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The Reformation and Nationalism

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From Constantine to Charlemagne to Charles V the relationship of Church and State determined the course of history and affected every aspect of Western civilization. The interplay between this problem and the emerging nationalism of the Middle Ages provides a most interesting phase in the study of the Protestant Reformation.

The medieval man did not think of Church and State in the modern conception of those two institutions and their relationship. It never occurred to him that Church and State might be viewed as separate entities. He regarded them as indissoluble. As there was but one Head, Christ, so there could be but one body. Of course, within the Christian world there were two points of emphasis. The one was the Church, whose concern was spiritual; the other was the State, whose duty it was to restrain and punish evil and to preserve law and order. These two powers were represented, respectively, by the Pope and hierarchy and by the emperor, kings, and princes. "If the question had been raised whether Pope or emperor was at the top, the answer would have been that the emperor was lord over men's bodies, but that the Pope was sovereign of their souls. Therefore, obviously, for souls are more important than bodies, the highest of all was the Pope." [1] The alliance between Church and State was so firmly welded that the Church was not *a* state, but *the* State. The State was merely the "bailiff of the Church," the secular side of the universal ecclesiastical body. "If you stressed the one, it became the Church; if you stressed the other, it became the State." [2] This fact is evidenced by the very name, "Holy Roman Empire," which for

1) Chaplin, *The Effects of the Reformation*, p. 88.
2) E. G. Schwiebert, in *The Cresset*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 18.

long centuries held sway over the life and faith of Western Christendom. Factors were at work, however, which were to reach their apogee in the time of the Reformation, reducing the empire to a hollow shell and leaving it but a shadow of its former glory. Pre-eminent among these factors was the rise of nationalism.

Under the Papacy, Europe had formed, as it were, one family, united by the bond of a common religion, fused into a single spiritual community, and subjected to a uniform discipline. It was inevitable, however, that in the course of time this unity should be dissolved and its component elements emerge. This process was heralded by the gradual development of the national languages after the Dark Ages and the creation of vernacular literature. The enfranchisement of the towns, which dates from the eleventh century, and the growth of their power; the rise of commerce; the Crusades, which heightened the national consciousness and distinctions between nations; the conception of monarchy in its European form, which evolved already in the twelfth century — these point the way to the advent of a new order of things.

The pre-Reformation age was an age of widening horizons, and this had its profound political effects. Murray points out that the Papacy had been a Mediterranean power and the Crusades had been Mediterranean wars.[3] The Crusades, however, had revived Western trade and commerce, and these, in turn, led to travel, exploration, and discovery. The journeys of Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville, and Vasco da Gama excited Europe, and the perfection of the compass by the beginning of the fourteenth century ushered in a great era of exploration. Columbus' discovery of America, 1492, and Magellan's round-the-world voyage, 1519—22, revolutionized man's geographical concepts and gave him a totally different, and infinitely broader, picture of the world in which he lived.

The new contact with the outside world transformed the economic, social, and cultural life of the age. The rapid increase in the population of the cities gave rise to a new social class, the *bourgeoisie*. At the same time, new inventions marked a turning point in the history of civilization. Among these were the compass, already alluded to; the manufacture of paper, borrowed from the Mohammedans; the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg, which was to play such a decisive role in the Reformation; and the invention of gunpowder, which revolutionized the art of warfare and gave the deathblow to feudalism.

Men were beginning to see that the old world was gone, the

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3) Murray, *The Political Consequences of the Reformation*, p. XI.

old order ended. The medieval notions of a world empire were completely upset. "The moment men completely realized there was another continent where the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire had never flown, that moment the whole structure of medievalism was undermined." (Murray.) "After 1492 the nationalities of such lands as England, France, and Spain were unconsciously forming themselves. . . . National sentiment was waxing. . . . Ecclesiastical authority was breaking down, and as there must be authority, secular was taking the place of ecclesiastical. The national State steps proudly on the stage." [4]

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For the rise of the national State, however, three concepts had to be overthrown: the Pope as supreme arbiter of all Christians; the lordship of the emperor over all the European territorial rulers; and the feudalistic system.

According to the medieval concept, the Pope's jurisdiction included control over all church property, which the secular rulers could not regulate or tax; over the persons of the clergy, who were accountable only to Rome and could not be tried before any secular court; and even over the temporal rulers themselves, over whom the Pope constantly held the spiritual whip.

The idea that the emperor was superior to all other secular princes prevailed for many centuries, even though his authority, for all practical purposes, had never existed in fact. Thus we find Dante, in his *De Monarchia,* praising the empire as a symbol of world dominion, giving peace and order to all men.

