or less settled in the first hundred years or so of theology's formal study as an academic discipline in the new universities of Europe. In the mid-twelfth century Peter Lombard had arranged his *Sententiae* from the Fathers in a topic order; a century later Thomas Aquinas produced a *Summa Theologiae* which was to outrun its rivals in use as a standard textbook by the end of the sixteenth century.

Aquinas' method was to begin by considering the nature of theological

² Tr. A. L. Graebner, 'An Autobiography of Martin Chemnitz', *Theological Quarterly*, 3 (1899), 472–87.

³ See R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1986) on the *dicta*. Also see collections in Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters*, ed. J. E. Cox (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1846) for a more closely contemporary comparison.

subject-matter and the methods appropriate to it as a discipline, and then to examine questions about the existence and attributes of God; unity and Trinity, the creation, and within it angels and humankind and their mode of knowledge of God; then human right living, the effect of sin and God's work of redemption. The *schema* was, in outline, much the same as that of Hugh of St Victor, Peter Lombard's older contemporary, in his *De Sacramentis Ecclesiae*, and of Peter Lombard himself, whose *Sentences* were always studied as part of a theologian's training throughout the later Middle Ages. This theological framework was devised before the developments of the later Middle Ages had begun to pose questions about authority in the Church so serious and comprehensive as to require systematic treatment in their own right. Aquinas is inclined to deal piecemeal with those which were apparent to him, as they arose within the existing framework.

Chemnitz's notion of what was 'fundamental' was, then, in part determined by the *schema* of systematic theology as he knew it. But he also had a sense that Luther and others in the reforming communities were rediscovering truths which were 'essential to salvation' and which had somehow become obscured, distorted or cluttered with extraneous matter in the teaching of the late mediaeval Church. It was in this spirit that when Melancthon advised the Elector Maurice on the Interim document drawn up in 1548 to try to bring about peace in the war in Germany, he stressed the differences between essentials and inessentials, *res necessariae et non necessariae*.⁴ These seemed to the participants to be debates in which everything was to be lost or won, the salvation of individuals and the salvation of the world.

Except among the radicals and Socinians, the essentials and fundamentals at issue⁵ were not the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas debated in the first Christian centuries and set out in the Creeds. The credal formulations commanded almost universal acceptance. Indeed, Luther rehearses them in Part I of the Smalkald Articles (1537) in order to underline that they 'are not matters of dispute or contention, for both parties confess them'. A great deal was amicably agreed at the Colloquy of Ratisbon in 1541 before protestant and Catholic negotiators came to a stop in mutual suspicion. Calvin was able to say 'Amen' to a number of the Decrees and Canons of Trent. But the Creeds are exceedingly brief on the doctrine of salvation and the Church, and what had come to seem fundamental in the sense Chemnitz means was a series of non-negotiable

⁴ Vatican, MS. Barb. Lat. 806, fo. 244.

⁵ Cf. A-L Pullach (25), *Growth*, p. 17.

central principles in this area on which a great deal was now seen to turn, and which appeared to the reformers to be the key to the whole theological system. Chief among these were ‘Christ-centredness’, justifying faith, the acceptance of no ultimate authority in matters of faith but that of Scripture.

Luther more than once points out the ramifications of error to which misunderstanding of such basic principles could lead. Those who hold fast to ‘the chief article of Jesus Christ’ have, he argues, remained secure in the true faith. ‘All error, heresy, idolatry, offence, misuse and evil in the Church originally came from despising or losing sight of this article of faith in Jesus Christ.’ He says that the idea that we must make satisfaction for sins committed after baptism is the ‘source and origin of all monasteries, masses, pilgrimages, invocations of the saints and such, with which people try to make satisfaction for their sins’.⁶ He thinks that the Mass is a ‘dragon’s tail’ which has ‘brought forth a brood of vermin and the poison of manifold idolatries’ such as purgatory; vigils; pilgrimages; fraternities, those ‘monasteries, chapters and vicars’ which ‘have obligated themselves to transfer by legal and open sale’ Masses for the benefit of the living and the dead; relics; indulgences.⁷

