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AN EVALUATION OF BAINTON'S CONCEPT OF LUTHER AND
HIS THEOLOGY AS PRESENTED IN THE REFORMATION OF
THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. TRANSLATION INTO SPANISH
OF BAINTON'S BOOK

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

37070

by

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May 1965

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BAINTON'S CONCEPT OF LUTHER

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major handicaps for Latin American Churches is the scarcity of published material in the Spanish language by Protestant church historians. Most of the works available in Spanish are translations of English or German books and monographs. In the field of the Lutheran Reformation there are a number of translations and original works on Luther's life but not all of them can be recommended. But the Spanish works in the field of the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century are scarcer still. The only major work in the field that has been written or translated into Spanish is the old standard written almost a generation ago by the late Thomas M. Lindsay. However, it is largely institutional and does not take into account all the modern historical research produced in this field. In the interest of the general public it is important for the churches in Latin America, which are products of the Protestant Reformation, that the Reformation be studied and made known through a more readable and up-to-date work than the one already mentioned.

This major void in this area of Church History is attested to by those who have been or are now engaged in preparing full time workers for the Latin American churches. The Caribbean Mission District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will open a theological school in Mexico

City next year and will need more books in Spanish in the field of Church History. Consequently this translation is offered to meet a definite and long felt need.

There are several reasons for choosing Bainton's The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century to fill this vacuum. First, Bainton is known already in the Spanish-speaking countries through his biography of Luther, Here I Stand, which has been very well accepted especially by its Protestant readers. Secondly, Bainton is a well-known church historian with an established reputation of genuine scholarship. His works reveal an enormous amount of research both of primary sources and of the secondary authorities.

Therefore, one can read Bainton's books with the reasonable assurance that the historical facts are well represented. Thirdly, Bainton has an easy style of writing that has made his books quite popular in the English-speaking world. Of course in a translation some of the virtues of his style are lost. But generally speaking, notwithstanding a few garbled sentences here and there, the translation can express Bainton's thought very clearly. Furthermore, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century covers much ground in the scope of a little over two hundred and fifty pages. Despite its brevity and conciseness, it gives the reader a fairly complete picture of the major reformation movements of the sixteenth century without sacrificing clarity. The lack of critical apparatus, although a drawback for the

serious student, is an asset for the general reader. Another pleasant aspect of the book is its selection of woodcuts and drawings which are very illustrative. This is a feature that is very helpful to the Latin American readers who are generally unfamiliar with these kind of reproductions. Finally, even though the book contains a great many details connected with the different Protestant reformers, there is unity to the book. The theme that Bainton develops throughout the book is the struggle for religious liberty. This is a particular concern of his. His own background, his own pacifist convictions, his interest in this feature of American Church History have caused Bainton to analyze each of the reformers from this viewpoint. Each reformer is judged as to his degree of religious tolerance. This approach gives the book a certain unity, which is desirable, but it also is the cause of some one-sided statements, an oversimplification of the reformer's theology and hasty generalities.

It is not easy to judge the work of a man who has been so widely acclaimed for his scholarship and skill in phrasing. Historical scholarship owes a great debt to Roland H. Bainton. His work has inspired many to follow in his footsteps. As Georgia Harkness has attested in her biographical appreciation of Roland Bainton in *Reformation Studies*,¹

¹Georgia Harkness, "A Biographical Appreciation," *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton*, edited by Franklin H. Littell (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 14.

a volume of essays written by his former doctoral students in tribute to him, he has always demanded rigorous self-discipline from his students. Miss Harkness calls it his "passion for perfection."²

Nevertheless, a critique is here attempted in order to evaluate some of Bainton's concepts and judgments. The writer recognizes his own limitations, the lack of adequate time, the lack of a library, all the source books that Bainton employed for this work, and a lesser degree of skill in the necessary research techniques. For those reasons the scope of the evaluation was limited. Instead of trying to evaluate the entire field covered in his book, the writer limited himself to an evaluation of Bainton's interpretation of Luther and his theology. And yet, this is a gigantic field in itself, a field in which few can claim to be masters. However, a study of Bainton's book, independent research and a comparison of Bainton with other Luther scholars of the same stature revealed that there are areas in which Bainton had not fully understood Luther or his theology. It is evident that Bainton has read Luther's works but it is also apparent to those who study Luther that Bainton at times misinterprets him. In his presentation of Luther's life and work, Bainton places too much emphasis on secular factors that determined his life course and not enough empha-

²Ibid.

By the writings of various Luther scholars were consulted. sis on the spiritual factors (Luther's religious convictions, his faith, his obedience to the Word), that determined his actions and the nature of his struggle. On Luther's theology, Bainton's judgments are too superficial at times, in the opinion of this writer, and completely mistaken at others. For example, Bainton charges that Luther taught the doctrine concomitance. This cannot be shown from his writings. *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (Stoughton, 1963).

In this evaluation, therefore, critical areas of Luther's theology have been selected. In order to arrive at any conclusions as to whether Bainton is mistaken or not the writer first studied what Luther said in these major areas. Bainton did not try to cover all the areas of Luther's thought, and the critique does not attempt either to present all of Luther's religious concepts. It concentrates mainly on those writings to which Bainton himself referred as his sources. In those cases where Bainton did not give his sources, the writer analyzed these writings on that particular subject which were listed in the index of the St. Louis edition of Luther's works³ or in Aland's work.⁴ Final-

³Haupt-Sachregister, Spruchregister, Berichtigungen und Nachträge zu sämtlichen Bänden der St. Louiser Ausgabe von Luthers Werken. By A. F. Hoppe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1910).

⁴[copy as on p. v.]

ly, the writings of various Luther scholars were consulted. They were especially Holl,⁵ Pauck,⁶ Rupp,⁷ Bornkamm,⁸ Watson,⁹ Pinomaa,¹⁰ Saarnivaara,¹¹ Elert,¹² Pelikan,¹³ Preus,¹⁴

⁵Karl Holl, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), I.

⁶Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Revised and enlarged edition; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., c.1961).

⁷Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963).

⁸Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, translated by Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958).

⁹Philip S. Watson, Let God be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947).

¹⁰Lennart Pinomaa, Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology, translated by Walter J. Kukkonen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963).

¹¹Jurus Saarnivaara, Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1951).

¹²Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, translated by Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962).

¹³Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings, companion volume to Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

¹⁴Herman A. Preus, "The Christian and the Church," More About Luther, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), pp. 123-214.

Prenter,¹⁵ Quanbeck,¹⁶ Ritter,¹⁷ Lau,¹⁸ Schwiebert,¹⁹ Thiel,²⁰ Forell,²¹ Sasse,²² and many others. On this bases Bainton's concepts can be judged fairly.

Wherever possible the writer depended most heavily on the English translation of Luther's works, especially the American edition²³ and the Philadelphia edition.²⁴ One of the limitations of this critique is that only Luther's basic works were consulted in German.

¹⁵Regin Prenter, "Luther on Word and Sacrament," ibid., pp. 63-122.

¹⁶Warren A. Quanbeck, "Luther's Early Exegesis," Luther Today, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), pp. 35-103.

¹⁷Gerhard Ritter, Luther: His Life and Work, translated by John Riches (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963).

¹⁸Franz Lau, Luther, translated by Robert H. Fisher (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1963).

¹⁹Ernest G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

²⁰Rudolf Thiel, Luther, translated by Gustav K. Wiencke (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955).

²¹George Wolfgang Forell, Faith Active in Love (New York: The American Press, 1954).

²²Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959).

²³Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (55 vols., American Edition; Concordia Publishing House and Muhlenberg Press, 1955--).

²⁴Works of Martin Luther, edited by Henry E. Jacobs (6 vols.; Philadelphia: A. J. Halman Co., 1913-1932).

Another important primary source on which the writer depended heavily was the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, especially those either written by the Reformer himself or heavily inspired by him. Bainton makes very little use of this important source.

This evaluation covers five major areas of Luther's thought that Bainton has treated in his book. These are: Luther's faith, Luther's view of the authority of Scripture, Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, his social ethics, and his concept of church and state.

This translation of The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and evaluation of Bainton's concept of Luther as it is presented in this book is offered in the hope that it will stimulate others also to go back to Luther.

In regard to the translation, the writer owes a great debt to his friend Dr. Andrés Meléndez, Spanish editor for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, who graciously checked the translation and corrected the Spanish where it was needed. A deep debt of gratitude is due him for this time-consuming contribution and painstaking exactness with which he examined the manuscript.

For the evaluation, the writer is indebted and especially grateful to his faculty adviser Dr. Carl S. Meyer, who guided him in the correct methods of historical research.

He is grateful, too, to Dr. Robert W. Bertram for his invaluable criticism of the manuscript when it was first written.

CHAPTER I

LUTHER'S FAITH

Roland H. Bainton is an accomplished Luther scholar. His work, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,¹ though it lacks a critical apparatus, shows his knowledge of Luther and his ideas and a full acquaintance with the work of others. Since the book in the scope of 261 pages tells the story of all the important reformation movements of the sixteenth century, it is obvious that it cannot go into nature of the Lutheran Reformation as fully as Bainton's Luther biography, Here I Stand.² Therefore it cannot be expected that the book presents the full picture of Luther's faith, in spite of the fact that the section on Luther and his Reformation take up the major part of the book. Nevertheless, it would seem that Bainton's exposition of Luther's faith is rather superficial.

Bainton rightly calls Luther's Reformation a religious revolution, "because Martin Luther was above all else a man of religion."³ "Not the abuses of medieval Catholicism,"

¹Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952).

²Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960).

³Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 24.

says Bainton, "but Catholicism itself as an abuse of the Gospel was the object of his onslaught."⁴ "The aim of the Lutheran Reformation was a call to penance, summoning man back to the foot of the Cross of the Son of Man, the Cross of Him Whom the world despised," says Ritter.⁵ Basically, Luther's attack was not upon the low moral standards of the Medieval Church, but an attack on the theological premises of the Roman Church of the Middle Ages. Luther's mission, Ritter points out, "was not to re-establish the form of early Christian life and doctrine, but to reveal the religious strength of the Christian tradition in a way which was closely related to the spirit of the earliest beginnings."⁶ In conclusion,

The Reformation, one of the most dynamic and revolutionary movements in western history, was basically theological. In its purest essence it represented a resurgence of evangelical Christianity which perforce bursts the bonds of the old theology and ecclesiastical institutions. But as an event of first magnitude and great complexity it immediately involved also social, economic, and political forces, effecting fundamental changes in almost all areas of life, including the concepts of church and state.⁷

⁴Ibid.

⁵Gerhard Ritter, "Lutheranism, Catholicism, and the Humanistic View of Life," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, XLIV (1953), 146.

⁶Gerhard Ritter, Luther: His Life and Work, translated by John Riches (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, c.1963), p. 43.

⁷Lewis W. Spitz, "Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Issues," Church and State Under God, edited by Albert G. Huegli (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 62, 63.

Although Luther's religion is the place to start if one would understand Luther or the Reformation,⁸ it would seem that Bainton lets the reader understand that Luther's faith was grounded on a subjective experience. In his chapter on Luther's faith, Bainton describes Luther's struggle for faith in a very interesting and dramatic fashion.⁹ As in his biography of Luther, Bainton portrays the different stages through which Luther had to suffer in order to find the evangelical faith. For Luther, says Bainton, "faith was no pearl to be mounted in a gold setting and gazed upon at will. Faith was ever the object of an agonizing search."¹⁰ It cannot be denied that Luther's religious development was deeply personal. Luther would be the first to agree that every man must die for himself and nobody can die for him, and in the same manner every man must believe for himself and nobody can believe for him. It is self-evident that forgiveness and faith are related to man in a deep, personal way. However, one could hardly make a more radical misjudgment "than if one were to see the chief importance of his work in his new formulation of the faith, in the deepening of the scientific understanding of the Bible, and so

⁸Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 24.

⁹Ibid., pp. 26-35.

¹⁰Roland H. Bainton, "Luther's Struggle for Faith," The Reformation Material or Spiritual?, edited by Lewis W. Spitz (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1962), p. 93.

on."¹¹ The basis of Luther's faith was what God had done for him in Christ and what he continued to do through the Holy Spirit.¹² As Ritter states:

It is decisive in an understanding of Luther's Life-work to know that he never based his right to proclaim a new teaching on a special gift of the spirit, on an extraordinary vocation by any sort of divine suggestion or miraculous revelation, . . . but exclusively . . . on pure study . . . He never even thought or intended to say anything really new with his understanding of Christian truth Even the formulations of scholastic theology, in which he interpreted his religious experience for himself and for others, were for him in no way a mere expedient which he accepted for want of any better; they were indispensable to him because they insured the unbroken continuity of the Christian tradition, of which he saw himself as the reformer and never rely on pure meditation, on the intuitions of the 'inner light', but only on the firm and clear word of the Bible similarly his religious experience would never allow him to rest until he had fitted it . . . into the firm system of the traditional early Christian doctrine of Christ's all-sufficient saving act. But . . . the anchoring of his own corpus of belief in the traditional world of ideas of the Church, enabled him to be the first to achieve that highly original compromise between revolution and restoration, which is the essence of the Reformation: and this in the founding of a new Church, which in spite of all, set out with the sole aim of reviving and continuing the old. Luther never wanted to make the way clear for religious individualism, but only for God to work in the hearts of men.¹³

In another of his books, Bainton states, "Luther's in-

¹¹Ritter, Luther, p. 48.