Under the feudal system, the greater part of the territory in each state was given as fiefs to certain nobles; these, in turn, divided their holdings into lesser fiefs, and so on indefinitely. Each fief holder owed homage to his immediate superior. Moreover, the feudal lords had the right to maintain their own militia and to administer justice within their own domain. Feudalism, accordingly, was a condition of political atomism. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries feudalism steadily declined, although the feudal nobility retained collectively many of the rights which they had given up individually; and in the exercise of these collective rights we have the germ of the parliamentary system.

When Boniface VIIII (1294—1303) became Pope, he inherited the power and influence which Gregory VII and Innocent III had bequeathed the papal office. Boniface, however, disregarded the rising spirit of nationalism, with its attendant impatience of papal domination, and arrogantly set forth the claims of supremacy for the Holy See in two drastic bulls, *Clericis Laicos* (1296) and *Unam*

4) *Op. cit.*, p. XVIII.

Sanctam (1302). He thus gave rise to a conflict which led eventually to the Babylonian Captivity (1305—76) and seriously damaged the prestige of the Papacy.

A widespread desire for reform began to arise, and this went hand in hand with the nascent spirit of nationalism. Marsilius of Padua, in 1324, wrote his *Defensor Pacis*, wherein he gave voice to the ideal that the Church should limit herself to her proper sphere, namely, the spiritual, and that it should not meddle with the affairs of the State. The government of the Church is a part of the government of the State. The State, moreover, should rest on the sovereignty of the common people, acting through their chosen representatives, functioning under an elected king, and guided by an accepted constitution. Marsilius is a pioneer in his advocacy of religious individualism, political liberalism, and modern democracy. His treatise presents a theory of Church and State "in many respects out of all relation to the current of medieval thought, and accords with the full spirit of the Reformation. . . . In general, his whole attitude toward the historical development and dogmatic supports of the Roman Church is precisely that which was assumed by the Protestants after the Lutheran revolt." [5]

William of Occam (1280—1349), whose theology had a strong influence on Luther, openly rejected the infallibility of the Pope and declared that in all secular matters Pope and Church are subordinate to the State. He denied the validity of the Constantinian Donation and pulled the props from under the theory of papal supremacy over the State. Occam, too, presents the idea of representative government. The idea of the sovereign State is carried forward by Nicholas of Cusa and by Machiavelli, to whom the State was an end in itself.

The Renaissance marked a "new birth of the human spirit," which had its influence on every phase of contemporary life. "The general ferment and the shaking of men's traditional beliefs extended to all departments of human thought, even to the fundamental questions of society itself. Freedom was the dominant intellectual note of the age." [6] The Renaissance was, then, also a potent factor in stimulating patriotism and the feeling of nationalism. This new spirit found expression in the evolution of the national states, with strong centralized governments. Feudalism was breaking down, papal authority was declining, and royal absolutism was on the upgrade. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the four great Christian powers in Europe were England, France, Spain, which had strong national governments, and Ger-

5) Dunning, *Political Theories Ancient and Medieval*, pp. 238, 244.
6) Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

many, where a tendency toward national unity was in evidence. Italy had no political unity or national government.

England was the first country to become a compact nationality. The monarchy had become strong at the expense of the feudal lords, and this factor curbed the power of the Pope. Since the time of William the Conqueror, the king had been the supreme head of the English Church, although the Pope was recognized as the head of the Church of England "insofar as the law of the land permitted." Edward I successfully resisted the bull *Clericis Laicos*. The parliamentary system had come into being with the creation of the House of Commons in 1265, and the spirit of national autonomy and of independence from alien control was dominant. "There was at the time the feeling that England should not be at the beck and call of any State, Italian or other." [7]

In France the power of the king had been strengthened during the Hundred Years' War (1338—1453). The French nobility had become increasingly important, and the trend toward centralized government was unchecked. The French court was unwilling to brook interference on the part of the Holy See, and the conflict between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair had far-reaching effects in the furtherance of French nationalism.

Germany was divided into about 300 virtually independent states, but the right to elect the king (who, since 926 also had the right to the crown of Italy and the imperial title) was vested in seven leading princes, called electors. Maximilian I (1493—1519) put forth strong efforts to consolidate Germany, but he was balked by the electors in his bid for greater authority. At the same time, Germany was seething with discontent under the Roman yoke, and the national gorge rose at the vast sums of money which were taken out of Germany for the replenishment of the treasury at Rome. The time was not far off when the German people would assert their freedom from alien ecclesiastical domination.