Luther’s picture of things running away at a gallop, once first principles have been lost sight of, conflates a number of ideas which he did not himself always clearly separate. Uppermost in his mind was the threat to the faith of simple people, who were in danger of believing that the purchase of indulgences assured their salvation; they were putting all their trust (*tota fiducia*) not in Christ but in a bit of paper with a wax seal, in the mistaken belief that indulgences brought forgiveness and effected a reconciliation between themselves and God.⁸ Here the issue was not strictly whether the theology was mistaken, but the perennial problem of popular misunderstanding. This was coupled, as it has been in every Christian century, with the persistent tendency of uneducated people to turn to magic and the help of local and familiar spirits in their troubles. When Luther speaks of a trail of implications of abuse arising from failure to keep to Christ, he is referring in part to muddle of this sort. But he came to believe that the Church had gone along with popular misunderstanding, even fostering it for its own pecuniary ends, and encouraging the faithful to put their trust in all the aids and apparatus the penitential system and

⁶ WA 39i.111.

⁷ Smalkald Articles II.2.

⁸ Ninety-Five Theses, 32 and 38, *Resolutiones*.

the system of indulgences now afforded. His own grasp of the theology of indulgences was imperfect in the period when he compiled the Ninety-Five Theses, as he later acknowledged in 1545 in writing *Against Hanswurst*.⁹ Melancthon comments that the theology of penance was confused until Luther came to grips with it.¹⁰ There is some truth in the view that the theology underlying indulgences at least was still not quite clear. As we shall see, the practices connected with the granting of indulgences in the later Middle Ages preceded the development of the theology which explained and justified them.

We have, then, a number of factors in the upheaval of early sixteenth-century theology: an existing order and syllabus of 'systematic theology' as studied in the universities, which could not fully accommodate the theological issues which had been raised by the developments of the last mediaeval centuries; a longstanding custom of the adoption of certain topics for fashionable debate from time to time in the schools; the perception that something was wrong pastorally and practically within the life of the Church, partly as a result of corruption, but also because neither the full syllabus of theological studies nor the topics of current academic interest were encouraging systematic thinking about what was wrong; a sense of 'emergency' among the reformers.

If we are to see how the agenda of debate was drawn up, and how difficult it was to perceive at the time the importance of the task of approaching systematically the problems of authority which were being raised, we must try to capture the freshness of his insights as they appeared to Luther himself. In the period from about 1516, he was beginning to think in an orderly way about the nature and process of personal salvation, to find the kinds of question put in academic teaching of theology unhelpful, and to read the Bible afresh for himself. The result was a creative ferment in his mind, and a sense of high discovery. The driving force was not merely his own sense of intellectual dissatisfaction. It was also strongly pastoral. As he discusses the theology of indulgences and the abuses connected with contemporary practice, Luther begins to discover a number of important principles. First, it cannot be overemphasised that indulgences cannot bring salvation.¹¹ The popular assumption that they can, leads to distortions of emphasis which obscure

⁹ WA 51.462ff.

¹⁰ *Apologia* for the Augsburg Confession, Art. 12, Tappert, p. 183.

¹¹ Ninety-Five Theses, 23, 29, 49, 52, 89.

the great simplicities of our redemption;¹² because in preaching about indulgences ministers push the Word into the background, or omit reference to it altogether,¹³ these simplicities are not brought before people's minds. The cross put up by the indulgence-seller when he speaks is thought by the people to have a power equal to that of the Cross of Christ itself.¹⁴ In truth this cross and the indulgences it promises are very insignificant graces in comparison with the true Cross.¹⁵ The real message of the Cross is that we are to take it up in a lifetime of repentance,¹⁶ and follow Christ through pain, death and all the sufferings of this life.¹⁷ The 'theologian of the Cross' – that is, the true theologian – teaches that sufferings, crosses borne and death are the treasure (*thesaurus*) of all that is most precious, and that the Lord of this theology consecrated and blessed them not only by the touch of his most holy flesh, but also by the supremely holy embrace of his divine will; and he left them here to be kissed, sought after and embraced by us.¹⁸

Luther is seeking to emphasise in these Theses that good works and willing acceptance of suffering are not mere machinery. There had come to be a strong sense of the mechanical in performing a set action. (Praying at a particular shrine and giving alms won an indulgence of 4,000 years at Halle in 1521.¹⁹) It was only too easy to slip from asking for an outward act as a sign of penitence making the relief of indulgence appropriate, to seeing the act as being in itself enough to make reparation. What was fair practice in feudal relations or in business between man and man seemed proper between man and God too. Indulgences were regarded as a fair transaction. One got what one paid for.