¹²Jerald C. Brauer, The Lutheran Heritage: Christian Social Responsibility, edited by Harold C. Lette (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), II, 8.

¹³Ritter, Luther, pp. 48, 49.

dividualism was religious. It meant that he, Martin Luther, must confront God for himself alone."¹⁴ But in The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, Bainton is not at all concerned in presenting Luther's concept of the Triune God. Bainton's entire approach is quite humanistic. Although admittedly the book is not a treatise on Luther's theology, yet it does not seem possible to understand Luther's faith or Luther's Reformation without understanding Luther's God. As Pauck says, "Without God's initiative there can be no response of faith, for Luther's deepest convictions were determined by his conception of God."¹⁵ Luther saw God as an active God, as "the ever-active, creative livingness which lets no creature rest still."¹⁶ Emanuel Hirsch is right when he says:

When we understand Luther's view of God we understand the whole Luther. This is not only so because piety in general is most powerfully expressed in its concept of God. It is part of Luther's unique greatness that his faith is in a very special measure God-centered.¹⁷

Therefore, though Bainton volume cannot discuss all of Luther's concepts, it is impossible for him to talk about

¹⁴Roland H. Bainton, The Age of the Reformation, an Anvil Original, no. 13, edited by Louis L. Synder (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., c.1956), p. 25.

¹⁵Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Revised and enlarged edition; Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p.22.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Emanuel Hirsch, Luthers Gottesanschauung, 1918, p. 3,

Luther's faith without talking about his idea of God. The first commandment, "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me,"¹⁸ is to Luther first of all law, because it contains a command. But it is also Gospel because the commandment begins with: "I am the Lord your God."¹⁹

"If your faith and trust be right," says Luther, "then your God is also true; and on the other hand, if your trust be false and wrong, then you have not the true God: for these two belong together, faith and God."²⁰ The man who trusts in riches and the one who trust in himself are both idolaters. Trust in self is distrust in God. This is unbelief, the root of all sins.

In his exposition of Luther's inner struggles, Bainton deals mainly with Luther's Anfechtungen, his afflictions or torments. It is quite right to say that Luther was an afflicted and tortured man as few have been in the history of Christianity. Luther was constantly aware of the living presence of God. Yet Luther's consciousness of his sin

as quoted by Lennart Pinomaa, Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology, translated by Walter J. Kukkanen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 13.

¹⁸Exodus 20:2,3.

¹⁹Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, edited by F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp.581-589).

²⁰Ibid., p. 581.

caused him to sense the infinite distance between God and himself. In His commandment, God commanded Luther to love Him. It was the impossibility of this task which drove him to despair, and not, as many have supposed, the natural fear of hell. What terrified Luther most was the impossibility of fulfilling the divine commandment in its fullest sense.²¹ In the depths of despair no word of comfort was able to help him. The question that tortured Luther was whether God was gracious to him and whether he would ultimately receive the benefit of Christ's atoning work. His heart argued that man must be better, more perfect than he was.

It is difficult to comprehend just what Bainton wants to convey to his readers when he writes these words:

The prospect of the judgment day on occasion filled him with panic. His fear was all the greater because he believed in sinister spirits conspiring for his doom, the denizens of hell who roamed abroad and infested the earth, riding on the wings of the wind, lurking in woods and waters, ready ever with sardonic laughter to lure and bolt the unwary into hell.²²

Does Bainton mean to say that Luther was driven to the monastery and thus to his spiritual development by the fear of hell? It is difficult to say, because he also talks about Luther's deeper "and more devastating doubt" that

²¹Ritter, Luther, p. 40.

²²Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 26, 27.

assailed him when he could not love God.²³ It is true that Luther knew the egotistic fear of hell, that is to say, of arbitrary damnation by the Almighty; but he rejected it as temptation of the flesh and the Devil.²⁴ But Bainton does call Luther's doubts and Anfechtungen "morbid introspection."²⁵ In another article, Bainton calls Luther's torments as an all "too intense emotional reaction."²⁶ Bainton confesses he does not know the source of Luther's depressions.²⁷ However, the Finnish scholar Lennart Pinomaa can say:

Luther's afflictions and torments in the monastery cannot be traced to particular causes, such as a false conception of confession, morbid thoughts concerning predestination, and so forth. In the final analysis they point to one general cause: the ever-present God who judges all sin, the righteous God before whom nothing human can stand. Luther himself says that, standing before God, man would like to flee but knows that he can not. This is the reason for the unending affliction. Thousands upon thousands before and after Luther have been familiar with such afflictions, but it is doubtful whether anyone has taken up the struggle with such seriousness and drawn its full implications as Luther did.²⁸

Thus Luther's struggle for peace with God was neither

²³Ibid., p. 32.

²⁴Ritter, Luther, p. 40.

²⁵Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 33.

²⁶Bainton, "Luther's Struggle for Faith," Reformation Material or Spiritual?, p. 94.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Pinomaa, p. 15.

Cause

unnatural nor morbid. Luther did not seek or devise the toil and sweat of the monastic life for himself. He merely followed the course prescribed to him by the Church. He was not the first nor the last to be tormented and mortified by the question: "How do I gain a gracious God?" This was the question he was asked. It was the question of the Church before his time; it was the question of all Christendom. Luther neither invented the question concerning a gracious God nor the answer to it. Certainly it was not uncommon for a Christian in the Middle Ages to enter the monastic life.²⁹

Only one thing was extraordinary in Luther's case: that he took everything literally and seriously, both the question and the answers. He followed the course to its end; it was not in him to stop halfway or to forge a solution and answer. Just because he did not yield and evade the issue, he overcame and exhausted all the answers given by the Catholic Church and monasticism in reply to the question concerning a gracious God. And he arrived at the correct answer by no different method. After his discovery of the ineffectiveness and futility of ecclesiastical doctrine he now took God Himself at His word and dared believe that God accepted the believer with all his sins as His child in accordance with His promise in Christ.³⁰

Therefore, it is not an amazing thing that Luther did not turn to the Bible before, as Bainton comments: "One may wonder why so agonizingly earnest a spirit should not have thought earlier of this expedient. . . ." ³¹ As

²⁹Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, translated by Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 77, 78.

³⁰Ibid., p. 69.

³¹Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 33.

Gerhard Ritter points out:

The historical importance of Martin Luther's temptations lies in the fact that they acted as a spur to an intellectual undertaking of enormous range and depth--to such an extent that it is not possible in detail to distinguish his religious struggle for reconciliation with God from his theological struggle for a proper understanding of the Bible.³²

It should also be pointed out that Bainton's main emphasis in his presentation of Luther's struggle for faith is on Luther's activity.³³ Bainton fails to note that the chief characteristic of this struggle is the activity of God and the passivity of Luther. It is God who comes to the man and seeks him in His grace. As Luther later confessed:

For more than twenty years in my cloister I experienced the meaning of such disappointment, I sought God with great toil and with severe mortification the body, fasting, watching, singing and praying. In this way I shamefully wasted my time and found not the Lord. The more I sought and the nearer I thought I was to him, the farther away I got. No, God does not permit us to find him so. He must first come and seek us where we are. We may not pursue and overtake him. That is not his will.³⁴

God's activity was an essential aspect of Luther's concept of God. Luther knows nothing of the quiet God of Greek thought. For Luther God is always active, and His activity is basically gracious. Divine omnipotence colors everything

³²Ritter, Luther, p. 36.

³³Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 23-35.

³⁴Martin Luther, "Epistle Sermon, 20th Sunday after Trinity," The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther, edited by John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1903-1910), IX, 12.

that Luther says. To him omnipotence includes the concept that God is at work everywhere and in all, also in the godless, even in the devil.³⁵ The whole universe is his "masquerade in which he hides himself while he rules the world so strangely by making a hubbub."³⁶ Were it not for God's almighty power everything would collapse into nothing. God moves everything. God is immanent in all. God transcends all. In Luther's words:

It is God who creates, works, and preserves all things by his almighty power and by his right hand, as we confess in the Creed. He sends out no delegates or angels when he creates and preserves, but everything is the working of his own divine power. But if he is the creator and preserver, he himself must be present, creating and preserving his creature in its most inward and most outward being. That is why he himself is in the every inwardness and in the very outwardness of every creature, from end to end, below and above it, before and behind it. Nothing can be more present and be more really within all creatures than God himself.³⁷

God is smaller than anything small, higher than anything big, shorter than anything short, longer than anything long, broader than anything broad, slimmer than anything slim, and so on; he is an inexpressible being, above and beyond all that one can name or think.³⁸

However, God has made himself known in Christ. In this incarnate God we find the most certain, the only certain, revelation on the Father's love. In His Son Jesus, God has

³⁵D. Martin Luthers Werke, kristische Gesamtausgabe, edited by J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar, 1883), XVIII, 709. 2. (Hereafter cited as W. A.)

³⁶W. A., XV. 574. 14.

³⁷W. A., XXIII, 133-136.

³⁸W. A., XXVI. 339-340.

made Himself accessible. "Men naturally know," says Luther, "that there is a God, but what His will is, or what is not His will, they do not know."³⁹ The structures of Life show that God is at work but they never actually reveal the nature of God or His will toward men. Therefore Luther says, "Christ is the only mean, and as ye would say, the glass by the which we see God, that is to say we know his will."⁴⁰ In Christ, God is made comprehensible. In Christ, God reveals His true nature and will. Therefore, says Luther, "Whosoever does not apprehend this man born of Mary, simply cannot apprehend God; even if they should say that they believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth, they believe really only in the idol of their heart, for outside of Christ there is no true God."⁴¹

Luther's faith was not based on human experiences or on visible tokens of God's rule in the world. His faith was founded in another aspect of God's reality in the world: His hidden presence in Jesus Christ. "Our theology is certain," Luther said, "because it places us outside of ourselves. I do not need to rely upon my conscience, my senses, and my doing, but I rely upon the divine promise

³⁹W. A., I. 225. 1.

⁴⁰W. A., X. iii. 3.

⁴¹W. A., XL. iii. 56.

and truth which never deceive."⁴²

Thus, it would seem that in order to understand Luther's faith it is necessary first to understand his concept of the Triune God. If this is not evident in one's treatment of Luther's Anfechtungen, then one is forced to grope for an answer as to what was the cause of his disturbances, as is seen from the work of Erik Erikson.⁴³ Bainton himself is aware of this fact as he so states in his critique of Erikson's book, Young Man Luther.⁴⁴ Erikson's book is an attempt to psychoanalyze Luther. Bainton feels that this is almost impossible because the evidence is so sparse. "What we know of young Luther, comes largely from the old Luther, at an interval of thirty years, and only at second hand in the table fallings of inaccurate student note-takers," says Bainton.⁴⁵

Nevertheless Bainton also admits, "One cannot blithely dismiss the possibility of abnormal psychology," and "We must recall that attacks of melancholia not only recurred after the evangelical experience but that they began before

⁴²W. A., XL. i. 589. 8.

⁴³Erik H. Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1958).

⁴⁴Roland H. Bainton, "A Critique of Erik Erikson's Young Man Luther," Studies on the Reformation (Boston: Beacon Press, c.1963), pp.86-92.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 91.

the entry into the cloister," and "Such fluctuations suggest manic depression, and if such a classification appears extreme . . . at least one is prompted to inquire whether the times of despondency may not have been due to some glandular or gastric deficiency."⁴⁶ Some have attempted to explain his spiritual struggles in terms of an aberrant sexuality.⁴⁷ But this has been thoroughly disproved. The only accurate interpretation of his distress of soul may be found not in a natural but in a theological explanation. And since Luther's deepest convictions were determined by his concept of God, whosoever wishes to present the full picture of the historical Luther must begin there. For this reason, it would seem that Bainton's appreciation of Luther's faith is rather weak.

The last two pages of Bainton's chapter on "Luther's Faith" appear to be an attempt to pinpoint the exact moment of Luther's great experience in which he reached a new understanding of his evangelical faith and tore himself free from the scholastic doctrinal system. In this experience, Luther, as Bainton expresses it, "as no one before him in more than a thousand years, sensed the import of the

⁴⁶Bainton, "Luther's Struggle for Faith," Reformation Material or Spiritual?, p. 93.

⁴⁷Joseph Lortz, Reformation in Deutschland, 1940, I, xi, as quoted by Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 106.

miracle of divine forgiveness."⁴⁸ It is clear, then, that Bainton is talking about Luther's "tower experience." According to his table talk, Luther had the experience in the tower of the monastery!, accordingly, it is commonly known as the "tower experience." Ritter describes the experience as a "piece of pure 'revelation' of a deep spiritual nature."⁴⁹ Lau describes Luther's saving experience as "his experiencing the grace of, indeed one might say, the nearness of being elected by God. He actually found the peace of a comforted conscience; he found the gracious God for whom he had struggled."⁵⁰ This evangelical experience happened according to Bainton during the course of his lectures on the Psalms between 1513 and 1515.⁵¹ According to Bainton these studies led to his personal conversion, or as he puts it, "These studies proved to be for Luther the Damascus Road."⁵² But in his effort to find a specific point in the course of his lectures on the Psalms where this radical change can be observed, Bainton gives an artificial picture of the dramatic moment when this breakthrough should suddenly and decisively have taken place. However,

⁴⁸Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 34.

⁴⁹Ritter, Luther, p. 49.

⁵⁰Franz Lau, Luther, translated by Robert H. Fisher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c.1963), p. 57.

⁵¹Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 34.

⁵²Bainton. Here I Stand, p. 60.

as Luther scholars⁵³ have shown, it is impossible to prove this by the text of his lectures on the Psalms or by other writings.

