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RE-DISCOVERY

THE ESSENCE OF THE REFORMATION

BY

HUGH J. BLAIR

Jan 1963

RE-DISCOVERY: THE ESSENCE OF THE REFORMATION

ABSTRACT

Aim: to show that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was essentially a re-discovery of Biblical truth (Section I).

The doctrines of the Reformation are taken up seriatim. The order in which these doctrines are discussed is not arbitrarily chosen: the emphasis of the Reformers themselves is followed in considering first the doctrines relating to God - the Word of God and the Sovereignty of God - and then the doctrines relating to man - justification by faith alone and the priesthood of all believers.

Section II deals with the re-discovery of the Word of God, (i) as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct; and, (ii), as the rightful possession of the common people.

Section III deals with the re-discovery of the Divine Sovereignty. It was felt that this fundamental Reformation doctrine required special consideration, and there are chapters on (i) The Divine Control: (ii) Martin Bucer's De Regno Christi: (iii) the Lordship of Christ.

Section IV deals with the re-discovery of the way of salvation - justification by faith alone.

Section V, dealing with the re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers, stresses the rights and responsibilities of the laity.

The re-discovery of these doctrines had important ethical and social implications, dealt with in section VI.

But the Reformation was more than the re-discovery of a series of doctrines: section VII, therefore, concludes the study with a consideration of the Reformation as the re-discovery of the Gospel.

In each section the same pattern of discussion is followed: it is shown that, far from being a sixteenth-century negative reaction to Romanist teaching, the doctrines of the Reformation were essentially positive: far from being a new departure, they were a return to ancient truth: and, far from being of merely historical interest, they have an urgent contemporary relevance.

RE-DISCOVERY: THE ESSENCE OF THE REFORMATION

by Rev. Hugh Jamison Blair, B.A.

Thesis presented to the University of Dublin for the
degree of Doctor in Philosophy.

Approved by the Board

August, 1962.



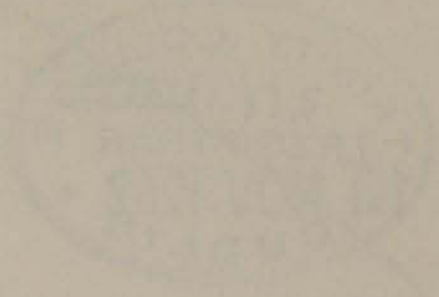
REPRODUCED FROM THE RECORDS OF THE ARCHIVES

by Rev. Hugh Jackson Blair, S.J.



This is presented to the University of Dublin for the
degree of Doctor in Theology.

August, 1862.



I hereby declare (a) that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree of any other university: and (b) that it is entirely my own work.

Signed:

Hugh J. Blair

Hugh Jamison Blair.

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I

THE REFORMATION - THE RE-DISCOVERY OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Reformation of the sixteenth century, wrote Philip Schaff in his History of the Creeds of Christendom,

is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history.... It was not a superficial amendment, not a mere restoration, but a regeneration; not a return to the Augustinian, or Nicene, or ante-Nicene age, but a vast progress beyond any previous age or condition of the Church since the death of St. John. It went, through the intervening ages of ecclesiasticism, back to the fountain-head of Christianity itself, as it came from the lips of the Son of God and his inspired Apostles. It was a deeper plunge into the meaning of the Gospel than even St. Augustine had made.¹

The purpose of this study is to examine that assertion and to maintain that the Reformation must be seen not merely as a protest or a movement of reform but as a period of re-discovery.²

¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, (London, 1877), vol. I, p. 204

² Principal John A. Mackay of Princeton makes the same point when he writes, 'It was the contention of the Protestant Reformers, and continues to be the contention of their successors, that the religious emphases that began to be made in the sixteenth century were not discoveries of new truth, but rather recoveries of ancient truth. The Reformers did not regard themselves as discoverers but as restorers. They did not think of their work as opening up new paths, but as re-opening old paths, great highways of truth, which in the course of Christian history had been abandoned or grown over' - Christianity On The Frontier (London, 1950), p. 98. Cf. Charles Gore, Dissertations, pp. 180ff - 'No one can interpret the Reformation rightly, on its religious side, who does not bear in mind the existence of a widespread and passionate desire to get back to the Christ of the Gospels and the primitive Church' - quoted, L. E. Elliott-Binns, England and the New Learning (London, 1937), p. 103.

Much study of the Reformation has stressed the immediate situation which was its background and to some extent its cause. And certainly the impact of intellectual, social, political and economic factors cannot be ignored. The influence of the Renaissance, for example, is of the greatest importance; learning has ever been the handmaid of reform: nor is it without significance that new democratic ideals played their part in preparing men and nations for the new liberty into which the Reformation was to usher them. But preoccupation with such immediate causative factors has perhaps tended to make some scholars think of the Reformation as a historical rather than a specifically religious movement. The Reformation was not the result of historical development: it broke into history and overturned history. It was not accomplished by man's decision to "shatter the sorry scheme of things and mould it nearer to the heart's desire." "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."¹

The great thing that was accomplished by the Reformation was not the amendment of certain things that were amiss - man's own innate desire for improvement when things have reached a certain pass might have achieved that - but the substitution of a completely new standard in place of the ecclesiastical expediencies of the previous centuries. That standard was, "What saith the Lord?" The Reformers were not concerned to tinker with the abuses which were no more than symptoms of the Church's malady: they were led by the Holy Spirit to go back to the Early Church whose faith and organisation that same Holy Spirit had guided; they went back, to quote Schaff again, "through the intervening ages of ecclesiasticism, to the fountain-head of Christianity itself, as it came from the lips of the Son of God and his inspired Apostles." The Reformation was, first and foremost, the re-discovery of Biblical truth.

Three propositions will be taken as the framework of this study of the Reformation as Re-discovery. The Reformation was not negative but positive: it was not new but old: it was not historical merely but is contemporary.

¹Psalm 118. 23.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

Unfortunately, Protestantism is too often thought of merely as a negation of Roman Catholicism. A dictionary definition of Protestantism, for example, states it in an unambiguously negative way. It declares

A Protestant is a member of one of the many Christian bodies which reject the claim of the Pope to be the head of the Church, dispute the Roman Catholic theory of the papacy generally, and which further disagree profoundly with the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹

It would be difficult to find anything more uncompromisingly negative than that! "Reject the claim...dispute the theory...and disagree profoundly...!"

Regrettably that is a misunderstanding of Protestantism which is widely prevalent, and, let it be said, it is a misunderstanding which Roman Catholics are most careful to perpetuate. Professor Hugh Thomson Kerr of Princeton quotes from a Roman Catechism of Christian Doctrine - the Revised Edition of the Baltimore Catechism (1949) - the question, "How do we know that no other church but the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ?" And included in the answer is this statement, "The Protestant churches began in the sixteenth century when their founders, rejecting certain doctrines of faith, broke away from Catholic unity."² Such a statement immediately puts Protestantism into the role of an opposition party, and suggests that it is largely negative and reactionary.

It is regrettable that the very terms 'Protestant' and 'Reformation' can be taken to have a largely negative connotation. 'Protestant' seems to suggest someone who is making a protest; and 'Reformation' seems to have very much the same significance, suggesting the correction of things that are wrong.

Certainly the Protestant Reformation was a protest against abuses in the church which needed amendment. The Reformers did not mince their words in speaking of the corruptions which the passing

¹The Universal Dictionary of the English Language, ed. Henry Cecil Wyld (London, 1936)

²Hugh Thomson Kerr, Jr., Positive Protestantism (Philadelphia, 1950), p. 39 (my italics)

centuries had brought into the Church. The Scots Confession of 1581, for example - to take a Scottish illustration, famous not only in its own right but because it was the basis of the National Covenant of 1638 - was forthrightly anti-Roman. It declared

We abhor and detest all contrary religion, and doctrine; but chiefly all kinds of Papistry in general and particular heads, even as they are now condemned and confuted by the Word of God and Kirk of Scotland. But, in special we detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist upon the Scriptures of God, upon the kirk, the civil magistrate, and consciences of men; all his tyrannous laws made upon indifferent things against our Christian liberty; his erroneous doctrine...his five bastard sacraments...his blasphemous opinion of transubstantiation...his devilish mass....¹

It is not strange that that Confession has been called 'The Negative Confession.' And yet it should be carefully noted that even this 'negative' Confession is concerned first and foremost with stating a positive conviction. It begins,

We all and every one of us underwritten, protest, That, after long and due examination of our own consciences in matters of true and false religion we are now thoroughly resolved in the truth by the Word and Spirit of God; and, therefore, we believe with our hearts, confess with our mouths, subscribe with our hands, and constantly affirm, before God and the whole world, that this only is the true Christian faith and religion, pleasing to God, and bringing salvation to men, which is now by the mercy of God revealed to the world by the preaching of the blessed evangel....²

There is nothing negative there. Before any repudiation of what Rome had taught there is a positive assertion of a vital faith. It is equally significant that many of the apparently negative strictures of Roman heresies in this Confession are in themselves a declaration that it is the Roman Church which has departed from the positive truth which is now being restated. For example, summing it all up, the Confession says,

And finally, we detest all his vain allegories, rites, signs, and traditions brought into the kirk without or against the Word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed

¹ Cited from J. C. Johnston, Treasury of the Scottish Covenant (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 48

² ibid., p. 48

kirk; to the which we join ourselves willingly in doctrine, faith, religion, discipline, and use of the holy sacraments, as lively members of the same in Christ our Head: promising and swearing, by the great name of the Lord our God, that we shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this kirk, and shall defend the same, according to our vocation and power, all the days of our lives....¹

That is an unmistakably positive affirmation directed against a defective Roman position.²

Attention has frequently been drawn to the fact that the word 'Protestant' is derived from the Latin word 'protestari,' whose primary meaning is 'to witness publicly, to declare, to profess.' In the sixteenth century that was its sense. When Robert Herrick wrote to his Anthea -

Bid me to live, and I will live
Thy Protestant to be

he was not concerned with religion: he was simply concerned to 'protest,' to declare his love for his lady. And Shakespeare's "Methinks the lady doth protest too much" meant not that she was objecting to something too strenuously but simply that she was making an over-strong declaration of her case.

Similarly, the primary meaning of 'Reformation' is not as negative as it has come to be. Its original significance is not amendment or improvement but re-formation, rebuilding.

The name 'Protestant' as applied to the first adherents of the Reformed Faith owes its origin to a well-known historical event, and must be explained by the occasion which first gave rise to it. It was first applied to those princes and other adherents of Luther who at the Diet of Speier in 1529 protested - that is, publicly declared - that they had a right to preach a free Gospel according to the Word of God; that they would not tolerate the Mass within their dominions;

¹ Treasury of the Scottish Covenant, p. 49

² F. D. Maurice in The Kingdom of Christ, vol. I (London, 1842), p. 89, stresses the fact that it was the negative abuses of the Roman system which called forth the denunciations of the Reformers, declaring 'that Protestantism has a standing point of its own; that it is not merely condemnatory, merely negative; and that so far as it keeps within its own proper and appointed province, it denounces and condemns only that which is itself negative....'

and that - to quote their own words -

in matters that concern the glory of God and the salvation of the soul of each one of us, it is our bounden duty, according to God's command and for the sake of our own consciences, before all things to have respect unto the Lord our God.¹

Their protest arose from the fact that the Roman Church had resolved to take away the right of each State to its own religion, thereby encroaching, the princes felt, on their liberty of conscience and their right of action according to the Scriptures. It was, therefore, a positive declaration of their rights and was linked with their positive obedience to the Word of God.

The German princes and the representatives of the fourteen free cities which had embraced the principles of the religious reform did not 'protest' against ideas; they appeared in the role of 'protestants' because a curb had been placed upon the free propagation of truths that were decidedly positive in character....The genius of Protestant Christianity is affirmation, not negation.²

This positive character of Protestantism will be stressed in this study, as an introduction to the main thesis that the Reformation was not new but old, a return to New Testament Christianity. If Protestantism had been nothing more than a negation of Romanism, it could never have survived, for it would have had nothing to replace that which it condemned. But it was because of what the Reformers believed and not because of what they denied that the Reformation came into being. Their protests against prevailing evils had their root in a positive faith: because of that they achieved a success that would have been quite impossible for a negative reaction. Their concern was not primarily to show where they differed from Romanists, nor to attack the evils of the day, but to state the only answer to them - the sovereign, redeeming grace of God, revealed in His Word.

That brings us immediately to our second proposition. The

¹ quoted Burgess, The Protestant Faith, p. 3

² John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier, p. 98

Reformation was -

NOT NEW BUT OLD

From where did the Reformers derive the positive character of their witness? What gave them such resoluteness and determination in declaring it? It was the conviction that their positive statement of faith was simply a re-statement. It was not new but old, as old as the apostolic age itself.

If Roman Catholic writers are concerned to suggest that the Reformation was nothing more than a negative reaction, a destructive criticism of the historic Catholic faith, they are still more concerned to suggest that it was something new, something which was trying to undermine the position which had been held for centuries. The Roman Catholic Catechism already quoted declares in answer to the question, "How do we know that no other church but the Catholic church is the true Church of Christ?" - "The Protestant churches began in the sixteenth century...."¹ Yves Congar in his Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Eglise (Paris, 1950) insists that Luther was not a Reformer but a revolutionary, an innovator in the field of doctrine; and he dismisses the Reformers' claim that, far from being innovators, they were restoring the true, original apostolic doctrine, with the comment, "Marcion also pretended to restore original Christianity."²

It is significant that the first to use the name 'Lutheran' to describe the church of the Reformation were its opponents, for the nickname was a skilful insinuation that this was nothing more than a sectarian movement. "Where was your church before Luther?" was a challenge that the Reformer's adherents had to face again and again. Two particularly pungent retorts have come down to us. "Where was your church before Luther?" "In the Bible," came the answer, "where yours never was!" And another quick-witted Lutheran flung his question back at the Romanist, "Where was your face this morning before it was washed?" The church's

¹ supra, p. 3

² op. cit., p. 367

face was still the same: the Reformers had merely washed it.¹

Until near the end of the sixteenth century Luther's followers were careful to disown such terms as Lutheranus, Luthericus, Lutheranismus, which were first used by Dr. Johann Eck, Luther's doughty adversary, and other Romanists, to stigmatize the Reformation as an innovation: they simply called themselves Christian or Evangelical, and sometimes Reformed, the name in general use in Geneva. Luther himself writes very strongly on the point:

I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in I Corinthians iii, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him whose doctrine we have.²

Henry Airay, writing in England in 1618, in his Lectures Upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians, was quick to note that the attaching of party names to the Reformers was a tactical move on the part of their opponents. Answering the Roman Catholic charge that Protestants are divided into a multitude of sects, Zwinglians, Lutherans, Calvinists, etc., he says,

But I say unto them what doe they meane to note us by such termes? The memorie of these men we honour and reverence, as also we doe other notable lights which have beene in the Church, and are at this day. But if we be named after any other name than only the name of Christ Jesus, it is through their malice, not by our desire.³

¹ Richard Sibbes had his answer for those who asked where the Protestant Church in general or the English Protestant Church in particular could be found before the time of Luther: 'Therefore we say Our Church was before Luther, because our Doctrine is Apostolicall....Our positive points are grounded upon the holy Scriptures; we seek the Old Way, and the best way, as Jeremy adviseth - Richard Sibbes, Yea and Amen (London, 1638), pp. 10,11

² Works of Martin Luther (6 vols., Philadelphia, 1915-32), III.218

³ cited from Charles H. George and Katherine George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation (Princeton, 1961), p. 377.

It is not difficult to understand the Reformers' insistence on the fact that their movement was no innovation. If theirs was in truth a new church, a new movement, they were at once cut off from the main stream of Christian thought and experience which had its source in the New Testament. To change the figure, if the Reformation had no depth of earth, it might have grown up quickly enough, but it would inevitably have withered just as quickly when the strong sun of persecution arose upon it. It is easy to see how urgent a matter this was for them. 'Outside the Church there is no salvation' was the view universally held. And it was interpreted that to be in the Church meant to be in communion with the Pope and with Rome. To be outside the circle of the Pope's pastoral care meant, in those days of wholesale excommunications, to be cut off from all church privileges. If a city was excommunicated, all the services of the Church ceased. There could be no baptisms, no marriages, no services of public worship until the sentence of excommunication was remitted. More than that, it involved the cessation of trade and all social relationships with those who were within the Church. That was what it meant to be outside the pale of the Church. Consequently, it was of the utmost importance for the Reformation movement that its leaders should convince the people that they were not deserting the Church into which they had been born, by which they had been baptised, in whose communion they had worshipped since childhood, and in which many of them had been ordained.

The Reformers dealt with this problem of showing the continuity of their movement with the historic church characteristically. Luther's answer lay in his doctrine of the Church as a "Communio Sanctorum," a Communion of Saints. He went back to the simple affirmation of the Apostles' Creed, which he rendered, "I believe in a holy Christian Church, a communion of saints," and declared

The Creed indicates what the Church is, clearly, namely: A Communion of Saints, that is, a group or assembly of such people as are Christians and holy.¹

¹Works of Martin Luther (6 vols., Philadelphia, 1915-32), V. 264

He expressed a dislike of the word 'Kirche,' which has the same ambiguity in German as 'Church' has in English, and can be taken to mean not only an assembled company of people but a dedicated building, and he affirmed,

If the words had been used in the Creed, 'I believe that there is a holy Christian people,' it would have been easy to avoid all the misery that has come in with this blind, obscure word... for the common man thinks of the stone house which we call a Church. 'Ecclesia' ought to mean the holy Christian people, not only of the time of the apostles...but right to the end of the world, so that there is always living on earth a Christian holy people in which Christ lives, works and reigns 'per redemptionem' through grace and forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Ghost 'per vivificationem et sanctificationem' through the daily purging out of sins and the renewal of its life.¹

So Luther claimed for all believers the title Catholic, which contemporary Protestants have been too ready to abandon to Rome, and the monopoly of which Rome claims 'in every quarter from the telephone directory upwards.'²

In order to show beyond all doubt that, though he had severed his connection with Rome, he still fulfilled the conditions of membership in the Catholic Church, Luther took the historic creeds of the Church and published them as his own Confession of Faith. In his preface to his statement he said,

I have ex abundantia caused to be published together in German the three symbols or Confessions, which have hitherto been held throughout the whole Church: by this I testify once and for all that I adhere to the true Christian Church, which, up to now, has maintained those symbols, but not to that false pretentious Church, which is the worst enemy of the true Church, and has surreptitiously introduced much idolatry alongside of these beautiful Confessions.³

It should be noted that all the Reformers stood by the creeds, emphasising particularly their adherence to the Apostles' Creed. The preamble of the Second Helvetic Confession, 1566, declares that

¹ Works of Martin Luther (6 vols., Philadelphia, 1915-32), V. 264ff

² Cf. James Bulloch, The Kirk in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 62f

³ cited A. Ritschl, Justification and Reconciliation, vol. I (English translation, p. 130, n.1)

that its signatories are no heretics

but Catholics and Christians. We sincerely believe and freely profess whatsoever things are defined out of the Holy Scriptures in the Creeds, and in the decrees of those first four and most excellent councils held at Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, together with Blessed Athanasius' Creed, and all creeds like to these.... Thus we maintain the Christian and Catholic faith, whole and inviolable, knowing that nothing is contained in the aforesaid creeds which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and makes wholly for the uncorrupt declaration of the Faith.¹

That was precisely Luther's position. In his Commentary on Galatians he maintained that he had no desire to introduce any new teaching. He wrote,

We teach no new thing, but we repeat and establish old things, which the apostles and all godly teachers have taught before us.²

He elaborated this point of view in his early book On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church of God, where he maintained that the Church had been led away captive by the Pope and his court, just as the Israelites had been when they were carried off to Babylon. The Church, freed from the Roman yoke, had all the privileges which the Church of God ever had, and in addition the priceless privilege of freedom from bondage. The leaders of the Reformation were men like Zerubbabel, or Ezra, or Nehemiah. They were not founding a new Church; they were leading the old Church of the Apostles back out of bondage into liberty.

Writing near the end of his life, in Wider Hans Worst, Luther published a stated defence of the Reformation against the charge that it had founded a new Church, and declared, in a tribute to the achievement of the Reformation,

The former old Church shines forth again now as the sun out of the clouds behind which was that same sun all the time but not clearly.³

What the Reformation had done was to repudiate Rome's

¹ cited James Bulloch, The Kirk in Scotland, p. 64

² Martin Luther, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, ed. P. S. Watson (London, 1953), p. 53

³ Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 51, p. 486

adulteration of the Apostolic faith and all the innovations that it had introduced, and to restore to the Church its virginity as the pure Bride of Christ.¹

Calvin repudiated no less emphatically than Luther the charge that the Reformers had broken away from the true Church. In March, 1539, Cardinal Sadolet, Bishop of Carpentras, seized the opportunity presented by the expulsion of Calvin and Farel from Geneva to attempt to win back the allegiance of the Genevese to the Papacy. In his letter to the Senate and People of Geneva he made much of the argument that the Reformers were introducing a new faith and were forsaking the Church. He wrote,

The point in dispute is, Whether is it more expedient for your salvation, and whether you think you will do what is more pleasing to God, by believing and following what the Catholic Church throughout the whole world, now for more than fifteen hundred years, or (if we require clear and certain recorded notice of the facts) for more than thirteen hundred years, approves with general consent; or innovations introduced within these twenty-five years, by crafty, or, as they think themselves, acute men; but men certainly who are not themselves the Catholic Church?²

Calvin framed his reply to this charge by putting into the mouth of a representative Reformer the following defence:

As to the charge of forsaking the Church, which they were wont to bring against me, there is nothing of which my conscience accuses me, unless, indeed, he is to be considered a deserter, who, seeing the soldiers routed and scattered, and abandoning the ranks, raises the leader's standard, and recalls them to their posts....In order to bring them together, when thus scattered, I raised not a foreign standard, but that noble banner of thine whom we must follow, if we would be classed among thy people.³

The Reformation was not desertion from the Church: it was a rallying of the broken ranks of God's people.

Earlier in his Reply to Cardinal Sadolet Calvin had claimed that the Reformers recalled the Church not only to the model of the

¹Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 51, p. 498

²Cardinal Sadolet's Letter to the Senate and People of Geneva, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 14

³Reply by John Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter, ibid., pp. 58,59

New Testament but to the ancient form of the Church set forth by the Early Catholic Fathers and the ancient canons. He challenged the Cardinal,

I will not press you so closely as to call you back to that form which the Apostles instituted, (though in it we have the only model of a true Church, and whosoever deviates from it in the smallest degree is in error,) but to indulge you so far, place, I pray, before your eyes, that ancient form of the Church, such as their writings prove it to have been in the age of Chrysostom and Basil, among the Greeks, and of Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine, among the Latins; after so doing, contemplate the ruins of that Church, as now surviving among yourselves.¹

Three years before, Calvin had demonstrated in dramatic fashion his knowledge of the writings of the Fathers and his conviction that the Reformed Faith was a re-discovery of the faith of the early centuries of the Christian Church. In October, 1536, a public discussion on religion was arranged in Lausanne, and Viret, Farel and Calvin debated the principles of the Reformation with Romanist speakers. For three days Calvin deferred to Farel and Viret and remained silent. But on the fourth day, Mimard, one of the Romanists, read a carefully prepared speech, in which he alleged that the Protestants ignored the Fathers because the teaching of the Fathers was against Protestantism. At that, Calvin at last arose, and began to speak:

Honour to the Holy Church Fathers: he among us who does not know them better than you, let him beware lest he mention their names. Too bad that you are not more thoroughly read in them, otherwise certain references could be of benefit to you.²

With no time to refer to his authorities, nothing to rely on but his reading and his memory, Calvin proceeded to refute the opinions presented, and overwhelmed his opponent with an incredible

¹ Reply to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, pp. 37,38

² Doumergue, Jean Calvin (3 vols., Lausanne, 1905), II. 216

series of quotations from the Fathers on the point at issue. A scene of great excitement followed. A Franciscan friar, by name Jean Tandi, stood up and said,

It seems to me that the sin against the Spirit which the Scriptures speak of is the stubbornness which rebels against manifest truth. In accordance with that which I have heard, I confess to be guilty, because of ignorance I have lived in error and I have spread the wrong teaching. I ask God's pardon for everything I have said and done against His honour; and ask the pardon of all of you people for the offence which I gave with my preaching up until now...¹

There could scarcely have been a more decisive vindication of the claim of the Reformers that their teaching was not new but old.

In his preface to the Institutes, which were essentially an extended commentary on the Apostles' Creed,² Calvin stated that he wrote the book to answer those who called the doctrines of the Reformers new, doubtful and contrary to the Fathers:³ he showed convincingly and with many Patristic references that the Reformers held all the great historic doctrines of the faith. Let his own words from his Address to the Emperor On the Necessity of Reforming the Church summarise his position:

Therefore, let there be an examination of our whole doctrine, of our form of administering the sacraments, and our method of governing the Church; and in none of these three things will it be found that we have made any change upon the ancient form, without attempting to restore it to the exact standard of the Word of God.⁴

¹Doumergue, op. cit., II. 216

²Zwingli followed the same pattern in his Exposition of the Faith. Professor G. W. Bromley in his introduction to Zwingli's works in vol. xxiv. of the Library of Christian Classics, says, "The Exposition is built up upon the Apostles' Creed, which Zwingli no doubt adopted as a basis in order to demonstrate his essential orthodoxy" (p. 241)

³Prefatory Address to King Francis, in Institutes, vol. I, in Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX (London, 1961), pp. 14, 15

⁴Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, p. 146

John Knox's rebuttal of the charge of innovation was no less characteristic. James Tyrie, a sixteenth-century Scotsman who had gone to France and joined the Jesuits, wrote a letter to his brother, David Tyrie, of Drumkilbo, near Perth, seeking to reclaim him from the Reformed faith, so powerfully presented by Knox. The letter was shown to Knox, who wrote a reply to it point by point, and published this reply in 1572 as his last legacy to his countrymen. Tyrie had begun by twitting his brother with the recentness of the new Church, referring to it contemptuously as "your invisible Kirk of Scotland, but yet eight year old," and thereby brought down upon his head the full force of Knox's caustic answer:

Whensoever the Papists and we shall come to reckon of the age of our faith, we doubt nothing but that their faith, in more principal points nor one or two, shall be found very young, and but lately invented in respect of that only true faith which this day in the kirks of Scotland is professed.... And therefore we say that our Kirk is no new-found Kirk as the writer blasphemously railleth, but that it is a part of that holy Kirk Universal which is grounded upon the doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles; having the same antiquity that the Kirk of the Apostles had, as concerning doctrine, prayers, administration of sacraments, and all other things requisite to a particular Kirk.¹

A Scotsman of the seventeenth century, John Forbes of Corse, elaborated a similar thesis in a learned and lengthy dissertation - Instructiones Historico-Theologicae de Doctrina Christiana et vario rerum statu, ortisque erroribus et controversiis, iam inde a temporibus Apostolicis, ad tempora usque seculi decimo-septimi priora.² The purpose of this was to show that Romanism is nothing more nor less than a colossal system of innovations. Typical of Forbes' method is his attack on the novelty and emptiness of the Roman doctrine of the Seven Sacraments.³ "That canon of Trent," he maintains, "is opposed to the teaching of the ancient Church, nor

¹Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (6 vols., Edinburgh, 1846-64), vi., 492

² published in Amsterdam, 1645

³Doctrinae Romanensium, de septem Novi Testamenti Sacramentiis proprie dictis, novitas et vanitas. op. cit., p. 448

did the doctrine begin to be heard before the twelfth century, at which time lived Hugo of St. Victor and Peter Lombard."¹ These two are the first of the scholastics, so far as Forbes can discover, to list the seven sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, Matrimony.²

Forbes makes a careful study of the claims of these seven to be called sacraments, and concludes:

When there have been excluded from the list of Sacraments of the New Testament accurately so called, Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony, which the Scholastics and Pontiffs reckoned as additional sacraments; also foot-washing, martyrdom and the sign of the Cross, and others of that kind to which the title of sacrament has been ascribed at some time or other among ancient writers, there are left only two Sacraments of the New Law, accurately so called, namely Baptism and the Eucharist.³

¹Tridentius iste canon repugnat doctrinae veteris Ecclesiae, neque audiri coepta est ante seculum duodecimum, quo vixerunt Hugo de S. Victore, et Petrus Lombardus.

- op. cit., p. 448

²Septem Sacramenta Novi Testamenti primus (quantum invenire potui) numeravit Hugo de Sancto Victore, in suo opere de cerimoniais, sacramentis, officiis, et observationibus Ecclesiasticis....Floruit hic Hugo anno Dominicae incarnationis 1130. cum quo consentit Petrus Lombardus, Jam (inquiens) ad Sacramenta novae legis accedamus; quae sunt Baptismus, Confirmation, Panis benedictionis id est, Eucharistia, Poenitentia, Unctio extrema, Ordo, Conjugium.... Floruit Lombardus anno Domini 1140

- op. cit., p. 448

³Seclusis igitur ex albo sacramentorum proprie dictorum novi Testamenti, Confirmatione, Poenitentia, Extrema unctione, Ordine, et Matrimonio, quae Scholastici et Pontificii sacramentis accensuerunt; item lotionem pedum... nec non martyrio, et crucis signo, et id genus aliis, quibus sacramenti appellatio apud veteres quandoque attributa est: supersunt sacramenta novae legis proprie dicta tantummodo duo, videlicet Baptismus et Eucharistia.

- op. cit., p. 471

Forbes follows the same method throughout his lengthy work to show that it was the Romanists, not the Reformers, who were the innovators.

The English Reformers were equally insistent that their teaching was not new but old. When Ridley was on trial in Oxford on 30th September, 1555, the Bishop of Lincoln interrupted his defence to say, "Wherefore, Master Ridley, consider your state: remember your former degrees: spare your body: especially consider your soul." Ridley answered amid much interruption, "I prefer the antiquity of the Primitive Church before the novelty of the Romish Church."¹

Cranmer in 1550 wrote 'A Defence of The True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament,' in which he proved that the Reformed doctrine alone could claim true Scriptural and patristic support. In 1555 he wrote to the Queen,

Forasmuch as I have alleged in my book many old authors, both Greeks and Latins, which above a thousand years after Christ continually taught as I do: if they (the Romanists) could bring forth but one old author that saith in these two points as they say, I offered six or seven years ago, and do offer yet still, that I will give place unto them.²

In 1562, John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, published his Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae - The Apology of the Church of England - summing up the teaching of the English Church, and, particularly in the earlier part of it, dealing with the charge of heresy levelled against the Church of England by the Romanists. He concludes with a recapitulation of the argument of the Apology, and declares,

We have said that we abandon and detest, as plagues and poisons, all those old heresies, which either the sacred scriptures or the ancient councils have utterly condemned;

¹ Stephen Cattley, The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe (1841) vol. VII., pp. 520, 521

² Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Parker Society ed., (Cambridge, 1846), p. 453. Cf. Cranmer's acrimonious correspondence with a Justice of Kent, in which he declared, "Truly you and your sorts be so blinded, that you call old that is new and new that is old." op. cit., p. 351

that we call home again, as much as ever we can, the right discipline of the church, which our adversaries have quite brought into a poor and weak case....we have searched out of the holy bible, which we are sure cannot deceive, one sure form of religion, and have returned again unto the primitive church of the ancient fathers and apostles, that is to say, to the first ground and beginning of things, as unto the very foundations and head-springs of Christ's church.¹

Throughout his Apology Jewel made abundantly clear the distinction between the Catholic doctrines of the English Church and the Roman "perversions" which had replaced them.²

Romanism, which he called the new learning, and Reformed teaching, which he called the old learning, were compared in detail by William Turner in a book published in London in 1548 with the title The New and the Old³. He wrote,

The Jews, which were blinded by the old leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees, said, 'What new learning is this?' Even as the unlearned people of this realm, blinded of long time by the false doctrine and ordinances of the Bishop of Rome, do call the Gospel of Christ (long buried and holden down by man's doctrine, when it now beginneth to be preached again) new learning and strange doctrine, and that because they have not been acquainted with it, but only have been brought up in the learning of the Pharisees of our time. Was Christ's learning new learning, I pray now, because the Jews had never heard it before preached of the Pharisees? If it were no new learning, but many hundred years before preached and taught by the prophets, then is not the Gospel which we preach new learning because you have not heard it before, any more than the sun is a new sun to a man which hath been in a house twenty years, and never saw the sun in his life, before at the last he seeth it, and calleth it a new light.⁴

And he challenged his readers to decide for themselves which was old and which was new:

Judge whether our learning or their learning, which boast themselves so much of old antiquity, is the older and more agreeing with God's holy word.⁵

¹ Works of John Jewel, Parker Society ed., (Cambridge, 1848) - English translation by Lady Ann Bacon, 1564 - p. 108

² Cf. W. M. Southgate, John Jewel and the Problem of Doctrinal Authority (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1962), p. 59

³ published in Tracts of the Anglican Fathers, vol. II, 1841

⁴ ibid., p. 192 ⁵ ibid., p. 193

All the Reformers maintained that the truths which they proclaimed were not discovered but re-discovered in the sixteenth century. Among the evidences for this which they produced, perhaps the most impressive - certainly the most lengthy - were the Magdeburg Centuries¹, a voluminous history of the church to A.D. 1400, in thirteen volumes, prepared by Lutheran theologians under the direction of Matthias Flacius, and published at Basel, 1559-1574. To prepare this work Flacius and his collaborators combed the libraries and unearthed a surprising number of evangelical and protesting 'Catholics' throughout the centuries, all lending their support to the Reformers' insistence that the Protestant position was, in the best sense, a catholic position.²

It should be stressed, however, that in the last resort the appeal of the Reformers was not to the Fathers but to the Bible. Though they honoured and accepted the creeds of the early centuries of the Church and the scriptural teachings of the Fathers, these occupied in their thinking a secondary place to the one primary authority, the Word of God. Writing to Cardinal Sadolet, Calvin gives to Councils and Fathers "such rank and honour as it is meet for them to hold, under Christ," but insists that

the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgment and that Fathers and Councils are of authority only in so far as they accord with the rule of the Word.³

The Schmalkald Articles, prepared by Luther in 1537 as a definition of Christian doctrine in opposition to Romanism, state what was in essence the position of all the Reformers:

¹Matthias Flacius, Ecclesiastica historia....secundum...singulas centurias (13 vols., Basel, 1559-1574)

²Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, The Riddle of Roman Catholicism (Abingdon Press, New York, Nashville, 1959), pp. 45ff. Dr. Pelikan has a good section on 'The Catholicity of the Reformers.'

³Calvin's Tracts and Treatises (Edinburgh, 1958), vol. I., p. 66
It should not be overlooked that the frequent references of the Reformers to the Fathers were due not primarily to their acceptance of patristic authority but to the Roman assumption that the writings of the Fathers were part of the orthodox Christian tradition. Thus the Reformers could use the Fathers (a) to demonstrate that the Reformed doctrines were not new but old, and (b) to controvert obvious Romanist departures from patristic belief and practice.

The articles of faith are not to be built up from the words or deeds of the Fathers....We, on the other hand, have another rule, namely that the Word of God should establish the articles of faith, and none besides, not even an angel.¹

The teaching of the Reformers was not new but old - not merely as old as the Councils and the Fathers, but as old as the Word of God itself.

Our third proposition is that the Reformation was -

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

The Reformers were the last to claim finality for what they did. Listen, for example, to the preface to the earliest Confession of the Scottish Church:

If any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugnant to God's Holy Word, we beseech him that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writing, and we upon our honour and fidelity, by God's grace, do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is from the holy Scriptures, or else reformation of that which shall prove to be amiss.²

Two dicta that have come down to us from the days of the Reformation give us the Reformers' attitude. Their ideal was ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda - a Church reformed and always needing to be reformed. And again, Ecclesia semper reformari debet - the Church requires always to be reformed. They never thought of the Reformation as something accomplished and done with: it was something ever needing to be done. Always, like the famous spiritual counsellor of the Pilgrim Fathers, John Robinson, they looked for 'more light to break forth from God's Holy Word.' The Word stands unchangeable, but the Church must be constantly measuring itself by that unalterable standard, ever seeking to approximate more closely to it. The same John Robinson

¹ Sahmalkald Articles (pars II, art. 2,15), cited R. S. Franks, The Work of Christ (2nd ed., 1962), p. 283

² John Knox's History of the Reformation, vol II, pp. 93ff (Laing's ed.)

went on to say,

I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches who are come to a period in religion and will go at present no further than the instruments of their reformation. Luther and Calvin were great and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not the whole counsel of God....Be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God.¹

There is always a danger of thinking of the Reformation as an incident, something that happened in the sixteenth century, remembered with a thanksgiving that grows dim with the passing of the years. What is needed today is not a more vivid remembrance of the Reformation as a historical event but a fresh re-discovery for our day of the fundamental truths of the gospel. Only as the Church continues to measure itself by the standard of the Word of God can it keep the name 'Reformed.' Judgment must begin at the house of God.

¹ cited, John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York, 1957), from John Robinson (Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers in Leyden, d. 1625): Works, with Memoir by Robert Ashton (London, 1851, 3 vols)

II

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE WORD OF GOD

(i) The Only Infallible Rule of Faith and Conduct

There was a day in Scotland when Andrew Melville, a sixteenth-century Scottish Covenanter, was called before the Privy Council and charged with seditious teaching. He confronted his adversaries, unafraid, and unclasping his Hebrew Bible from his belt, he threw it on the table, and said, "These are my instructions; see if any of you can judge of them, or show that I have passed my injunctions."

That was the unwavering stand of all the Reformers. They had but one standard of reference - the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. That, rather than tradition or the Church, constituted their supreme authority in all questions of Christian faith and practice. As early as 1536 Zwingli declared in the First Helvetic Confession that

Canonic Scripture, the word of God, given by the Holy Spirit and set forth to the world by the prophets and apostles, the most perfect and ancient of all philosophies, alone contains perfectly all piety and the whole rule of life.¹

All the Reformed Confessions set forth similar statements of the supreme authority of Scripture - the Geneva Confession of 1536 (Art.1),

¹quoted, T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation (Edinburgh, 1907), vol. I, p. 467, footnote.

the Second Helvetic Confession of 1562 (Art.1), the French Confession of 1559 (Arts. 3 - 6), the Belgic Confession of 1561 (Arts. 4 - 7), the Thirty-nine Articles of 1563 and 1571 (Art. 6), the Scots Confession of 1560 (Art. 19), followed by the Westminster Confession of 1647, which puts it concisely and definitely:

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the Books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these....All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.¹

It is clear, therefore, that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is of fundamental importance. This chapter, however, is not primarily concerned with a study of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture in itself: its intention is rather to show that the view of Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct accepted and proclaimed by the Reformers was in its essence a re-discovery of the Word of God.

Several questions present themselves for consideration -

In what sense was this conception of the Bible a re-discovery?

Was there any specific reason why this re-discovery should be made in the sixteenth century? If so, what was it?

How, and to what extent, is it necessary to make the same re-discovery today?

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

We begin with what may seem to be a very minor question, of limited relevance - Was there any specific reason why this re-discovery of the Word of God should be made in the sixteenth century? - because a right understanding of the principle involved here is an essential preliminary to the main thesis that the view of Scripture put forward by the Reformers was in fact a re-discovery, and because a study of this question will show the positiveness of the doctrine which they proclaimed.

¹The Westminster Confession of Faith I. ii (Belfast, 1933,) p. 18

It has been held by many historians that there was a specific reason why the infallible authority of the Word of God should be re-discovered at this time rather than at any other. The situation was that the Reformers had challenged and overthrown the authority of the Church as personified in the Pope. For centuries men had accepted his authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Now that authority had been swept away, almost overnight. Was there anything to take its place? Was there any longer any supreme authority on earth? Man demands authoritative guidance in the things of the spirit: in such matters of life and death he must be sure; he cannot be satisfied with anything less than an assured authority. The power of the Roman church lay then, and lies still - at least in part - in its claim to meet that need for an assured authority. "I used to be concerned about religion," said a foreign professor once to Henry Drummond, "but religion is a great subject, and I was busy, and there was little time to settle it for myself: so I became a Catholic, and instead of dabbling any longer in religion myself, just left it to the Church to do everything for me. Once a year I go to Mass."¹

The Reformers, therefore, it is maintained, realised that another infallible authority must be substituted for the spurious infallibility of the Church, represented by the Pope. They found that infallible authority in the Word of God. A. Mitchell Hunter puts it clearly and definitely in his book, The Teaching of Calvin:

When the Reformers challenged and overthrew the authority of the Church, religion was left in a perilous position. The average man demands authoritative guidance in regard to unseen things; he asks to be told what to believe. The power of the Roman Catholic Church lay partly at least in its claim to meet that need. The destruction of its authority was tantamount to the annihilation of the foundations on which religious belief for most men rested. It amounted to the severing of the moorings that had kept them in a haven of refuge from the miseries of uncertainty about the things which

¹ quoted J. S. Stewart, The Gates of New Life (Edinburgh, 1937), p.55

men most want to know....It was the task of the Reformers and especially of Calvin to provide them with new and secure moorings. This they did by replacing the authority of the Church by that of Scripture...¹

But that view of the Reformers' attitude to the Bible cannot be accepted without question. It does not do justice to the historical fact that it was not their rejection of the authority of the Roman Church that led the Reformers to maintain the infallible authority of the Scriptures: rather it was the Scriptures, whose power had been manifest in their own experience, which led them to question the infallibility of the Pope and the authority of the Church. At the heart of the Reformers' view of Scripture there was no mechanical conception of a necessary authority to set over against the spurious authority of Rome: that would be to throw us right back to negative Protestantism again. The Reformers accepted the Divine authority of Scripture because of their positive, personal experience of its compelling power.

As Professor J. K. S. Reid puts it in The Authority of Scripture,

That Scripture then came to occupy the place vacated by the stultified claims of the Pope is a consequence of the Reformers' work, not a deliberate aim.²

And he goes on to answer the implied suggestion of Seeberg that Luther looked around for 'an absolutely sure standard recognised by friend and foe alike, from which to criticize his opponents and defend himself:'

New insight into what Scripture is and has to offer may certainly be said to be the occasion of Luther's characteristic understanding of the Christian faith and life. But it is unconvincing to represent the place which Scripture is given in his theology as dictated by tactical considerations and the desire to occupy a position of advantage against possible opponents.³

It is a misrepresentation of the Reformers to suggest that they proclaimed the infallibility of Scripture simply as a reaction

¹J. K. S. Reid, The Authority of Scripture (London, 1957), p. 32

²ibid.

against the discredited infallibility of the Pope.

Let us look at Luther's experience of the Word of God. In the convent at Erfurt he was led to a study of the Bible through the Prior, Johann Staupitz, a man with the root of evangelical faith in him, though he never took the decisive step of breaking with the Roman Church. But the unhappy Luther did not derive much help from his initial study of the Scriptures. They terrified him with their warnings of judgment against sin and their picture of a God of utter righteousness giving to every man his due. The only God he came to know was Jehovah, the stern, unbending God, Who insisted, "I am the Lord thy God. Walk before Me and be thou perfect." At last Staupitz saw what his real difficulties were, and tried to tell him that God's righteousness is on the side of all who trust in Christ. This sent Luther back to the Bible with new hopes. He began to study the Epistle to the Romans. Let his own words tell the story:

At last, God being merciful, as I meditated day and night on the connection of the words, namely, 'the Justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written, "the Just shall live by Faith,"' there I began to understand the Justice of God as that by which the just lives by the gift of God, namely by faith, and this sentence, 'the Justice of God is revealed in the gospel,' to be that passive justice, with which the merciful God justifies us, by faith, as it is written 'The just lives by faith.'

This straightway made me feel as though reborn, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From then on, the whole face of scripture appeared different. I ran through the scriptures, then, as memory served, and found the same analogy in other words, as the Work of God (opus) that which God works in us, Power of God (virtus Dei) with which he makes us strong, wisdom of God (sapientia Dei) with which he makes us wise, fortitude of God, salvation of God, glory of God.¹

That was the experience which lay behind Luther's acceptance

¹Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 54, pp. 179 - 187, cited by Professor Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God, (London, 1953), pp. 121 f.

of the authority of the Word of God. God had spoken - to him - and the Word could not be gainsaid.¹ His conviction that the Scriptures provide the sole and authoritative source of truth was the immediate result of his experience of justification by faith alone. Later he was to put it into a maxim: Sola experientia fecit theologum - experience alone makes a theologian. "Experience is necessary for the understanding of the Word. It is not merely to be repeated and known, but to be lived and felt."²

We know less of the personal crisis which won John Calvin for the Reformation cause. It was, as he tells us in the preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, 'a sudden change' to the evangelical faith. Philip Schaff gives the following interpretation of his experience:

Like Luther, he strove in vain to attain peace of conscience by the methods of Romanism, and was driven to a deeper sense of sin and guilt. 'Only one haven of salvation is left for our souls,' he says, 'and that is the mercy of God in Christ. We are saved by grace - not on our merits, not by our works.' After deep and earnest study of the Scriptures, the knowledge of the truth, like a bright light from heaven, burst upon his mind with such force that there was nothing left for him but to abjure his sins and errors, and to obey the will of God.³

There seems to be no direct evidence that it was in fact his "deep and earnest study of the Scriptures" that led to Calvin's conversion, but it can safely be inferred from his later concern with the study of the Scriptures, and more particularly from the letter which he wrote in 1539 to Cardinal Sadolet in reply to the Cardinal's Letter to the Senate and People of Geneva. Part of Calvin's Reply consists of the defence which one who is instructed in the Reformed Faith would make for himself at the Day of Judgment. Calvin here obviously uses his own experience as a basis for the statements of

¹ As Dr. A. Skevington Wood has put it, "The Protestant Reformation really started not on the steps of the Scala Sancta in Rome (where pious legend may have overlaid the tale) nor at the entrance to the newly-built Schlosskirche at Wittenberg (where the Theses were intended to inaugurate a discussion rather than touch off a revolt), but in the tower room of the Augustinian cloister where Luther sat before an open Bible and allowed Almighty God to address him face to face." Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation,

(London, 1960), p. 7
² Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 5, p. 108

³ History of the
Creeds of Christendom, vol. I., p. 98f

this characteristic adherent of the Reformed Faith. The speaker describes how he was brought up in the Christian faith, but had no other reason for his faith "than that which then everywhere prevailed," since he was denied direct access to God's Word. He declared,

Thy word, which ought to have shone on all thy people like a lamp, was taken away, or at least suppressed as to us. And lest any one should long for greater light, an idea had been instilled into the minds of all, that the investigation of that hidden celestial philosophy was better delegated to a few, whom the others might consult as oracles - that the highest knowledge befitting plebeian minds was to subdue themselves into obedience to the Church.¹

The speaker then goes on to tell how, in obedience to the Church, he had sought in vain for true peace of conscience in "the righteousness of works," until at last "a very different form of doctrine started up, not one which led us away from the Christian profession, but one which brought it back to its fountain head, and, as it were, clearing away the dross, restored it to its original purity."² The defence concludes,

My mind being now prepared for serious attention, I at length perceived, as if light had broken in upon me, in what a sty of error I had wallowed, and how much pollution and impurity I had thereby contracted. Being exceedingly alarmed at the misery into which I had fallen, and much more at that which threatened me in the view of eternal death, I, as in duty bound, made it my first business to betake myself to thy way, condemning my past life, not without groans and tears. And now, O Lord, what remains to a wretch like me, but, instead of defence, earnestly to supplicate thee not to judge according to its deserts that fearful abandonment of thy word, from which, in thy wondrous goodness, thou hast at last delivered me.³

The intensely personal tone of this section of Calvin's Reply makes it impossible to doubt that here we have a transcript of his own experience. At the heart of that experience was a re-discovery

¹ Reply by John Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 61ff.

² ibid., p. 62

³ ibid., p. 64

of the Word of God, so long denied to a seeking heart. God had spoken!

The implications could be worked out later, as Calvin did work them out, to a full theory of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. But that theory was not a mechanical setting of one authority against another. It was the fruit of experience and the inevitable consequence of the discovery that "the Lord hath spoken." For those who demanded proof Calvin had his answer:

As to their question - How can we be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church? - it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.¹

For Calvin the supreme proof of the authority of Scripture is that God in person speaks in it.² Belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture is more than the recognition of a formal truth: it is a religious experience.

The prefaces which Calvin wrote for various Bible translations are warm and compelling expressions of his personal faith. In his preface to the old Geneva Bible, for example, he writes,

If I were to write a long introduction, then I would begin by setting forth what a treasure the Holy Scripture is, what great dignity it possesses, and the incalculable profit it has. As concerning truth, it is the principal and most precious treasure we possess in the world. It is the key which opens unto us, and ushers us into the Kingdom of God, so that we may know how we ought to worship God, and the task to which He calls us. It is the sure guide to direct us, so that we may not be as lost wanderers all the days of our life.... In short, it is the one thing which distinguishes us from pagans and unbelievers, in that we have a religion assured and established in the infallible truth of God. And the right use of the Word of God is to relinquish all our own wisdom and to humbly attend to the voice of God.³

¹Institutes I. vii. 2 (Cf. I. vii. 5) - (ed. J. T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, London, 1961)

²ibid. I. vii. 4

³Corpus Reformatorum, Opera Calvini (Brunswick and Berlin, 1863-1900), IX. 823-825

It is not surprising to find both Luther and Calvin commenting on Augustine's famous remark that he would never have believed the Gospel, unless the authority of the Church had moved him thereto, for the Roman interpretation of it contradicted the Reformers' view of the supreme authority of Scripture. Both Luther and Calvin insist that the Authority of Scripture is rooted in personal experience of the Word of God. Luther's comment is:

We must not understand St. Augustine to say he would not believe the Gospel unless he were moved thereto by the authority of the whole Church. For that were false and unchristian. Every man must believe only because it is God's Word, and because he is convinced in his heart that it is true, although an angel from heaven and all the world preached the contrary....In this way Augustine also had to believe, and all the saints, and we too, every one for himself.¹

Luther accepts the fact that the Gospel is to be found nowhere except in the Church, and maintains that the unanimous acceptance of it by the universal Church is an 'external proof of faith, by which heretics are refuted and the weak strengthened in faith.'² But even the unanimous testimony of the Church can be no more than confirmation of a conviction already reached by personal experience.

Calvin's interpretation of Augustine's remark is that it means, not that the Church's authority is higher than that of the Gospel, but that unbelievers can be induced to accept the Gospel only by their reverence for the Church; whereas the faith of believers rests on a very different foundation. He says,

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but

¹ Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia, 1915-32), II. 452f.

² ibid., p. 453

above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean....¹

It is clear, therefore, that Luther and Calvin did not discover the authority of the Word of God when they looked for something to take the place of the displaced authority of the Church. They discovered the authority of the Word of God first in their personal experience of its power.

What is true of Luther and Calvin is true no less of the other leaders of the Reformation. Of critical importance for the Reformation in Zurich was a sermon preached by Zwingli in 1522 and published with the title, Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God. Zwingli leaves no room for doubt about the source of his convictions about the clarity and certainty of the Word. He says,

I know for certain that God teaches me, because I have experienced the fact of it: and to prevent misunderstanding this is what I mean when I say that I know for certain that God teaches me. When I was younger, I gave myself overmuch to human teaching, like others of my day, and when about seven or eight years ago I undertook to devote myself entirely to the Scriptures I was always prevented by philosophy and theology. But eventually I came to the point where led by the Word and Spirit of God I saw the need to set aside all these things and to learn the doctrine of God direct from his own Word. Then I began to ask God for light and the Scriptures became far clearer to me - even though I read nothing else - than if I had studied many commentators and expositors. Note that that is always a sure sign of God's leading, for I could never have reached that point by my own feeble understanding.²

On which Professor G. W. Bromiley in his Introduction to Zwingli's sermon makes the relevant comment:

The importance attached to the Word was not merely due to the desire to replace one external authority by another. The appeal of the Reformers was to a living and effective

¹ Institutes, I. vii. 5

² Zwingli and Bullinger, ed. G. W. Bromiley in The Library of Christian Classics, vol. xxiv. (London, 1953), pp. 90f

Word which verifies itself inwardly to all those who are prepared to hear it in penitence and faith. And that Word is authoritative not because its authority can be outwardly demonstrated but because it is inwardly apprehended....The clarity of the Word is the self-illumination and self-attestation by which the inward meaning and truth of the Word are guaranteed to those who accept it in faith.¹

The place of the Bible in Thomas Cranmer's conversion can be estimated from his preface to the English Bible of 1540. He lists a number of eventualities for which the Bible is a necessary remedy, and continues,

...the loss of thy dear and well-beloved causeth thee to mourn; prosperity exalteth thee, adversity bringeth thee low. Briefly, so divers and so manifold occasions of cares, tribulations, and temptations besetteth thee and beseigeth thee round about. Where canst thou have armour or fortress against thine assaults? Where canst thou have salve for thy sores, but of holy scripture?²

Jasper Ridley in his Thomas Cranmer³ suggests that the words, "the loss of thy dear and well-beloved causeth thee to mourn" may have had a personal significance for Cranmer. It seems they had, for it was after the death of his first wife in childbirth in 1516 that he began to study the Bible. It was three years' intensive study of the Bible then that brought him to the side of the Reformation, and his doctrine of the supreme authority of Scripture was based on an intensely personal experience of its power and

¹G. W. Bromiley in Introduction to Zwingli and Bullinger, pp. 55f. Professor Bromiley makes precisely the same point when writing of Thomas Cranmer, "Cranmer was not thinking of a possible substitute at the human level for the human authority of the Papacy. The Bible is not an authoritative book merely because of certain characteristics at the human level, that it is old, or of outstanding literary excellence, or historically inerrant. Nor in the last resort does it really resemble a public record which can be consulted legalistically....The Bible is not authoritative because it is an ecclesiastical Magna Carta, and in that sense a paper pope. It is authoritative because it is the revelation of God Himself in the concrete attestation of Jesus Christ." - G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer, Theologian (London, 1956), p. 19

²Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1846), p. 120

³Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer (Oxford, 1962), pp. 19, 20

sufficiency.

Thomas Bilney's conversion gives an outstanding illustration of the impact made by the publication of the Novum Testamentum of Erasmus in March, 1519. His own account is given in a letter written in Latin to Tunstall, Bishop of London, and quoted in The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe (Stephen Cattley, 8 vols., 1841). Bilney admits that he was attracted to Erasmus' translation from a motive less than the highest, "being allured rather by the Latin than by the Word of God (for at that time I knew not what it meant)." The first time he sat down to read, a divine light shone into his soul. He wrote,

At the first reading, as I well remember, I chanced upon this sentence of St. Paul (O most sweet and comfortable sentence to my soul!) - 'It is a true saying and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am the chief'.... This one sentence, through God's instruction and inward working, which I did not then perceive, did so exhilarate my heart, being before wounded with the guilt of my sins, and being almost in despair, that immediately I felt a marvellous comfort and quietness, insomuch that my bruised bones leaped for joy.¹

This one verse of Scripture led him to the discovery that all Scripture is most sweet and wholesome, and he began to read it with much prayer for a steady increase of faith. At last, he told Tunstall,

I desired nothing more than that I, being so comforted by Him, might be strengthened by His Holy Spirit and grace from above, that I might teach the wicked His ways which are mercy and truth.²

The story of Bilney's influence in Latimer's conversion is well-known. Latimer was not slow to acknowledge his debt. He said,

Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney...was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge; for I thank him, next to God, for that knowledge that I have in the Word of God.³

One further incident will suffice to illustrate our contention

¹The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe (Stephen Cattley, 1841), vol.IV., p. 635

²ibid., p. 636

³Hugh Latimer's Sermons (Parker Society ed., 1844), p. 334

the the Reformers' doctrine of the authority of Scripture was firmly rooted in personal experience of the power of the Word of God. When John Knox lay dying, on November 24, 1572, about five o'clock in the afternoon he said to his wife, "Go, read, where I cast my first anchor." She did not need to be told what he meant, but turned up the Bible and read in the seventeenth chapter of John,

Thou hast given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him; and this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.¹

There Knox had first cast his anchor, and at the end the anchor held. For behind all Knox's spiritual experience was the simple fact that God had spoken.

Let the Westminster Confession summarise the Reformers' view of Scripture:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God: yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.²

The Reformers' view of the authority of Scripture came not from any desire to set it over against the spurious authority of the Roman Church: it came from their experience of the Holy Spirit's

¹John 17. 2,3. Professor James S. McEwen of Aberdeen, in his recent valuable reappraisal of Knox - The Faith of John Knox (London, 1961) - in his final chapter on 'The Faith of the Heart' shows how all Knox's deep devotional thought can be linked with this seventeenth chapter of John

²Westminster Confession of Faith I.5.

work within their hearts.¹

But is all this of any real importance for us today? It is. For if the Reformers' doctrine of the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct were merely a negative reaction to the rejected authority of the Roman Church, it is immediately put on most precarious ground. If one infallibility merely replaces and supersedes another, then there is nothing to hinder that infallibility itself from been challenged and superseded. That is exactly what those who reject the infallibility of the Scriptures declare has happened. The Reformation got rid of an authoritative, infallible Church, personified in the Pope: modern scholarship, it is claimed, has got rid of an infallible Book.

But if the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture is a positive declaration of what they themselves had found in the Bible, then there can be no question of its being superseded by any other authority which may challenge it. This is not a theory which can be disproved: this is a fact which cannot be denied. God has spoken! And God speaks still. Faith in Divine inspiration is more than a cold assent to a theory about Scripture: it is a personal experience of a God Who has spoken, Who speaks still, in the Word which He has given to men.

Let us come back, therefore, to the question with which we started: "Was there any specific reason why this re-discovery should be made in the sixteenth century?" It cannot be denied that there were many historical developments which culminated in the Reform-

¹ Professor James S. McEwen, writing on John Knox's view of the authority of Scripture declares, 'At this point Knox and the other early Reformers have been much misrepresented. Despite all that has been said and written to the contrary, these men did not proclaim the infallibility of Scripture as a counter-blast to the infallibility of the Pope. It was not the infallibility of Scripture that interested them, so much as its supreme authority; and that authority they proclaimed not as a matter of dogma, but as a matter of experience.'

'For the same experience had come to all these men...to each of them, God had suddenly spoken from His Word.' The Faith of John Knox, p.38.

ation. But, as was said in the preceding chapter, the Reformation was not the result primarily of historical development: it broke into history and overturned history. There were many secondary factors which contributed to the re-discovery of the Word of God by the Reformers. The New Learning, and particularly a new interest in the study of Greek and Hebrew; and, not least, the wilful and blatant irregularities of the Roman Church - all these played their part in preparing the way for the re-discovery of the Bible as the rule of faith and conduct. But the primary factor was simple and unmistakable. God had spoken! And as men here and there heard His voice, the Reformation had begun. The primary reason why this re-discovery of the Word of God was made in the sixteenth century was that God's hour had struck and the fullness of the time had come. God had spoken!

The Reformation, then, was a positive re-discovery of the Word of God, not a negative reaction to the discredited authority of the Roman Church. And in the last resort, it was not that men discovered it, but that it discovered them, and laid hold upon them with an authority that could not be gainsaid.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

In what sense, we go on to ask, was this a re-discovery? The answer to that takes us back a long way to a conflict which began in Eden and has continued to the present day. That conflict began when the Tempter first questioned the validity of the Divine Word. "Yea, hath God said...?"¹ was the Serpent's question to Eve. Over against the Word of God was set a suggestion that there were a truth and an authority beyond and opposed to what God had said. Every apostasy in the Old Testament had its root in a similar suggestion. For example, when the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, they were given adequate injunctions for the direction of every part of their lives. But as they mingled with the Canaanites and

¹Genesis 3.1.

learned the arts of agriculture in a new land, they came to question the sufficiency of their own faith and ritual for the situation in which they found themselves. And so they introduced into their own worship elements from the Baal-worship of the Canaanites. They did not completely or openly abandon their allegiance to the Lord their God, but they co-ordinated and sometimes even identified their God with the gods of Canaan, and thus the simple, pure worship of Israel was gradually corrupted by the addition of usages and ritual borrowed from the nature-worship of the Canaanites. But again and again there came a fresh realisation that God had spoken and that His Word was adequate in itself for every circumstance in which they were placed. That is the significance of every revival of religion led by the Judges: in every case there was a re-discovery of God and His all-sufficient Word, and a recall to the pure faith and worship of an earlier day - a recall which culminated in the decisive work of Elijah, who stood forth as the first of the major prophets and proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord!"

The prophetic age shows a similar conflict between the true and the false prophet. There grew up within Israel a school of prophecy which did not rely on the direct word of God for its message. There were two possible alternatives to such a sure word of prophecy. It was possible, on the one hand, for the false prophet to repeat slavishly what had been said by earlier prophets who had an authentic Divine word to deliver. The inviolability of Jerusalem, for example, had been a principle of the older prophets, which was quite true for their times: Isaiah had made good use of it for rousing his fellow-citizens from despair and preventing them from surrendering when the army of Sennacherib stood before the gates.¹ It was true then that Jerusalem, the city of God, was inviolable, as the hosts of Sennacherib's dead around the walls well testified.

¹Isaiah 30. 27ff: 37. 6,7

But in Jeremiah's time the principle was no longer true, for circumstances had changed. And yet the false prophets kept on repeating it; no doubt they seemed both to themselves and to many of their hearers to be in a strong position when they could quote Isaiah against Jeremiah.¹ All the time, however, they were betraying those who listened to them, for their word was no longer the word of God.

A second alternative to a sure word of prophecy was for the false prophet to bring a new message of his own, having no Divine sanction. It is noteworthy that the influence of the false prophets always seemed to tend towards ritualism and a magnifying of the externals of religion. It is significant, too, that a prophetic message which had no Divine authority and which tried to substitute ritual for a sure word led invariably to immorality of life. "Both prophet and priest," says Jeremiah, "are profane; yea, in My house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord." "I have seen," he declares, "in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in lies."² Isaiah is no less forthright in his denunciation. "The priest and the prophet," he says, "have erred through wine, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink." And he gives this terrible picture of them: "His watchman are blind, they are ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one to gain from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day and still more abundant."³

It is difficult to keep one's thoughts from running forward to

¹Jeremiah 23. 9ff. George Adam Smith Writes; speaking of the differences between Jeremiah and the prophets who opposed him, "Along with the priests they clung to tradition, to dogma, to things that had been true and vital for past generations but were no longer so for this one....To all these he opposed the Word of the Living God.... - George Adam Smith, Jeremiah (London, 1923), p. 263

²Jeremiah 33. 11,14

³Isaiah 56. 10ff.

the period immediately before the Reformation when a similar substitution of tradition for Divine truth had led to the same ritualism in worship and something of the same immorality in life. **Zechariah** in his denunciation of the false prophets had pictured a time when the very name of prophet would be a byword, when men would be anxious to deny all connection with prophecy, and when the father and mother of any man who claimed to be a prophet would thrust him through, to deliver themselves from the reproach of having such a connection.¹ Such a time had surely come when Martin Luther's father did his utmost to prevent his son from entering the priesthood. Luther tried to justify what he was doing. "Dear father," he said, "why have you been so set against me, so wrathful; why is it that you are still perhaps unwilling to see me a monk? It is such a peaceful, pleasant and godly life." The old man glanced round the table, at which sat many monks and learned men, and said, "Did you never hear that a son must obey his parents? and, you learned men, have you never read in the Holy Scriptures that a man should honour his father and his mother?" No arguments from the company about the beauties of the monastic life were of any avail; no man could convince the sturdy old peasant that the monk's life was better or more godly than the life lived amid wife and children and the world of everyday work. Luther could not be persuaded at the time; but the day came when he saw how wrong he had been. He dedicated his tract On The Monastic Vow to his father. His dedication read: "You were right, dear father, after all."²

But we go back to the Old Testament again, to note that in the prophetic age, as in the age of the Judges, revival always comes, the dawn of truth breaks, and the darkness of error is shattered, when, as against the false prophets, an Amos, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, a man of God, stands forth and proclaims, "Thus saith the Lord!" Every period of reformation in the Old Testament was a re-discovery

¹ Zechariah 13. 3ff.