Luther argues first that doing good works and performing acts of piety (and their converse the willing acceptance of suffering) are worthwhile.²⁰

¹² In a letter to Albert of Mainz written in October 1517, Luther tried to draw the bishop's attention to the belief of many of the faithful that when they have bought a letter of indulgence they are assured of salvation, and that the grace obtained by indulgences is so great that there is nothing which cannot be forgiven in this way.

¹³ Theses 53, 54, 55, 62, 78.

¹⁴ Thesis 79.

¹⁵ Thesis 68.

¹⁶ Thesis 1.

¹⁷ Thesis 94.

¹⁸ Thesis 58.

¹⁹ See Luther's diatribe *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops, falsely so-called*, on the festival of relics in the new cathedral at Halle in 1521, WA 10ⁱⁱ.95ff.

²⁰ Thesis 32.

Such actions are better than buying indulgences.²¹ But their value lies not in their capacity to satisfy or pay for our sins, but in their tendency to encourage us to grow in love and holiness. Love grows by works of love and thereby becomes better, but no-one actually grows by buying an indulgence.²² Such growing, Luther is sure, continues until the soul enters Heaven; it is possible for souls in purgatory to grow – indeed, that is what they are there for.²³ If we think we are making satisfaction by our actions, or by substitute indulgences, we shall lose a necessary fear, the *timor dei*, the fear of death, of judgement, of Hell, of pangs of conscience.²⁴ It is a fear of which not even souls in purgatory ought to be free.²⁵ (Luther is against this form of assurance.) Pain and fear are our true Cross; they help us.

Unpacking the implications of his initial criticisms, Luther begins to see his way. Confidence in our own works, or in bought ‘works’, leads to the error of seeking to be justified through our works (*per opera nostra*) and through our own righteousness (*nostra iusticia*) rather than through faith.²⁶ It is faith in Christ which justifies, not our works or even our repentance. Even if you do not believe yourself to be sufficiently contrite – and you can never be sure that your contrition is sufficient – nevertheless, if you believe in him who says, ‘He who believes and is baptised will be saved,’ you are saved. What you have depends on your faith: *Tantum habes quantum credes*.²⁷ There is no confidence of salvation (*fiducia salutis*) for us in anything but the one Jesus Christ, and no other name given under Heaven by which we are to be saved.²⁸ Thus Luther contrasts the simplicity of justification by faith with the anxious nagging and worrying of seeking salvation by personal effort.²⁹

Luther must not be allowed to bulk too large in this story. In the Ninety-Five Theses and the supporting arguments Luther soon supplied to go with them, we have a text to which much significance has been attached because of their importance in setting in motion a chain of events in

²¹ Theses 41, 42, 43.

²² Thesis 44.

²³ Thesis 18.

²⁴ Theses 14, 15, 16, 17.

²⁵ Theses 17, 19.

²⁶ *Resolutiones*, p. 124.37–9.

²⁷ Thesis 38, *Resolutiones*, p. 105.9–19.

²⁸ Thesis 32.

²⁹ Acts 15.11, *Resolutiones*, pp. 37–8.

Luther's own life which made him a leader of reform.³⁰ But the Theses were no more than a conspicuous event in more widespread developments. Zwingli found a similar complex of difficulties of a theological and practical sort clustering round the controversy about baptism which was stirred up by Anabaptist preachers. These presented what seemed to him, too, a danger of leading the simple faithful astray.³¹ In his *Defence of the Reformed Faith* in 1523, Zwingli claims to have been preaching for a good five years on topics closely similar to those which were exercising Luther. Like Luther, but apparently more or less independently,³² Zwingli had come to place an emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, the centrality of the Gospel, man's dependency on the efficacy of Christ's Passion for forgiveness in the sight of God.