Thus, when Bainton singles out particularly the study of Psalm 22, where Luther is suddenly arrested by that word "forsaken," he has parted from the field of history and entered into the more captivating field of historical fiction. The nature itself of the existing documents, as well as the very nature of the case, makes it impossible for anyone to say this is where the turning point came in his spiritual development. "This, as the lecture notebooks show, is a big exaggeration; in them the new element in his thought grows gradually so that it is impossible anywhere to discern a sudden leap forward or to fix a precise date for the 'experience in the tower,'"⁵⁴ says Gerhard Ritter. But the Reformer himself can shed some light on this problem. Later in life Luther described the great exegetical discovery that meant so much for his spiritual development quite extensively. This he did, not only in various table talks, but especially in a preface to the Wittenberg edition of his collected Latin works, which appeared in 1545.

⁵³Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God, pp. 136, 137. W. J. Kooiman, By Faith Alone: The Life of Martin Luther, translated by Bertram Lee Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1954), p. 39. Kooiman says it is "impossible to trace all steps which Luther trod as he passed from stage to stage in his spiritual life."

⁵⁴Ritter, Luther, p. 51.

Here one finds an interesting biographical note and one of the most significant sources for the history of the Reformation. Having discussed the first incidents in his struggle against indulgences, Luther continued:

Here, in my case, you may also see how hard it is to struggle out of and emerge from errors which have been confirmed by the example of the whole world and have by long habit become a part of nature, as it were . . . I had then already read and taught the sacred Scriptures most diligently privately and publicly for seven years so that I know them nearly all by memory. I had also acquired the beginning of the knowledge of Christ and faith in him, i.e. not by works but by faith in Christ are we made righteous and saved. Finally, regarding that of which I speak, I had already defended the proposition publicly that the pope is not the head of the church by divine right. . . .⁵⁵

.....

Meanwhile, I had already during that year returned to interpret Psalms anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skillful, after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter I (:17). "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that

⁵⁵Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings, Wittenberg, 1545," translated by L. W. Spitz, Sr., in Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer IV, edited by Lewis W. Spitz, and Helmut Lebmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960) XXXIV, 333, 334. (Hereafter the American edition of Luther's Work will be cited as L.W.)

I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly. I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the Gospel and also by the Gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live,'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the Gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine's The Spirit and the Letter, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God's righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us. Although this was heretofore said imperfectly and he did not explain all things concerning imputation clearly, it nevertheless was pleasing that God's righteousness with which we are justified was taught. Armed more fully with these thoughts, I began a second time

to interpret the Psalter.⁵⁶

The Table Talks of Luther contain several accounts of his discovery of the meaning of Rom. 1:17. Since they throw additional light on the subject, the most significant ones shall be quoted:

These words 'righteous' and 'righteousness of God' struck my conscience as flashes of lightning, frightening me each time I heard them: if God is righteous, He punishes. But by the grace of God, as I once meditated upon these words in this tower and hypocaustum (heated room): 'The righteous shall live by faith' and the 'righteousness of God', there suddenly came into my mind the thought that if we as righteous are to live by faith, and if the righteousness of faith is to be for salvation to everyone who believes, then it is not our merit, but the mercy of God. Thus my soul was refreshed, for it is the righteousness of God by which we are justified and saved through Christ. These words became more pleasant to me. Through this word the Holy Spirit enlightened me in the tower.⁵⁷

Thanks to God when I understood the matter and learned that the righteousness of God means that righteousness by which He justifies us, the righteousness bestowed as a free gift in Jesus Christ, the grammar became clear and the Psalter more to my taste.⁵⁸

"The righteous shall live by his faith." This sentence is the explanation of the righteousness of God. When I discovered this, I began to rejoice exceedingly. And so the way was clear when I read in the Psalms: "Deliver me in Thy righteousness." They revealed to me that the righteousness is the mercy of God by which He Himself justifies us by giving His grace.⁵⁹

Hitherto I lacked only a proper distinction between

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 336-338.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther, Tischreden, III, 3232 (1532--Cordatus) (Hereafter cited as W. A., T. R.)

⁵⁸ W. A., T. R., V, 5347 (1540--Mathesius).

⁵⁹ W. A., T. R., V, 5553 (1542-43, Heydenregch).

the Law and the Gospel. I considered both to be the same and Christ to differ from Moses only in time and perfection. It was when I discovered the difference between the Law and the Gospel, that they are two separate things, that I broke through.⁶⁰

There are several conclusions which can be reached from Luther's words. First, that in his early career Luther found the concept of the "righteousness of God" a stumbling block for his faith. Second, that the understanding of this concept became the corner-stone of his theology. Third, that early in his life Luther was acquainted with the explanation that the righteousness of God in Rom. 1:17 means the righteousness by which God makes man righteous, and not merely God's retributive justice, which considers the merits of man. Luther scholars have shown that Luther presents this Augustinian view in all his writings that date from the earliest period of his life.⁶¹ Fourth, that the crucial point in Luther's discovery was the doctrine of the imputation of righteousness; in other words, Luther discovered the reformation insight of justification by faith. As a result of this discovery, Luther was overjoyed and he felt that he had entered Paradise itself.

Because he trembled before God's punishing Justice, felt himself crushed by it, and yet recognized its verdict honestly as true, he was enabled to apprehend its final meaning. God does not send his Grace alongside his justice . . . but he sends it through his

⁶⁰W. A., T. R., V. 5518.

⁶¹Uuras Saarnivaara, Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evan-

justice . . . God is nothing but sheer goodness, which is always giving itself. This was more than a new exposition of Romans 1:17, this was the fountain of a new doctrine of God.⁶²

Fifth, that Luther discovered the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. This is the distinction that scholars have found in his mature teachings.

Luther gained a new conception of God--or rather, he entered into a new relationship to God, a relationship established not on the basis of Luther's righteousness--his fulfilment of the commandments of love toward God according to the Law--but on the basis of God's righteousness--God's fulfilment of His promise of love, according to the Gospel, toward Luther.⁶³

The Augustinian-Catholic doctrine of grace was a confusion of the Law and the Gospel.⁶⁴ As Luther said, "Hitherto I lacked only a proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel. I considered both to be the same and Christ to differ from Moses only in time and perfection."⁶⁵ (Luther thought that the Gospel makes it possible for us to fulfil the Law and so to become righteous before God.) Luther now understood that Christ had fulfilled the Law for us, and

gelical Faith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), pp. 59-73.

⁶²Karl Holl, "Die 'Justitia Dei' in der Vorlutherischen Bibelauslegung des Abendlandes," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928).

⁶³Philip S. Watson, Let God be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 21.

⁶⁴Saarnivaara, p. 43.

⁶⁵W. A., T. R., V, 5518.

that we are justified when God imputes to us this perfect fulfillment of Christ.⁶⁶ Sixth, that Luther's discovery of a gracious God was not a personal conversion but an exegetical discovery. As he himself says, "At that time I had already for seven years read and taught the Holy Scriptures with great diligence both privately and publicly. I know most of the Scriptures by heart and, furthermore, had eaten the first fruits of the knowledge of, and faith in, Christ, namely, that we are justified not by works, but by faith in Christ."⁶⁷ Thus, the real significance of the tower discovery lies in the realm of interpretation. It was the final exegetico-religious discovery of the evangelical way of salvation.⁶⁸ At the same time it was

by no means a new theoretical understanding of God but an encounter with God, a transformation not in theological terminology but in his attitude toward God . . . it was not that he changed his attitude toward God, but God changed his toward him Luther's development into a reformer came out of his monastery struggles and not out of the offenses that he took at abuses in church practices.⁶⁹

Neither was it a mere subjective personal experience, as Bainton describes it. At the same time that it was the discovery of the true interpretation of Scripture, it was also an answer to a deep personal yearning, which resulted in the

⁶⁶Saarnivaara, p. 45.

⁶⁷L. W., XXXIV, 333, 334.

⁶⁸Saarnivaara, p. 46.

⁶⁹Lau, p. 67. (Italics added)

attainment or a deeper personal assurance of salvation or justification.⁷⁰ And seventh, on the basis of these few biographical notes, which have been interpreted by scholars in different ways, it is impossible to trace all the steps which Luther took as he passed from stage to stage in his theological development. As Kooiman states:

It is practically certain that it was in the course of this first study of the Psalter that Luther received his great theological liberation, but the precise date when this occurred and how it relates to the biblical text he was studying cannot be determined with absolute certainty with our present knowledge.⁷¹

Thus it would seem that Bainton's view that Luther's discovery of the right understanding of justification by faith occurred during the study of the Twenty-second Psalm cannot be substantiated. Gordon Rupp suggests that the three passages in the Table Talks that refer to Luther's discovery of the justitia Dei indicate that it occurred during the interpretation of Psalm 31, when he came across the words, "In justitia tua libera me."⁷² Robert Fife finds that the God that appears in Luther's lectures on Romans is a God of mercy. Therefore he concludes that Luther's full realization of the doctrine of justification by faith came to him in his last year of his course on the Epistle to the Romans

⁷⁰Saarnivaara, p. 46.

⁷¹Willem Jan Kooiman, Luther on the Bible, translated by John Smith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 26.

⁷²Rupp, The Righteousness of God, p. 126.

which was between 1515 and 1516.⁷³ But his "tower experience," which he believes to be something different from his understanding of justification by faith, took place, says Fife, during Luther's lectures on the Psalms, 1513-1515, when he learned to interpret the justitia Dei, not in the sense of the justice that condemns, but as mercy that saves.⁷⁴

There are others who argue for an earlier date. Holl is of the opinion that Luther's evangelical view of justification appeared already in 1511-1512.⁷⁵ Boehmer writes: "We have in those notebooks documentary proof that Romans 1:17 was indeed the gate of Paradise to Luther, and that the illumination of which he speaks later did indeed take place in the period to which he attributes it, at the end of 1512 or the beginning of 1513."⁷⁶ Loetscher says: "The change took place in 1512 or 1513, just before he gave his lectures on the Psalms."⁷⁷ However, the view held by most

⁷³Robert Herndon Fife, Young Luther: The Intellectual and Religious Development of Martin Luther to 1518 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), p. 206.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 179.

⁷⁵Holl, p. 182.

⁷⁶Henrich Boehmer, Luther and the Reformation in the Light of Modern Research, translated by E. S. G. Potter (New York: The Dial Press, 1930), p. 60.

⁷⁷Frederich W. Loetscher, "Luther and the Problem of Authority in Religion," The Princeton Theological Review, XV (October 1917), 564.

Luther scholars is the view sustained by Rupp (during the lectures on the Psalms, 1513-1514)⁷⁸ or Scheel:⁷⁹ Vogelsang finds clear evidence of a transformation of Luther's thought in Psalms 70/71.⁸⁰ Lau maintains: "Luther shows his new understanding of the righteousness of God, at Psalm 31 or Psalm 71."⁸¹ Ritter is more general when he writes: "Luther's new understanding of justification appears more or less clearly in his first great course of lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515)."⁸² Schwiebert is specific in saying it occurred when Luther was working on the Psalm 71, some time in the fall of 1514.⁸³ Watson notes: "The basic principles of his reforming, or rather, evangelical position emerge in the course of his Lectures on the Psalms, 1513-1515. They are to be seen first possibly in the exposition of Psalm 31, but certainly in that of Psalms 70 and 71 --i.e. not later

⁷⁸Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms (London: S. C. M. Press, 1951), p. 38.

⁷⁹Otto Scheel, Luther (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1930), II, 437.

⁸⁰Erich Vogelsang, Die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung: Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte (Berlin und Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1920), pp. 4, 10, 59, 81.

⁸¹Lau, p. 66.

⁸²Ritter, Luther, p. 80.

⁸³Ernest G. Schwiebert, Luther and His times: The Reformation from a New Perspective (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 288.

than the beginning of 1514."⁸⁴ Thiel says: "Luther found the evangelical righteousness in the explanation of Psalm 71 in 1513-1514."⁸⁵

Finally, there are those who argue for a later date, between 1518 and 1519. As Lau states: "Today there is a tendency to identify Luther's experience in 1518 or 1519."⁸⁶ One notable example is Saarnivaara, who says: "Luther's 'tower experience' took place during the time he was preparing his second course of lectures on the Psalms, probably in the autumn or early winter of 1518."⁸⁷ According to Saarnivaara, much of modern Luther research has gone astray in maintaining that the Reformer's final conception of justification is to be found in Luther's lectures on the Psalms of 1513-15.⁸⁸

To summarize, Luther scholars have given several solutions to the problem of the date of the "tower experience." They can be classified as follows: (1) Luther's discovery took place while he was preparing his first lectures on the Psalms, between the late fall and the summer of 1513; (2) Luther's discovery took place during Luther's first lectures

⁸⁴Watson, p. 28, n. 19.

⁸⁵Rudolf Thiel, Luther, translated by Gustav K. Wiencke (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 148.

⁸⁶Lau, p. 66.

⁸⁷Saarnivaara, p. 108.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 73.

on the Psalms, 1513-1514; (3) The "tower experience" took place sometime during the years 1514-16; (4) Luther is interpreted as stating that his "tower experience" took place toward the end of 1518. Although as Lau says, "it is not even altogether certain whether Luther really intends this in the passage where he seems to say it, in his brief autobiography in the Preface to his Collected Latin Works of 1545."⁸⁹

Thus although most Luther scholars argue that the "tower experience" took place before the course of the lectures on the Psalms, 1514, there is no general agreement as to the exact point of Luther's illumination. In any case there is no evidence that it took place during his study of Psalm 22, as Bainton seems to suggest.