² Cf. T. M. Lindsay, Luther and the German Reformation (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 191

of the Word of God.

In the New Testament we find the ancient conflict renewed, between God's authoritative Word and the doctrines and traditions of men, in the controversy between God's Word made flesh in Jesus Christ and the Pharisaism which finally crucified Him.

The Jews in Christ's day had the Old Testament Scriptures, carefully preserved and handed down intact. But alongside the inspired Divine Word were set traditional interpretations and additions, which to a large extent nullified the authority of the Scriptures themselves. The Rabbinical treatment of the law of the Sabbath, for example, would be amusing if it were not so tragically symptomatic of a mistaken attitude to the Word of God. Here are some of the rules prescribed by the Mishnah, the oral law which had gradually grown up among the Jews, two tractates of which, Shabbath and 'Erubin, are devoted to a detailed consideration of how the Sabbath should be observed.¹ No burden could be carried on the Sabbath, and so the Jew in dressing on the Sabbath morning had to be careful not to put on anything that might turn out to be burdensome and break his Sabbath rest. He must not wear any ornament which he might put off and carry in his hand, for that would be a 'burden.' Women were forbidden to look in the mirror on the Sabbath, because they might discover a grey hair and attempt to pull it out, which would be unnecessary work and a very grievous sin! It was a very serious question, causing much discussion and dissension among the Pharisees, what should be done if the fastening of a sandal broke on the Sabbath.

If a traveller arrived at his destination just as the Sabbath commenced, he must take from his beast only such objects as were allowed to be handled on the Sabbath. As for the rest, he may loosen the ropes and let them fall down by themselves!

Plucking ears of corn and rubbing them in the hands, as the disciples did in the cornfields on the Sabbath day, was a double

¹Cf. G. F. Moore Judaism (London, 1927)

breach of the Sabbath law, for it involved both reaping and threshing. But even to walk on the grass was a form of threshing and was specifically forbidden!

Thus, and in countless similar ways, was the Word of God made of none effect by the traditions of men. Was it any wonder that Christ lashed the Pharisees with His words? - "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups; and many other such like things ye do."¹ Nor was it strange that the common people heard Him gladly when He broke through these petty regulations and, speaking with Divine authority, declared that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.² Once again men recognised the voice of God. A new hope leaped up in the hearts of many who had been crushed beneath the burden of tradition, as they listened to One Who brought them the very Word of God, speaking with authority and not as the Scribes.³

The outstanding feature of the Age of the Apostles was the consciousness that God had spoken irrevocably in Christ. The Holy Spirit, given in manifest power at Pentecost, brooded over the Early Church, as the same creative Holy Spirit had brooded over the waters in Creation. There was no doubt, no uncertainty, about the message that the heralds of the apostolic church went forth to proclaim. Christ had conquered; sin and death were defeated; God had spoken finally and irrevocably in His Son.

There may have been some, like the Judaizers whom Paul answers so fully in Galatians and Romans, who thought to add something to the Christian faith by enjoining Jewish ritual and practice upon the Gentile Christians. Timothy likewise is warned of a time when his hearers will not endure sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables.⁴ There are suggestions in II Peter, too, of a day when false teachers

¹Mark 7. 7,8

²Mark 2. 27

³Matthew 7. 29

⁴II Timothy 4. 3

and heresies will be brought in. But II Peter gives clearly the authentic note of the predominant Apostolic preaching:

We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty....We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts....For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.¹

Men had discovered the compelling, authoritative Word of God.

There was one legacy from the Jewish Church that the Christian Church could well have done without: and that was a type of Biblical interpretation which was to grow and develop until at last it almost choked the life out of the Bible in the Medieval Church. The Jewish Rabbis distinguished two types of Biblical interpretation. One they called peshat, the simple, literal, straightforward exposition of the text. The other they called derash: it was an elaborate system of deduction applied to the Old Testament to give some authoritative backing to the Rabbinical teaching which they had placed side by side with Scripture. The Jewish scholars of Alexandria were further influenced in their turn by similar allegorical methods which the pagan scholars of that learned city used for the purpose of extracting some germ of truth from their ancient mythology, and especially from their poets. These ancient writings contained so much about their gods that was incredible and even revolting that some such method of interpretation had to be devised if their influence was to be maintained. Eventually, Christian scholars in Alexandria accepted the same kind of allegorical interpretation as the method by which all Scripture should be understood, and it became the standard method of expounding the Bible.²

The whole process arose from a mistaken idea of what the Bible contained. The fundamental principle which lies behind

¹II Peter 1. 16, 21

²Cf. F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (London, 1886), esp. pp. 267ff.
and James D. Wood, The Interpretation of the Bible (1958)

allegorical interpretation is that the Bible is a collection of abstract truths, a book of information about doctrine and morals. Every part of it must be considered as teaching a lesson. Consequently, those parts of it which are purely descriptive and historical must be taken as allegory, teaching deeper truth than appears on the surface. As the system became more highly organised, it was laid down by the expositors of the Middle Ages that there are really four senses in which Scripture can be taken. Exposition was by means of the Quadrige, of fourfold rule, around which, as Guibert of Nogent, writing about 1100 A.D. on 'How to Make a Sermon,' put it, "every sacred page revolves as if on wheels."¹

First, and of least importance, is the literal sense, the historical account of what actually happened, the plain sense of a passage. The allegorical sense extracted from a passage what was to be believed. The tropological, or moral sense gave the lessons of the passage in its bearing on conduct. And the fourth sense, developed from the allegorical, and called anagogical, applied the passage to the world to come.

A Latin couplet long circulated by medieval scholars summed up the whole gamut of interpretation:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia -

The letter (that is, the literal interpretation) teaches what actually happened: allegory teaches you what to believe: the moral interpretation teaches you how to behave: and the anagogical interpretation teaches you in what direction you are going.

For example, when water is mentioned in the Bible, it can be understood in these four ways. First, it is just water (the literal sense); secondly, it can be used to teach something about Baptism (allegorical sense); thirdly, it denotes purity of life (the moral sense); and, finally, it reminds us of the water of life in heaven

¹Guibert of Nogent, How to Make a Sermon, translated in Early Medieval Theology, vol. IX in Library of Christian Classics (London, 1957), p. 291

(the anagogical sense). Similarly, Guibert of Nogent uses Jerusalem as an illustration of this method of interpretation:

Jerusalem is a certain city, historically speaking; allegorically, it represents holy church; tropologically, that is, morally, it is the faithful soul of anyone who sighs for a vision of eternal peace; anagogically, it means the life of the heavenly citizens who see the God of gods when his face is revealed in Zion.¹

Of all these senses of Scripture, the one which gave most scope for the inventive imagination was, of course, the allegorical. And weird and wonderful were some of the expositions which sprang from it. The parables in particular were a fertile ground for allegorizing. To take a familiar example, it might be thought that Christ's application of the parable of the Good Samaritan would have been enough to make clear the message that the parable was designed to bring: "Go and do thou likewise." But for the allegorizer the traveller is personified Human Nature, or Adam as the representative and head of our race. He has forsaken Jerusalem, the heavenly City, and is going down to Jericho, the profane city, the city under a curse. But no sooner has he thus left the holy City and the presence of God, and turned his desires towards the world than he falls into the hands of the Evil One and his agents, who strip him of his robe of original righteousness, wound him, and leave him covered with mortal strokes, every sinful passion and desire a gash from which the life-blood of his soul is streaming. His case would be desperate if it were not that Christ, Himself the Good Samaritan, comes to rescue him. Augustine's proof that our Lord intended Himself by this Samaritan is an amazing one. When the reproach, "Thou ~~xxx~~ art a Samaritan and hast a devil" was flung at Christ, He did not answer, "Neither am I a Samaritan nor have I a devil." He simply said, "I have not a devil." Therefore, He was a Samaritan, the Good Samaritan! Priest and Levite were helpless to aid the wounded traveller; many passed by and there was none to save. The great

¹Early Medieval Theology, p. 291

patriarch Abraham passed by, for he could justify only himself by faith. Moses passed by, for he was not the giver of grace, but of the law. Aaron the priest passed by, for the sacrifices which he continually offered were unable to purge the conscience from dead works. Only the true Good Samaritan could have compassion and could bring help. The oil and the wine which were used to treat the wounded traveller were no less significant than the other items in the story. The oil was the anointing of the Holy Spirit; the wine the blood of Christ. The inn is the Church; the innkeeper is Paul (according to Augustine) or Peter (according to another interpretation). The two pence mean either the two Sacraments, or the two Testaments, or the Word and Sacraments, or the gifts that the Lord has left with His Church, that it may keep house for Him till His Return.¹

This kind of interpretation of Scripture has a persistently long life and is discovered cropping up again and again, even long after the Reformation. Robert Bragge, for example, an eighteenth century minister of the City Temple, London, gave a four months' long series of discourses on the mystical meaning of Joseph's coat of many colours. A contemporary of the preacher has described it:

Eternal Bragge, in never-ending strains
Unfolds the wonders Joseph's coat contains;
Of every hue describes a different cause,
And from each patch a solemn mystery draws.²

It is not difficult to see the inevitable end of such 'interpretation' of the Bible. Men lost sight of the fact that the Bible is a historical revelation of God's love to the world, and began to regard it as a collection of abstract truths which could be studied and comprehended only by the learned. It became a book considered to be far beyond the grasp of the common mind, and reserved for the philosopher and the theologian; those were esteemed the greatest preachers and teachers in the Church who showed the

¹For this type of interpretation of this parable, cf. R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables (London, 1906), pp. 322ff.

²quoted, J. S. Stewart, Heralds of God (London, 1946), p. 168.

greatest ingenuity in elaborating these allegorical interpretations. It were well for any who might still be tempted to such cleverness to remember the penetrating words of James Denney: "No man can give at once the impressions that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."¹ The tragedy of the pre-Reformation centuries was that man's cleverness had blinded men's eyes to the power of Christ to save.

It should not be forgotten that there were some, particularly of the School of Antioch, who opposed the allegorizing principles of the School of Alexandria. The importance of the literal sense of Scripture had never been entirely obscured by allegorical interpretation. Thomas Aquinas had stressed it, and before him Albertus Magnus and Richard of St. Victor in the twelfth century. Nicholas of Lyra, who was a more important precursor of the Reformation than has often been realised, in some measure prepared the way for Luther's emphasis on the sensus literalis: hence the jingle:

Si Lyra non lyrasset²
Lutherus non saltasset -
If Lyra had not 'lyred,'
Luther had not danced.

But the highest place among those who pointed the way back to a sane, literal interpretation of the Scriptures must be given to John Colet, who became Dean of St. Paul's in 1505. In 1496 he delivered a series of lectures in Oxford on the epistles of Paul, and caused an immediate stir because his methods of interpretation were so different from those of his contemporaries, in that he was content to bring out the plain meaning of the sacred text. When Erasmus came to Oxford in 1498, Colet influenced him greatly by teaching him this way of interpreting the Bible: and the next step to the Reformation was a short one, for, to change the metaphor, Erasmus "laid the egg that Luther hatched."

Constantin Hopf, in his careful study of the influence of Martin Bucer on the English Reformation, draws attention to the effect

¹ quoted, J. S. Stewart, The Gates of New Life (Edinburgh, 1937), p. 81

² cited, A. Ekevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London, 1960), p. 25

that Colet's methods had on Martin Bucer. In his letter to the Senators of Strassburg in 1527 Bucer referred to John Colet's opinion on the interpretation of Scripture, and used it to buttress his own objections to the allegorical interpretation. The strong impression that Colet's arguments made on Bucer is seen in Bucer's Commentary on the Gospels, to which his letter to the Senators of Strassburg was prefixed, for in it he avoids allegorical interpretation almost completely. Hopf writes,

The Continental reformer, who later contributed so much to the English Reformation, was coming, for the first time, into contact with English theologians, indebted to one of England's greatest reformers of the pre-Reformation period, John Colet.¹

After his conversion Luther insisted on the primacy of the literal sense of Scripture. "The literal sense of Scripture alone," he declared, "is the whole essence of faith and Christian theology."²

He saw clearly that the allegorical interpretation of Scripture meant that the Bible could be made to teach anything that anyone chose. "It was," he declared, "a nose of wax, which could be twisted into any shape that was desired."³ "When I was a monk," he frankly acknowledged, "I was an adept in allegory. I allegorized everything. But after lecturing on the Epistle to the Romans, I came to have some knowledge of Christ. For therein I saw that Christ is no allegory, and learned to know what Christ was."⁴ He did not find it easy to break away from the type of interpretation that he had used for so long, and particularly in his lectures on the Psalms, as Professor Gordon Rupp has pointed out,⁵ this method was of undoubted service to him. He declared,

It was very difficult for me to break away from my habitual zeal for allegory. And yet I was aware that allegories were empty speculations and the froth, as it were, of the Holy Scriptures. It is the historical sense alone which supplies

¹Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation (Oxford, 1946), pp. 51ff

²cited, F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 327

³Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia, 1915-32), I. 367

⁴Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), I, p. 136

⁵Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God, p. 134

the true and sound doctrine.¹

Luther was followed by the rest of the Reformers in showing the plain, literal sense of Scripture. The Reformation had come, the Bible was in the hands and in the understanding of the common people; and men could hear once again, in unmistakable tones, the authoritative voice of God. But this was not discovery, it was re-discovery, a re-discovery that, we have seen, was made again and again in the history of God's dealings with men. Even in the centuries of increasing jugglery with fanciful interpretations of Scripture, there were those, who, as we have seen, insisted on the importance of the literal sense of Scripture.

The extent to which the Early Church Fathers accepted the sole authority and sufficiency of Scripture is open to question. There is evidence to support the contention that the Fathers accepted both Scripture and the Church's tradition as authoritative. Thus, for example, Vincent of Lérins, in his Commonitory, written c. 434, declares,

Should I or any other person wish to unmask the frauds of heretics as they arise, and avoid their snares, and in healthy faith to remain sound and whole, we would, with the Lord's help, doubly fortify our own faith, first, of course, by the authority of the divine law, and, second, by the tradition of the catholic church.²

It was Vincent who stated the famous standard by which tradition must be tested: it must be that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all men.³ But, with that proviso, it does seem that tradition early took its place beside Scripture as an authority. It must not be forgotten, however, that in the early centuries of the Christian era Scripture and tradition had not yet come into conflict: it was the later traditions, contradictory to Scripture, that led to the Reformers' uncompromising rejection of tradition.

¹Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 42, p. 173

²op. cit., in Early Medieval Theology, vol. IX, Library of Christian Classics, p. 37

³ibid., p. 38 - quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus.

There can be no doubt that the Early Fathers did maintain the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, and the necessity of proving everything out of it. For example, Basil of Caesarea said:

Without doubt it is a most manifest fall from faith, and a most certain sign of pride, to introduce anything that is not written in the Scriptures, our blessed Saviour having said, "My sheep hear My voice, and the voice of strangers they will not hear"; and to detract from Scripture, or to add anything to the faith that is not there, is most manifestly forbidden by the Apostle saying, "If it be but a man's testament, no man addeth thereto."¹

Thomas Cranmer, in A Confutation of Unwritten Verities, gives an impressive series of quotations to show that "the Writings of the old Fathers, without the written Word of God, are not able to prove any doctrine in religion," starting with Irenaeus, Lib.II, cap. 46 -

To lean to the scriptures of God (which is the certain and undoubted truth) is to build a man's house upon a sure and strong rock. But to leave that, and lean to any other doctrines (whatsoever they be), is to build a ruinous house upon the shattering gravel, whereof the overthrow is easy.²

Jerome realised that no weight could be put upon any doctrine which had not Scriptural authority:

This, because it has not authority from the Scriptures, is with the same easiness despised as approved.³

Origen made the same point:

We must take the scriptures as our witnesses, for our own additions have no value as witnesses, and our own interpretations are not to be trusted.⁴

The truth is that while the Fathers gave due weight to tradition that was founded on Scripture, their ultimate resort was to the

¹ cited, George Salmon, The Infallibility of the Church (London, 1888), p. 142, from Basil's De Fide, Garnier's Ed., ii. 313

² Cranmer's Works, Remains and Letters, (Parker Society ed.), p. 22

³ cited, Salmon, op. cit., p. 146, from In Matth. xxiii.35

⁴ cited Harnack, History of Dogma, (Eng. trans., 1897), vol. III, p. 206, from Orig. in Jerem., Hom. I. c.7 (my translation)

Scriptures themselves. Their acceptance of both Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition can be traced to the fact that their knowledge and experience of the gospel came to them through the Word of God, mediated to them by the hands of the Church. Augustine's experience may be taken as typical. It was through the preaching of Ambrose that his heart was first deeply stirred, and he was sent back to the Scriptures to find in them, and particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul, the gospel of the grace of God, and a conception of Christianity that was completely new to him.¹ But when the decisive moment came, it was the Word of God alone that spoke to his soul. The child's voice in the garden, chanting, "Take and read, Take and read," sent him to the Scriptures, to read, 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences' (Romans xiii.13). He said,

I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.²

The Church had had its place in the transformation that took place, and Augustine never forgot that. That perhaps lay behind his assertion, "I should not believe the Gospel, did not the authority of the Catholic Church move me thereto."³ But his personal experience of the living Word of God meant that his final resort was to the Holy Scriptures, so that he must say, "To the canonical Scriptures alone I owe agreement without any dissent."⁴

There can be no doubt that the acceptance of both Scripture and tradition in the early centuries led later to manifest inconsistencies, but the conflict between the two did not develop

¹ St. Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion, translated by Albert C. Outler, in vol. VII, Library of Christian Classics (1955), VI.3

² ibid. VIII. 7

³ Cont. Epist. Manich., 5 ⁴ Nat. et Grat., 61 (both these citations from G. P. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh, 1896), p. 179)

until it became increasingly evident that the Church in many things had departed disastrously from the teaching of Scripture. It was that departure which led John Wycliffe to base his attack on the current abuses of ecclesiastical practice on the supreme authority of the Scriptures. In 1378 he published his De veritate sacrae Scripturae - On the Truth of the Holy Scriptures - in which he declared,

Holy Scripture is the highest authority for every Christian and the standard of faith and of all human perfection.¹

The Church's tradition, pronouncements of the Councils, papal decrees, and all other expositions of Christian doctrine must be tested by the Word of God.² In that re-discovery of the Word of God as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, Wycliffe was a true forerunner of the Reformation, and led straight on to Martin Luther.

It is not certain that Martin Luther, on trial at Worms in 1520, used the famous words, "Here I stand. I can do none other." But what he did say is far more significant:

Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe neither in the Pope nor Councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen.³

The Word of God, authenticated in his personal experience, was his ^{supreme} authority, and on it he took his stand irrevocably. But he knew full well how easy it is to drift away from the Word, and we close this section with his warning:

While the Word of God flourishes, all things flourish and go well in the Church - and what is the reason that, at this day, the Church is not only withered away into luxury and pomp

¹R. Buddensieg, ed., De veritate sacrae Scripturae (London, 1905-1907), Introduction, 25

²ibid., 47

³Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 7, p. 838

but is almost wholly destroyed? It is because the Word of God is disregarded, and the laws of men and the artful inventions of Rome are taught."¹

That diagnosis of Luther's of the situation at his day leads us to our third section -

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

How, and to what extent, do we need to re-discover the Word of God today? In an article written some years ago in The Round Table, a Church of Scotland magazine for youth leaders, Professor James S. McEwen commented on the fact that the great majority of people never open a Bible except to follow the Scripture Readings in Church. He said,

This means that the Protestant Church today is drifting rapidly into a condition very like that of the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, where the only contact the people had with Scripture was through the preaching of the clergy. But there is this significant difference: the teaching of the priest was accepted as authoritative, whereas the teaching of the Protestant minister is not, but is subjected to the criticism of his congregation, who accept only as much of it as they think right.

This critical attitude was excellent as long as it meant that the people tested their minister's message by its agreement with Bible teaching. But as the Bible becomes less and less known by the man in the pew, preaching will be more and more tested - not by its agreement with the Word of God, but by its agreement with the prejudices of the hearers; by its agreement with vague religious ideas taken over from popular literature, and from current 'scientific teaching,' so called.

The one sheet-anchor which keeps the Protestant Church true to the Word of God is a laity grounded and educated in the Bible. And the last strands which hold us to that sheet-anchor are cracking.²

There we have very much the same assessment of the situation as Luther's four centuries earlier, and the answer to it must be

¹Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 5. 131.23, cited by Professor Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God, p. 233

²The Round Table, No. 6, November 1942, p. 6

the answer of Luther and all the Reformers - the re-discovery of supreme authority of the Word of God.

Rita Snowden in her book, A Thousand Sunrises, quotes the words of one who felt that Bible critics had robbed the Word of God of its authority for him -

They dried up all my Jacob's wells,
They broke the faithful shepherd's rod,
They blurred the gracious miracles,
Which are the signature of God.¹

Is not that precisely what much of the Biblical criticism of the past century has done? - "blurred the signature of God." As William Sanday put it in 1893, "a change has come over the current way of thinking on the subject of the authority of the Bible. The maxim that the Bible must be studied 'Like any other book' has been applied."²

The most serious result of such study has been to undermine the unity of the Bible. As J. K. S. Reid writes in The Authority of Scripture,

This constitutes a further blow to the authority of the Bible. Upheld as a unity, the Bible wields an impressive authority. Broken down into small fragments different from one another rather than harmonious, as criticism has taught it must be, this impressive authority is sensibly shaken if not irrecoverably lost.³

The authority of the Bible will be re-discovered today only as there is re-discovered the unity of the Bible as the Word of the living God.

It is not the critical study of the Bible which is deprecated here, but rather the assumption that the Bible is merely a body of literature, largely of man's making. A man can be examined post mortem, and a body can be dissected when it is dead. But a very different approach is needed for the examination of a living soul, dwelling in an earthly, physical frame. The same distinction holds for our study of the Bible today. What is needed is a

¹Rita S. Snowden, A Thousand Sunrises (London, 1944), p. 156

²W. Sanday, Inspiration (London, 1893), p. 1

³J. K. S. Reid, The Authority of Scripture (1957), p. 18

consecrated study of the spiritual content of the Bible, of the vital message in the written Word, of the Incarnate Word, to Whom the whole Bible points.

God has spoken! God is speaking still! These are the truths that need to be re-discovered today. What man has always needed is a word on which he can rely, coming with the unmistakable authority of God in it, spoken to him personally and directly, undistorted by human tradition. The answer to man's need today, as in the sixteenth century, and always, is the Bible, the only infallible rule of faith and conduct, "the Word of God that liveth and abideth for ever."¹

On the broader issue of ecclesiastical policy in the world of today, the question needs to be asked, as Professor C. K. Barrett, of Durham University, has pointed out in a recent issue of The Expository Times,

whether we still seek a full reformation of the Church by the pure word of God, or something less radical, and more accommodating, that looks not to Scripture only, but to Scripture and tradition, and tries to be Catholic and Protestant at the same time.²

A disturbing feature of the Ecumenical Movement is, as Dr. Barrett says, that it seems to be trying to make precisely this compromise, and to be ignoring the true ecumenicity of the Reformers, who found their unity in the Word of God alone.³ In ecumenical discussion, as in individual experience, there is need for a re-discovery of the Word of God as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct.

¹ I Peter 1. 23

² C. K. Barrett, 1662 and 1962, in The Expository Times, vol. LXXIII, No. 10, July, 1962, p. 295

³ Cf. Calvin, in Reply to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter: "My conscience told me how strong the zeal was with which I burned for the unity of thy Church, provided thy truth were made the bond of concord" - Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 60

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE WORD OF GOD

(ii) The Rightful Possession of the Common People

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, speaking at the meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, held in Edinburgh, in October, 1960, to mark the 400th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation, underlined one thing as the essential feature of the Reformation. "I believe," she said, "that what happened at the Reformation can be stated in terms on which all Christians may agree. Holy Writ was liberated to the people, and as a result the Word of God was revealed again as a force to be reckoned with in the affairs of both public and private life..."

The Reformation was essentially the re-discovery of the Word of God as the rightful possession of the common people.

The two who did most to give the Word of God to the common people in their own English language had no doubts about the importance and the urgency of their task. John Wycliffe asserted that

every Christian has the right and the duty to study the Bible: for not to know the Bible means not to know Christ, Who Himself is the writing which we study and the belief which we must believe.¹

And in a tract written especially for knights and secular lords he claimed New Testament precedents for vernacular translations:

Christ and His apostles converted much people by the uncovering of scripture, and this in the tongue which was

¹R. Buddensieg, ed. Wycliffe's De veritate sacrae Scripturae (London, 1905-1907), pp. 37f.

most known to them....why then may not the modern disciples of Christ gather up the fragments of that same bread? The faith of Christ ought therefore to be recounted to the people in both languages (Latin and English).¹

And William Tyndale in his Preface to his version of the Pentateuch, printed at Marburg in 1530, declared that he was moved to translate the New Testament because, to use his own words,

I perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text.

The giving of the Word of God to the common people in language that they could understand was a natural corollary of the Reformers' doctrine of Scripture. Four things are involved in that doctrine - Scripture's authority, sufficiency, clarity and efficacy - and each of these demands that Scripture should be in the hands of every man in his own language. "That which is every man's guide ought to be in every man's hand."²

Authority. As has been stated in the previous chapter, the Reformers derived their doctrine of the Word of God as an infallible rule of faith and life from their personal experience of its power. This authority inevitably came to be set over against the spurious authority of an infallible church personified in and represented by the Pope, but ultimately its strength depended on personal experience. Consequently, if this doctrine could hope to win general support, the same Word which had made such a personal impact on the Reformers must be brought to bear on others. Recognition of the Word's authority depended on its being circulated as widely as possible. The Westminster Confession of Faith, summarising the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, declares that our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Word of God "is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."³ The inner witness of the Spirit is inextricably linked with

¹ cited, Margaret Deansly, The Lollard Bible (Cambridge, 1920), p.246

² John Brown, History of the English Bible, with reference to Wycliffe, quoted Carey Bonner, The Romance of the English Bible (London, 1927), p. 32

³ Westminster Confession of Faith I. v

possession of the Word.

Sufficiency. In opposition to the Romanist view that Scripture is an incomplete record of revelation, needing to be supplemented by tradition, the Reformers maintained that it was completely adequate. As the Westminster Confession puts it,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of man.¹

If the Bible contains and makes known all that is necessary to salvation, as the Reformers said it did, the obvious strategy is to let it loose among men, untrammelled by the traditions which had been superimposed upon it.

Clarity. The Bible, the Reformers maintained, is not an obscure book, comprehensible only by the learned, and needing the interpretation which only authoritative Councils and infallible Popes could give it. It was quite clear in its teaching regarding the way of salvation, and, though there are difficult passages, they can be understood by reference to those which are plain and easy. Luther constantly complained against the Romanists that they regarded the Bible as a closed book, comprehended only by ecclesiastical experts, and he maintained,

There is not on earth a book more lucidly written than the Holy Scripture. Compared with all other books, it is as the sun compared with all other lights.²

To quote the Westminster Confession again,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, I.vii.

² Martin Luther, Comment on Psalm 37, cited, A. Skevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London, 1960), p.17.

use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.¹

If the 'unlearned' can 'attain unto a sufficient understanding' of the Word, it follows inevitably that he should be given access to it.

Efficacy. Here we come to perhaps the most distinctive contribution of the Reformers to the doctrine of Scripture; here we find the fundamental difference which underlay the cleavage between the Roman and the Reformed attitude. To the medieval theologians, as we have seen, the Bible was principally a storehouse of abstract truths, a source book of information on doctrine and morals. To the Reformers it was a means of grace. T. M. Lindsay writes,

Protestants believe that men can get from the simple reading of the Bible not only information but fellowship with God, not merely knowledge about God but communion with Him. It gives not merely new truths about divine things; it actually quickens the divine life.²

That gives us the supreme motive of all the work of the Reformers in their translation, circulation and interpretation of the Scriptures. The common people could find in the Bible a message for themselves; they could hear their Father's voice; they could discover their Redeemer's love; they could trust their Lord's promises. So haste was made to translate the Bible into all languages and to place a Bible which he could understand in the hands of every man. As Principal John A. Mackay writes,

The presupposition that underlay the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular tongues of Europe, and later of the whole world, was and continues to be, that the Holy Spirit, under whose inspiration the writers of the sacred Record had done their work, would lead humble souls to a saving knowledge of God.³

¹Westminster Confession of Faith, I. vii

²T. M. Lindsay, The Reformation (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 188

³John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier (London, 1950), p. 114

So it was that from the pens of the Reformers flowed translations of the Bible, innumerable commentaries and helps to the study of the Bible of all kinds. Professor Margaret Deanesly, writing about Wycliffe's work, says,

If all men were in immediate relationship to God, and owed Him a righteousness and obedience to His law for which they themselves were responsible, they needed to study His law personally, to satisfy themselves that they were keeping it.¹

One of Martin Luther's greatest contributions to the German Reformation was his giving the German people the opportunity of reading God's Word in their own tongue. He was determined that his Bible translation should be for the common man. He says,

One has to ask the mother in her home, the children in the street, the common man in the market-place, and to look at their mouths to see how they speak, and thence interpret it to oneself, and so to make them understand.²

His first edition of the New Testament in German was published on 21st September, 1522, to be followed in 1534 by the complete Bible.

Calvin's contribution to Bible study was not in the field of translation - that was being done by others, notably his cousin, Robert Olivétan, whose translation of the Bible was published at Neuchatel in June, 1535 - but in the field of exposition. His concern was not only that the Bible should be in the hands of the common people, but that they should be provided with helps to enable them to understand its meaning. He "made it the main business of his life to open up Scripture to the common people."³ Continually throughout his crowded life he was engaged with the Commentaries. In the Preface to the first which he produced - on the Epistle to the Romans - he gives as his reason for entering this well-worked field the clamant need for exposition which would

¹ Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 227

² quoted, T. M. Lindsay, Luther and the German Reformation (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 143

³ A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, (2nd ed., London, 1950), p. 17

meet the needs of those of simple mind. He contrasts with his own work that of Martin Bucer, for whom he had a great admiration, saying that it was "larger than that he may be quickly read by those who are tied to their business, and also higher than can be easily understood of the simple and those what are not very attentive."¹

Calvin's concern that the Word of God should be understood by the common people is further seen in the care with which he prepared French translations of the Commentaries for popular study, adding explanations of many phrases in the Latin originals which might be puzzling to the unlearned.

John Knox's Letter of Wholesome Counsel,² written to Scotland in 1556, states clearly his view of the importance of giving the Bible to the common people in language that they can understand, and insists that "lairds, burgesses and even artisams may sit down with the Bible; and together, even without the guidance of a minister, learn the truth of God from its pages."³

Thomas Cranmer insists that to deprive the common people of the Bible in their own language is a departure from ancient custom:

And yet, if the matter should be tried by custom, we might also allege custom for the reading of the scripture in the vulgar tongues, and prescribe the more ancient custom. For it is not much above one hundred years ago, since scripture hath not been accustomed to be read in the vulggar tongues within this realm; and many hundred years before that it was translated and read in the Saxons' tongue, which at that time was our mother's tongue....And when this language waxed old and out of common usage, because folk should not lack the fruit of reading, it was again translated in the newer language.⁴

Surprisingly, Cranmer found opposition, particularly in the West of England, to his support for the Bible in English, and among the Fifteen Articles of the Devon Rebels was one which said, "We will have the bible, and all books of scripture in English, to be called

¹ A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 24

² John Knox's Works (ed. Laing, Edinburgh, 1846-64, 6 vols), IV.133ff

³ James S. McEwen, The Faith of John Knox (London, 1961), p. 31

⁴ Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer (Parker Society), p. 119

in again. For we be informed that otherwise the clergy shall not of long time confound the heretics." But Cranmer had his answer for them:

As many of you as understand no Latin cannot know God's word but in English, except it be the Cornish men, which cannot understand likewise none but their own speech. Then you must be content to have it in English, which you know, or else you must confess that you refuse utterly the knowledge thereof... And can you name me any Christians in all the world, but they have, and ever had, God's word in their own tongue....And will you have God farther from us than from all other countries; that he shall speak to every man in his own language that he understandeth and was born in, and to us shall speak a strange language that we understand not?¹

All the Reformers had the same concern to give the people their rightful possession, the Word of God in their own language, and to help them by every means to understand it and apply it to their own lives.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

Here once again we find confirmation for the view that the standpoint of the Reformers was not negative but positive. William Tyndale declared most solemnly in his Preface to the New Testament, published in 1534,

I take God to witness, to record to my conscience, beseeching him that my part be not in the blood of Christ if I wrote of all I have written throughout this book aught to any evil purpose...or to stir up any false doctrine or opinion in the Church of Christ, or to be the author of any sect, or to draw disciples after me.

The motive of the Reformers was not primarily to discredit Rome - though that was bound to follow as men discovered for themselves the distortions of truth which underlay the Roman system - but to let men hear the voice of God in the Scriptures which are the rightful possession of all His children. The movement in its English-speaking aspect had its climax in the Authorised Version of 1611, whose aim was

¹ibid., p. 183

to give to the nation a Bible that could be "understanded of the people." In the Address to the Reader this is clearly stated:

But how shall men meditate in that which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? as it is written, "Except I know the power of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh, a Barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a Barbarian to me.

Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered. Indeed, without translation into the vulgar tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well (which was deep) without a bucket, or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom ^{when} a sealed book was delivered, with this motion, "Read this, I pray thee," he was fain to make this answer, "I cannot, for it is sealed."

It is significant that the negative reaction has come from the Romanist side.

The question of the attitude of the Roman Church to the reading of the Bible by the common people is a very complex one, complicated by the fact that no doctrine regarding Bible reading by the laity appears to have been consistently held or applied. But a careful and meticulous study by Professor Margaret Deanesly in The Lollard Bible suggests that prior to the Reformation and its re-discovery of the Bible as the rightful possession of the common people the policy of the Roman Church was to prohibit or at best discourage vernacular Bible reading. The post-Reformation history of the Roman Church seems to suggest that, while this policy has undergone considerable modification, it has not even yet been fundamentally superseded.

The lack of unanimity in the Roman Church on the question of popular biblical translations is evident in the earliest pronouncement on the subject. This was in a letter of Pope Gregory VII to Vratislaus, king of Bohemia, written in 1079. Vratislaus had asked permission for his monks to recite the divine office in Slavonic: this permission was refused, and the reason given was

that to grant it would involve the translation of portions of Scripture. Gregory's ruling declared that

it is clear to those who reflect often upon it, that not without reason has it pleased Almighty God that holy scripture should be a secret in certain places, lest, if it were plainly apparent to all men, perchance it would be little esteemed and be subject to disrespect; or it might be falsely understood by those of mediocre learning, and lead to error.¹

The fear of 'heresy' - in the sense of teaching and practice at variance with the standards of the Church - was then, and continued to be, the Church's main reason for prohibiting the reading of the Scriptures by the common people. As Professor James S. McEwen has said, "the Bible had become, to the mediaeval Church, a bewildering and dangerous book."² But another ~~and~~ significant and more ominous reason is suggested by a constant belittling of the capacities and abilities of the common man to be found in the regularly repeated prohibitions of vernacular Bible reading. "Cast not pearls before swine" occurs again and again as Biblical authority for denying the Bible to the common people. About 1200 Pope Innocent III wrote to the Christians of the diocese of Metz stating that he had been informed that

a multitude of laymen and women, led to a large extent by a desire of understanding the scriptures, have had translated for themselves the gospels, epistles of S. Paul, the psalter, the moralisation of Job, and many other books in the French tongue. They intend that with this translation, made thus at their own discretion (would that it had been made with prudence as well), laymen and women shall presume to hold forth on such matters, and to preach to each other.³

Innocent could not condemn the desire to understand the scriptures, but he was convinced that to understand them was beyond the capacity of ordinary folk. He wrote,

Though the desire to understand the divine Scriptures is not to be censured, but rather ought to be commended, yet the

¹ cited Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 24

² James S. McEwen, The Faith of John Knox, p. 30

³ cited The Lollard Bible, p. 31

secret mysteries of the faith ought not to be explained to all men in all places, since they cannot be everywhere understood by all men: but only to those who can conceive them with a faithful mind; for what says the apostle to simple people? Even as babes in Christ have I fed you with milk and not with meat.... For such is the depth of divine scripture, that not only the simple and illiterate, but even the prudent and learned, are not fully sufficient to try to understand it.¹

Innocent supported this view by two quotations from Scripture - one from the Latin translation of Psalm 64.6 (Vulgate 63.7), quia multi defecerunt scrutantes scrutino - "because many have failed, searching in their search" - words which cannot be derived from the Hebrew original. The other quotation is from Exodus 19.13-14: "Whence rightly it was of old written in the divine law, that a beast which touched the mount should be stoned; that is, lest some simple and unlearned person should presume to reach up to the sublimity of holy scripture, or to preach it to others."²

The strongest prohibition of the vernacular Scriptures comes from the time of the Albigenses, when in 1229 the Synod of Toulouse decreed -

Prohibemus etiam, ne libros veteris Testamenti aut novi permittantur habere; nisi forte psalterium, vel brevarium pro divinis officiis, aut horas B. Mariae aliquis ex devotione habere velit. Sed ne praemissos libros habeant in vulgari translato, arctissime inhibemus.³

Moreover we prohibit that (lay people) should be allowed to have the books of the Old Testament or the New, unless perhaps anyone from devotion should wish to have a psalter, or a breviary for the divine office, or the hours of the blessed Virgin Mary. But we most strictly prohibit their having even the aforesaid books translated into the vulgar tongue.

The Bible in the vernacular had come to be regarded as a dangerous book.

A further reason given for the Church's disapproval of vernacular translations is the inadequacy of such translations to

¹ ibid.

² ibid.

³ Conc. of Toulouse, 1229, c, xiv, cited T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 148.

express the profundity of the thoughts contained in the original languages of the Scriptures or in the Latin of the Vulgate. Berthold, Archbishop of Mainz, in his diocesan ~~litt~~ edict of 1486, wrote,

Let such translators say, if they have any regard for truth, whether they do this with good or evil mind, and whether the German language is sufficient to treat of these things.... For it must be confessed that the poverty of our mother tongue is quite insufficient, and that it would be necessary for translators to invent unknown names for things out of their head; or, if they used old names, they would corrupt the true meaning: which we fear the more, because of the great danger in the case of the sacred books. For who would enable simple and uneducated men, and even women, into whose hands copies of the sacred books might fall, to pick out the true meaning.¹

In Italy, Passavanti, a Dominican who died in 1357, had the same opinion of translations and translators:

because they have not the spiritual understanding, and because our vulgar tongue is lacking in the right words, they expound it often coarsely and rudely, and often not truly.²

It is of interest to find the same objections being made to Wycliffe's translation in England. In an appendix to The Lollard Bible Professor Deanesly gives the Latin text of two closely reasoned denunciations of vernacular translations. The first was by the friar William Butler, who opposed the lawfulness of any translation. Professor Deanesly writes,

He took his stand on the broad grounds of the difficulty of translation, and of securing the circulation of correct English texts, and the providential dispensation of the inferiority of the laity; it was no business of lay folk to read the Bible, and the human intellect, unassisted by the grace of priesthood, was insufficient for it. The earthly hierarchy should be an image of the heavenly, where grace is mediated from the higher to the lower orders. The gospel was not at first given in writing, and the subtlety of the

¹ cited, Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 125

² ibid., p. 46

scripture was still too great for it to be read in translations.¹

The second opponent of translations for the common people was another friar, Thomas Palmer, who debated with a Lollard believed by Professor Deanesly to have been Peter Payne, who was encouraged in the debate by John Purvey, Wycliffe's secretary and disciple. Among the arguments of the defender of Biblical translations were the following: the law of Moses was recited in the ears of the people; the apostles were unlettered men, but they knew the scriptures; the gift of tongues was given at Pentecost that men of all nations might know the new law; Jerome translated the Vulgate; Bede translated the Vulgate into English. Palmer's rejoinder, given at considerable length, was based chiefly on the inherent inferiority of the laity and their incapacity for Bible reading, and he made frequent use of the text, "Cast not pearls before swine."

These objections to vernacular translations of the Bible would have kept the Word of God in the hands of the experts. But one of the greatest achievements of the Reformation and its insistence on the clarity of Scripture was to release the Bible from bondage to ecclesiastical experts. Perhaps, as Dr. A. Skevington Wood suggests, "a similar emancipation is overdue today."²

In Tyndale's day a certain Prior Buckenham provides an illustration of some of the childish and absurd objections urged by some of the priests against giving the people the Bible in their own tongue. Referring to the saying concerning a man putting his hand to the plough, and then looking back, he asks,

Will not the ploughman, when he readeth these words, be apt forthwith to cease from the plough, and then where will be the sowing and the harvest? Likewise also whereas the

¹Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 290

²A. Skevington Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation, p. 19

baker readeth 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,' will he not forthwith be too sparing in the use of leaven, to the great injury of our health? And so, also, when the simple man readeth, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out,' incontinent, he will pluck out his eyes, and so the whole realm will be full of blind men, to the great decay of the nation, and the manifest loss of the King's grace.¹

On these arguments, it was indeed a risky business to put the Bible into the hands of the common people!

But lest it should be thought that such opposition to the giving of the Bible to the common people is not typical of Romanist policy, let us seek the official attitude of the Roman Church to the question. Rule IV of the Index Expurgatorius - the list of books prohibited, on pain of excommunication by the Roman Church - is as follows:

Inasmuch as it is manifest from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to any one, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it, this point is referred to the judgment of the bishops or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety they apprehend will be augmented, and not injured by it, and this permission they must have in writing. But if any one shall have the presumption to read or possess it without such written permission, he shall not receive absolution until he have first delivered up such Bible to the ordinary. Booksellers, however, who shall sell, or otherwise dispose of Bibles in the vulgar tongue, to any persons not having such permission, shall forfeit the value of the books, to be applied by the bishop to some pious use, and be subjected to such other penalties as the bishop shall judge proper, according to the quality of the offence.²

This fourth rule of the Index, first drawn up by Pope Paul IV and the Council of Trent, has been confirmed by many subsequent decrees of Popes, and while in England and in the United States it is now relaxed, it is still observed in many Roman Catholic countries,

¹ quoted, Carey Bonner, The Romance of the English Bible, p. 59

² quoted from English reprint of the Index of Expurgated Works of 1608, in 1837, by Richard Gibbings, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Dublin.

and generally the tendency has been to discourage the reading of the Bible by the laity.

What then are we to make of vernacular translations officially approved by the Roman Church? For example, the Brethren of the Common Life, a body of secular clergy and laymen organised by Gerard Groot and Florentius Radewins in 1378, asked in 1398 for a legal pronouncement on, among other things, the lawfulness of the use of German "scriptures," including biblical translations, by the laity.¹ A reply to them was given by a group of Cologne doctors and other friendly ecclesiastics, and was favourable to vernacular translations. It was pointed out that the Bible was first written in the language of the people for whom it was intended, and not in Latin; that the saints translated it for the benefit of the heathen to whom they preached, as St. Bartholomew was said to have done in India; that holy scripture was translated into Latin, not in order that it might be hidden but that it might be open to all. The doctors concluded, that the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Syrians, Arabs, Goths (for whom Ulphilas translated the holy scriptures), the Egyptians, Russians, Armenians have the holy scriptures in their vulgar tongues, "and perhaps, if any man inquired more diligently he would find that they exist in every language under heaven: what then is the reason that holy scripture may be read in the tongues of so many nations, and yet not in the German language?"²

But there were certain careful limitations of this approval. First, the vernacular writings must not contain heresy; secondly, they must deal with simple subjects, for children should be fed with milk and not with meat; thirdly, they must deal openly with the subject and not figuratively; fourthly, they must be similar in style to the books of the doctors of the Church; and, fifthly, the meaning must agree with the books of the saints, and care should be taken that they are properly translated.

¹ One of their number, Gerard Zerbolt (d. 1398), had published a treatise, The Usefulness of Reading Sacred Scripture in the Common Speech.

² cited, Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 93. Cf. Cranmer's argument, supra, p. 61.

Professor Deanesly, after careful consideration of the extent to which these vernacular "scriptures", approved for the use of the Brethren of the Common Life, were used, comes to this conclusion:

The doctors in 1398 had declared the use of translations of the simpler books of the Bible canonical and lawful, and there is good reason to believe that the brethren actually encouraged their use in the houses of nuns and tertiaries which they directed. But among the laity they only argued for the free use of Dutch books of edification, not the canonical scriptures themselves....¹

A similar situation prevailed in England, where, G. C. Coulton says, speaking of the numerous manuals of devotion prior to Wycliffe's day, "while they prescribe reading for the layfolk never suggest Bible-reading."² It seems clear that what was approved in Holland was only a limited use of vernacular translations of the Bible, and that only for purposes of devotion. There was no thought of a biblical theology.

A more familiar example of Roman approval of biblical translation is the Douai Version, the work of English scholars connected with the University of Douai. The New Testament was issued at Rheims in 1582, and the whole Bible in 1609, just before the Authorised Version. It may be noted, in support of our contention that the Roman attitude was negative rather than positive, that this version was prepared, in part at least, as an answer to the Genevan Bible and its strongly anti-papal notes. The Douai notes in turn were strongly anti-Protestant, and in its preface it explains its existence by saying that Protestants had been guilty of "casting the holy to dogs and pearls to swine." The fact is that the Douai translation was grudgingly wrung from the authorities of the Roman Church. Sir Frederic Kenyon writes,

It was not that the heads of the Roman Church believed such translations to be in themselves desirable; but since there was evidently an irrepressible popular demand for them, it was clearly advisable, from the Roman point of view, that the

¹Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 98

²G. C. Coulton, The Roman Catholic Church and the Bible, p. 24 in his Mediaeval Studies, xiv (1921)

translated Bible should be accompanied by a commentary in accordance with Roman teaching, rather than by that of the Genevan Calvinists or the English bishops.

The Roman Catholic translators themselves admit the substantial truth of this in their preface, declaring that they have undertaken the translation only "upon special consideration of the present time, state and condition of the country." The Council of Trent, they point out, did not approve of the Scriptures being "indifferently read of all men." They deny that in earlier days, "translations of the Bible into the vulgar tongues were in the hands of every husbandman, artificer, prentice, boys, girls, mistress, maid, man..."

No, in those better times men were neither so ill, nor so curious of themselves, so to abuse the blessed book of Christ; neither was there any such easy means before printing was invented, to disperse the copies into the hands of every man, as now there is.²

All in all, the Douai Version was a reluctant translation.

It is significant that the English of this version was not colloquial, but ecclesiastical: it was very far from being a book for the common people. Samuel McComb writes in The Making of the English Bible,

Many passages convey no meaning except to the scholar who is able to turn them back into Latin, and in some cases even the Latin has lost the sense. Many of these faults have been remedied in later editions, but a considerable number still remain.³

Examples are: "celebrating the exequies" (Gen. 1.10); "nothing of that anathema shall stick to thy hand" (Deut. xiii.17); "give us today our supersubstantial bread" (Matt. vi.11); "inflameth the wheel of our nativity" (James iii. 6).

After the unlearned reader has puzzled out these and others like them, he may go on to ask the meaning of 'pythonic spirits,' 'loaves of proposition,' 'a rational,' 'the cords of Adam,' And, then, what are 'tamaric,' 'cherogrillus,' 'ophimachus,' 'sciniph,' 'charadrion,' 'azymes'? This is not the Word of God as it can be "understande^d of the people."⁴

¹F. G. Kenyon, Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts (1939), p.228

²quoted, F. J. Paul, Romanism and Evangelical Christianity, (London, 1940),

³Samuel McComb, The Making of the English Bible, pp. 74ff

p.44

⁴ ibid., p. 74

And yet it is only fair to remember that, in a considerable number of places, words and phrases used in the Authorised Version are due to the influence of the Douai translation.

A new situation has arisen with the entry of the Roman Church into the field of modern translations. In 1935 The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures provided for Roman Catholic readers a translation of the New Testament from the original Greek, but it was not strictly a modern version, for it used a traditionally 'biblical' style with archaic forms. Monsignor Ronald A. Knox published in 1945 a translation of the Latin Vulgate into felicitous modern English (the New Testament): this was given official recognition along with the Douai version. In 1949 Monsignor Knox published a translation of the Old Testament from the Latin Vulgate 'for private use only.' A revision appeared in 1955 with official authorisation.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of Monsignor Knox's work, particularly since it took its place in the literary field, not as a counter-blast to the modern versions of Protestant translators, but as another attempt to approximate the Bible to the literary requirements of our day. Knox was perhaps limited to some extent by being tied by his church to the Vulgate, but nevertheless the publication of his work marked an epoch, for it required and looked for a reading public, and, even more so, a reading Church.

Protestant prejudice might still recall that there are other factors in the Roman attitude to the Scriptures. Whatever be the version, Douai or Knox, it must still be interpreted in strict accordance with the views of the Church. It may also be maintained that Knox's version has not had unlimited circulation - for a time at least it was prohibited in Eire - and its price still keeps it from being a popular edition. But the fact remains that it marks a break with the policy which the Roman Church has followed for centuries, and however the interpretation of the Bible may be limited by ecclesiastical control, the Word of God is not bound.

It does seem, moreover, that the Roman Church, today as in

1398, is prepared to sanction the use of the Bible for purposes of devotion, but not as an exclusive and supreme authority in matters of faith. In 1960 it was reported that a Vatican publishing firm had issued a completely new translation of the Scriptures, prepared by Catholic scholars, consisting of three volumes with 3,500 pages and 120 full-page illustrations. The Vatican official newspaper, Osservatore Romano, urged its readers to broaden their knowledge of the Bible,

so that those who live in a Christian civilisation may know what it was that nurtured the spirit which animated their ancestors, and so that those living outside the Christian civilisation may learn to know the spiritual basis of that civilisation.¹

There is no suggestion that the Word of God is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice.

Two vivid metaphors may be taken as our summary of the general attitude of the Roman Church to the Bible. One is from F. J. Paul's Romanism and Evangelical Christianity -

The general attitude of the Roman Church to the Bible is that the Bible is a kind of poison - highly dangerous if taken 'neat,' and innocuous or occasionally even helpful if taken along with the prescribed antidote.²

The other metaphor comes from T. M. Lindsay's History of the Reformation, and may be a reminiscence of a sermon of Geiler of Kayersberg (1478 - 1510) against the giving of the Bible to the laity. Lindsay describes the Church's attitude:

It is right that the children should be fed with the Bread of Life, but Mother Church ought to keep the bread-knife in her hands lest the children cut their fingers.³

Professor Margaret Deanesly⁴ quotes from Geiler's sermon:

It is dangerous to put knives into children's hands, for them to cut bread with themselves, for they may cut themselves. So also holy scripture, which contains the bread of God, should

¹ quoted from E.P. News Service in Covenanter Witness, Aug. 17, 1960

² F. J. Paul, Romanism and Evangelical Christianity, p. 47

³ T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, p. 151

⁴ Margaret Deanesly, The Lollard Bible, p. 107

be read and explained by such as are already far advanced in knowledge and experience, and will set forth the undoubted meaning. For inexperienced people will easily take harm from their reading.

We can see the contrast between the negative attitude of Rome and the positive attitude of the Reformers by putting side by side the statement of the translators of the Douai Version and a passage from John Calvin's The Necessity of Reforming the Church. The Douai translators wrote:

Which translation we do not for all that publish, upon erroneous opinion of necessity, that the holy Scriptures should always be in our mother tongue, or that they ought, or were ordained of God, to be read indifferently of all, or could be easily understood of every one that readeth or heareth them in a known language: or that they were not often through man's malice or infirmity, pernicious and much hurtful to many: or that we generally and absolutely deemed it more convenient in itself, and more agreeable to God's word and honour and edification of the faithful, to have them turned into vulgar tongues, than to be kept and studied only in the ecclesiastical learned languages: Not for these nor any such like causes do we translate this sacred book, but upon special consideration of the present time, state, and condition of our country, unto which, divers things are ~~new~~ either necessary, or profitable and medicinable now, that otherwise in the peace of the Church were neither much requisite, nor perchance wholly tolerable...¹

Calvin on the other hand maintains,

This much, certainly, must be clear alike to just and unjust, that our reformers have done so small service to the Church, in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance, to read the Scriptures, in labouring diligently to make them better understood....²

It is the Roman position rather than the Protestant, which is negative and reactionary.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

We proceed now to consider in what sense this giving of the

¹A. W. Pollard, Records of the English Bible (1911), pp. 301, 302
²Calvin, The Necessity of Reforming the Church, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises (ed. T. W. Torrance), vol. I, p. 146

Word of God to the common people was a return to ancient principle and practice rather than a new departure.

A glance at the Old Testament will show that here was a revelation from God which was given to the common people - to all the people alike. Even the weakest and youngest were given an opportunity to discover for themselves the meaning of the Divine revelation. As Dr. R. E. McIntyre has put it in his introduction to a little booklet, Clue To the Old Testament,

If the Hebrews have been, as they still are, a people of quick intelligence, they owe it in part to this: their children, unlike some that could be named, were encouraged to ask questions about the profoundest matters, and the parents among them, more fortunate by far than some distracted generations, were supplied with clear, adequate, and even thrilling answers.¹

The child, viewing the Passover, was encouraged to ask, "What mean ye by this service?"² And the answer told him again the amazing story of the Exodus. Future generations, seeing the stones set up by the Jordan by Joshua, would ask, "What mean these stones?" and would be told,

Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over; that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.³

In times of apostasy, reformation always meant a new giving of the Word of the Lord to the people. For example, when the long-lost book of the law was found in the house of the Lord in the days of Josiah, it was forthwith given to the people.

Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small (margin, from great even to small):

¹R. E. McIntyre, Clue To the Old Testament (Edinburgh, n.d), p.4

²Exodus 12. 26

³Joshua 4. 21ff

and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord.¹

Nehemiah's description of the scene when the book of the law was read in the hearing of the exiles after their Return gives further evidence of a concern that the common people should hear and understand the word of the Lord. Moffatt's translation makes it extraordinarily vivid:

When the seventh month arrived, all the people gathered like one man in the open space in front of the water gate, calling upon Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Eternal had imposed upon Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest and scribe laid the law before the community, both men and women all who could listen intelligently; he read from it, in the open space in front of the water gate, from early morning to noon, in presence of the men and the women and all who could understand it; they all listened closely to the book of the law....The Levites also explained the meaning of the law to the people as they stood; they read from the book, from the law of God, translating as they went and explaining the meaning, so that the people understood what was read.²

As the centuries passed, the question of translation began to occupy the attention of those who were concerned to give the people the Word of God for themselves. In the third century before Christ, when Jews were becoming more and more scattered over all parts of the Greek-speaking world, the Jews of the Dispersion habitually spoke Greek and gradually lost their knowledge of the Hebrew in which their Old Testament was written. So the need arose for a Greek translation of the Scriptures, lest these Greek-speaking Jews should lose their Bible altogether. This translation was made - traditionally by seventy-two scholars, from which, somewhat inaccurately, it derives its name, the Septuagint - in Alexandria, where large colonies of Jews were located. The traditional account of the translation, found in the famous letter of Aristeas, is now discredited, but its claim that the work had its origin in the interest of King Ptolemy Philadelphus suggests

¹II Chronicles 34. 29,30

²Nehemiah 8 (James Moffatt, The Old Testament: A New Translation, London, n.d.)

that there were two confluent streams in its source. To one we have already referred - the desire of the Greek-speaking Jews for the Word of God in their own language. The other was a growing Greek interest in Jewish history and in Judaism. Consequently, the part of the tradition which assigns the Alexandrian translation to the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus need not be questioned. The literary tastes of this Ptolemy and the scholars gathered around him may well have awakened in them an interest in the ancient Law of his Jewish subjects and a desire to obtain it for his great Library. No doubt the translation was spread over many years and was produced in divers portions and by divers hands. But its twin sources were the religious requirements of the Jews of the Dispersion and their desire to propagate their divinely given faith wherever they went.

It is important to note that the Greek of the Septuagint was not pure, classical Greek. It was colloquial Greek, which could be "understood of the common people." Adolf Deissman's investigations into the papyri have shown convincingly that the Septuagint had an Egyptian and popular origin. He writes in Bible Studies,

A large part of the Papyri, for us certainly the most valuable, comes from the Ptolemaic period itself; these venerable sheets are in the original of exactly the same age as the work of the Jewish translators which has come down to us in late copies. When we contemplate these sheets, we are seized with a peculiar sense of their most delightful nearness to us - one might almost say, of historical reality raised from the dead. In this very way wrote the Seventy - the renowned, the unapproachable - on the same material, in the same characters, and in the same language!¹

The Septuagint, therefore, marked a most important landmark in the maintenance of the principle that the Word of God is the rightful possession of the common people. H. B. Swete writes of it,

¹G. Adolf Deissman, Bible Studies, English translation, 2nd edition, (Edinburgh, 1903), p. 71

It created a language of religion, which lent itself readily to the service of Christianity and became one of the most important allies of the Gospel. It provided the Greek-speaking Church with an authorized translation of the Old Testament, and when Christian missions advanced beyond the limits of Hellenism, it served as a basis for fresh translations into the vernacular.¹

Coming to New Testament times, we note that at the time of Jesus' boyhood, the schoolboy had only one reading book - the Old Testament. In Israel, therefore, the question of the relation of religion to education did not arise, for they were one and the same. As Wellhausen has written, "In the beginnings of popular education, the Bible became the spelling-book, the community a school."²

Wrangle as the Rabbis might about the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the plain fact was that every Jewish boy was taught to read and had the opportunity of reading for himself the Old Testament's revelation of the wonderful works of God. To have the Bible in their own hands was the unquestioned right of our Lord and His contemporaries in the days of His flesh.

The outstanding mark of His own teaching was, of course, that "the common people heard Him gladly." He spoke to people in language that they could understand. Himself of common stock - they said of Him, "Is not this the carpenter?" - He spoke of nets to fishermen, of seed and soil to farmers, of baking and mending to housewives, of common things to common folk. And always He stressed that His message was for all who would listen to it - "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." His was no esoteric religion, reserved for the privileged few: here was something for all men, and whosoever willed it so might come and take. The word He taught, the salvation He brought, were for all the world.

At Pentecost the happening of that eventful day that most impressed the pilgrims to Jerusalem from many lands was the fact that every man heard the message in his own language. "Parthians,

¹H. B. Swete, Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek (Cambridge, 1902), p. 433

²quoted, W. M. Grant, The Bible of Jesus (London, 1927), p. 25

and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asis, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians" - the list reads like a modern Bible Society report! - "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."¹ Is it not still the strongest evidence of the Spirit's working in the Church, that it should send forth the Word to peoples everywhere in a language that they can understand?

The difficulty - to use - of some parts of the Epistles should not blind us to the fact that they were written in the first instance to very ordinary people, many of them slaves and such-like, and that they were written to be understood by them. They were, to borrow J. B. Phillips' title for his modern translation of them, "Letters to Young Churches," and the members of those young churches were "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble."² Yet it was to them that the Word of the Lord came. Archbishop F. D. Coggan writes,

What to us are theological technicalities, were to St. Paul's hearers or readers religious truths put in language which they themselves heard and used every day. "Freedom", "deliverance", "redemption" (that is, "buying-off") - these were everyday words in the Graeco-Roman world, the number of whose slaves ran into many millions. The group of ideas which clusters round that of "ransom" was very easily understood by the early Christians, many of whom had themselves been through the experience of manumission.³

But the most notable evidence of the New Testament's being a Book for the common people is the language in which the whole book was written - the Koine, 'Common' Greek. For long it had been believed that the Greek of the New Testament was a technical, literary language, in a class by itself. But Deissman's study of the Greek papyri of Egypt revealed that the language of the New Testament, as of the Septuagint, was the same language as is found in the wills,

¹ Acts 2. 9ff

² I Corinthians 1. 26

³ F. D. Coggan, The Ministry of the Word (London, 1945), p. 100

official reports, private letters, petitions, accounts and other trivial survivals from the rubbish heaps of antiquity. Let J. H. Moulton summarise the conclusions reached by researches into the papyri:

The conclusion is that 'Biblical' Greek, except where it is translation Greek, was simply the vernacular of daily life. Men who aspired to literary fame wrote in an artificial dialect, a would-be revival of the language of Athens in her prime....The NT writers had little idea that they were writing literature. The Holy Ghost spoke absolutely in the language of the people, as we might surely have expected He would. The writings inspired of Him were those

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef.

The very grammar and dictionary cry out against men who would allow the Scriptures to appear in any other form than that "understanded of the people."¹

The very language, then, of the New Testament tells us that this is the rightful possession of the common people. C. S. Lewis writes in his introduction to J. B. Phillips' Letters to Young Churches:

The New Testament in the original Greek is not a work of literary art; it is not written in a solemn, ecclesiastical language, it is written in the sort of Greek which was spoken over the Eastern Mediterranean after Greek had become an international language and therefore lost its real beauty and subtlety....It is a sort of 'basic' Greek; a language without roots in the soil, a utilitarian, commercial and administrative language. Does this shock us? It ought not to, except as the Incarnation itself ought to shock us. The same divine humility which decreed that God should become a baby at a peasant-woman's breast, and later an arrested field-preacher in the hands of the Roman police, decreed also that He should be preached in a vulgar, prosaic and unliterary language.²

Dr. F. R. Barry, in his The Relevance of Christianity says much the same thing:

¹J. H. Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol. I, Prolegomena, 3rd edition (Edinburgh, 1908), pp. 3 - 5

²J. B. Phillips, Letters To Young Churches (with an Introduction by C. S. Lewis), London, 1947, pp. vii. f

Christianity was the first society which took the broken illiterate vernacular...of the Mediterranean sea-ports, which no scholar would ever have dreamed of using as a literary medium, and made it the organ of a supreme literature.¹

The language of the New Testament was essentially the language of the common people.

Thanks to the impulse given by the Septuagint and the New Testament Scriptures, Greek continued to be the language of the Church for the first two centuries of the Christian era. It was not till the end of the second century or the beginning of the third that we have Christian literature in Latin, even in Rome itself. The earliest translation of the Bible into Latin, as Latin gained on Greek as current speech throughout the Empire, was probably made in North Africa. We have evidence of its existence in Tertullian, writing at the end of the second century; and in Cyprian half a century later. In course of time this version spread throughout the Empire, being modified here and there to suit the dialects of the different provinces, so that numerous variations in readings were introduced, and the one translation became many. So there arose a natural demand for a Latin translation that should be authoritative, a demand that was met by the work of Jerome, who between 390 and 404 corrected the countless errors of the Latin Bibles of his day, revising earlier translations to begin with, but ultimately going back to the original Greek and Hebrew where he could do so. The name given to Jerome's version - the Vulgate - is a fresh reminder that this Word of God in every century, and in every language, is a book for the common people, for 'Vulgate' is derived from 'vulgata edition,' which means, 'a popular edition,' a Book for the common people.