Zwingli's *Defence* covers a wider span of topics than Luther had yet encompassed. There were significant differences of emphasis, over the Eucharist in particular. Zwingli did not share Luther's antinomianism, and he regarded 'doing good' rather differently as to its place in the Christian life. But as he began to read Luther's works he came to recognise that they were responding in substantially similar ways to the same perceived abuses, although he acknowledges in correspondence with Rhenanus that he found Luther spiky reading (*echinus*) at first.³³ Both were responding as pastors to the signs they saw, in the lives of the faithful, of incompleteness and some incoherence in the Church's teaching about salvation.

Luther and Zwingli were voicing criticisms which were already in the air and which had, in some cases, been there for a long time. Some of their ideas struck old chords of resentment about the Church's teaching on authority, chords which had been sounding at intervals since at least the twelfth century, and which had been heard again more recently among Lollards and Hussites. But the force and persistence with which Luther in particular brought certain questions to prominence encouraged an unprecedented shaking up of the framework within which the topics of

³⁰ For a bibliography of the debate about the posting on the Church door at Wittenberg, see K. Aland, *Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses* (St Louis, Miss./London, 1967), pp. 99–100 and see, too, K. Honselmann, 'Wimpinas Druck der Ablassthesen Martin Luthers 1528 (nach einem der 1517 von Luther ausgegebenen Texte) und Luthers frühe Aussagen zur Verbreitung seiner Ablassthesen', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 97 (1986), 189–204.

³¹ W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford, 1986).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 45–6.

³³ Zwingli, *Werke* VII.152, Letter 67, and p. 175, Letter 79.

systematic theology had been considered, since the *summae* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had suggested an appropriate order. We can see the impact at a glance by contrasting the agendas of the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512–17 and of the Council of Trent.³⁴ The Lateran Council had on its list one or two matters of faith and order. It decided against the neo-Aristotelian doctrine of the soul which some theologians had been putting forward; it made a decree on usury; most importantly in Session IX (1516), it endeavoured to establish clearly the relationship of the authority of a Pope to that of a Council. In its condemnation of heretics and its directives on preaching it looked back to the disturbances of the fifteenth century, particularly the aftermath of the Hussite revolution. But its chief preoccupation was with matters of internal order, with the repair of structures of authority and decision-making within the Church which had been put under strain by the conciliar movement, and especially by recent moves in France to hold in royal hands the nomination to bishoprics. The Council of Trent (1545–63), by contrast, found it necessary to set out in detail clear rulings on large areas of Christian doctrine. Enormous questions of faith and order had been forcibly opened up in the half century between.

Interested enquirers were already asking for a map in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.³⁵ Melancthon published the first version of his *Loci Communes* in 1521. Martin Bucer and Thiébaud Schwartz sent a list to Matthew Zell in September 1523 in answer to his request for advice on what he should accept and what he should reject in the current controversy (a list not of course necessarily representing Bucer's mature thought). The most important point, they say, is that everything should be tested against Scripture, and what contradicts Scripture utterly rejected. There is a question how far the Church should be obeyed in matters of faith. This is the *vestibulum*, the point of entry into all controversies. It can be stated with confidence that the Scriptures speak of nothing but Christ the Saviour; that resolves 'that greatest controversy' (*maxima illa controversia*) whether we are justified by faith not works; that is, by

³⁴ It is also instructive to note the topics of Pico della Mirandola's *Apologia* of the 1480s: Christ's descent into Hell; mortal sin; adoration of the Cross; whether Origen is saved; freedom of belief; three Eucharistic questions (*Opera Omnia*, ed. C. Vasoli and repr. Hildesheim, 1969 from edition of 1557–73, vol. I, pp. 114ff.).

³⁵ For comparison with earlier preoccupations, see A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford, 1988), p. 389, for a 'Lollard' list.