In a paper that Bainton gave as an address at the International Congress for Luther Research, meeting at Aarhus, Denmark, in 1956, he defends this historical method on the principle that:

Accounts, remote by years from the events which they describe and reported only at second hand, may be credited if they serve to make the event more credible and meaningful, and provided they are not contradicted by evidence at first hand or evidence closer to the event, though even here a strictly contemporary account is not always to be preferred, because there is the possibility that a more mature reflection may be sounder than an immediate ejaculation.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Lau, pp. 66, 67.

⁹⁰Roland H. Bainton, "Problems in Luther Biography," Studies on the Reformation, p. 101.

Thus Bainton maintains the opinion that it is a valid historical method to assume that an idea that was later more fully explained by Luther was already present in Luther's mind at the time when he penned only a laconic note.⁹¹ This is what Bainton has done in the case of Luther's exposition of the Twenty-second Psalm. Since Bainton is of the opinion that during these lectures of 1513-1515 Luther experienced his evangelical awakening, he assumes that Luther could not have done this without coming to grips with the meaning of the Passion of Christ and he could not have avoided confrontation with the significance of that event when commenting on the Twenty-second Psalm.⁹² Bainton regards Luther's treatment of the Twenty-second Psalm in the year 1519 as the core of his evangelical experience.⁹³ For that reason Bainton concludes:

It does not appear to me to be too bold an assumption that the emotional response and profound insight into the meaning of the cross evident in the exposition of the Twenty-second Psalm in 1519 had already taken hold of Luther when he was confronted with this very Psalm in 1513. To posit less requires the assumption that his evangelical experience did not as a matter of fact come until much later, which some indeed have lately contended. Provided that the experience can be dated in 1513, then to read back the fullness of the later exposition is not unwarranted.⁹⁴

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., p. 102.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 103.

It would seem that the main reason for following this historical method is to give the event a dramatic tone. But the question is whether this procedure is very reliable and isn't it presupposing too much? Certainly the solution of Romans 1:17 is the only part of Luther's theological development which could be called dramatic, but then it would be well to follow Rupp's advice: "We must beware of certain conclusions . . . and we must not succumb to the perennial temptation to all historians, of propounding certain judgments where in truth the evidence is insufficient."⁹⁵

The real significance of the "tower experience" is that "Luther's hand at last grasped the key with which Scriptures could be unlocked."⁹⁶ Luther's illumination "transformed the whole Bible for him and supplied his overall hermeneutical clue."⁹⁷ From this moment Luther's theology took a definite direction, it became Christocentric and Cristological.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Luther's encounter with Erasmus. The Reformer and the "Prince of Humanism" clashed on the matter of the free will. Luther respected Erasmus for his contribution to the study of the Bible, but he also found Erasmus distasteful because he did not give

⁹⁵Rupp, The Righteousness of God, p. 137.

⁹⁶A. Skevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), p. 7.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 8.

sufficient emphasis to Christ and to the grace of God.⁹⁸ In 1524 Erasmus wrote his Diatribes on Free Will. A year later Luther wrote his Bondage of the Will. The debate brought into the open the clear differences between the message of the Reformation and the theology of some of the Renaissance theologians. The issue between them was the doctrine of salvation. In this debate Luther's concept of God is set forth in clearer and more powerful lines than ever before. In his book Luther propounds the biblical doctrine of judgment and grace. The denial of free-will was to Luther the foundation of the biblical doctrine of grace, and an endorsement of that denial was the first step in recognizing that man is not at the center of things, but God. For man's will is not free, but possessed either by God or by Satan.⁹⁹ "It was man's total inability to save himself, and the sovereignty of Divine grace in his salvation, that Luther was affirming when he denied 'free will;' and it was the contrary that Erasmus was affirming when he maintained 'free will.'¹⁰⁰

*not so
Schwiebert!*

Roland H. Bainton discusses briefly the issues at stake between Erasmus and Luther in his chapter on "The

⁹⁸Martin Luther, Bondage of the Will, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., c.1957), pp. 205-238.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 247-253.

¹⁰⁰Packer and Johnston, "Historical and Theological In-

Irreparable Breach."¹⁰¹ Says Bainton:

Luther attributed the acceptance of some and the rejection of others to God's immutable decree and this admittedly was a rock of offense. Erasmus inquired why the anomalies of life should thus be projected into eternity and preferred to leave man insecure rather than to incriminate God. Luther answered, "God must be God."¹⁰²

There is nothing wrong with Bainton's interpretation of Luther's doctrine of election, as far as it goes. But that is precisely what is wrong in Bainton's presentation, that he does not go far enough. Thus he gives the reader the impression that Luther leaves man in the depths of despair. According to Bainton, Luther "exalted God even though he might appear cruel."¹⁰³ In other words, Luther's concept of God lacks unity at this point. If the cause of salvation and damnation is the sovereign will of God, then the activity of God appears rather confused, ambiguous, indecisive and even arbitrary. But that would preclude all talk about divine love. But if that were true how could we explain Luther as a man of faith, a man who made faith the central doctrine of his theology? Anders Nygren has said that Luther's contribution to the history of the Christian idea of love is so great that it can be called a "Coper-

roduction," Bondage of the Will, p. 48.

¹⁰¹ Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 57-76.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 69.

nican revolution."¹⁰⁴

Luther has two pieces of advice for the man who is tempted to despair, and to deny God's justice altogether. The first is that man must not try to force his way into the mysteries of the Divine Majesty, Luther says that the doctrine of predestination is not for human investigation.

Wherever God hides Himself, and wills to be unknown to us, there we have no concern God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor does He wish us to deal with Him. We have to do with Him as clothed and displayed in His word, by which He presents Himself to us The Diatribe is deceived by its own ignorance in that it makes no distinction between God preached and God hidden, that is between the Word of God and God Himself. God does many things which He does not show us in His Word, and He wills many things which He does not in His Word show us that He wills We must keep in view His Word and leave alone His inscrutable will; for it is by His word, and not by His inscrutable will, that we must be guided. . . . It is enough simply to know that there is in God an inscrutable will; what, why, and within what limits It wills, it is wholly unlawful to inquire, or wish to know, or be concerned about, or touch upon; we may only fear and adore But let man occupy himself with God Incarnate, that is with Jesus crucified, in whom, as Paul says (of Col. 2.3), are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (though hidden); for by Him man has abundant instruction both in what he should and what he should not know.¹⁰⁵

The second piece of advice to those in temptation and in doubt is that man must put his trust in God, for God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and we find refuge in grace and the gospel, that is, in the revealed will of

¹⁰⁴Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, translated by Philip S. Watson (London: S. P. C. K., 1953), II, 463-475.

¹⁰⁵Luther, Bondage of the Will, pp. 170, 171, 176.

God. But man has to leave behind his pride and forget all thoughts of merit. The idea of merit is a contradiction of God's omnipotence.¹⁰⁶ At its best, free will is at its worst, because it resists the righteousness of faith.¹⁰⁷ If man can do what is required of him, Christ is unnecessary, for he makes himself his own savior.¹⁰⁸ Man may imagine that his will is free and his reason independent, but in reality he is a captive and slave of Satan.¹⁰⁹ Therefore man must trust in God's inscrutable justice and thank Him if we are preserved from doubts and despair (Anfechtungen). Erasmus affirms that God's mercy is won by works; Luther, that it is recognised and received by faith. Luther saw the whole problem in the form of the alternative: either self-made faith or Christ.¹¹⁰

Bainton makes Luther's God appear as an unjust God, because He wills the destruction of the wicked. Bainton fails to make clear that Luther's God wills to be known through Christ, and through Him gives saving knowledge of Himself. Faith is trust in Jesus Christ as He stands revealed in the gospel. Thus, Luther's purpose in writing

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 100-105.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 176-185.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 262.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 101.

The Bondage of the Will was not to stress predestination but to set forth the way of salvation. His concern was to indicate how misinterpretation of passages dealing with predestination can be avoided.¹¹¹

Finally, the whole matter is to be viewed in the light of reason, the light of grace, and the light of glory. Since the justice of God is inexplicable by the light of nature and by the light of grace it is up to the light of glory to give the answer.¹¹²

But the light of glory insists otherwise, and will one day reveal God, to Whom alone belongs a judgment whose justice is incomprehensible, as a God Whose justice is most righteous and evident--provided only that in the meanwhile we believe it, as we are instructed and encouraged to do by the example of the light of grace explaining what was a puzzle of the same order to the light of nature.¹¹³

¹¹¹Pinomaa, p. 33.

¹¹²Luther, Bondage of the Will, pp. 316-317.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 317.

CHAPTER II

LUTHER'S VIEW OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

In the previous chapter it has been shown that Luther's faith, Luther's doctrine of a gracious God who justifies sinners, Luther's own persuasion concerning God, can hardly have been based upon his religious experience. As he says,

This is the reason that our doctrine is most sure and certain, because it carrieth us out of ourselves, that we should not lean to our own strength, our own conscience, our own feeling, our own person and our own works; but to that which is without us, that is to say, to the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive us.¹

If Luther's convictions had rested ultimately upon his own individual religious experience, and instead of a objective religion Luther had been the founder of a subjective religion, this would have been in contradiction to all that he said and stood for. The theology of Martin Luther was a theology of the Word of God. His theology was strictly and consistently theocentric, not egocentric. Luther lived for and by the Word of God. It is reported that at the Diet of Worms he said these words: "My conscience is captive in the Word of God."² Now it would have been entirely out of

¹Martin Luther, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, translated by Erasmus Middlenton (New edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1940), p. 348.

²Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 185.

harmony with what Luther has just said, if he had sought to invest the Scriptures with the same kind of authority as he denied to the Papacy.

But the theology of Luther is also a theology of the Scriptures.³ Luther asserts that his doctrine is securely founded on the Holy Scripture, and that nothing must be believed or taught as Christian, if it does not have its warrant in Scripture.⁴ This is Scriptural theology. A Scriptural theology is one that proves its dogmas by statements from the Bible. But the Bible is not an arsenal of proof texts. He is certain that his interpretation is right, and he will not be moved, even if a thousand biblical texts are quoted against him. For he has Christ on his side, the Lord of the Scriptures, whom the Scriptures cannot contradict.⁵ To have Scriptures, without the knowledge of Christ, he declares, is to have no Scripture, for Scripture, rightly understood, contains nothing but Christ.⁶

When Luther asserts therefore that "there is no other evidence of Christian truth on earth but the Holy Scrip-

³Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings, companion volume to Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslave Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 48.

⁴D. Martin Luthers Werke, kristische Gesamtausgabe, edited by J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar, 1883), XVIII, 709. 21. (Hereafter cited as W. A.)

⁵Luther, Galatians, p. 234.

⁶W. A., X. i. 628. 6-8.

tures,"⁷ he does not mean that he himself believes, or that anyone else must believe, what the Bible says, simply and solely because the Bible says it. He is thinking of Scripture as witness to Christ. The Scriptures therefore can be described as "in truth the spiritual body of Christ."⁸ For Luther, all authority belongs to Christ in the end, Christ the Word of God, and even the authority of the Scriptures is secondary and derivative, pertaining to them only inasmuch as they bear witness to Christ and are the vehicle of the Word.⁹

In two chapters: "Luther's Reform" and "The Irreparable Breach" Bainton deals with Luther's attitude towards Scripture. Bainton accuses Luther of being inconsistent and arbitrary in his treatment of the Bible. He bases this judgment on the fact that Luther accorded greater significance to the Gospel of John and the Pauline Epistles than to the Epistle to the Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. Bainton admits that Luther did not treat Scripture at whim and that Luther conceived Scripture as an entity. He also admits that Luther's position was neither that of free interpretation or

⁷W. A., X. i. 80. 16-18.

⁸Works of Martin Luther, edited by H. E. Jacobs. (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co. c.1915), III, 16. (Hereafter cited as W. M. L.)

⁹Philip S. Watson, Let God be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 175.

that of stark Biblicism.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he concludes: "Necessarily, then, if the Bible was taken as a whole and yet not regarded as uniformly valuable, some portions had to be taken literally and others spiritualized. This is the point at which Luther often appears arbitrary and even inconsistent."¹¹ Bainton affirms that this inconsistency is particularly evident in Luther's view of the sacraments.

Secondly, while Bainton admits that when Luther took a stand at the Diet of Worms he acted by the authority of the Holy Scripture, he nevertheless makes Luther partly responsible for "opening the flood-gates of individualism, producing an inundation of all the vagaries of private interpretation, and on the other hand of investing a particular interpretation of Scriptures with all the rigidity and finality of papalism."¹² He regards himself justified in saying this by observing that Lutheranism developed in the direction of stark Biblicism.¹³

When Luther came before the Diet of Worms on 18 April, 1521 he gave this famous answer:

Unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scriptures and by evident reasoning--for I cannot trust the decisions of either popes or councils, since it is

¹⁰ Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, c.1952), pp. 44-46.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹² Ibid., p. 44.