Three things stand out in the Vulgate's history, and may be taken as an epitome of our whole discussion of the fact that the giving of the Bible to the common people at the Reformation was no new thing but as old as the Bible itself. First, there was the extent of its influence. Milman in his History of Latin Christianity declares that Jerome's version was more powerful than the

¹F. R. Barry, The Relevance of Christianity (2nd.ed, 1932), pp,67-68

Papal Church in establishing Christianity among the Latin races,¹ and Jerome himself in one of his letters speaks of the heathen nations everywhere accepting the Word of God and becoming Christians. The Word of God itself speaks home to the heart of every man, whatever his circumstances, his education and his environment may be.

The second thing to note in the history of the Vulgate is that for centuries after Jerome's death his version was condemned by the Roman Church, and only in 1546 did the Council of Trent finally pronounce it authentic. It was the ignorance and prejudice of the Church which did most to hinder the circulation of the Bible for the people.

And, thirdly, when John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, the translation he made was from the Vulgate. So at last the wheel came full circle, and, in our land, and in our own tongue, the Word of God was re-discovered as the rightful possession of the common people.

Adolf Harnack's study of the extent of private Bible reading in the first four or five centuries of the Christian Church² gives abundant evidence that in these centuries the Bible was obviously the rightful possession of the common people, and supports the view that, to quote his own words,

the Reformation, by placing the Bible in the hands of every Christian layman, has only returned to the simple confidence of the early Church.³

He suggests that this use of the Bible by the laity was a direct descendant of the practice of Judaism. The Law, and, to a lesser extent, other sacred writings were to be found in Jewish homes. "Of this fact the strange rule taught by the Pharisees and scorned by the Sadducees, that to touch the Holy Scriptures defiled the hands, is in itself a proof..."⁴ The private use of

¹ H. H. Milman, History of Latin Christianity, cited Carey Bonner, The Romance of the English Bible, p. 35

² Adolf Harnack, Bible Reading in the Early Church (English trans. 1912)

³ op. cit., Preface, vii.

⁴ ibid., p. 29

Scripture in the Greek and early Roman period is proved by the decree of Antiochus that every month a search should be made, and that everyone in whose possession the book of the Law was found should be punished by death. "This decree presupposes a considerable circulation of the Law in private houses."¹

The writings of the apologists of the second century presuppose the wide circulation and the easy accessibility of the Scriptures of the Old Testament to those who were constantly exhorted to read and study them. Aristides, the earliest of the apologists, exhorts his heathen readers, after reading his own work to take into their hands and to read the Bible itself.² Justin, Tatian and Theophilus expressly say that it was through reading the Scriptures that they became Christians.³

In the second and third-century conflicts with heretics who misunderstood and misrepresented the teaching of Scripture, there was never the slightest suggestion that the Church should use its undoubted power to withhold the Bible from the laity. Tertullian on the contrary in his work De Praescriptione Haereticorum teaches that laymen ought to read the Scriptures industriously and search them with inquiring mind, though he does warn them of the dangers of entering into controversy with heretics concerning the interpretation of Scripture.

Outside the field of controversy there are numerous injunctions to the laity to read the Scriptures. Both Clement and Tertullian impress on married couples the duty of reading the Scriptures together.⁴ Harnack quotes a long passage from the Apostolic Didaskalia to illustrate the fact that the Bible was constantly to be found in Christian homes, naturally of the more wealthy class:

If thou art in good circumstances and needest not to work for thy living, do not wander hither and thither wasting your time, but be ever zealous to visit thy brethren in the

¹Harnack, op. cit., p. 30

²ibid., p. 42

³ibid., p. 43

⁴Harnack, op. cit., p. 55

Faith. Meditate with them, and instruct thyself in the Living Word. If not, stay at home and read in the Law, in the Book of Kings and the Prophets, and in the Gospel which is their fulfilment....If thou wouldest read history, thou hast the book of the Kings; if works of wise men and philosophers, thou hast the Prophets, with whom thou findest more wisdom and understanding than with the wise and the philosophers; for they are the words of the One and only wise God. If thou desirest poetry, thou hast the Psalms of David; if thou cravest information about the beginnings of the world, thou hast Genesis written by that great man Moses; if laws and ordinances, thou hast the Law, the glorious book of God the Lord.¹

Against Celsus Origen defended the unassuming form of the Bible, because it was the purpose of the Holy Spirit to be intelligible to those who were uneducated and insignificant in the eyes of the world.² Indeed, he maintains that laymen could often be better exegetes than the clergy, who often enough had the veil drawn before their eyes.³ In the same Homily he expresses the view that Christians should spend one or two hours daily in private prayer and Bible study.⁴ Eusebius tells of Origen himself that he,

exercised already from childhood in the Holy Scriptures, had laid a good foundation for the teaching of the Faith.... His father, besides seeing that his son was instructed in the usual subjects of study, made a special point of instruction in the Scriptures.⁵

Chrysostom constantly stressed the importance of Bible reading in the firm conviction that if he could only establish regular Bible-reading in the family and among individuals he would lay a solid foundation for a truly Christian life. The fact that his admonitions were so often repeated shows that they were not always heeded, and often his words took the form of answers to objections made to Bible reading. He once grew quite impatient with some who, in those days of very expensive Bibles, declared that they could not

¹Harnack, ibid.

²Origen, Contra Celsus, vi. 1f

³Hom. II, In Num., vol. X, p. 19

⁴ibid.,

⁵Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. vi. 2,6

afford to have one. He said,

There is another excuse employed by people of this indolent frame of mind, which is utterly devoid of reason, namely, that they have not a Bible. Now as far as the wealthy are concerned, it would be ridiculous to spend words on such a pretext. But, as I believe many of our poorer brethren are in the habit of using it, I should be glad to ask them this question, Have they not every one of them got complete and perfect the tools of their respective trades? Though hunger pinch them, though poverty afflict them, they will prefer to endure all hardships rather than part with any of the implements of their trade, and live by the sale of them....Is it not a shame, then, if, when the tools of this world's trades are concerned, you make no excuse of poverty, but take care that no impediment shall interfere with your retaining them, here, where such unspeakable benefits are to be reaped, you whine about your want of leisure and your poverty?¹

The Fathers frequently directed that children in Christian homes should be introduced to the Bible from the very earliest age. "As a beginning in elementary education, little boys and girls should learn to put together Biblical names with their ivory letter blocks...they should then be advanced to reading the Bible."² The Apostolic Constitutions gives the comprehensive direction: "Teach your children thoroughly the Word of the Lord....and place in their hands every book of Holy Scripture." (iv.11).

Harnack shows convincingly that in the early centuries the Bible was accessible to and used by the laity, and, almost in passing, at the close of his book, gives the tragedy of the succeeding centuries:

This unrestricted right to listen daily to the direct voice of God might have proved the strongest bulwark of Christian independence, freedom and equality, and a lasting defence against complete subjection to sacerdotalism and mystery. But as time went on the laity made less and less use of their privilege...³

So they laid down from their hand the one weapon which would have saved the Church, until in God's grace it was given to them again

¹ quoted George Salmon, The Infallibility of the Church (London, 1888),

² Harnack, op. cit., p. 122

³ ibid., p. 147 (my italics)

at the Reformation, and the Bible was re-discovered as the rightful possession of the common people.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

In what sense is this re-discovery of the Bible as the rightful possession of the common people needed once more today?

Today's situation challenges Protestantism from two directions. There is the challenge of literacy; and there is the challenge of illiteracy.

1. The challenge of literacy. In recent years great strides have been made along the road to world literacy. In India alone three million children are learning to read every year: in China something like fifteen million people are becoming literate annually. But this spread of literacy has created its own special problem. What is going to be read by these people who in their millions are learning to read? Dr. Frank Laubach, the modern apostle of literacy, asked in 1938,

Are we going to give them that reading or who? Will it be clean or not? Will they be flooded with the message of Christ or with atheism? Will they read love or hate?¹

Ten years earlier Moscow had already given its answer. Pravda in 1928 had written:

In Moscow there is a place called the Central Publishing House. In each of the rooms there is a group of people working on translation work. We shall see that each of these rooms will ~~one~~ day become a new republic of the great Soviet Union.²

In the years which have passed since then Russia has continued to pour out in a multitude of languages the gospel of Communism. What is our answer? Nearly 500 years ago, when a similar situation was arising, and the invention of printing was setting people, who had never read, at the threshold of the world of books, the first book to be turned out from John Gutenberg's press in

¹ quoted, Report of National Bible Society of Scotland, 1948

² ibid.

Mentz was the Bible. There is our answer to the same challenge of a reading world today. The Bible in the common tongue of the people must be our answer to Communism and the challenge of literacy.

2. The challenge of illiteracy. By 'illiteracy' is meant the spiritual ignorance of a considerable percentage of the people of Britain today. And what is the answer? It is to be found today, as it was found three and a half centuries ago in the translation of "the lively oracles of God into the speech of our time." 1961 has seen the publication of the first part of a new English Bible, a Bible in living idiomatic English, which will be immediately intelligible to the present generation, prepared by a joint Committee representing most of the Protestant churches of the British Isles. It all began when in May, 1946, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland considered an overture presented by the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane 'anent the translation of the Bible into the language of the present day.' Let the memorandum of the Committee appointed to deal with the matter speak for itself:

We are fully appreciative of the superb literary qualities of the Authorized Version, its majestic style, its noble cadences, and the many excellences which have given it its unique place in our literature and endeared it to generations of Christians in the English-speaking world. But we are compelled to recognise that the A.V. is becoming unable to fulfil the function it was created to serve, because the language in which it was written is not the language our people speak or readily understand today....There is the further danger that, where the language of the Bible is intelligible with or without explanation, the archaic flavour may well give the impression that the message of the Bible itself belongs to a bygone age and has no relevance to the world of the twentieth century. This is especially to be deplored, since the New Testament was originally written in the 'common' language of the time, and, as the papyri have shown, there are few of its terms which did not belong to the current vocabulary of everyday speech.¹

The initial invitation of the General Assembly to other churches

¹ quoted by J. K. S. Reid in an article 'Concerning the New Translation of the Bible' in The Expository Times, vol. LXIII, no. 6, p. 173

to share in the project stated:

It was a vital concern of our pious forefathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the Bible should be made available to the people in the vulgar tongue. The A.V. nobly fulfilled that purpose for its own and many succeeding generations. But now, through no fault of its own, it is no longer able to fulfil it; and the time has come for the Church to undertake the preparation of a new version in a language understood of the people of the present age, so that every man may hear in his own tongue (not that of his distant ancestors) the wonderful works of God.¹

Thus the twentieth century is making anew the re-discovery of the sixteenth, and the Bible is being prepared to be once again the rightful possession of the common people.

¹The Expository Times, LXIII, no. 6, p. 176.

III

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

(i) The Divine Control

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is at the very heart of the Reformed Faith. William Hastie, one time Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, has written in The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles,

Undoubtedly the principle of the sovereignty of God is the ruling conception of the Theology of the Reformed Church.¹

And a present-day theologian puts it no less emphatically:

The sovereign God, whose redemptive purpose constitutes the scarlet thread of Holy Scripture, whose Son is the Saviour and Lord of life, and whose Church is the true bearer of history, is the theme of Reformed theology, in the same way that the concept of His sovereignty is its organizing principle. The conception of the sovereignty of God is, of course, not unique in Reformed theology. What is unique is that divine sovereignty is here made the centre and organizing principle of theology.

The doctrine is inextricably linked with the name of John Calvin; and rightly so, for he was the first to give organised expression to it and to make it central in theology: but that fact in itself may make for misunderstanding, and consequently two things require to be made clear at the outset.

¹William Hastie, The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles (Edinburgh, 1904), p. 159

²John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier, p. 88

The first is that the doctrine, particularly in the limited sense of predestination, was by no means confined to Calvin. Luther, and Zwingli, and Bucer were teaching it while he was learning it. The whole body of the leaders of the Reformation movement were teaching it along with him. As Philip Schaff puts it,

All the Reformers of the sixteenth century, including even the gentle Melancthon and the compromising Bucer, under a controlling sense of human depravity and saving grace, in extreme antagonism to Pelagianism and self-righteousness, and, as they sincerely believed, in full harmony not only with the greatest of the Fathers, but also with the inspired St. Paul, came to the same doctrine of a double predestination which decides the eternal destiny of all men.¹

It should be noted, however, that the Reformers held this doctrine, not primarily in antagonism to any contrary doctrine, but as a consequence of their own experience of the grace of God. The doctrine of predestination for them was given directly in their awareness of their dependence as sinners on the free mercy of a saving God, and was consequently part of the content of their deepest religious consciousness. Calvin himself linked the doctrine with religious experience when he said,

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination, by which God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences others to eternal death.²

All the Reformers derived the doctrine from personal religious experience, and they all held it in common. On occasion, indeed, Calvin felt that Zwingli went further than he himself would have been prepared to go, or at least that Zwingli's way of expressing it was somewhat lacking in discretion. He wrote to Bullinger,

Zwingli's little book³...is so full of hard paradoxes that it is as far as possible removed from that moderation which I have employed.⁴

¹Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, vol. I, p. 451

²Calvin, Institutes, III. xxi. 5

³On Providence

⁴Calvin to Bullinger in Opera Calvini (ed. Baum, Cunitz and Reuss, xiv. 253. 1875)

Certainly there can be no doubt regarding Zwingli's emphasis on the divine sovereignty. As Professor G. W. Bromiley says in his introduction to the volume on Zwingli and Bullinger in the Library of Christian Classics,

Behind all his ecclesiastical activity there stood the two great doctrines on which his whole thought finally centred: the supremacy of the divine revelation in Holy Scripture, and the sovereignty of God in his election and grace.¹

Writing against the doctrine of human merit in An Exposition of the Faith, Zwingli declared,

It is necessarily the case that none comes to the Father except by Christ. Hence it follows that eternal salvation is only by the grace and favour of God as it is superabundantly poured out upon us in Christ. But what are we to say then to the above and similar texts concerning the reward promised for a draught of cold water? Obviously this: The election of God is free and gratuitous. For he elected us before the foundation of the world, before ever we were born. Consequently God did not elect us because of works, for he executed our election before the foundation of the world. Hence works are not meritorious.²

It is particularly important to stress the fact that Luther held strongly to the doctrine of the divine sovereignty, as we shall see, since Later Lutheranism, largely through the influence of Melanchthon, allowed it to drop into a secondary position, and to some extent departed from it. It is interesting to note that it was not Calvin but Melanchthon who was the first to give a formal place to the doctrine of predestination in a statement of the elements of the Protestant faith.³ But Melanchthon later modified his position to find room for human freedom and a basis for human responsibility. In the Augsburg Confession, section VII, man's will was said to have "some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can reach to." But Luther never wavered in his contention that salvation is all of grace, without human merit, and that it rests on the eternal decree of God. His book, The Bondage of the Will, was written to answer the

¹Zwingli and Bullinger, ed. G. W. Bromiley, Library of Christian Classics, vo. xxiv (London, 1953), p. 31

²An Exposition of the Faith, by Zwingli, ibid., p. 271

³Loci Communes, 1521. Cf. Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, vol. i, p. 451.

argument of Erasmus in his On Free Will, in which he maintained, against the Reformers, that man had some part, however small, in his sàlvation. That could not satisfy Luther. Nothing would satisfy him but that all of salvation should be attributed to the grace of God alone. And so The Bondage of the Will stressed again and again human impotence and the absolute control of God within the sphere of man's voluntary action. A great part of the book, writes B. B. Warfield,

is given to insistence upon and elucidation of this doctrine of absolute predestination, and Luther did not shrink from raising it into the cosmical region or from elaborating it in its every detail.¹

To the end he stood by what he had written. He could well spare all that he had ever written, he wrote to Capito in 1537, except The Bondage of the Will and the Catechism: they only are right.² In his commentary on Romans he wrote,

All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned.³

It is clear, then, that predestination was stressed not by Calvin alone.

A second, more serious misunderstanding arising from the association of the doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty with the name of John Calvin is the fact that Calvinism in popular thought means simply the doctrine of predestination - the doctrine that God from all eternity, of His own good pleasure, has chosen some to everlasting life and some to everlasting damnation. The tendency ~~therefore~~ therefore is to equate the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the doctrine of predestination - a tendency that has not been altogether avoided in the preceding paragraphs. But that tendency, if not corrected, does a grave disservice both to Calvin and to the

¹B. B. Warfield, Studies in Theology (London, 1932), p. 476

²Cf. Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God, p. 271

³cited, Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1932), p. 15

doctrine of the sovereignty of God, for to limit it to predestination confines it within a comparatively narrow controversial field instead of leaving it in its original setting - the Universe. A. Mitchell Hunter in his book on The Teaching of Calvin points out that

in his first Catechism (1537) there is a paragraph in which the doctrine¹ is stated as a fact of observation, while he strongly deprecates looking into the mystery lying behind it as likely to lead to pain and madness....The earliest treatment is given in the first edition of the Institutes and even there it gets no special prominence.²

It is significant that in the first and second editions of the Institutes, the subjects of Predestination and Providence are treated in the same chapter. Later they were separated, and Calvin was obliged to deal with predestination more polemically, but, as A. Mitchell Hunter has pointed out,

had it not been for the exigencies of controversy, Calvin might never have given the doctrine the prominence it came to assume in his teaching.³

When we turn to the section in the later editions of the Institutes dealing with the doctrine of predestination we have clear evidence of its polemical nature in the frequent references to those who contravert this doctrine - those who "all but require that every mention of predestination be buried"⁴...."our opponents...."⁵ those who "dispute all these positions which we have set forth...."⁶ "the false accusations with which this doctrine has always been unjustly burdened."⁷ It is very evident that here we are in the realm of controversy. But at the beginning Calvin saw predestination as one of the manifestations of the Divine control of all things. He asserts that,

not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it straight to their appointed end.⁸

¹ of predestination ² A Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, pp.94f.
³ ibid., p. 96 ⁴ Institutes, III. xxi. 3
⁵ Institutes III. xxi. 5 ⁶ III. xxii. 1
⁷ Title, III. xxiii. ⁸ Institutes I. xvi. 8

It is worth noting that John Knox gives us a similar illustration of the importance of taking the doctrine of the divine sovereignty out of the narrow controversial field of predestination and setting it where it belongs in the broad context of the divine control of all things. Like Calvin, Knox dealt at length with predestination: the greater part of volume V of his Works is taken up with this subject. But, as in Calvin's case, his treatment of it is set in the realm of controversy, for his treatise was a reply to an Anabaptist who had published an attack on Calvin's teaching on predestination. Knox's method was to take up the Anabaptist's book, chapter by chapter, and, point by point, to show the errors in it - a method which does not make for an interesting, lucid or systematic treatment of the subject.

Professor J. S. McEwen suggests that Knox was not too happy in this kind of theological debate. He says, of Knox,

I do not think ~~that~~ he was particularly interested in systematic theology, but rather in its pastoral and homiletic applications.¹

But he could do it effectively enough where it was needed, as his lengthy treatise proves. The truth is that, like Calvin, he was much happier when the subject was taken out of the narrow field of a debate on predestination and set in the wide realm of the divine providence in all things. His thought of that divine providence in all things can be best illustrated not from his theological writings but from his personal experience. For nineteen months he was a galley slave, the prisoner of the French, rowing at the galley oar in chains, attacked by fever, and sometimes tempted to despair. Once, when they were lying off St. Andrews, and Knox was very ill with fever, James Balfour, one of his companions, asked him if he knew the place, and he answered,

Yes, I know it well - for I see the steeple of that place where God first opened my mouth in public, to His glory - and I am fully persuaded that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place.²

There was an evidence of John Knox's faith in the divine control of all things greater than all he ever wrote on predestination.

¹James S. McEwen, The Faith of John Knox, p. 64

²Cf. T. Ratcliffe Barnett, The Makers of the Kirk (1915), p. 81

It should be borne in mind that the reader of Calvin will probably look in vain for the word "sovereignty" applied to God in Calvin's writings. But if the word is not there, the idea behind it most certainly is, being found in Calvin's doctrine of Providence, where the term most frequently used is the traditional one, "omnipotence."¹ Bearing this in mind, we find Calvin's exalted view of the sovereignty of God ~~in~~ particularly in the section of the Institutes, which begins at Book I, chapter xvi, which bears the title, "God by His power nourishes and maintains the world created by Him, and rules its several parts by His Providence." This means that there is no such thing as fortune or chance:² His people "may safely rest in the protection of him to whose will are subject all the harmful things which, whatever their source, we may fear:"³ providence means,

not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events. Thus it pertains no less to his hands than to his eyes.⁴

It is of the utmost importance to understand the sovereignty of God in this wide sense. We think too narrowly of it if we think of it only as illustrated in God's eternal choice of those who are ultimately saved. To limit it to that is to make it a ground for argument instead of a ground for worship, as the troubled history of the doctrine of predestination has all too clearly shown. By God's sovereignty is meant His universal dominion and His absolute right to rule and carry out His own will in all His realms. The great strength of the Reformed Theology, wrote William Hastie,

lies in truth, in its deep apprehension of the sovereignty of God as manifested not only in the soul of man, but everywhere throughout the universe, from its centre to its circumference, in its least as in its greatest parts, in its atoms and in its star-systems - in short, wherever law and order and even the merest speck of existence are presented;

¹ Cf. John T. McNeill's edition of the Institutes, Library of Christian Classics, vol. xx, p. 121

² Institutes I. xvi. 2

³ I. xvi. 3

⁴ I. xvi. 4

so that we cannot find ourselves (nor even consider of ourselves as being) anywhere in the universe where God does not reign.¹

The application of this wide doctrine to man's salvation is, of course, of prime importance: the God Who is sovereign in every part of the Universe which He has made directs that same sovereignty to the fulfilling of His Divine purpose in the salvation of particular individuals: that is to say, election is one of the acts of the Divine sovereignty, and, so far as we are concerned, its most important illustration. But let us not limit it to that sphere, where it has so often been productive of fruitless controversy. This great truth of the Divine Control must be brought to bear upon every department of life - scientifically, philosophically, economically, as well as theologically - if it is to be a force to be reckoned with.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

To state the doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty in this broad sense is sufficient in itself to show its essentially positive character; but we proceed to emphasise that positiveness by going on to speak, first, of the negative Roman position to which in the fifteenth century it was ~~in~~ the answer, and, then, of the positive consequences of the doctrine in the lives of men and in history.

In each of the truths already studied as re-discoveries of the Reformation, we have found a positive antidote to a Roman position which was largely negative and unsatisfying. That has been our answer to the view that the Reformation was merely a negative reaction to views which had been held for centuries. It should be stressed again, however, that it was not that the Reformers set themselves intentionally to contradict the Romanist view: their statement of positive Scriptural truth, confirmed in their own experience, was sufficient in itself to expose the inadequacy of the Roman position.

We proceed to ask, therefore, if it is possible to discover what negative Roman Catholic standpoint is answered by this great Reformed doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty. One naive answer

¹William Hastie, Theology of the Reformed Church, p. 160

has to be dismissed immediately as inadequate. Calvin, says Philip Schaff, "set the absolute sovereignty of God over against the mock sovereignty of the Pope."¹ In some sense that may be true, for the whole Reformation was a challenge to the mock sovereignty of the Pope. But the Pope never dared to assume sovereignty in the sense in which Calvin spoke of the sovereignty of God; with all his fantastic claims to control the lives of men, he never claimed to control the Universe: that would have made him another King Canute, or another Mrs. Partington with her mop seeking to repel the advancing waves. We must go much deeper if we are to discover the Romanist principle at which the Reformation doctrine of divine control struck a telling blow.

Another answer to our question begins with a distinction which came to be drawn between the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches - a distinction which in itself is derived from the differing situations in which the two main branches of the Reformation movement were set. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is central in the theology of the Lutheran Church. The re-discovery of that doctrine in Luther's own tortured experience made that inevitable: his realisation of the utter failure of the works of righteousness prescribed by the Roman Church - penances, fastings, and the like - ensured his unceasing protest against these denials of the truth of salvation by grace through faith alone. The Calvinists, too, accepted the crucial importance of justification by faith alone; but they were not so much concerned with the abuses of the Roman Church against which Luther directed his attack as with the dishonour done to God by the Church's denial to Him of the glory which belongs alone to Him. Calvinism asks with Lutheranism the most fundamental and vital of all questions, "What must I do to be saved?" and it answers it exactly as Lutheranism does. But it goes on to ask the further question, "How shall God be glorified?" B. B. Warfield puts the contrast like this:

Lutheranism, the product of a poignant sense of sin, born from the throes of a guilt-burdened soul which cannot be

¹Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, p. 452

stilled until it finds peace in God's decree of justification, is apt to rest in this peace; while Calvinism, the product of an overwhelming vision of God, born from the reflection in the heart of man of the majesty of a God who will not give His glory to another, cannot pause until it places the scheme of salvation itself in relation to a complete world-view, in which it becomes subsidiary to the glory of the Lord God Almighty.¹

William Hastie, therefore, maintains that the primary protest of the Reformed Church was against the idolatry of Romanism. "The distinctive and generating Protestant principle of the Reformed Church," he writes,

is to be formulated as predominantly a religious protest against the idolatry or paganism of the Roman Church and against all worship of the creature...as a derogation from the honour and glory due to God alone according to His revealed will.²

Zwingli in particular - quite unaware of Luther's work on the other side of the Swiss mountains - was roused into active opposition to the abuses of the Roman Church as manifested in the idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary at Einsiedeln, some twenty miles south-east of Zurich, the site of a famous shrine to the Virgin, with an alleged angelic dedication and a plenary indulgence. Both he and Calvin were quick to see that

the corruptions of the primitive Church in the idolatry of the Mass, the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, the worship of the Blessed Virgin, and the whole pomp and superstition of creature-worship, had been mainly derived from the pagan spirit and practice of ancient Rome.³

The idolatrous elements in Romanism were derived from the paganism on which Christianity had been grafted.

In passing, it is instructive to note a parallel from present-day Mexico which shows the same syncretism in Roman practice. Principal John A. Mackay in Christianity On The Frontier has a chapter entitled Mexican Musings, in which he draws attention to

¹B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism (London, 1931), p. 358

²William Hastie, Theology of the Reformed Church, p. 36

³ibid., p. 37

the fact that the Virgin of Guadalupe, an Indian madonna, without a child, is the national divinity of Mexico. He declares,

It was the policy of the early Roman Catholic missionaries in Mexico to relate Christian symbols to pagan sentiment. Pagan idols were placed behind Christian altars. By a marvellous stroke of ecclesiastical statesmanship, the story was propagated that on a hillside sacred to an Aztec goddess the Virgin Mary graciously appeared to a simple Mexican Indian.¹

There was considerably more of paganism than of Christianity in the synthesis which was made, and to all intents and purposes "the deity of Mexico's popular religion is a brown-coloured female figure who is divine in her own right."²

It was against similar paganism and idolatry in the medieval church, Hastie maintains, that the Reformed doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty was directed. He says,

The founders of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches both proceeded in their work of reformation by protesting against the abuses of the Roman Church; but whereas Luther directed his protest against the theory of righteousness by works as a Judaic corruption of primitive Christianity which gave occasion to the sale of indulgences and kindred abuses, Zwingli directed his protest against the idolatrous practices of the Roman worship and generally against all creature-worship and idolatry as pagan corruptions of the pure primitive Christianity.³

We shall see that this view of the setting of the Reformed doctrine of the Divine sovereignty will require some modification, particularly in its assessment of the central emphasis of the Lutheran protest. But it is true to say that the Reformed Church was unsparing in its condemnation of the idolatries of Romanism, because such idolatries denied the sovereignty of God.

The pass to which Roman idolatry before the Reformation had come is seen at its most ridiculous in the use and worship of relics. This was an evident concession to superstitions which had their roots in paganism. Parts of the body or clothing of the saints,

¹ John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier, p. 175

² ibid., p. 176

³ William Hastie, Theology of the Reformed Church, pp. 33f

the Virgin Mary, or our Lord Himself were venerated and had miraculous power attributed to them. If the pre-Reformation sale of indulgences was a scandal, no less scandalous in the Middle Ages was the sale of remains which purported to be relics of the saints, potent against all manner of ills. Parts of bones, hair, clippings of the nails of the saints were shamelessly offered for sale throughout all Europe. Calvin's satirical treatise - Admonition, Showing the Advantages Which Christendom Might Derive from An Inventory of Relics - pungently exposes the multiplicity of these relics. He wrote, of the bodies of the Apostles,

Everybody knows that the inhabitants of Tholouse think that they have got six of these bodies, viz., those of James the Greater, Andrew, James the Less, Philip, Simeon, and Jude. The body of Matthias is at Padua, that of Matthew, at Salerno, of Thomas, at Ortona, and of Bartholomew, at Naples, or somewhere in that district. Now, let us attend to those who have had two or three bodies. For Andrew has another body at Melfi, Philip and James the Less have each another body at the church of the Holy Apostles, and Simeon and Jude, in like manner, at the church of St. Peter. Bartholomew has also another in the church dedicated to him at Rome? So here are six who have each two bodies, and also by way of a supernumerary, Bartholomew's skin is shown at Pisa. Matthias, however, surpasses all the rest, for he has a second body at Rome, in the church of the Elder Mary, and a third one at Treves. Besides, he has another head, and another arm, existing separately by themselves....¹

Calvin goes on at length, as part of a calculated effect to destroy by ridicule the credit of the most respected relics. They all, like those still offered for the veneration of credulous folk, are demonstrably unauthentic; but more reprehensible than the credulity which accepts them is the idolatry which worships them. If the possession or adoration of such things be thought effective to bring good or ward off ill, we are back to primitive paganism. And God's control of the world which He has made is thereby denied.

It is worth recalling that the Scottish Reformation's protest against the abuses of Rome was particularly directed against such idolatry. The Thirty-four Articles of accusation against the

¹ John Calvin, An Admonition Showing the Advantages Which Christendom Might Derive from An Inventory of Relics, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I., p. 327.

Lollards of Kyle, in the reign of James IV, began by accusing them of maintaining "that images are not to be had nor yet to be worshipped," and "that the relics of saints are not to be worshipped."¹ A famous sermon of John Knox's, preached at Perth, on 25th June, 1559, thundered forth the watchword of the Scottish Reformation: "Away with Idolatry!" Knox himself gave practical demonstration of his preaching, when, chained to the oar in the French galley, he had presented to him a gaily decked image of the Virgin that he might worship it. With contempt he flung the image into the water as nothing more than a painted board. "Our Lady is light enough," he cried with scorn, "let her swim!" But Knox saw that there was much more in idolatry than the worshipping of images. He declared

that all worshipping, honouring, or service of God invented by the brain of man in the religion of God without His own express commandment is idolatry....It shall nothing excuse you to say, we trust not in idols, for so will every idolater allege; but if either you or they in God's honour do anything contrary to God's Word, you show yourself to put your trust in something else besides God, and so you are idolaters. Mark, brethren, that many maketh an idol of their own wisdom or phantasy; more trusting to that which they think good nor unto God.²

Zwingli made the same point in An Exposition of the Faith:

Only the eternal and infinite and uncreated God is the basis of faith. Hence the collapse of all that foolish confidence with which some rely upon most sacred things or the most holy sacraments. For it is in God that we must put our firm and sure trust. If we were to trust in the creature, the creature would have to be the Creator. If we were to trust in the sacraments, the sacraments would have to be God....And how absurd that is may be judged not merely by scholars but by all intelligent people.³

Idolatry in the last resort is putting anything else in the place of God, and giving power and glory to anything but Him. As

¹W. M. Hetherington, History of the Church of Scotland, vol. I. (Edinburgh, 1852), p. 35

²Works of John Knox (ed. David Laing) vol. III, p. 47

³Zwingli, An Exposition of The Faith, vol. xxiv, Library of Christian Classics, p. 247

Professor G. W. Bromiley comments in his introduction to Zwingli and Bullinger,

It was because of this tremendous stress upon the divine initiative and sovereignty that Zwingli was compelled to protest violently against the existing theory and practice of Christianity. It was not merely that the mediaeval system was contrary to the New Testament norm, although that in itself was a valid point and one which Zwingli consistently made. But at a deeper level the mediaeval system rested upon semi-Pelagian presuppositions which were in direct contrast with the evangelical doctrine of Holy Scripture.¹

It is at that deeper level that we must find the Roman position to which the Reformed doctrine of the Divine sovereignty is so directly opposed. It is true that pagan elements had a large part in the doctrine and especially the worship of the medieval church, but these were symptomatic of a deeper ailment - a religion which had become anthropocentric instead of theocentric. All the medieval deviations from primitive Christianity stemmed from that.

Calvin in chapters xi and xii of Book I of the Institutes spoke very strongly against the use of images in the worship of God. But when he came to sum up his argument, he showed that the error lies deeper than literal idolatry:

Thus, if we wish to have one God, we should remember that we must not pluck away even a particle of his glory and that he must retain what is his own.²

Thus in the context of idolatry Calvin states the principle which is at the very heart of theology for him - solī Deo Gloria. Nothing can be tolerated which sets itself upon the throne beside God or takes to itself the place which is His alone. Let Hastie summarise the Reformed doctrine for us in the concluding chapter of his The Theology of the Reformed Church:

The principle of sovereign grace was the ultimate theological issue of the special protest of the Reformed Church against the pagan idolatry of the creature. With it, all

¹Zwingli and Bullinger, ed. G. W. Bromiley, vol. xxiv., Library of Christian Classics, p. 34

²Calvin, Institutes, I. xii. 3

reliance for salvation upon any creature or creaturely act or creaturely condition was completely swept away; and the certainty of salvation was grounded solely upon the eternal nature and working of God Himself. The finite was recognised in its essential negativity and limitation, even in the highest operations of the human personality; and that personality was brought face to face with the infinite in the omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient God as the only source of its being, life and salvation.¹

In short, the Reformation set the sovereignty of God over against all human effort and achievement, that the glory might be God's alone.

It only remains to show that this was Luther's emphasis no less than Calvin's, Knox's and Zwingli's. A new direction to Lutheran study in Britain was given by the publication in 1947 of Professor Philip S. Watson's Fernley-Hartley lecture on the theology of Martin Luther. While the title - Let God Be God! - irritated at least one reviewer², it served admirably to stress the point that is Professor Watson's main thesis, namely that the motif of Luther's theology no less than Calvin's was solī Deo gloria. He declares,

In Luther the theocentricity of primitive Christianity returns; and it is the determining factor of his whole outlook. His opposition to Catholicism is due ultimately to nothing ~~else~~ else but this. In the Catholic conception of Christianity, it is in the last analysis man who occupies the centre of the religious stage; in Luther's reforming conception it is God....Here, man must be content to receive undeserved the gifts God wills to bestow on him, and to obey without thought of reward the commandments God pleases to give him. In other words, he must let God really be God, the centre around which his whole existence moves. This theocentric emphasis can be described as the fundamental motif of Luther's entire thought.³

Let Luther himself state his standpoint:

My doctrine is such that it setteth forth and preacheth the grace and glory of God alone, and in the matter of salvation, it condemneth the righteousness of all men.⁴

¹William Hastie, The Theology of the Reformed Church, p. 233

²In The Expository Times, vol. LIX, No. 2, Nov., 1947, p. 40

³Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God! (London, 1947), pp. 37, 38

⁴Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 78

In A short and good Exposition of the Lord's Prayer forwards and backwards Luther makes a sharp distinction between man-centred and God-centred prayer. The Lord's Prayer is prayed 'forwards' when the proper order of its clauses is observed and we pray first for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom and the doing of God's will. It is prayed 'backwards' when - in our hearts if not with our lips - we begin with the petitionary clauses - "Give us...." Those who pray it in that order "seek rather their own glory and a name for themselves rather than the glory of God." Even the first three clauses can be prayed selfishly: and in the very order in which they occur, Luther sees a warning against this: -

In order that we should not desire the kingdom of God for our own sake, the hallowing of the Divine name is put in the first place; so that we should pray in this sense to be blessed and for the coming of God's kingdom, not in order that it may go well with us, but that the name and honour and glory of God the Lord may be praised and magnified.¹

Here is clear evidence of Luther's concern that the first thing in religion should be the glory of God.

It is interesting to compare Calvin's and Luther's expositions of the First Commandment: it is obvious that they are at one on the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty. Calvin writes,

The purpose of this commandment is that the Lord wills alone to be pre-eminent among his people, and to exercise complete authority over them. To effect this, he enjoins us to put far from us all impiety and superstition, which either diminish or obscure the glory of his divinity.... Therefore, in forbidding us to have strange gods, he means that we are not to transfer to another what belongs to him.... For it is unlawful to take away even a particle from his glory; rather, all things proper to him must remain with him.²

Luther explains the Commandment to mean,

"Since I alone am God, thou shalt place all thy confidence, trust and faith in Me alone, and on no one else." For that

¹Luther's Works (Weimar ed.,)VI. 20ff, cited P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! , p. 40

²Institutes, II. viii. 16

is not to have a god, if you call him God only with your lips, or worship him with the knees or bodily gestures; but if you trust Him with the heart, and look to Him for all good, grace and favour, whether in works or sufferings, in life or death, in joy or sorrow....Now you see for yourself that all those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in His favour, grace, and good-will, but seek His favour in other things or in themselves, do not keep this Commandment....Such are all who wish with their many good works, as they say, to make God favourable to themselves, and to buy God's grace from Him....¹

In both expositions we find the Divine sovereignty opposed to anything that takes away in the slightest from the glory of God. Luther may lay more stress on man's efforts to win salvation by his own efforts, and Calvin more on the giving of glory to created things, as breaches of the Commandment, but both are concerned alike that nothing should be allowed to detract in any way from the glory of God. The Reformation in both its main branches was an unceasing protest against all dishonour done to God, Who alone is sovereign and Who alone is to be worshipped. It was a positive re-discovery of the sovereignty of God opposed to everything that would diminish His glory.

The positive character of this doctrine is seen further in its extraordinarily ~~positive~~ positive consequences in the lives of men and in the events of history. Foremost among these consequences is the assurance which is engendered by it. As we shall see, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, in basing salvation not on the works of human merit but on the finished work of Christ imputed to us, begets in the believer a confidence that the Roman doctrine of salvation is unable to supply. This assurance is made doubly sure by the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty, particularly as manifested in election, God's eternal choice of some from all eternity to eternal life. Faith in itself may not give complete assurance, for faith has many degrees: there is a little faith and there is the faith that moves mountains. There are moods when

¹Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia, 1915-32), vol. I, pp.194ff

faith burns low and assurance is lacking. It is therefore clear, says W. P. Paterson,

that it must give a powerful support to the religious life when the mind combines the doctrine of justification with a doctrine of election, and, believing that God has elected particular objects of His mercy from the foundation of the world, draws the inference that He apprehends them by an effectual calling, enables them by His Spirit to fulfil the conditions of salvation, guarantees that they will persevere in the state of grace and promises that no power in earth or hell will pluck them out of His hand.¹

Commenting on John 10. 28-29, Calvin writes,

Here is our only ground for firmness and confidence: in order to free us of all fear and render us victorious amid so many dangers, snares, and mortal struggles, he (Christ) promises that whatever the Father has entrusted into His keeping will be safe.²

John Knox's doctrine of Assurance rests firmly on the doctrine of election. It can be reached only when we realise that our acceptability with God rests entirely on His choice of us. And this election, proceeding from God's free and sovereign grace, and exercised without respect to anything in us, does not vary with our varying moods, but abides unchanging in them all.³ Other things may give us comfort: only the doctrine of God's electing grace can give us certainty.

But just as sovereignty is wider than predestination, so the assurance which it brings is more than assurance of eternal salvation. It is the confidence which comes from the knowledge that everything in the Universe is under God's absolute control. It is the certainty that though the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing, nothing can frustrate the Divine purpose, nothing can defeat God's plan. Let Calvin describe the confidence that comes from the sure knowledge that God is in control:

¹W. P. Paterson, The Rule of Faith (5th ed., London, 1933), p. 306

²Institutes, III. xxi. 1

³Summarised from Preface to section on Predestination in Knox's Works (ed. David Laing), V. 26, 27

Yet, when that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care....His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it. Moreover, it comforts him to know that he has been received into God's safekeeping and entrusted to the care of his angels, and that neither water, nor fire, nor iron can harm him, except in so far as it pleases God as governor to give them occasion.¹

What this confidence meant for the history of the Reformation can best be estimated by what the Reformation had to face. Every one of the lands influenced by the Reformation had persecution awaiting it, and it was this doctrine that put into the heroes and martyrs of those lands the iron of the strongest faith that had ever entered into religious life to make them what they were. To quote W. P. Paterson again,

When men found themselves, as witness and workers for God, confronted by overwhelming odds, persecuted, driven hither and thither, and menaced by the prison and the stake, what gave them courage to endure and fight the battle to the end was the conviction that all the issues were in the hand of God, that the power of the enemies of the truth could prevail no further than He, for His own wise and holy ends, permitted, and that at the last He would attest and vindicate His own cause by giving it complete and open victory, and by reducing its enemies to weakness and confusion.²

Calvin summarises the consequences of the knowledge that God is in control of all things in an eloquent sentence. They are "gratitude in prosperity, patience in adversity, and a wonderful freedom from worry about the future."³ There could scarcely be anything more positive than that.

The eschatological relevance of this doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty is obvious. It was part of the strength of the Reformed Faith that it believed unwaveringly in the final victory of

¹Institutes, I. xvii. 11

²The Rule of Faith, pp. 304f.

³Institutes, I. xvii. 7

righteousness in the world. Writing on the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, Calvin declared that while we submit to God's righteousness,

He makes us sharers in His glory. This comes to pass when, with ever-increasing splendour, he displays his light and truth, by which the darkness and falsehoods of Satan's kingdom vanish, are extinguished, and pass away. Meanwhile, he protects his own, guides them by the help of his Spirit unto uprightness, and strengthens them to perseverance. But he overthrows the wicked conspiracies of enemies, unravels their stratagems and deceits, opposes their malice, represses their obstinacy, until at last he slays Antichrist with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroys all ungodliness by the brightness of his coming (II Thess. 2 : 8).

At the end of all things sees God eternally upon His throne.

There can be no more positive creed anywhere than that of a man who knows that he is a child of a God Who is sovereign in all places of His dominions, Whose purposes cannot fail, and "of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things."

NOT NEW BUT OLD

It is not difficult to show that this doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty was no new speculation or discovery, no new departure at the time of the Reformation: it was old, as old as the Bible itself, and re-discovered again and again as men came to realise their utter dependence on God.

The thread of the Divine sovereignty runs throughout the whole Old Testament. It is seen both in natural phenomena and in the history of men and nations. The writers of the Old Testament, for example, rarely use such expressions as "it rains, it thunders:" they instinctively speak of God's sending the rain and the thunderstorm. One of the most dramatic pictures of a natural phenomenon - a thunderstorm - is found in the twenty-ninth Psalm. The Psalmist pictures the pealing of the thunder above the storm-clouds; the storm breaks, shattering the cedars and shaking the mountains in the far north; the lightnings flash; the wilderness of the south and

¹Institutes III. xx. 42

its inhabitants are terrified. But this is to the ancient Hebrew poet no mere natural phenomenon but an exhibition of Jehovah's power. "The voice of the Lord" is heard in every manifestation of these tremendous forces of nature. And as the Psalmist's thought turns back to the greatest natural phenomenon in history - the Flood - he sees something more than the devastating might of Nature; he sees the Lord sitting as King at the Flood. "Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever."¹ That is the characteristic attitude of all the Old Testament writers: God is in control of the world of nature. The winds are His messengers, the flaming fire is His servant, and every natural occurrence is the work of His hands. All that He has made, He has made for Himself, to set forth His praise, and the heavens themselves with all their splendour exist but to illustrate His glory.²

In the lives of men, the Divine Sovereignty means that the possibilities of accident and chance are excluded. The use of the lot as an accepted way of obtaining God's decision is an evidence of a belief that all things are disposed by Him. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."³

B. B. Warfield has written,

It was not accident that brought Rebecca to the well to welcome Abraham's servant (Gen. 24), or that sent Joseph into Egypt (Gen. 45:8; 50:20; 'God meant it for good'), or guided Pharaoh's daughter to the ark among the flags (Ex. 2), or that, later, directed the mill-stone that crushed Abimelech's head (Judges 9:35), or winged the arrow shot at a venture to smite the king in the joints of the armour (I Kings 22:35). Every historical event is rather treated as an item in the orderly carrying out of an underlying Divine purpose; and the historian is continually aware of the presence in history of Him who gives even to the lightning a charge to strike the mark (Job 36:22).⁴

The Biblical concept of man's life is a life lived out ~~in the~~

¹Psalm 29. 10

²Psalm 19. 1

³Proverbs 16. 33

⁴B. B. Warfield, Biblical Doctrines (London, 1933), p. 14

in the hollow of God's hand and under the control of God's sovereign will.

Similarly the history of the nations is determined by the sovereign will of God. From Amos 9. 7 we learn that Jehovah is the supreme Ruler of all the peoples: Syrians, Philistines, Ethiopians, as well as the tribes of Israel, were led by Him and settled in their separate lands. Even Babylon, quite unawares, was a golden cup in the Lord's hand;¹ Cyrus was His battleaxe,² Nebuchadnezzar His servant;³ all alike were the instruments of a sovereign God, working out His eternal purpose for the world.

There were times, of course, when the sovereignty of God was denied and had to be re-discovered. The idolatry and nature-worship associated with Baal, and so quickly learned by the Israelites from their Canaanite neighbours, was a denial that it was Jehovah who gave them their corn and their wine, their bread and their water, their wool and their flax, their oil and their drink.⁴ The seeking of alliances with world-powers like Egypt in Isaiah's day was a similar denial of the sovereignty of God in the realm of history.⁵ And the messages of all the prophets were a constant call to re-discover the truth that the Lord, He is the God; and that beside Him there is none else.⁶

The outstanding illustration of the Sovereignty of God in the Old Testament is the history of the Jewish people. God's choice of Abraham and his posterity to be blessed and made a blessing to all the families of the earth; His deliverance of the people from Egypt and His adoption of them as His own peculiar people; His gracious dealing with them through centuries of backsliding and failure - these are our supreme evidence of a sovereignty that knows no motive and no reason but its own will. All the Old Testament writers alike are convinced that God's choice of Israel was not because of anything that Israel had done or was. When asked for

¹Jeremiah 51. 7

²Jeremiah 51. 20

³Ezekiel 26. 7

⁴Hosea 2. 5 - 8

⁵Isaiah 31. 1

⁶I Kings 18. 39

a motive, they go back to the promises made to their fathers and to God's oath of long ago. "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day."¹ And if they are pressed to take the problem further back, to discover a motive for God's action, they can only rest in a statement like Deuteronomy 7. 7,8 - "The Lord did not set his love upon you nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you..." The Lord set His love upon you because the Lord loved you! What is that but to say that behind all the history of the Chosen People was the sovereign love of God, always incomprehensible and always undeserved?

A New Testament discussion of the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty, applied particularly to man's salvation - Paul's discussion of Election in Romans 9 - can say no more than has been said already throughout the whole Old Testament, applying it now not to Israel only but to the whole world. We cannot get behind or beyond God's sovereign choice of those whom He has called to Himself. That was Paul's re-discovery of the doctrine in a new setting and with a wider application than it had ever known. It is noteworthy that Paul's emphasis on the sovereignty of God has a practical aim. Again and again he exhorts believers to remember that their salvation is not committed to their own weak hands, but rests securely on the faithfulness of the God Who has called them according to His eternal purpose.²

The only other New Testament illustration of the Divine sovereignty that will be examined here - leaving another chapter to deal with the New Testament conception of the Divine sovereignty made flesh in the Lord Jesus Christ - is the most wonderful of all. It cannot be more concisely stated than in the words of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Speaking of Christ's death, he declared to the listening Jews, "Him, being delivered by the

¹Deuteronomy 10. 15

²Cf. I Thess. 5. 24, I Cor. 1. 8f, Phil. 1. 6

determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; Whom God hath raised up...."¹ The Cross, erected by the hands of wicked men, had not been God's defeat, but God's purpose and God's victory. When Christ died, evil was apparently victorious, but men had forgotten the sovereign power of God, which makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and had failed to realise that His purpose must ultimately prevail. In the Cross of Christ the Divine sovereignty had been, not frustrated and broken, but embodied and proclaimed. The Lord was sitting as King there, when the enemy came in like a flood, and out of the worst that man could do He has brought the salvation of the world. Confronted with the victory of Calvary, sealed for ever in the triumph of the Resurrection, men can never again doubt the sovereignty of God.

But even the vision of Calvary can grow dim; and it is significant that every fresh re-discovery of the Divine sovereignty in the Christian era went hand in hand with a re-discovery of salvation through the finished work of Christ. Augustine's doctrine of predestination - the outstanding re-discovery of the sovereignty of God since the days of the Apostles - is inextricably linked with his doctrines of sin and grace. These in turn were derived partly from his own personal experience in being converted to Christianity from a worldly life, and partly through the necessity of refuting the teaching of Pelagius, who taught that man in his natural state is quite able to work out his own salvation, that the only effect of Adam's fall was to set a bad example which has been consistently followed, that Christ in His death little more than the first Christian martyr, and that we are not under any special providence of God. All these heretical views hang together, and against them Augustine held that the whole race fell in Adam, that all men by nature are depraved and spiritually dead, that Christ suffered vicariously for His people, that God elects whom He will,

¹Acts 2. 23, 24

irrespective of their merits, and that saving grace is efficaciously applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit.¹

To such an extent was the Reformation a re-discovery of the truths of sin and grace which had been taught by Augustine that it has been often stated that the Reformation was essentially a revival of Augustinianism.² But that cannot be maintained without some qualification. We do find the Reformers freely acknowledging their debt to Augustine. When Luther began teaching evangelical truth in Wittenberg, he called his doctrine not Lutheran but Augustinian. And constantly throughout the Institutes we find Calvin referring to what Augustine had written. Dealing with the bondage of sin, he writes,

Surely my readers will recognise that I am bringing forth nothing new, for it is something that Augustine taught of old with the agreement of all the godly, and it was still retained almost a thousand years later in monastic cloisters.³

And, again, dealing with the subject of election, Calvin calls Augustine and others of the Fathers to his support:

Having taken away all merits before election, Augustine says, "Here, surely, is rendered void the reasoning of those who defend God's foreknowledge against God's grace, and therefore say that we were chosen before the establishment of the world because God foresaw that we would be good, not that he himself would make us good. He who says, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you' (John 15:16), does not speak of ~~future~~ foreseen goodness. For if he had chosen us because he had foreseen that we would be good, he would also have foreseen that we would choose him, and the consequence thereof." Let Augustine's testimony have weight among us who want to rely upon the fathers' authority. However, Augustine does not allow himself to be cut off from the other fathers....If I wanted to weave a whole volume from Augustine, I could readily show my readers that I need no other language than his.⁴

But it should be carefully noted that the Reformers, while acknowledging their debt to Augustine, could not exempt his views from the test of Scripture. Calvin, indeed, almost without

¹Cf. article on "Augustine" by B. B. Warfield, in Studies in Theology (London, 1932)

²ibid., p. 477

³Institutes, II. iii. 5

⁴Institutes, III. xxii. 8

exception, uses Augustine's opinions only as corroboration of Scripture and his interpretation of it. The truth is that the Reformers, like Augustine, re-discovered their doctrines from Scripture: the roots of their agreement lie there.

Following Augustine there was retrogression rather than advance, as the persistent heresy of justification by works laid its child hand upon the church. Alongside a blurring of the way of salvation went a growing paganism and superstition, which were swept away, as we have seen, only by the Reformed doctrine of the Divine sovereignty, as the Reformers re-discovered the truths which Augustine had re-discovered from the Scriptures. But just as there were heroes before Agamemnon, so there were Calvinists before Calvin. Gottschalk of Orbais was a monk who became indoctrinated with Augustine's views on predestination and original sin: he was condemned for heresy in 849 and died in prison in 868. Thomas Bradwardine, who died immediately after his consecration as archbishop of Canterbury in 1349, wrote a long treatise entitled De causa Dei contra Pelagium, in which he confessed that in his early foolishness and vanity he had imbibed the Pelagian notions which were current in his day, but that he had been "visited" by the conviction of the Divine sovereignty as "by a beam of grace." In his book he quoted freely from Augustine and the Scriptures, arguing that "grace is given gratis," and that predestination is "according to the free will of God," without reference to works.¹ Similar views were held by Gregory of Rimini, who asserted that God has predestinated the elect gratis and in compassion, and affirmed the doctrine of reprobation as without reference to divine foreknowledge of the individual's bad use of free will or resistance to grace.²

Gregory of Rimini died in 1358, and a few years later John Wycliffe appeared as "The Morning Star of the Reformation" in England and taught the Scriptural truths of the sovereignty of God

¹Bradwardine's work is analysed in Joseph and Isaac Milner's History of the Church, IV. 79-106. See H. A. Obermann, Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine, a Fourteenth-Century Augustinian (Utrecht, 1958)

²Obermann, op. cit., pp. 211-223

and the fore-ordination of all things. In his De ecclesia, completed towards the end of 1378, he contrasted the visible Church with the invisible Church. Every man, he declared, was predestined to salvation or damnation by the will of God: those predestined to salvation formed the true Church, of which Christ was the head; the reprobate, even though they are members of the visible Church, do not belong to the true Church. Hence, merely formal membership in the ecclesiastical organisation is no proof of salvation.

Wycliffe proceeded from this distinction, based on the Divine sovereignty, to make demands for the reform of the Church, and thereby heralded the dawn of the Reformation.¹

Wycliffe was followed in his teaching by John Hus, who found his basis, too, in the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty. To quote two Czech interpreters of Hus, Paul Roubiczek and Joseph Kalmer,

Wycliffe's basic idea, the doctrine of predestination, built up into a system with a vast amount of scholarship, with all its endless detail and innumerable implications, was taken over by Hus in its entirety; he changed nothing, he left nothing out and he added nothing. By his popular and gripping language he merely charged the learned apparatus with vital life.²

The martyrdom of Hus, like the martyrdom of many of Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, may have seemed for a time to have halted the Reformation, but those of whom we have spoken and many others who are nameless were the links which maintained the continuity of this great doctrine from Augustine to Calvin, and underlined the truth that it was not new at the Reformation, but old.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

Let us ask now in what sense this doctrine of the Divine sovereignty needs to be re-discovered today. Is this ancient doctrine relevant to the twentieth century? A striking coincidence from

¹Cf. M. Spinka, Advocates of Reform, vol. xiv. Library of Christian Classics, (London, 1953), p. 27

²Paul Roubiczek and Joseph Kalmer, Warrior of God, The Life and Death of John Hus, (London, 1947), p. 64

the tense days of 1939 gives the answer. At the beginning of that fateful year, the editor of The British Weekly invited two of the outstanding preachers of the day, Dr. J. D. Jones and Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, to give his readers a heartening message for the new year. Writing quite independently, each based his message on the same great truth, the sovereignty of God. Dr. J. D. Jones said,

That was my own sheet-anchor during the dark and testing years of the Great War. The ultimate issues were not in the hands of the Kaiser and his soldiers. The destinies of the nations were not settled by machine guns and Big Berthas....The future of the world was not at the mercy of the big battalions - it was God's world, and it was His will that would get done. I preach that same great truth in these days of crisis.

And Dr. Campbell Morgan wrote:

What is the message that was in the past, and is still, the one all-inclusive word that I am attempting to utter? It is that, to quote the old-fashioned phrase, of the Sovereignty of God. I am firmly convinced that the one fact is God, all other things are circumstances.

Is there any message that we are needing more today than that God is still in control? There are at least three elements in our contemporary situation which make this doctrine as relevant as it has ever been. The first is a world out of control. The mushroom-shaped shadow of the Bomb hangs over all the world. Man is coming more and more to feel that the powers which he can unleash at the touch of a button are, Frankenstein-like, too much for him. He has found the key to the powers of the world of nature, only to find that that world is like to destroy him. Morally and spiritually, too, the world seems to be going out of control. The words of the second Psalm are coming true before our eyes:

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder.

God's authority is repudiated on every side, and the world seems out of control.

A second element in our contemporary situation is a world afraid. Listen to Sir James Jeans in The Mysterious Universe:

We find the universe terrifying because of its vast meaningless distances, terrifying because of its inconceivably long vistas of time which dwarf human history to the twinkling of an eye....terrifying because of the material insignificance of our home in space - a millionth part of a grain of sand out of all the sea-sand in the world. But above all else we find the universe terrifying because it appears to be indifferent to life like our own....Perhaps indeed we ought to say it appears to be actively hostile to life like our own.

And as well as that nameless fear of the universe there are the particular fears that beset man in critical days - fear of war, fear of want, fear of life, fear of death, fear of everything. We are living in a world afraid.

But perhaps the most significant element in our contemporary situation is a world growing pagan. We have seen that the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty was an answer to the paganism and superstition of the pre-Reformation Church. Are we seeing nothing of the same paganism and superstition today? If destiny depends on the carrying of a rabbit's foot or a St. Christopher badge, if the stars can foretell the future, if the world is governed by the gamblers' goddess Chance - and all these symptoms are found in our modern civilisation(?) - are we not back among the superstition-ridden folk of the Middle Ages? And this is God's world no longer.

What, then, is our answer to a world out of control, a world afraid, a world growing pagan? What but this - that God is still upon the throne! There was a day when John on Patmos sat down to write of a world that in its rebellion against God, its fear and its paganism, was the same kind of world in which we live today. What did he write? This, that stands for every situation and every age, flung in the teeth of everything that seems to deny it - "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

(ii) Martin Bucer on The Kingdom of Christ

It is strange that history has been so slow to take account of the contribution of Martin Bucer to the Reformation, and that it is only within recent years that he is beginning to emerge from the shadows. Stranger still is the fact that, though a great part of his work had a direct reference to the situation in England, scarcely any of his writings have been translated into English. It seems scarcely credible that his De Regno Christi, in particular, dedicated to King Edward VI, and directed to "the 'solid restitution' of the Kingdom of God in England, that is, the reorganisation of the public and national life in obedience to the Gospel of Christ"¹ still awaits an English translation. ~~Francis~~ Professor François Wendel of Strasbourg, who has been so largely instrumental in the re-discovery and re-publication of Bucer's works, has written in his introduction to De Regno Christi,²

Bien que spécialement destiné à l'Angleterre, le De Regno Christi n'a fait l'objet d'aucune traduction complète en anglais³

¹Professor T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church (Edinburgh, 1956), p.75

²vol. XV of Martini Bucer Opera Latina, ed. François Wendel
(Presses Universitaires de France, 1955)

³op. cit., p. lxiv.

Professor Wendel then goes on to list the shamefully few and little-known translations of isolated chapters in English -

(a) a translation of the chapters on relief for the poor, under the title, A Treatise, How by the Worde of God, Christian mens Almoese ought to be distributed, published, according to Dr. Constantin Hopf¹, probably in 1558:

(b) a fragment included in Certain brief Treatises...concerning the...Government of the Church, etc. (London, 1641), under the title, The Judgement of M.Bucer, touching the Originall of Bishops and Metropolitans:

(c) a translation of the chapters on marriage and divorce, by John Milton, in 1644, under the title, The Judgement of Martin Bucer, concerning Divorce, writt'n to Edward the sixt, in his second Book of the Kingdom of Christ; and now Englisht (London. Matthew Simmons, 1644)

There are also in the British Museum in manuscript two fragments of Bucer's work, translated with the titles: Off the power and authoritie off the chyrche in doctrine (ms. Harley 423, fos. 2 - 9) and Off the Order howe Christ governethe his churche (ibid., fo. 10f).²

This persistent English neglect of Bucer's most important work - apart from a few recent studies, outstanding among which are Dr. Constantin Hopf's Martin Bucer and the English Reformation (1946), with a subsequent article in JTS, 1960; and a most important section in Professor T. F. Torrance's Kingdom and Church (1956) - in itself would justify the detailed study of De Regno Christi which follows: additional impetus to such study is given by the fact that, to quote Dr. Hopf, "the De Regno Christi is Bucer's final word, summing up all his life work for the advancement of the Reformation,"³ and also by the undoubted influence of Bucer on Calvin's views of election, the Kingdom of Christ, the ministry of

¹ Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation (1946)

² Professor Wendel's Introduction, pp. lxiv, lxv.

p. 100

³ Hopf, op. cit., 99f.

the Church, and the place and function of discipline.¹ Bucer's influence on Calvin has been much debated,² and it may be that Professor Torrance tends to overemphasise it. All that is certain is that it was Bucer who, like Farel, laid hands on Calvin and compelled him to abandon all hope of living as a private individual. Calvin writes in his autographical preface to to Commentary on the Psalms,

I decided to live quietly as a private individual. But that most distinguished minister of Christ, Martin Bucer, dragged me back again to a new post with the same curse which Farel had used against me. Terrified by the example of Jonah which he had set before me, I continued the work of teaching. And although I always consistently avoided public notice, somehow I was dragged to the imperial assemblies.³

It was almost certainly Bucer who mediated to Calvin the thinking of the German Reformers, as Calvin knew no German. But it would be unwise to be dogmatic about who influenced whom, for all the Reformers, on the Continent and in England, were working on common problems, and exercised a reciprocal influence, sometimes directly, often indirectly, on one another.

For our present study the most important significance of Bucer's work is that it gives a direct challenge to the view that the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ was not a fundamental Reformation doctrine. This view has been expressed, for example, by Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft in his book The Kingship of Christ. He writes,

Protestantism stands in a theological tradition in which the priestly and prophetic ministries of Christ have been strongly worked out but in which the kingly office has been obscured.... The Reformers are more reserved in their teaching concerning the Kingship of Christ than they are about his other offices.⁴

And Professor L. Berkhof in The Kingdom of God asserts that

the Reformers discussed the idea of the Kingdom of God in an incidental and fragmentary way, rather than in a systematic manner.⁵

¹Cf. T. W. Torrance, Kingdom and Church (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 100

²Cf. Georg Klingenburg, Das Verhaltnis Calvins zu Butzer (Bonn, 1912)

³Calvin, Commentary on the Psalms, cited, Calvin: Commentaries, vol. xxiii, in Library of Christian Classics, (London, 1958), p. 54

⁴W. A. Visser 't Hooft, The Kingship of Christ (London, 1948), p.14

⁵L. Berkhof, The Kingdom of God (1951), p. 24

It will be shown later that the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ had a no less important place in the teachings of Luther and Calvin than it had in Bucer's, but Bucer is of outstanding significance because he specifically gathered together Reformed doctrine under the concept of the Kingdom of Christ.

In the setting of our wider study of the Reformation as Re-discovery, it should be noted that Bucer speaks consistently of the restoration of the Regnum Christi. He sets out his aim as being to show

how salutary it is for all men that the kingdom of Christ should be solidly restored among them:¹

and in the conclusion of his work he declares that he has given an account

of the ways and means by which Christian kings and princes and all the governors of public affairs both can and ought solidly to restore the blessed reign of the Son of God and our only Saviour to their peoples, that is, to recall, restore and confirm the administration both of religion and also of all the rest of government according to the purpose of Christ our Saviour and Supreme King.²

His whole work is directed ad Regni Christi restitutionem.³

Bucer's work is divided into two sections: the first volume consists of an analysis of the idea of the kingdom of Christ and the chief functions of the Church, while the second, of a more practical character, contains Bucer's suggestions for establishing the Kingdom in England.⁴

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 90: 'quam sit omnibus hominibus salutare restitui apud eos solide regnum Christi'

² ibid., p. 293: '...earum viarum et rationum, quibus...Christianique reges, principes rerumque publicarum moderatores omnes et possint et debeant beatum filii Dei et unici sospitatoris nostri regnum populis suis solide restituere, hoc est, cum religionis, tum reliquae republicae univversae administrationem ex Christi servatoris nostri et regis summi sententia revocare, instaurare atque confirmare.'