From the time of Boniface VIII, the reaction against the Papacy began to take definite and effective shape through the upsurge of the nationalistic spirit. "In this contest of the fourteenth century, 'monarchy' was the watchword of the adversaries of the Papacy, the symbol of the new generation that was breaking loose from the dominant ideas of the Middle Ages. In France it was the rights of the throne and its independence of the Church which were maintained by the jurists and by the schoolmen, as John of Paris and Occam, who came to their help. In Germany it was the old imperial rights as defined in the civil law, and as preceding even the existence of the Church, that were defended. . . . National rivalries and the ambitions of princes were everywhere

7) *Op. cit.*, p. xviii.

prominent. The sovereigns of Europe were endeavoring to augment their power at the expense of the Church, especially by taking into their hand ecclesiastical appointment. It was during the fifteenth century that the European monarchies were acquiring a firm organization." [8] This transition of the medieval feudal states into dynastic monarchies provided the framework for a national, patriotic feeling.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, therefore, as Fisher aptly points out, two salient factors had emerged: 1. the development and consolidation of the nations as separate entities, each with its own language, culture, institutions, and laws, and moved by a national spirit that resented foreign ecclesiastical control; 2. the secularizing of the Papacy; the Popes had prostituted their spiritual function and dignity for the sake of personal power and territorial aggrandizement. "Everywhere, but especially throughout the north of Europe, the breach of feeling and sympathy went on widening; so that all Germany, England, Scotland, and other countries started, like giants out of their sleep, at the first blast of Luther's trumpet." [9]

* * *

In Germany, the age witnessed the emerging sovereignty of the territorial princes. Although Germany was divided into many small states, there was a strong desire for national unity, and the spirit of German nationalism became a force seriously to be reckoned with, particularly by the Papacy. The princes controlled the churches in their respective territories. Despite mutual antagonism between the Popes and the princes that had arisen from the medieval investiture struggles, the Papacy, beginning at the Council of Constance, negotiated concordats with the territorial rulers. Thus the Papacy recognized the existence of national and territorial churches, while at the same time it aimed thereby to keep the clergy and laity under control. "The immediate beneficiaries of this policy were the princes, who, on the one hand, cleverly loosened the clergy from papal control only so far that it could not be used by the Papacy against them and, on the other hand, sufficiently recognized the papal authority that they could rely on it for support in their efforts to dominate the clergy." [10] The incipient trend toward nationalism was also expressed in the "Grievances of the German Nation," in which the princes, during the second half of the fifteenth century, complained against the excessive financial contributions exacted of their lands by the Papacy.

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8) Fisher, *The Reformation*, pp. 33, 36.
9) Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
10) Pauck, in *Environmental Factors of Christian History*, p. 291.

"The great princes of the empire present a double aspect, varying with the point of view from which they are regarded. To Charles they were collectively an oligarchy which threatened to destroy the monarchical principle embodied in the person of the emperor; but individually and from the point of view of their own dominions they represented a monarchical principle similar to that which gave unity and strength to France, to England, and to Spain, a territorial principle more youthful and more vigorous than the effete *Kaisertum*." [11] It is obvious, then, that Luther did not, as is sometimes charged, create the power of the German princes. They were already independent and sovereign lords of their own domains, powerful enough even to withstand the Emperor. In fact, the German territorial princes had been steadily gaining the upper hand, with the emperor reduced to comparative impotence. They were, moreover, deeply concerned with the preservation of internal order and the resistance of ecclesiastical abuses. It was only natural, then, that the princes should have concerned themselves with matters of church reform even before and apart from the great reformatory movement of Luther. "The course of the German reformation in the field of politics was nothing unusual in the light of the previous political history of the German princes." [12]

The nationalistic spirit in Germany was further augmented by the Humanism of the Renaissance. While Humanism everywhere gave rise to patriotic fervor, in Germany it took the form of a new awareness of, and pride in, the history of the German *Volk*. The incentive for this trend was provided, interestingly enough, by Aeneas Silvius (later Pope Pius II) in the midfifteenth century, who sought to arouse the Germans to a sense of their ancient glory and of their cultural heritage, in order thereby to spur the Germans on to valorous deeds in a crusade against the Turks. Rising to the challenge, the German Humanists played upon the theme of German cultural unity. "As they contrasted it with the actual particularistic divisiveness of their country, they pleaded for a restoration of the empire on a national basis. . . . All of them, each in his own way, glorified the strength of the German historical character and tried to prove the justice of the German claim for leadership in the world. They pointed to the scholarship of the German universities, which had newly come into being. They praised the wealth and the civilization of the German cities. And they derived an especially proud satisfaction from the fact that the Germans had given to the world the art of printing." [13]

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11) Pollard, in *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. 2, pp. 150, 151.
12) Schwiebert, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
13) Pauck, *op. cit.*, pp. 294, 295.

This was the era, says Bryce, of the first conscious feeling of German nationality as distinct from the imperial.