¹³ Ibid., p. 45.

plain that they have frequently erred and contradicted one another--I am bound in conscience and held fast in the Word of God by these passages of the Holy Scripture which I have quoted. Therefore, I cannot and will not retract anything, for it is neither safe nor salutary to act against one's conscience . . . God help me! Amen.¹⁴

Bainton takes these words as the words of an individualist. When Luther says: "The pope is no judge of matter pertaining to God's words and faith. But the Christian man must examine and judge for himself,"¹⁵ Bainton calls this the "epitome and the extent of protestant individualism."¹⁶

Bainton seems to infer that Luther here demanded an unrestricted liberty of thought and conscience, according to which there is no such thing as an objective authority outside ourselves, and man is responsible to no one but himself, his own subjective, arbitrary conscience. Such unrestricted individualism, centering only in itself divorced from all objective authority, was, perhaps, advocated by Italian Humanists but never by Luther. Luther is no individualist,

¹⁴"Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521," translated by Roger A. Hornsby, Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer II, edited by George W. Forell and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), XXXII, 112. 133 (Hereafter the American edition of Luther's Works will be cited as L. W.)

¹⁵W. A., VI. 328-329.

¹⁶Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 61.

no sectarian iconoclast, who set himself up proudly above the whole Christian Church. Whoever appeals to the confession of Luther at Worms in support of this individualism, closes his eyes to the fact that Luther expressly said, "My conscience is captive to the word of God."¹⁷ As Ritter says, "Luther never wanted to make the way clear for religious individualism, but only for God to work in the hearts of men."¹⁸ Nevertheless, Luther insisted on the individual's right to "prove the spirits" with the Word of God as his touchstone.¹⁹

I say not that I am a prophet, yet for my own self I am certain that the Word of God is with me and not with them, for I have the Scriptures on my side, and they have only their own doctrine. This gives me courage, so that the more they despise and persecute me, the less I fear them. There were many asses in the world in the days of Balaam, but God spake by none of them save only by Balaam's ass. He saith in Psalm 13 to these same great ones, "Ye have shamed the doctrine of poor preacher, because he trusteth in God," as if to say, "Because he is not great and mighty, his doctrine must needs be false in your eyes."²⁰

Luther was not here exalting the individual but the authority of Holy Scripture, which is above the decrees of popes and councils and churches. Luther was not and did not

¹⁷ L. W., XXXII, 112.

¹⁸ Gerhard Ritter, "Lutheranism, Catholicism, and the Humanistic View of Life", Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, XLIV (1953), 146.

¹⁹ Herman A. Preus, "The Christian and the Church," More About Luther, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah: Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958, p. 167.

²⁰ W. M. L., III, 12-14.

want to be the forerunner of the modern idea of freedom of conscience. Against Latomus Luther enunciated the principle that a Christian with the Word of God is invincible. "The Holy Scriptures belongs to all in common and are clear enough for salvation and also obscure enough for the meditation of pious souls. Let every man go his own way with the Word of God, which is inexhaustible as it is universal for all men, and we will refute the words of men or at least read them critically."²¹

The free access of the individual Christian to the Word of God and the right to "prove the spirits," no matter who they are, proclaims one of the high notes of the Lutheran Reformation. But it is an awesome thing to challenge the judgment of the highest spiritual authorities in the church. How did he dare? Luther is certain that his doctrine is solidly supported by all Scripture. He is sure it is the doctrine of universal Christendom--and if the Pope and his followers, or any other men, deny it, they are self-excluded from the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. It is attested, he maintains, by the witness of the Spirit in every believer's heart yet it does not depend upon any man's experience of this.²²

Now the Church is not wood or stone, but the body of Christian believers; one must hold fast to them and see what they believe and teach and how they live who surely

²¹L. W., XXXII, 217.

²²Luther, Galatians, pp. 346, 347.

have Christ with them. For outside of the Christian Church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation. From this it follows that it is untrustworthy and false for the pope or a bishop to ask us to believe him alone and hold him for a master; for these all may and do err. But their doctrine must be subject to the group. What they teach, the congregation must appraise and judge.²³

Bainton is correct in attributing decisive significance to Luther's words at the Diet of Worms and to his deed which destroyed the claims of papal supremacy over the lives of people, but it is doubtful whether this event can be interpreted as if it had been inspired by a spirit akin either to the individualism of the Renaissance or to the individualistic freedom of the Enlightenment. For Luther protested against papal authority not because he desired to pit the authority of his own mind against that of the papal church, but because he found it irreconcilable with the Word of God which he had rediscovered in the Bible.

In recent years the question of Luther's hermeneutics, his method of interpreting the Bible, has been the object of intensive study by many Luther scholars. "Protestant interpretation of the Bible," says Grant, "whether historical or not, owes its life to the spirit of the Reformation."²⁴ And as Luther said at the Leipzig Debate, "No believing Christian can be forced to recognize any authority beyond the sacred Scripture, which is exclusively invested with divine

²³D. Luthers sämtliche Werke, ed. by J. Plochmann and J. K. Irmischer (Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1826-57), X, 162.

²⁴Robert M. Grant, A. Short History of the Interpreta-

right, unless, indeed, there comes a new and attested revelation."²⁵ Interpretation then was a focal issue in the Reformation. The brunt of Luther's attack on Rome lay in his challenge to the Roman monopoly of interpretation. In his treatise The Papacy at Rome, Luther complained that the papists interpreted the Scriptures in accordance with their own insane folly and that the pope "soiled them like a sniveling child."²⁶ "Thus we can see how beautifully the Romanists treat the Scriptures and make out of them what they like, as if they were a nose of wax to be pulled around at will."²⁷ It is difficult to understand, in the light of these hermeneutical studies and of Luther's words, how Bainton can say that Luther's interpretation of the Bible was arbitrary and inconsistent.

It can be said that Luther became consistent in his interpretation of Scripture when through a genuine use of the traditional hermeneutics, he attained a new insight into biblical truth, the Scriptures are the living Word of the crucified and resurrected Lord.²⁸ In the course of the cen-

tion of the Bible (Revised edition; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948, 1963), p. 128.

²⁵W. A., II. 279.

²⁶W. A., VI. 316, 321.

²⁷W. A., VI. 305.

²⁸Willem Jan Kooiman, Luther on the Bible, translated by John Smith (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 33.

turies an allegorical method of interpretation had grown up in the church, called the *quadriga*, the fourfold sense of Scripture. The first of these is the sensus literalis: the second is the sensus allegoricus (also called the sensus mysticus); the third is the sensus tropologicus or moralis; and the fourth the sensus anagogicus. The allegorical sense explains the text with regard to the doctrinal content of church dogma, especially with reference to Christ. The tropological sense provides the application for the individual believers; and the anagogical interpretation draws from the text the allusions concerning metaphysical and eschatological secrets.²⁹

There were many varieties of this scheme and the order was not always the same, but this is the most common and the one with which Luther grew up. It is complicated and often bizarre method of Bible study, which encouraged arbitrariness. It did not so much imply four different explanations the one standing alongside of the others, but sought rather to establish a principle by which the different aspects of the one text could be clearly seen. In practice, however, it often occurred that scholars on wholly subjective grounds explained one text according to the first, another according to the second, and still another according to the third or fourth sense, as each pleased them best. In this way the most fantastic and speculative allegorizing was practiced.³⁰

Much has been written about the dangers of this method. But it also must be remembered that in the Middle Ages and into the period of the Reformation only the literal sense

²⁹ Gerhard Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," *Theology Today*, XXI (April 1964), 38.

³⁰ Kooiman, pp. 34, 35.

was valid in disputations and in exegesis it was not considered essential to search for all four possibilities in every verse.³¹

Because the Bible interpreted by the Spirit is an instrument in the hand of God to carry out his will, Luther assigned a tremendously important function to biblical interpretation. His historic document The Ninety-Five Theses opens with this statement: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believer to be one of repentance."³² Luther proceeds to discuss the interpretation of Matt. 4:17 and the rendering of "Do penance" of the Vulgate. "This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance unto the kingdom of heaven."³³ It is very significant that at the outset of his theological revolution Luther sought to lay a foundation of sound exegesis. In his Türmerlebnis, Luther, as Wood puts it, "grasped

³¹A. Skevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), pp. 24, 25.

³²L. W., XXXI, 25.

³³L. W., XXXI, 25, 26.

the significance of one centripetal portion of God's Word and by it he proceeded to reinterpret the rest."³⁴ "Beware of allegories"³⁵ was the motto of many of his lectures.

The Luther scholar Karl Holl, in his decisive essay on "Luther's Significance for the Progress of the Art of Interpretation,"³⁶ has summarized the Reformer's contribution to the "art" of Bible interpretation in seven points. (1) The Scripture has only one meaning. The method that must prevail, Luther said, is

not well named the literal sense, for by letter Paul means something quite different. They do much better who call it the speaking or language sense, as St. Paul does in I Cor. 14, because it is understood by everybody in the sense of the spoken language. . . . The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth, and therefore his words cannot have more than one, and that the very simplest sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense.³⁷

(2) The literal, grammatical interpretation is prior to any other understanding of the Bible. "Luther did not altogether set aside spiritual interpretation, but he emphatically urged the priority and superiority of the literal sense."³⁸

Thus the interpretation of Holy Scripture is concerned

³⁴Wood, p. 8.

³⁵W. A., XXXI. 11. 243.

³⁶Karl Holl, "Luther's Bedeutung für Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte: Luther (Seventh edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948), I, 542-582.

³⁷W. M. L., III, 352-353.

³⁸Wood, p. 25.

with the theology of the cross as the substance of Holy Scriptures, the significance of which must be established through exegesis. This new stamp which Luther presses upon the understanding of letter and spirit is the preparation of Luther's later distinction between law and gospel. The traditional structure of the twofold sense of Scripture is thus principally destroyed. Luther does continue to use the allegorical method in a limited way as a means of decorative application. But, in the correct understanding, the one, plain, grammatical sense is the truly theological one which includes within itself the duality of law and gospel in its orientation to the substance of Holy Scripture; or, to say it more exactly, the basic task of theological hermeneutics occurs in the distinction between law and gospel.³⁹

(3) Every single passage in the Bible must be seen in the light of the whole Bible. In his Enarratio Capituli Noni Esaiiae of 1543-44 Luther confesses:

I am much displeased with myself and I hate myself because I know that all that Scripture says concerning Christ is true, that there is nothing besides it that can be greater, more important, sweeter or joyful, and that it should intoxicate me with the highest joy because I see that Scripture is consonant in all and through all and agrees with itself in such a measure that it is impossible to doubt the truth and certainty of such a weighty matter in any detail--"40

(4) In the interpretation of the Bible the words are important and its subject matter;

That is, they do not believe they are God's words. For if they believed they were God's words they would not call them poor, miserable words but would regard such words and titles as greater than the whole world and would fear and tremble before them as before God himself. For whoever despises a single word of God does not regard any as important.⁴¹

³⁹ Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutics and the Early Luther," Theology Today, XXI (April 1964), 44.

⁴⁰ W. A., XL. iii. 652. 12-17.

⁴¹ W. A., XXVI. 449. 3-9.

(5) The substance of the Bible is clear and intelligible;

The Holy Ghost is the most simple author and speaker in heaven and earth, therefore His words cannot have more than one, the most simple meaning.⁴²

(6) Because of this fundamental clarity, the Bible is its own interpreter;

(7) If the fundamental clarity of the Bible is recognized, its undeniable obscurities and difficulties in details may be openly admitted.

When discrepancies occur in the Holy Scriptures and we cannot harmonize them, let it pass, it does not endanger the article of the Christian faith, because all the evangelists agree in this that Christ died for our sins.⁴³

For Luther, Biblical interpretation is nothing less than the proclamation of the truth of God. As a man of scholarship Luther employed the best historical-critical scholarship available to him and demanded that the historical sense of the Scriptures receive the normative place in exegesis.⁴⁴ But the establishment of the correct text and the explanation of linguistic, historical and critical problems was only the preliminary step.⁴⁵ As a man of faith, Luther continually extracted something more than the single

⁴²W. A., VII. 650. 21-24.

⁴³W. A., XLVI. 726. 20-26.

⁴⁴Pelikan, p. 259.

⁴⁵Warren A. Quarbeck, "Luther's Early Exegesis," Luther Today, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 86.

historical sense from the Scriptures. Thus he was willing, at least in his earlier exegesis to give the "spiritual" sense of "body of Christ" as a certain pre-eminence over the "historical" or "natural" sense.⁴⁶ Luther's spiritual sense is derived from the Scripture itself and the apprehension of faith. So he can speak of the Spirit giving a "new interpretation, which is then the new literal sense."⁴⁷ As Wood says, "Luther's major contribution to hermeneutics lies in the fusion of literal and spiritual in a new and dynamic relationship."⁴⁸ For Bainton this method of interpretation is inconsistent and arbitrary!

Luther's understanding of the purpose of exegesis can be summarized under three principles: (1) The Bible is a living book, speaking to the needs of the present day; (2) The message of the Bible is personal and it demands a personal response; (3) The purpose of the Bible is practical, seeking the edification of the Church of God and the destruction of error and falsehood.⁴⁹

In view of this Luther could not understand the purpose of exegesis as the mere compilation of interpretations and opinions. The futility of most medieval exegesis was the result of such lifeless compilation. There was too much at-

⁴⁶Pelikan, p. 259.

⁴⁷W. M. L., III, 349.

⁴⁸Wood, p. 34.