³ ibid., p. 100

⁴ Cf. F. Wendel's Introduction, p. xxxvii

I. DEFINITION OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Bucer begins with a consideration of the Biblical terms for the Kingdom - the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son, and the Kingdom of Heaven. The word 'kingdom' is applied to the administration of a people or state by one who is outstanding above others in wisdom and every virtue,

so that everyone from childhood is formed and guided into every virtue and a blessed way of life and a true felicity.¹

The Kingdom of God exhibits these qualities in perfection, and uniquely, since God alone is good, wise and powerful.

The revelation of this eternal, transcendent Kingdom of God on earth is the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son, Who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant that He might enter into and administer His Kingdom in this age.

But, while this Kingdom in Christ has moved into this world and this age, it is not of this world but is the Kingdom of heaven (Regnum caelorum).

When it is called the kingdom of heaven it is clearly expressed that it is not of this world, although it is among us who are still living in this present world. For it is of heaven, where we have and call upon our Father, the true God and our Creator, where our King Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, and restores all things which are in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1.10), and we are called into this Kingdom by the Gospel and the Holy Spirit and are ruled to eternal life.²

Bucer proceeds further³ to define the nature of the Kingdom of

¹De Regno Christi, p. 4: 'quo a puero quisque ad omnem virtutem, beatamque vivendi rationem, solidamque felicitatem formetur atque perducatur.'

²ibid., p. 6: 'cum regnum vocatur caelorum, clare exprimitur, illud non esse de hoc mundo, tametsi sit in nobis, qui in praesenti adhuc mundo versamur. De coelo enim, ubi patrem nostrum, verum Deum et conditorem nostrum habemus et invocamus, ubi rex noster Jesus Christus sedet at dexteram patris, et instaurat quae sunt in coelo et in terra omnia, Ephes. 1.10, et in regnum hoc per Evangelium et Spiritum sanctum convocamur, et ad vitam aeternam regimur.'

³ibid., pp. 6 - 20

Christ by showing (a) what the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world have in common; and (b) what are the special marks of the Regnum Christi. Summing up his argument, he writes,

From these things...one can easily see what the Regnum Christi and the regna mundi have in common, and also what is peculiar to the Kingdom of Christ.¹

Bucer gives seven points of comparison and contrast, and in most, if not all, cases the contrast is more significant than the comparison.

(i) This first is agreed between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ that the supreme authority of government is in the power of one.²

But earthly kings need deputies to carry through their work, since they cannot be everywhere at once. Christ has servants but no deputies, since He is everywhere present.

Our heavenly King, Jesus Christ....Himself sees, attends to and completes all things which pertain to His people's salvation.³

(ii) The second thing common to the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world is that the kings of the world especially ought to do their best to see that they make all their citizens pious and good.⁴

But although the kings of the world direct all their care to this end, and omit nothing which pertains to this matter, nevertheless they themselves cannot cleanse the minds of men from innate impiety and unrighteousness....They can root out from the field of the Lord...useless trees, thorns and briars...They can plough and cultivate the field, and prepare it in a measure for receiving the seed of God. But that this field may bear the fruit of piety and righteousness, this is not to be looked

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 20: 'Ex his....facile videre licebit, quid commune sit Christi regno cum regnis mundi, et quid etiam Christi regno proprium.'

² ibid., p. 6: 'Primum convenit hoc inter regna mundi et regnum Christi, ut penes unum sit summa gubernationis potestas.'

³ ibid., p. 7: Noster vero rex coelistis, Jesus Christus...omnia ipse videt, instituit, perfecit, quae ad salutem suorum pertinet.'

⁴ ibid., p. 7 (margin): 'Secundum regni Christi et mundi commune, et mundi reges imprimis dare operam debere, ut cunctos cives suos pios et bonos efficiant.'

for before our King Christ, when the seed of the Gospel has been sown in it, has infused His increase. For it is He Himself alone Who quickens His citizens and brings those who were dead in sins to the life of righteousness. And so that He might receive this power from the Father, He underwent the most cruel death for His citizens, even when they were still His foes and enemies.¹

Two important points emerge here. One is Bucer's emphasis on the Kingdom of Christ as a spiritual kingdom, concerned primarily with the quickening of those who were dead in sins to the life of righteousness, by the instrument of the Gospel. The other is his awareness of the limitations of the power of the State to procure righteousness.

(iii) Thirdly, there is agreement between the administration of the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of Christ, in that both must put up with the bad among the good, while they are concealed, but when they practise their impiety and unrighteousness openly, and, when corrected, persist in refusing to lay it down, they must remove them from the community.²

The kingdoms of the world have the power of the sword, but in the kingdom of heaven and of Christ evildoers are to be brought back into the way of salvation only by the Word and Spirit³

¹De Regno Christi, p. 8: 'Porro, quamquam omnem curam suam reges mundi huc intendant, nec quicquam quod ad hanc rem pertineat praetermittant; tamen animos hominum innata impietate et iniustitia purgare ipsi non possunt...Excindere possunt de agro Domini...inutiles arbores, sentes, et vepres...possunt agrum...proscindere et patinare, et ad percipiendum semen Dei quodammodo praeparare...Ut fructum autem hic ager ferat pietatis et iustitiae, hoc non ante expectandum est, quam cum rex noster Christus, sparso in eo Evangelii semini suum adspiraverit incrementum. Ipse enim solus est, qui suos cives regnit et peccatis mortuos ad vitam adducit iustitiae. Utque hanc a patre potestatem acciperet, acerbissimam mortem subiit pro civibus suis, etiam cum illi adhuc essent eius inimici et hostes.'

²ibid., p. 8: Tertio competit administrationi regnorum mundi, sicut et Regni Christi, ut utraque malos, dum latent, ferre inter bonos debeat, dum autem palam suam impietatem et iniustitiam fecerint, nec correcti eam deponere sustineant, e republica tollere.'

³ibid., p. 9: '...In regno autem coelorum et Christi verbo tantum et Spiritu...reducuntur in viam salutis.'

Here emerges a favourite term of Bucer's - 'Respublica' - which he uses to refer both to the community which is the Church and the community which is the State, thought of in each case as a Christian society. Here, too, is emphasised the truth, which Bucer refers to again and again, that Christ rules solely by His Word and Spirit.

He had received all power from the Father in heaven and on earth. But he exercised that power and administered it only by the Word and Spirit, entirely without supports, tools or weapons of the world. And never at any time did He reign among men, nor will He reign in this age, in any other way.¹

Christ's kingdom is 'regnum crucifixi.'²

(iv) A fourth resemblance between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ is that citizens are received and sealed into membership in both by certain contracts and bonds.³

But the contrast lies in the fact that

it is peculiar to the Kingdom of Christ that His people are cleansed from their sins and born again to eternal life by His sacraments.⁴

Again the emphasis is on the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom and its benefits.

(v) Fifthly, this is common to the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world, to provide that no one should be in need. But it is the special function of the Kingdom of Christ "to supply all the things which are required for living well and piously."⁵ Again Bucer is concerned to stress the spiritual nature of the benefits of the Regnum Christi.

(vi) A sixth thing common to the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ is the ceaseless warfare of both against their

¹ De Regno Christi, pp. 5,6: 'Potestatem acceperat a patre omnem in coelo et terra. Eam autem potestatem exercebat et administrabat verbo tantum et Spiritu, nullis omnino adminiculis, instrumentis aut armis mundi...nec alia ullo unquam tempore ratione apud homines regnavit, nec regnabit in hoc quidem saeculo.'

² ibid., p. 6 ³ ibid., p. 9: 'Quarto, convenit inter regna mundi et Christi, quod, sicut solent reges mundi, ita velit et noster rex coelorum Christus suos cives externis certis pactis et sacramentis insuum regnum recipi et obsignari.'

⁴ ibid., p. 9f (margin): 'Proprium Christi, homines eius sacramentis etiam purgari peccatis et regni in vitam sempiternam.'

⁵ ibid., p. 11 (margin): 'suppeditare omnibus, quae ad bene pieque vivendum requiruntur.'

enemies.

This is common to the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ that both must do battle with evil men and spirits.¹

But in the Kingdom of Christ it is with spiritual weapons, "against enemies both carnal and spiritual."² Once again, there is no suggestion of a kingdom of this world, or weapons of this world to secure it.

(vii) Seventhly, there is agreement between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ, in that just as the kingdoms of the world are subject to the Kingdom of Christ, so also the Kingdom of Christ in its own way is subject to the kingdoms of the world.³

Just as Christ in the days of His flesh subjected Himself to the powers to whom He Himself had committed the power of the sword, so also must His people do, even when rulers are unjust. But, on the other hand, every true kingdom of the world must subject itself to the Kingdom of Christ.

Just as the Kingdom of Christ subjected itself to the kingdoms and powers of the world, so, on the other hand, every true kingdom of the world (I say 'kingdom' not 'tyranny') subjects itself to the Kingdom of Christ, and kings themselves especially do so, as those who are eager to cultivate godliness not so much for themselves as to bring their subjects to it.⁴

This insistence on a mutual subjection of the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of the world⁵ is Bucer's distinctive contribution to the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ and the question of the relationship of Church and State, and presupposes a State that will

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 13: 'Sexto, est regnis umundi et Christi commune, quod perpetuo dimicandum utrisque est cum malis et hominibus et spiritibus.'

² ibid., p. 14: 'contra hostes tam carnales, quam spirituales.'

³ ibid., p. 14: 'Septimo, convenit inter regna mundi et regnum Christi, quod sicut regna mundi regno Christi ita etiam regnum Christi suo modo subiiciatur regnis mundi.'

⁴ ibid., p. 14: 'sicut se regnum Christi regnis et potestatibus subiicit mundi: sic contra omne verum mundi regnum (regnum dico, non tyrannidem) subiicit se regno Christi, et reges ipsi cum primis, ut qui pietatem non colere tantum pro se, sed etiam ad eam subditos adducere studeant.'

⁵ ibid., p. 20: 'quomodo inter se coniungantur, sibi que invicem sese subiiciant et deserviant.'

listen to the Word of God - the only weapon that the Church can use - proclaimed through the Church, whose task it is to call the State into obedience to Christ. Professor T. F. Torrance gives an accurate summary of Bucer's thought here:

The Regnum Christi in Butzer's theology constitutes...the Communio Christiana, which, through the Word and the Spirit, is visibly and actively realised on earth, and through obedience to the Church's preaching of the Word and daily witness also in the State. The relations of the Church and State are mutual. The Word of God is communicated to the State through the Church, and in obedience to that Word the State creates within the world a sphere of liberty, setting bounds to the kingdom of Satan, so that the life of the Church protected by the State may freely grow in obedience to God's Word and in the exercise of love, and so assume the character of a Respublica or Societas Christiana.¹

Bucer takes a further step in the definition of the Kingdom of Christ when in Chapter V he considers "what is the Kingdom of Christ and what things are necessary for its restoration."² In a comprehensive introduction to this section Bucer writes,

The kingdom of our Saviour Jesus Christ is the administration and management of the eternal salvation of the elect of God, by which this Lord Himself and King of heaven, by his doctrine and discipline through fit servants chosen by himself for this very thing brings together to Himself His own elect, whom He has, spread throughout the world, and whom He wishes nevertheless to be subject to the powers of the world, and incorporates them in Himself and in His Church, and so controls them in it that they are daily purged more fully from sin and live well and happily both here and now and in the future.³

He stresses that the means to be used are the Word and Sacraments and Church discipline,⁴ and then proceeds to indicate particular

¹T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, p. 87

²De Regno Christi, p. 54: 'Quid regnum Christi et quae ad eiusdem regni restitutionem necessaria.'

³ibid., p. 54: 'Regnum servatoris nostri Iesu Christi administratio est et procuratio salutis aeternae electorum Dei, qua hic ipse Dominus et rex coelorum, doctrine et disciplina sua per idoneos et ab ipso delectos ad hoc ipsum ministros et vult nihilominus mundi potestatibus esse subiectos, colligit ad se, sibi que et et Ecclesiae suae incorporat atque in ea sic gubernat, ut purgati indies plenius peccatis bene beateque vivant et hic et in futuro.'

⁴ibid., p. 55

characteristics of the Kingdom of Christ.

The first of these is that whatever things are done in the Church should have as their object and contribute to the accomplishing of the salvation of men, that is, that those who have been cleansed from sins and reconciled to God through Christ should worship and glorify God in Christ the Lord with all piety and righteousness.¹

A second characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ is that those who have been elected out of the world are gathered together into His Kingdom by the preaching of the Gospel through fit servants sent to this work and chosen by the Lord Himself, inspired at the same time by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of faith, through Whom it is given to men that they should have true faith in the gospel. Certainly by this means both Christ our Lord Himself and His apostles restored the Kingdom of God in the world. And so it is necessary that those who wish the Kingdom of God to be restored among them should especially pray to God that He would send true and faithful preachers of the Gospel to His people and Church.²

These two points renew Bucer's emphasis on the Kingdom of Christ as a spiritual Kingdom, dependent for its realisation in the world on the preaching of the Word by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The third characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ to which Bucer refers returns to the thought that all its citizens and their pastors and teachers ought to be subject to the powers of the world, to whom the Lord has committed the power of the sword.³

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 55: 'Ex his vero primum est, ut quaecumque in Ecclesiis geruntur, ea ad administrandam et procurandam salutem hominum pertineant et conferant, hoc est, eo ut, a peccatis mundati et De reconciliati per Christum, Deum in Christo Domino omni pietate et iustitia colant et glorificent.'

² ibid., p. 56: 'Alterum regni Christi proprium est, electos de mundo in hoc regnum colligi per praedicationem Evangelii administratam per idoneos et a Domino ipso ad hoc missos et delectos ministros, adspirato simul Spiritu sancto, Spiritu fidei, per quem datur hominibus, ut Evangelio veram habeant fidem. Hac certe ratione et Christus Dominus ipse et apostoli eius regnum Dei in mundo restituerunt. Necesse itaque est, eos, qui volunt regnum Dei in mundo restituerunt, cum primis orare Deum, ut veros et fideles mittat populis atque Ecclesiis suis Evangelii praedicatores.'

³ ibid., p. 57

In considering a fourth characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ Bucer identifies the Kingdom with the Church. The conditions of entrance to both are the same - a knowledge of the Gospel, repentance, renunciation of the world and Satan, and obedience that shows itself in consistent living: and Bucer specifically equates the two - "the kingdom of Christ, that is, His Church."

A fourth characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ is that adults are not received into the Kingdom of Christ, that is, His Church, unless they have previously been adequately taught the Gospel, acknowledge and deplore their sins, renounce Satan and the world, and have professed all obedience to the Gospel, and their life and character are not inconsistent with that profession.¹

Earlier, in expounding Isaiah 60. 4 - 14 as dealing with the "wonderful increase and blessedness of the Church of Christ," Bucer had written,

It is predicted by the prophet that Christ, our Lord and King... would have a kingdom and a holy state on earth, that is, the Church.²

Heaven is God's throne, but the Church is called the place of His feet,

because in the Church alone God exhibits Himself as truly present according to the measure of our capacity in this life.³

Here we have the thought of the Kingdom as finding its truest expression on earth in the Church, for in the Church Christ reigns here and now in the midst of His people, and through the Church the Kingdom is progressively realised.

¹De Regno Christi, p. 57: 'Quartum regni Christi proprium est, ut adulti in regnum Christi, hoc est, Ecclesiam eius, non recipiantur, nisi sint ante Evangelium Christi satis docti, peccata agnoscant et deplorent sua, Satanae et mundo renuncient, omnemque Evangelii obedientiam fuerint professi, eique professioni vita et mores eorum non repugnent.'

²ibid., p. 33: 'praedici a vate, Dominum et regem nostrum Christum ...ut regnum et civitatem habeat sanctam in terris, hoc est, Ecclesiam.'

³ibid., p. 33: 'quam vocat locum pedum Domini, quia in sola Ecclesia Deus se vere praesentem pro modo nostrae capacitatis in hac vita exhibet.'

Bucer's identification of the Kingdom of Christ and the Church is confirmed by his assertion that the means of incorporation in the Kingdom is the Sacrament of Baptism.

All are incorporated in the Kingdom of Christ and give their assent to obedience to Him in holy baptism, and come together frequently in their holy assemblies, so that there they may understand the teaching of Christ more fully and adapt themselves to His discipline more solidly.¹

Commenting on Matthew 28. 18 - 20, he writes, "All the citizens of His Kingdom ought to be incorporated with Him in holy baptism."²

The fifth characteristic of the Kingdom of Christ is that all its true citizens show themselves to be ruled and governed in every part of life by Christ the King, that is, cleansed from sin with a view to all piety and righteousness.³

This is done

through the holy service of the Church. Wherefore it is necessary that every Church of Christ should have its service duly constituted.⁴

This leads straight into the next section of the work, where Bucer deals in detail with the tasks of the Church - "the teaching of Christ, dispensing of His sacraments and administration of His discipline."⁵

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 14: sancto baptismate omnes regno Christi incorporantur et obedientiae eius sese addicunt, ad sacros coetus frequentes conveniunt, ut se Christi doctrinam ibi percipiant plenius et disciplinae se eius solidius accomodent.'

² ibid., p. 51: 'omnes regni sui cives oportere sibi in sancto baptismate incorporari.'

³ ibid., p. 59: 'Quintum regni Christi proprium est, ut omnes veri eius cives praebant se Christo regi per omnem vitam regendos et gubernandos, id est, a peccatis purgandos ad omnemque pietatem et iustitiam.'

⁴ ibid. p. 59: 'per sacrum Ecclesiae ministerium. Qua propter nedesse omnem Christi Ecclesiam habere hoc ministerium rite constitutum.'

⁵ ibid., p. 62: 'Partes vero huius sacri ministerii sunt doctrina Christi, sacramentum eius dispensatio et disciplinae eius administratio.'

II. PRACTICAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

Of radical importance for an understanding of Bucer's application, in his second volume, of the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ, expounded in volume I, to ecclesiastical and national reformation, is his conception of religion as a Divine Covenant which issues in human obedience to Divine Law. (This conception of Covenant and Law is, as we shall see, at the very heart of Biblical and Reformed thought regarding the Kingdom of God).

Bucer has already frequently referred to the covenant-idea at crucial points in his first volume. For example, speaking of the sacraments, he says that by them men "establish the covenant of eternal salvation both with God and among themselves."¹ In the sacraments "the covenant of salvation is sealed and confirmed."² This covenant of salvation is defined as "adoption into the ranks of the children of God."³

But it is when he comes to make the transition from Book I (the doctrine of the Kingship of Christ) to Book II (the practical application of that doctrine) that the twin-conception of Covenant and Law becomes particularly significant. Introducing his contention that "the kingdom of Christ can and ought to be restored by godly kings"⁴ Bucer refers to the examples of godly kings in Scripture

¹ De Regno Christi: p. 10: 'foedus salutis aeternae et cum Deo et inter se constabliant.'

² ibid., p. 67: 'cum his sacramentis...foedus aeternae salutis obsignatur et confirmatur.'

³ ibid., p. 57: 'foedusque salutis, adoptio in filios Dei.'

⁴ ibid., p. 98: 'Regnum Christi possit et debeat restitui per pios reges.'

Calvin has the same thought in the Preface to Olivétan's N.T. - 'And you kings, princes, and Christian lords...to you it belongs to have this sacred doctrine, so useful and needful, published, taught, and understood in all your lands, realms, and lordly domains, to the end that God may be magnified by you, and his gospel exalted; because by right it is his due that all kings and kingdoms obey him in all humility and serve his glory. Remember that sovereign Empire, above all kingdoms, principalities, and lordships, was given by the Father to the Lord Jesus...' - in Calvin's Commentaries, vol. xxiii, Library of Christian Classics (London, 1958), p. 74

and indicates the duty of kings in the maintenance of religion.

Examples to be put before your Most Serene Majesty and to be imitated with the utmost conscientiousness are those of David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah and the like, to whom the Scripture attributes the solid praise of piety and of the excellent administration of the kingdom....Above all else they took care that the law of God was expounded to the people and explained with the greatest zeal. Next, they persuaded them all to receive the covenant of God with their whole heart and to ratify it in truth, having professed obedience to the law.¹

Bucer is careful to insist that the means to be used by kings for the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ must be spiritual, particularly the preaching of the gospel, though, somewhat inconsistently, he does allow to the godly king the power of the sword to prevent flagrant opposition to sound doctrine.

It is the duty of godly kings and princes, since the covenant of the Lord has been renewed, and His laws have now been accepted, to allow none of their people to violate this covenant and transgress these laws openly....nevertheless, since no one can be a true citizen of the kingdom of Christ, unless voluntarily, and all Christians, especially princes, ought to see to it that they bring their citizens voluntarily to the Kingdom of Christ, rather than drive them to it as unwilling hypocrites, from these things anyone can easily understand how fitting it is that religious princes should undertake the renewal of the Kingdom of Christ among their people, first by a clear and zealous preaching of the gospel, then by holy and careful persuasion both by themselves and by those whose authority is as holy and weighty as possible among the people of the kingdom.²

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 99: 'Exempla itaque Serenissimae Maiestati Tuae proponenda sunt et summa religione imitanda Davidis, Salomonis, Asae, Hiskiae, Iosiae, Nehemiae ac similium, quibus solidam pietatis laudem et probe administrati regni scriptura attribuit....Tum ante omnia legem Dei populo exponi explicarique maximo atudio curaverunt. Deinde, ut foedus Domini rursus toto corde omnes reciperent et in veritate sanciernt, legis obedientiam professi, persuaserunt.'

² ibid., p. 105: 'Est quidem in piorum regum et principum officio, ut, renovato foedere Domini et receptis iam Dei legibus, neminem suorum patiantur hoc foedus palam violare et has leges transgredi... nihilominus, cum nemo possit verus esse regni Christi civis, nisi volens, et debeant Christiani omnes, etiam principes, quantum illis Dominus contulerit, operam dare, ut voluntarios regno Christi adducant cives, potius quam ad illud adigant hypocritas invitos, ex his facile quivis intelligit, quam deceat religiosos principes regni Christi apud suos reparationem moliri, in primis clara atque sedula Evangelii praedicatione, tum sanctis et accuratis suasionibus et per se ipsos et per eos, quorum sit quam sanctissima atque gravissima apud populos regni autoritas.'

Open opposition to sound doctrine is to be met with the power of the sword.

Since all have been baptized into the Kingdom of Christ, not of Antichrist, and so that they may be taught to keep whatever commands Christ has laid down (not what His false substitutes have imposed on them) no one ought to be tolerated in a Christian commonwealth who does not allow himself to be taught the things of Christ's Kingdom, much less anyone who has dared to clamour against and revile these things.¹

It should be carefully noted that Bucer sees as integral to the whole work of reformation the renewal of the Divine covenant and the acceptance of the Divine law. The same thought recurs as he comes to the point of elaborating in detail the steps which must be taken for a thorough reformation.

When God has truly granted it that after the just preaching of the gospel through the whole kingdom there will have been agreement from each great council of the kingdom on the full acceptance of the Kingdom of Christ, then shall there be chosen and sent off to individual assemblies men of whose zeal for the Kingdom of Christ there is confirmation from their deeds, and who are outstanding in the kingdom for their grace and authority, so that in the name of your Most Serene Majesty they may as diligently as possible persuade and commend the same reformation of the churches.

When that has been done, because the Covenant of the Lord will then have been received again and constituted with the full authority of the kingdom, it will be within the duty of your Most Serene Majesty to ratify this covenant by holy laws and just punishments directed against violators of it, and to maintain it as watchfully and consistently as possible.²

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 105: 'cum baptizati omnes sint in regnum Christi, non Antichristi, et ut doceantur servare quaecumque praecepit Christus, non quae imponunt ementiti eius vicarii, ferri in republica christiana non debet, qui se, quae regni Christi sunt, non sustineat, multo minus qui ausit his obstrepere et convitiari.'

² ibid., p. 113: 'Ubi vero Dominus dederit, ut post Evangelii per omne regnum justam praedicationem a magno quoque regni concilio in plenam regni Christi susceptionem fuerit consensus, tum deligendi erunt et amandandi ad singulos comitatus viri, de quorum studio in Christi regnum ex fructibus eorum constet, quique gratia et et autoritate in regno plurimum valeant, quo Serenissimae Maiestatis Tuae nomine eandem Ecclesiarum reformationem quam diligentissima suadeant et commendent.

Quo facto, quia tum foedus Domini summa regni auctoritate receptum rursus et constitutum fuerit, in officio erit Serenissimae Maiestatis Tuae foedus hoc sanctis legibus ac iustis in violantes illud animadversionibus sancire et quam vigilantissime et constantissime tueri.'

Bucer then proceeds to give a detailed exposition of the laws which he considers necessary "for protecting and preserving the religion of Christ."¹

His first law is concerned with the bringing up of children in the principles of religion. It should be noted that he goes on the assumption that "all have been transferred to the kingdom of Christ by holy baptism and have received the covenant of eternal salvation."² Since this is so, the king can order parents "to bring up their children with the utmost care to the faith of Christ and Christian obedience."³

Bucer's second law deals with the restoration of the law of God regarding holy days, which should be spent wholly in religious exercises.

God teaches that His people on these days should assemble in His name, hear His Word, offer prayer to Him, give thanks to Him for benefits received, participate in His sacraments, offer holy offerings, and so renew all piety.⁴

The third law enjoins that "churches consecrated to God should be opened and kept for only religious purposes."⁵

The fourth law deals in detail with the duties of bishops. They are to apply themselves wholly to the business of their calling and not to be entangled with secular employment.

It is necessary that bishops before all other ministers and guardians of the Churches, rejecting all secular business and affairs, should give themselves wholly to reading and

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 113: 'leges de tuenda et conservanda Christi religione.'

² ibid., p. 113: 'sicut omnes sacrosancto baptismate Christi regno sunt mancipati et foedus salutis aeternae tum receperunt.'

³ ibid., p. 113: 'liberos suos ad Christi fidem et obedientiam summa cura educare.'

⁴ ibid., p. 115: 'Praecipit autem Dominus, populum suum his diebus in suo nomine convenire, suum verbum audire, preces ad se fundere, gratias sibi pro acceptis beneficiis agere, sacramentis suis communicare, sanctas offerre oblationes, atque ita pietatem omnem instaurare.'

⁵ ibid., p. 117, margin: 'templa consecrata Deo solis religionibus Christi pateant et serviant.' Cf. p. 80: 'templa non patefiant ulli hominum negotio, set sacris tantum religionibus.'

teaching the holy scriptures, to offering private and public prayers to God, and to every kind of administration of the doctrine and discipline of Christ.¹

To further this detachment from secular employments, Bucer recommends that bishops should be given helpers to assist them in the less directly spiritual aspects of their work, even though some of them might understandably be reluctant to accept this help.

Since it is necessary that bishops should be freed from all care of external (secular) things, so that they may lay themselves out altogether in looking after the salvation of souls, it will be part of the duty of your Most Serene Majesty to see that even for unwilling bishops there should be given helpers... chosen by the clergy and people of Christ.²

Bucer emphasises that reformation here, as everywhere, must consist in a return to Scriptural principles and practice.

This will certainly be for the great service of your Most Serene Majesty that the just restoration of the order and duty of bishops should be undertaken and set in motion, that is, restoration to that form which the Holy Spirit in His Scriptures has left clearly described for us.³

Bishops should visit their dioceses at least once a year, and provincial synods ought to be held twice a year. In all these

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 119: 'Necesse itaque est, ut episcopi ante reliquos omnes Ecclesiarum ministros et curatores, relictis a se cunctis saeculi negotiis et rebus, totos se impendant legendis et docendis divinis scripturis, privatis et publicis fundendis ad Deum precibus, omnique generi administrandae cum doctrinae tum disciplinae Christi.'

² ibid., p. 123: 'Iam quoniam episcopus necesse est omni externarum rerum cura exonerari, quo saluti procurandae animarum sese totos impendant...episcopis etiam invitis dari delectos a clero et populo Christi oeconomos...in officio erit Serenissimae Maiestatis Tuae.'

³ ibid., p. 120: 'hoc certe erit Serenissimae Maiestati Tuae maioribus opibus instituenda et molienda episcopalis ordinis et muneris iusta reformatio, hoc est, ad eam formam restitutio quam Spiritus sanctus in scripturis suis nobis clare descriptam reliquit.'

regulations for ecclesiastical reform there is manifest Bucer's concern that the Church should be fitted for her supreme task of making a vital spiritual impact on the nation for the restoration of the Kingdom of Christ.

The fifth law is concerned with the revenues of the Church, and Bucer's main point is that the Church should not have to contribute in any way to the support of the State. There should be a law,

by which the affairs and the resources of the Churches are appropriated and restored to their own legitimate uses.¹

Here Bucer breaks a lance with the Roman system and suggests that for the State to demand money from the Church and to impose high taxes on it is the same kind of sacrilege as the Pope's claiming firstfruits and tithes from the clergy. The Church, of course, ought to pay some taxes, but certainly not on the scale which has been demanded: on the contrary, the exchequer should be responsible for the payment of pensions for the support of the clergy and the poor. Even though the wealth of the Church may in the past have been gained by sometimes doubtful means and not always used in the most commendable ways, that is no excuse for the State to take everything from the Church. Answering in Christ's name, Bucer argues,

Because pretended and disorderly bishops have formerly misspent my patrimony, does it become you, who account it an honour to profess My Gospel, to seize the remainder? Is it tolerable in you, who complain of these drones, to practise what you condemn, to rob the hives and devour the honey? Are you willing to receive Me for your Sovereign, and come under the administration of My Kingdom? If you are thus resolved, I would have you

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 137: 'qua res et facultates Ecclesiarum.... ad suos legitimos usus vindicentur et restituantur.'

consider whether there must not be select officers to execute My orders, and represent Me in My government.¹

Bucer's main thought here is that the revenues of the Church, which are so vital for the training and maintenance of her ministry, so that her high spiritual tasks may be fulfilled, ought not to be diverted to any other purpose.

Bucer's sixth law, concerning providing for the poor, is dated to some extent by the particular circumstances of the time: Dr. Constantin Hopf has shown that the Elizabethan poor laws can be linked with the suggestions made by Bucer. Professor François Wendel has pointed out² that this passage in Bucer's writing proceeds entirely from the practice followed in Strasbourg.

This section, as has been noted above,³ found an early translator into English, who published his work under the title, A Treatise, How by the Worde of God, Christian mens Almose ought to be distributed. The alarming increase in begging and vagrancy led him

to set forth in Englishe the mynde and opinion of the Reuerende Father, and Excellent clerke Master Martyne Bucer, touchinge the right geuinge and distribution of Almose, and prouision for the poore, declared in his boke entitled De Regno Christi, made for the Moste Blisshed King Edwarde.⁴

In formulating his seventh law, Bucer enters on a very long section, extending to thirty-three chapters, dealing with marriage and divorce. A selection of these chapters was translated into English by John Milton in 1644, when he published The Judgement

¹De Regno Christi, p. 138: 'Quia vero pseudoepiscopi et eumentiti mearum Ecclesiarum praefecti meum sic diripuerunt hactenus et dilapidarunt patrimonium...decetne vos, que de meo Evangelio gloriamini, eripere et perdere, quod sacrilega illorum mihi reliquum fecit rapacitas? Vestrumne esse putatis, sic queri de fucis illis, qui mella absumunt apum mearum, ut vos illis novi adiungatis, et quod mellis apibus meis ab illis adhuc superest, totum exedatis?....Quin statuitis semel, num velitis me super vos regnare....Tum videte, si vultis meum apud vos regnum restituam, num ad id necesse sit, et educare, et instituere, et alere selectos a me homines ad regni me ministeria.'

²in a personal letter ³supra, p. 118 ⁴cited, Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation, p. 116

of M. Bucer concerning Divorce, rejoicing⁴ to have found in Bucer an ally and an eminent ecclesiastical authority for his own views."¹

It may well be asked why Bucer laid such stress on this one item in the Christian legislation which he proposed, and why he felt it necessary to deal with it at such length. No doubt there are more reasons than one for this inordinate emphasis. It cannot be forgotten that the question of marriage and divorce had a most important bearing on the English Reformation, though care must be taken neither to overstate nor underestimate the importance of Henry VIII's desire for relaxation of his marriage bond. It is overstated when it is represented as being the fountain of the Reformation in England, as though there would have been no breach with Rome but for the royal lust. That overlooks the fact that there was in England at that time a soil ready for the Reformed Faith, and also that there was a national sentiment ready to throw off papal domination.² But, on the other hand, the bearing of Henry's divorce on the Reformation in England must not be underestimated, for it was over this that action was first taken. Until the question of the Divorce arose, the king stood by the Pope, and, if he had continued to do so, the Reformation, while bound to come, might have been delayed. But once the king ceased to be the pope's supporter, the flood-gates of Reformation were opened, and what began as a political secession came to be a truly spiritual movement. There can be no doubt that the implications of the Divorce in the history of the Reformation in England were sufficient to warrant Bucer's giving more than ordinary attention to the subject.

Professor Wendel in his introduction to De Regno Christi draws attention to the fact that, quite apart from Henry VIII, this was a burning question of the hour in England. The marriage of clerics had been permitted by a law of 24th November, 1548; and, in addition,

¹Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation, p. 108

²D. B. Knox's The Doctrine of Faith (London, 1961) shows the strength of Protestantism early on.

the divorce and remarriage of the Duke of Northampton, condemned as illegal by the Duke of Somerset, Lord Protector of England, was a matter of public interest and concern.¹

But it may be doubted whether these factors in the English situation, significant though they were, could by themselves justify Bucer's prolonged treatment of the subject. These explanations do not take sufficient of Bucer's most revolutionary divergence from pre-Reformation thinking about marriage and divorce. The other Reformers declared that marriage was not a sacrament.² But Bucer states this more positively and emphatically when he declares that marriage and divorce should be taken out of the hands of the Church and put under the regulations of the State. "Marriage is a civil affair."³

It is agreed that marriage and divorce are civil matters. It was in their acknowledgment of this that Christian Emperors gave marriage laws...and none of the holy and true bishops ever condemned this view.⁴

Christ Himself did not take it on Himself

either to give new laws or change ancient laws about political matters, but, as far as civil life was concerned, put His people under the laws of the state in which each lived.⁵

Bucer had no doubts about the motive of ecclesiastical trespass into the realm of matrimonial legislation. He declares,

The Roman Antichrists, so that they might transfer the power of the Emperors to themselves, first by fraudulent persuasion,

¹ De Regno Christi, Introduction, p. L

² Cf. Calvin, Institutes IV. xix. 34 - 'Marriage is no sacrament...All men admit that it was instituted by God...but no man ever saw it administered as a sacrament until the time of Gregory. And what sober man would ever have thought it such? Marriage is a good and holy ordinance of God; and farming, building, cobbling, and barbering are lawful ordinances of God, and yet are not sacraments.'

³ De Regno Christi, p. 152: 'Cum etenim coniugium res sit politica.'

⁴ ibid., p. 180: 'Constat autem matrimonium et divortium esse res civiles. Quod agnoscentes Christiani Imperatores leges coniugales dederunt....Quod nemo sanctorum et verorum episcoporum unquam

⁵ ibid., p. 180: 'leges de rebus politicis vel dare damnavit. novas, vel mutare antiquas, sed suos, quod ad civilem vitam attinet, subiecisse legibus cuique republicae, in qua quisque viveret.'

and afterwards even by force, drew to themselves all power of deciding and judging about matrimonial cases, as also about nearly everything else.¹

The result was that eventually this matter came to be taken out of the hands of kings and governors altogether. But the Reformation meant that "when the Gospel of Christ was received, the laws of the Roman Antichrist were repudiated."² It was, Bucer maintains, lust for material power that led the Roman Church to the place where "it invaded the realm of matrimonial cases,"³ and that particular invasion was symptomatic and characteristic of its challenge to the reign of Christ. It is because of that challenge that Bucer, in common with all the Reformers, refers to the Roman Church as Antichrist.⁴ This was not merely a term of abuse: it was a statement of fact, for the Roman Church had come to usurp the power which belonged to Christ alone.

It is clear that Bucer considered Rome's claims to authority in the realm of marriage a crucial illustration of the denial of the Kingship of Christ, and it seems that he deliberately chose this particular ground as the ground on which he would do battle with the Roman claims to totalitarian control. It might not have been the battle-ground which a twentieth-century apologist would have chosen, though it is not without significance that it is just in this realm that Rome still finds her authoritarian claims exposed to contradiction. There are many Roman Catholics who are not happy

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 153: Antichristi autem Romani, quo Imperatorem potestatem in se transferrent, primum fraudulenta persuasione, postea etiam vi, omnem de matrimoniis, sicut plerisque aliis de rebus, statuendi et iudicandi potestatem ad se pertraxerunt.'

² ibid., p. 153: 'ubi Christi Evangelium recipitur, Romani Antichristi leges...repudiantur.'

³ ibid., p. 153, margin: Antichristi Romani...moderationem invaserunt matrimonium.'

⁴ Cf. Calvin, Institutes IV. vii. 25: Luther, Commentary on Galatians (P. S. Watson's ed.), p. 391: pre-Reformation writers also used the title in this sense, especially Wycliffe and Hus. Cf. Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (13 vols. 1908 - 26), I. p. 581.

about their Church's demands in the matters of divorce or birth-control. But, in any case, marriage was in the sixteenth century a recognised realm in which ecclesiastical control held sway. Writing of the Church and the Social Order in the later Middle Ages, Professor S. L. Greenslade has said,

Fundamental to all social life is the family, and therefore the law of marriage. For some centuries this was almost wholly ecclesiastical, and was administered by Church courts.... Much can be said against the ecclesiastical marriage laws. At some points (e.g. affinity) so strict that the necessary exceptions bred chaos, at others, especially regarding the distinction between betrothal and marriage, so uncertain as to perplex the lawyer and destroy the plain man's confidence, it was far too dependent upon the papal power of definition and dispensation, even if that power was wisely used.¹

And so, when Bucer chose the subject of marriage as the ground on which to meet the authoritarian claims of the Roman Church, he offered battle on a decisive field. The point at issue, however, was not merely Rome's attitude to marriage, but the Church's inexorable claim to absolute control in all things.

Bucer in his summing up of this lengthy section admits his prolonged treatment of the subject:

Those things are indeed many, which I have brought forward and which have been treated quite copiously by me.²

But he gives as one of his reasons the great darkness which Antichrist has spread over this question³ and ends with the prayer:

May the Lord only grant it that we may be willing by His eternal and always wholesome word to make of less account...the fictions of Antichrist and his false and blasphemous interpretations of the Words of the Lord.⁴

¹S. L. Greenslade, The Church and the Social Order (London, 1948), pp. 52, 53

²De Regno Christi, p. 235: 'Multa illa quidem sunt, quae attuli atque a me admodum fuse pertractata.'

³ibid., p. 235: 'quales ac quantas Antichristus huic questioni tenebras offuderit.'

⁴ibid., p. 236: 'Dominus tantum donet, ut velimus aeterno eius verbo ac semper iusto atque salutari...Antichristi commenta atque falsas ac blasphemias verborum Domini interpretationes posthabere.'

Bucer's views on divorce were too advanced to commend themselves to his contemporaries, though Milton, as we have seen, rejoiced to find in them support for his own ideas. A. R. Winnett in his Divorce and Remarriage in Anglicanism gives a good summary of Bucer's argument:

Bucer finds the essential nature of the marriage bond declared in the words 'The twain shall be one flesh,' and from this he reasons that where this union is lacking 'either by obstinate malevolence, or too deep bred weakness of mind, or through incurable impotence of body,' no marriage bond truly exists. Bucer's position is virtually this: that whenever the objects of marriage are not attained, divorce is not merely permitted, but demanded.¹

Professor Wendel gives illustrations of the opposition that Bucer's views had to meet², including a letter from John Burcher to Bullinger, on 8th June, 1550:

Bucer is more than licentious on the subject of marriage. I heard him once disputing at table upon this question, when he asserted that a divorce should be allowed for any reason, however trifling.³

But, whatever may be thought of Bucer's views on divorce, there can be no denying that his view of marriage was a truly lofty one. Milton's translation of his definition of the proper end of marriage makes this clear:

Now the proper and ultimate end of marriage is not copulation, or children....but the full and proper and main end of marriage is the communicating of all duties both divine and human, each to other with utmost benevolence and affection.⁴

Before leaving this section of Bucer's work, it should be noted that in insisting that marriage is a civil affair, Bucer is returning to the view and practice of the Early Church. While our

¹ A. R. Winnett, Divorce and Remarriage in Anglicanism (London, 1958), pp. 9, 10.

² De Regno Christi, Introduction, p. L, footnote 205

³ 'Bucerus in matrimonii causa plus quam licentiosus est. Audivi semel in mensa de hac quaestione disputantem, ubi affirmavit, ob quamcumque leviusculam causam divortium concedendum fore.' - Epistolae Tigurinae de rebus potissimum ad Ecclesiae Anglicanae Reformationem pertinentibus conscriptae (Parker Society), Cambridge, 1848, p. 431

⁴ De Regno Christi, P. 208, trans., John Milton, The Prose Works ed. J. A. St. John (London, 1848-53), vol. III., p. 305

information about Christian marriage in the earliest age of Christianity is very scanty, it seems clear that, whatever Christian ceremonies came to be associated with the blessing of marriage, the essential thing was the contract between the two parties to accept ~~one~~ each other as partners. "The blessing of the Church belonged to the ornamentation of marriage, not to its essence."¹

The Church from the beginning realized that Matrimony was in its essence a contract between individuals. So far as regarded the external forms which gave validity to that contract, the Church was ready to approve all that was seemly and in accordance with national custom.²

It was not till the thirteenth century that vows before a priest became obligatory as part of the marriage itself: prior to that it was still customary for the guardians of the partners to act in the ceremony, and only later was the Nuptial Mass celebrated.

Probably we shall be right in assuming that the first effort everywhere made by the Church to impart a religious character to the contract of marriage was by requiring or urging the married pair to be present at a special Nuptial Mass....

For a long time, undoubtedly, the espousals and the actual nuptials remained distinct ceremonies throughout the greater part of the Western world, and except for the subsequent bringing of the parties before the altar for the celebration of the Mass, the Church seems to have had little directly to do with either function.³

It was much later, as Calvin and Bucer and the other Reformers pointed out, that marriage was made into a sacrament, and thereby the Church's control was clamped more firmly on the lives of its members. All the Reformers denied that it was a sacrament, but Bucer went further than the rest in seeking to make it a purely civil affair, as it had been in the early centuries of the Church.

Bucer's eighth law deals with the education of youth. Men

¹ Cf. article on Marriage in the Bible and the Early Christian Church, by Professor William Robinson, M.A., D.D., in The Expository Times, vol. LIX, No. 3, Dec., 1947, p. 79

² Cf. article on Marriage, Ritual of, by Herbert Thurston, in The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1910), p. 704

³ Ibid., p. 705

of piety are to be appointed to care for them. Schools are to be up as in earlier days,

in which all the children consecrated to our Lord Jesus Christ in holy baptism should be taught letters and the catechism of our religion. It is necessary that such schools should be restored among us in large numbers if we wish Christ to reign fully among us.¹

Young people are to have training in the practical arts of wool, agriculture, leather and metal work. And there is to be some time for recreation, since there is need for relaxation of both body and mind.²

Under this section Bucer has a chapter on the reforming of merchandizing, with rules for imports and exports which are not irrelevant to twentieth-century economics.

Merchants shall be forbidden either to export or import other articles of merchandise than those which your Most Serene Majesty has decreed. The merchant shall decide that only those things shall be offered for sale, by which the people of the kingdom may truly grow rich, so that by the export of them the good of the people of the kingdom to whom these things are surplus will be considered no less than the good of those who take these things into other regions, and thence make their profit.³

Price control seems desirable to conserve justice and humanity among citizens.⁴

The purpose of Bucer's ninth law is to restrain luxury and hurtful expenses.⁵

Now since pleasure and luxury chiefly plot against healthy industry, your Most Serene Majesty will take measures against these plagues of human life, to the benefit of his people, with a law relating to expense, by which he may prohibit all

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 239: 'Quamobrem veteres sancti patres apud quamlibet Ecclesiam scholam esse voluerunt, in qua cuncti pueri Christo Domino per sacrum baptismum consecrati literas atque religionis nostrae catechismum edocerentur. Tales scholas necesse est, ut et antea dictum, apud nos frequentes restitui, si volumus Christum plene apud nos regnare.'

² ibid., p. 252: De honestis ludis

³ ibid., p. 249: 'Deinde, ne hi alias, quam quas Serenissima Maiestas Tua decruerit, merces sive exportent, sive importent. Decernetque ipsa, eas tantum res efferendas, quibus populus regni vere abundat, ut earum exportatione non minus consulatur cui eae res supersunt, quam iis, qui illas in alias regiones efferunt indeque questum faciunt.'

⁴ ibid., p. 250

⁵ ibid., p. 260

unworthy luxury to those who have professed piety - pomp and pride in buildings, clothes, ornaments of the body, food and drink and all things relating more to the pampering of the flesh than to the virtue and true advantage of the state.¹

The tenth law deals with the method of reforming the laws themselves.² It is important to note that for Bucer no law is worthy of the name of law unless it has its source in the law of God, summed up, as Christ has shown, in the injunction, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

No law or regulation made for governing the life and morals of men can bear the name of law unless it is derived and taken from the chief law, namely, the mind of the God Who sees and rules all things....Attention must be given by all authors, revisers and restorers of laws that only those things should be imposed on men, which are directed to the pure and sincere worship of God, and to solid and kind love and beneficence to one's neighbours.³

Bucer complains that the laws, written in an obsolete language, are unintelligible to the layman, so that unscrupulous lawyers are able to exploit people and rob them of their money. Since the laws are every man's birthright, and since everyone is obliged

¹ De Regno Christi, pp. 260, 261: 'Iam cum salutari industriae insidiatur maxime voluptas et luxus, Serenissima Maiestas Tua et contra has vitae humanae pestes populis suis consulet lege sumptuaria, qua omnem prohibeat indignam professis pietatem luxuriam, pompam, et fastum in aedificiis, vestibus, ornamentis corporum, cibo potuque ac rebus omnibus conferentibus magis ad carnis oblectationem, quam ad animi virtutem veramque reipublicae utilitatem.'

² ibid., p. 264: De civilium legum repurgatione et explicatione

³ ibid., p. 266: 'Ut vero nulla sanctio aut constitutio moderandae hominum vitae et moribus facta legis nomen queat sustinere, si non sit a principe lege, mente omnia tuentis et regentis Dei, derivata et excepta....Id cum primis spectandum est omnibus legum et conditoribus et repurgatoribus atque instauratoribus, ut ea tantum praecipiantur hominibus, quae puro sinceroque Dei culti, tum solidae atque officiosae charitati et beneficentiae in proximos sint accomodata.'

to keep them, it is only reasonable that they should lie open in language and meaning, that everyone may understand them. He goes so far as to suggest that short summaries of them should be put into songs,

which would soon be learned by young people from their boyhood instruction, and be sung by the whole people.

"Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws" would not have satisfied Bucer: he wanted the laws to become the songs!

The eleventh law is concerned with the appointment of magistrates, and lays down very high standards for them.

God requires it in the magistrates of His people, and that particularly, that they should be men of truth, that is, outstanding lovers, cultivators and defenders of truth and sincerity.²

Their relationship to the Church is clearly defined:

Those who undertake the office of the magistracy must swear that they ~~will~~ cultivate and will cultivate the communion of the most holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God, and that they will not oppose it in any way or at any time, nor, so far as they can, allow that to anyone else.³

The remaining laws, numbered twelve to fourteen, are concerned with judges, trials and punishments for breaches of the law. The most noteworthy point here is Bucer's insistence that crimes against the law of God should be more severely punished than crimes which more particularly are directed against the personal concerns of men. If we ask the reason why in many kingdoms theft is

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 265: 'carmina quae ab adolescentibus mox a doctrina puerili ediscantur atque decantentur ab omni populo.'

² ibid., p. 270: 'Deus in populi sui magistratibus et illud nominatim requirit, ut sint viri veritatis, hoc est, veritatis et sinceritatis singulares amatores, cultores, propugnatores.'

³ ibid., p. 272: 'iurare oportebat eos, qui magistratus susciperent, se communionem colere et culturos esse sanctissimae De Ecclesiae catholicae atque apostolicae nec se huic ullo modo ullove tempore adversaturos, neque id cuiquam, quoad eius possent, permissuros.'

punishable by death, but whoredom, adultery and things like the perversion of Divine truth are less severely dealt with, it can only be because "money, and external power, are much dearer to men than God Himself, their eternal salvation, or virtue and honour."¹ Here we have the characteristic theocentric emphasis of the Reformers: God, not man, is the determining factor in every situation, and everything has as its aim solī Deo gloria.

Any assessment of Bucer's work has to take into account the fact that his ideal state was not realised. The Kingdom of Christ was not restored in England. It is true that Bucer's book made an undoubted impression on King Edward VI, to whom it was directed: the King's own small treatise on similar topics - A Discourse about the Reformation of many abuses¹ suggests that he was willing to make an attempt to put Bucer's ideas into practice. And Dr. Constantin Hopf has shown that De Regno Christi did make some impact on ecclesiastical and social life in England.² But the fact remains that Bucer's ideal never became anything more than an ideal.

"In Protestant England, no eagerness was shown for a realization of the Kingdom of God."³

Various reasons may be given for the comparative failure of Bucer's work. It was unfortunate that he died so soon after the completion of his book: still more unfortunate was the fact that two years after him King Edward VI died, to be succeeded by Mary, who was determined to undo the work of the Reformation: it is not strange that Bucer's work fell into oblivion. He does not seem to have given any indication about what he would advocate when a godly prince ceased to be godly. He must have known that Edward would not live long, and that Mary would soon rule.

But there is a deeper reason for the fact that Bucer's ideal

¹ Gilbert Burnet, The History of the Reformation of the Church of England (London, 1841), vol. II, pp. clxxv ff.

² Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation (Oxford, 1946)

³ Wilhelm Pauck, Martin Bucer's Conception of a Christian State, The Princeton Theological Review, vol. xxvi, January, 1928, p. 87.

remained no more than an ideal. "He forgot," says Wilhelm Pauck, "that the community of love which he desired had to be established within a national state ruled by selfish patriotism."¹ That is to put it too strongly, but it is true to say that all that Bucer wrote, particularly his practical applications of the principles underlying the Kingdom of Christ, presupposes a Christian king and a Christian government, with power to enforce Christian legislation. This is supported by the assumption which he makes again and again in his pages that the citizens of whom he is writing are baptised members of the Church.² And yet he does not forget that there are those in the nation to whom his words do not apply. In the closing pages of his book he writes,

Indeed, when I undertook to write about the restoration of the Kingdom of Christ, and its full reception again, it was my duty to consider only those men 'whom God chose to Himself out of the world,' (John 15.59), and as 'He chose them before the foundation of the world,' (Eph. 1.4), and 'foreknew and predestined' them, so also in His own time 'He calls, justifies and glorifies them.' (Romans 8. 29, 30). For those who are of the world understand the things which are of the world (cf. Rom. 8.5), not the things which are of Christ. For they hated and killed Him and all His members (John 15.18,19): so far are they from giving attention to His words; and so they remain in evil, and the wrath of God abides on them, for the Son does not pray for them (John 17.9). Therefore it is not fitting for me to spend time, in writing about the Kingdom of Christ, on what those people approve or disapprove, or on what they are prepared to accept or not, who are the sworn enemies of His Kingdom.³

¹ Wilhelm Pauck, op. cit., p. 87

² E.g., De Regno Christi, pp. 14, 33, 51, 239

³ ibid., p. 298: 'Ego vero, cum instituissem scribere de Christi regno restituendo pleneque ~~is~~erum recipiendo, eos tantum respicere homines debui, quos Deus sibi deligit de mundo (John 15.19), utque ante conditum mundum elegit (Eph. 1.4), parecognovit atque prae-definivit, ita suo quoque tempore vocat, iustificat, glorificat. Rom. 8. 29, 30. Qui enim de mundo sunt, quae mundi sunt sapiunt, non quae Iesu Christi; hunc enim oderunt et interficiunt, et cuncta eius membra, John 15. 18,19; tam abest, ut eius verba admitterent; manent itaque in amlo et incumbit in eos ira Dei; nam filius pro illis non orat. John 17.9. Non igitur morari me decebat, scribentem de Christi regno, quid illi probent aut reprobent, quid sustineat recipere, necne, qui sunt regni huius devoti hostes.'

The blessings of the Kingdom are promised "only to those who yield themselves to His Kingdom, not to those who oppose it or do not receive it fully."¹ But Bucer is not content to leave unclaimed for Christ the territory into which His Kingdom has not yet come. He calls the king to learn from the Word of God "what things are characteristic of the Kingdom, and what is the sure plan of restoring it most fully among us."² The method of carrying out the plan of restoration which Bucer has described so exactly and explicitly is that the king should have associated with him a Council of men, "whom he has laid hold of for the Kingdom, solidly taught and excellently endowed."³ With their help,

He will seek out everywhere and send forth to his people proved evangelists, who through all assemblies will preach to them the whole Gospel of Christ and the whole scheme of restoring the Kingdom among us with the utmost faith and with pious skill.⁴

And so the wheel comes round full circle to where Bucer began his detailed exposition of the methods of restoration of the Kingdom

¹ De Regno Christi, p. 299: 'iis modo, qui se eius regno subiiciunt, non illis, qui ei adversantur aut illud non plene recipiunt.'

² ibid., p. 300: quae sunt regni Christi propria, quae certa restituendi eius apud nos quam plenissime ratio.'

³ ibid., p. 300: quos ad Christi regnum deprehenderit et solide doctos et optime animatos.'

⁴ ibid., p. 300: 'conquiret undique et emittet ad populos suos probatos evangelistas, qui totum illis Christi Evangelium omnemque restituendi apud nos regni eius rationem per cunctos comitatus praedicent fide summa et pia dexteritate.'

of Christ. It is to be accomplished "not by edicts but by pious persuasions,"¹ not by force, but by "the accurate preaching of the Gospel."²

Since that is the weapon by which the Kingdom of Christ is to be restored, Bucer is supremely confident. "Christ is accustomed to restore His kingdom gloriously and to subdue His enemies under His feet, even using the service of very few and in the eyes of the world very weak and contemptible instruments....For He lives, and through all things Christ our King is still like Himself....He will do it, He will do it, our Lord Jesus Christ, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."³

¹De Regno Christi, p. 101: 'Regnum Christi non edictis tantum sed piis suasionibus revocandum.'

²ibid., p. 104: 'evangelii accurata praedicatione.'

³ibid., pp. 302, 303: 'solet enim Christus suis hominibus regnum suum gloriose restituere et hostes eorum subicere pedibus etiam perpaucorum et apud mundum maxime informorum et contemptorum utens ministerio....Vivit enim et sui adhuc per omnia similis est Christus rex noster....Faciet, faciet, hic Dominus noster Iesus Christus, rex regum et Dominus Dominantium.'

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

(iii) The Lordship of Christ

Professor J. S. Stewart, writing on the words of the Apostolic Benediction - "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all"¹ - makes the comment,

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" - how significant that Paul starts there! He starts with God the Redeemer, God revealed in Christ the Son, the Saviour. Why did he not start with God the Creator, God the sovereign Ruler, God the all-embracing Providence of this vast, tremendous universe?²

Professor Stewart goes on to answer his own question:

It is through his experience of the grace of Christ the Son that Paul reaches his conviction of the love of God the Father... It is by standing on the vantage-point of redemption ground... that he sees, afar off, range after range of towering peaks - the righteousness and sovereignty and wisdom and justice and everlasting mercy of God.³

That approach is of crucial importance for our study of the Sovereignty of God as a doctrine re-discovered at the Reformation. We know the Sovereignty of God as it has been revealed in the Lordship of Christ, for God's sovereignty, no less than God's love, was made flesh in the Incarnation; and it is the Lordship of Christ that gives us our grasp on the Sovereignty of God as living reality.

¹ II Corinthians 13. 14

² J. S. Stewart, The Strong Name (Edinburgh, 1940), p. 254

³ ibid., p. 256

Even in the Old Testament the theocracy had to be embodied in a person if it was to be laid hold of by the people of Israel. That is illustrated not only by the people's ultimate demand for a king, but even by the place that Moses occupied in mediating the Divine Rule to the people. "Speak thou with us," they said to him, "and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."¹ God was Israel's King, and the people were bound in covenant with Him and committed to obedience, but the rule of God was personified for them in the person of Moses, and reference is made again and again to their obeying his commandments. Indeed, in one place the title 'king' is specifically given to him:

Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes were gathered together.²

Later on, though Gideon and Samuel protested that the appointment of a king over Israel was inconsistent with the Divine Kingship, both of them stood almost in the royal position: and afterwards, when kingly rule was established in Israel, the thought was never entertained that the theocracy had ceased. In the early days of the kingdom at least, it was stressed that the king was chosen by the Lord, and endowed by Him with special kingly gifts: he was the Lord's Anointed and ruled in His name. As Dr. Jean Bosc of Paris puts it in The Kingly Office of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As for the king he is the representative and sign of the exclusive sovereignty which God intends to exercise over His people in virtue of the covenant.³

When the kingdom had grown hopelessly corrupt, the prophets looked forward to the coming of another king of David's line, Who, delivering them from their enemies, would rule in righteousness and bless His people with peace. That dream was fulfilled beyond all

¹ Exodus 20. 19

² Deuteronomy 33. 4,5

³ Jean Bosc, The Kingly Office of the Lord Jesus Christ (English translation by A. K. S. Reid, Edinburgh, 1959), p. 18

their hopes when in Bethlehem of Judaea was born Jesus, the King: and shepherds and wise men kneeling in a stable saw the Sovereignty of God made flesh.

We have seen that the doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty is linked inextricably with the name of John Calvin. But for Calvin it was no abstract dogma or intellectual theory: it meant the reign of Christ. His view of the necessary response of man to the sovereignty of God is clearly seen in the words with which he presented his appeal to the Emperor Charles V and his princes to reform the Church. His tract on The Necessity of Reforming the Church bore this on the title page -

TO THE MOST INVINCIBLE EMPEROR CHARLES V.,
AND THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCES AND OTHER ORDERS NOW HOLDING
A DIET OF THE EMPIRE AT SPIRES
A H U M B L E E X H O R T A T I O N
SERIOUSLY TO UNDERTAKE THE TASK OF RESTORING
THE CHURCH

PRESENTED IN THE NAME OF ALL THOSE WHO WISH CHRIST TO REIGN¹

The essential mark of the Reformation was a desire that Christ should reign.

Calvin knew that the Sovereignty of God could be personalized and realised only in the Lordship of Christ. All the Reformers had the same idea of the Kingdom of God's being made visible and real in the Kingship of Christ. We have already seen this in Bucer's careful consideration of the Biblical terms for the Kingdom - the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son, and the Kingdom of Heaven.² Luther made the same distinction, between "the invisible kingdom of the invisible God...

¹ Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, ed. T. F. Torrance, vol. I, p. 123

² supra, p. 121.

utterly incomprehensible to us" and "the kingdom of the Incarnate Son, 'the visible God'". The latter is

the revealed Kingdom in which Christ as King and Lord rules through the Word of the Gospel, through the Spirit and the Sacraments; it is the Kingdom of the Incarnation and the mighty deeds of Christ for our salvation.¹

And Calvin writes,

The Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son's hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in his care and help us....Scripture usually calls Christ 'Lord' because the Father set Christ over us to exercise his dominion through his Son.²

The Reformation's re-discovery of the Sovereignty of God was essentially a re-discovery of the Lordship of Christ.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

It will be our purpose to show once again that the position of the Reformers was not merely a negative reaction to a defective Romanist position, but rather a positive answer to an error which itself contained essentially negative elements.

It is obvious, of course, that the Reformed doctrine of the Lordship of Christ was a direct negative to the claims and pretensions of the Papacy. None of the Reformers was mealy-mouthed when it came to referring to the Pope. Calvin, for example, writing to Cardinal Sadolet, declared,

We maintain that the Roman Pontiff, with his whole herd of pseudo-bishops, who have seized upon the pastor's office, are ravening wolves, whose only study has ~~been~~ hitherto ~~been~~ to scatter and trample upon the kingdom of Christ, filling it with ruin and devastation.³

¹ Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 45, ppl 280 ff, cited T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, pp. 22,23

² Institutes, II. 15. 5. Professor Torrance writes, 'It is generally characteristic of Calvin that when he thinks of the Kingdom in terms of God's eternal majesty and reign he speaks of it as the Regnum Dei, but when he thinks of it in terms of the Incarnation and the death and resurrection of Christ, and of His reigning over the world until the manifestation of the new heaven and the new earth, he speaks of it as the Regnum Christi.' Kingdom and Church, p. 95

³ Calvin's Tracts and Treatises (ed. T. F. Torrance), vol. I, p.50

Later in the same letter Calvin roundly declares,

The kingdom of Christ was prostrated when the primacy of the Pope was raised up.¹

That attitude was characteristic of all the Reformers, and it may be said that the Reformed position was negative in the sense that it opposed the Roman claim to domination. But it did so only because the Roman claim itself was a denial of the sole Lordship of Christ.

The radical mistake of medieval thinking about the Kingdom of God was that it identified the Kingdom with the Church and assumed that the Church had authority not only in the spiritual but also in the secular sphere. This was a flat contradiction of Christ's affirmation that His Kingdom was not of this world. And that Romanist error still persists. Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft in his book The Kingship of Christ says,

The encyclical Quas Primas of 1925 concerning the institution of the feast of Christ the King gives in its beginning an admirably clear definition of the Kingship of Christ and its Biblical basis. It emphasizes strongly the universal character of Christ's Reign. But - almost in passing - it suddenly declares that the Church is precisely this Kingdom of Christ which is destined to cover the whole earth. Thus the demarcation line is blurred. Christocracy becomes ecclesio-
cracy.²

It is not necessary here to trace the history of this tragic development. It is effectively summarized in a sentence from W. Hobhouse's Bampton Lectures, The Church and the World in Idea and History:

The Papal system tried to set up a theocracy above the kingdoms of this world, to absorb the world and the State into the Church: and in doing so was forced to use worldly weapons and immoral means.³

The tragic outcome was that the system of the medieval Papacy

¹ Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I., pp. 63f.

² W. A. Visser 't Hooft, The Kingship of Christ, p. 90

³ W. Hobhouse, The Church and the World in Idea and History (London, 1910), p. 212

succeeded in secularizing the Church more than it spiritualized the world. Dante spoke strongly regarding the Church's acceptance of political position and power:

Say henceforth that the Roman Church, beguiled
To blend two governments distinct in one,
Hath in the mire itself and them defiled.¹

The mistake of identifying the outward organised Church with the Kingdom of God not only led to the secularizing of the Church: it led to the secularizing of the world as well. If the Church was the Kingdom of God, and the Christian's duty was to seek first the Kingdom, then all Christian duty and activity must take the form of service of the Church. Anything that fell outside that was secular in the sense of belonging to the world outside the Church. The consequence was that a barrier was erected between the church and the world, between what is religious and what is secular: and the ethics of the Church came to adopt a purely negative attitude towards the State and natural social life. The Reformation's attack on this separation between the sacred and the profane was essentially a positive assertion that God is the Lord of the whole of life and that it is in every aspect of it that He is to be served and glorified.