Ulrich von Hutten inveighed against the Roman influence in Germany and sought to effect the unification of imperial Germany. Hutten symbolizes the long-felt desire for ecclesiastical and political reform, coupled with an intense *Nationalbewusstsein*. He waged a "personal war" against Rome, and his writings did much to arouse the spirit of German nationalism. The relationship of Luther and Hutten is a very interesting chapter in Reformation history. The claim that Luther's reformatory course was influenced decisively by Hutten is, of course, a gross misstatement of fact. At the same time, there was a beneficial intercourse between the two men: Hutten's publication of Laurentius Valla's *exposé* of the Constantinian Donation forgery profoundly impressed Luther and helped to convince him that the Pope was the Antichrist; Hutten's *Vadiscus seu Trios Romana* awakened Luther's national consciousness. Hutten, on the other hand, was greatly influenced by Luther. The great Reformer not only excited his German patriotism, but he even made him "talk like a pious Lutheran" (Boehmer), although he never fully understood Luther's religious concern. To Hutten, Franz von Sickingen, and their followers Luther's cause and the nation's were the same.

Hence, Luther's prolific writings in German, especially his German translation of the Bible, were destined to play a leading role in the furtherance of German nationalism. The excitement of the Reformation had stirred up a feeling of national self-consciousness — a trend greatly augmented by this new German literature. Luther's German Bible, in particular, was an important means of welding the German people together into a feeling of spiritual and cultural — albeit not political — unity.

* * *

When Luther, appearing on the world scene in 1517, was catapulted into the position of a German national hero — and, at the same time, the *bête noire* of the Church of Rome — no one was more surprised than he. It was never his intention to become a champion of nationalism or to become "the father of his country," as Crotus Rubianus called him. His patriotism was always subordinate to his religious interests. His Reformation had its rootage, not in any national consciousness or any political motivation, but solely in his revulsion against the intolerable corruption of the Roman Catholic system.

The association of Luther with the cause of German nationalism is rather traceable to the fact that the Catholic opposition which he encountered from the very outset of his reformatory movement forced him to identify his cause with that of the German

people. Luther voiced the common grievances of the German people in his protest against the sale of indulgences, and his spiritual reform movement became interlaced with the German nationalist program. Thus Luther became, willy-nilly, the champion of the popular movement in opposition to the encroachments of the Roman Church on the German social and political order.

"As a good German he resented and revolted against the Italian contempt for Germany and German civilization, and his Germanism undoubtedly contributed to open the hearts of his countrymen for his prophetic message and mission. In hurling defiance at Rome in the presence of the emperor and the assembled magnates at Worms, he gave resounding expression to the national spirit as well as to the imperative voice of conscience and religious conviction. From this point of view, the revolt against the papal authority was the revival, in altered circumstances, of the old conflict between the empire and the Papacy. Worms was the counterfoil to Canossa, and his revision of Canossa, in vindication of the national spirit against the arrogant spirit of a corrupt and oppressive Ultramontanism, has enthroned the daring rebel in the love and veneration of millions of his fellow countrymen from that day to this." [14] It is, of course, a gross distortion of fact to say, as Pollard does,[15] that Luther stood *solely* for national opposition to Rome.

In his great treatise of 1520, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation,* Luther denounces the papal interference with German rights and liberties and excoriates the Roman Church for its manifold evils and widespread corruption.

On account of these evils the Christian nobility should rise up against the Pope as a common enemy and destroyer of Christianity. . . . They should ordain, order, and decree that henceforth no benefice shall be drawn away to Rome. . . . It should be decreed by imperial law that no episcopal cloak and no confirmation of any appointment shall, for the future, be obtained from Rome. . . . Be it decreed that no temporal matter shall be submitted to Rome, but that all shall be left to the jurisdiction of the civil authorities. . . . Besides this, we should prohibit in all foundations the grievous extortion of the ecclesiastical judges. They should only be allowed to consider matters concerning faith and good morals; but matters concerning money, property, life, and honor should be left to the temporal judges. . . . The Pope should have no power over the emperor, except to anoint and crown him at the altar, as a bishop crowns a king; nor should that devilish pomp be allowed that the emperor should kiss the Pope's feet. . . . Much less should he pay homage to the Pope or swear allegiance, as is impudently demanded by the Popes, as if they had a right to it. . . . It is not meet that the Pope should

14) MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation,* Vol. IV, pp. 330, 331.
15) Pollard, in "Cambridge Modern History Series," Vol. II.

exalt himself above temporal authority, except in spiritual matters. . . . In other matters, he should be subject to it, according to the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. 13) and St. Peter (1 Peter 3). . . . It is absurd and puerile for the Pope to boast for such blind, foolish reasons, in his decretal *Pastoralis*, that he is the rightful heir to the empire if the throne be vacant. Who gave it to him? . . . The Pope wishes to rule an empire, and to remain a Pope. . . . We have the name, title, and arms of the empire, but the Pope has its treasure, authority, law, and freedom. Thus, whilst the Pope eats the kernel, he leaves us the empty shell to play with. . . . Let the Pope give up Rome, all he has of the empire, and free our country from his unbearable taxes and robberies, and give back to us our liberty, authority, wealth, honor, body, and soul. . . . Let the German emperor be a true, free emperor, and let his authority or his sword not be overborne by these blind pretenses of the Pope's sycophants, as if they were to be exceptions and be above the temporal sword in all things.[16]