⁴⁹Quanbeck, pp. 86, 87.

tention to the voice of the Fathers, too little attention to the voice of Scripture. Thus Luther says, "Heretowith we would say nothing and believe we have said nothing which does not harmonize with the Catholic Church and the Church teachers."⁵⁰

Luther's understanding of exegesis as a vital personal synthesis created by the living message of the Bible, experienced in the life of the exegete, confronted and tested by the experience of the Church, explains the apparent unevenness of his treatment. He does not comment on every verse of the text, but on those which have spoken most clearly and tellingly to him (compare Rom. 4:7). Not everything in Scripture is of equal significance, for not every book or verse is as closely related to the center of Scripture, Jesus Christ.⁵¹ "In the whole Scripture there is nothing but Christ, either in plain words or involved words."⁵² The whole Scripture is about Christ alone everywhere, if we look to its inner meaning, though superficially it may sound different.⁵³ "It is beyond question that all Scriptures point to Christ alone."⁵⁴ "The entire Old Testament refers to

⁵⁰W. A., I. 229. 34-36.

⁵¹Regin Prenter, "Luther on Word and Sacrament," More About Luther, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1959), pp. 76, 77.

⁵²W. A., XI. 223.

⁵³W. A., LVI. 240.

⁵⁴W. M. L., II, 432.

Christ and agrees with Him."⁵⁵

Luther's interpretation of Scripture is Christocentric because he regards the Lord Jesus Christ as the heart of the Bible. Therefore, as Wood says, "Luther's Christocentric approach to Scripture supplies the clue to the paradox involved in his insistence on the primacy of the literal sense whilst conceding that there is a further, inner, spiritual meaning. Luther takes his stand on the literal sense. That is fundamental. But he recognizes that there is an inward meaning of the Word to which the eyes of faith must penetrate. It is not supplementary to the literal sense but communicated by it."⁵⁶

To Bainton the combination of these two principles, the literal interpretation and the Christological or "spiritual" --as he calls it--exegesis may seem self-contradictory. But what Bainton fails to realize is that it was precisely Luther's Christological exegesis which compelled him to reject allegory and to emphasize grammatical interpretation.

The important books of the Bible for Luther are those which declare the Gospel in its manifold relation to men. In his Preface to the Book of James, Luther says, "All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate (treiben) Christ. And that is the true test

⁵⁵W. A., X. 576.

⁵⁶Wood, p. 34.

by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. . . . Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching."⁵⁷ The books which give clear expression to the Christological content of Scripture are more significant than those in which the purpose of God is not expressed.

From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought properly to be foremost books. . . . For in them you do not find many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation.⁵⁸

These books can be either from the Old or from the New Testament. To Luther the presence of Christ in the Old Testament does not rest primarily upon the occurrence of certain images and figures in the Old Testament pointing to Christ. That Christ is present and speaks in the Old Testament means simply that God reveals Himself through words of the Old Testament. In his Introduction to the Old Testament, Luther says speaking of the books of the Old Testament: "Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the

⁵⁷L. W., XXXV, 396.

⁵⁸L. W., XXXV, 362.

treasure, Christ, that lies in them."⁵⁹

It is in this context, of the content of the books of the Bible concerning the grace of God in Christ, that Luther distinguished between the different books of the Bible calling the Epistle of St. James an epistle of straw.⁶⁰

Consequently, the Scripture is Luther's authority because it reveals Christ, because in it God speaks His Word of judgment and grace. The authority of the Bible therefore requires obedience, the exegete's willingness to subordinate all things to the authority of the Word. Since man cannot understand the ways of God, he has no right to believe what he pleases and to reject the rest. He cannot sit in judgment over the Scripture, but must trust God's wisdom.⁶¹

In the final analysis no man has interpreted rightly the Bible unless his interpretation is to the glory of God. "This I know assuredly," said Luther, "that I teach not the things of man, but of God: that is to say, I attribute all things to God alone, and nothing to man."⁶²

⁵⁹W. M. L., VI, 368.

⁶⁰L. W., XXXV, 362. *W. M. L., The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 45.

⁶¹Quanbeck, p. 100.

⁶²L. W., XXVI, 58.

Herbert J. A. Smeets, This is My Body! Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 100.

CHAPTER III

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

As is understandable in a book such as this, Bainton does not give Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper full treatment.¹ There are only passing references to it.² One of these, however, is of interest since Bainton affirms that Luther taught the doctrine of concomitance. It appears that Bainton either does not understand Luther's doctrine or he does not agree with him or both. Seemingly Bainton does not understand Luther's doctrine of the Real Presence, since he equates the physical presence with the substance.³ Neither did Luther put the error of the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation on the same level as withholding the cup from the laity, or the sacrifice of the mass.⁴ For in fact up to 1519 Luther understood the Real Presence in the sense of the official doctrine of transubstantiation.⁵

Bainton rightly affirms that "in the case of the Mass, Luther was strongly insistent that there is no sacri-

¹Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, c.1952), p. 48.

²Ibid., pp. 74, 91-42, 110, 201, 202.

³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Hermann Sasse, This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 100.

fice."⁶ In his De Captivitate Luther had declared:

But there is yet another stumbling block that must be removed and this is much greater and the most dangerous of all. It is the common belief that the mass is a sacrifice, which is offered to God. Even the words of the canon tend in this direction, when they speak of "these gifts," "these offerings," "this holy sacrifice," and farther on, of "this oblation." Prayer also is made, in so many words, "that the sacrifice may be accepted even as the sacrifice of Abel," etc. and hence Christ is termed the "Sacrifice of the altar." . . . To all of this, firmly entrenched as it is, we must resolutely oppose the words and example of Christ.

But Bainton fails to present the other side of the picture. At the same time, Luther says that Christ is the offering priest. For while Luther rejected the interpretation of the mass as a sacrifice, he accepted and used that term for Christ's atoning work.⁸ It is hardly suprising that Luther spoke of Christ's work as a sacrifice. He simply followed the New Testament tradition. Commenting on Galatians 2:20 he says:

For Christ is the Son of God, which of mere love gave himself for our redemption. And with these words Paul setteth out most lively the priesthood and the offices of Christ: which are, to pacify God, to make intercession for sinners, to offer himself a sacrifice for their sins, to redeem. . . . But let us define him as Paul here doth: namely, that he is the Son of God, who not for our desert or any righteousness of ours, but of his

⁶Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 48.

⁷Works of Martin Luther, edited by H. E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1915-1932), II, 211, 212 (Hereafter cited as W. M. L.)

⁸D. Martin Luther Werke, kristische Gesamtausgabe, edited by J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar, 1883), XVIII, 709. 21. (Hereafter cited as W. A.)

own free mercy and love, offered up himself a sacrifice for us sinners, that he might sanctify us for ever.⁹

Here we see the Christ that knew no sin who made a sacrifice for us. He the innocent submitted to the law that he might free us who are the guilty.¹⁰

This idea of sacrifice has nothing in common with the theology of sacrifice of the mass. In the mass it is Christ as a man who stands before God on behalf of men. He points up the merits which gain recognition for those who share in them through masses and indulgences. The sacrifice of the mass is not an act of God's mercy, as for Luther, but a human attempt to satisfy God.¹¹ The idea that a priest could sacrifice the body and blood of Christ anew in the mass was distateful to Luther. "But I fear, no, alas, I see that your sacrificing amounts to offering up Christ anew, as Hebrews 6:6 predicted: They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him openly to shame."¹² "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, yet they go ahead and sacrifice him daily more than a hundred thousand times in the world, wherewith they deny in their hearts

⁹Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4, translated and edited by Joroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), XXVI, 177. (Hereafter the American edition of Luther's Works is cited as L. W.)

¹⁰Ibid., p. 178.

¹¹W. A., VIII. 466, 467.

¹²W. A., VIII. 421.

and by their deeds that Christ put sin to nought and that he died and rose again."¹³ In the Smalcald Articles Luther expressed his verdict on the mass thus: "The mass in the Papacy must be the greatest and most horrible abomination as it conflicts directly and powerfully with this chief article, and for all other popish idolatries it is the chief and most specious."¹⁴

Luther has often been criticized for rejecting the sacrificial element in the mass as completely as he did. Did he not neglect an essential element of New Testament thought? We can say that Luther had no intention of striking the idea of sacrifice from the gospel. Rather he gave it its rightful place in the faith and life of the church.¹⁵

The point of reference for the idea of sacrifice in Luther's theology is the priesthood of all believers.¹⁶ The sacrifice of the mass, then, is nothing but faith itself, and for that reason all believing Christians are priests and priestesses with authority to offer it.

Faith I call the true priestly office which makes of all of us priests and priestesses. Through faith we

¹³W. A., XVIII. 18, 29.

¹⁴Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, edited by F. Bente and W. H. F. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 463.

¹⁵W. A., VIII. 522. 367.

¹⁶Vilmos Vajta, Luther on Worship, translated and condensed by U. S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 151.

place ourselves, our misery, our prayer, our praise, and thanksgiving in Christ's hands, and through Christ offer it all to God in the sacrament. Thus we offer Christ to God, that is, we give Him occasion and move Him to offer Himself for us, and us with Himself. This faith of which I speak is master of everything in heaven, on earth, in hell and purgatory. I readily admit that it is impossible to ascribe too much to that faith.¹⁷

Luther rejected the mass for the very reason that it was a conception of sacrifice apart from faith. To him, the mass was a sacrifice only insofar as it was "used" by faith. This is the significance of the sacrifice of Christ and of the sacrifice of Christians.

Though the body and blood of Christ was seen like any other material thing, it was not seen as a sacrifice, not as something he was offering. . . . Christ sacrificed himself to God in his own heart, of which nobody knew. That is why his physical body and blood are a spiritual sacrifice. Likewise we Christians sacrifice our bodies (Rom. 12:1), yet it is, as Paul himself says, a reasonable service, for we do it in the spirit where God alone can see.¹⁸

What is then the sacrifice that is related to faith?

Luther points to the sacrifice of praise thanksgiving, of prayer, of the body. He thought of man in all his relationships.

This is certainly true. Such prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and offering of ourselves we are not to present before the eyes of God on our own account, but are to lay them on Christ and leave it to Him to present them to God . . . If the mass is called a sacrifice in this sense, and so understood, it is all right. Not that we offer the sacrifice, but that we, through our thanksgiving, prayer, and offering implore Him, and give Him occasion to offer Himself for us in heaven and us with

¹⁷W. A., VI. 371. 21.

¹⁸W. A., XVII. 11. 228.

Himself.¹⁹

What Luther is saying is that true sacrifice does not consist in man's presenting anything to God. It is effected through Christ. Thus sacrifice cannot be identified with any particular liturgical act, not even prayers. It rests on the believer's fellowship with Christ and as such it is hidden.²⁰ While the sacrifice of the Christian priesthood may be realized in certain liturgical acts, it cannot be identified with them. But as Prenter says, "This genuinely Lutheran conception of the Eucharistic sacrifice has been forgotten in the Lutheran Church."²¹

In his discussion of The Book of Common Prayer, Bainton mentions in passing that Cranmer and his associates repudiated the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation "in favor of Luther's doctrine of concomitance."²² The statement seems so incongruous that it makes one wonder whether Bainton meant to say "consubstantiation." In contrast to the scholastic term "transubstantiation" Luther's doctrine has sometimes been dubbed "consubstantiation." To be sure, certain statements of the Reformer are cited in support of this interpre-

¹⁹W. A., VI. 368. 26-28; W. A., VI. 369. 12.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Regin Prenter, "Luther on Word and Sacrament," More About Luther, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 118.

²²Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, P. 201.

tation,²³ but it is improper to use the term "substance" in reference to Luther, because it infers a philosophical approach that Luther rejected so violently.

The doctrine of concomitance as taught by Thomas Aquinas states that the blood of Christ is per concomitantiam together with the body after the consecration of the bread and accordingly, the body with the blood after the wine has been consecrated. Body and blood furthermore are accompanied by the soul of Christ and by His divine nature. The presence of Christ in this sacrament is, then, always the presence of the whole Christ, His Human and His divine nature.²⁴

In the early years of the Reformation, Luther regarded the taking of the cup on the part of the laity as an adiaphoron. Luther treated this whole matter with great evangelical freedom. When Carlstadt in 1522 declared it to be a sin to take the Lord's Supper without the cup, Luther stated that he too, would like to introduce the communio sub utraque; if, however, pious Christians were refused the cup by tyrants, they should be satisfied with the bread.²⁵ However when Carlstadt and the enthusiasts endangered the Gospel and the Church of the Gospel. Luther said these words:

²³ W. A., VI. 510; W. A., X. ii. 207.

²⁴ Sasse, p. 49.

²⁵ Dr. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel, edited by E. L. Enders

Thus I see how Satan intends to make both species a common rule, just as the Pope has made one species his rule, before there are Christians who should do it. He intends to make it worse on the right hand side than it was on the left hand side. We need, therefore, to remain in the middle of the road and to pray that God may help keep us there. For Satan is seriously snaring us.²⁶

Luther never doubted that Christians during the centuries when the cup was denied them, received the real sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. The same, he thinks, is true of those believing communicants from whom the cup is withheld by the Pope and his bishops in his day.²⁷ But people who for conscience sake did not want to receive the cup could take the bread only.²⁸ Yet to those who after careful indoctrination on the Sacrament still refused to take the Lord's Supper under both, Luther recommended as early as 1523 to abstain from the sacrament.²⁹

The time of transition passed when at the Diet of Augsburg the theologians declared in Article XXII the custom of communion under one species to be "not only contrary to Scripture, but also contrary to the old canons and the example of the Church."³⁰ Luther's classical position is to be

and G. Kawerau (Stuttgart und Leipzig: 1884), 207 (no. 449, 76-80) Hereafter cited as Enders).