Further, the Reformers' conception of the essentially negative character of the regime which they opposed is graphically indicated in their sustained references to the Pope as Antichrist.

Martin Bucer's reference to the Pope as Antichrist has already been noted as characteristic of all the Reformers² for them all it was not simply a term of abuse; it was a statement of fact. In short, if the Reformers were anti-papal, it was because for them the Pope was anti-Christ: if their reaction appears to be a negative one, it was because the papal dominion was a flagrant denial

¹ Dante, Purgatorio, XVI, 127-129, quoted P. Carnegie Simpson, The Church and the State, p. 72

² supra, p. 139.

of Christ's Lordship in the Church and in the world.

It is noteworthy that the use of the term 'Antichrist' to describe the Papacy had an extensive pre-Reformation use. As early as 1379 Wycliffe had launched a bitter attack on the Pope in his De potestate papae - On the Power of the Pope - and had asserted categorically that a pope who fails to follow Christ in simplicity and poverty is the Antichrist.¹ In his later works Wycliffe went still further and advocated the abolition of the papal office altogether:

The pope, instead of being "quasi-divine or god on earth," who has the right to dispense men from laws human and divine, and to offend whom is a graver trespass than to offend Christ, is in reality the Antichrist.²

John Hus, writing on simony, speaks of

the self-assertion of the Antichrist whereby he lifts up himself above all which is called God; that is, even above Christ's divinity as well as Christ's humanity, grasping God's power but rejecting humility, poverty, and the other virtues and work of Christ. Thus, as Christ, when he lived on earth, had been in all things obedient unto the Father, he (the Antichrist) is in all things contrary to Christ; hence he is called the Antichrist, which means the adversary of Christ.³

From the many references in Luther's and Calvin's writings to the Pope as Antichrist it will be sufficient to pick out a few instances in which the papal dominion is specifically stated to be opposed to the Kingship of Christ.

In his exposition of Galatians 3. 10, Luther writes,

All hypocrites and idolaters go about to do those works which properly pertain to the Divine Majesty, and belong to Christ only and alone. Indeed they say not in plain words: I am God, I am Christ, and yet in very deed they proudly challenge unto themselves the divinity and office of Christ, and therefore it is as much in effect as if they said: I am Christ, I am a saviour, not only of myself, but also of others.... The Pope in like manner, by publishing and spreading his divinity throughout the whole world, hath denied and utterly buried the office and divinity of Christ.⁴

¹ John Wycliffe, De potestate papae, ed. Johann Loserth, (London, 1907), pp. 176-9

² R. Buddensieg, ed. John Wyclif's Polemical Works (London, 1883), II. 674-676, 691

³ John Hus, On Simony, in Advocates of Reform (London, 1953, ed. Professor Matthew Spinka), p. 200
⁴ Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 200

Again, writing on Galatians 4. 6, Luther refers to the inability of the Pope to perform what he had promised:

Moreover, the Pope called all the world to the obedience of the holy church of Rome, as to an holy state, in the which they might undoubtedly attain salvation; and yet after he had brought them under the obedience of his laws, he commanded them to doubt (of their salvation). So the kingdom of Antichrist braggeth and vaunteth at the first.¹

It is important to note that Luther's castigation of the Pope as Antichrist never brings him to the point of agreeing with the Anabaptists and similar revolutionaries that the Pope should be overthrown by violence. We are grateful to Professor P. S. Watson for giving us a translation of a passage, omitted in the earlier English translation of Middleton, in which Luther, writing on Galatians 3. 5, contrasts his methods with those of the 'sectaries.'

They (i.e., the sectaries) say: The Pope is Antichrist! Doubtless; but he in turn replieth, that he hath a ministry of teaching, that with him is the authority to administer the Sacraments, and to bind and to loose, and that he possesseth this power by hereditary right as handed down in succession from the Apostles. Therefore he is not thrust out of his seat by these external tumults, but by this means, if I say: O Pope, I will kiss thy feet, and acknowledge thee to be the supreme pontiff, if thou wilt adore my Christ, and allow that we have remission of sins and eternal life through his death and resurrection, and not by observation of thy traditions. If thou wilt grant this, I will not take from thee thy crown and authority: but if not, I will constantly cry out that thou art Antichrist, and declare all thy worships and religions to be not only the denial of God, but supreme blasphemy against God, and idolatry. This the sectaries do not, but they seek by external force to take away the Pope's crown and authority; therefore their endeavour is in vain.²

Calvin frequently uses the term 'Antichrist' as a designation of the Papacy.³ He writes,

Daniel and Paul foretold that Antichrist would sit in the

¹ Commentary on Galatians (P. S. Watson's ed.), p. 219 370

² ibid., p. 219

³ Cf. Institutes, III. xx. 42: IV. vii. 4, 25: IV. xvii. 1: Comm. I John 2. 18. Cf. H. Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things (Eng. tr. H. Knight, Lutterworth, 1955), pp. 117-122

Temple of God. With us, it is the Roman pontiff we make the leader and standard bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom.¹

Writing on the spiritual character of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, he sets the true kingdom of Christ over against the kingdom of Antichrist:

But it also behooves us...to see what was formerly the true use of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and what great abuses crept in, in order that we may know what is to be abrogated and what of antiquity is to be restored, if we wish to overturn the kingdom of Antichrist and set up again the true Kingdom of Christ.²

It is clear that the Reformers' use of 'Antichrist' as a designation of the Pope was no negative name-calling: it was their positive protest against the Pope's usurpation of a place that belonged to Christ alone. Let the Westminster Confession summarise the conviction of them all:

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.³

To realise fully the positive character of the Reformed doctrine of the Lordship of Christ, it must be emphasised that His is a spiritual kingship. This is often overlooked in modern studies of the Lordship of Christ,⁴ but it is of fundamental importance for a true understanding of the Reformed emphasis to realise that Christ is a spiritual King and that His is a spiritual Kingdom. That is not to deny that for the Reformers Christ's Lordship had definite implications in the material realm. These, as we shall see, are of great importance, but they were no more

¹Institutes, IV. III. 12

²ibid., IV. xi. 5

³Westminster Confession of Faith, xxv. 6

⁴Cf. Study Documents of the World Council of Churches on The Lordship Of Christ over the World and the Church (1957 and 1959), stressing the social and political responsibilities of the Church.

than corollaries of the basic truth that Christ is a spiritual King of a spiritual Kingdom. The fact that all the Reformers were not agreed on the particular applications of the doctrine to the different situations in which they found themselves has perhaps obscured the unity of their testimony to the truth that Christ is King in the spiritual realm. That was their positive contribution. And it is there that we find not only their oneness, but also their timelessness. Some of their particular applications of the doctrine, set as they were in a medieval context, are irrelevant today. For example, the Reformers took over the medieval conception of a single society which in one aspect was the Church and in another the civil community, membership in one being identical with that in the other. The pre-supposition is no longer valid, and makes much of the Reformers' contribution to the problem of the relationship between Church and State to a large extent irrelevant. But the fundamental truth which they proclaimed and applied - the truth of Christ's spiritual sovereignty - is imperishable.

But can this assertion of the Reformed emphasis on the essentially spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom be maintained? Among those who say that it can are J. S. Candlish¹, Professor L. Berkhof², Professor Jean Bosc³, Professor T. F. Torrance⁴, though in each case with qualifications which recognise that the Reformers did not overlook the ethical, social and political implications of the truth which they proclaimed.

J. S. Candlish has said,

The truly reformatory teaching, that which has been proved by history to have had the power to elevate and liberate men's religious ideas, and to give purity and power to their Christian life, has been that which distinguished the true Church of Christ from its appearance to the judgment of charity, and so represented it, that the blessings of the spiritual kingdom of God could be enjoyed in it here and now.⁵

¹J. S. Candlish, The Kingdom of God (Edinburgh, 1884)

²L. Berkhof, The Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1951)

³Jean Bosc, The Kingly Office of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1959)

⁴T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, (Edinburgh, 1956)

⁵J. S. Candlish, op. cit., p. 271

And, a few pages later, writing of Luther, he said,

In contrast with the carnal and earthly theocracy of the Anabaptists, Luther's idea of the kingdom of God was thoroughly spiritual.¹

Professor Berkhof writes,

During the Middle Ages, the claim of the Roman Catholic Church to be the kingdom of God led to the usurpation of unwarranted powers on its part....The Reformers did not recognize this claim of the Roman Catholic Church, and emphasized instead the spiritual nature of the kingdom.²

...They agreed in identifying it (the Kingdom) with the invisible Church, the community of the elect, or of the saints of God. For them it was first of all a religious concept, the reign of God in the hearts of believers, the regnum Christi spirituale or internum. At the same time they did not overlook its ethical implications.³

Professor Torrance summarises Luther's teaching on this aspect of the Kingdom:

The Kingdom of Christ is...'regnum coelorum non terrestre'. It is the 'regnum remissionis peccatorum' through which heaven is opened and hell is closed.⁴

Professor Jean Bosc is faintly critical of the Reformers for their limitation of the doctrine of the Lordship of Christ to Christ's spiritual rule. He writes,

In Calvin as well as the confessional documents of the Reformation, one discerns a tendency to give too exclusive a place to the sovereignty of Christ over the Church and to weaken the affirmation of His Kingship over the world.⁵

But Professor Bosc himself goes on immediately to say,

It is of course in complete harmony with the teaching of Holy Scripture to say that the Kingship of Christ is exercised first of all and immediately over the Church, and that its Head governs and defends it against its enemies.⁶

¹J. S. Candlish, op. cit., p. 283

²L. Berkhof, op. cit., Preface ³ibid., p. 24

⁴T. F. Torrance, op. cit., p. 18. Cf. Luther's Works (Weimar ed.),

⁵Jean Bosc, op. cit., p. 41

49, p. 483

⁶ibid., p. 41

The truth is that the Reformers were concerned only to discover the teaching of Scripture. That Scripture, they knew, had a particular application to their own particular situation, but they were content, to begin with, to enunciate the general principle, standing for all time and for every situation - in this case, the spiritual Lordship of Christ over His Church. There were ~~various~~ corollaries of that principle which were applicable to their own social and political structure, and they did not hesitate to draw these, though for the most part they did not demand general application of them.

Our task today, in a vastly different social and political environment, is similarly to make our application of Christ's Lordship to our world-situation, and to derive the corollaries for ourselves. It was a strength of the Reformers, not as Bosc suggests, a weakness, that they were apparently reluctant to make particular applications of the doctrine of Christ's Lordship over the world.

It may have been, of course, that their reluctance stemmed in some measure from the peculiar difficulties of the political situation in which they found themselves. A. F. Scott Pearson wrote in his Church and State,

Certain phenomena connected with the beginnings of the Reformation had made it injudicious or delicate to meddle with politics. The political extravagances of the Anabaptists had made it appear that the revolt from Rome was also a political revolution and had inspired such reformers as Luther and Calvin with a dread lest the religious principles of the Reformation should be applied by extremists to purposes of civil disintegration. Calvin and his followers were exceedingly anxious to dissociate themselves from such extremists and both French Huguenot and English Puritan resented any insinuations that they represented destructive Anabaptist tendencies.

That may have been the reason for the Reformers' caution; in any case, we may be thankful for their reluctance to take the Kingdom

¹A. F. Scott Pearson, Church and State (Cambridge, 1928), pp. 5f.

out of the spiritual sphere. Their general principle holds: each generation must make its own application of it.

Fortified by the support of the authors quoted above, let us go to the Reformers themselves for the evidence that their view of Christ's Kingdom was an essentially spiritual one.

Our careful investigation of Bucer's De Regno Christi, the most explicit and detailed study of the concept of the Kingdom in Reformed thought, has shown clearly that for him the Kingdom of Christ was essentially a spiritual kingdom, to be brought in by the preaching of the Word.¹

Writing on Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ in Matthew 16.16, Melanchthon indicates the nature and extent of His Kingship:

He is King. Since He releases us from sin, death, and the devil, He destroys the kingdom of the devil and restores ~~us~~ to us justice and eternal life. He is such a king, restoring an eternal kingdom, not political.²

This thought is developed in the Augsburg Confession of 1530, which was largely the work of Melanchthon's pen, though Luther was so pleased with it that he would alter nothing in it, except, perhaps, that it was too gentle with the pope!³ In this Confession there is found, for the first time in any ecclesiastical statement of doctrine, a section on "Church Power" (De Potestate Ecclesiastica), especially in its relationship to civil power. They are not to be confused, and the ecclesiastical power, that is, the Kingdom of Christ, is expressly limited to the preaching of the gospel, the remitting or retaining of sins, and the administration of the Sacraments.

Luther states explicitly that the law of the Regnum Christi is spiritual. "He is a King over Christians, and rules by His Spirit alone without law."⁴ Writing in his Commentary on Galatians

¹ supra, pp. 123ff, 148f.

² Corpus Reformatorum, Opera Philip Melanchthon (Halle, 1834-60), 12, pp. 389, 390, cited, J. F. Jansen, Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ (London, 1956), p. 35

³ Cf. Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, pp. 229f

⁴ Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 11, p. 235, cited T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, p. 32

of the liberty by which Christ makes us free, he says, "Christ hath made us free, not civilly, nor carnally, but divinely (theologicè seu spiritualitèr)¹.

An important point in Luther's discussion of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is his conception of the Old Testament as a type or foreshadowing of the New.² The physical and outward in the Old corresponds in the New to an inward and spiritual reality which is the object of faith. For example, in the Old Testament the Israelites ate literal bread from heaven: in the New Testament Christ is the believer's bread, partaken of by faith. Applying this method of interpretation to the Kingdom, Luther teaches that in the Old Testament there is an outward and visible Kingdom with men as kings, but in the New Testament the Kingdom is inward and spiritual. Christ's Kingdom is not of this world: no one can see that He is King; we must receive Him by faith.

Calvin's stress on the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom is unmistakable. In his earliest theological writing, Psychopannychia, written in 1534, though not published till 1542, he deals with Anabaptist errors, and, stressing that the Kingdom is a present reality, he writes,

That kingdom wholly consists in the building up of the Church, or of the progress of believers, who as described to us by Paul, (Eph. iv. 13), grow up, through all the different stages of life, into 'a perfect man'.³

Calvin never saw any reason to alter that early view. Writing in the Institutes on Christ's kingly office, he says,

I come now to kingship. It would be pointless to speak of this without first warning my readers that it is spiritual in nature.⁴

¹Commentary on Galatians (P. S. Watson's ed.), p. 442

²Works of Martin Luther (6 vols. Philadelphia, 1915 - 32), VI. 367-82, esp. 379f.

³Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III, p. 465

⁴Institutes, II. xv. 3

Writing on the Church as founded upon God's Word, he sums up his argument:

Since the church is Christ's Kingdom, and he reigns by his Word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his sceptre (that is, his most holy word).¹

It is particularly significant that before entering on the section on Civil Government in the Institutes - a section which might be interpreted as maintaining Christ's Lordship in the civil realm - Calvin carefully distinguishes between spiritual and secular rule, and observes "that the spiritual sovereignty of Christ and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct."² "Hence," says Dr. Wilhelm Niesel,

the possibility is excluded that, for example, Calvin might have wished to show...how his conception of the God revealed in flesh, and His eternal kingdom, finds its realization in this world and in human society and culture.³

The Reformers' views of the spiritual character of Christ's Kingship are perhaps most concisely and explicitly stated in their Catechisms. Luther's Larger Catechism, for example, asks, "What is the Kingdom of God?" and answers,

Nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, that God sent his Son Jesus Christ our Lord into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to himself, and to govern us as a king of righteousness, life and salvation, against sin, death and an evil conscience....⁴

Calvin's Geneva Catechism asks, "But what is this kingdom of which you speak?" and gives the answer, "It is ~~x~~ spiritual, and consists in the Word and Spirit of God, and includes righteousness of life."⁵ And, again, "What does His Kingdom minister to us?

By it we are set at liberty in our conscience and are filled with His spiritual riches in order to live in righteousness and holiness, and we are also armed with power to overcome the devil, the flesh, and the world - the enemies

¹Institutes IV. ii. 4

²Institutes, IV. xx. 1

³William Niesel, The Theology of Calvin (Eng. trans., London, 1956), p. 229

⁴quoted, J. S. Candlish, The Kingdom of God, p. 393 ⁵From School of Faith - the Catechisms of the Reformed Church, trans. and ed. by T. F. Torrance, question 37, p. 10.

of our souls.¹

Question 123 of the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, asks, "What is the second petition (of the Lord's Prayer)?"

Answer: Thy kingdom come. That is: So govern us by Thy Word and Spirit that we may more and more submit ourselves to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, every power that exalts itself against Thee, and all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word, until the fullness of Thy Kingdom arrives, in which Thou shalt be all in all.²

Two points in these definitions of the Kingdom remain to be considered in support of the contention that for the Reformers the Kingdom of Christ is an essentially spiritual rule. (a) It should be noted that in all of them there is the thought of the Kingdom as including victory over hostile forces. This is a recurrent theme of the Reformers. Luther writes at the beginning of his Commentary on Galatians,

Moreover, by the preaching of this doctrine (i.e. the Gospel), the devil is overthrown, his kingdom is destroyed, the law, sin and death...are wrested out of his hands: briefly, his prisoners are translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and liberty.³

Commenting on Matthew 12. 29, with its promise of a Stronger than the strong man who holds mankind under his tyranny, Calvin writes,

Now this kind of redemption Christ shows to be necessary, in order to wrench from the devil, by main force, what he will never quit till he is compelled. By these words He informs us, that it is vain for men to expect deliverance, till Satan has been subdued by a violent struggle.⁴

Christ's Kingship in the last resort rests upon a royal victory: He is Christus Victor.

(b) The definition from the Heidelberg Catechism states explicitly the view held by all the Reformers that the full revelation of the Kingdom is to be a thing of the future, not indeed

¹From School of Faith - The Catechisms of the Reformed Church, question ~~37xxxixxi~~ 42, (p. 11)

²ibid., p. 94 ³Luther, Commentary on Galatians (P. S. Watson's ed), p. 29

⁴cited, J. F. Jansen, Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ, p. 88.

abruptly separated from the present, but fully manifested and realised only at the end. Calvin writes,

Christ reigns even now, when we pray that his kingdom may come....But his kingdom will properly come, when it will be completed. And it will be completed when he will plainly manifest the glory of his majesty to his elect for salvation, and to the reprobate for confusion.¹

These two points - that the Kingship of Christ rests on His victory in His Cross and Resurrection and that the complete manifestation of His Kingdom awaits the final consummation - are additional compelling evidence that the Reformers thought of the Kingdom as a spiritual reality.

But it must be said most emphatically that to say that Christ's Kingdom is spiritual does not mean that His Lordship over the world is ignored. Calvin may declare in the last section of the Institutes that "Christ's spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct," but he goes on to say,

This distinction does not lead us to consider the whole nature of government a thing polluted, which has nothing to do with Christian men....For spiritual government, indeed, is already initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of a Heavenly Kingdom, and in this mortal and fleeting life affords a certain forecast of an immortal and incorruptible blessedness.²

While we aspire to the true fatherland, we are still pilgrims here, and God's Kingdom does not wipe out our present life. "Christ as the Head of His church is also precisely the Lord of this world."³

But it is Luther who is most vulnerable to the charge that his stress on the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingship is in effect a denial of His Lordship over the world. The gravest form of this charge would blame Luther and Lutheranism's detachment from public affairs in Germany for Adolf Hitler and German Naziism.

¹ Calvin, Psychopannychia, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III, p. 465.

² Institutes, IV. xx. 1,2

³ William Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, p. 230

This view, put forward by Mr. Peter F. Wiener in his pamphlet, Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor, was thoroughly trounced by Professor Gordon Rupp, in his Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause - or Cure? But the fact that the charge was made, and has sometimes been insinuated in less dogmatic terms,¹ means that it must be examined. The fact is that this criticism of Luther rests mainly on a misinterpretation of his doctrine of the two kingdoms. When Luther says that there are two kingdoms, of Christ and of the world, it is tempting to interpret him as meaning that the former is religious and the latter secular, and then to go on to deduce from his contention that the two are not to be confused - as later Lutheranism possibly did - the consequence that civil government is outside the influence of the Church and the rule of Christ altogether. This, in spite of the fact that in the pre-fatory letter to his Of Earthly Authority (Von Weltlicher Oberkeit, 1523) - directed specifically against the Romanist view that there are two ethical standards, the "precepts of God" which could be obeyed in the world, and the "counsels of perfection" which were best fulfilled within the religious vocation - Luther declares,

I hope to show that the prince and magistrates may remain Christian, and that Christ can remain the supreme ruler, without their having, in the interests of their function, to transform the commandments of Christ into 'counsels.'²

It should be noted that Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is only one of the many dualisms which he suggests. Just as there are two kingdoms, a spiritual and a worldly, so there are two laws, Christian and natural; two aspects of the individual, his person and his office; giving him his place within the order of human society. To think of the first member of each pair as spiritual and its partner as secular is to do a grave injustice to Luther and seriously to misrepresent his teaching. Luther's dualism is not

¹ Cf. William Temple's assertion (Malvern Report, p. 13) that "it is easy to see how Luther prepared the way for Hitler," by making autonomous politica possible.

² cited, Gordon Rupp, Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause - or Cure? (London, 1945), p. 59, from Henri Strohl, Evangile selon Luther, pp. 358-79

absolute: "he makes no ultimate separation of sacred from secular and certainly does not emancipate the State from God."¹

Of fundamental importance for an accurate understanding of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms - and all his other dualisms - is his difficult conception of larva Dei. For Luther it is impossible to have a direct relationship between God and man, between the spiritual world and the life of man in this world. God, therefore, must wear, as it were, a 'mask' (larva) in all His dealings with men, to shield them from the unapproachable light of His majesty.

God here in this life dealeth not with us face to face, but veiled and shadowed from us....Therefore, we cannot be without veils (larvae) in this life. But here wisdom is required, which can discern the veil from God himself....So the prince, the magistrate, the preacher, the schoolmaster, the scholar, the father, the mother, the children, the master, the servant, are persons (personae) and veils (larvae), which God will have us acknowledge, love and reverence as his creatures, which also must needs be had in this life; but he will not have us to worship them, that is, so to reverence them that we trust in them and forget him.²

God even leaves grave weaknesses in them, let we should worship them.

Applied to the two kingdoms, this conception of larva Dei enables us to make the distinction: the gestliche (spiritual) kingdom is the kingdom as it is in reality; the weltliche (worldly) kingdom is the aspect (larva) that it assumes in our earthly existence. Professor P. S. Watson summarises Luther's thought like this:

The whole created world, then, as Luther sees it, occupies a kind of mediatorial position between God and man. Its manifold orders of life...can be described as 'persons and outward veils (larvae)' which serve God as 'His instruments by whom He governeth and preserveth the world.'³

Luther warns against confusing the two Kingdoms:

¹S. L. Greenslade, The Church and the Social Order, p. 82

²Commentary on Galatians (F. S. Watson's ed.) pp. 104f.

³P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! p. 79. Cf. Commentary on Galatians, p. 105.

There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world....God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy, not of wrath and punishment. In it there is only forgiveness, consideration for one another, love, service, doing of good, peace, joy, etc. But the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity....For this reason it has the sword, and a prince or lord is called in Scripture God's wrath or God's rod (Is.14)....Now he would confuse the two kingdoms - as our false fanatics would do - would put wrath into God's kingdom and mercy into the devil's kingdom: and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell.¹

But, as Professor T. F. Torrance points out,

This does not mean that the two realms are to be separated from each other, for the visible and outward realm is also under Christ and belongs to the Kingdom of God, and therefore must listen to the Word of God's Kingdom as proclaimed in the Gospel. But just because Christ's Kingdom is inward (internum Regnum) and spiritual it has no right to rule over the corporal realm or to exercise authority over it as though it were itself an external kingdom.²

The only weapons the spiritual kingdom has are spiritual. "Christ is a King over Christians, and rules by His Spirit alone without law."³

The fact is that the outward form is no more than a temporary expedient, to make the best of existing circumstances, and it has no innate sanctity about it. J. S. Candlish quotes a Lutheran theologian, K. H. von Scheele, on the Lutheran conception of the constitution of the Church:

For the Lutheran the ecclesiastical constitution is nothing more than a camp which the Church militant pitches for herself on the battlefield, a tent which she erects for one or two nights during her pilgrimage to the city of God. We need not wonder, then, that not too much care is given to the matter.⁴

The same thing might be said of all the larvae through which God

¹Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 18, p. 389

²T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, p. 32

³Luther's Works (Weimar edition), 11, p. 235

⁴J. S. Candlish, The Kingdom of God, pp. 286f.

and His Kingdom are revealed. This explains Luther's readiness to fall back on the princes for the work of reformation, when the bishops would do nothing for him: the categories of the Christian life could not be applied directly to the life of this world, and Luther did not worry very much by what outward authority - Church or State - they were applied. But no one could be more anxious than he that they should be applied. His doctrine of the two kingdoms, on examination, gives no real support to the contention that the Reformers' insistence on the spiritual nature of Christ's kingship involves His abdication from the throne of the earthly realm. He rules, perhaps through defective instruments, but He rules. That is the positive assertion of all the Reformers.

It is perhaps worth ~~noting~~ noting that if there is a negative aspect of the Reformers' thought of the kingdom, it concerns the function of the State. The Reformers tended to think of the State's function as primarily negative - to restrain and punish wickedness. Luther's appeal To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation respecting the Reformation of the Christian State assumes that "the secular authorities are ordained of God to punish evil-doers and to protect the law-abiding."¹ And it is only in the later editions of the Institutes that Calvin adds to the negative functions of the civil magistrate a duty

to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behaviour to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity.²

But this one negative emphasis of the Reformers might itself be adduced as support for our view that their main preoccupation was with a spiritual kingdom, to be attained through the instrumentality of the Word and Spirit: if worldly weapons are to be used at all, let them be used by the State, and only for a negative purpose. The

¹ Bertram Lee Woolf, Reformation Writings, (Lutterworth, 2 vols., 1952, 1956), vol. I, p. 116

² Institutes, IV. xx. 2. Perhaps Calvin's view of government's primary function as the suppression of evil was derived from his study of Seneca, who regarded coercive government as due to the increase of vice. (Cf. Seneca, Epist. 90, paras 38ff, 46). Calvin's first published work was on Seneca's De Clementia.

essential, spiritual Kingdom of Christ is incontrovertibly positive.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

The doctrine of the Lordship of Christ was of course no new discovery of the Reformation: it was the re-discovery of a Biblical truth, which, though it had often been obscured, had been brought to light again and again. It was not new but old.

But what was re-discovered? It will be our main purpose to show that the re-discovery of the Lordship of Christ by the Reformers was a re-discovery of the Biblical concept of the Kingdom as a spiritual rule. It will be shown that in Scripture and in the later history of the Church the true doctrine of the kingdom deteriorated as the Kingdom was thought of as something less than spiritual, and that repeatedly it needed to be re-discovered as a spiritual reality.

We must begin with the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament, for it should be emphasised that the Kingdom realised and proclaimed by Christ was not something absolutely new and previously unknown to those who heard Him. That is evident from the fact that He did not define the Kingdom for them, but simply stated that it was "at hand." The New Testament concept of the Kingdom had its roots in the Old Testament theocracy.

At first sight it might seem that the Old Testament kingdom of Israel is an earthly kingdom, certainly with God as its sovereign, but still an earthly kingdom, held together by a code of laws, for worship and for life, which regulated man's relationship with God and with his fellow-man. But there is one thing above all others which shows that the Old Testament theocracy was essentially a spiritual kingdom. The kingdom of God in Israel was based on a covenant. Exodus 19. 4 - 6 makes it quite clear that the formal beginning of the kingdom of God in Israel was rooted in a covenant relationship, by which He proposed to bring Israel into a special relationship to Him as His special treasure. The fact that Israel is then described as "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation" leaves no doubt that the kingdom then inaugurated was to be thought

of as a spiritual kingdom. This people's special relationship to God undoubtedly would have important consequences for their life in the world, and, consequently, a code of laws was forthwith given for their guidance in every relationship of life: every part of their life was to be subordinated to the spiritual purpose for which they had been called of God. And so it is true to say, as Geerhardus Vos does, that

The primary purpose of Israel's theocratic constitution was not to teach the world the principles of civil government, though undoubtedly in this respect also valuable lessons can be learned from it, but to reflect the eternal laws of religious intercourse between God and man...¹

In passing, it is worth noting that the Reformers consistently emphasised the thought of the Kingdom as being based on the Divine covenant. Calvin has often been blamed for trying to set up a theocracy in Geneva, based largely on the laws and regulations of the Old Testament. It is not true that his laws were Old Testament laws,² but even if they had been, there was something that came before law in Geneva: there was a covenant. Calvin came to Geneva in the autumn of 1536, and early in 1537 he presented a document to the Council, in which his whole conception of Christian rule in the city was briefly outlined. The first thing proposed was that it be ascertained at the outset who of the inhabitants of the town wished "to avow themselves of the Church of Jesus Christ." It was suggested that a brief and comprehensive Confession of Faith be prepared, and "all the inhabitants be required to make confession and render reason of their faith, that it may be ascertained which of them desire to be of the kingdom of the Pope rather than of our Lord Jesus Christ."³ All the legislation that followed in Geneva presupposed a people in covenant with God. We have seen that for Bucer, too, the conception of Law was inseparable from the Covenant.⁴

¹ Geerhardus Vos, The Kingdom and the Church (1951), p. 50.

² For a good discussion of misrepresentations of Calvin's legislation see The Calvin Legend, an article by Basil Hall in The Churchman, vol. lxxiii, No. 3, Sept. 1959.

³ cited, B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Calvinism, p. 17

⁴ supra, pp. 130ff.

Later generations looked back to the reign of David as the zenith of the Kingdom: and it is true that David was the king of Israel who most nearly realised the theocratic ideal of a king, the Lord's Anointed, ruling in His name, making his capital the religious centre of the nation, and ruling in the fear of the Lord. But it was in his reign that ~~the~~ decline began, to be hastened in succeeding reigns, as Israel aspired to secular power among the nations. As that decline was accelerated, and Israel proved no match for the growing empires of the day, there must have been many who shared the pathetic perplexity of the writer of the eighty-ninth Psalm, who almost flung in God's face the promises made to David and David's line, and contrasted them with the pitiful reality:

Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth? Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how do I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O Lord; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.¹

And yet it was just then that prophecy re-discovered the truth that the promised Kingdom was a spiritual one, and the promised King a greater than David. So attention came to be focussed more and more on the future, when the Lord would perform mighty acts of deliverance for His people, which would make Him their king in a new and fuller sense.² Thus it came about that the idea of a future kingdom became equivalent to Israel's hope for the Messiah: when it was said of Joseph of Arimathea that he "waited for the kingdom of God,"³ what is meant is that he waited for the coming of the Messiah.

But before Christ came, the spiritual character of the kingdom had again become obscured. No doubt many factors contributed to this. The legalism of the Pharisees made the Kingdom man-centred, something to be attained by man's obedience - let the law be kept

¹Psalm 89. 49 - 51

²Cf. Isaiah 24. 21 - 23: Hosea 3. 4,5

³Mark 15. 43

aright for only one Sabbath, and the Kingdom would come - and inevitably transferred it to the realm of outward conduct which can be accurately assessed and measured. The nationalism of the Zealots made it something to be sought by human means, too, by a popular uprising and war of liberation, and the setting of an earthly king upon an earthly throne. The political opportunism of the Sadducees, likewise, was prepared to settle for an earthly kingdom. And the millennialism of the Essenes looked for the signs of a coming apocalyptic kingdom. Possibly all of these misconceptions of the Kingdom stemmed in some measure from the Jews' last experience of priestly monarchy, arising almost by chance in the Maccabean revolt. Dr. Edwyn Bevan gives an accurate summary;

It appears to be a question whether it was not at great spiritual cost that the Jewish people allowed itself to be launched by the sons of Hashmon upon a career of carnal strife. For the Jewish community could not be amenable to the same laws as ordinary nations; it was, as we said, more like a church; and the laws of a church's life were in that degree the true laws of its being....The peculiar vocation of the Jewish community entailed inevitably the deprivation of certain rights belonging to men whose kingdoms are only kingdoms of this world.¹

The current misappropriation of the term "kingdom of God" as a slogan for Jewish nationalism, with its dream of "a super Judas Maccabaeus...driving his way with drawn sword to the throne of an earthly kingdom"² explains Christ's emphatic refusal of an earthly crown.³ It was for this reason that, as Professor Oscar Cullman points out in his The State in the New Testament,

He intentionally applied to himself the Jewish conception of the 'Son of Man' and not that of the political Messiah....In the decisive moments of his life when he was asked whether he was the Messiah, Jesus quite characteristically never answered the question with a 'yes'; but on every occasion returned an answer which intentionally avoided that title and replaced it with the other title: 'the Son of Man.'⁴

Men had to be made to re-discover the essential spirituality of ~~th~~

¹Edwyn Bevan, Jerusalem under the High Priests (London, 1904), p. 99.

²J. S. Stewart, The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ, p. 55

³op. cit. (London, 1957), pp. 26f.

His Kingdom. It was a theological not a political concept.

It is instructive to note that Judaism's misconceptions of the Kingdom find their parallel in medieval attempts to realise the Kingdom of God on earth. J. S. Candlish writes,

The result of the medieval attempts to realize the kingdom of God had been that Christendom was sent back to the position of Judaism, and made an external and worldly theocracy, which had come to be regarded, not as a preparatory and temporary state of things leading on to a better reign of God, but as the final and highest ideal to be attained. What was needed therefore was just the re-publication of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles about the kingdom of God; nothing more, but also nothing less.¹

It will be sufficient at this point to indicate a few of the most emphatic New Testament evidences of the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom. In the Temptation He expressly refused the offer of "the kingdoms of this world."² He resisted every attempt of the multitude to invest Him with civil authority.³ He peremptorily refused to interfere with the functions of civil rulers, when asked to arbitrate in a civil dispute.⁴ He stressed that the way into the Kingdom is by regeneration,⁵ repentance, and faith.⁶ Before Pilate He declared that His Kingdom was not of this world, and not to be defended or advanced by worldly means.⁷ And when at the end the apostles were still asking if He was about to restore again the kingdom to Israel, He pointed out that the power which will restore that Kingdom will be the power of the Spirit, bearing witness to Him.⁸

The conclusion is inescapable that in Christ's teaching it is the spiritual side of the kingdom which alone is made prominent. But that is not to say that this spiritual kingdom does not have physical, ethical and social implications in this world. The physical consequences of Christ's royal rule are evident in the

¹J. S. Candlish, The Kingdom of God, p. 277

²Luke 4. 5 ³John 6. 15 ⁴Luke 12. 13, 14 ⁵John 3.3

⁶Mark 1. 15 ⁷John 18. 36 ⁸Acts 1. 8

miracles, which were evidence of the Kingdom's present reality: "if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."¹ And the importance of the ethical and social implications of Christ's Kingship is no less evident. It must never be forgotten that when the Kingdom is consummated, and the King sits on the throne of His glory, the standard of His judgment will be whether or not we fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, befriended the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner.² But it must not be forgotten, either, that behind all these evidences of worthiness or unworthiness to inherit the kingdom is a spiritual transformation. For "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."³

After the Ascension a new aspect of Christ's Lordship came to be emphasised. It finds classic expression in Philippians 2. 9 - 11:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Professor Oscar Cullman has shown convincingly in his Earliest Christian Confessions⁴ and in The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament⁵ that

one of the oldest Christian creeds consists of the three words: Kyrios Iesus Christos: Jesus Christ is Lord. For the first Christians this meant that Christ is not merely the true ruler of men, as the Roman emperor claimed to be, but ruler of the whole visible and invisible creation.⁶

Here we have the dominating thought of Christus Victor, which, as we have seen, was re-discovered by the Reformers.⁷

But while the decisive victory has been won, the battle against the "powers" - forces antagonistic to Christ's claims - is not yet

¹Luke 11. 20

²Matthew 25. 31ff.

³John 3. 3

⁴Oscar Cullman, The Earliest Christian Confessions (trans. J. K. S. Reid, London, 1949)

⁵Oscar Cullman, The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament, in The Early Church (London, 1956)

⁶Oscar Cullman, The Early Church, p. 105

⁷supra, p. 165.

over: they are still active on the earth and manifest their rebellion there. It is significant that the Church's proclamation of the Lordship of Christ now comes to be set more and more in the context of opposition and persecution. The Roman State quickly realised the threat to its authority made by the claim Kyrios Christos, and demanded acknowledgment from its citizens of Caesar's supreme authority - Kyrios Kaisar - 'Caesar is Lord.' We find indications in the New Testament of the Church's view that behind the persecutions which the Christians endured there lay the hostility of the "powers" under the rule of Satan.¹ The Church's unconquerable answer continued to be that Christ alone is Lord. Thus when the aged Polycarp at Smyrna was commanded to say Kyrios Kaisar, and curse Christ, his answer came unflinchingly:

Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me wrong, how then can I blaspheme my King Who has saved me?²

Shortly afterwards the Church in Smyrna wrote an account of his martyrdom:³ and this is how it was dated: 'Statius Quadratus being proconsul, but Jesus Christ being King for ever. To Him be glory, honour, majesty, and the eternal throne, from generation to generation. Amen.'

The physical weakness of the Church, battered by persecution, only served to show up in clearer perspective the Church's view of the Kingdom as spiritual. Hegesippus relates that when the grandsons of Judas the Lord's brother were brought before Domitian and interrogated about Christ and His Kingdom, of what sort it was, and when and where it should appear, they replied that it was not worldly nor on the earth, but heavenly and angelic, to be at the end of the age, when, coming in glory, He should judge the quick and the dead, and render to every man according to his deeds.⁴

In Justin Martyr's Apology we have the same insistence on the

¹ Cf. Romans 8. 35ff; Ephesians 6. 10ff; I Peter 4. 12 - 14, and, especially, Revelation 12 - 14

² Cf. Early Christian Fathers, ed. Professor Cyril C. Richardson, in Library of Christian Classics, vol. I, p. 152

³ ibid., pp. 156, 7

⁴ Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, iii. 20 (English translation by H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, London, 1828)

spiritual character of the Kingdom and the same brave disregard of the worst that the King's enemies can do:

When you hear that we look for a kingdom, you rashly suppose that we mean something merely human. But we speak of a kingdom with God, as is clear from our confessing Christ when you bring us to trial, though we know that death is the penalty for this confession. For if we looked for a human kingdom we would try to deny it in order to save our lives, and would try to remain in hiding in order to obtain the things we look for. But since we do not place our hopes on the present (order), we are not troubled by being put to death, since we will have to die somehow in any case.¹

So long as the Church was weak and persecuted, there could be no thought of the Kingdom of Christ as an outward and worldly rule: it was a spiritual thing, a kingdom in the hearts and lives of believers. But that conception was dramatically altered, when, on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine adopted Christian insignia for his army, and after his victory entered Rome as the professed champion of Christianity. His motives in doing so have been the subject of much discussion, but historians have been coming round to the view that personal conviction had at least as much to do with his decision as had political expediency.¹ In any case, the consequences for the Church were far-reaching. The thought of Christ's imminent return as the Church's one hope of deliverance from persecution receded, and was replaced by the idea of a victorious Church claiming the world for Him. Now it was possible to regard the Kingdom not merely as invisible and spiritual, but as an outward and visible dominion. The ruler of the world was now a subject of Christ the King: was not that the fulfilment of the Apocalyptic vision: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."²

But whatever gain there was from the Constantinian revolution was matched, and perhaps more than matched, by loss. The Emperor's favour to the Church meant that it was to a man's advantage

¹Cf. T. M. Parker, Christianity and the State in the Light of History (London, 1955), pp. 44ff.

²Revelation 11.15. Cf. Eusebius, Ecclēsiastical History, x. 4, for an expression of this view.

to profess Christianity. And so the world crowded into the Church, and the Church, admittedly very much larger, became much more secularized. As Dr. T. M. Parker puts it, "There was a price to pay for the conversion of Constantine, a price for which the bill was not presented all at once."¹ The Empire may have become Christian: Christianity certainly became imperial.

It must now be asked if any voice was raised to recall the Church to a more spiritual conception of the Kingdom. Was there any re-discovery of the spiritual Lordship of Christ? The answer lies in Augustine's De Civitate Dei, The City of God. It was written while the whole secular order was collapsing, as Alaric and the invaders from the north shattered the illusion of Rome's invincibility; and it answered the pagan contention that it had been the adoption of Christianity which had proved the ruin of Rome, and then went on to depict another City, unshaken and unshakable, the City of God. If we can take this City of God as Augustine's picture of a spiritual Kingdom, we find in him the voice which we are seeking, recalling the Church to a spiritual conception of its function. But here we step on to most controversial ground. Augustine certainly contrasts two societies, the civitas terrena, the earthly city, and the civitas Dei, the City of God, which he identifies in some sense with the Church. But it is a debatable question whether by the Church he meant the Church invisible or the visible ecclesiastical organisation of his time. If the former, he does recall the Church to realise its function as a spiritual society: if the latter, he points the way to the more strongly entrenched earthly supremacy of the church of the Middle Ages.

It is generally felt that Augustine is not entirely consistent. Thus, for example, in one section (De Civitate Dei, xx.9), he can speak of the the City of God as including the souls of the blessed

¹Cf. T. M. Parker, Christianity and the State in the Light of History, pp. 115ff.

dead,¹ thereby equating it with the Church invisible, though a few lines before he has stated that those who sit on thrones, to whom judgment is given, are those "through whom the church is now governed."² At one time he can speak of the citizens of the Kingdom as those who have received remission of sins and who have been justified by the Holy Spirit, and so joined in fellowship in eternal peace with the holy angels:³ at another time he states expressly that the City of God and the Church are one - "There is a house which is in process of building to the Lord in every land - it is the City of God, which is the holy Church."⁴

Different estimates have been given of the extent of the inconsistency. B. B. Warfield writes,

To Augustine the Church was fundamentally the congregatio sanctorum, the Body of Christ, and it is this Church which he has in mind when he calls it the civitas Dei, or the Kingdom of God on earth. He is, however, not carefully observant of the distinction between the empirical and the ideal Church, and repeatedly - often apparently quite unconsciously - carries over to the one the predicates which in his fundamental thought belonged properly to the other. Thus the hierarchically organised Church tends ever with him to take the place of the congregatio sanctorum, even when he is speaking of it as the Kingdom of City of God in which alone any communion with God is possible here, and through which alone eternal blessedness with God is attainable hereafter.⁵

G. F. Fisher comes to a similar conclusion:

A study of Augustine's writings reveals to us two discordant veins of thought. There are two currents and they flow in opposite directions. On the one hand, there is the common Catholic ecclesiasticism, in which he lived and moved, and which as a rule shapes his doctrinal statements. On the other hand, there is the great idea of the church spiritual and invisible, composed of the saints elect.⁶

¹ Augustine, De Civitate Dei, xx. 9: 'Neque enim piorum animae mortuorum separantur ab ecclesia quae nunc etiam est regnum Christi.'

² ibid.; sedes praepositorum et ipsi praepositi intellegendi sunt, per quos nunc ecclesia gubernatur.

³ Ibid., xii. 23. B

⁴ ibid., viii. 24. G - Aedificatur enim domus Domino Civitas Dei, quae est sancta ecclesia, in omni terra.'

⁵ B. B. Warfield, Studies in Tertullian and Augustine, pp. 121f.

⁶ G. F. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh 1896), pp. 192f.

But there are others who are not so sure that Augustine identified the City of God with the Church. Professor L. Berkhof writes,

It is more probable that he had the invisible Church in mind, though he undoubtedly used some expressions that point in the opposite direction, and was, perhaps unintentionally, instrumental in paving the way for the hierarchical conception of the Middle Ages.¹

And it is significant to find a Roman Catholic scholar, Fr. Joseph Rickaby, S.J., writing under the imprimatur of his Church, who might have been expected to look for support for his Church's hierarchical claims in Augustine, flatly denying that Augustine's Two Cities are the Church and the World. In St. Augustine's City of God - A View of the Contents, he writes,

A city is a visible, organised construction: the elect and reprobate on earth are not thus two cities. The Catholic Church is such a city, a visible organism. But the Catholic Church has existed only for nineteen hundred years, whereas Augustine dates his City of God from the earliest days of man on earth. His Two Cities, then, cannot accurately be described as the Church and the World. Once more, I say, the World is not an organised body, organised for the damnation of mankind, as the Church is organised for their salvation.

In fact, the Two Cities are not the Church and the World, but the Elect and the Reprobate. This St. Augustine lays down clearly:

"We distribute the human race into two kinds of men, one living according to man, the other living according to God. Mystically, we call them Two Cities, or two societies of men: the one of which is predestined to reign eternally with God, the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil" (C.D., xv.1).²

While Augustine may not always have expressed himself consistently, it does seem that the prevailing outlook of his work is other-worldly. This is particularly marked in the concluding books (xx - xxii) on eschatology. Though the occasion of the writing of his book was the collapse of the Roman State, it was not his purpose, directly at least, to lay the foundation of a new Christian order of civilisation to replace the shattered Civitas Romana:

¹L. Berkhof, The Kingdom of God, pp. 22, 23

²Joseph Rickaby, S.J., St. Augustine's City of God - A View of the Contents (London, 1925), introduction, p. 3

rather it was to demonstrate the existence of "a better country, that is, a heavenly."¹ The world that was passing away before his eyes was to be replaced not by a new and alternative shape of human society, but by an eternal order unshaken and abiding in the heavenlies. It must be said that in intention, if not in result, Augustine's De Civitate Dei was a recall to the spiritual conception of the Kingship of Christ.

Whatever differences of opinion there may be about Augustine's doctrine of the Kingdom and the Church, there can be no doubt that the spiritual side of his doctrine was increasingly disregarded, and ever more strongly the claim was made that the Church exercised supremacy over the civil powers of kings and emperors. The Kingdom of God on earth assumed the form of a totalitarian Church, until the Reformation re-discovered the Lordship of Christ as a spiritual reality.

But the overshadowing of Christ's Lordship by the Papacy was not complete. There were some to challenge the Papal claim of 'plenitudo potestatis in temporalibus et in spiritualibus.' Outstanding among these was Marsiglio of Padua. In his Defensor Pacis, published in 1324, he denied the claims of "recent bishops of Rome" to jurisdiction over the whole world. Christ refused to be an earthly sovereign and forbade His Apostles to accept such rule. Even within the Church, the Pope has no divine right of supremacy: Peter had no more authority than the other Apostles.² Therefore the supreme authority in the Church should reside not in an autocratic Pope, but in "a General Council of Christian men, or of those to whom such authority is deputed by the whole body of believers."³ Marsiglio looked to such a General Council, guided by Scripture, to heal the hurts of Christendom.⁴

Marsiglio was followed by William of Ockham in questioning

¹ Hebrews 11.16 ² Defensor Pacis, II. xvi. 11 (ed. C. W. Previté-Orton, Cambridge, 1928), p. 281

³ ibid., II. xix-xxi, pp. 312 - 342

⁴ For the importance of Marsiglio's book for the English Reformation, cf. Philip Hughes, The Reformation in England, vol. i (London, 1950), pp. 331ff.

the temporal power of the popes, the spiritual supremacy of Rome and the authority of ecclesiastical tradition.¹

John Wycliffe's De potestate papae - On the Power of the Pope - dated 1379, continued the challenge to papal supremacy. Professor Matthew Spinka, in his essay on John Wyclif, Advocate of Radical Reform, in volume xiv of the Library of Christian Classics, writes,

In true Marsiglian spirit Wyclif declares that the pope's administration of the Church is limited to spiritual concerns; these are, nevertheless, superior to the temporal; but Christ did not grant him jurisdiction over temporalities, since his 'Kingdom is not of this world.'²

Later, Wycliffe advocated the abolition of the papal office altogether. For him the Church was the corpus praedestinatorum - the body of the elect, and he came more and more to see that ecclesiastics could not rightly exercise jurisdiction in that invisible realm, where Christ alone is Lord.

These shafts of light heralded the dawn of the Reformation, breaking through the darkness of medieval papal supremacy: when the dawn came, it meant the re-discovery of the Biblical truth of the spiritual Lordship of Christ, with its implications for every part of life.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

The demand for a fresh re-discovery of the Lordship of Christ today comes from many sides. It is the one hope of an effective challenge to totalitarianism. Writing in 1947, Dr. J. W. C. Wand, Bishop of London, said,

The period between the two world wars revealed a serious deficiency in Christian propaganda. The Church found that it had no easily expressed idea of the summum bonum to compare with the vaunted ideologies of Fascism and Nazism.³

¹ Cf. Ockham, De imperatorum et pontificum potestate, ed. C. K. Brampton, chs. i - iv, pp. 5 - 10; ch. xi, p. 24

² Advocates of Reform, p. 28

³ J. W. C. Wand, God and Goodness (London, 1947), p. 84

The counter-claimant for man's devotion today is not Fascism nor Nazism, but Communism; but the answer to all such totalitarianisms must be the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all life. Every new demand to bow the knee and say "Caesar is Lord" must be met with the unwavering affirmation, "Christ is Lord."

But the challenge is not merely a totalitarian one, in the sphere of international politics. We meet it nearer home. Writing in 1953, Professor J. S. Stewart declared,

There are facts in the life of our land to-day quite incompatible with the conception of a regnant Christ....We may say we are a Christian society, with a structure firmly based on Christian foundations. We may say, Jesus is Lord. But when we do, there are glaring facts flinging back at us the stinging challenge, "Is He indeed?"¹

The growing secularization of the modern world is its most blatant denial of the Lordship of Christ.²

But we have not rightly estimated the contemporary challenge to the Lordship of Christ if we limit it to totalitarianism or secularism. The real conflict lies deeper, in a cosmic battle, a wrestling "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world,"³ against the demonic powers that are arrayed against the Kingdom of Christ.⁴ Quoting Professor J. S. Stewart again -

This is the insight which modern theological reconstructions have been apt to lose. We have lost Paul fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus and Luther flinging his ink-pot at the devil.⁵

If the ultimate conflict is thus in the invisible realm of "principalities and powers," it is clear that the Church's weapons for that conflict must be spiritual. The Church's answer today must be a new re-discovery of the spiritual Lordship of Christ. Anything

¹The British Weekly, May 7, 1953

²Cf. Professor Jean Cadier, The Relevance of Calvin Today, in The Churchman, vol. lxxiii. No. 3, Sept., 1959

³Ephesians 6. 12

⁴Cf. Calvin, Institutes, I. xiv. 15

⁵J. S. Stewart, A Faith To Proclaim (London, 1953), p. 79

less with which to meet the challenge of the world could be, to quote Professor Jean Bosc, "nothing more than the encounter of two sociological entities."¹

What part, then, has the Church today to play in this spiritual conflict? The Church's possible roles have perhaps never been more concisely stated than in the concluding words of Gloege's Reich Gottes und Kirche:

The Church has neither to "spread" the news of the divine sovereignty in the world - that would be too little - nor to "build" the divine sovereignty - that would be too much and to make God Himself the creation of man. The Church's task rather is to carry the divine sovereignty into the world by the Word of reconciliation through Christ, to make effective the divine powers as powers of the New Age, now breaking in, and to make the world ready for the onset of the sovereignly working God.²

For the Church to attempt to "build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land," or anywhere else, is to make the Kingdom a human enterprise and to forget that it comes down from God out of heaven. Equally, for the Church to rest content with a proclamation of the Divine Lordship is to leave a great gulf between the Kingdom and the world. But for the Church to bring the Word of reconciliation - the Gospel of Jesus Christ - to bear on every part of life is to fulfil her God-given task.

But when man has done everything that man can do to make effective the Divine power of the Kingdom, it is God and God alone, Who can make His perfect Kingdom come. Somehow, in a way beyond our understanding, God will come breaking in triumphantly. That is the eternal hope which lies behind the great vision with which the New Testament closes - "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."³

¹ Jean Bosc, The Kingly Office of the Lord Jesus Christ, p. 3

² Gerhard Gloege, Reich Gottes und Kirche im Neuen Testament, 1929, p. 424 cited, Dr. G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Expository Times, vol. LXVI, No. 5, Feb., 1955, p. 155

³ Revelation 11. 15

IV

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE WAY OF SALVATION

Justification By Faith Alone

The attitude with which the subject of justification should be approached was well stated by the Puritan divine, John Owen:

I cannot but think it best for those who would learn or teach the doctrine of justification in a due manner, to place their consciences in the presence of God, and their persons before His tribunal, and then, upon a due consideration of His greatness, power, majesty, righteousness, holiness, to inquire what the Scriptures and a sense of their own condition direct them unto as a relief and refuge, and what plea it becomes them to make for themselves.¹

In a word, the only right approach to this subject is an attitude of worship. What we are concerned with here is no abstract discussion of a doctrine, but the very heart of spiritual experience. H. R. Mackintosh in The Christian Experience of Forgiveness speaks of it as a doctrine, and then corrects himself - "this doctrine, or rather this gospel in Protestant theology."² There we have the authentic note of evangelical theology: this is not a doctrine to

¹quoted, Alexander Whyte, The Shorter Catechism (Edinburgh, 1922), p. 83

²H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness (5th ed., London, 1938), p. 101

be debated; it is a gospel to be proclaimed. The Reformation was not primarily a theological Renaissance; it was an evangelical revival: the Reformers were not merely keen doctrinal debaters; they were eager evangelists. As Philip Schaff writes,

The Reformation was eminently practical in its motive and aim. It started from a question of conscience: 'How shall a sinner be justified before God?' And this is only another form of the older and broader question: 'What shall I do to be saved?' The answer given by the Reformers with one accord, from deep spiritual struggle and experience, was: 'By faith in the all-sufficient merits of Christ, as exhibited in the holy Scriptures.' And by faith they understood not a mere intellectual assent to the truth, or a blind submission to the outward authority of the Church, but a free obedience, a motion of the will, a trust of the heart, a personal attachment and unconditional surrender of the whole soul to Christ, as the only Saviour from sin and death.¹

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

That brings us immediately to the point which has been reiterated in all these chapters - that here we are concerned with

¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom (London, 1877), p. 205. James Orr makes the same point in The Progress of Dogma (London, 1901), p. 257: 'It was not flesh and blood that revealed this doctrine to the Reformers, but their Father who was in heaven. It is equally important to notice that, as it came to them in response to practical needs, so it was not a doctrinal or speculative, but a vital, practical interest which gave it supreme value in their eyes, and led them to make it the centre of all their preaching. They were not theorists spinning doctrinal cobwebs from their brains, but men intensely in earnest in finding out the true way in which a sinner could be at peace with God. And the great truth that came to them...was this, that the sinner, penitent for his sins, had the right of free access to God, without intervention of priest, church, sacrament, or anything else to stand between him and his Maker; and that God freely forgives and accepts anyone laying hold on His promise in the Gospel, without works, satisfaction, or merits of his own, but solely on the ground of Christ's atoning death and perfect righteousness, to which faith cleaves as the only ground of its confidence.'

something that is not negative but positive. It has sometimes been said that the essential principle of Protestantism is justification by faith over against justification by works, as if the doctrine had been formulated simply to oppose a Roman Catholic position which had proved inadequate. That is to give it a negative aspect which robs it of its essential, evangelical note. There is no gospel in a doctrine which is derived merely from opposition to an existing doctrine. There is nothing in a negation to proclaim. Proclamation is essentially affirmation; and here we have the proclamation of a gospel of full and free forgiveness, whose very essence is positive.

It will be necessary, however, if the positiveness of this doctrine is to be clearly seen, to contrast it with the Romanist position. But here certain difficulties arise, mainly from the fact that the Decrees of the Council of Trent, giving the formal statement of the Roman Catholic position, were, perhaps unavoidably, ambiguous. It was necessary to confute the doctrines of Luther, and it was clearly perceived that the matter of justification was fundamental. The Council maintained that

it was necessary for the establishing of the body of Catholic doctrine to destroy this heresy of justification by faith alone, and to condemn the blasphemies of the enemy of good works.¹

And yet at the same time there were many members of the Council itself, particularly among the Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian orders, who had discovered that the views on justification which had been disseminated throughout Europe by the Reformers were closely similar to those held by the founders of their orders. Consequently, it was almost inevitable, if the concurrence of all parties was to be secured, that the statement drawn up should be in vague and somewhat ambiguous terms. Calvin in his treatise dealing with the Decrees of the Council, and offering an Antidote to them - Acta Synodi Tridentinae, cum Antidoto² - showed himself well aware of the

¹ Paolo Sarpi, History of the Council of Trent (1619, Eng. trans. 1858),
Book ii, p. 75

² Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, ed. T. F. Torrance, vol. III, pp. 17ff

ambiguities and inconsistencies of the Roman statement. He noted that in their prefatory statement the Decrees "at the outset breathe nothing but Christ."¹ But this is later negated by making justification depend on an infused grace which enables men to perform good works, so that in the long run "men are justified partly by the grace of God and partly by their own works."²

The difficulty of getting an unambiguous statement of the Romanist position is illustrated by the way in which Cardinal Bellarmine, the Roman controversialist who wrote at the end of the sixteenth century, after arguing powerfully and at length against the Protestant doctrine, comes at the last to make his confession:

It is the safest course, by reason of the uncertainty of our own righteousness, and the danger of vainglory, to repose our whole trust in the mercy and lovingkindness of God alone.³

But the whole point of the controversy was that Rome would not accept that word "alone," while the Reformers insisted on it. Calvin represented them all when he saw that men could not be justified partim gratia Dei, partim operibus propriis. Justification is by faith alone.

It is important to define clearly the import of this crucial word "alone." It does not mean that the faith which justifies is ever alone or unaccompanied by other graces. The Westminster Confession maintains that "it is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."⁴ Calvin put it tersely: "It is faith alone which justifies: nevertheless the faith which justifies is never alone."⁵

The meaning of "alone" was concisely stated by Philip Melancthon when he said,

If the exclusive term, only, is disliked, let them erase the Apostle's corresponding terms, freely, and without works.⁶

¹ Sic quidem praefaritur, ut initio, nihil spirent praeter Christum (op. cit., ed., Geneva, 1611), Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III., p. 108

² partim gratia Dei, partim operibus propriis, justificari homines. ibid.

³ Robert F. R. Bellarmine, Works (5 vols, ed. 1721), cited from De Justif., lib. v., c. 7, by James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 214

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, XI.2 ⁵ Calvin, Acts of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III, p. 152

⁶ quoted, James Buchanan, op. cit., p. 129

And Luther's personal confession of faith leaves no doubt whatsoever about the implications of the doctrine which was for him the foundation of everything:

I, Dr. Martin Luther, the unworthy evangelist of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus think and thus affirm:

That this article, namely, that faith alone, without works, justifies before God, can never be overthrown, for... Christ alone, the Son of God, died for our sins; but if He alone takes away our sins, then men, with all their works, are to be excluded from all concurrence in procuring the pardon of sin and justification. Nor can I embrace Christ otherwise than by faith alone: He cannot be apprehended by works. But if faith, before works follow, apprehends the Redeemer, it is undoubtedly true, that faith alone, before works and without works, appropriates the benefit of redemption, which is no other than justification, or deliverance from sin. This is our doctrine; so the Holy Spirit teaches, and the whole Christian Church. In this, by the grace of God, will we stand fast, Amen!¹

Cranmer makes it equally clear that "only" is simply an equivalent of "without works." He writes in his 'Homily Of Salvation,'

So that the true understanding of this doctrine, we be justified freely by faith without works, or that we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not, that this our own act....doth justify us...

The old ancient fathers of the church from time to time have uttered our justification with this speech, Only faith justifieth us; meaning none other thing than Paul meant, when he said, Faith without works justifieth us.²

He is at pains to exclude faith itself if it is regarded as a work or merit:

And because all this is brought to pass through the only merits and deservings of our Saviour Christ, and not through our merits, or through the merits of any virtue that we have within us, or of any work that cometh from us, therefore, in

¹ cited, James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, p. 129, from Luther's 'Animadversions on the Edict of Augsburg' (1531)

² Thomas Cranmer, Miscellaneous Writings and Letters (Parker Society ed.), Cambridge, 1846, pp. 131, 133.

that respect of merit and deserving, we renounce, as it were, altogether again faith, works, and all other virtues.¹

If the emphasis is placed on faith alone, it is because faith is focused not on ourselves or our works, but only on Jesus Christ. Cranmer insisted that "we must not on any account think of faith ~~xxx~~ as a ground of justification, for ultimately justification is not even of faith but only by grace."²

It might be said, indeed, that sola gratia is a more accurate statement of the Reformed doctrine of justification than sola fide. But there is no contradiction. Sola gratia means that the initiative is with God, and that man's justification is His work alone: sola fide looks at it from man's side, and realises that it is without man's works. As Professor Joachim Jeremias put it in a lecture delivered at the Summer School of the Faculty of Divinity at St. Andrews, in July, 1955,

The sola fide describes man's way to get righteousness, the sola gratia describes God's action when attributing righteousness. In Romans 4. 6 - 8 Paul has summed ~~up~~ up quite simply the meaning of justification by faith and by grace. 'Even as David describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth ($\lambdaογίζεται$, i.e., sola gratia) righteousness without works ($\chiωρὶς ἔργων$ i.e. sola fide), saying: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Psalm 32. 1, 2).'³

From God's side it is 'grace alone:' from man's side it is 'faith alone.'

All that has been said in the preceding discussion serves to underline the admirable completeness and accuracy of the concise definition given in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his

¹ Thomas Cranmer, op. cit., p. 133

² ibid., p. 203

³ Professor Joachim Jeremias, Paul and James, in The Expository Times, vol. LXVI, No. 12, p. 369.

sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.¹

We now proceed further to indicate the positiveness of this doctrine by underling four things in Reformed soteriology - (i) the positiveness of grace: (ii) the positiveness of sin: (iii) the positiveness of justification: (iv) the positiveness of faith.