In this clarion call for national independence, Luther was acclaimed as the champion of the cause of a united Germany with a government by the Germans and for the Germans. His plea has rightly been hailed as one of the strongest in the history of the world for the government of a national group by its own rulers, without foreign ecclesiastical dictation. While the result was not a consolidated German nation, the foreign yoke nevertheless was cast off, and the power of the territorial princes became stronger and more centralized. If Charles V had been of a different caliber, or if Elector Frederick the Wise had taken the imperial crown when offered to him in 1519, it is quite likely that the German people would have become a united, sovereign nation, according to Luther's pattern. As a matter of fact, however, despite Luther's appeal and the popular will of the German people, German unification had to wait three centuries before it became a reality.

* * *

Luther was no political theorist, and whatever political theory he espoused he took from the New Testament. It was of small concern to Luther under what form of government one might live; it is the Christian's duty, according to Romans 13, to obey the powers ordained by God to rule over him. He writes: "Obedience is to be rendered for God's sake, for the ruler is God's representative. However they may tax or exact, we must obey and endure patiently."

Luther broke with the Church-State conception that prevailed in his day by asserting the independence of the temporal power from the domination of the Church. The civil government is not beholden to the spiritual authority for its existence or its functions. Each of the two powers must keep within its own sphere. In his

16) Luther, *Address to the Christian Nobility.*

tract *Secular Authority* (1523) he shows, on the basis of God's Word, that the State exists by divine right and that it forms a part of God's economy for the human race. Civil authority has been made necessary because of sin; it is, nonetheless, an ordinance of God. "It belongs to the estate of fatherhood," and therefore Luther enjoins obedience to the State as belonging to the requirements of the Fourth Commandment.

Although Luther advocated no specific form of government, he held that all government should exist for the welfare of the governed. True, he did not envision democracy according to the modern American concept, and he favored the restriction of the right of franchise to those who were trained and qualified to have a voice in the administration of government. Like Calvin, his ideal of government was more aristocratic than purely democratic. He never overcame his fear of "Master Omnes." It must always be borne in mind, however, that Luther was a theologian, not a politician or statesman, and that his paramount concern was not the structure of civil government, but the maintenance of the Scriptural doctrine regarding the nature and authority of the State.

Yet, at the same time, in the work and progress of the Reformation important strides toward the ultimate realization of democracy were made. Indeed, the later development of democracy depends largely upon two outstanding accomplishments of the Reformation: (1) The destruction of the universal power of the medieval Church. No form of democracy could have emerged at all if the medieval system of absolute universal control by the institution of the Church had not been destroyed. This destruction of the all-embracing power of the Church of Rome is a most important contribution of the Reformation to the rise of democracy. (2) Luther's declaration of the universal priesthood of all believers. Thereby Luther rejected all hierarchalism, the division of Christian people into two classes — clergy and laity. Instead he reaffirmed the equality of all Christians before God. It can be affirmed that the principle of the universal priesthood of all believers has been the most powerful agent of the democratic spirit in modern Christendom, and from it certain important movements in modern democracy have been directly derived. From this doctrine Luther drew the principles that were to govern congregational life, especially the calling of ministers and the relation of minister to congregation.

This teaching of the universal priesthood was significantly articulated in the Puritanism that emerged out of the English State Church in the sixteenth century. When the Pilgrim Fathers, who espoused the congregational policy, resolved to emigrate to America, the principle of the universal priesthood also became, in the Mayflower Compact, the principle ordering secular society. Thus it became the first basis of the foundation of democratic society in

Western civilization. Hence there is, in this respect, a direct line from Luther to the establishment of democracy in America.

Luther recognized the three essential functions of the State to be legislative, administrative, and judicial. To the State he committed the regulation of commerce and trade, the maintenance of public health and welfare, the preservation of civil order, etc. When necessary, the State may be called upon to protect and defend the Church; but "as the Church is not to interfere in civil matters, so the State has as little right to intermeddle in matters purely ecclesiastical, except where life and property are at stake." Obviously, Luther's conception cleared the way for the emergence of the modern State.

While the State has the right to govern man's external life as it affects others, Luther steadfastly upheld the individual's freedom of conscience, of religion, and of speech. In his tract on "Christian Liberty" (1520) he sets forth the paradoxical, yet complementary, propositions that, on the one hand, the Christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to none; and that, on the other hand, he is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone. He thus drives home the twofold Christian ideal of individual liberty and mutual charity — and this ideal must underlie the effective functioning of the Christian State.