²⁶W. A., X. 11. 24. 22-27.

²⁷W. A., XXXVIII. 171-174.

²⁸W. M. L., VI, 95, 96.

²⁹Ibid., p. 96.

³⁰Triglot Concordia, p. 494.

found in the words of Smalcald Articles:

And that not only one form is to be given. For we do not need that high art which teaches us that under the one form there is as much as under both, as the sophists and the Council of Constance teach. For although it may perhaps be true that there is as much under one as under both, yet the one form is not the entire ordinance and institution established and commanded by Christ. And we especially condemn and in God's name execrate those who do not only omit both forms, but also tyrannically prohibit, condemn and blaspheme them as heresy, and so exalt themselves against and above Christ, our Lord and God.³¹

It is possible that Luther was suggesting that the idea of concomitance was correct. It is possible that in the early years this question was at best an open question for him. But there was a development in Luther's concepts on these matters. In later years in his fight against the denial of the Real Presence and in his protest against the Roman communio sub una, he rejected the doctrine of concomitance.³² According to Sasse, what a Christian receives who in faith partakes of the bread only, as the people in the Late Middle Ages did, is a question whether or not the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ includes also the presence of His soul and Divinity.³³

This is not the place for developing the full riches of Luther's theology concerning the Lord's Supper, but one brief comment must be made on Bainton's misunderstanding

³¹ Ibid., p. 493.

³² W. A., XXVI. 495; W. A., XXXIX. i. 27. 4-39.

³³ Sasse, p. 99.

of the doctrine of the Real Presence. Bainton equates the physical presence with the substance. He says, that Luther, "did not deny a real and even a physical presence."³⁴ Natural bread and wine are the vehicles of the presence of Christ. But one must not infer from this that Luther regarded the elements in Holy Communion as a divine substance on earth. Real Presence does not mean local presence. Luther did not think it proper to inquire into the mode of the Divine Presence. As Bornkamm points out:

For Luther, Christ is present only in the action, in the proclamation. The elements are only the perceptible sign of the mysterious presence of Christ, with which He is close to man as He addresses him, the believer to his salvation, the unbeliever to his damnation. In Luther's mind the physical presence . . . is always an act, a creative deed of God in an effective sign.³⁵

Luther does not attempt to give a theoretical, rational explanation how Christ is present in the Sacrament.³⁶ The miracle of the Real Presence can be stated only as an article of faith, as Luther does in the Third Article of the Smalcald Articles:

Of the Sacrament of the Altar we hold that bread and wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and are given and received not only by the godly

³⁴Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 48.

³⁵Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, translated by Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 112.

³⁶W. M. L., XIX. 500.

but also by wicked Christians.³⁷

To Luther the Real Presence was a corollary of the incarnation. The incarnation was the real offense, and Christ's presence in worship is no more than a consequence and extension of the revelation of the omnipresent God.³⁸

Luther's belief in the Real Presence rested solely on the words of Christ: "This is my body This is my blood of the New Covenant." It is not stubbornness that moved Luther to retain the words in their literal sense. It was simply reverence for Him who spoke these words. To Luther the words of institution were God's own words and therefore creative words inasmuch as, when God speaks, word and act cannot be separated from one another.³⁹

Luther's opposition to Zwingli and the Spiritualists reached much deeper than the difference on the interpretation of the words of institution. Zwingli had deprived Holy Communion of its real meaning. For if the true and complete body of Christ is not present in the Eucharist, then Christ Himself, with the fullness of His grace, is not there. For Zwingli the Lord's Supper was only a pleasing, symbolical celebration of the congregation; no longer a sign in which the presence of God is concealed but merely a historical

³⁷Triglot Concordia, p. 494.

³⁸W. A., XIX. 500.

³⁹W. A., XXIII. 87.

commemoration, a memorial meal, a meal of rejoicing akin to a patriotic celebration, a feast of confession, and a renewal of moral obligation.⁴⁰ If the bread and wine of the Eucharist only represent the body of Christ, which is thought of as seated up in heaven, then the Sacrament is no longer a manifest sign of the presence of the true, gracious God, the incarnate God, among men.⁴¹ Zwingli converted Luther's sign into a symbol, an arbitrary symbolical act.

Luther believed that in Holy Communion, God was as palpably close to him as his own sins were. Luther yearned for a reality of grace not less real than that of his own sins. His doctrine of Real Presence is an expression of his faith in this reality of God in the midst of the world's reality and the reality of man's Anfechtungen; it is the final conclusion of his belief in the reality of the forgiveness of sins.⁴²

⁴⁰Bornkamm, p. 100.

⁴¹Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), p. 163.

⁴²Bornkamm, p. 112.

CHAPTER IV

LUTHER'S SOCIAL ETHICS

In his chapter on "Luther's Reform"¹ Bainton deals with the subject of Luther's social ethics. As Bainton points out, Luther's Reformation affected very vitally the "entire relationship of the Church to society."² In his attack on the papacy, the clergy and monasticism, Luther wrecked the medieval pattern for Christianizing the world. Luther was then confronted with the problem of the Christianizing of the world. But, according to Bainton, "Luther had so insisted that man is incapable of contributing to his salvation as to make easy the inference that moral effect is pointless."³ Thus Luther, says Bainton, effected the devastation of Christian ethics, with his affirmation that "the higher reaches of the Christian ethic defy achievement."⁴

During these years Luther issued some of his most famous writings. In his 1520 tracts of The Freedom of a Christian Man, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Address to the Christian Nobles of the German Nation, Open Letter to Leo

¹Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, c.1952), pp. 36-56.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴Ibid.

X, and The Sermon on Good Works, Luther refutes the charges of his antagonists that he had despised good works. On the contrary, he declared that his whole life had been dedicated to preaching good works, but keeping them in their proper place in the Christian Gospel. Luther said that justification is the basis for all Christian ethics. There is no Christian ethics apart from Christian people; and only people justified by faith are Christian people.⁵

Justification of necessity precedes loves. One does not love until he has become godly and righteous. Love does not make us godly, but when one has become godly love is the result. Faith, the Spirit, and justification have love as effect and fruitage, and not as mere ornament and supplement. We maintain that faith alone justifies and saves.⁶

Good works, Christian ethics, Luther insisted, are not only dependent on faith but actually flow out of it. It can be described as faith in action. Luther expressed this thought repeatedly in his tract On Christian Liberty:

Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does make good works; evil works do not make a man wicked, but a wicked man does evil works; so that it is always necessary that the 'substance' or person itself be good before there can be any good works, and that good follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, 'A corrupt tree does not bring forth good fruit, a good tree does not bring forth evil fruit.'⁷

⁵D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe, edited by J. F. K. Rnaake et al. (Weimar: 1883), XVIII, ii. 166, 15 (Hereafter cited as W. A.)

⁶The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther, edited by John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1903-1910), II, 125.

⁷Works of Martin Luther, edited by H. E. Jacobs

Here lies the basis of Luther's ethical viewpoints as a whole. The man who does good works is the man who has been justified through faith.⁸ Justification and sanctification are for Luther two aspects of the same process and therefore mutually interdependent.⁹

According to Luther, then, a living faith always expresses itself in works of love. These works of love are completely spontaneous. Real faith "is a divine work in us. It changes us and make us to be born anew of God; it kills the old Adam, and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. O, it is a living, busy, active mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask, whether there are good works to do, but before the questions arises it has already done them, and is aways at the doing of them."¹⁰ Faith is always active in love. Luther found support for this view in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, chapter five, verse six: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision

(Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1915-1932), II, 211, 212.
(Hereafter cited as W. M. L.)

⁸Lennart Pinomas, Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology, translated by Walter J. Kukkonen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), p. 142.

⁹George W. Forell, Faith Active in Love (New York: The American Press, 1954), p. 86.

¹⁰W. M. L., VI, 451, 452.

is of any avail, but faith working through love." In Luther's words, "And although it be true, that only faith justifieth, yet he speaketh here of faith in another respect; that is to say, that, after it hath justified, it is not idle but occupied and exercised in working through love."¹¹

The Christian life is indeed a life of faith and love, but faith is the Christian's attitude towards God, and love is the Christian's attitude towards his fellow man which follows from faith. Faith in God through Christ is the necessary presupposition for love to our fellow man, and it is therefore the source of all ethics.¹²

It is clear then that Luther's doctrine of salvation does not lead to the conclusion that all moral effort is pointless, as Bainton affirms. On the contrary, faith cannot exist without love. Faith can never rest but must serve its neighbor in love. Of course Luther did not have any illusions in regard to the perfection that man could possibly achieve in this life. He did not believe that after their experience of justification men would immediately and completely be free from sin. On the contrary he always spoke of Christians being simul justus et peccator.

The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the

¹¹Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4, translated and edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), XXVI, 272 (Hereafter the American edition of Luther's Works is cited as L. W.)

¹²Forell, p. 89.

law and are not without sinful desires.¹³

But this again does not mean that sin is something static in the Christian and not in any way affected by the fact of justification and sanctification. On the contrary, there must be a development in the Christian life. "Where men have become Christians, he (the Old Adam) daily decreases until finally perishes," says Luther.¹⁴ But it is God who gives "the power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong."¹⁵

Commenting on Luther's ethical viewpoint as set forth in his treatise On the Freedom of the Christian Man, Bainton wrote in Here I Stand: "This is the word which ought to be placarded as the epitome of Luther's ethic, that a Christian must be a Christ to his neighbor."¹⁶ And again, "Where will one find a nobler restoration of ethics and where will one find anything more devastating to ethics?"¹⁷ Yet as one can see, in spite of these glowing comments on Luther's ethics,

¹³ Martin Luther Lectures on Romans, translated and edited by Wilhelm Pauck, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), XV, 208.

¹⁴ Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, edited by F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 751.

¹⁶ Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), p. 231.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Bainton insists that Luther's doctrine effected the devastation of Christian ethics.

Following this line of thought, Bainton concludes that Luther had a pessimistic view of society, in the manner of the Anabaptists and of Machiavelli.¹⁸ Therefore, Luther, he says, allowed only a resigned participation in the world.¹⁹

Luther's writings would seem to contradict this viewpoint. Few Christians have grasped the glory and the fullness of the Christian life as Luther did. A Christian cannot live a full life in isolation from other Christians, Luther said: "You don't help your neighbor by locking yourself up in a monastery."²⁰ A good work must benefit our fellow man and society, otherwise the work is no good, it is worthless. Good works are socially useful, they are works done within the community and for the community."²¹ Luther frequently said: "For God does not need our efforts but our neighbor has need of our deeds."²² But Luther did not believe that this Christian service which is the result of the Christian faith should only be rendered to individuals; on the contrary the Christian must serve the world,

¹⁸Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, p. 233.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 114.

²⁰W. A., X. III. 344.

²¹W. A., X. 1 (2). 4, 5, 7, 17.

²²W. A., XXV. 394. 15.

the same world which is the kingdom of the devil.²³ However, the response of the neighbor, be he an individual or the member of a collectivity, can in no way modify the concept of Christian service.²⁴

To many, Luther's view of the world in general and thus also of society may seem pessimistic when in truth it is nothing but a sober and objective reflection of reality. Thus Luther advocated no remedies for the world's ills except those of reality. But certainly Luther did not propose that the world should drift and fend for itself.²⁵

In his treatise on Temporal Authority of 1523, Luther speaks of two kingdoms, one spiritual and the other temporal, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.²⁶ To the kingdom of God belong all who believe in Christ and live under Him, for Christ is King and Lord in the kingdom of God. Of them Luther says:

These people need no temporal law or sword. If all the world were composed of real Christians, that is, true believers, there would be no need for or benefits from prince, king, lord, sword, or law. They would serve no purpose, since Christians have in their heart the Holy Spirit, who both teaches and makes them to do in-

²³W. A., XXV. 222. 44.

²⁴W. A., XVI. 322. 8.

²⁵Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, translated by Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 260.

²⁶L. W., XLV, 81-129.

justice to no one, to love everyone, and to suffer injustice and even death willingly and cheerfully at the hands of anyone.²⁷

But beside His spiritual kingdom God has established another, the kingdom of temporal authority. This exists because evil exists. God has set the evil world under the sword that it may be restrained, as men put bonds and shackles on a wild beast, and has instituted authorities to check violence and injustice, and to maintain peace and order. This sin is the reason for setting-up of earthly government. Luther expresses the idea by saying it was set up "against the devil."²⁸

It should be noted that it is God Himself who rules in both these realms. To speak of either is thus to speak of a kingdom which is God's, and it is with Him that we deal in matters spiritual and temporal. God is in command in every sphere of life. It is with Him that we have to do both the heavenly and earthly kingdom, in both spiritual and temporal rule. God meets us in both, though in different ways--in the spiritual with the Gospel and in the temporal with the Law. But His will is made manifest to us in both Law and Gospel. The two kingdoms exist side by side, both instituted by God but for different reasons. His purpose in the spiritual kingdom is to make men Christian and to sanctify them in Christ. In the temporal realms, His purpose is to

²⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

sustain justice and peace in the world, and His characteristic instrument here is power, the use of the sword.²⁹

Luther insists that it is very important not to confuse the two kingdoms. Each must be true to its divine mission. Through the Gospel, God rules His spiritual kingdom, forgives sins, justifies and sanctifies. But he does not abolish the earthly kingdom: in its domain it is to rule with power and the sword.³⁰

But Luther explains that a point of contact exists between the secular realm and the spiritual realm in the person of the individual Christian. In this point the spiritual realm penetrates the secular, without, however, abolishing it. The Gospel itself cannot be used to rule the world, because it is the Gospel and demands a voluntary response from men. It would cease to be Gospel if it became a new Law. But through the believer, who is related to Christ through the Gospel, and who is at the same time a member of the temporal realm, the faith active in love penetrates the social order.³¹ And it is only for the sake of the Christians that God maintains the world.