(i) The positiveness of grace

At the heart of the Reformers' controversy with Rome is the contrast between a salvation which is wholly God's doing and that in which man has a part - the contrast between grace and merit. Luther puts it unequivocally:

My doctrine is such that it setteth forth and preacheth the grace and glory of God alone, and in the matter of salvation, it condemneth the righteousness and wisdom of all men. In this I cannot offend, because I give both to God and man that which properly and truly belongeth unto them both.²

Calvin's Reply to Cardinal Sadolet similarly goes straight to the heart of the controversy:

What have you here, Sadolet, to bite or carp at? Is it that we leave no room for works? Assuredly we do deny that, in justifying a man, they are worth a single straw. For Scripture everywhere cries aloud, that all are lost; and every man's own conscience bitterly accuses him. The same Scripture teaches, that no hope is left but in the mere goodness of God, ~~but~~ by which sin is pardoned and righteousness imputed to us. It declares both to be gratuitous, and finally concludes that a man is justified without works (Rom. iv. 7).³

Again, in his tract on The Necessity of Reforming the Church, Calvin states the point at issue with unmistakable clarity:

There are here two questions: first, whether the glory of our salvation is to be divided between ourselves and God: and, secondly, whether, as in the sight of God, our conscience

¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 33

² Luther, Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 78

³ Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, p. 42

can with safety put any confidence in works. On the former question, Paul's decision is - let every mouth "be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God." "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God - being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" and that "to declare His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," (Rom. iii. 19, etc.) We simply follow this definition, while our opponents maintain that man is not justified by the grace of God, in any sense which does not reserve part of the praise for his own works.¹

It must be made quite clear that Romanist soteriology does not exclude the grace of God. It emphasises 'grace' no less than the Reformed doctrine. But by 'grace' the Romanist means, not the act of God in Christ by which He seeks men out in spite of their sin, but rather a supernatural gift from God, bestowed on men to make them worthy of acceptance, "a supernatural energy, which, proceeding from the being of God, enters into human experience, and renews, enlightens and sanctifies the soul."² The grace of God is acknowledged as the ultimate ground of man's acceptance with God, but room is left for human merit in the fact that justification is based on what man can do by the aid of infused grace. But the Reformers saw clearly that grace which does not exclude all human merit is not grace at all, and that a justification which rests at all on works, however inspired, is human rather than Divine. Professor P. S. Watson gives a vivid picture of the difference between the scholastic view and Luther's which we may borrow to point the contrast between the Roman and the Reformed conception of grace. He writes,

According to the former, God must be regarded as something like a doctor who refuses to come into contact with his patients so long as they are ill, but is sufficiently well-disposed toward them to send them medicine through the post (sacramental grace!) with a promise that he will see them when they are recovered. According to Luther, on the other hand, we must think of God in Christ as a true physician,

¹ Calvin, On the Necessity of Reforming the Church, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, p. 162

² W. P. Paterson, The Rule of Faith (5th ed., London, 1933), p. 246

who without a thought for Himself enters the plague-stricken dwelling to tend the sick with His own hands and nurse them back to health.¹

Luther states characteristically the positive assurance which is derived from the Reformed doctrine of grace:

The gospel commandeth us to behold, not our good works, our own perfection, but God the promiser, Christ the mediator. Contrariwise, the Pope commandeth us to look, not unto God the promiser, nor unto Christ the high bishop, but unto our own works and merits. Here, on the one side, doubting and desperation must needs follow: but on the other side, assurance of God's favour and joy of the spirit.²

Such is the fruit of the Reformers' positive doctrine of grace.

(ii) The positiveness of sin

If the Roman view of justification is defective in its conception of the grace of God, it is no less so in its conception of the need of man. It has perhaps not been sufficiently noted that one's view of the doctrine of justification depends to a considerable degree on one's view of sin. The cleavage between Roman and Reformed soteriology is clearly marked here. An investigation of the Roman doctrine of sin shows how the exceeding sinfulness of sin has been blunted as a concession to human pride - in two ways. First, Rome asserts that Adam before the Fall had an original righteousness which was a "superadded gift," which enabled him to keep his lower nature subject always to his higher nature, his spiritual self. Through the Fall this superadded gift was lost; and man now stands in his purely natural state, with no help from any supernatural power within him, and the antagonism between the higher and lower natures has full play. Every man, therefore, now occupies the same position as Adam did before his super-added

¹ P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 68. The simile is suggested perhaps by Melancthon's classic phrase, as quoted by H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 145 - "Grace is not medicine but good-will."

² Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), pp. 371f.

gift was bestowed. Consequently he can still hope to take some part in his own redemption. The sinful principle in the world, on the Roman view, is not so much positive evil as something lacking, due to the loss suffered at the Fall.

Secondly, Rome distinguishes between mortal and venial sins. "Mortal sin is a grievous ~~six~~ offence or transgression against the law of God..." and "is so called because it kills the soul by depriving it of true life, which ^{is} sanctifying grace, and because it brings everlasting death and damnation to the soul."¹ But not all sin is mortal: much of it is considered venial, that is, pardonable. And since "they who die in mortal sin will go to hell for all eternity,"² the tendency is for the priest, who has all authority in the matter, to reduce mortal sin to venial sin.

In contrast to the Roman view, the Reformed view of sin has in it the deep undertone of despair. Here is no softening of sin's guilt or sin's consequences. The whole human race, untouched by the grace of God, is without exception in a state of total moral corruption. Man's nature is corrupted in all its parts, in mind, conscience, heart and will. Sin is something that takes possession of a man, something that turns him into an open enemy of God, something that not only makes him miss the mark of perfection, but drives him on to open rebellion. It is a principle and a power, exercising dominion over men, holding them in the bondage of abject slavery, reigning in their bodies, blinding their minds, working death in them.³ Sin, in the Reformed view, is a positive, active principle, driving men to despair - though a despair that may bring them at last to the very threshold of the Kingdom, for, as James Denney once said, "The Kingdom of heaven is not for the well-meaning; it is for the desperate, for those between whom and the great darkness there is nothing but the mercy of God."

Luther taught uncompromisingly the absoluteness of God's Law

¹ Maynooth Catechism, p. 23, cited, Handbook on Romanism and Evangelical Christianity, published by Youth Committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

² ibid., p. 23

³ Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, VI.

and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He wrote,

Through that most false understanding of this statement, "God does not require perfection," it has come to be said that anything done with less than perfect love is not sin; whereas the reason why He does not require it, is because He forgives, not because it is lawful and not sin.¹

The Law requires us to love with our whole heart and our whole strength, and we sin if we do less.²

It was Luther's deep and positive sense of sin that led him at last to despair of all human ways of dealing with it, and to enter into peace with God. He has told us something of the way in which his sin lay crushingly upon him, something of the fastings and penances that, at the command of the Church, he endured, if haply they might bring him peace. Even with the Bible in his hands, the terror of sin was overwhelmingly upon him, and he could not see the gospel: until at last God spoke to his heart the message that was the end of all his striving and his agony - "The just shall live by faith."

(iii) The positive-ness of justification

We have seen that the Reformers and the Romanists have radically different conceptions of grace and of sin. It is not surprising to find that they differ also in their views of what is meant by justification.

All the Reformed Confessions make it clear that justification primarily means that the sinner is accepted as righteous, or acquitted, and this not on the ground of any goodness of his own, but because of the merits of the Saviour. The Augsburg Confession teaches "

that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits or works, but are justified freely for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe they are received into favour, and their sins forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death hath satisfied for our sins.³

¹ Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 1, p. 368

² ibid.

³ Part I, Art. IV.

The Thirty-nine Articles similarly stress that justification means being "accounted righteous before God," and emphasises that we are so accepted "only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings."¹

The Decrees of the Council of Trent make it equally clear that the Roman conception of justification implies the priority of sanctification. Justification was defined as "the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man as unjust becomes just."² In other words, man must be sanctified by some means or other, if he is ever to be justified in the sight of a God Who is Himself holy and just. "First sanctification then forgiveness" was the divinely appointed order in the receiving of salvation. Hooker summarised the Roman view like this:

The medicine whereby Christ cures our diseases is a divine spiritual quality which, received into the soul, doth first make it to be one of them who are born of God, and secondly endues it to bring forth such works as they do that are born of Him, maketh the soul gracious and amiable in the sight of God, washeth out all the stains and pollutions of sin, so that by it through the merit of Christ we are delivered as from sin so from eternal death the reward of sin.³

The condition of the sinner's acceptance with God is, in short, that he has been made righteous by the gracious influences brought to bear upon him. A disquieting feature of this is that acceptance with God, as expressed in the forgiveness of sins, is proportionate to the progress that has been made in righteousness. W. P. Paterson declares,

As justification in the sense of sanctification is partial and progressive, so are also acceptance and forgiveness ~~partial~~ness partial and progressive,⁴

and thereby shows the fatal weakness of the Roman system. In

¹ Article XI
² Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (ed. J. Waterworth, London, 1848), Session vii 7 (p. 34)

³ Hooker's Works (ed. 1850), vol. ii. p. 603

⁴ W. P. Paterson, The Rule of Faith, p. 255

the great majority of cases the process of becoming just is slow and is accompanied by frequent sin and backsliding; this involves the expectation of a heavy load of punishment, whether in this world or in Purgatory, before admission can be gained to the Kingdom of Heaven.¹

The Council of Trent emphasised the essential function of the sacraments of the Church in justification. It is "through the most holy sacraments of the Church that all true justice either begins, or being begun is increased, or being lost is repaired."² An indispensable function was attributed to the sacrament of baptism. "The instrumental cause of justification," it was decreed, "is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified."³ It must be noted, however, that the cleansing of baptism avails only for past sin, and it is in the treatment of post-baptismal sin that Rome goes most disastrously astray. Sins committed after baptism are of two kinds - venial, which weaken grace in the soul; and mortal, which destroy grace. The definition of mortal sins as pride, covetousness, unchastity, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth - the seven deadly sins - shows clearly enough that mortal sin is possible in the baptised believer, for who does not, at some period of his life, fall into one or other of these? What, then, is a man to do, who has fallen from grace by committing one of these mortal sins? It is not possible for him to be baptised again, but God in His mercy has provided a new sacrament, a "second plank," namely penance. James Orr writes in The Progress of Dogma,

It is in this article of penance, if anywhere, that we are to seek the real doctrine of justification in Romanism as a working system.⁴

When grace is lost by mortal sin, the sinner is exhorted to contrition, and is even assured that, if only his contrition were perfect, that in itself would suffice to procure forgiveness. But

¹ Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sess. vii, canon 30

² ibid., sess. vii.

³ ibid., session vi. 7

⁴ James Orr, The Progress of Dogma, p. 267

contrition seldom or never is perfect: God, therefore, has provided an easier method in confession, for which a lesser degree of penitence, called attrition, will suffice. On confession, the priest gives absolution, and prescribes certain works of penance as satisfaction for the sin committed. It might seem that the penitent was now justified, but not so. He is freed from the eternal penalty of his sin, but there still remains a temporal penalty, to be discharged by the sinner's own efforts in good works and continued penances. Supposing the whole of this obligation is not discharged - and practically it never is in this life - the balance is carried over into purgatory, and has to be worked off there. Alleviation of purgatory is possible through the treasury of the merits of the saints, through masses and indulgences; and so the whole system, centred around the 'sacrament' of penance, is worked out to its dark conclusion of uncertainty and fear. For the thing which stands out most clearly is the dreadful lack of assurance in the whole business. No man can ever know for certain that he is justified or will be saved. The best he can do is to hope that some day he may be: to hope - and also to fear.

Compare that fear and uncertainty with the confidence of the Apostles, recaptured in turn by the Reformers. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God,"¹ "It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?" The source of that triumphant confidence is the fact that justification is not the consequence of anything that the justified can do: it is the free gift of God. It is something accomplished once and for all when the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and we are counted righteous in Him.

James Denney gave notable expression to this truth when he wrote:

¹Romans 5. 1, 2

²Romans 8. 33,34

Luther and those who learned from him were conscious that they were getting a sight of the gospel such as they had never had before, and such as made all things new for them. It gave them what their sinful souls needed and craved for, but what they could never find in any system of ecclesiastical observances, however venerable, nor by any moral efforts of their own, however sincere. It gave them an initial religious assurance, in the strength of which...a new life was possible for them.... This initial assurance...is the essential mark of Reformation Christianity.¹

And it is the fruit of a positive justification.

(iv) The positiveness of faith

The faith which takes God's gracious gift of justification is a positive thing, too. Luther recognised clearly, and repeated again and again in his teaching that faith may mean two things. Faith, as the Medieval Church used the term, meant mainly assent to certain statements, though it is going too far to say that it never meant anything more than this. Certainly the formal statement in the Athanasian Creed - "This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved - leaves little room for any other connotation of faith than assensus. In the case of the ordinary Christian the Church was satisfied if he accepted what the Church taught, though he might have very little understanding of what the Church did actually teach: implicit faith, a general assent, was ~~xxx~~ all that was required. The Reformers, on the contrary, held that faith must be explicit, and that it was not mere assent but was essentially fiducia - trust and committal. Luther declared,

There are two kinds of believing: first, a believing about God which means that I believe that what is said of God is true. This faith is rather a form of knowledge than a faith. There is, secondly, a believing in God which means that I put my trust in Him, give myself up to thinking that I can have dealings with Him, and believe without any doubt that He will be and do to me according to the things said of Him. Such faith, which throws itself upon God, whether in life or in death, alone makes a Christian man.²

¹ James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation (London, 1917), pp. 294f

² Luther's Works (Erlangen ed.), xxiii. 15, cited T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I., p. 429

This trust is a great deal more than a mere sentiment or feeling, though it has often been misunderstood and misrepresented as being only that.¹ Luther's own words about it are not open to misunderstanding:

It is a living, busy, active, powerful thing, faith; it is impossible for it not to do us good continually. It never asks whether good works are to be done; it has done them before there is time to ask the question, and it is always doing them.²

Cranmer drew the same kind of distinction between the two kinds of faith as Luther did. He said,

It is diligently to be noted, that faith is taken in the scripture two manner of ways. There is one faith, which in scripture is called a dead faith....And this faith is a persuasion and belief in man's heart, whereby he knoweth that there is a God, and assenteth unto all truth of God's most holy word...so that it consisteth only in believing of the word of God, that it is true....

Another faith there is in scripture, which is not, as the aforesaid faith, idle, unfruitful and dead....And this is not only the common belief of the articles of our faith, but it is also a sure trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.³

It is this latter kind of faith, Cranmer asserts, that avails for justification.

Philip Melanchthon in his Loci communes (1521), in the section on "Justification and Faith" charges the "Sophists" with being satisfied with a "historical" faith that is empty of spiritual force, thereby implicitly making the same distinction as Luther and Cranmer.⁴

And Calvin writes,

Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them.⁵

This, then, is faith in the view of the Reformers - not simply

¹ as by Dom Gregory Dix, The Question of Anglican Orders (1944), pp.

² Luther's Works (Erlangen ed.), lxiii. 125, cited T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I. p. 431 20ff

³ Cranmer, op. cit., p. 135

⁴ Melanchthon, Loci communes, Eng. trans., C. L. Hill, The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon (Boston, 1944), p. 185

⁵ Institutes, III. ii. 16.

Assensus, acceptance of certain truths, but fiducia, trust, committal and surrender, an active and positive thing.

The crucial Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, therefore, is no mere negation but a positive acceptance of the positive answer of the grace of God to the positive and desperate need of man.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

We proceed now to consider the evidence for the view that this doctrine was not discovered but rather recovered at the Reformation. It was not new but old.

When the Council of Trent met, there was universal agreement that the doctrine of justification was the chief one to be debated. The subject was a difficult and perplexing one, and it is significant that one of the presiding dignitaries naively confessed that it was a new one to the Fathers, and had never been strictly considered by any previous Council of the Church.¹ But, on the contrary, it was not new but old, as old and as permanent as the thought of God concerning man. "The doctrine of the Justification of Sinners," wrote Buchanan, "had its origin immediately after the Fall."² John Knox goes back to our first parents' experience of the mercy and grace of God to find the beginning of the Gospel:

All this plainly may be perceived in the life of our first parent Adam, who, by transgression of God's commandment, fell in great trouble and affliction - from which he should never have been released, without the goodness of God had first called him. And, secondly, made unto him the promise of his salvation, the which Adam believng, before ever he wrought good works, was reputed just.³

Zwingli makes the same point:

Had Adam felt that he had anything remaining after his fall which might gain the favour of his Maker, he would not have fled to hide himself; but his case appeared to himself so desperate, that we do not read even of his having recourse

¹ Paolo Sarpi, History of the Council of Trent, Book ii. p. 75

² James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, p. 24

³ Knox's Works (ed. David Laing), vol, iii. p. 439.

to supplication. He dared not at all to appear before God. But here the mercy and kindness of the Most High are displayed, who recalls the fugitive, even when, with a traitor's mind, he is passing over to the camp of the enemy, and not even offering a prayer for pardon; receives him to His mercy; and, as far as His justice would permit, restores him to a happy state. Here the Almighty exhibited a splendid example of what He would do for the whole race of Adam, sparing them, and treating them with kindness, even when they deserved only punishment. Here, then, Religion took its rise, when God recalled despairing, fugitive man to Himself.¹

Right through the Old Testament we find that man's rightness with God depends not on successful attainment of a standard of conduct but on the grace of a forgiving God. If the Old Testament was in any real sense a preparation for the New, that is only what we might expect. There cannot have been two entirely different ways of being right with God - the way of self-renouncing faith and the way of meritorious achievement. The thesis of Dr. Norman H. Snaith's book, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, is that these distinctive ideas ~~were~~ were those which are carried on and brought to full expression in the New Testament in the teaching of Christ and His Apostles, and, further, that it was these same ideas which were re-discovered by Luther and the other Reformers in the sixteenth century. He writes,

Herein are the beginnings of those doctrines of the Christian Faith which we sons of the Reformation know assuredly to be at the root of the Gospel, in chief, Salvation by Faith alone, and through Grace, for even the first stirrings towards repentance in the human heart are the work of God Himself.²

Paul uses Abraham, of course, as his chief illustration of the fact that under the old covenant, no less than under the new, man was justified by faith. Abraham's faith, that is, agrees with Christian faith in not being a work which puts God in man's debt and thereby makes him righteous. His righteousness was the free gift of God, received by faith alone. In him we see

the spiritual attitude of a man, who is conscious that in himself

¹Zwingli, De Vera et Falsa Religione, p. 169, cited James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, p. 424

²Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London, 1944), p. 122

he has no strength, and no hope of a future, and who nevertheless casts himself upon and lives by the word of God which assures him of a future.¹

That is faith, and that is how men have been justified from the very beginning.

Paul was content to clinch his argument with the case of 'the father of the faithful,' but he reminds us before he begins his illustration that this righteousness which is by faith, apart from the works of the law, is "witnessed by the law and the prophets," and he conjoins with Abraham a passage from the Book of Psalms, as if to declare that the whole Old Testament - law, prophets and psalms - gives evidence of the same principle.²

The Law. The Levitical sacrifices did not earn God's forgiveness - the prophets later on condemned that misunderstanding unsparingly - they were no more than the way by which the worshipper had made real to him the forgiveness which God gave, not because the sacrifice had bought it, but because it was His will to bestow it freely. The final ground of the sinner's pardon and restoration was not the sacrifice which he gave but the free grace of a merciful and loving God Who accepted it.

The Prophets. The prophets were all preachers of righteousness, but one and all of them saw clearly that man could not attain this righteousness by himself. The failures of their people were too evident for any illusions on that question, and mercilessly they exposed those failures. But again and again we find them coming to the place where they see and declare that salvation must be all of God. Jeremiah, for example, preached repentance to a heedless people until he was almost in despair. Then he came at last to find refuge in the sure hope of a new covenant in which it is God Who bestows righteousness and pardons His people.

¹ James Denney, Commentary on Romans, in Expositor's Greek Testament (1900), ad. loc.

² Romans 3. 21: 4. 6ff.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband to them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.¹

The new covenant is of God's giving, unearned and undeserved: and man's part is but to receive.

Hosea's own tragic life-story is the background to his teaching of the same truth. He comes at the end of his prophecy to make his appeal to Israel:

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.²

"Receive us graciously" means "Receive us as if we were good." After all the prophet's denunciation of Israel's sin, how can he bid his people pray such a prayer? He had learned from his own bitter experience that 'love is not love that alters as it alteration finds,' that love in the last resort does not depend on recompense or response. His wife Gomer had played the harlot, as Israel had played the harlot with God. And yet he never ceased to love her, but at the last, when she had sold herself to sin and shame, he bought her back and brought her home. That, says Hosea, is God's way. When we have no goodness of our own, He will receive us as if we were good. And that is justification, by which God receives us graciously and loves us freely.

Perhaps the clearest teaching of all that justification is not of works but by faith is found in Micah. At first sight his answer

¹Jeremiah 31. 31ff

²Hosea 14. 1,2

to the question, "How can a man be right with God?" appears to be justification by works:

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?¹

But Micah does not stop there. The next chapter shows how disastrously that way had failed:

The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood.... That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asked for a reward....The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge....a man's enemies are the men of his own house.²

And then comes the only solution:

Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me....Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.³

Such is the final verdict of prophecy: man's only hope lies in the forgiving grace of a merciful God, received by faith alone.

The Psalms. Let H. R. Mackintosh sum up for us the teaching of the Psalms on justification by faith:

Every prayer for pardon and cleansing in the Psalter takes for granted that it is God who freely puts men right with Himself: 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions:' 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.'⁴

So we find throughout the whole Old Testament - in the Law, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms - the truth that man does not earn justification: it is the act of God, and it is received by faith alone.

¹Micah 6. 8

²Micah 7. 2 - 4, 6

³Micah 7. 7, 18

⁴H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 102. Cf. Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, pp. 17ff.

That is not to say, however, that there was no defection from this sure ground of salvation. From the time of Ezra on, an arid legalism descended on the Old Testament Church, and made acceptance with God depend on the exact fulfilment of the Mosaic law - "He that doeth these things shall live in them," as Paul expressed it in Galatians 3. 12 - until the coming of Christ shattered the legalism of the Pharisees and revealed anew to the sinner the free-forgiving grace of God.

The view of the Pharisees is a revealing parallel to the view of the Roman Church. God, they held, was to bring in the Kingdom of the Messiah, but His action depended on man's behaviour.

Let the law be rightly kept even for one Sabbath, and the great event would take place. Salvation waited for an obedient people; on no other could it be bestowed. The heaped-up treasure of the people's merits went to hasten the cataclysm, and he whose account with God showed a surplus of righteousness over sins was safe for a place within the Kingdom.¹

Forgiveness and acceptance were the portion of those who could show a worthy record of achievement. And then Christ came, seeking not the whole but the sick, not the righteous but publicans and sinners. By drawing out their trust in Himself, He led the sinful to trust the pardoning mercy of God. That is justification by faith alone.

The charge has frequently been made that Paul overlaid the simplicity of the Gospels with elaborations of doctrine which made the Christianity of the Epistles a very different thing from the teaching of Christ. We must ask, therefore, if the doctrine of justification by faith alone, so clearly set out in Paul's teaching, is really consonant with the teaching of Jesus. In the address already referred to² Professor Jeremias of Gottingen gives his answer unequivocally:

Nowhere is the connexion between Paul and Jesus so clear as here. The Pauline doctrine of justification has its origin

¹H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 106

²supra, p. 191.

in the conflict with Judaism, i.e. with the attempt to save oneself. The same conflict appears in the conflict of Jesus with the Pharisees in regard to their religious self-righteousness. Both Jesus and Paul are sure that nobody is so far from God as the self-righteous person. The Pauline doctrine of justification is the development of the preaching of salvation by our Lord: 'Blessed are the poor' (Matt. 5.3); 'I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (Mt. 9. 13)⁷ it is also the central message of His parables....Both Jesus and Paul proclaim God's great gift. Jesus says: 'The beggars before God are blessed'; Paul says: 'The ungodly ones are justified.' It is the same message, only the terms are changed.¹

Some of the parables have a direct bearing on the question before us. The context of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard² was Peter's question about the merit involved in leaving all and following Christ: "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"³ Christ's answer, embedded in the parable, was that there is no relation between the amount of work done by man and the benefit which he receives from God, and that the man who seeks to bargain about final reward will always be wrong. At the end of the day it must be grace that reigns, and God is the God Who "justifies the ungodly."⁴

The actual term "justified" occurs in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.⁵ Luke makes it quite clear that the parable was spoken against those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others." And A. B. Bruce makes the comment:

Christ's reflection on the two men is equivalent in drift to Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith.⁶

In the parable of the prodigal son⁷ there is no question of a period of probation for the returning ~~wandering~~ wanderer: he is

¹ Joachim Jeremias, Paul and James, in The Expository Times, vol. LXVI, No. 12, p. 369

² Matthew 20. 1 - 16

³ Matthew 19. 27

⁴ Romans 4. 5

⁵ Luke 18. 9 - 14

⁶ A. B. Bruce, The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, p. 314

⁷ Luke 15. 11 - 32

restored immediately to the full status of sonship, with no thought of deserving whatsoever. "It is the elder brother," writes Professor J. S. Stewart, "whose merit-philosophy is more deeply rooted than his love, who stands condemned."¹

And so, when the Reformers re-discovered the gospel of justification by faith alone, they found it not only in the teaching of Paul but in the life and teaching of our Lord Himself. Paul himself discovered it when he met the Christ of the publican and the sinner on the Damascus Road. Then the discovery came to him like a sudden blaze of light. As he wrote to the Corinthians,

God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.²

It was the discovery of his life, but reflection was to tell him, as we have seen, that it was rather a re-discovery of a truth that had been there all the time. The light which shone into his despairing heart had been shining always. Thereafter he had only one gospel to preach, the gospel of justification by faith. He had painfully followed the pathway of a righteousness which is man's doing, and it had led only to frustration and despair. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"³ But now he had received pardon from God's hand as a free gift, and from henceforth ~~his~~ he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for from his own experience he knows it to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.⁴

One would have thought that the idea of human merit as a ground of salvation would never have arisen again after such an exposure as Paul gave of its utter futility and weakness. But, as Professor J. S. Stewart has said, "Still the old error takes in every generation a new lease of life."⁵ It was not long until man's persistent trust in his own endeavours began to vitiate the

¹J. S. Stewart, A Man in Christ (London, 1935), p. 253

²II Corinthians 4. 6

³Romans 7. 24

⁴Romans 1. 16

⁵J. S. Stewart, A Man in Christ, p. 84.

the pure gospel of grace. The idea crept in that man might by repentance, love and hope fit himself for the reception of the grace of God. It is not too much to say that within two centuries the motto of the Church became "Salvation by faith and good works." In the Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, commonly called Clement's First Letter, and dated c. 96 or 97 A.D., there is a reference to our being "justified by our deeds, not by words."¹ And Abraham is given as an illustration of blessedness, "because he acted in righteousness and truth, prompted by faith."² Salvation has become a thing achieved by man's effort. Clement writes,

We, then, should make every effort to be found in the number of those who are patiently looking for him, so that we may share in the gifts he has promised. And how shall this be, dear friends? If our mind is faithfully fixed on God; if we seek out what pleases and delights him; if we do what is in accord with his pure will, and follow in the way of truth. If we rid ourselves of all wickedness, evil, avarice, contentiousness, malice, fraud, gossip, slander, hatred of God, arrogance, pretension, conceit and inhospitality.³

And yet, only a few paragraphs earlier he has maintained a truly Pauline conception of justification:

We, therefore, who by his will have been called in Jesus Christ, are not justified of ourselves or by our wisdom or insight or religious devotion or the holy deeds ~~that~~ we have done from the heart, but by that faith by which almighty God has justified all men from the very beginning. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.⁴

Such inconsistency serves to show how insidiously a doctrine of justification by faith and works could creep into the Church.

A few years later, about the middle of the second century, the anonymous Sermon, misleadingly called Clement's Second Letter

¹ Clement's First Letter, c. 30, in Early Christian Fathers, vol. I in Library of Christian Classics (London, 1953), p. 57

² ibid., c. 31 (p. 58)

³ ibid., c. 35 (pp. 58, 59)

⁴ ibid., c. 32 (p. 58)

to the Corinthians, unequivocally preaches justification by works:

If, then, we have done what is right in God's eyes, we shall enter His Kingdom and receive the promises "which ear has not heard or eye seen, or which man's heart has not entertained."¹

And, again,

For if we renounce these pleasures and master our souls by avoiding their evil lusts, we shall share in Jesus' mercy.²

For Hermas, writing about 140 A.D., religion is a thing of righteousness and its reward, the practice of Christian virtues and the merit that flows from it. The Shepherd declares,

If, when you have heard these (commandments and parables), ye keep them and practise them with pure minds, ye will receive from the Lord all that He has promised you."³

Hermas is quite frank about works of supererogation:

Keep the commandments of the Lord and you will be well-pleasing to God, and inscribed among the number of those who observe them. And if you do any good beyond what is commanded by God, you will gain for yourself more abundant glory and will be more honoured by God than you would otherwise be.⁴

So rapid was the deterioration from the doctrine of justification by faith alone that as early as Tertullian (c. 160 - 230) it could be stated, Bonum factum deum habet debitorem - "A good deed makes God our debtor."⁵ Though Tertullian applied this only to life after baptism, and though Augustine's teaching on the sovereignty of grace was a considerable modification of this conception, the deterioration continued and finally issued in the fully developed medieval doctrine of merit. Pardon came to be thought of as for those who have made themselves worthy of it: justification was something to be earned and paid for: and men looked away from Christ to themselves, from the free grace of God revealed in Him to the futile endeavours of men.

¹ Clement's Second Letter, in Early Christian Fathers, c. 11.7

² ibid. c. 16. 2 ³ The Shepherd of Hermas, Vis. v

⁴ The Shepherd of Hermas, Sim. v. 3

⁵ Tertullian, De Paenitentia, c. 2

The question must be asked to what extent this recession to a doctrine of justification by merit was complete. Is it true that the doctrine of justification by faith alone needed to be re-discovered de novo by the Reformers? Or was there a thread of continuity between the age of the Apostles and the Reformation which kept the doctrine alive in the Church until the time came for its full recovery? Ritschl in his History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation goes into the question in considerable detail, and comes to the conclusion,

There must have continued to exist within her (i.e. the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages) along with the theory that turns upon grace and merit, a marked tendency also to the devotional feeling which relies exclusively on God's grace.¹

The fact is that, as we have seen in the case of Clement of Rome, the Fathers can be quoted on both sides. Professor G. W. Bromiley in his book on the theology of Thomas Cranmer refers to the charge that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was a new thing in Luther's day, and shows how Cranmer "destroyed this objection by quoting quite a number of passages from the fathers which support justification by faith alone."² But Professor Bromiley goes on,

No doubt other passages can be quoted from the fathers which point in a rather different direction. That is one of the disadvantages (or should we say the advantages?) of the patristic appeal.³

James Buchanan, who takes several pages of his book on Justification to quote extracts from the Fathers, to prove

beyond all controversy, the fact that the Protestant doctrine of Justification by grace through faith, was not a novelty introduced into the Church by Luther and Calvin - that it was held and taught by some of the greatest writers in every successive age...⁴

adds, rather plaintively, "The writings of the Fathers are not

¹Albrecht Ritschl, A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation (Eng. trans. Edin., 1872), p. 94

²G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer, Theologian, p. 36 ³ibid., p. 36

⁴James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, p. 97

always self-consistent."¹ But both Buchanan, writing in 1867, and Bromiley, writing in 1956, see quite clearly that the truth of continuity is maintained if "the doctrine of Justification by grace, through faith in the merits of Christ" can "be traced in the writings of some witnesses for the truth, along the whole line of the Church's history:"² "it is not a novel doctrine of which there is no trace at all in the primitive church."³

The truth is that there were two tendencies between which the Church of the Middle Ages was continually oscillating - and continued to oscillate in the ambiguous decisions of the Council of Trent. On the one hand, there was a formal theology which had built up a vast ecclesiastical mechanism of salvation by human merit. On the other hand, individual souls, realising the insufficiency of their own efforts, were constantly going back to the fountain-head of all mercy in the grace of God in Christ, and finding their one hope there. Luther was quite sure that notwithstanding the Church's gross misrepresentation of the truth, there were simple, humble souls who were saved through grace, by faith alone. Writing on Galatians 2. 16, 17, he said,

Wherefore I have much and often marvelled, that these sects of perdition reigning so many years in so great darkness and errors, the Church could endure and continue as it hath done. Some there were whom God called purely by the text of the Gospel (which notwithstanding remained in the pulpit) and by Baptism. These walked in simplicity and humbleness of ~~heart~~, heart, thinking the monks and friars and such only as were anointed of the bishops, to be religious and holy, and themselves to be profane and secular, and not worthy to be compared unto them. Wherefore they finding in themselves no good works to set against the wrath and judgment of God, did fly to the death and passion of Christ, and were saved in this simplicity.⁴

There were others, too, whose devotion proved better than their

¹James Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, p. 440

²ibid., p. 79

³G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer, Theologian, p. 36

⁴Luther, Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 144

theology. A striking example has already been referred to,¹ in the case of Cardinal Bellarmine, the doughty opponent of the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. His last word on the discussion, as has been pointed out by William Cunningham in his Historical Theology,

amounts, in substance and spirit, to a virtual repudiation of the whole five books he had written upon justification.²

Bellarmino wrote,

It is the safest course, by reason of the uncertainty of our own righteousness, and the danger of vainglory, to repose our whole trust in the mercy and lovingkindness of God alone.

Ritschl draws attention to the fact that the renunciation of all claim to merit in a certain sense constitutes a constant and characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church itself, "whenever she places herself in the attitude of prayer..."³ And the official agenda of the Roman Church prescribe for the dying that they must repose their confidence upon Christ and His passion as the whole ground of salvation.⁴

There was need in truth for re-discovery, for the formal theology of the Church had hidden the truth of justification by faith alone beneath an edifice of man's building which had to be shattered by the Reformation. But when the truth was re-discovered, it found an echo through the corridors of the centuries in the experience of all the saints; and it found an echo, too, in the deep pit of man's sin and helplessness. And men rejoiced to hear from a Reformed Church the truth that God receives and forgives them not for anything that they can offer but only in His love and grace revealed finally in Jesus Christ, Whose righteousness is imputed to us and received by faith alone.

¹ supra, p. p. 189

² William Cunningham, Historical Theology, vol. II, (3rd. ed. Edinburgh, 1870), p. 109

³ Ritschl, History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 116

⁴ Cf. Ritschl, op. cit., p. 120.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

It remains to ask, Has this ancient doctrine any meaning and any message for us today? Is there any sense in which justification by faith needs a fresh re-discovery in this twentieth century? Let Professor J. S. Stewart answer. Writing on Paul's theology, he says,

The spirit of legalism is by no means extinct. The idea underlying the words 'righteousness by the law' still commands the tacit assent of multitudes, even within Christendom.... We cannot afford to set all this part of Paul's message aside with an airy gesture as though it were obsolete now. It carries permanent validity. It goes right to the roots of our modern problem, lays its finger on the Church's deepest need, and concerns the spiritual experience of every soul.¹

There are two reasons at least why this way of salvation must be re-discovered today - (i) for Rome's sake; (ii) for Protestantism's sake.

(i) For Rome's sake. Writing fifty years ago, William Muir developed an original and fruitful line of approach when he spoke of The Arrested Reformation. The Reformation, he maintained,

is the classic instance of arrested development....Nor is any feature of the Reformation story more impressive than the fact that the line which was drawn between the nations within sixty years of the time when Luther was proclaimed a heretic by the Pope is drawn still....No nation was then Protestant, or is Protestant now, which had not become thoroughly Protestant before the generation which heard Luther preach had passed away; a portentous result which must be faced and understood if the work of the Reformation is ever to be carried to the glorious consummation which is so devoutly to be desired and which has so long and so sadly been postponed.²

But Luther himself had already seen the beginnings of decline, and,

¹J. S. Stewart, A Man in Christ, p. 84

²William Muir, The Arrested Reformation, pp. 3,4,7

more important, had seen the reason for it. He declared,

At the beginning of our preaching, the doctrine of faith had a most happy course, and down fell the Pope's pardons, purgatory, vows, masses, and such like abominations, which drew with them the ruin of all Popery....

But if they had, as they began, with a common consent together with us, taught and diligently urged the article of justification; that is to say, that we are justified neither by the righteousness of the law, nor by our own righteousness, but by only faith in Jesus Christ: doubtless this one article, by little and little, as it began, had overthrown the whole papacy....¹

If Rome has not yet been conquered and won, it is because the transforming doctrine of justification by faith alone has not been proclaimed as it might have been. The completed Reformation will be hastened only by a tide of evangelical revival flooding all the Churches - the Roman Church among them - with the new life which comes from God. For that reason, and for Rome's sake, this doctrine must be re-discovered and re-proclaimed today.

(ii) For Protestantism's sake. Karl Barth began his famous commentary on Romans with the words:

Paul, as a child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that, as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age.²

On which Professor J. S. Stewart comments,

In his attack on the legalist spirit, and in his heralding of a better way, the way of surrender to the Spirit of Christ - this is pre-eminently true....His problem is our problem. And the hope of our generation is to make his answer ours.³

That is why, for Protestantism's sake, his answer must be re-discovered today.

This message needs to be re-discovered, first of all, by the Church, for it is, as Luther said, articulus stantis aut cadentis

¹ Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), pp. 217, 8

² Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (Eng. trans., 1933), p. 1

³ J. S. Stewart, A Man in Christ, p. 88

ecclesiae, the article of a standing or falling church. The doctrine of justification by faith, he declared, was "a very brittle matter, because we are brittle." And he realised how easily it could be overlaid and forgotten.

We have good experience of this matter: for we are able to teach it unto others, and this is a sure token that we understand it; for no man can teach unto others that whereof he himself is ignorant. But when in the very conflict we should use the Gospel, which is the Word of grace, consolation and life, there doth the law, the Word of wrath, heaviness and death prevent the Gospel....and so shaketh all our inward powers, that it maketh us to forget justification, grace, Christ, the Gospel, and all together.¹

That the danger which he saw so clearly is still with us can be seen from an assessment of American Protestant preaching which was published in the journal Theology by the editor, Dr. Alex. R. Vidler, now Dean of King's College Cambridge, in February, 1948, after a visit to the United States. He wrote,

So far as I can ascertain, the paradigm of American preaching is: 'Let me suggest that you try to be good!'. Your preachers, it seems to me, are still advocating justification by good works of one kind or another (they may be very orthodox or very 'Catholic' good works); they are not proclaiming the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.²

It would be a naive assumption to suppose that that criticism could be limited to American preaching. It is all too applicable to a great deal of preaching in our British churches. The Protestant Church as a whole needs to re-discover the gospel of justification by faith, for nothing else deserves the name 'good news,' and nothing else can meet the need of our sin-sick world today.

But the gospel message needs to be re-discovered by the Church only that it might be brought to the individual. H. R. Mackintosh writes,

There are instincts in human nature, everywhere, which

¹ Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 76

² Alex. R. Vidler, in Theology, February, 1948

constitute St. Paul's message of justification by faith - in essence drawn from his Master - the only possible gospel for a sinner.¹

The ageless tendency of the human heart is to eke out faith by works of righteousness which we can do. Let us remember that, whenever we are tempted to think that this doctrine is nothing more than a relic of an ancient controversy between Paul and his Judaist opponents or Martin Luther and the Romanists. There is a Judaist and a Roman Catholic in the heart of every man, making him seek some share in the accomplishing of his salvation. David Brainerd, a devoted eighteenth-century missionary to the North American Indians, wrote in his Journal:

Hundreds of times I renounced all pretenses of any worth in my duties, as I thought, even while performing them; and often confessed to God that I deserved nothing for the best of them but eternal condemnation; yet still I had a secret hope of recommending myself to God by religious duties.²

So long as there is any trace of that tendency in human hearts, so long will the doctrine of justification by faith alone be no obsolete survival of ancient truth, but a living word of God, challenging and consoling and ever mighty to save.

Let the last word on justification by faith alone be with Luther:

This is the article whereat the whole world doth take offence, and few there be that teach it aright, and still fewer that heartily believe it. There is ever in our hearts a reluctance to be nothing ourselves, and to let Christ do all. We always want to have a finger in the pie ourselves, and to serve God with such zeal as to compel Him to have respect unto us, and forgive us our sins, and grant us His grace. And that simply cannot be, nor ever shall be neither. For these twain are as oil and water in the heart; I cannot put my trust in both - one of them must go, either Christ or mine own works.³

The hands which take God's great gift of justification must be empty hands.

¹ H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 114

² quoted, Pratt, The Religious Consciousness, p. 146, cited H. R. Mackintosh, The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 139

³ quoted in The Expository Times, LVIII., No. 10, p. 255, from Luther Speaks, a collection of essays for the fourth centenary of Luther's death, written by a group of Lutheran ministers in Britain in 1946.

V

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The Rights and Responsibilities of the Laity

It is by no means unanimously agreed that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a Reformation principle. An article in The Expository Times, of November, 1951, by Mr. J. M. Ross, contains this startling statement:

Anyone who supposes that the priesthood of all believers is one of the pillars of Protestant theology will get an unwelcome surprise if he tries to trace this doctrine in the classic Protestant and Free Church writers; for he will find that the doctrine was given no prominence until the latter half of the thirteenth century.¹

This appears to run quite counter to the view of Dr. John A. Mackay, writing about the same time in Christianity On The Frontier, when he says,

The doctrine of the 'universal priesthood of believers' is a basic Protestant affirmation.²

Two Scottish Professors seem equally at odds on this question. W. D. Niven, in Reformation Principles after Four Centuries is emphatic that the universal priesthood of believers is not a Reformation principle, and gives three reasons for excluding it:

¹The Expository Times, Vol. LXIII, No. 2, pp. 45 - 48

²John A. Mackay, op. cit., p. 119

First, it was only in the nineteenth century that by some the conception was exalted into a Reformation 'principle.'

Second, it is very difficult for Protestant Churches which hold by a 'stated' ministry to draw clear distinction between their ministers and Roman priests....

Third, the alleged principle has very slender New Testament basis.¹

And yet, writing about the same time in the Scottish Journal of Theology, G. D. Henderson gives ample evidence that it is a Reformation principle, and states,

Biblical evidence for the doctrine is clear.²

That this is no new disagreement - or what seems to be a disagreement - may be seen if we put side by side the views of two earlier Professors of Church History, writing about eighty years ago. In The Form of the Christian Temple, Thomas Witherow declared,

The doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is a doctrine both false and mischievous....It has no better foundation than a metaphor in Scripture, and no truth of God is ever made to rest only on a figure of speech.³

And yet, T. M. Lindsay, writing a few years earlier, could say,

The priesthood of all believers is the principle of the Reformation.⁴

Where contradiction is so categorical, one can begin to suspect that the opposing parties are not talking about the same thing, and it becomes evident that a careful definition of the priesthood of all believers is required before we can proceed further. Fortunately all the writers quoted have given a very clear indication of what they mean by 'priesthood of believers.' On the one hand,

¹W. D. Niven, Reformation Principles After Four Centuries (Glasgow, 1953), pp. 10, 11

²Scottish Journal of Theology, vol. 7, No. 1, March, 1954, pp. 1f

³Thomas Witherow, The Form of the Christian Temple (Edinburgh, 1889),

⁴T. M. Lindsay, The Reformation (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 186.

Mackay, Henderson and Lindsay show that for them 'the priesthood of believers' means the privileges and responsibilities of the laity. Mackay writes:

Believers in Christ, whoever they may be, enter upon a life of unique privilege and responsibility. They are constituted 'priests.' As such they have full right of access to God through Christ at all times.¹

Henderson introduces his article,

Writers belonging to various Christian denominations have recently had much to say about the Laity and their privileges and responsibilities within the Church.²

And Lindsay writes,

The one principle of the Reformation is the priesthood of all believers - the right of every believing man and woman, whether lay or cleric, to go to God directly with confession seeking pardon, with ignorance seeking enlightenment, with solitary loneliness seeking fellowship, with frailty seeking strength for daily holy living.³

Ross, Niven and Witherow, on the other hand, make it clear that the doctrine which they exclude is the view that all church members can assume the functions of the ministry. Ross shows that the doctrine which, he maintains, is not characteristic of Protestant thought is the doctrine that "any believer is entitled to perform all the functions of the Christian ministry."⁴ Niven dissociates the Reformed position from "the view that no specifically trained and orderly appointed ministry is necessary."⁵ And Witherow repudiates as false to Scripture the doctrine that "ordinary members may...assume the ordinary functions of the ministry at their pleasure."⁶

The truth is that the Reformers learned from the Scriptures,

¹ John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier, p. 119

² G. D. Henderson, The Priesthood of Believers, SJT, vol. 7, No. 1, p. 1
³ T. M. Lindsay, op. cit., pp. 185, 6

⁴ J. M. Ross, The Priesthood of All Believers, E.T. LXIII, No. 2,

⁵ W. D. Niven, op. cit., p. 11

p. 45

⁶ Thomas Witherow, op. cit., p. 234.

confirmed in their own experience, that every believer is a priest in the sense that he has direct access to God through Christ the only Mediator. But acceptance of the priesthood of all believers in that sense did not lead them to reject a ministerial order or seek to abolish a constituted ministry in the Christian Church. It is true that Luther in the heat of battle against the priesthood of the Roman clergy came forth with such extreme statements as these:

Every Christian man is a priest, and every Christian woman a priestess, whether they be young or old, master or servant, mistress, scholar or illiterate.¹

Or this, from his "Address to the German Nobility":

It has been devised that the Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate. That is an artful lie and hypocritical device, but let no man be made afraid of it, and that for this reason; that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate...and there is no difference among them, save of office alone....As for the unction by a Pope or a bishop, tonsure, ordination, consecration, and clothes differing from those of a layman - all this may make a hypocrite or an anointed puppet, but never a Christian or a spiritual man. Thus we are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as St. Peter says - 'Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (I Pet. ix.9) - and in the book of Revelation - 'and hast made us unto our God, by Thy blood, kings and priests' (Rev. v. 10). For if we had not a higher consecration in us than pope or bishop can give, no priest could ever be made by the consecration of pope or bishop, nor could he say the mass or preach, or absolve.²

But Luther modified his views considerably when during the Peasants' Revolt he saw disorders arising because all sorts of people were taking it upon themselves to preach, and were claiming Divine revelation for what they did. And he made it as clear as any of the other Reformers that the priesthood of believers did not justify anyone and everyone performing the functions of the Christian ministry. "We are all priests,"³ he said pithily, "but

¹ quoted, Witherow, op. cit., p. 233

² Luther's Primary Works (ed. Wace and Bucheim, London, 1896)
pp. 164,5

³ quoted H. H. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther (1947), p. 78.

we are not all parsons." Even in the passage quoted above in his "Address to the German Nobility," where he states so emphatically that all believers are priests unto God, he also, in virtue of that very fact, places restrictions on those who may assume the office of the ministry:

For since we are all priests alike, no man may put himself forward, or take upon himself without our consent and election, to do that which we have all alike power to do¹.

All the Reformers accept the priesthood of believers in the sense that every man has full right of access to God at all times, and has a corresponding responsibility to live his life out in utter dedication to God's service. But they also see that, drawn from, and in the midst of that universal priesthood, there must be an order of men to serve God and the Church in things spiritual, if there is not to be chaos or at least confusion in the Church. Zwingli puts it like this:

It is true we are all fully ordained to the priesthood which in the New Testament offers sacrifices, which means nothing else but that everyone offers himself. But we are not all apostles and bishops.²

The same truth is clearly stated in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566);

The Apostles of Christ indeed call all believers in Christ priests, but not by reason of a ministerial office, but because through Christ all who are the faithful, having been made kings and priests, are able to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Accordingly, there are great differences between a priesthood and a ministry. For the former is common to all Christians, as we have just now said, but the same is not so with the latter. And we have not removed the ministry out of the midst of the Church when we have cast the papistical priesthood out of the Church of Christ.³

It has been noted as significant that Calvin does not use the phrase 'priesthood of all believers,' and that, to quote

¹Luther's Primary Works (ed. Wace and Bucheim, London, 1896), p. 164

²Zwingli, Samtliche Werke, ed. Usteri and Vogelien (Zurich, 1819,20), cited, J. L. Ainslie, Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches, (Edinburgh, 1940), p. 7

³Cf. Philip Schaff, Creeds of the Evangelical Churches, p. 281

Professor J. T. McNeill in his 1961 edition of the Institutes, his "utterances on the priesthood of believers are rare and unsystematic."¹

But the significance of this has been variously interpreted. Dr. Wilhelm Niesel declares that

for Calvin's doctrine of orders the New Testament vision of the church as the body of Christ is fundamental, while the thought of the priesthood of all believers, which only too easily can be understood as a common possession of all the necessary gifts, plays no part in his doctrine.²

But, according to G. D. Henderson,

Bohatec asserts firmly that the general priesthood is taught by Calvin quite as energetically as by Luther, and Wendel in France appears to take this for granted.³

The truth seems to be that, though Calvin gives no formal expression to the doctrine, for reasons which will be noted later, he does reveal, implicitly, his belief in the priesthood of all believers, as a corollary of their union with Christ as their High Priest. Thus he writes:

Now, Christ plays the priestly role, not only to render the Father favourable and propitious toward us by an eternal law of reconciliation, but also to receive us as his companions in this great office (Rev. 1:6). For we who are defiled in ourselves, yet are priests in him, offer ourselves and our all to God, and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary that the sacrifices of prayers and praise that we bring may be acceptable and sweet-smelling before God.⁴

Here we have Calvin's most notable contribution to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He starts with the priesthood of Christ, and sees the universal priesthood of believers as dependent on it: finding their access in Him, they bring their spiritual sacrifices to God.

Calvin's implicit acceptance of the doctrine of the priesthood

¹ Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, vols xx and xxi in Library of Christian Classics (London, 1962), p. 502

² Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin (English trans., London, 1956), pp. 202f.

³ G. D. Henderson, The Priesthood of Believers, SJT, vol. 7, No. 1 (March, 1954), pp. 6,7

⁴ Institutes, II. xv. 6.

of all believers is seen in his mild protest against the use of the word 'cleric' to designate those who were given special training for the ministerial office. He writes:

All who were steeped in this preliminary training were called by the general name 'clerics.' I would have preferred them to be given a more proper name; for this appellation arose from error or at least from a wrong attitude, since Peter calls the whole church 'the clergy,' that is, the inheritance of the Lord (I Peter 5:3).¹

But again it is significant that this mild protest occurs in the midst of a section of the Institutes where Calvin is dealing specifically with the question of ministerial order.

If there is apparent inconsistency in Luther regarding the priesthood of all believers and apparent hesitancy on Calvin's part to make a formal statement of the doctrine, it must be explained by the fact that they were fighting a battle on two fronts. On the one hand, they were utterly opposed to the Roman doctrine of a sacrificing priesthood. This opposition took two forms. One was to assert unequivocally the uniqueness and complete sufficiency of the mediatorial work of Christ, which left no room whatever for mediation by human priests, or their repeated offering of a sacrifice in the celebration of the Mass.² The other was to assert equally strongly the universal priesthood of believers.³

But, on the other hand, the Reformers had to contend with the eccentricities of the Anabaptists and their interpretation of the priesthood of all believers as a denial of ministerial order

¹Institutes, IV. iv. 9

²Cf. Calvin's Short Treatise On The Lord's Supper, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, ed. T. F. Torrance, pp. 183ff: and Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), VIII. 442

³Cf. J. F. Jansen, Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ (London, 1956), pp. 45, 46: 'Calvin is anxious to find an adequate biblical foundation for the church's ministry that will preserve the principle of the priesthood of all believers while yet safeguarding the ministerial order against a Roman denial of its authenticity and an Anabaptist repudiation of church orders.' Dr. Jansen's argument is that it was to stress the teaching and preaching function of the ministry in biblical times that Calvin came to include the prophetic office in the offices of Christ, and based the prophetic role of the ministry on the prophetic office of Christ.

altogether. And this they did, as we have seen, by emphasising the need for a special ministerial order in the Church.¹

As Dr. Gösta Hök has pointed out in an article on Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry, against the Roman conception of a sacerdotal priest the Reformers used the conception of priesthood belonging to all believers: against the Anabaptists they emphasised the place of the ministerial order in the Church. And what he goes on to say of Luther is true also of Calvin:

But to conceive of this as an altered standpoint in Luther would be totally wrong, for right through his writings the ministry is found in both the extended and restricted sense.²

Having established the fact that the priesthood of believers was a Reformation doctrine, and having gone some way towards defining the sense in which doctrine should be taken, we may pass to note that, like all the doctrines which we have studied, it is

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

It is perhaps all too easy to stress the negative aspect of it. Speaking of this formula, T. W. Manson writes,

It may be suspected that some who use it most often and most emphatically mean by it something more like 'the priesthood of no believer whatsoever' or 'the non-priesthood of all believers.'³

We have seen that the doctrine does involve the denial of a particular kind of priesthood - the Roman sacerdotal priesthood. If it did nothing more than that, it would be undeniably vulnerable to the charge that in this doctrine we have nothing more than a negative reaction to the Roman priesthood. But that charge fails on two counts. First, it was not the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which was in the first instance opposed to the Roman priesthood. And, secondly, it was not against the Roman priesthood as

¹ Cf. French Confession of 1559 - 'Wherefore we abhor all fantastic people who greatly desire, so far as it lies with them, to abolish the ministry and the preaching of the Word of God and His sacraments.' Cited J. L. Ainslie, Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches, p. 9

² Gösta Hök, op. cit., SJT, vol 7, No.1 (March, 1954), pp. 16ff.

³ T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours (London, 1958), p. 40.

such that the doctrine was set.

There can be no doubt that the Reformation opposed the Roman sacerdotal priesthood. But against it the Reformers set, not the universal priesthood of believers, in the first instance at least, but the sole priesthood of Christ. That was Calvin's primary emphasis. He writes:

All who call themselves priests to offer a sacrifice of expiation do wrong to Christ. Christ was appointed and consecrated priest according to the order of Melchizedek by the Father with an oath (Psalm 110:4) (Heb. 5:6), without end, without successor (Heb. 7:3). He once for all offered a sacrifice of eternal expiation and reconciliation; now, having also entered the sanctuary of heaven, he intercedes for us. In him we are all priests (Rev. 1:6; cf. I Peter 2:9), but to offer praises and thanksgiving, in short, to offer ourselves and ours to God. It was his office alone to appease God and atone for sins by his offering. When these men take this office upon themselves, what remains but that their priesthood is impious and sacrilegious?¹

All the Reformers repudiated the Roman priesthood on this primary ground: Christ is the one Mediator between God and man. But their emphasis varied when they came to state what should take the place of the sacrificing Roman priesthood in the Church. T. W. Manson puts it too strongly when he says that

the main strains of Reformation theology are not at one regarding the priesthood of believers,²

but he is right to draw attention to the fact that they did have different emphases in dealing with this question. For the Roman

¹Institutes, IV. xix. 28

²T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours, p. 37 (footnote)

priest Calvin substituted the corporate priesthood of the Church? Luther had the same thought, but as well he stressed the replacement of the Roman Catholic priesthood by a ministry of preaching,² and a ministry of prayer.³ It was, however, the doctrine of the sole priesthood of Christ, not the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that was in the first instance set in opposition to the Roman priesthood.

Against what, then, was the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers set? Among his list of contrasts between Protestantism and Romanism Philip Schaff puts the following:

Protestantism is the Church of the Christian people; Romanism is the Church of priests, and separates them by education, celibacy, and even by their dress as widely as possible from the laity.⁴

There we come to the crux of the matter so far as this doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is concerned. It is a protest

¹Cf. T. F. Torrance, Royal Priesthood (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 35: "The expression 'priesthood of all believers' is an unfortunate one as it carries with it a ruinous individualism." Dr. Ernest Best in an article on 'Spiritual Sacrifice: General Priesthood in The New Testament' in Interpretation - A Journal of Bible and Theology - (Union Theological Seminary, Virginia), vol. XIV, July, 1960, No. 3, takes issue with Professor Torrance on the conception of corporate priesthood, and from a careful study of the relevant N.T. passages concludes that "the New Testament evidence cannot then be said to suggest that priesthood is corporate or belongs to the church as church and not to the members composing the church." (op. cit., p. 296). Dr. Best agrees that the extreme individualistic emphasis is also wrong, and suggests the term 'general priesthood' as doing justice to both points of view that Christians as individuals are priests "but only in association with other priests." (op. cit., p. 297). That expresses Calvin's view precisely.

²Cf. Gösta Hök, Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry, SJT., vol. 7, No. 1 (March, 1954), pp. 16, 17, 21

³Cf. B. L. Woolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, vol. I (London, 1952), pp. 365ff.

⁴Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, p. 208.

against the separation of the clergy and the laity. It is not merely a negative reaction against the sacerdotal claims of the Roman priesthood - the sole priesthood of Christ, with all that follows from it, is the counter to that error - but a positive assertion of the rights and responsibilities of the laity.

The words 'laity' and 'layman' have had an extraordinary history. The basic meaning of 'laity' is 'people of God.'¹ To be a layman is to possess the privilege of those of whom it is written, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people....which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God."² But the Church which coined the word was the first to debase it until now, when a man wishes to disclaim any expert knowledge, he says, 'I'm only a layman.' The word has come to mean a novice, an amateur. How did this degeneration occur?

It was very early in the history of the Church that a clearly marked distinction came to be made between the members of the Church and its officers. And behind that lay the fatal conception of a double standard. As the Church became more and more secularized - which happened as Christianity became more and more an official religion - it came to be realised that the high standard which the New Testament set for church members could never be applied to the worldly people who were flocking into the Church. The Church, therefore, to meet the situation, evolved this conception of a double standard - a maximum and minimum standard of obedience. The maximum was represented by a rigorous monasticism, which demanded complete separation from the world as a protest against the secularization of Christianity: the minimum asked little more than formal acquiescence in the worship of the Church and an unqualified obedience to its supremacy. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written in The Cost of Discipleship:³

¹ λαος θεος

² I Peter 2. 9, 10

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (2nd. ed. 1960).

By limiting the application of the commandments of Jesus to a restricted group of specialists, the Church evolved the fatal conception of the double standard - a maximum and a minimum standard of Christian obedience. Whenever the Church was accused of being too secularized, it could always point to monasticism as an opportunity of living a higher life within the fold, and thus justify the other possibility of a lower standard of life for others. And so we get the paradoxical result that monasticism, whose mission was to preserve in the Church of Rome the primitive realisation of the costliness of grace, afforded conclusive justification for the secularization of the Church. By and large, the fatal error of monasticism lay not so much in its rigorism... as in the extent to which it departed from genuine Christianity by setting up itself as the individual achievement of a select few, and so claiming a special merit of its own.¹

It is no less paradoxical that monasticism, which began as a lay movement of protest eventually became more ecclesiastical than the Church itself!

From the very beginning of the Church there was the danger that distinctions might be drawn between different ranks within the Church. Christ had given clear warning:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.²

But before the end of the first century, we find that the necessity had arisen for the counsel of I Peter 5. 3 - "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." It is noteworthy that Peter applies the word from which 'clergy' is derived³ not to the elders who have oversight of the flock but to the congregation. But very soon afterwards we find the first use of the noble title 'people of God'⁴ - the laity - to describe a class inferior to the 'clergy', when Clement of Rome about 96 A.D. specifically stated the fateful distinction between clergy and laity:

¹ op. cit., pp. 40, 41

² Luke 22. 25

³ κληρος

⁴ λαος Θεου

The high priest is given his particular duties: the priests are assigned their special place, while on the Levites particular tasks are imposed. The layman is bound by the layman's code.¹

It is important to note, however, that Clement does treat the laity as an order: the distinction is not yet so much a distinction of rank as a distinction of function. But the cleavage between clergy and laity widened, and became more and more marked, as the sacrifices of the worshipper came more and more to be linked with the Eucharist. Side by side with the idea of the Eucharist as a sacrifice went the idea that the minister of the Eucharist is the priest. By the end of the second century, Tertullian described the officiating bishop as summus sacerdos, the high priest, and a little later Cyprian transferred the phraseology of the Levitical law to Christian institutions, and worked out a series of equations in which Christ Himself is the new High Priest, "summus sacerdos Dei Patris," the Christian bishop takes the place of the Jewish priest, while the presbyters and deacons represent the Levitical tribe. The office of the bishop is primarily a sacrificial office, as was that of the Jewish priests.² The consequence of that was, as has been pointed out by T. W. Manson,

that there is here a parting of the ways: priesthood is on the way to be completely bound up with the right of a specialized group within the Church to offer the eucharistic sacrifice of bread and cup identified with the body and blood of Christ. The priesthood of all believers, on the other hand, is on the way to become a godly sentiment with little or no relevance to the day-to-day practice of the Church at worship.³

A. Mitchell Hunter links State establishment of the Church with sacramentarianism as reasons for the widening gulf between clergy and laity. He writes,

The advance of sacramentarianism and State establishment intensified the distinction which thus arose between clergy

¹Clement's First Letter, in Early Christian Fathers, vol I in Library of Christian Classics, 40. 5, p. 62

²Cf. J. H. Bernard, The Early History of the Church and Ministry ed. H. B. Swete, p. 228 (cited T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood, p. 68).

³T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours

and laity or priests and people. The direction of ecclesiastical affairs, the discharge of ecclesiastical functions, the cure of souls, fell entirely into the hands of the former, laymen being left without say or control.¹

That cleavage is still characteristic of the Roman Church. An encyclical of Pope Pius X in 1906 declared,

The Church is the mystical Body of Christ, a Body ruled by pastors and teachers, a society of men headed by rulers having full and perfect powers of governing, instructing, and judging. It follows that this Church is essentially an unequal society, that is to say, a society comprising two categories of persons; pastors and the flock; those who hold rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. And these categories are so distinct in themselves that in the pastoral body alone reside the necessary right and authority to guide and direct all the members towards the goal of the society. As for the multitude, it has no other right than that of allowing itself to be led, and, as a docile flock, to follow its shepherds.²

That is the very antithesis of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, re-discovered at the Reformation, to give the laity their rightful place in the Church after fourteen centuries of increasing limitation of their rights and privileges. The false double standard of Romanism was swept away, and men, in their privileges and in their responsibilities, stood on one level before God.

The practical applications of this doctrine are further evidence of its positive character. They have perhaps never been more challengingly stated than by A. M. Fairbairn, when he wrote more than half a century ago:

Over against their official priesthood let us place the spiritual priesthood, the office and the function at once common and sacred to all believers....Let us feel, every man of us, that we are priests, standing before God for men, before men for God. Let us create in our Churches the feeling that they are priestly bodies, where every man by watching and prayer, ~~par~~ by personal communion with God and loving intercourse

¹A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 204

²cited, James Bulloch, The Kirk in Scotland, (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 133f.

with men, can help to work the reconciliation of humanity and God. Over against their organized sacerdotal society, let us place our Christian brotherhood, our commonwealth of saints, where every man is free to exercise all his rights and bound to fulfil his every duty. And finally, over against their theory of the continuity of the apostolic succession, let us set our faith in the continuity of religious life, which makes us possess the truth and hold communion with the saints of all the churches, share in and sympathize with all the good of all ages.¹

Let us examine, therefore, some of the practical implications of this great Reformation doctrine.

1. Access to God. All believers are priests in their right of direct access to God in prayer. The chief responsibility of the Old Testament priesthood was to appear in the presence of God on behalf of the people. Only the high priest, and he only once a year, could pull aside the great veil of blue and purple and scarlet that hung before the Holy of Holies and enter into the Divine presence; the way was barred to all others. But in the moment of Christ's death that veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, as though God Himself were saying, "The way of access lies open, and whosoever will may come." No human mediation is any longer required: Christ "hath made us...priests unto God and His Father."² "The priesthood of all believers," to quote T. M. Lindsay again,

is the right of every believing man and woman, whether lay or cleric, to go to God directly with confession seeking pardon, with ignorance seeking enlightenment, with solitary loneliness seeking fellowship, with frailty and weakness seeking strength for daily holy living.³

But it should not be overlooked that the priestly function of prayer should not be limited to self-seeking. Intercessory prayer is the believer's highest privilege. Professor Gordon Rupp declares that the heart of the priesthood of all believers for Luther

lies in no individualist conception of private judgment, or

¹A. M. Fairbairn, Studies in Religion and Theology, p. 138

²Revelation 1. 6

³T. M. Lindsay, The Reformation, pp. 185,6

the denial of priesthood altogether, but rather that solidarity of Christian communion expressed in the ministry of intercession.¹

Luther himself states this in noble terms:

In addition, we are priests, and thus greater than mere kings, the reason being that priesthood makes us worthy to stand before God, and pray for others. For to stand before God's face is the prerogative of none except priests. Christ redeemed us that we might be able spiritually to act and pray on behalf of one another just as, in fact, a priest acts and prays on behalf of the people...²

Calvin has the same thought. In exercising the ministry of intercession we must lay aside all our selfish personal considerations and "clothe ourselves with a public character."³ Dr. Ronald S. Wallace summarises Calvin's teaching here:

It is as members of the body of Christ, sharing in the intercession and priesthood of the Head, that we are inspired with love to make our intercessions. Our intercession...is our expression of our unity with one another in the body of the Church and with our great High Priest and Head.⁴

In the Reformed Faith there is no such thing as a detached individual. Man comes before God as an individual, only to find that he is a member of a community, sharing the same new and living way by which he has come. And so the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has relevance not merely to the personal experience of the individual as he accepts the privilege of direct access to God: this doctrine is of far wider application than the drawing near to God of individual believers.