Christ, not by our own merits. It follows that salvation and righteousness are not to be sought from the sacraments, from the merits of the saints, from one's own confession or satisfaction. It is asked what sacraments are attested in Scripture, what is the Lord's Supper and what benefits it brings to minister or people, what benefits are to be expected from the cult of saints, whether confession is allowed by Scripture, what it is to make satisfaction, and under that head, what prayers and fasting are for. Indulgences are condemned. It is asked what is the power of binding and loosing; what is excommunication; what is the value of blessing water, salt and other things; whether vows should be permitted, particularly monastic vows; what of human traditions; what of images and processions and anointing; what of the authority of magistrates, the ministers of the Church, the Pope; what of tithes? These topics had already been taken up by Luther with greater or lesser thoroughness, and Bucer recommends vigorous defence of *doctrina sana* and sharp contradiction of error.³⁶

It is striking that a list which begins so firmly at the *vestibulum* and proceeds at first in a logical way, unfolding implications of taking up certain positions, should fall so quickly into disorder. Comparatively small matters such as the blessing of water are interspersed with large questions about civil and ecclesiastical authority; there is a good deal of repetition. This is a pattern which tends to recur elsewhere. Old grievances which can be found in the popular anticlericalist movements from the twelfth century reappear alongside the relatively new preoccupations with certain aspects of the doctrine of salvation. Radical claims about authority (all Christians may administer the sacraments; there is no authority in the Church over matters of faith, but only in Scripture) mingle with concern over matters which touch ordinary people's lives directly (what shall I do to be saved?). If we take one of the major markers of progress in reforming thought, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, we find something of the same order in disorder. The Articles begin with God, like a mediaeval *summa*, and continue with original sin and Christology. The fourth article covers justification, the fifth the ministry of the Church, with a series of following articles on ecclesiology. A ninth article on baptism is followed by Article Ten on the Lord's Supper. Confession and repentance follow, then the use of the sacraments,

³⁶ Bucer, *Correspondance*, ed. J. Rott (Leiden, 1979), pp. 200–3, no. 49. On Schwartz, see no. 68, n.2.

ecclesiastical order, rites, civil affairs, the Last Judgement, free will, the cause of sin, faith and good works and the cult of saints. The final articles are separated off as giving an account of abuses which have been corrected by the reformers; the topics are: communion in both kinds, the marriage of priests, various practices in the saying of Mass, confession, rules about forbidden foods, and their implications for the place of human tradition, monastic vows and ecclesiastical power.

In 1531, Hugh Latimer, who had come under suspicion in England for Lutheran sympathies, was required to subscribe to articles stating that there is a place of purgation for souls after this life, where souls are helped by Masses, prayer and alms-deeds; that the saints mediate by praying for us in Heaven; that pilgrimages have merit; that the keys of binding and loosing 'given unto Peter, doth remain to his successor bishops, although they live evil; and they were never given for any cause to laymen', that 'the images of the crucifix and saints are to be had in the church, in memory, honour, and worship of Jesus Christ and his saints'.³⁷

Individual topics were compelling, and their interconnectedness perceived to be so various and complex that again and again we find the same group of subjects treated in different orders. At Ratisbon in 1541, with three protestant and three Catholic representatives, the meeting considered the Fall, free will, original sin; then justification, the jurisdictional authority of the Church, penance, the teaching authority of the Church, the sacraments, the relationship of ecclesiastical authority, ecclesiastical discipline. When the faculty of theology at Paris produced its list of Articles in 1544, they began with the assertion that baptism is necessary to salvation even in infants, went on to free will, penance, the necessity of good works, then to transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the Mass, and communion in both kinds; then to the question whether anyone but a priest duly ordained may validly administer the sacraments; then to points concerning miracles, prayers to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, shrines, pilgrimages, the adoration of the Cross and of images; then to purgatory; whether the Church on earth is visible; whether definitions in matters of doctrine may be made by the visible Church in circumstances of controversy; to the place of tradition; excommunication; the authority of Councils; obedience, conscience, the making of vows. Cardinal Seripando, one of the chief architects of the Trent pronouncements on

³⁷ *Remains*, pp. 218–19.