We as Christians ought to know that the entire temporal rule and order, stands and remains as long as it does only because of God's order and commandments and the prayer of the Christians. These are the two pillars

²⁹Ibid., pp. 91-104.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 91, 92.

³¹Ibid., W. A., XLV. 212. 21.

which uphold the entire world.³²

Certainly then God wants the Christian to take his full responsibility in the world. He may become a leader in secular affairs and even bear the sword.³³ Through the Christian in the world his faith active in love influences the social structure.³⁴ "If there were no Christians on this earth," says Luther, "no city or country would enjoy peace; indeed in one day everything would be destroyed by the devil."³⁵

This explains Luther's personal attitude towards the social order, says Forell.³⁶ Luther did not believe that the Christian Gospel could become directly useful to society. Therefore, says Luther, "it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people, for the wicked always outnumber the good."³⁷ In order to transform society, Christ uses the individual Christian who lives a life of faith in this world. Through him, says Forell, "the ethical principle of Luther's

³²W. A., XLV. 535. 3.

³³W. A., XIV. 273. 6.

³⁴W. A., XLVII. 246. 37-40.

³⁵W. A., XLV. 532. 11.

³⁶Forell, p. 154.

³⁷L. W., XLV, p. 91.

social ethics penetrates the practical principle, and the insights of the Christian faith become relevant to society."³⁸

Luther, says Forell, "by emphasizing the theoretical separation of the two realms, avoided the identification of the Gospel with any specific program of social organization."³⁹ In conclusion, says Forell:

Far from making Christianity irrelevant to the social order, Luther made it possible to make the absolute Christian truth ever available to society, not by means of an hierarchical organization or a legal interpretation of the Gospel, but by means of the Christian saint, i.e. the sinner saved by grace, active in the world as the willing tool of God's preserving and saving purpose.⁴⁰

Thus as shown by Forell, Luther's writings seem to point to a very different view of society and of the Christian's role in it than what Bainton presents. Certainly there is no similarity whatever between Luther's view and that of the Anabaptists. His position was certainly a lot more than simply a resigned participation in the temporal realm.

³⁸Forell, p. 154.

³⁹Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁰Ibid.

LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF THE STATE

Properly speakin Luther did not have a doctrine of the state. Luther's statements on political questions are more in the nature of spiritual counsel, the application of the Word of God to the activities of men engaged in civic life.

Most of Luther's views on the state, on government and on temporal power are expressed in his treatises: An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility, Temporal Authority: To what Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523, Whether Soldiers Can be Saved, 1526, and his writings against the "Fanatics" and concerning the Peasant War of 1525.

In these writings Luther propounded his views on political issues in the framework of the doctrine of the two realms, or the two kingdoms, or "regimes." These terms are used to translate Luther's regiment. Since this doctrine has been outlined in the preceding chapter it will not be necessary to go into it further. Thus only what needs to be explained in relation to Bainton's presentation in The Reformation of the XVith Century will be presented here.

Bainton affirms that Luther "was gradually brought by the jurists to the conclusion that even the highest magistrate, the emperor himself, was not absolute but only a constitutional monarch who, if he violated the constitu-

tion, could be brought to book, resisted, and deposed by princes of the realm."¹ "This," says Bainton, "was the doctrine of the right of the lower magistrate to protect the people against the tyranny of the higher."²

In his treatises of 1520 and 1523 Luther affirmed that the temporal power of the sword was in the world by God's will and ordinance.³ He also affirms that all citizens in a state are subject to the authority of the government, although Christians do not need the restraining power of the sword.⁴ The natural conclusion of Luther's view is that every person, no matter what his calling or position in society be, owes absolute obedience to the rulers.

In 1522 he wrote An Earnest Exhortation for all Christians, Warning Them Against Insurrection and Rebellion.

Here he said: "No insurrection is ever right, no matter how right the cause it seeks to promote. It always results in more damage than improvement."⁵ As Brunner says:

¹Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, c.1952), pp. 235-236.

²Ibid., p. 236.

³Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," Luther's Works: The Christian in Society II, edited by Walther I. Brandt and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), XLV, 85. (Hereafter the American edition of Luther's Works will be cited as L. W.)

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Ibid., p. 63.

"Luther knows no possibility of limiting the sword from below by force."⁶ Luther constantly emphasizes that no prince, regardless of his rank may take up arms against those that God has placed over him. In case the emperor or an overlord should attack a Christian prince, he must not resist him by force of arms. He may protest against such injustice, but if his protest goes unheeded, then the Christian must endure all abuse for the Lord's sake.⁷ Luther grants the right to revolt on only one case: that the prince, king or lord should lose his mind.⁸ If the rulers are tyrannical--and Luther is convinced that they usually are--the punishment rests in God's hand.⁹

The real test of Luther's political convictions came in 1529, when the German lands began to be divided into two armed camps.¹⁰ The governments of Saxone and Hesse, fearing an attack by Charles V, came to Luther with the question: in the event the Emperor attempted to suppress Protestantism by force of arms, would it be right for the princes to re-

⁶Peter Brunner, "Luther and the World of Twentieth Century," Luther in the Twentieth Century, Martin Luther Lectures (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1961), p. 35.

⁷L. W., XLV, 126.

⁸Works of Martin Luther, edited by H. E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1915-1932), V, 44, 45. (Hereafter cited as W. M. L.)

⁹Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰Ernest G. Schwiebert, "The Medieval Pattern in Luther's

sist him? The lawyers of the two courts had already given their answer in the form of an emphatic "yes." Yet Martin Luther first on December 25, 1529,¹¹ and then again on March 6, 1530,¹² on the basis of Scripture could only answer in the negative.

In conclusion, Luther preached the doctrine of submission. The supreme law was complete obedience to the higher authorities, in all matters except in religious conviction, and then this disobedience would have to be in the form of passive resistance, a suffering in silence for the Lord's sake. Waring says that Luther made a distinction between the Christian and the citizen. "As a citizen, Luther," says Waring, "agreed with the jurists that resistance against the emperor was admissable. But as a theologian he could not advise any Christian to resist."¹³

Thus in the light of Luther's writings, Bainton's statement cannot be substantiated.

Secondly, Bainton affirms that Luther's views on Church

views of the State," Church History, XII (June 1943), 19.

¹¹D. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel, D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kristische Gesamtausgabe, edited by Konrad Burdach et al (Weimar, 1930), V, 208-211.

¹²Preserved Smith, Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1918), II, 518.

¹³Luther Hess Waring, The Political Theories of Martin Luther (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), pp. 144-161.

and state gave way to the state church and caesaropapism.¹⁴ He also affirms that the Visitation conducted in 1527 is the beginning of the state church.

In the first place, it must be remembered that within the frame work of the two kingdoms, Luther affirmed that the state, that is authority, is not Christian and has nothing to do with the church. It is secular, a realm of power, established by God for the suppression of evil.¹⁵ Properly speaking then, there is no Christian authority, but only Christians in authority. A Mohammedan could be a good ruler and could expect obedience of his subjects.¹⁶ If all men were true Christians there would be no need for government or force for it could do them no good, since they would have the Holy Ghost in their hearts who teaches them and effects it so that they do no one any wrong, love everyone, suffer wrong from someone else gladly, even death. Where sheer wrong is suffered and right alone is done there is no dispute, wrangle, judgment, magistrate, punishment, law or sword necessary.¹⁷ At the same time Luther affirmed that the Church has the mission of exhortation, warning and

¹⁴Bainton, Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, pp. 54, 234.

¹⁵D. Martin Luthers Werke, kristische Gesamtausgabe, edited by J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar, 1883), XVIII, 709. 21 (Hereafter cited as W. A.)

¹⁶W. A., XVIII. 398.

¹⁷W. A., X. 1. 454.

even rebuking the princes when they interfere with its own freedom to preach and to live as a church.¹⁸ The preacher, as the proclaimer of the divine will must proclaim the law as well as the Gospel. To be true to his calling he must always make clear to the Obrigkeit what the content of the law is.¹⁹

In the second place, since Luther was interested above everything else in the preservation of the Gospel, in the preaching of the "pure doctrine", he permitted--and even encouraged--the ruler to take a hand in religious matters during serious crises. But Luther also emphasized that the right of the prince to act is a common right (gemeyn), belonging to the Christian body, and the authorities act as Christians and deserve "honor and thanks" for bringing the others up.²⁰ In addition Luther always insisted that the Visitation and the powers granted to the princes under the Visitation Articles were only temporary until an improved situation or better plan evolved. In 1539 Luther advised the visitors not to be too concerned with the desires of the prince, since he was only a Notbischof, an emergency bishop, which meant that he need be called on only in time of need.²¹

¹⁸W. M. L., IV, 297.

¹⁹Edgar M. Carlson, "Luther's Conception of Government," Church History, XV (December 1946), p. 267.

²⁰W. A., VI. 411-427.

²¹Dr. Martin Luthers sämtliche Werke, edited by J.

What Bainton and others frequently omit, is that only due to the necessities and circumstances of the time, did Luther look upon the princes as bishops. At first, Luther thought that the worst abuses of the Roman Church could be corrected simply with the preaching of the Word of God, and true Christians would arise who would gradually form new congregations and proceed to build a new order.²² Luther envisioned a kind of confessional church, a free voluntary church. But almost immediately a problem arose which made impossible practical development along the preferred line. The leadership and the ability of the common church member were not up to the requirements. The people were not ready for a confessional church.²³ Therefore Luther turned to the princes for help and leadership. Waring says that "Luther tried personally to keep church and state separate but the developments and needs of the time brought the church under the care of the princes. As a permanent institution, state churchism was not in harmony with Luther's fundamental doctrines."²⁴ Ritter says, "it would be unfair

Plochmann and J. K. Irmischer (Second edition; Erlangen: Carl Heyder, 1826-1857), LV, 223.

²²Wilhelm Pauck, The Heritage of the Reformation (Second edition; Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961) p. 110.

²³W. A., XII. 693.

²⁴Waring, pp. 253, 254.

to say that Luther is responsible for the development of the State Church."²⁵ Schwiebert says that "to claim that Luther's tracts of 1528 were responsible for the origin of the German state church merely confesses lack of background."²⁶ Therefore says Lewis Spitz, "on the question as to whether the state-controlled church as it developed historically, especially after his death, was in accordance with Luther's wishes, it is possible to say that Luther was clear, consistent, and articulate in demanding that there be no mixture of the spiritual and secular realms."²⁷

In summation, says Spitz:

It seems difficult to see how in any genuine sense Luther can be called the "father of state-ecclesiasticism." To make him such is an example of what Whitehead has called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The momentum of the political ascendancy of the princes had carried them into the saddle even before Luther's reforming activities began. Luther clarified the distinction necessary between church and state and wished always to make this distinction effective in practice. That he failed was largely due to the force of political and social circumstances beyond his control, just as it might be argued that historical circumstances such as the republican environment in which Calvin worked among the Swiss and the opposition of state in France, the Netherlands, and Scotland influenced the development of a presbyterian and congregational polity

²⁵Gerhard Ritter, Luther: His Life and Work, translated by John Smith (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, c.1963), p. 184.

²⁶Ernest G. Schwiebert, "The Medieval Pattern in Luther's Views of the State," Church History, XII (June 1943), 19.

²⁷Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and his Concept of the Prince as Notbschof," Church History, XXII (June 1953), 134.

in part of the Calvinist tradition. The culus regio, eius religio was not his invention. Moreover, there is some truth to Schm's assertion that it was not Luther but the "small faith of his contemporaries" which turned the church over to the princes.²⁸

²⁸Ibid., pp. 134, 135.

CONCLUSIONS

Bainton's The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century is a remarkable book. In the span of only two hundred and sixty pages it presents an entire religious panorama with its economic, political and sociological implications. It is quite apparent that Roland Bainton is a historian of first order. His command of the subject at hand is astounding. He has the rare quality of being able to present history in a lucid and interesting fashion. He has a flair for the dramatic statements, and perhaps this is the reason why at times he falls into the pitfall of overstating his case. Naturally in a work of this size he cannot go into detail ever each of the themes he develops, and this is also why the book at times gives the reader a wrong impression. This is particularly true when Bainton tries to simplify the theology of man such as Luther. Although Bainton has studied Luther as few men have, nevertheless, his treatment in this book of Luther's theology is often superficial. It would have been possible to explore many more themes in Luther's thought that Bainton either leaves incomplete or totally misrepresents. This paper has been an attempt to give only a quick insight into some of the subjects in Luther's thought that Bainton seems to misrepresent.

It is possible that the author of this evaluation has not understood Bainton correctly or does not understand the

depth of Luther's concepts. Nevertheless it is the writer's opinion that Bainton has presented a picture of Luther that does not do full justice to his own emphasis on what God revealed to him and did through him. Therefore, as this paper has tried to show, Luther's faith, his concept of God, his view on the authority of Scriptures, his social ethics and his views on church and state lack the depth and the theological understanding shown in Luther's writings.

In the same manner that a great number of people owe Roland Bainton the debt of having led them to Luther, this student of Bainton owes him the debt of having been led into a greater understanding and appreciation of Luther's thought and work.

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