2. Family Religion. The first society in which man finds himself is the home; and it is noteworthy that one of the consequences of the re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers at the Reformation was a great revival of family religion. The full impact of this was perhaps not felt in the early days of the

¹Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms (1951), p. 88

²B. L. Woolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, vol. I (1952), p. 366

³Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 20. 2

⁴Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 289.

Reformation: at least, references to it in the writings of the Reformers are comparatively rare. But Calvin in "a letter to his dear and very excellent friend, N.S.," published in 1537 with the title, On Shunning the Unlawful Rites of the Ungodly and Preserving the Purity of the Christian Religion¹, gives careful injunctions for family religion:

Then you must be particularly careful in regulating your household, over which you should consider that you have been set, not merely that each may yield you obedience and service, but be religiously brought up in the fear of the Lord, and imbued with the best discipline....Wherefore, if the first requisite in a good householder is to manage his household rightly, and in order - and the household of a Christian man can then only be considered duly arranged, when it exhibits the appearance of a little Bethel - it must be your careful endeavour not to leave yours ignorant or devoid of piety.²

A similar letter of John Knox's in 1556 - A letter of wholesome counsel addressed to his brethren in Scotland - gives similar advice. In it he reminded the heads of families that within their own houses they are bishops and kings, their bishopric and kingdom being their wives, children and servants. He wrote,

Let your tongues learn to praise the gracious goodness of Him Whose mere mercy hath called you from darkness to light. All within the household are to be made

partakers in reading and exhorting and in making common prayers, which I would in every house were used once a day at least.³

Later generations showed the impact of the Reformed Faith on family religion. Writing on 'The Puritans' in Christian Worship (ed. Nathaniel Micklem), A. G. Matthews says,

Public worship had its appointed times and places; on other occasions, whether as a conscious revival or not, they followed the early Christian example of the 'church in the

¹ Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III. (ed. T. F. Torrance, Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 359ff.

² ibid., pp. 408, 9

³ The Works of John Knox (ed. David Laing), vol. IV. 129-140

house.' In many seventeenth-century homes there was a daily religious observance which in its fullness and regularity suggests a comparison with monastic discipline. But it was monastic with the notable difference that it was associated with family life. The institution of the family was given a new significance by the men of the Reformed Faith. The covenant is for you and for your children, so ran the Scripture used at baptism, and this carried with it further implications of family solidarity in Christ. The head of the household was held answerable for the spiritual welfare of all beneath his roof.¹

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland which in 1647 approved the Westminster Confession of Faith also approved 'The Directory for Family Worship' with specific directions for its conduct, beginning,

Beside the publick worship in congregations, mercifully established in this land in great purity, it is expedient and necessary that secret worship of each person alone, and private worship of families, be pressed and set up; that, with national reformation, the profession and power of godliness, both personal and domestic, be advanced.²

The fruit of these directions is seen in a description of religious life in Scotland in the seventeenth century which declares that

. you could not, for a great part of the country, have lodged in a family where the Lord was not worshipped by reading, singing and publick prayer.³

A century later Robert Burns in "The Cottar's Saturday Night" gave a picture of a family religion that was characteristic of the humble Scottish homes of his day:

The chearfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace
The big Ha' Bible, ance his father's pride.
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside
His lyart haffets wearing thin and bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care,
And 'Let us worship God' he says, with solemn air.

....

The priest-like father reads the sacred page....

¹Christian Worship, ed. N. Micklem (Oxford, 1936), p. 184

²Confession of Faith, etc., (Belfast, 1933), p. 322

³The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland, from the Restoration to the year 1678, by the Rev. James Kirkton.

It was from its Reformed Faith that Scotland learned that every man could be a priest in his own house; and it is significant that we still speak of 'the family altar' when we refer to worship in the home.

3. Public Worship. The re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers at the Reformation meant in public worship the active participation of the worshippers. In medieval worship both the ceremonial and the language were unintelligible to the laity. The whole emphasis was on seeing rather than on hearing. The people were unable to follow the prayers of the priest, since they were offered in Latin, and in any case were almost wholly inaudible: the responses were made by the priest's assistants and not by the congregation as a whole. In the mass, for the most part, only the priest received the sacrament, on behalf of the people: the laity never received the cup. All this meant that the congregation had no active part in the offering of public worship: they were merely passive spectators.

But all this was radically altered in a reformation of worship which recognised the rights and privileges of the laity. Of fundamental significance was the fact that the language used was the vernacular, "spoken in a strong clear voice."¹ The congregation were no longer spectators: they were hearers; and, hearing, they understood, for the words were in their own tongue. The people were encouraged to share in the worship as active participants, and worship became once more a corporate action. It was in effect the re-discovery of the congregation.

In every part of the worship of the Reformed Church - praise, prayer, preaching and the observance of the Sacraments - the active co-operation of the laity was most carefully safeguarded.

Praise. Congregational singing occupied a unique place in Reformed worship. Certainly, in medieval worship, hymns had been

¹W. D. Maxwell, Worship in the Church of Scotland (1955), p. 49

used in the Mass and in the Offices of the Hours, but these were monastic, belonging almost exclusively to the clerks in the choir, and forming no part of the devotions of the congregation. Luther, Calvin and Bucer in particular made the singing of hymns and metrical psalms a distinctively congregational act of worship, and an expression of congregational fellowship.¹

For Luther, congregational praise was the response of the congregation to the proclamation of the Gospel. At times, perhaps, he overdid the use of singing as a medium of instruction: in his Preface to the German Mass (1526) he declared himself in favour of the singing of Latin and even Hebrew and Greek in the ordinary services of the Church on the ground of the instruction conveyed to youth by that means!² But it is by his vernacular hymns that he is best remembered, and these played a vital part in expressing the German people's response to the Gospel. His Church songs, issued in 1524, form, says A. Mitchell Hunter, "the first known collection of Christian hymns and metrical Psalms with music."³

Calvin, like Luther, unhesitatingly affirmed the place of singing in public worship, though, unlike him, he insisted that no language should be tolerated in the sanctuary but the language of the people who worshipped there; and he had a very decided preference for the Psalms, whose divine inspiration fitted them to be the most perfect expression of the complex feelings of the human soul. He declares,

When we have sought all round, looking here and there, we shall find no songs better and more suitable for this end than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit dictated and gave to him; and therefore when we sing them, we are certain God has put words into our mouths as if He himself sang within us to exalt His glory.⁴

¹It is surprising that Zwingli, a better musician than any of them, left no place for singing in Church. Cf. Christian Worship (ed. N. Micklem), pp. 142, 164

²Cf. Christian Worship (ed. N. Micklem), p. 124

³A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 280

⁴from Calvin, Preface to Psalms, cited A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 282.

Psalm-singing became an outstanding feature of the Genevan Church, whose example was followed by the Scottish Church and all the churches of the Presbyterian tradition. And there, Calvin maintained, he was only reverting to the practice of the Early Church. He writes,

It is evident that the practice of singing in church...is not only a very ancient ~~one~~ but also was in use among the apostles.¹

The little church in Strassbourg, ministered to by Bucer and Calvin, we are told, was remarkable for ~~the~~ its hearty congregational singing. In 1545 a Walloon student in Strasbourg wrote to a friend in Antwerp that he had been unable to refrain from weeping for joy during the first days of his sojourn there when all, men and women, joined together in the psalmody.

You would not believe the joy that is experienced in singing the praises of the Lord in the mother tongue, as is done here. Every one has in his hand a book of music.²

Congregational singing by all the worshippers was characteristic of the worship of the Reformed Church.

Prayer. Calvin follows his section on 'church singing' with an insistence that public prayer should be in the language of the people.

Public prayers must be couched not in Greek among the Latins, nor in Latin among the French or English, as has heretofore been the custom, but in the language of the people, which can be generally understood by the whole assembly. For this ought to be done for the edification of the whole church, which receives no benefit at all from a sound not understood....Who can marvel enough, then, at the unbridled licence of the papists, who...are not afraid to make their wordy prayers resound in a foreign language, of which they themselves often understand not one syllable, and do not wish others to understand either.³

It was in the field of public prayer that the English Reformation made its most distinctive contribution to Reformed worship.

¹Institutes III, xx. 32

²cited J. T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (2nd printing, 1957, New York), p. 147

³Institutes, III. xx. 33.

The publication of the Book of Common Prayer - 'Common', because for the use of all worshippers - in 1549 meant that the services of the Church were now within the reach of the laity, and that the whole congregation was able to participate actively in the various acts of worship. And this, once more, was a return to primitive practice. In a recent work on Thomas Cranmer, Dr. Jasper Ridley writes,

In Cranmer's eyes, his Book of Common Prayer merely purged the services of the innovations which had crept in during recent centuries, and returned to the old practices of the primitive church, while the translation of the mass into the vernacular enabled the people to understand its meaning.¹

The aim of the English Reformers is expressed in the preface to the first English litany:

And such among the people as have books and can read ~~them~~ may read them quietly and softly to themselves, and such as cannot read, let them quietly and attentively give audience in time of the said prayer, having their minds erect to Almighty God and devoutly praying in their hearts the same petitions which do enter in at their ears so that with one sound of the heart and with one accord God may be glorified in His Church.²

Dr. Constantin Hopf has shown the important part that Martin Bucer played in the revision of the Book of Common Prayer in 1552.³ Commenting on passages in the First Book, Bucer is insistent that the congregation should take an active part in worship.

People have to be taught to say the responses, which they do not. All ought to recite the prayer 'We do not presume' and the Thanksgiving after...together with the priest.⁴

Bucer objects to the segregation of the choir: he declares

that it was an anti-Christian practice for the choir to be severed from the rest of the church, and for the prayers there only to be said, which pertained to the people as well

¹ Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer (Oxford, 1962), p. 289

² cited, Cyril Eastwood, The Priesthood of All Believers, (London, 1960), p. 99.

³ Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation (Oxford, 1946)

⁴ ibid., p. 65

as to the clergy; that the separation of the choir from the body ~~of~~ of the church served for nothing else, but to get the clergy some respect above the laity, as if they were nearer to God than laymen are: that a pernicious superstition was thereby maintained, as if priests alone were able to procure God's favour, by reading and reciting a few prayers.¹

Not all Bucer's suggestions were accepted, but his stress on increased congregational participation is of the utmost significance. Whatever else the service-book might be, it must be the Book of Common Prayer.

The congregation's sharing in public prayer in the worship of other branches of the Reformed Church was ensured by some use of liturgical prayers. Calvin had his Liturgy, and was accustomed to repeat the same prayer before and after the sermon: Knox compiled a liturgy for the Scottish Church. And the scene in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, where Jenny Geddes is said to have figured so prominently, was not incited by the fact that the Dean that day read his prayers from a prayer-book: the congregation had just listened without objection to the Reader reading the old prayers from the "Book of Common Order" for the last time. "The real objection," writes Professor John M. Barkley, in his book Presbyterianism,

was twofold; first, because it was alien to the custom and use of the Church of Scotland, and second, because the prayers in it were invariable, whereas the old Liturgy provided optional variants for all prayers, and even allowed the prayers themselves to be altered.²

The Reformed service of Calvin, moreover, as A. Mitchell Hunter has pointed out, was by no means all of liturgical cast, opportunity being given for 'free prayer.' This 'free prayer' became more and more the practice of the churches that followed the Genevan pattern. But here, too, the intelligent co-operation of the congregation was ensured by the use of the "People's 'Amen'."

¹Constantin Hopf, Martin Bucer and the English Reformation, p. 67

²John M. Barkley, Presbyterianism (Belfast, 1951), p. 51

Professor Barkley writes,

In the early church the people responded "Amen" at the end of each prayer. The same practice was followed in the Church of Scotland after the Reformation, but later died out due to innovators. It is sacerdotalism and^a perversion of worship to allow the Minister alone to say "Amen" as an indication that the prayer is ended. It is a latinized Hebrew word, meaning "so be it," which from the earliest days of the Christian Church has been the people's assent to prayer, this linking them with the prayers offered in their name.¹

The Reformers considered it vital that in public prayer the whole congregation should actively pray.

. Preaching. In preaching, no less than in praise and prayer, the participation of the people in worship was carefully attended to. Preaching was an essential part of the Reformed Faith. The Roman Catholic ministry is the ministry of a sacrificing priesthood: the Reformed ministry is the ministry of the Word. Luther declares,

Anyone entrusted with the ministry of the Word receives the highest ministry in Christianity, and after receiving it he may baptise, celebrate Mass, and have the cure of souls. If, however, he chooses to confine himself to preaching, he can let others administer baptism and attend to the lower functions, as Christ, Paul, and all the apostles did.²

And Calvin writes,

As God was of old not content with the law alone, but added priests as interpreters from whose lips the people might ask its true meaning (cf. Mal. 2:7), so today he not only desires us to be attentive to its reading, but also appoints instructors to help us by their effort.³

Calvin was concerned that adequate preaching should be provided in England. He wrote to the Duke of Somerset in 1548:

There is some danger that you may see no great profit from all the reformation which you shall have brought about,

¹ John M. Barkley, Presbyterianism, p. 53

² quoted, Gösta Håk, Luther's Doctrine of the Ministry in Scottish Journal of Theology, vol. 7, No. 1, p. 17

³ Institutes IV. i. 5

however ~~strong~~ sound and godly it may have been, unless this powerful instrument be developed more and more.¹

It must not be overlooked that for all the Reformers the glory of God and the edification of their hearers were the end and aim of preaching. For illustration, let it suffice to quote from the section 'Of the Preaching of the Word' in the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God. The preacher

is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers; which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, Zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest and give glory to God....The servant of Christ is to perform his whole ministry...plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.²

The great work of the preacher was to teach his hearers, and the aim of his endeavour was the edification of the whole congregation, who had, therefore, a very real share in the part of the service that was concerned with preaching.

The Sacraments. In the Sacraments, no less than in the other parts of public worship, participation by the laity was made by the Reformers an essential feature. Baptism for Luther was the rite by which all believers were consecrated as priests,³ and, more than that, it was a rite in which every member of a believing congregation had a responsible part. Dealing with infant baptism,

¹ cited, A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 209

² A Directory for the Public Worship of God, 1645, in Confession of Faith, etc., (Belfast, 1933), pp. 288ff.

³ B. L. Woolf (ed.), Reformation Writings of Martin Luther vol. I, (London, 1952), p. 113

he wrote,

On this matter I agree with everyone in saying that infants are helped by vicarious faith: the faith of those who present them for Baptism....Further, all things are possible in response to the prayers of a believing Church when it presents the infant, and this is changed, cleansed, and renewed, by their infused faith....¹

Here again the use of the vernacular was imperative.

In the early days of Elizabeth the re-introduction of English was defended on two grounds: first, that the apostles themselves had used the language of the people, and, second, that 'since the sacraments are sermons of the death and resurrection of Christ, they must be had in such language as the people may perceive, otherwise they should be had in vain.'²

When Ridley conceded, as he had to, that baptism in Latin is valid, Latimer declared emphatically,

Surely I would wish that you had spoken more vehemently, and to have said, 'It is of necessity' - i.e. the use of English - 'for the edifying and comfort of them that are present.'³

In the case of the Lord's Supper the Reformers all protested most vigorously against the Romanist denial of the cup to the laity, for this made an intolerable cleavage between clergy and laity. Luther declared,

In the matter of the mass and the sacraments, we are all equals, whether priests or laity.⁴

At the Eucharist,

our priest or minister stands before the altar, having been publicly called to his priestly function; he repeats publicly and distinctly Christ's words of the institution; he takes the Bread and Wine, and distributes it according to Christ's words; and we all kneel beside him and around him,

¹B. L. Woolf, ed., Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, vol. I, p. 271

²G. Burnet, A History of the Reformation of the Church of England (ed. Oxford, 1829), III. 3, quoted, G. W. Bromiley, Baptism and the Anglican Reformers, 1953

³Ridley, Works (Parker Society ed.), p. 140, cited G. W. Bromiley, ibid., p. 144

⁴B. L. Woolf, ed., Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, vol. I, p. 244.

men and women, young and old, master and servant, mistress and maid, all holy priests together, sanctified by the blood of Christ. We are there in our priestly dignity.¹

Calvin had the same view as Luther of the importance of the active participation of the laity in the Sacraments, and stressed as well the need of instructing the worshippers so that they might understand the meaning of what they did. He said,

We have brought back into our Churches the ancient custom of accompanying the administration of the sacraments with an explanation of the doctrine contained in it.²

This was something in which all the people shared; and therefore all the people must understand what it is they do.

Thus in praise, prayer, preaching and the sacraments the Reformers made public worship a priestly act of the whole congregation.

4. Church Government. In Germany and England the Reformation meant the giving of some authority in church government into the hands of the laity, but the share was still a subordinate and limited one. Calvin, on the contrary, "consistently with his view regarding the common priesthood of believers...restored to laymen a position in church government which they had not held since primitive days."³ They were given seats of equal authority with the clergy in the church courts, and played their part in the supervision of church life and in the determination of creed and policy. It is possible that, as Jaques Courvoisier argues,⁴ this emphasis on the eldership was derived from Bucer's system in Strasbourg of having a board of lay workers (Kirchenpfleger), to co-operate with the ministers in visitation, discipline and church government. Certainly both in Geneva and Strasbourg a vital place in church government was occupied by the laymen.

John Knox gave a similar place to the laity of the Scottish Church. In his John Knox and his Gifts to Scotland, Professor

¹ quoted from Luther by T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol.

² Calvin, The Necessity of Reforming the Church, in Calvin's^I, p. 444
Tracts and Treatises, vol. I, p. 169

³ A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 204

⁴ Jaques Courvoisier, La notion d'Eglise chez Bucer dans son développement historique, Paris, 1933.

James S. McEwen gives an excellent summary of Knox's contribution in this field:

In the long years when the Scottish Reformation was still struggling towards expression, there were few preachers to guide or shepherd the scattered groups of believers, laymen, perforce, had to shoulder much of the responsibility. Knox took the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers seriously, more seriously than any of the other great reformers; and it was by his genius that this lay leadership was fostered and given its permanent place in the Scottish Church. He made provision for a study-group technique in which laymen could be encouraged to study and to think for themselves, and to express their own minds. To the humblest groups of laymen he gave the right to choose and call their own ministers and to elect annually the office-bearers who would manage the affairs of the congregation. To the laity he gave equal rights in the Church's courts to determine the Church's life, its doctrine, its policy. He made the common man feel that the Church was his Church, in which he had his own place and dignity, and for the well-being of which he was directly responsible.¹

In all the churches of the Reformation laymen rose nobly to the responsibilities which were laid upon them, and worthily took their share of the service which true insight has seen in every age to be the concern of every member of the Church.

5. Vocation. It would be a serious minimising of the greatness of the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to leave the impression that it is concerned only with the worship and service of the Church. Perhaps one of the greatest contributions made by the Reformed Faith was the doctrine of Divine vocation. Every believer is a priest, not merely in that he is called to worship God in the sanctuary, but in that he is called to serve God wherever God has set him. Every Christian is a priest in his daily vocation.

Luther held this view and applied it particularly to the duties of civil rulers. He said,

¹James S. McEwen, John Knox and his Gifts to Scotland
(Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 10, 11.

Those who exercise secular authority have been baptised like the rest of us, and have the same faith and the same Gospel; therefore we must admit that they are priests and bishops. They discharge their office as an office of the Christian community, and for the benefit of the community...¹

And he goes on,

Those now called 'the religious,' i.e., priests, bishops, and popes, possess no further or greater dignity than other Christians, except that their duty is to expound the word of God and administer the sacraments - that being their office. In the same way the secular authorities 'hold the sword and the rod', their function being to punish evil-doers and protect the law-abiding.²

T. M. Lindsay summarises Luther's view of vocation like this:

Luther asserted that men and women living their lives in the family, in the workshop, in the civic world, held their position there, not by a kind of indirect permission wrung from God out of His compassion for human frailties, but by as direct a vocation as called a man to what by mistake had been deemed the only 'religious life.'³

But it was Calvin who made the greatest contribution to this aspect of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. A man is a priest because he finds his 'calling' in God.

The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling....Each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentrypost so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life...It is enough if we know that the Lord's calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of well-doing.... From this will arise also a singular consolation: that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight.⁴

Calvin does not go so far as to suggest that if a man is born in one station or calling in life he cannot seek to change it.

He writes,

¹B. L. Woolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, vol. I, p.114

²ibid., pp. 115,6

³T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, p. 443

⁴Institutes, III. x. 6

It would be a very hard thing if a tailor were not at liberty to learn another trade, or if a merchant were not at liberty to betake himself to farming.¹

But each individual must realise that he is called by God to fulfil some useful task in the society where he is set. And all of it must be considered as service done to the Lord.

If the chambermaid and the manservant go about their domestic tasks offering themselves in their work as a sacrifice to God, then what they do is accepted by God as a holy and pure sacrifice pleasing in His sight.²

This teaching of Calvin's strikes at the foundation of the separation between sacred and secular, clergy and laity. "Those who teach the superiority of a 'contemplative life' to a life of toil teach falsely."³ So we have in Calvin's doctrine of Vocation the exalting of daily work, and the giving to every detail of life a potential religious significance. There we have the climax of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, when a man brings his daily work and presents it as his offering on the altar of God's service.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

It will have been apparent again and again in the foregoing discussion of the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that the tenets of the Reformers were a return to primitive belief and practice, and particularly to the belief and practice of the New Testament. But the most explicit New Testament statement of the priesthood of all believers - in I Peter 2. 9 and Revelation 1. 5,6; 1,10; 20.6 - sends us immediately back to the Old Testament. Peter's reference to "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," and the references ~~ix~~ in the Apocalypse to "a kingdom of priests" are

¹ Calvin's Commentary on I Cor. 7.20, cited by Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life (Edin. 1959), p. 154

² Calvin, Sermon on I Cor. 10. 31 - 11.1, cited from Calvin's Works, Corpus Reformatorum (Brunswick 1869-96) by Ronald S. Wallace, op. cit., p. 155

³ Calvin, Commentary on Luke 10. 38, cited Ronald S. Wallace, ibid., p. 155.

directly derived from Exodus 19. 5,6:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people....and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.¹

The whole body of Israel shared in this royal priesthood. The rights and privileges of this universal priesthood were not limited by the fact that there was given to Israel a sacrificing priesthood within the royal priesthood, in the tribe of Levi, and within the family of Aaron, to carry out the special religious functions of their office.² Indeed, it should be noted that originally the father of a household in Israel could offer sacrifice "in somewhat the same way that the head of any Christian household can conduct family worship."³ The parallel to the Reformed conception ~~and~~ of priesthood and ministry, and particularly to Luther's views, is obvious.

Dr. Ernest Best points out that in Israel side by side with the institutional priesthood there was what he accurately calls a 'general priesthood,' with the right of access to God and offering spiritual sacrifices to Him - spiritual sacrifices which "were often valued more highly than those of the levitical cultus."⁴ The ordinary Israelite may not have been called a priest: he scarcely could be, so long as the levitical priesthood remained. But

once the New Israel had come into being and the levitical priesthood had been done away in Christ...every Christian was a priest.⁵

T. W. Manson draws attention to the fact that

priests in Israel had as perhaps their primary task the receiving, transmitting, preserving and interpreting of divine revelation.⁶

¹Exodus 19. 5,6

²Cf. T. F. Torrance, Royal Priesthood (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 81

³Cf. W. Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments, vol. I (1933). p. 211, cited T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood, p. 52

⁴Ernest Best, Spiritual Sacrifice: General Priesthood in the New Testament, in Interpretation (Union Theological Seminary, Virginia), vol. XIV, No. 3, July 1960, p. 299

⁵ibid.,

⁶T. W. Manson, ~~Exixixixix~~ Ministry and Priesthood, p. 52

So the task of the tribe of Levi, as indicated in the "Blessing of Moses," was:

They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.¹

As Buchanan Gray puts it in his Sacrifice in the Old Testament:

Priests were from the first, and most conspicuously in the earlier periods, recipients, organs of revelation.²

But this function - perhaps corresponding roughly to preaching in the New Testament Church - was increasingly overwhelmed by a purely sacerdotal function, which set them quite apart from their brethren in the general priesthood, and, after the Exile, made them into a high-priestly hierarchy.

It was the general priesthood that was re-discovered in the Apostolic Church, as distinct from the institutional priesthood whose special functions lay in the realm of sacrifice. It is significant that in the lists of church officers in I Corinthians 12. 23 - 30 and Ephesians 4. 11,12 there is no mention of an order of priests. When "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith,"³ there is no suggestion that they exercised any function as priests in the new fellowship into which they came. There was no further need of such priests, for Christ, our great High Priest, had made His offering for sin, once and for all.⁴

But the function of the general priesthood was, as we see from I Peter 2. 9 and the passages cited from the Apocalypse,⁵ transferred from Israel to the whole Christian Church. There was still a ministerial order ~~in~~ within that general priesthood,⁶ but the task of Christian witness and service was committed to all alike. We have seen that the movement towards a distinction between

¹Deuteronomy 33.10

²Buchanan Gray, Sacrifice in the Old Testament (1925), p. 200

³Acts 6. 7

⁴Hebrews 10. 11,12

⁵supra, p. 248

⁶Ephesians 4

clergy and laity began very early, but it seems clear that in the Apostolic Age, to quote F. J. Foakes-Jackson,

the laity seem to have exercised almost the same powers as the clergy. The Spirit manifested Himself in almost every member of the Christian body.¹

"The manifestation of the Spirit," says Paul in his discussion of spiritual gifts, "is given ~~to~~ every man to profit withal."² All the members alike had a share in the work and organisation and witness of the Church: and the contribution of each part made up the whole. Our very word 'member' comes from Paul's famous metaphor in I Corinthians 12, where he speaks of the church as a body made up of many limbs, many members, all of which have a function to perform and a service to render. "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."³

Again and again in the Book of the Acts we find what Dr. Halford E. Luccock has called 'Inspired Amateurs',⁴ taking the gospel with them wherever they went. As Harnack has put it,

The most numerous and successful missionaries of the Christian religion were not the regular teachers but Christians themselves, by dint of their loyalty and courage....We cannot hesitate to believe that the very great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries.⁵

T. W. Manson pictures it vividly:

The Christianity that conquered the Roman Empire was not an affair of brilliant preachers addressing packed congregations.... When we try to picture how it was done we seem to see domestic servants teaching Christ in and through their domestic service, work~~ers~~ doing it through their work, small shopkeepers through their trade, and so on, rather than eloquent propagandists swaying mass meetings of interested inquirers.⁶

In the realm of church government decisions were made and action taken by the whole community.⁷

¹F. J. Foakes-Jackson, History of the Christian Church to A.D.461,

²I Corinthians 12. 7 ³I Corinthians 12. 27 p. 211

⁴Halford E. Luccock, Acts of the Apostles, vol. 2 (1939), p. 52

⁵A. Harnack, Expansion of Christianity (1904), vol. i, pp. 458-460

⁶T. W. Manson, Ministry and Priesthood, p. 21

⁷E.g. Acts 6.2.

So far as worship was concerned, it is of interest to note that the practice of the early church, with active participation by all the members,¹ re-discovered at the Reformation, was in itself no new discovery, but was in a large measure adapted from the worship of the synagogue. The synagogue, not the Temple, supplied the mould and model for the worship of the Christian Church.² The prayers of the synagogue, for example, were said by a single individual chosen for the purpose, named 'the deputy of the congregation'; and at the end of each collect the congregation made the prayer their own by repeating the 'Amen.' Paul's warning that prayer in an unknown tongue would prevent this 'Amen' arising from the other worshippers at the giving of thanks - I Corinthians 14. 16 - is evidence that this practice was taken over into the Christian Church.

To ensure that the Old Testament readings in the synagogue were understood by the common people, they were translated into Aramaic, the language of Palestine in New Testament times, by an interpreter, and into Greek in the Dispersion.

The sermon consisted of exposition or 'teaching,' and any member of the community had liberty to speak: when a likely stranger was present, he was invited by the ruler of the synagogue to address the congregation, as Paul was at Pisidian Antioch.² So there came into the Christian Church from the worship of the synagogue a truly democratic ideal of worship: all men were brethren and the only Lord was Christ. It was that democratic ideal of worship that was re-discovered at the Reformation in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

We have seen how in the post-Apostolic Church the cleavage between clergy and laity widened,³ but it should be noted that the conception of believers as a general priesthood still survived in the Church, alongside the growing conception of a sacrificing priesthood.

¹ Cf. art. on 'Synagogue' in Hastings Dictionary of the Bible
(1909)

² Acts 13. 15

³ supra, pp. 230f.

Even though Justin Martyr identified the sacrifices of the Church with the bread and wine of the Eucharist, offered by a sacrificing priesthood,¹ in another section of the same work he claims that all Christians are now "God's true high-priestly race, as God himself witnesses when he says that in every place among the Gentiles men are bringing acceptable and pure sacrifices to him."² Irenaeus declared that "all the righteous have priestly rank."³ Origen in his Exhortation to Martyrdom connected the priesthood of believers with loyalty to the Faith in face of persecution:

Just as the high-priest, Jesus Christ, offered Himself in sacrifice, so the priests, whose high priest he is, offer themselves in sacrifice and therefore appear by the altar in their proper place. Those priests who are blameless and offer blameless sacrifices used to serve the worship of God; but those who were at fault, as Moses set out in Leviticus, were banished from the altar. Who then is the blameless priest who offers a blameless offering other than he who holds fast the confession and fulfils every requirement made by the doctrine of martyrdom.⁴

These citations are sufficient to show that in the early centuries of the Christian Church room was left for the conception of a priesthood outside and beyond the institutional priesthood of the Church. But, as we have seen, the rights and privileges of the laity were more and more restricted as the clergy claimed a status and a prerogative of grace beyond their rights. No doubt there must have been some protests in the early stages of deterioration: one interpretation of the revolt of the Montanists sees in them, notwithstanding their extravagances, a protest against the increasing institutionalism of the Church.⁵ All protests, however, were in vain, and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was lost sight of until just before the Reformation.

There were precursors of its re-discovery then. G. D.

¹ Dialogue with Trypho, 41.3

² ibid., 116.3

³ Against Heresies, IV. viii. 3

⁴ Origen, Exhortation to Martyrdom, para. 30, in Alexandrian Christianity, vol. II, Library of Christian Classics (London, 1954), p. 413

⁵ Cf. Cyril Eastwood, The Priesthood of All Believers (London, 1960), p. 32.

Henderson writes:

Erasmus complained how the common people handed religion over to ecclesiastics 'as if themselves were no part of the Church or that their vow in baptism had lost its obligation.'¹

Wycliffe's advocacy of the translating of the Scriptures into the language of the common people was a big step towards the giving of the laity their rightful place in the Church: side by side with that, he recognised the layman's position as a priest:

Surely it seems according to the testimony of Augustine, Chrysostom, and other saints that every predestined layman is a priest.²

John Hus had only one hope of reform, particularly of simony in the Church: it could not be expected that the Pope or the ecclesiastical authorities would do anything about it; secular princes and lords were too deeply involved in their own worldly affairs to take any action; the one possibility of reform lay in the local congregations, the people. The method he suggested was the withholding of revenues!³

But it took the Reformation itself, with its re-discovery of the authoritative Word of God as the rightful possession of the common people, its re-discovery of the Divine sovereignty and the sole Lordship of Christ, its re-discovery of justification by faith alone, as the believer's way of access to God, to bring a real re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

There is general agreement that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers needs to be re-discovered today. Hans-Ruedi Weber, writing in the fifth issue of The Laity,⁴ has said,

All through Church history the Laity has played a decisive role in the life and mission of the Church, but this role has

¹G. D. Henderson, The Priesthood of Believers, SJT, vol. 7, No. 1, p.2

²Wycliffe on The Eucharist, in Advocates of Reform, vol xiv. in Library of Christian Classics, p. 84

³Hus on Simony, *ibid.*, pp. 273f.

⁴Published by the Department on the Laity, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

very inadequately been taken into account in the thinking of the Church. True, the reformers made a new start, breaking through the almost exclusively "ecclesiastical-hierarchical" self-understanding of the Church. But - besides some interesting consequences in the New World - the much-vaunted principle of "the priesthood of all believers" fulfils rather the role of a flag than an energizing principle.¹

Similarly, Professor William Robinson, in his Completing the Reformation,² refers to the fact that while Luther and Calvin saw clearly that the Christian layman has a religious vocation as truly as any priest or monk, this aspect of Reformation teaching has been all too frequently forgotten. To stress it again would, he maintains, be the logical completion of the Reformation.

It is hardly necessary to do more than refer to the practical applications of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers referred to earlier in this chapter³ to reveal the urgent necessity for its re-discovery today.

1. Access to God. Do not men need to re-discover today that every man can draw near to God, for himself and for others, with full assurance of faith? Too many people, even within the Church, are content to let the professional clergy do their praying for them.

2. Family Religion. The fact that family religion is practically non-existent in the majority of modern homes underlines the need for the re-discovery of a man's priesthood at his own family altar.

3. Public Worship. It is undeniably true to say that in many churches the congregation has become little more than an audience listening to a preacher. There is urgent need for a re-discovery of the truth that every believer has his share in the worship of the church - in prayer and praise and Christian fellowship with his fellow-members.

¹ cited, Douglas P. Blatherwick, A Layman Speaks (London, 1959), p. 19

² William Robinson, Completing the Reformation (Lexington, Kentucky, 1955)

³ supra, pp. 233ff.

4. Church Government. The fact that the popular conception of the church today equates it with its ministry, not with its members, is eloquent indication of the need to re-discover the place of the laity in the government of the church.

5. Vocation. One of the most urgent needs of today is that the Christian layman should see his daily work as a sphere for Christian witness and service. The report of the Commission on Evangelism appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, entitled, Towards the Conversion of England (1945), puts it concisely and accurately:

The Christian laity should be recognised as the priesthood of the Church in the working world, and as the Church militant in action in the mission fields of politics, industry and commerce.¹

It should not be overlooked that since the days of the Reformation there have been movements, both outside and within the church, to re-emphasise the place of the laity in the church. In some cases these movements took the form of a protest against clericalism. Thus the Society of Friends, who had their roots in the 'Collegiants' or 'Seekers' of Holland and Germany in the early days of the Reformation, sought, about the middle of the seventeenth century, to return as closely as possible to the ways and customs of apostolic simplicity in the Book of the Acts and the Epistles. An outstanding feature of their organisation is the place given in their thinking to the truth that every man may have 'direct illumination' from God: consequently they deny any need for a specially trained, educated and ordained ministry; and their worship is led by any of their members who are urged by a movement of the Spirit to read, or speak or pray.²

The Plymouth Brethren, who separated themselves from the official churches in the early part of the nineteenth century,

¹ Towards the Conversion of England (1945), p. 61

² Cf. Rufus Jones, The Faith and Practice of the Quakers and chapter entitled, 'The Queer Folk Called Quakers' in James Black, New Forms of the Old Faith (1948)

similarly stress the priesthood of all believers in their repudiation of an ordained ministry and in their view that all members of a worshipping congregation may take an active part in leading the worship of their fellow-members.¹

It should be noted that both these movements give their own particular emphasis to the priesthood of all believers by denying the place of an ordained ministry, and consequently their influence has been outside the Church rather than within it.

Movements within the Church for a more active participation of the laity in the church's worship and service have a more recent history. Outstanding among these within the Roman Catholic Church - though with a considerable influence beyond the bounds of that Church - is the Liturgical Movement. Some authorities would date the beginning of this movement for liturgical reform within the Roman Church as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century and the publication of L'Année Liturgique, by Dom Guéranger, who succeeded in restoring the plainsong chant in the Roman liturgy. But the Movement as we know it today stemmed rather from the feeling on the Continent, and particularly in France, that the Church had lost touch with the masses. During the past fifty years there has been a series of reforms or attempted reforms in the worship of the Roman Church, seeking to substitute the vernacular in various parts of the service, and to make possible more intelligent participation of the laity, though few of these reforms have received official sanction.² Along with these changes has come a renewed interest in the Bible and a renewed emphasis on the need for preaching, though these are still more a matter of promise than of fulfilment.

¹Cf. W. B. Neatby, A History of the Plymouth Brethren (London, 1901) and Chapter VI. in James Black, New Forms of the Old Faith.

²Cf. J.-D. Benoit, Liturgical Renewal: Catholic and Protestant Developments on the Continent (London, 1958):
Ernest Koenker, The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church (Chicago, 1954):
Alfred R. Shands, The Liturgical Movement and the Local Church (London, 1959)

Without minimising the importance of these reforms in the Roman Church for a more effective participation in worship by the laity, they can scarcely be said to be an effective re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers. Unlike the re-discovery made by the Reformers, the Liturgical Movement does not base the priesthood of believers on the priesthood of Christ. And it is significant that the Papal authorities have been very quick to put a stop to anything which threatened to blur the distinction between clergy and laity. Speaking to an audience of 1,400 delegates who attended the International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy held at Assisi, in October, 1956, Pope Pius XII referred to liturgical reforms, and said, "It is also Our duty to forestall whatever might be a source of error or danger." In this connection he went on,

It would be superfluous to call once more to mind that the Church has ~~g~~ave motives for firmly insisting on the absolute obligation of the priest celebrating Mass to use Latin and also, when Gregorian chant accompanies the Holy Sacrifice, that this be done in the Church's tongue.

He reaffirmed the statement that he had made previously regarding the celebration of the Mass that

the priest-celebrant, putting on the Person of Christ, alone offers the Sacrifice, and not the people, nor the clerics, nor even the priests who reverently assist.¹

A tentative protest against the withholding ~~the~~ of the cup from the laity met with strong opposition.² And the brave attempt of the French worker-priests to bring the Church into vital contact with industry was eventually considered too radical and too dangerous to be tolerated.³ As J.-D Benoit writes of the whole

¹ Reported in The British Weekly, volume CXXXVIII, No. 3649, Oct. 18, 1956, pp. 1,3. The comment of The British Weekly's heading is, "Reformation coming to Rome? Not if the Pope can help it."

² Cf. article on Liturgy and Architecture, by N.S. Pollard, in The Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin, No. 30, 1961, pp.14ff1

³ Cf. Leo Zander, The Tragedy of the Priest-Workman in France, in Church Quarterly Review (July-Sept., 1955), 284

Movement,

There may be signs of a thaw, and a certain fluidity, but everything could be frozen up again the moment it appeared dangerous to the Holy See.¹

Other movements within the Church which are in greater or lesser measure a re-discovery of the priesthood of all believers include the Evangelical Kirchentag in Germany,² the French Reformed Community of Taizé in Burgundy,³ and the Iona Community in Scotland.⁴ It is significant that in these Protestant movements there has been a considerable emphasis on evangelism. It is here more than anywhere that the priesthood of all believers must be re-discovered today. Referring to the final charge of Christ to His disciples before His ascension - "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me..." - the Report Towards the Conversion of England declares,

The charge of Christ at His ascension and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit were not confined to the twelve apostles, an ordained ministry, but were given to all the members of the infant Church. Thus, upon the whole Church of Christ, clergy and laity alike, the duty to witness is equally laid, and the power to witness is equally bestowed.⁵

Jacques Ellul has written in The Presence of the Kingdom,

The channel through which the Gospel should reach the world - and does not - ought to be the "layman"....He is the "point of contact" between the ideologies of the world in which he lives and theology.⁶

The truth is that the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers must be more than a theological principle: it must be an evangelizing impulse.

¹J.-D. Benoit, Liturgical Renewal, cited Pollard, op. cit., p. 15

²Cf. Kirchentag Calling (ed. Bernard Causton)

³Cf. J.-D. Benoit, Liturgical Renewal

⁴Cf. T. R. Morton, The Iona Iona Community Story (London, 1957)

⁵op. cit., p. 39
⁶Jacques Ellul, The Presence of the Kingdom (London, 1951), p. 19

We are all committed to the task of evangelism together. That was the secret of the growth of the Early Church. During the century of expansion that followed the death of Paul, we look in vain for the name of one outstanding missionary. The real work was done by ordinary men and women who made it their first duty to spread the message of the Gospel among their own circle of friends and neighbours. A similar lay movement is our one hope for evangelism today. There is a terrifying number of people quite untouched by the clerical, professional department of the Church's witness: they will not be reached, they will not be won, except by our common commitment to the task that is laid upon us all alike. For the Master's command comes to all who believe in Him - "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."¹

¹Mark 16.15.

VI

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF PRACTICAL PIETY

Ethical and Social Implications

The operative word in the sub-title of this chapter is "Implications." The primary aim of the Reformers was not moral reformation or social revolution, though it is an undoubted fact that their work had far-reaching ethical and social consequences. But these were by-products rather than primary objectives. Even Luther's protest against indulgences, which in a sense marked the beginning of the Reformation, was directed not so much against their unethical character - morally indefensible though they were - as against the false doctrine of human merit which was their root.

To say, however, that the ethical and social consequences of the Reformation were implications of the doctrines re-discovered by the Reformers is not in the slightest to belittle their significance: it is merely to say that the Reformers began at the right end. There were many abuses crying out for remedy, but the Reformers saw clearly that these were signs and symptoms of a malady that was much more deep-seated. They therefore began with a reformation of doctrine rather than a reformation of morals. Luther explicitly drew a distinction between his own work and that of earlier reformers, on the ground that they had attacked only the 'life,' whereas he was concerned to attack the 'doctrine.'¹ He

¹At the beginning of his The Scottish Reformation (Cambridge, 1960), Prof. Gordon Donaldson writes, 'All could see that much was in need of reform. But it was of "discipline", of the "lives" of the clergy, of their "manners" and their "morals" that reformation was all but unanimously craved.' - op. cit., p. 1

declared,

Others who have lived before me, have attacked the Pope's evil and scandalous life; but I have attacked his doctrine.¹

And, again,

We ought not so much to consider the wicked life of the Papists, as their abominable doctrine and hypocrisy, against the which we specially fight.²

It was just here that Luther showed that he had seen much more clearly than, for example, Erasmus, into the corruptions that were destroying the Church: Luther recognised that at the root of all the corruptions was the perversion of Christian truth. Reformation for him and for all the Reformers began with doctrine. But it did not end there. All the Reformers saw clearly that reformation of doctrine is disastrously incomplete unless it leads to a reformation of morals. Calvin puts it succinctly:

We have given the first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us.³

And he speaks with detestation of those

who are content to roll the gospel on the tips of their tongues when its efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, take its seat in the soul, and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply than the cold exhortations of the philosophers.⁴

Dr. John A. Mackay writes,

The most relevant symbol for Reformed thought and action today is John Calvin's crest of the flaming heart in the outstretched hand. Christian doctrine must lead in life to the warm and unreserved surrender of the heart to God, as well

¹Martin Luther, Tischreden, ed. H. Borchardt and W. Rehm. (Munich, n.d.) 26.nr.35, cited P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 29, note 20.

²Luther, Commentary on Galatians (ed. P. S. Watson), p. 439

³Institutes, III. vi. 4

⁴ibid.

as to the ceaseless dedication of the hand to those good works which God requires in loyalty to His will.¹

That was the standpoint of all the Reformers. The indicatives of the truths which they proclaimed passed inevitably into imperatives: for them the truth was not merely to be learned; it was to be lived.

Three of Luther's most important writings were issued in 1520. The first was An Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, which challenged Papal tyranny and appealed to the Christian magistrates of Germany to lend their aid to the work of reformation. The second was A Prelude concerning the Babylonish Captivity of the Church, attacking the authority and prestige of the clergy. The third, and the most practical of the trilogy, was Of the Liberty of a Christian Man, which traced the religious and ethical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith, and emphasised the liberty of the Christian man whose obedience to God and service to his neighbour are the fruits of faith. Professor Gordon Rupp has pointed out that this third writing was a necessary completion of the other two,

testifying to the wholeness of Luther's programme - to the fact that it is more than indignant moralism or anti-clericalism.²

Doctrine must find its way into life.

We have already noted the significant order of Bucer's De Regno Christi.³ The first part of his work deals with the idea of the Kingdom of Christ in its theoretical aspects: the second part presents a detailed programme for the Christianization of the social order. The Kingship of Christ has implications for education, marriage, business, recreation and every part of life.

Cranmer in England observed the same order of precedence. A recent study of his work draws attention to the fact that the

¹John A. Mackay, Christianity On The Frontier, p. 92

²The New Cambridge Modern History, vol. II, The Reformation, 1520-59 (Cambridge, 1958), p. 81

³supra, pp. 120, 130ff.

strength of Cranmer's statement of the doctrine of justification by faith

is that it gives a theological and therefore a true rootage to Christian ethics.¹

Cranmer's clearest statements on the subject are found in a series of homilies entitled, "Of salvation," "Of the true, lively and christian Faith," and "Of Good Works."² Summing up, he declares,

Here you have heard the office of God in our justification, and how we receive it of him freely, by his mercy, without our deserts, through true and lively faith. Now you shall hear the office and duty of a christian man unto God, what we ought on our part to tender unto God again for his great mercy and goodness....For the right and true christian faith is, not only to believe that holy scripture and all the fore-said articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merdiful promises, to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ: whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.³

In short, true evangelical faith must show itself in loving obedience.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

The Reformers' insistence that moral reformation must follow their doctrinal re-discoveries gives an essentially positive character to their ethical teaching. Here was no negative "Thou shalt not...", set in isolation from the whole truth of God, but a challenge to give a positive response to His revelation and His redemptive acts.

Professor G. W. Bromiley puts an unerring finger on the great weakness of medieval ethics. He writes,

In Christian history there has always been a tendency for ethics to break loose from theology and to establish what we might almost call an autonomous kingdom, or at least an imperium in imperio. Something of this kind had happened in

¹G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer, Theologian, p. 39

²Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer (Parker Society ed., 1846), pp. 128ff.

³ibid., p. 133

the Middle Ages....In the last resort, the aberration was from first to last theological, but ethics divorced from the doctrines of grace contributed to the dogmatic misunderstanding.¹

One of the results of the divorce of ethics from theology in the Middle Ages was that much medieval ethical preaching was largely negative and denunciatory. What preaching there was - and there seems to have been little enough of it at best - was directed against prevalent vices, and urgent calls to repentance and confession were given. G. P. Fisher in his History of the Christian Church writes,

In the preaching of the Middle Ages there abounded appeals to fear. The aim was to paint the torments of the lost in the most vivid colours.²

And T. M. Lindsay gives the following description of the preaching of John Geiler, one of the best known preachers of the late fifteenth century:

His sermons are full of exhortations to piety and correct living. He lashed the vices and superstitions of his time. He denounced relic worship, pilgrimages, buying indulgences, and the corruptions in the monasteries and convents. He spoke against the luxurious living of Popes and prelates, and their trafficking in the sale of benefices. He made sarcastic references to the papal decretals and to the quibblings of Scholastic Theology. He paints the luxuries and vices he ~~denounced~~ denounced so very clearly, that his writings are a valuable mine for the historian of popular morals. He was a stern preacher of morals, but his sermons contain very little of the gospel message. As we read them we can understand Luther's complaint, that while he had listened to many a sermon on the sins of the age, and to many a discourse expounding scholastic themes, he had never heard one which declared the love of God to man in the mission and work of Jesus Christ.³

It should not be forgotten that the Roman Church lays, if possible, more stress on the Christian duty of obedience than the

¹G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer, Theologian, p. 39

²G. P. Fisher, History of the Christian Church, p. 238. Cf. G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge, 1926)

³T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, p.118

Reformers did. But Roman obedience is not primarily obedience to Christ, but obedience to the Church. It is not necessary here to go into the long story of the process by which obedience came more and more to be given to the Church rather than to Christ, the Head of the Church. It is enough to say that man is only too willing to give his surrender and obedience to any power on earth which is strong enough to claim them, as the history of dictatorships clearly shows. Man welcomes regulation and regimentation when they relieve him of personal responsibility. It was out of these tendencies in human nature that the power of the Roman Church was developed, and men came more and more to give to that Church the obedience which is due to God alone. Dr. W. G. D. MacLennan writes in his book, Christian Obedience,

Here was a system that undertook to look after a man's spiritual welfare from the cradle to the grave and even to exercise considerable influence beyond the grave provided ~~he~~ that he was obedient to the clergy and to the rules and regulations laid down.¹

If such obedience were refused, the Church painted in vivid pictures of Hell and Purgatory the fate that awaited the disobedient. P. Carnegie Simpson has written in The Church and the State:

As a matter of history, it was not by force either of intellectual argument or of arms that the papal claim to absolute and universal supremacy dominated Europe. It was because the ~~pope~~ pope could, literally, put the fear of death - death and hell - upon the world.²

But had the Roman closely-knit system of morals with these terrifying sanctions of Hell and Purgatory any real influence on morality? Let a modern Roman Catholic writer answer:

From the fourteenth century onwards, however, moral degeneration went hand in hand with political and social

¹W. G. D. MacLennan, Christian Obedience (1948), p. 78

²P. Carnegie Simpson, The Church and the State (London, 1929), p. 81.

decline....

Nothing less than the united resources of a deeply respected Church were needed to grapple effectively with all these evil forces which were creating such havoc within the Christian soul. Alas! the Church was not merely disunited and divided against herself: the corruption of all too many of her own constituent organs meant that she actually played an active part in the moral degeneration of the period.¹

J. A. Froude's use of a report of a Visitation of the Abbey of St. Albans in 1489 to illustrate the corruptions of English medieval monasticism is well-known. In his Short Studies on Great Subjects, in one of three essays on "Times of Erasmus and Luther," he wrote:

In the reign of our Henry the Seventh the notorious corruption of some of the great abbeys in England brought them under the notice of the Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Morton. The archbishop, unable to meddle with them by his own authority, obtained the necessary powers from the Pope. He instituted a partial visitation in the neighbourhood of London; and the most malignant Protestant never drew such a picture of profligate brutality as Cardinal Morton left behind him in his Register, in a description of the great Abbey of St. Albans.²

Dom David Knowles in his The Religious Orders in England, vol. III - The Tudor Age states his belief that

it would be unsafe to conclude that all the charges were in every respect either bona fide or susceptible of legal proof.³

He agrees, however, that "there were probably serious delinquencies."⁴

It is possible that Protestant historians have tended to overdraw the vices of the monasteries, and no doubt there is another side to the picture. But it is significant that when Dom David Knowles comes to sum up the findings of his detailed study of the religious orders in England in the Tudor Age, he has to say,

When all allowances and reservations have been made, we must still say that the Church throughout Europe was at a lower

¹H. Daniel-Rops, The Protestant Reformation (Eng. trans., London, 1961) pp. 124, 126

²J. A. Froude, Short Studies on Great Subjects (New York, 1868), p. 60.

³Dom David Knowles, The Religious Orders in England: vol. III, The Tudor Age (Cambridge, 1959), p. 79

⁴ibid.

level of discipline and observance, and exhibited more symptoms of mental and moral sickness than at any time since the Gregorian reform. Though England on the whole showed less alarming signs of decline than most of the continental countries it is certain that here, too, the faith and charity of many were cold and...the Catholic religion was being reduced to its lowest terms.¹

And when Dom David Knowles comes to paint the other side of the picture, it cannot escape notice that the grounds of his commendation of the monasteries which do not come under censure are not primarily ethical but aesthetic and cultural:

The reader has indeed had before him records of visitations that do little credit to the religious...but on the other hand he has entered the cloister of the Charterhouse with Maurice Chauncy, he has seen something of the achievement of Marmaduke Huby and Richard Kidderminster, he has watched Prior More summering and wintering at Worcester and Grimley, and Robert Joseph and his friends discovering Plautus and Virgil. He has seen something of the dignified and richly apparelled liturgy and chant at Durham and Waltham, and has noted the new and beautiful buildings rising at St Osyth, at Forde and at Westminster, and the words of praise given by their neighbours to many a house great and small.²

D. Hay Fleming in The Reformation in Scotland gives chapter and verse for his picture of the corruption of the Roman Church, which may be judged by the Statutes passed by the Provincial Council of the Clergy, held in Edinburgh in 1549, when it was admitted that the cause of the troubles and heresies which afflicted the Church were the corruption, the lewdness and the gross ignorance of churchmen of all ranks.³

It seems clear, that, however slow we must be to judge the morals of the Middle Ages by the standards of the twentieth century, the negative approach of the Roman Church to ethics proved

¹ Dom David Knowles, op. cit., p. 460

² ibid., p. 465

³ D. Hay Fleming, The Reformation in Scotland (London, 1910), pp. 48, 49, etc.

lamentably ineffective. But to say that is not to say that there was not a real concern in many quarters of the Roman Church for a reform of discipline. Satirical writings like the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum (c. 1514), probably by a group of Humanists at Erfurt, exposed the weaknesses of the clergy with merciless insight. But it is Erasmus who must stand as the pre-eminent example of those who called for a reform of the corrupt morals of clergy and monks, the extravagant pretensions of the papacy, the credulity and inconsistency of the members of the Church in general. With rapier-like wit and satire he exposed the manifest weaknesses of those of whom he wrote, and sought to shame men into a life of true piety and reason. But as Professor Matthew Spinka has said in his introduction to the Enchiridion of Erasmus, "What was needed to break the rock of offense was a sledge hammer, not the jeweler's tool."¹ And T. M. Lindsay quotes Albert Dürer's appeal to Erasmus for the stronger action which he was not prepared to take:

'Oh! Erasmus of Rotterdam, where art thou?' said Albert Dürer. 'See what the unjust tyranny of earthly power, the power of darkness, can do. Hear, thou knight of Christ! Ride forth by the side of the Lord Christ; defend the truth, gain the martyr's crown! As it is, thou art but an old man. I have heard thee say that thou hast given thyself but a couple more years of active service; spend them, I pray, to the profit of the gospel and the true Christian faith, and believe me the gates of Hell, the See of Rome, as Christ has said, will not prevail against thee.'²

The unwillingness of Erasmus to strike at the root of the moral weaknesses of his day by attacking the doctrinal weaknesses of the Church meant that he proved inadequate to effect the reformation that he so urgently desired, and it is significant that his real and lasting contribution towards reformation lay not in his Enchiridion or his Praise of Folly but in his edition of the New Testament, the Novum Instrumentum of 1516.

¹ Advocates of Reform, vol. xiv. in Library of Christian Classics (London, 1953), p. 293

² cited, T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, p. 188 from Leitshuh, Albrecht's Durer's Tagebuch der Reise in die Niederlande (Leipzig, 1884)

It should not be overlooked that there were popes like Adrian VI (1522-23) and Paul III (1534 - 39), who did institute moral reforms which sought to do something to correct the abuses that were making the Church a by-word, though Calvin had some strong things to say about the latter's lack of fitness for the task.¹

The official expression of Roman concern for moral reformation is found in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (1543-63). The Admonition and Exhortation of the Legates of the Apostolic See to the Fathers in the Council of Trent, read in the first session, gave an explicit statement of the purposes of their meeting:

for the increase and exaltation of the Christian faith and religion; for the extirpation of heresies; for the peace and union of the Church; for the reformation of the Clergy and Christian people; for the depression and extinction of the enemies of the Christian name.²

Let it be said at once that the Council, in dealing with the fourth of its five declared aims - the reformation of the Clergy and Christian people - did seek to abolish various crying abuses, and introduced some measure of reform, particularly with regard to the sale of indulgences, the education and morals of the clergy, the regulation of monastic orders, etc. Even here, however, the attitude of the Council was essentially negative. But the tragedy of the Council of Trent was that it allowed itself to be diverted from its true function - the doctrinal and ethical reform of the Church - to make the second of its declared aims - the extirpation of heresies - its prime object. Its main contribution turned out to be a flat rejection of the truths re-discovered by the Reformers and an unmitigated condemnation of those who held them. In his Antidote to the Acts of the Council of Trent Calvin goes straight to this point:

¹ Calvin refers to him as "a fatal pestiferous monster. As to your proclaiming him worthy of heaven, I don't know if you are aware of the universal belief that he was unworthy of the earth!" - Calvin's Antidote to the Acts of the Council of Trent, in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III, p. 52

² Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, ed. J. Waterworth, (London, 1848), p. 12.

For in regard to the doctrine of salvation, which they have wholly adulterated by their impious and abominable fictions; in regard to the sacraments which they have utterly vitiated, and which they prostitute to a vile and shameless traffick-
ing, they find nothing in themselves to correct. How little aid, then, do they bring to ruined affairs!....They are to cling with a death-grasp to all their impieties, while we who desire nothing but the reign of Christ, and maintain the pure doctrine of the Gospel, are to be judged heretics.... From their own mouths we hear that this pompous Council is held not for inquiry, but to establish that kind of doctrine, be it what it may, with which monks and sophists have imbued the world; that all rites shall remain by whatever superstition they may have crept in; and all the fetters of conscience be drawn into a tighter knot.¹

Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan sees and describes clearly the tragedy of the Council of Trent: he writes,

All the more tragic, therefore, was the Roman reaction on the front which was most important to the reformers, the message and teaching of the church. This had to be reformed according to the word of God; unless it was, no moral improvement would be able to alter the basic problem. Rome's reactions were the doctrinal decrees of the Council of Trent.²

Those decrees were essentially a gitting-in in face of the positive challenge of the Reformation. Here, more manifestly than ever, it is the Roman position which is negative - negative ethically in its attempt to put right the abuses which were scandalizing the Church, and negative doctrinally in its attempt to confute the teachings of the Reformers.

Having established that the moral teachings of the Reformers were corollaries of their theological re-discoveries, we proceed to show that each of the Reformed doctrines which have been dealt with in preceding sections had a positive reference to practical piety: each had positive moral and social implications.

¹ Calvin's Antidote to Prefatory Discourse, In Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, vol. III, pp. 38, 39

² Jaroslav Pelikan, The Riddle of Roman Catholicism (Abingdon Press, New York, Nashville, 1959), p. 51

I. The Re-Discovery of the Word of God.

We have seen that the Reformers, out of their own experience of the living, transforming Word of God, substituted for the obedience claimed by the Roman Church an absolute obedience to God, and that they found the rule of that obedience in the Bible. The Word of God was for them the only rule of faith and conduct - a standard not only of faith but of conduct, a criterion of behaviour no less than of belief. The Reformers have sometimes been criticised for the practical applications of some of the truths which they found in Scripture - perhaps justifiably so - but the principle on which they acted is beyond criticism. For through their own experience they had found in the Word of God a standard of conduct far removed from any subjective criterion. The Lord had spoken, authoritatively, and the way of duty was clearly mapped out before them.

Zwingli, for example, put the preaching of the Word of God at the very heart of the Reformation in Zurich. The point has been well brought out by two recent writers. Professor Gordon Rupp writes,

His (i.e. Zwingli's) Reformation was begun, continued and ended through the agency of prophetic preaching....It is something with few parallels (Calvin, Knox, Latimer?) - this continuous biblical exposition, adjusted to the practical needs of each changing day, in a community small enough for everybody to be known, and where all the effective leadership in the city sat under the Word.¹

And Professor G. W. Bromiley writes in his introduction to Zwingli and Bullinger:

The most striking feature of the reforming work actually accomplished by Zwingli is perhaps the thoroughness and consistency with which it was carried through....For Zwingli there were, strictly speaking, no adiaphora. Practice as well as doctrine must be tested at every point by the Word of God.²

¹The New Cambridge Modern History, vol II, The Reformation (Cambridge, 1958), p. 99

²Zwingli and Bullinger, vol. xxiv. in Library of Christian Classics (London, 1953), pp. 28,29

But it should be noted that Zwingli himself saw quite clearly that doctrine had to come before conduct. In his treatise Of the Upbringing and Education of Youth in Good Manners and Christian Discipline, he writes,

These precepts of mine fall into three parts:

The first tells how the tender mind of youth is to be instructed in the things of God;

The second, how it is to be instructed in the things which concern itself;

And the third, how it is to be instructed in conduct towards others.¹

That is the order adopted by all the Reformers - first theology, then ethics, and both founded on the Word of God.

Calvin introduces his section of the Institutes on The Life of the Christian Man by saying that "it will be profitable to assemble from various passages of Scripture a pattern for the conduct of life."² And a little later he stresses the fact that the whole Word of God is to be our guide in conduct:

For it is not lawful for you to divide things with God in such a manner that you undertake part of those things which are enjoined upon you by his Word but omit part, according to your own judgment.³

The rule of conduct is the whole, authoritative Word of God.

The mainspring of Luther's ethics was the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but he saw as clearly as the other Reformers that the Word of God plays a vital part in regulating morals.

He declares,

When, however, the Word remains pure, then the life can come and be put right.⁴

The Word, according to Luther,

¹ Zwingli and Bullinger: Zwingli: Of the Education of Youth, vol. xiv. in Library of Christian Classics, p. 103

² Institutes, III. vi. 1

³ ibid., III. vi. 5

⁴ Martin Luther, Tischreden, 31f.nr.44, cited P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! p. 29, n. 24.

is the high, chief, holy possession from which the Christian people take the name 'holy', for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; nay, it is the very holiness of God. Moreover the Holy Ghost Himself administers it, and anoints and sanctifies the Church, that is, the Christian, holy people with it.¹

In short, a holy life has its root in a holy Word.

We saw, further, that this final, objective Rule of Life is the rightful possession of the common people. The influence on conduct of the Bible in the vernacular is incalculable. Here is how the historian J. R. Green describes the effects of the English Scriptures on the life and character of the people:

Far greater than its effect on literature or social ~~phrase~~ phrase was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people at large. The Bible was as yet the one book which was familiar to every Englishman; and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened to their force and beauty, kindled a startling enthusiasm. The whole moral effect which is produced now-a-days by the religious newspaper, the tract, the essay, the missionary report, the sermon, was then produced by the Bible alone; and its effect in this way, however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing. The whole nation became a church.²

So was answered the prayer which is found on the opening page of the English Bible in the Genevan version of 1578:

O gracious God and most merciful Father, who hast vouchsafed us the rich and precious jewel of Thy Holy Word, assist us with Thy Spirit, that it may be written in our hearts to our everlasting comfort, to reform us, to renew us according to Thine own image, to build us up, and edify us into the perfect building of Thy Christ, sanctifying us and increasing in us all heavenly virtues.³

¹ Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia, 1915-32), V. 270

² John Richard Green, History of the English People, vol. III, (New York, 1879), p. 12

³ cited, Carey Bonner, The Romance of the English Bible, p.116.

II. The Re-Discovery of the Divine Sovereignty.

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is of fundamental importance in the field of moral conduct. For it is in that doctrine that the supreme motive for good living is to be found. Utilitarian systems of ethics find in human happiness or human good - whether of the individual or of society - the criterion of right conduct. But that does not give a sure enough foundation: if man is the measure of things, we have no firm basis for morality. Joseph in the Old Testament story knew where the one sure foundation of morality was to be found. It was not thoughts of the wrong done to himself, or his master, or his temptress, or to society, that enabled him to fling from him the suggestion of Potiphar's wife: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"¹ God is the ultimate basis of morality.