justification, compiled a collection of texts for reference in which lists of key points reflect Luther's preoccupations. Is purgatory Scriptural? Are souls in purgatory beyond 'meriting' or sinning, and do they have assurance of their salvation? Do indulgences remit *culpa* or *poena*? If they remit *poena*, is it temporal or eternal penalty? If temporal, is it as imposed canonically, or as imposed by divine justice? Do the saints have merit to spare for the 'treasury'? If contrition, confession and absolution do not involve a fresh application of Christ's merits, how can it be of help for indulgences to draw on the infinite store of Christ's merits? And so on.³⁸

At Trent itself the Council considered, in order over nearly twenty years, the Creeds, the relationship of Scripture and tradition, original sin, justification, the sacraments, penance, communion in both kinds, the sacrifice of the Mass, orders, marriage, purgatory, saints, relics and images, monastic vows, indulgences. During this period the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles, which had begun to evolve from a set of six articles of 1536, the Bishops' Book of 1537, the Six Articles of 1539, the King's Book of 1543, were maturing into the Forty-Two Articles of 1553 and a more definitive series of Articles of 1563. They were to undergo some final revision before they were issued in 1571. In their scope fall all the main topics of controversy and there is an attempt, at least in the first few, to impose a systematic order.

The reformed theologian Gisbert Voetius (1589–1676) was still struggling with the problem of putting all these elements in order in the next century. He tries to pick out principal corruptions as he sees them: false doctrine on the merit of works; false teaching concerning auricular confession and absolution, concerning the 'application' of actions and prayers and hymns to other people's benefit, the possibility of freeing and helping souls after this life by 'human satisfaction', papal indulgences and dispensations, and all the exactions and procedures of the penitentials and the apostolic chancery.³⁹

These common difficulties in settling on a useful and generally acceptable working order for dealing with this complex of questions reflect the heat of the debate of the sixteenth century. The combatants repeatedly perceived interconnections and entailments which had not been apparent to the predecessors of Aquinas, to Aquinas himself in compiling his *summa*, or to his immediate successors in their *summa*-making. It seemed

³⁸ Vatican, MS Vat. lat. 80, fos. 94–5 and 73–5.

³⁹ J. Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Oxford, 1965), p. 271.

to Melancthon that their underlying presence was already creating strains in the theology of the later Middle Ages. His sketch of the situation in relation to the doctrine of penance is prejudiced but not inaccurate.

All good men ... even the theologians, admit that before Luther's writings the doctrine of penitence was very confused. The Commentaries on the *Sentences* are full of endless questions which the theologians could never explain satisfactorily. The people could grasp neither the sense of the matter nor the chief requirements of penitence nor the source of the peace of conscience. Let any one of our opponents step forward and tell us when the forgiveness of sins takes place.⁴⁰

A good deal of theological ground was covered in the sixteenth-century attempts to deal with this agenda in its various forms. Progress was made with many problems. But in some areas polemic drove the disputes into blind alleys or ran them up against blockages and intransigence. We have, as it were, the minutes of the discussions and a number of preparatory papers and correspondence; there are some interim settlements. But we do not have a systematic theology of authority from the period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in which the concerns of both sides are given their place. No real endeavour was made to draw the threads together in that way; it would not have been possible in the circumstances. Nor could anyone at the time take stock of the context of anterior abuses and resentments with any degree of coolness, or with the perspective which only the passage of time makes possible.

ii. THE INSTRUMENTS OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

The vitality of the scholarship of late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century Europe was the product of cross-breeding of influences, the introduction of new blood into the old stock. Nor is it possible to separate 'arts' and 'theology' here. Lorenzo Valla's *Repastinatio Totius Dialecticae* of the 1440s is best known as a pioneering textbook of the new 'humanist' approach to grammar, logic and rhetoric. The reader comes away with a strong impression of the contribution the book seeks to make to the reform of the *artes* envisaged as an end in itself. But the opening chapters address as a matter of priority a wide range of problems which arise in connection with

⁴⁰ *Apologia* for the Augsburg Confession, Art. 12, Tappert, p. 183.