In his exposition of 1 Peter, Luther writes: "If an emperor or prince (would) command me to believe this or that, I would answer, 'Dear sir, mind your secular business; you have no right to interfere with God's reign, and therefore I shall not obey you at all.' "

In his treatise on "Secular Authority" Luther asserts: "When imperial authority stretches itself over into God's kingdom and authority and does not keep within its own separate jurisdiction, discrimination between the two realms has not been made. For the soul is not under the authority of the emperor. . . . But over body, estate, and honor he has authority . . . for they are under his jurisdiction and power." The Christian's duty of obedience to the secular power ends, however, when such obedience would involve the breaking of God's commandments, and so Luther continues: "This is the meaning of St. Peter: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' He here clearly marks a limit to temporal authority. . . . When a prince is in the wrong, his subjects are under no obligation to follow him, for no one is obliged to do anything against the right; but we must obey God, who desires to have the right, rather than men." [17] It is patently false, accordingly, to ascribe to Luther the idea that the Church should be subordinate to the temporal prince in matters of faith and doctrine.

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17) Luther, *Secular Authority.*

At the same time, it must be granted that Luther's doctrine and policy strengthened the position of the territorial princes, with relation both to the individual subject and to the Church within their respective domains. In the first case, Luther's doctrine of civil government secured the allegiance of the subject to his ruler. In the second, the exigencies of the times impelled Luther to lean heavily on the support and authority of the princes for the furtherance of his reform movement.

Separation of Church and State was Luther's ideal, but conditions of the times literally threw him into the arms of the territorial princes, and the German Church has remained under the aegis of the civil government until modern times. He regarded State churchism as a makeshift, and as a permanent condition it was not in harmony with his fundamental doctrines. Luther found it necessary to modify his theory of congregational self-government because the people were in general not yet ready to undertake it without confusion and disorder. Luther, accordingly, in order to insure security for the progress of the Gospel, looked to the princes to assume the lead in ecclesiastical arrangements and regarded them as provisional bishops, or *Notbischoefe*. "The authority of civil rulers in the ecclesiastical sphere was pronounced to rest partly on the old right of patrons . . . and partly on the principle that princes and magistrates, as the principal members of the Church, are entitled to be heard with respect; a doctrine quite compatible with the general theory that Church government pertains not to the clergy alone, but to the laity, to the whole congregation." [18]

Yet Luther was always aware of the temporary character of the church organization of his time. The actual establishment of the State Church did not involve a denial of the implications of the universal priesthood. Luther always defended the freedom of the Christian which is spiritual and manifests itself most definitely in the whole ethos of the universal priesthood. This implies also freedom of conscience and freedom to serve one another. He never surrendered these in favor of an authoritarian church government or an authoritarian State. Even in the State Church congregational rights were always recognized. The Lutheran pastor never became a priest, but always remained the servant of the Christian congregation.

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Luther has been condemned on numerous counts by his detractors, but on none more severely than his attitude during the Peasants' War. Unfortunately, this unbridled condemnation largely rests upon either ignorance or distortion of the actual reasons for

18) Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

Luther's position. As a matter of fact, this position is a logical development and expression of his doctrine of the State. Luther deplored and combated the tyranny of rulers — as his writings testify over and over again — and the charge that he advocated iron-fisted control and oppressive regimentation on the part of the State is utterly false. To cite but one expression of Luther on this subject: "A civil ruler is not set in authority that he may seek his own interests and pleasures from his subjects, but that he may secure *their* best interests." [19] Equally without basis in fact is the favorite canard of his opponents that he was devoid of social consciousness, that he was cruel and callous in his attitude toward the peasants, unmindful of the wrongs which they had suffered, and desirous only to curry favor with the authorities. One needs only to read his bristling admonitions to the princes to know differently. On the contrary, Luther's hatred of tyranny moved him at the outset to be sympathetic toward the peasants' cause.

But even more than tyranny, Luther hated and mortally feared anarchy. And when he witnessed the excesses of the peasants' rebellion, he saw it to be an anarchic movement, and from that moment on he threw against it the full weight of his influence. Lawless violence must not be countenanced. He therefore urged that the most drastic measures be used to quell this *Aufruhr*, for rioting and sedition imperil the very existence of the civil authority.

Luther discovered in the peasants' program, moreover, a misapplication of the freedom promised in the Gospel. The spiritual freedom which he emphasized in his preaching they misconstrued as freedom from social injustice, political oppression, and economic burdens. Wrenching the conception of freedom out of its Scriptural context, and seizing only upon the magic word, they were carried to fanatical and bloody excess. To hold Luther, in his declaration of the principle of Christian freedom, responsible for the Peasants' War is grotesque.

It has become a favorite sport in recent times to associate Luther with modern Fascism. A case in point is McGovern's recent book, with the intriguing title — which speaks for itself — *From Luther to Hitler*. Luther, the author maintains, held that civil authorities may "dictate religious dogmas to the private individual," that "all men should be subject to the iron will of their secular lord," that "the average man is full of wickedness and needs to be restrained by the strong arm of temporal authority." It was Luther, McGovern informs us, who formulated "the doctrine of all-powerful national states in perpetual antagonism to one

19) Luther, *Exhortation to Peace.*

another."[20] Veritably, Luther was, after all, nothing but a sixteenth-century Fascist!

No elaborate refutation of McGovern's unscholarly and fanciful argumentation is called for, but a few observations will be in order. McGovern makes his fundamental mistake, of course, in overlooking the essentially religious and spiritual character of the Reformation and in ignoring the fact that Luther's orientation was wholly *theological.* McGovern himself grants that Luther's conception of the State was not unique, but that it was shared, in his time, by Henry VIII and the Gallican leaders in France. Why, then, trace the roots of modern Fascism back to Luther? Why not to the etatism of Machiavelli or Erastus? Furthermore, how does McGovern account for the democratic character of the Scandinavian countries, which for centuries have had the Lutheran State Church? If his thesis holds good, these countries, so directly influenced by Luther, should be fascistic. Conversely, how is the fact to be explained that modern Fascism has found its fullest expression in such Roman Catholic countries as Italy and Spain? It never occurs to McGovern that Luther drew his doctrine of the State from the New Testament and that, in espousing this doctrine, he was following in the footsteps of the early Church Fathers.[21] Were they Fascists, too? Finally, the fact will not down that Luther and the Reformation revitalized those enduring principles of human dignity and freedom which are basic to all of modern cultural, political, and scientific progress.

Luther has been hailed as the "father of German nationalism," but this term is wanting in accuracy. He was, to be sure, a national figure of heroic stature — the greatest German of all times. But the Reformation was not primarily a national movement, but a *supernational,* religious revolt against the institution and system of the Roman Catholic Church. National implications, of course, could not be divorced from the Reformation, as has been shown. But the opposition of Charles V prevented the Reformation from becoming a national-religious movement and forestalled the creation of a pan-German Lutheran State Church. "When Charles finally laid the ban upon Luther, he also banned the German nation by rendering its nationalism the political deathblow."[22]

The spirit of the Reformation allied itself with the spirit of nationalism. Luther became "the mouthpiece, the prophet, of all those who were sighing under the yoke of foreign tyranny and yearning for national and social liberty."[23] He furnished a theory

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20) McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler,* pp. 31–35.
21) Cp. Murray, *op. cit.,* pp. 49—52.
22) Pauck, *op. cit.,* p. 300.
23) Nuelsen, *Luther the Leader,* p. 86.

for the independence of the State that had become a possibility in conjunction with the rising tide of nationalism. The Reformers insisted on the independence of the State from the Church, and this gave the impetus to the freedom of the State that was taking place in the course of the historico-political process. The Reformation did not "emancipate the State from religion," as the Roman Catholics charge, but it did liberate the State from the Papal Church. And this, essentially, was a freedom *in the Word.*

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Calvin was much more of a political theorist than Luther, and his conception of the Christian State was a most significant contribution to political thought. Calvin conceived of Church and State as two intersecting circles; both are independent, and yet they are to co-operate and support each other in a very definite way. Calvin teaches that "civil government is designed to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, and defend the constitution of the Church" as well as to foster the temporal interests of men.

Calvin did not favor either a monarchy or an oligarchy as a governmental system. Nor was he a democrat. In fact, in the *Institutes* he has some very harsh words to say about democracy, calling it "a step to anarchy" (IV, 20). He rather favored an aristocratic form of representative government, which was a natural concomitant of his ecclesiastical system.

Like Luther, he taught that earthly rulers are God's representatives, and by virtue of their divine appointment they are entitled to obedience on the part of their subjects. But man is to render this obedience to the temporal authority "not on his knees, but as a free man." [24] For the civil government exists for the well-being of the people, and in the last resort the ruler is the "first servant of the State."

Civil government, Calvin teaches, is divine because it stems from God and is exercised in His stead. It is one of the instruments through which God manifests His sovereignty. Thus it can even be called "a god" (cp. Psalm 82). Civil government cannot contravene or subvert the will of God and must be obeyed only in Him.

State and Church, according to Calvin, are both related to the lordship of God, and hence both must realize His will. The laws of the State must conform to the Moral Law and must foster the right religion. But the State can know what the right religion is only by reference to the Church. Calvin's whole thinking on this subject, accordingly, was theocratic, and his paramount concern was for the sovereignty and honor of God.

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24) Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

Calvin profoundly influenced the Protestant movement in France — a movement whose course was marked by persecution, bloodshed, and frustration. Christian humanism, especially under Lefevre (1455—1536), had paved the way for the reception of Luther's writings and the spreading of the Protestant cause in France. French Protestantism, however, had no recognized head and no organization until 1536, when the *Institutes* of Calvin were first published. At about the same time the first translation of the Bible into French appeared. Given this fresh impetus, by 1547 the Reformation had spread into seventeen provinces and thirty-three of the principal cities of France. A national Church was organized in Paris in 1559, at which time a Confession of Faith, prepared by Calvin, was adopted. By 1561 the number of congregations had reached 2,150, and the Protestant cause had won over many of the nobles, including the Coligny family, and even the Bourbon branch of the royal family.

Thus the Reformation in France became strongly affected by political and national ramifications. Calvin kept in close touch with the Protestant movement in France and did his best to gain for it the favor of the crown. Calvin consistently advised the Huguenots not to employ force to attain their ends, but to rely upon prayer and patience. He cannot, therefore, be held responsible for the course of events, which, in 1562, plunged the French nation into a series of religious wars that continued to the end of the century. The Catholic nobles supported the house of Guise against the Protestant nobles, led by the house of Bourbon. In 1572 occurred the massacre of the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's night; but although more than 20,000 were slain throughout France, the Protestant cause did not perish. Finally, in 1598, King Henry IV, who had formerly been a Protestant, issued the Edict of Nantes, which granted the Huguenots religious toleration and certain civil rights, and this status continued for almost a century, when the Edict was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685.

In Francois Hotman, one of Calvin's ardent disciples, we perceive a fervent French nationalism, intensified by his sorrow over the travail experienced by his country during the period of civil warfare and expressed particularly in his *Franco-Gallia*. Sovereignty, he maintains, resides in the nation, and the right of governing belongs to the people, so that every form of tyranny is to be resisted. The same trend of thought is carried forward by such other disciples of Calvin as Beza and Duplessis-Mornay. The writings of these men did much to foster the French national spirit.

The effect of the Reformation upon the national development of such other European states as Holland, Sweden, and England forms an absorbing chapter in church history. The Reformation made

it possible for these to become free nations, and in these lands Protestantism became closely associated with the national spirit.

In Holland, which had long been a center of reform tendencies, the cruel and repressive measures of Philip II, son of Charles V, against the Protestants drove them to revolt, which resulted in the foundation of the Dutch Republic and the proclamation of Calvinism as the official state religion. In Sweden the Lutheran cause gained an early and permanent triumph and found a champion in King Gustavus Vasa. Throughout the Scandinavian countries the establishment of a truly national evangelical Church, which failed of consummation in Germany, became a reality and has continued down to modern times. In the seventeenth century, Sweden was to play a decisive role, under Gustavus Adolphus, in checking the forces of the Counter-Reformation and in saving the Protestant cause in Europe.

In England, a national Church was created, under the authority of Henry VIII and as a result of his embroglio with the Pope. The English Church stood for nationalism both in politics and in religion. Prior to this development, however, the seeds of the Reformation had been sown in England through circulation of Luther's writings, and this trend was abetted by Tyndale's translation of the New Testament in 1526. Although Henry was hostile to Luther, the accession of Edward VI in 1547 gave new impetus to the Protestant movement and gave free rein to the reformatory work of Archbishop Cranmer. Under "Bloody Mary," a strong Catholic reaction set in, but when Elizabeth ascended the throne, the Protestant cause again came to the fore. The high point in her reign was the crushing defeat of the Spanish Armada at the end of the century, which dealt a deathblow to medieval Catholic imperialism and won for Protestant England her place in the sun.

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Religious liberty belongs to the great heritage of the Reformation. Macaulay declares: "The Protestant doctrine touching the right of private judgment — that doctrine which is the common foundation of the Anglican, the Lutheran, and the Calvinistic churches — we conceive to be this, that there is on the face of the earth no visible body to whose decrees men are bound to submit their private judgment on points of faith." [25] As Renan puts it, "The cold hand of the State should not press upon the inner kingdom of the soul."

As this concept took root, it was inevitable that the idea of freedom should be transferred also to the realm of politics and statecraft. True, the trend toward nationalism was in progress

25) Macaulay, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, III, pp. 296, 297.

before the Reformation. However, the Reformation developed the spirit of free inquiry and deepened the sense of individual responsibility among men, and thus made a far-reaching contribution to the rise and development of the great national states of modern times and to the growth of the idea of representative government. Men held that their spiritual prerogatives had their counterpart in temporal prerogatives. While we obviously cannot agree with the appraisal of Figgis that "the supreme achievement of the Reformation is the modern State," yet the course of political and social freedom was mightily advanced by the Reformation. And while Luther and Calvin were not "democrats" in the modern political sense of the term, yet their theological systems and their reformatory labors bore the seeds that flowered into the great democratic movement of later centuries.

This, then, is the relationship between the Reformation and nationalism. Occurring at a period in Western history when a gradual shift from universalism to nationalism was in progress, the Reformation brought this transition "to a head." Breaking the unity of the medieval Catholic world, it made possible the era of modern nations. Hence the Reformation, which was essentially and pre-eminently a religious, spiritual, individualistic movement, had decisive and far-reaching nationalistic consequences. And thus, in the unfolding pattern of human history, it marked the beginning of a new epoch.

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