Professor P. S. Watson stresses "the significance of Luther's theocentric emphasis for his conception of ethics."² Luther's insistence that God, not man, must be the controlling factor in religious experience means that the motive for doing good centres not on self, but in God. The ideal is an unselfish doing of good that finds its pattern in the Divine goodness itself. "God and His children do good gratuitously."³ And only the good that is done in this Divinely unselfish way can, in Luther's estimation, be regarded as in any real sense ethically good.

But it is Calvin who gives the clearest statement of the centrality of the sovereignty of God for ethics. In chapter vii of Book III of the Institutes he summarises the whole Christian life as "The Denial of Ourselves." We are not our own masters, but belong to God. Calvin asserts,

We are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may hereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory....If we, then, are not our own but the Lord's, it

¹Genesis 39.9

²P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 46

³Luther, Sammtliche Werke (Erlangen ed.), xli. 90f

is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life. We are not our own; let not our reason, nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own; let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.¹

For Calvin the one adequate motive for righteousness is that it is God's will.

For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous.²

A. Dakin, writing on the ethical emphasis of Calvinism, quotes Macaulay's statement that 'the Puritan hated bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators,' and comments that Macaulay

completely misread Puritanism in the second part of his sentence, but he uttered more than a half-truth in the first. The actual motive of the true Calvinist in all such protests was not pity for the bear, ~~for~~ or for that matter sympathy with oppressed human beings; it was a strenuous opposition to something that was contrary to the will of God and unworthy of men created in the divine image.... Central in the system is neither the happiness of the individual nor the good of society, but the doing of the will of God for His glory.³

The conception of the Divine Sovereignty, therefore, is of quite incalculable importance for morality, for it means that the ultimate reference of every action is to God and not to man.

The Lordship of Christ is, as we have seen, the sovereignty of God made flesh for our response. The relevance of this for conduct has been compellingly stated by John E. Kuizenga in a little booklet, Relevancy of the Pivot Points of the Reformed Faith. He writes,

¹Institutes III. vii. 1

²Institutes III. xxiii. 2

³A. Dakin, Calvinism (1940), p. 210

The Lordship of Christ is the form taken by all the pivot ideas of our faith....The Lordship of Jesus gives us our distinctive grasp on the sovereignty of God as living reality. The Lordship of Jesus is the present meaning of the ten commands; He is the essence of our morality and its compelling motive. That is why the passion for morality, so characteristic of the Reformed faith, is not a relapse into legalism, but breathes through all its ethics the spirit of a new life. Hence the passion to make Him king of all life in every form characterized the faith from Geneva on, as indeed it did in Paul.¹

In short, to call Christ, "Lord, Lord," and mean it, inevitably involves doing what He says.² And that is the very heart of morality.

III. The Re-Discovery of the Way of Salvation.

It might be thought that the doctrine of justification by faith alone could have only a harmful effect on conduct. W. P. Paterson writes,

Superficially it seemed a dangerous doctrine, and inimical to the interests of morality, to say that what determines the relation of the soul to God is - not character and life, but faith alone.³

Paul at the very beginning had to face the misrepresentation of his teaching which suggested that by preaching a gospel of free grace and undeserved, unearned forgiveness, he was condoning sin and encouraging moral laxity. If every sin of man gives God another opportunity of showing His forgiving grace, may we not say, "Let us go evil, that good may come: let us continue in sin, that grace may abound"?⁴ And it must be admitted that there have always been those who have seen the gospel as an excuse for relaxing moral effort, forgetting that it is "by their fruits" that Christ's followers will be recognised.⁵ Luther was disappointed to find that the streams of charity were reduced by

¹ John E. Kuizenga, Relevancy of the Pivot Points of the Reformed Faith (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1951), p. 19

² Luke 6. 46

³ W. P. Paterson, The Rule of Faith, p. 289

⁴ Romans 6. 1

⁵ Matthew 7. 16

the abolition of the threat of Purgatory and of the sacrament of Penance, and John Knox found that the congregation of Christian people included many who had reached no high standard of sanctity, and were lacking in some instances in common honesty.¹ It may have been Knox's experience here which led to the term 'justification by faith alone' being omitted from the Scots Confession (1560).²

But the truth is that the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as believed and formulated by the Reformers, has in it factors which are the surest guarantees of morality. For one thing, there is the tremendous gratitude that is inspired by a free, forgiving grace. "Good works," says the Westminster Confession of Faith,

done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness.³

And the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) makes the same point:

Good works must be done, not to merit thereby eternal life, which is a free gift of God, nor for ostentation or from selfishness, which the Lord rejects, but for the glory of God, to adorn our calling and to show our gratitude to God.⁴

But the doctrine of justification by faith alone involves more than the motive of gratitude for free, forgiving grace. It involves the making of a new creature in decisive union with Christ. Luther regarded as meaningless such questions as "Why should a justified sinner do good works." He declares,

It is absurd and stupid to say: the righteous ought to do good works, as to say: God ought to do good, the sun ought to shine, the pear-tree ought to bear pears, three and seven ought to be ten; for all this follows of necessity by reason of the cause and the consequence...it all follows without commandment or bidding of any law, un-compelled and unconstrained.... The Sun shines by nature, unbidden; the pear-tree bears pears of itself, un-compelled; three and seven ought not to be ten, they are ten already. There is no need to say to our Lord God

¹Cf. W. P. Paterson, The Rule of Faith, pp. 289f.

²Cf. W. D. Niven, Reformation Principles After Four Centuries, p. 71

³Westminster Confession of Faith, XVI. ii.

⁴Cf. Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, pp. 407, 8

that He ought to do good, for He does it without ceasing, of Himself, willingly and with pleasure. Just so, we do not have to tell the righteous that he ought to do good works, for he does so without that, without any commandment or compulsion, because he is a new creature and a good tree.¹

Calvin is equally emphatic:

Take note that we do not justify man by works before God, but all who are of God we speak of as being 'reborn' (cf. I Peter 1:3), and as becoming 'a new creation' (II Cor. 5:17), so that they pass from the realm of sin into the realm of righteousness; and we say that by this testimony they confirm their calling (II Peter 1:10), and, like trees, are judged by their fruits (Matt. 7:20; 12:33; Luke 6:44).²

All the apostles are full of exhortations, urgings, and reproofs with which to instruct the man of God in every good work (cf. II Tim. 3:16,17), and that without mention of merit. Rather, they derive their most powerful exhortations from the thought that our salvation stands upon no merit of ours but solely upon God's mercy. Accordingly, Paul, when he devoted an entire letter to showing that we have no hope of life save in Christ's righteousness, when he gets down to exhortations, implores us by that mercy of God which he has deigned to give us.³

Cranmer, too, insists that justifying faith is a

true, lively and unfeigned christian faith, and is not in the mouth and outward profession only, but it liveth and stirreth inwardly in the heart....This faith doth not lie dead in the heart, but is lively and fruitful in bringing forth good works....Therefore, when men hear in the scriptures so high commendations of faith, that it maketh us to please God, to live with God, and to be the children of God; if then they phantasy that they be set at liberty from doing all good works, and may live as they list, they trifle with God, and deceive themselves.⁴

In short, all the Reformers are agreed in saying that faith is the root, of which good works are the necessary fruit.

¹Luther, Samtliche Werke (Erlangen ed. 1826-57), lviii.355, cited P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! pp. 47,48. Cf. Galatians (Watson's ed.),

²Institutes III. xv. 8

³ibid., III. xvi. 3

pp.247,8.

⁴Cranmer, Remains and Letters (Parker Society ed.), p. 136

IV. The Re-Discovery of the Priesthood of All Believers.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has obvious connections with moral conduct. As we have seen, it obliterated the distinction which had grown up between different ranks in the church, and swept away the fatal double standard which made a higher obedience incumbent on the select few. Obedience, this doctrine tells us, is laid on all alike.¹

It is noteworthy that the verse in I Peter 2 which speaks of believers as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood..." is immediately followed by instructions for holy living. As priests, believers are without exception to display a high Christian morality in all the relations of life - with one another, with those outside the fellowship, and with the State. Wives, husbands, masters, servants - all have their duties, and all are called without distinction to obedience.

It is abundantly evident, therefore, that all the doctrines of the Reformed Faith, re-discovered at the Reformation, are intimately related to conduct. Reformed Theology is belief that behaves.

The social implications of the Reformation are rather more difficult to assess, notwithstanding the monumental work of Ernst Troeltsch in his The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. Troeltsch handicaps himself in all his discussion by his rigidly-drawn classification of forms of Christianity into those belonging to the 'Church' type and those belonging to the 'sect' type. His consideration of Calvinism in particular finds him deeply involved in a discussion of Calvinism and the Anabaptist movement and the resemblance between Calvinism and the 'sect'² type -

¹ Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (Eng. trans. 1931), vol. II, pp. 501f - 'Luther's conception of the universality of this ecclesiastical ethic...does not mean an ordered "scale of perfection" with its various degrees of holiness, combined with the permission of a dualistic morality to various groups within the Church. It implies rather that the same ethical claim is made on all the members of the Church.'

² ibid., pp. 593ff.

- a discussion which does less than justice to the fact that Calvin ultimately derived his teaching from no other source than the Bible and that all his thought was Christo-centric.¹

Failure to realise this is the only explanation, for example, of Troeltsch's unqualified statement that Calvinism, as opposed to the Anabaptist movement's ideal of the Law of Christ, "felt no need at all to adjust its ethical ideal to the law of Christ in the New Testament, or the Sermon on the Mount."²

Professor P. S. Watson has pointed out that

Troeltsch's whole interpretation of Luther's ethic is vitiated by his misinterpretation of Luther's religion.³

Troeltsch, misled by his determination to make Luther's religion conform to the 'Church' type, makes it consist of aloofness from the world and concentration on personal salvation. With such a premiss, it is not surprising that Troeltsch finds that in Luther "the deduction of ethical behaviour from the religious element is still not very certain."⁴ "The uncertainty," declares Professor Watson, "arises from Troeltsch's own presuppositions, which are not Luther's."⁵

The truth is that the social implications of the Reformation cannot be rigidly defined and tabulated. Any attempt to do so overlooks the fact that there were many other social influences as well as the religious factors in the situation. There were many ingredients contributing to the social ferment of the time. It is only by ignoring the complexity of these many social influences that it is possible to derive the social revolution of the sixteenth century from the Reformation. To say, for example, that Luther was responsible for the Peasants' War⁶ is to forget that none of the materials of that conflagration were of Luther's

¹Cf. Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, p. 110 - 'All the truths which Calvin expounds in his theology have but one end - to make intelligible to us the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.'

²Troeltsch, op. cit., p. 599

³P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 115

⁴Troeltsch, op. cit., p. 496

⁵P. S. Watson, Let God Be God! p. 115

⁶Cf. Peter F. Weiner, Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor (London, 1945), pp. 44 - 46

gathering. The situation which led up to the Peasants' Revolt was set in a Germany where all classes of the community, from the Emperor down to the humblest peasant were ~~all~~ at odds, all feeling the impact of the winds of change that were blowing across the country, and all at a loss to deal with the problems which those winds of change were bringing with them. Certainly there were those who could turn Luther's teaching about the liberty of a Christian man to suit their own ends; and who could adapt his resistance to church authority to support their own resistance to the powers that be. For the spiritual freedom which he taught, multitudes, their ardour fanned by Anabaptist preachers, substituted freedom from social injustice, political oppression and economic burdens.

Three years before the outbreak Luther had declared his attitude:

Rebellion cannot be right, however just the cause: more injury than benefit is ever the result of it.¹

He saw quite clearly that religious incendiarism must inevitably end in social revolt, and that just as surely social revolt would end in disaster. In 1525 he replied to the moderate rebels who sent him a copy of their "Twelve Articles," with his An Admonition to Peace, in which he blamed both side impartially:

I have said that both sides share the wrong and fight for the wrong. You lords are not fighting against Christian men, for Christian men do not fight, but suffer all things, but you fight against public robbers and shamers of the Christian name, and those who die among them are already eternally damned. On the other hand, you peasants, you too do not fight against Christian men, but against tyrants and persecutors of God and murderers of holy Christians. Those who die among them are also eternally damned.²

The truth is that "there was as much connection between Luther

¹ An Admonition to all Christians to beware of Insurrection and Rebellion (1522), cited Gordon Rupp, Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause - or Cure? (London, 1945), p. 31

² Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), 18, p. 314, 333

and the outbreak as there was between Hus and the extreme fanatics of his party, or between Wyclif and Wat Tyler."¹ That is not to deny the influence of Luther's teaching on the social problems in Germany. The world in which medieval men lived was so much a unity that his resistance to church authority inevitably encouraged those who sought social and political changes. As Professor H. G. Koenigsberger, of Nottingham University, said in a broadcast on The Reformation: Social Revolution, on 21st March, 1962,

Only someone of Luther's singleness of mind could have imagined that his attack on one pillar of the established order, the Church, would not be interpreted as an attack on the social order as a whole. For many, - knights, peasants, and artisans - his teachings were the signal for revolt.²

But the social and political changes that others demanded were at best no more than implications of Luther's teachings, and at worst were rank perversions of them.

Calvin's social influence, while of the utmost importance, should not be exaggerated. A. M. Fairbairn goes much too far when he says,

Calvin's chief title to a place in history rests upon his success as a legislator. As a theologian he was a follower, as a legislator he was a pioneer. His system of doctrine was derived, while his political economy broke new ground and based the social edifice on new principles.³

It should be carefully noted that in the Address to King Francis, prefaced to the Institutes, Calvin disclaims all responsibility for social upheaval:

We are unjustly charged, too, with intentions of such a sort that we have never given the least suspicion of them. We are, I suppose, contriving the overthrow of kingdoms - we from whom not one seditious word was ever heard; we, whose life when we lived under you was always acknowledged to be quiet and simple....And we have not, by God's grace,

¹R. H. Murray, The Political Consequences of the Reformation (London, 1926), p. 74

²cited from Professor Koenigsberger's script, kindly made available.

³A. M. Fairbairn, in Cambridge Modern History, (Cambridge University Press, 1918), vol. II, p. 364

profited so little by the gospel that our life may not be for these disparagers an example of chastity, generosity, mercy, continence, patience, modesty, and all other virtues.¹

The fact is that Calvin's social influence was just his ethical influence, not on the limited canvas of personal living, but on the broader canvas of society. It may be that the personal ethics engendered by the re-discovery of Biblical doctrines inevitably involved social revolution when they were transferred to a wider sphere. But that social revolution was not of Calvin's seeking.

There have been critics of the absolute control on social life exercised by Calvin in Geneva: what that control involved can be seen from some of the extracts from the Registers of the Genevan Council from 1545 - 1547. A man guilty of card playing is made to sit in the open street with a pack of cards hung like a rosary about his neck. A member of the Council guilty of dancing at a wedding is sent to prison. A man hearing an ass bray says, "He sings a pleasant psalm," and is banished from the city. Drunkenness and debauchery were visited with more severe penalties: adultery more than once with death.² But it should be noted that such stringent control of civic conduct was by no means exceptional. T. M. Lindsay has pointed out that

every mediaeval town had its laws against extravagance in dress, in eating, and in drinking, against cursing and swearing, against gaming, dances and masquerades....The citizens of every mediaeval town lived under a municipal discipline which we would pronounce to be vexatious and despotic. Every instance quoted by modern historians to prove, as they think, Calvin's despotic interference with the details of private life, can be paralleled by references to the police-books of mediaeval towns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³

The difference at Geneva lay not so much in the fact that these

¹Institutes, vol. xx in Library of Christian Classics (ed. J. T. McNeill, London, 1961), p. 30

²Examples cited by R. H. Murray, The Political Consequences of the Reformation from summary in Mark Pattison's Essays, i. 302, 303 Cf. Hugh Y. Reyburn, John Calvin (1914), 118, for more detailed extracts.

³T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. II, p. 108

laws were made, but that they were enforced. And there can be no doubt that stringent measures were needed. Professor John T. McNeill writes,

Medieval Geneva, by common consent of historians, abounded in centers of dissolute pleasure....Genevese gaiety was often associated with intemperance, obscenity and licentiousness.¹

Calvin's methods of dealing with the vices of Geneva were strikingly successful, but his greatest influence on the city is seen not in such repressive measures but in the transformation wrought in the whole life of the city. He instituted measures relating to public health: a proper sewage system was organized; market wares were inspected and anything bad or rotten was thrown into the Rhone: to prevent frequent fatal accidents to children from their falling out of windows, an order was issued that every window should have a solid balustrade or secure railing: a silk industry was operated for the twofold purpose of increasing the revenue of the State and giving added employment to the citizens.²

Taken all in all, the legislation and discipline enforced in Geneva must have won high and wide approval, inasmuch as the city, instead of repelling immigrants, attracted them in large and increasing numbers.³

One of the most famous of those immigrants, John Knox, wrote to an English friend, Mrs. Anna Locke, in glowing admiration of Calvin's city,

where, I neither fear nor am ashamed to say, is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places, I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place.⁴

¹ John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York, 1957), p. 166

² Examples cited by Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, from E. Choisy, La Théocratie à Genève au temps de Calvin (Geneva, 1897)

³ A. Mitchell Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, p. 270

⁴ cited, J. T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, p. 178, from Calvini Opera (1863-1900), XVI. 333

But Calvin's social influence went far beyond Geneva. France, the Netherlands, Germany, England and America can be adduced as evidence of social revolutions which had their source in Calvinism. But let Scotland be our illustration of the transformation wrought by the Reformed Faith. N. S. McFetridge in Calvinism in History declares that before Calvinism reached Scotland,

gross darkness covered the land and brooded like an eternal nightmare upon all the faculties of the people.¹

And E. W. Smith in The Creed of Presbyterians adds his confirmation:

When Calvinism reached the Scots people, they were vassals of the Romish church, priest-ridden, ignorant, wretched, degraded in body, mind and morals.²

When the great doctrines of the Reformation broke upon Scotland, they brought not merely new teaching but new life. Philip Schaff maintains,

Calvin's theology and piety raised Scotland from a semi-barbarous condition, and made it the classical soil of Presbyterian Christianity, and one of the most enlightened, energetic, and virtuous countries on the face of the globe.³

A contemporary assessment of the transformation comes from an English emissary who had been sent by Lord Burleigh to watch the progress of events. This was his report:

You would be astonished to see how men are changed here. There is little of that submission to those above them that there used to be. The poor think and act for themselves. They are growing strong, confident, independent; the farms are better cultivated; the farmers are growing rich; the merchants at Leith are thriving, and notwithstanding the pirates, are increasing their ships and opening a brisk trade with France.⁴

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

¹N. S. McFetridge, Calvinism in History (Philadelphia, 1882), p. 124

²E. W. Smith, The Creed of Presbyterians, pp. 98,99

³Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, p. 445, footnote.

⁴cited, J. A. Froude, The Influence of the Reformation on the Scottish Character, in Short Studies, (1867), p. 145

NOT NEW BUT OLD

Our purpose ~~must~~ now must be to show that the re-discovery of practical piety at the Reformation, as the implication and consequence of the re-discovery of Biblical truth, was not new but old - as old as the Bible from which the truths of the Reformation were re-discovered.

For a right understanding of the ethics of the Old Testament as leading on to and finding fulfilment in the ethics of the New Testament it is vitally important to realise that what we have in the Old Testament is not a code of morals but a union of religion and morality. The Old Testament is essentially the revelation of God, and it is on the basis of that revelation that man is called to obey the laws of God. "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy"¹ is at the very heart of Old Testament ethics. It is just here that the cleavage between the religion and morals of Israel and those of their heathen neighbours is most clearly seen: vicious and unethical gods will inevitably have vicious and unethical worshippers. But even more important for our study is the truth that in Israel ethics have their source in the mighty redemptive acts of God. This is seen most clearly in the Ten Commandments. God did not begin with the people of Israel by saying, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." He began by saying, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt...."² So was revealed to the Hebrew people and through them to the world the intimate connection between theology and ethics, between religion and life. It was this intimate connection that was re-discovered, as we have seen, at the Reformation.

This Old Testament uniting of religion and morality makes the Old Testament idea of the Covenant of supreme significance. God

¹ Leviticus 19.2

² Exodus 20. 2,3. Prof. C. H. Dodd notes that the same structure is characteristic of the the Torah, or Law of Moses: 'The extremely concrete and detailed system of regulations is embedded in a narrative of events, which are presented in the guise of "mighty acts of the Lord"; that is to say, they are historical events understood as religiously significant.'
Gospel and Law (Cambridge, 1951), p. 10.

redeemed Israel from Egypt and made a covenant with ~~at~~ them at Sinai: that act of Divine grace is the foundation of the moral relationship into which they were brought. Dr. William Lillie writes in Studies in New Testament Ethics:

It has been a favourite theory of moral philosophers that morality depends on a social contract of one kind or another. Whatever can be said for or against this view in the case of ordinary secular morals and "natural law" theories, it is certain that Christian morality, like the morality of the Old Testament before it is morality within a covenant.... It is a covenant initiated by God, so that the justice and mercy which it demands in human relationships are demanded and guaranteed by the justice and mercy of God Himself.¹

In short, the root of morality is the grace of a covenant God.

The Old Testament prophets were great moral teachers, and their moral teachings covered a very wide field. They denounced evil wherever they found it in the bluntest terms, and demanded just dealing between man and man in every part of life; and they called the nation no less than the individuals within it to righteousness. But all this ethical teaching rested on a firm foundation of religious teaching. They saw that the root cause of Israel's moral degeneracy was unfaithfulness to their covenant God, and so at the heart of their message to the people was a recall to God. Only as they could win the heart of the people back to the God Whom they had forsaken could an adequate basis be secured for an upright individual and national character. Moral and national reformation could only follow religious reform, and at the heart of religious reform was man's re-discovery of the grace of God.

But alongside this supernaturally-based morality of the Old Testament was another conception of moral conduct, which divorced morality from the redemptive grace of God, and made it

¹William Lillie, Studies in New Testament Ethics (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 10.

consist in legalism and ritualism. We find it delineated in Isaiah 58. 2,3:

Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of God; they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?

The prophet unsparingly exposes the barrenness of their ritualism, and then goes on to remind them of the unfailing resources of God's grace available for their deficiencies:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.¹

But in the centuries that followed, the doctrine of the redemptive grace of God was increasingly dimmed by growing legalism and ritualism, until at last it was re-discovered when men saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and encountered the grace of God made flesh in Him.

The consequences for conduct of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are so evident in the New Testament that it is scarcely necessary to underline them. From the very beginning, the Gospel was linked with repentance and righteousness² and called men to aim for moral perfection.³ But always the moral ideal looked back to the supernatural and historical facts of the Gospel. That is most clearly seen in the structure of Paul's epistles. The first eleven chapters of Romans, for example, deal with the grace of God as the objective principle of religion and faith as its subjective principle: then Paul steps from doctrine to conduct with the first verse of chapter twelve:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

¹Isaiah 59. 1,2

²Matthew 3.2: 6.33

³Matthew 5. 48

Ephesians and Colossians are bisected in precisely the same way: on the one side the redemptive grace of God; on the other, the life that thankful faith will live. It was that order of things that was re-discovered at the Reformation when Luther came to realise that 'good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.'¹

In the ethical teaching of the sub-apostolic age two strands are discernible. On the one hand there was a continuing realisation of the dependence of morals on faith, of ethics on theology; and many reminiscences of apostolic teaching are to be found in the early centuries of the Christian era. In The Shepherd of Hermas, for example, we find sentiments like these:

Put therefore, ye who are empty and fickle in your faith, the Lord in your hearts, and ye shall know that there is nothing easier or sweeter or more manageable than these commandments.²

The Epistle of Barnabas has the same thought of obedience being the consequence of the new life that is derived from faith in Christ:

Having received the forgiveness of sins, and placed our trust in the name of the Lord, we have become new creatures....His statutes and doctrines dwell in us.³

And Irenaeus makes frequent reference to the moral efficacy of the death of Christ.⁴

But on the other hand there was a growing tendency to make morals a law of commandments contained in ordinances⁵ instead of the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.⁶ It is significant that there is no early Christian ethical treatise, dealing in a systematic way with the moral implications of the Cross and Resurrection. The Didache in this respect is more Jewish

¹ quoted, P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 48

² Mandata 12.4

³ The Epistle of Barnabas, c. 16

⁴ E.g. Against Heresies III.5.3

⁵ Ephesians 2. 15

⁶ Romans 8.2.

than Christian, and both the Paedagogos of Clement of Alexandria ~~and~~ the De Officiis of Ambrose fail to do justice to the essential connection between the facts of the Gospel and the Christian life.

As the Church became more highly organised, Christian obedience came more and more to be obedience to ecclesiastical authority: as the idea of merit became increasingly attached to good works, the one source and foundation of good works in the finished work of Christ was more and more ignored: and, combining both tendencies, canon law took the place of the Gospel as a determinant of Christian conduct. And all this meant a radical change in the conception of the Christian life itself, and a failure to grasp the real significance of Christian morals as set forth in the New Testament.¹

The basic weakness was that the Roman Church took its pattern more and more from a secular model. Its conception of the Kingdom was Roman rather than Christian; and its theology was Greek rather than Biblical. And, as she has so often attempted to, ^{do} the Church of Rome tried to assimilate these extraneous elements within a Christian framework. The climax of this attempt at assimilation in the realm of ethics came with Thomas Aquinas, who tried to show the fundamental agreement of Christian ethics and the ethics of Aristotle, thereby doing justice neither to Christian ethics nor to Aristotle. T. M. Lindsay goes so far as to say that Luther's criticism of medieval theology

was always confined to the theories introduced by the Schoolmen, and to the perversion of the old doctrines of the Church introduced in mediaeval times mainly to bring these doctrines into conformity with the principles of the philosophy of Aristotle.²

And A. M. Fairbairn has written,

If Churches always canonised their benefactors, he (Aristotle) would long ago have been at the head of the Roman Calendar.³

Rome had come to see something of the advantage which the Aristotelian

¹Cf. "The Lapse into Legalism", in H. H. Scullard, The Ethics of the Gospel.

²T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I. p. 468

³A. M. Fairbairn, Christ in Modern Theology (1893), p. 119.

philosophy might be to the Church as an institution, but failed to realise that it was a denial of the gospel, for Aristotle assumed that man had power to fulfil the law and become righteous by acting righteously, and that the "wise man" is self-contained and self-sufficient. Luther saw clearly that Aristotelian ethics, as adapted by the Roman Church, made man, not God, the centre of the moral universe, and on that score he attacked Aristotle from the beginning of his spiritual experience. Before he had nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, he had written to his friend, J. Lange, in 1516 that "if Aristotle had not been flesh, he would not hesitate to affirm that he was the very devil."¹ As T. M. Lindsay has written,

With an unerring instinct he fastened on the Scholastic devotion to Aristotle as the reason why what professed to be Christian theology had been changed into something else.²

William Tyndale had the same clear insight. He declared that, as opposed to the Beatitudes of Christ,

Aristotle's felicity and blessedness standeth in avoiding all tribulations; and in riches, health, honour, friends, and authority...³

And Tyndale saw clearly that Aristotle's weakness consists in finding in man himself the key ~~xxx~~ to moral achievement. He says,

Of like pride are all the moral virtues of Aristotle, Plato and Socrates and all the doctrine of the philosophers, the very gods of our schoolmen.⁴

Let Luther state the ultimate ground of the Reformers' opposition to the syncretism which sought to assimilate Aristotelian and Christian ethics. In his Disputation against the Scholastic Theology (1517), he wrote,

¹ cited, H. H. Scullard, The Ethics of the Gospel, p. 139

² T. M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, vol. I, p. 469

³ William Tyndale, The Obedience of the Christian Man (Lovett's ed), p. 61

⁴ ibid., p. 99

Almost the whole exceedingly bad ethic of Aristotle is hostile to grace.¹

The Reformation's re-discovery of the grace of God inevitably implied the repudiation of every system of ethics which was man-centred rather than God-centred. And all the Reformers found the beginnings of the truly moral life not in anything that man could do but in the redemptive act of the grace of God. That was the basis of ethics re-discovered in the sixteenth century from the Word of God.

The same re-discovery had been made in some measure a thousand years before. If we are right in finding the re-discovery of practical piety as an implication of the re-discovery of Biblical truths, and particularly as an implication of the re-discovery of the grace of God, we may look for a similar re-discovery of practical piety in the time of Augustine. Do we find it there? Adolf Harnack was convinced that we do. He devoted a long section of his History of Dogma to 'Augustine as Reformer of Christian Piety,'² and maintained,

He is in the first place, to be estimated, even for the history of dogma, not as a theologian, but as a reformer of Christian piety.³

In an eloquent summing-up of his argument, he declared,

If we Western Christians are shut up to the conviction that religion moves between the poles of sin and grace - nature and grace; if we subordinate morality to faith, in so far as we reject the thought of an independent morality, one indifferent to religion; if we believe that it is necessary to pay much greater heed to the essence of sin than to the forms in which it is manifested - fixing our attention on its roots, not on its degrees, or on sinful actions...if we comprise all means of salvation in the thought of God's grace and of faith...if, finally, we distinguish between law and gospel, gifts and tasks appointed by God - then we feel

¹ cited, R. S. Franks, The Work of Christ (2nd Ed., 1962), p. 285

² A. Harnack, History of Dogma (Eng. trans. 1898), vol. V. pp. 61-94

³ ibid., pp. 66,67

with the emotions, think in the thoughts, and speak with the words of Augustine.¹

Certainly the Confessions show us a man whose whole moral life was transformed by the ruling conception of the grace of God.

Out of deep and long-continued intellectual and moral unrest, he was brought to right ways of thinking about God and to a right way of life.²

That was the true order - "right ways of thinking about God" and then "a right way of life."

If Augustine's re-discovery of the grace of God made an effective impact on his personal morality only and had little, if any, effect on the ethical standpoint of the Church as a whole, there was a very good reason for that. Many writers on Augustine - including Harnack - have noted the dualism which is to be found in his thought. "There are two currents," says G. P. Fisher, "and they flow in opposite directions."³ His doctrine of the Church, as interpreted by succeeding generations, became the foundation of the Roman Church as a hierarchical institution: his doctrine of grace became the foundation of the Reformation. As B. B. Warfield put it, "What was the Reformation, inwardly considered, but the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church?"⁴ But the question could be put in another way. What was the barrenness of the Middle Ages, but the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of the Church (or the Church's misrepresentation of that doctrine) over Augustine's doctrine of grace? The re-discovery was not complete: the Church seized upon the elements in Augustine's teaching which lent support to an ecclesiastical kingdom, claiming every man's absolute allegiance, and equating morality with ecclesiastical obedience. A thousand years were to pass before the doctrine of grace was re-discovered as a moral force in the Church; and when the

¹A. Harnack, History of Dogma, vol. V., pp. 72, 73

²Hugh Martin, in a chapter on "The Confessions of St. Augustine," in Great Christian Books (London, 1945), p. 28

³G. P. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh, 1896), p. 192.

⁴B. B. Warfield, Tertullian and Augustine (New York, 1930), p. 285.

Reformation made that re-discovery, it went back, not to Augustine, but to the Word of God. It was not new, but old - as old as the Bible.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

It scarcely needs to be said that this re-discovery of practical piety needs to be made again today. We can see the urgent need of such re-discovery in two facts. The first is the decline of modern morals. This is so obvious that to speak of it means descending to the realm of platitudes. "A land-slide in morals:" "a complete lack of moral sense:" "decline in national honesty:" - these and phrases like them are the well-worn descriptions of the moral failure of our modern civilisation. It is unnecessary to underline them further, except to say this: that the power which modern man holds in his hands makes the matter of dealing with this moral decline a thing of quite terrifying urgency. A criminal with a stone axe in his hand was a grave enough threat to the society in which he lived: a criminal today - individual or nation - with an atomic bomb in his hand is an infinitely greater menace.

The Reformation came at ~~ix~~ a time when modern industrial development was beginning: the invention of the printing press meant that the industrial revolution was already on its way when Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door at Wittenberg. But the influence of the Reformation on morals meant that for a time at least man's moral achievements kept pace with his scientific attainment. But that was not continued, and today man holds in his hands powers which he has not the moral ability to control.

The second fact which underlines the urgent need of a re-discovery of practical piety today is the challenge of another ethic. Writing in The British Weekly of April 26, 1962, Dr. William Barclay quotes from the new charter of the Communist Party, published in August, 1961,

a list of the principles on which every member of the Communist Party ought to base and order his life.¹

¹The British Weekly, vol. CXLVI, No. 3928, April 26, 1962, p. 12

Dr. Barclay gives the list as follows:

- (i) Loyalty to the cause of Communism, of the Socialist Motherland, and the countries of Socialism.
- (ii) Conscientious labour for the benefit of society, always on the principle that he who does not work shall not eat.
- (iii) Collectivism and comradely mutual assistance, always on the principle of one for all and all for one.
- (iv) Honesty and truthfulness, moral purity, unpretentiousness, and modesty in public and in personal life.
- (v) Mutual respect within the family circle, and concern for the upbringing of children.
- (vi) Intolerance of injustice, parasitism, dishonesty and careerism.
- (vii) Fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries.

The surprising thing is that this manifesto scarcely differs from the moral standards of Christian civilisation; and Dr. Barclay sees in it a challenge to the Christian world to apply similar principles more effectively than the Communists. But the challenge goes deeper than a challenge to the Christian to show a higher standard of conduct than his Marxist counterpart. The superiority of the ethics of the Early Church to the ethics of its day did not lie primarily in the fact that it was a better system of ethics. It lay in the fact that the Reformers had re-discovered the true foundation of moral conduct, in the Gospel of the grace of God. In like manner, our one hope today is not a recovery of morals: it is the re-discovery of the Gospel.

VII

THE REFORMATION - THE RE-DISCOVERY OF THE GOSPEL

This study began with a quotation from Philip Schaff's The Creeds of Christendom. He declared:

The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history.... It was not a superficial amendment, not a mere restoration, but a regeneration; not a return to the Augustinian, or Nicene, or ante-Nicene age, but a vast progress beyond any previous age or condition of the Church since the death of St. John. It went, through the intervening ages of ecclesiasticism, back to the fountain-head of Christianity itself, as it came from the lips of the Son of God and his inspired Apostles. It was a deeper plunge into the meaning of the Gospel than even St. Augustine had made.¹

From that starting-point our enquiry has led us to see that the Reformation was the re-discovery of truths that had been overgrown and hidden for centuries. The Word of God as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct, and the rightful possession of the common people; the Divine Sovereignty, seen in God's ultimate control of all things, and supremely manifested in the Lordship of Christ; the Way of Salvation, through grace, by faith alone; the Priesthood of All Believers; Practical Piety, as the essential implication of doctrinal reform - all these truths, we have seen, were re-discovered at the Reformation. But the Reformation was more than the re-discovery of forgotten truths:

¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom (London, 1877), p. 204.

it was, as Schaff indicated, "a deeper plunge into the meaning of the Gospel." That was the supreme re-discovery that was made; and in a sense it was not man's discovery at all, for we do not discover the Gospel; the Gospel - and the God of the Gospel - discovers us and breaks in upon us. And that is the supreme re-discovery that needs to be made today. Professor K. S. Latourette puts it emphatically:

As in all Christianity from the beginning, continuing and growing vitality depends upon the degree to which Protestantism is a channel of the eternal Gospel. Protestantism came into being chiefly because through its great spirits the Gospel found fresh outlet....If Protestantism embodies the Gospel it will go on and grow. If it loses it or becomes too stereotyped to give it free expression it will dwindle and the eternal life in the Gospel will break out elsewhere and create for itself fresh channels.¹

The one hope for Protestantism today, and always, is a continual recall to the Gospel.

NOT NEGATIVE BUT POSITIVE

John Baillie in his Invitation to Pilgrimage uses a story of C. H. Spurgeon's as a parable of 'the greatest misunderstanding to which religion has been subject in every age.'² Spurgeon told how one of his fellow-ministers had gone to the house of a poor old woman with a contribution of money for the payment of her rent. He knocked again and again but failed to get any response. Nevertheless the old woman was inside all the time, and her explanation afterwards was, 'I heard the knocking, but I thought it was the man come to ask for the rent.' Baillie's comment is:

He who stands at the door has come with a gift, but we are so ready to think that He has come for a payment. The knock is a Saviour's knock, but we are so ready to think it is a Taskmaster's.³

And he goes on to assert that that is the error which has done

¹K. S. Latourette, The Christian Outlook (New York, 1948), p. 158

²John Baillie, Invitation to Pilgrimage, (London, 1942), p. 48

³ibid., p. 48

most to falsify and limit the true understanding of Christianity itself."¹ To think of Christianity as a code of good conduct, as an ideal to be striven for, as a demand to be met, or as a law to be obeyed, is to misinterpret its essence altogether. And that is precisely what was done in medieval preaching. We have already had occasion to refer to the fact that most medieval preaching was largely negative and denunciatory.² It could scarcely be described as gospel, good news, for it was news, not of rent paid but of rent inexorably demanded. Luther uses strong words to describe what the Roman Church had done with the Gospel. Speaking of the distinction which must be drawn between the law and the Gospel, he writes,

But the Pope hath not only mixed the law with the Gospel, but also of the Gospel hath made merelaws, yea and such as are ceremonial only. He hath also confounded and mixed political and ecclesiastical matters together; which is a devilish and hellish confusion.³

Calvin sees just as clearly that the Roman system is a denial of the Gospel. He writes,

So much the more ought we to prize the Gospel, when we see that in the Papacy this has been obscured, indeed entirely erased, to the point that poor souls always remain famished... they are never assured that God is propitious.⁴

Luther's conversion can be dated from the moment when he realised that the Gospel with its positive statement of rent paid is to be distinguished from the law with its negative statement of rent demanded. Let his own words describe his experience:

I was long in error under the Papacy...until at last I came upon the saying in Romans 1. 17: "The righteous lives by his faith." That helped me. Then I saw of what righteousness Paul speaks, where there stood in the text Iustitia, righteousness. Then...I became sure of my case, learnt to distinguish the righteousness of the Law from the righteousness of the Gospel. Before, I lacked nothing but that I made no distinction between the Law and the Gospel,

¹ John Baillie, Invitation to Pilgrimage, p. 48

² supra, p. 265

³ Luther, Commentary on Galatians, (P. S. Watson's ed.), p. 123

⁴ Calvin, Commentary on Isaiah 53.11 (Eng. trans. in The Gospel According to Isaiah, Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53, by John Calvin translated Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids, 1953), p. 111

held them to be all one....But when I found the distinction, that the Law was one thing, the Gospel another, then I broke through.¹

Luther insists that the Law must be clearly distinguished from the Gospel, as a demand from a gift. He writes,

Hereby we may see what is the difference between the law and the Gospel. The law never bringeth the Holy Ghost, but only teacheth what we ought to do: therefore it justifieth not. But the Gospel bringeth the Holy Ghost, because it teacheth what we ought to receive. Therefore the law and the Gospel are two quite contrary doctrines. To put righteousness therefore in the law, is nothing else but to fight against the Gospel. For Moses with his law is a severe exactor, requireth of us that we should work, and that we should give: briefly, it requireth and exacteth. Contrariwise, the Gospel giveth freely and requireth of us nothing else, but to hold out our hands, and to take that which is offered. Now to exact and to give, to take and to offer are clean contrary, and cannot stand together. For that which is given, I take: but that which I give, I do not take, but I offer it unto another. Therefore if the Gospel be a gift, and offereth a gift, it requireth nothing. Contrariwise, the law giveth nothing, but it requireth and straitly exacteth of us, yea even impossible things.²

It should be noted that while Luther frequently represents the Law and the Gospel as entirely hostile to each other, and tanks the Law among the 'Tyrants' which have been vanquished by Christ, he does so only in so far as the Law oversteps its proper bounds and claims to be a way of salvation. Writing on Galatians 4. 3, he says,

I speak not this to the end that the law should be despised, neither doth Paul so mean, but it ought to be had in great estimation. But because Paul is here in the matter of justification, it was necessary that he should speak of the law, as of a thing very contemptible and odious....But out of the matter of justification, we ought with Paul to think reverential of the law, to commend it highly, to call it holy, righteous, good, spiritual and divine.³

¹Martin Luther, Tischreden, ed. H. Borchardt and W. Reim (München, nd.) 26.nr.36. Cf. Luther, Werke, (Weimar ed.) V. 210.7ff (cited P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 31

²Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 205

³ibid., pp. 351,2

When the Law is not regarded as a way of salvation, "being in its true use, it ought to serve the promises, and to stand with the promises and grace."¹ And its true use is to convince man of the depth of his sinfulness ~~and~~ and his utter helplessness to fulfil its real requirements and deliver himself from its condemnation and from the wrath of God.

The law, when it is in his true sense, doth nothing else but reveal sin, engender wrath, accuse and terrify men, so that it bringeth them to the very brink of desperation. This is the proper use of the law, and here it hath an end, and it ought to go no further.²

The law, then, is "a minister that prepareth the way unto grace,"³ and when its work is done, man is ready to receive the glad tidings of a gracious God.

Calvin makes precisely the same distinction as Luther between the negative demands of the Law and the positive affirmations of the Gospel. In his commentary on Isaiah 53. 11, he writes,

It is true that God surely shows us in His Law how we ought and can come to life, if we were such that we had no hindrance on our part. The Law of God, then, speaks, but it does not reform our hearts. When God shows us: "This is what I ask of you!" yet, if all our desires, our affections, and our thoughts are contrary to what He commands, not only are we condemned, but the Law...renders us so much more guilty before God....We must then, have another manner of being justified, and it is in the Gospel. For in the Gospel, God does not say: "Look, do this and that!" but: "Believe that My Only Son is your Redeemer! Embrace His death and passion as remedy for all your illnesses. Plunge into His blood, and it will be your purification, you will be cleansed by it! Lean upon the sacrifice which He offered me, and that is how you will be justified!"⁴

For all the Reformers, Christianity was re-discovered not as a law, but a gospel; not as a demand but a gift; not as rent demanded, but as rent paid. It was not negative but positive, not an imperative primarily but an indicative.

¹Luther, Commentary on Galatians, Watson's ed., p. 386

²ibid., p. 302

³ibid., p. 303

⁴Sermon in Calvini Opera, Corpus Reformatorum, vol. 35, pp. 661-674 (Eng. trans. in The Gospel in Isaiah, Seven Sermons by John Calvin, translated by Leroy Nixon, (Grand Rapids, 1953), p. 107

Evidence of the positive nature of the Gospel re-discovered at the Reformation is found throughout the writings of the Reformers, as different aspects of it are expounded and emphasised: and to catalogue these in detail might only serve to hide the wood with the trees. But again and again in the Reformation writings are found summaries of the Gospel which indicate clearly its positive character as seen by the Reformers.

Luther, for example, defined Gospel as

a discourse about Christ, declaring Him to be the Son of God, who was made man for us, died and rose again, and is set as Lord above all.¹

And, again, writing on Galatians 3. 9 of the blessing promised to Abraham, he declared:

Wherefore the blessing is nothing else but the promise of the Gospel. And that all nations are blessed, is as much to say, as all nations shall hear the blessing; that is, the promise of God shall be preached and published by the Gospel among all nations....And this blessing is a great glory, not before the world, but before God. For we have heard that our sins are forgiven us, and that we are accepted ~~by~~ of God; that God is our Father, and that we are his children; with whom he will not be angry, but will deliver us from sin, from death and all evils, and will give unto us righteousness, life and eternal salvation.²

The positive affirmations of the Gospel are concerned with all that Christ has done for us: the positive blessings of the Gospel are forgiveness, reconciliation with God, sonship, deliverance, righteousness, life and eternal salvation.

Professor Gordon Rupp, in his notable book on Luther, The Righteousness of God, comes at the end of Part II to summarise Luther's theology. His summary gives an admirable statement of Luther's thought: having spoken of the function of the Law to bring men 'to that humility which rejects all its own self-righteousness,' he goes on:

¹Luther's Works (Weimar ed.) Xx 10, 1, 9

²Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 238. Cf. pp. 43, 84.

Once for all, God came to men in his Son Jesus Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the Law on behalf of his brethren; who identified himself with humanity, in accepting the consequences of sin, enduring the pains and torments of soul which are the very pains of hell, to the extremity of agony, in the cry of dereliction on the Cross. There, in dying, he conquered death in a mighty duel, and risen from the dead, he sheds his victory abroad. Jesus Christ is the Righteousness of God, the divine verdict upon sin and the remedy for sin. Men cannot believe this good news, cannot receive it save when God himself comes to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, when they hear the Word which is the living Gospel. Then by faith they partake in the Divine Righteousness. All the Righteousness of God is freely bestowed on them. All their unrighteousness is assumed by God that it may be utterly destroyed. Henceforth they live by faith, hope and love under that covering mercy which gives them happy and victorious power.¹

Professor Rupp concludes his summary with the words: 'And if a man say "this is not 'Luther's theology' but the common Christian Gospel, in Luther's accents!" that is how Luther would have had it. So be it.'² This is in truth nothing less than the re-discovery of the Gospel.

Perhaps the clearest and most compact statement of the Gospel in Calvin's writings is to be found in his Preface to Pierre Robert Olivétan's translation of the New Testament, written, significantly, in 1534, about a year after his conversion - his first statement of his faith as a Protestant. He wrote:

Scripture is also called gospel, that is, new and joyful news, because in it is declared that Christ, the sole true and eternal Son of the living God, was made man, to make us children of God his Father, by adoption. Thus he is our only Saviour, to whom we owe our redemption, peace, righteousness, sanctification, salvation, and life; who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; who ascended ~~up~~ to heaven for our entry there and took possession of it for us and (it is) our home; to be always our helper before his Father; as our advocate and perpetually doing sacrifice for us, he sits at the Father's right hand as King, made Lord and

¹Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God (London, 1953), p. 254

²ibid., p. 255

Master over all, so that he may restore all that is in heaven and on earth; an act which all the angels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles did not know how to do and were unable to do, because they had not been ordained to that end by God.

As the Messiah had been promised so often in the Old Testament by the many testimonies of the prophets, so also Jesus Christ was by sure and certain testimonies declared to be the One, and none other, who was to come and was to be waited for.¹

In chapter xvi of Book II of the Institutes Calvin follows the order of the Apostles' Creed² in giving a positive statement of the redemption that is ours in Christ, and concludes:

Thus far I have followed the order of the Apostles' Creed because it sums up in a few words the main points of our redemption, and thus may serve as a tablet for us upon which we see distinctly and point by point the things in Christ that we ought to heed.³

The English Reformers were no less positive in their declaration of the essence of the Gospel. The concluding paragraph of a Homily of Salvation, attributed to Thomas Cranmer, speaks of

the infinite benefits of God, shewed and exhibited unto us mercifully without our deserts, who hath not only created us of nothing, and from a piece of vile clay of his infinite goodness hath exalted us, as touching our soul, unto his own similitude and likeness; but also, when we were condemned to hell and death eternal, hath given his own natural Son, being God eternal, immortal, and equal unto himself in power and glory, to be incarnated, and to take our mortal ~~fram~~ nature upon him, with the infirmities of the same, and in the same nature to suffer most shameful and painful death for our offences, to the intent to justify us and to restore us to life everlasting; so making us also his dear beloved children, brethren unto his only Son our Saviour Christ, and inheritors for ever with him of his eternal kingdom of heaven.⁴

John Jewel, in his Apology of the Church of England, published in 1562, gives a similar statement, following closely the articles of the Apostles' Creed.⁵

¹ Calvini Opera, Corpus Reformatorum, vol 9, pp. 791f. Eng. trans. in Calvin: Commentaries, Library of Christian Classics, vol. xxiii (London, 1958), p. 64

² Calvin calls it the "Apostles' Creed", 'without concerning myself in the least as to its authorship....' - Institutes II. xvi. 18

³ ibid. ⁴ Miscellaneous Writings and Letters (Parker Soc. ed), p. 134

⁵ Works of Bishop Jewel (Parker Soc. ed. Cambridge, 1848), pp. 58, 59.

The purpose of the foregoing lengthy and to some extent repetitive quotations from the writings of the Reformers has been to show that the gospel which they preached was essentially a proclamation of what God in Christ had done for those who could do nothing for themselves: it was framed in the indicative not the imperative mood; it was news not of rent demanded but of rent paid; it was not negative but positive. And in all these features it was, as we shall see, the Gospel of the New Testament.

Before passing to that, there are two emphases of the Reformation Gospel that should be underlined as further evidence of its positive, Biblical character. The preachers of the Reformation proclaimed the Gospel as victory: and they presented its challenge in terms of personal encounter.

The Gospel as Victory

For Luther an essential part of the Gospel was the proclamation of Christ as the Divine Victor, Who has shattered the power of the 'Tyrants' that hold sway over human life. Writing on the opening verses of Galatians, he declares:

Thus Paul, even at the first entrance, bursteth out into the whole matter whereof he entreateth in this Epistle. For (as I said) he treateth of the resurrection of Christ, who rose again to make us righteous, and in so doing he hath overcome the law, sin, death, hell, and all evils....Christ's victory, then, is the overcoming of the law, of sin, our flesh, the world, the devil, death, hell and all evils: and this his victory he hath given unto us. Although, then, these tyrants and these enemies of ours do accuse us and make us afraid, yet ~~they~~ can they not drive us to despair, nor condemn us; for Christ, whom God the Father hath raised ~~from~~ up from the dead, is our righteousness and victory.¹

There Luther links the victory of the Gospel with the Resurrection: elsewhere he links it with the Cross, for he cannot separate the two. Writing on Galatians 2. 19, he says:

¹Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 36

Jesus Christ the Son of God died upon the cross, did bear in his body my sin, the law, death, the devil and hell. These invincible enemies and tyrants do oppress, vex and trouble me, and therefore I am careful how I may be delivered out of their hands, justified and saved....There is none but Christ only and alone, which taketh away the law, killeth my sin, destroyeth my death in his body, and by this means spoileth hell, judgeth and crucifieth the devil, and throweth him down into hell. To be brief, all the enemies which did before torment and oppress me, Christ Jesus hath brought them to nought.¹

Over against this victory of the Gospel Luther sets the impotence of the Roman system:

Hereby we may plainly see how horrible the wickedness and blindness of the Papists was, which taught that these cruel and mighty tyrants...which swallow up all mankind, must be vanquished, not by the righteousness of the law of God..but by the righteousness of man's own works, as by fasting, pilgrimages, rosaries, vows, etc. But, I pray you, was there ever any found, that, being furnished with this armour, overcame sin, death, etc.?²

The warfare in this cosmic conflict was not ended, but the final victory was sure. The triumph of the Word of God in the Reformation was for Luther a foreshadowing of the final victory of Christ over all His enemies. The shining of the light of the Reformation Gospel was "a clear evidence of the Advent of the Lord, and a dawn which is the prelude to eternal day."³

Calvin has the same thought of the Gospel as victory. Commenting on Isaiah 53. 12, he writes:

The prophet here declares, in summary, that our Lord Jesus not only conquered death by dying, but also had the right to carry away the substance of His enemies and to have their spoil; as when a victory is won, this also follows....This is how our Lord Jesus despoiled His enemies: namely, because we are no longer under the tyranny of Satan nor under slavery to sin, but we are set free from them.⁴

¹ Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 162

² ibid., p. 274f.

³ Luther's Works (Weimar ed.), Tr. 1169 - Ista lux evangelii hoc tempore est illustratio adventus Domini et aurora quae diem aeternum praecedit.

⁴ Sermon on Isaiah 53. 12, from Calvini Opera, Corpus Reformatorum, vol. 35, pp. 675-688, Eng. trans. in The Gospel According to Isaiah,

Similarly, writing of Christ's death on the Cross, and of the curse that He took to Himself in being crucified, Calvin sees there not defeat but victory:

Yet we must not understand that he fell under a curse that overwhelmed him; rather - in taking the curse upon himself - he crushed, broke, and scattered its whole force....Paul with good reason, therefore, magnificently proclaims the triumph that Christ obtained for himself on the cross, as if the cross, which was full of shame, had been changed into a triumphal chariot.¹

Like Luther, Calvin also links Christ's victory with the Resurrection:

For as he, in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone.²

And, like Luther, he looks for a final consummation of the victory when Christ comes again:

Christ gives to his own people clear testimonies of his very present power. Yet his Kingdom lies hidden in the earth, so to speak, under the lowness of the flesh. It is right, therefore, that faith be called to ponder that visible presence of Christ which he will manifest on the Last Day....He will appear to all with the ineffable majesty of his Kingdom, with the glow of immortality, with the boundless power of divinity, with a guard of angels.³

It must never be forgotten, then, that the Reformation Gospel, like the Gospel of the New Testament which it re-discovered, saw the Cross, the Resurrection and the Second Advent as Christ in triumphant action, Victor over death, Vanquisher of the demons, going forth conquering and to conquer.

The Gospel as Personal Encounter

It should be noted - for it was just here that later Protestant dogmatism tended to depart from the Reformation Gospel - that for the Reformers the gospel was something more than the proclamation

¹ Calvin, Institutes, II. xvi. 6

² ibid., II. xvi. 13

³ ibid., II. xvi. 17

of truth: it was a personal encounter with Christ. As the truths of the Gospel are proclaimed, the very proclamation means that God in Christ is confronting men. As Luther puts it, "The Gospel then is a preaching of Christ, which forgiveth sins, giveth grace, justifieth and saveth sinners."¹ The proclamation of God's redeeming acts is itself a continuance of the Divine redeeming activity. As Bullinger put it, Praedicatio verbi divini est verbum divinum² - "The preaching of the Divine Word is the Divine Word." The Gospel is personal encounter with the Word made flesh.

Writing on Galatians 1. 16, Luther speaks of the function of the Holy Spirit in making this encounter of the Word and the soul a living reality:

Of this inestimable treasure freely bestowed upon us, the Gospel properly preacheth unto us. Wherefore it is a kind of doctrine that is not learned or gotten by any study, diligence, or wisdom of man, nor yet by the law of God, but is revealed by God himself, as Paul saith in this place; first by the external Word, then by the working of God's Spirit inwardly. The Gospel therefore is a divine Word that came down from heaven, and is revealed by the Holy Ghost, who was also sent for the same purpose; yet in such sort notwithstanding, that the outward Word must go before.³

For Luther, the preaching of the Gospel is never a mere recital of historical happenings, nor is it the exposition of abstract doctrine. He says,

To me it is not simply an old song of an event that happened fifteen hundred years ago; it is something more than an event that happened once - for it is a gift and a bestowing that endures for ever.⁴

¹Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 153

²quoted, J. S. Stewart, A Faith To Proclaim (London, 1953), p. 42

³Commentary on Galatians, p. 84

⁴Luther, Samtliche Werke (Erlangen, 1826-57), xx. 1.114; I.241 cited, P. S. Watson, Let God Be God!, p. 151. Professor T. F. Torrance summarises Luther's thought here: "Faith is always encounter, always the tangential point where the divine bears upon the human, grace upon nature" - Kingdom and Church (1956), p.46.

Calvin has a similar thought. Writing on Isaiah 53. 1 - 3, he emphasises the truth that along with the Gospel it is necessary that God should reveal to us His power:

The prophet shows us that, although God commands that His Word should be publicly proclaimed to all, both good and bad, nevertheless, He works in a secret manner in His elect, as if He made them feel His arm and His power. Let us note well then, when the Gospel is preached, that it will be like a useless sound until our Lord shows that it is He Who speaks, for He does not do this good to everyone. Behold, then, the power of God which is hidden from reprobates.¹

Like Luther, he realised that it is the Holy Spirit's work to take the truths of the Gospel and make them real and effective in the experience of the believer. Faith, he declares,

is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently the terms commonly employed to express his power and working are, in large measure, referred to it because by faith alone he leads us into the light of the gospel.... Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.²

And Zwingli, writing on The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God declared to the nuns of Oetenbach:

Even if you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ from an apostle, you cannot act upon it unless the heavenly Father teach and draw you by the Spirit.³

In short, all the Reformers are agreed that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Gospel, still firmly rooted in the redemptive act of God in history, becomes personal encounter.

To complete our synopsis of the Reformation Gospel, we note that the Reformers did not overlook the ethical and social implications of the Gospel. For them, it was not only the proclamation of good news, and personal encounter with a living, present Lord: it was also teaching that calls the redeemed to a new way of life. This has already been referred to above in the discussion of the ethical and social implications of the re-discoveries of the Reformation.⁴

¹ Calvin, Commentary on Isaiah, from Calvini Opera, C.R. 35, pp. 595-608
Eng. trans in The Gospel According to Isaiah, p. 30

² Institutes III. i. 4. Cf. Institutes I. vii. 4

³ Zwingli, The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God, In Zwingli and Bullinger, p. 79

⁴ supra, c. VI.

But let Luther summarise Biblical teaching on good works as the necessary implication of faith:

Now follow exhortations and precepts of life and good works. For it is the custom of the Apostles, after they have taught faith and instructed men's consciences, to add precepts of good works, whereby they exhort the faithful to exercise the duties of charity one towards another.¹

...Both these doctrines, as well of faith as of works must be diligently taught and urged; and yet so that both may remain within their bounds. Otherwise, if they teach works only (as they do in the Pope's kingdom) then is faith lost. If faith only be taught, then carnal men by and by dream that works be not needful.²

The Gospel, for all the Reformers, includes teaching on the Christian duty of the believer.

To sum up this section of our study of the Reformation as the re-discovery of the Gospel, it is clear that the Reformation Gospel - in its character as proclamation of the good news of God's redemptive, victorious action in Christ, as personal encounter with a living Saviour, and as teaching of the Christian duty of the believer - is essentially positive.

NOT NEW BUT OLD

The constant recourse of the Reformers to the thought and the vocabulary of the New Testament in their proclamation of the Gospel makes it evident that the Reformation Gospel was essentially "a deeper plunge into the gospel" of the New Testament. Their preaching was not new but old, as old as the Bible. To confirm that identity of the Reformation Gospel and the New Testament Gospel, it will be necessary to make a careful study of the essential nature of the New Testament message. Three distinctive - though not distinct - terms have to be considered: evangelion, which directs attention to the nature of the gospel, as good news; kerygma, which directs attention to the preaching of the gospel, as

¹Luther, Commentary on Galatians (Watson's ed.), p. 481

²ibid., p. 494

proclamation; and didache, which directs attention to the implication of the gospel, as ethical teaching.

Evangelion - The Nature of the Gospel

In classical use the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον* meant 'reward for good news;' its later transference to the good news itself was a direct result of the use of it and its cognates in the Greek Bible (Septuagint and New Testament). In the earlier part of the Old Testament it still tends to have this significance, and is concerned with news on a human level.¹ But in the Psalms and in the Prophets it has come to have a religious rather than a secular meaning, dealing not with human tidings but with the good news of God's redemptive activity for men. In Psalm 40 (39 in LXX), verses 9, 10, for example, the Psalmist declares that he has proclaimed the good news of God's righteousness, God's faithfulness and God's salvation in the great congregation.² Similarly, Psalm 96.2 (95 in LXX), sounds forth a call to proclaim the good news of God's salvation from day to day.³ Here, and elsewhere in the Psalms, the very terms employed anticipate New Testament usage.

In the Prophets the evangelion is good news, not of past deliverance but of future hope: it is essentially forward-looking. Familiar phrases like "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion;"⁴ "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace;"⁵ "The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek"⁶ have in them not only the promise of the New Testament Gospel, but its very vocabulary. Through prophetic lips there came the good news that God had not forsaken His people, and that salvation, in a fuller and deeper sense than the past had ever known, was sure and was at hand. So

¹ Cf. II Samuel 4. 10: I Kings 1. 42: I Samuel 31. 9

² εὐαγγελισάμην δικαιοσύνην ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ μεγάλῃ... καὶ τὸ σωτήριον εἶπα

³ εὐαγγελίζεσθε ἡμέραν ἐξ ἡμέρας τὸ σωτήριον αὐτοῦ.

⁴ Isaiah 40.9, ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος Σιών

⁵ Isaiah 52.7, ὡς εὐαγγελιζόμενος ἀγαθὰ

⁶ Isaiah 61.1, εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἐπίστειλε με.

the Old Testament evangelion was the good news of God's redemptive acts in the past and the promise of a consummation yet to come, when God's redemptive purpose for the world would be fulfilled. When that promise was realised in Christ, the Gospel of the New Testament that proclaimed its fulfilment was not new but old: Jesus Himself saw in the prophecy of Isaiah 61. 1 - 3 a description of His own ministry.¹

So far as Jesus' own preaching of the Gospel is concerned, there is truth in R. W. Dale's epigram, "Jesus came not so much to preach a Gospel as that there might be a Gospel to preach," but like most epigrams it is no more than half-true. Mark states clearly that "after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel..."² The essence of the Gospel that He preached was that "the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand."³ But the Kingdom was present in Himself: in a very real sense, therefore, He was the Gospel, and Dale is right in saying that His coming meant that there was a Gospel to preach. He was the good news of God, incarnate, and in Him men were confronted with the challenge of the everlasting Gospel.

The evangelion of the Acts and the Epistles is, as Paul described it in Ephesians 3. 8, 10, a many-sided, many-coloured thing:

that I should preach (*εὐαγγελίσασθαι*) among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold (*πολυποίκιλος*, many-coloured) wisdom of God.

But there are certain aspects of it that we may pick out and underline.

¹Luke 4. 18 - 21

²Mark 1. 14

³Mark 1. 15

1. It was the Gospel of the Word. In Acts 8. 4 we are told that those who were dispersed by persecution went everywhere, "preaching the word" (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν λόγον). Similarly, in Acts 15. 35, Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, "Teaching and preaching the word of the Lord" (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι... τὸν λόγον τοῦ Κυρίου). What they preached was not merely a word about God, but the word which comes from God. "Here," says Archbishop F. D. Coggan, "is the prophetic note of the Old Testament enriched with all the wealth of the great central events of the life and death and resurrection of Christ."¹ The preaching of the Gospel was the preaching of the Word of God.

2. The Apostolic Gospel was the Gospel of God or the Gospel of the grace of God. Paul in Romans 1. 1 describes himself as separated "unto the gospel of God" (εἰς εὐαγγέλιον Θεοῦ), and then goes on to detail the mighty acts of God for our salvation. In his address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he speaks of his commission to bear witness to "the gospel of the grace of God" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ);² and grace for Paul meant God's sovereign power in action on behalf of undeserving men. The Apostolic Gospel was the good news of the sovereign grace of God.

3. The Apostolic Gospel was the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 4. 23; 9. 35; 24. 15). For the apostles the life, death and resurrection of Christ were the decisive act of God by which His eternal sovereignty was realised in history. The realm of evil powers and principalities had been invaded, as was illustrated, for example, in Samaria, where Philip came "preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ (εὐαγγελιζόμενος περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χ.)."³

4. The Apostolic Gospel was the Gospel of salvation. (Ephesians 1. 13 - τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν). Paul in

¹F. D. Coggan, The Ministry of the Word (London, 1945), p. 64

²Acts 20. 24

³Acts 8. 12

Romans 1. 16 declares that he is not ashamed of the evangelion, "for it is the power of God unto salvation," and then goes on to show that the way of that salvation is justification by faith, "to every one that believeth." The Gospel is the Gospel of salvation, received by faith alone.

It will not have escaped notice that this delineation of the Apostolic Gospel corresponds exactly with the earlier sections of this thesis. The Reformation, we have seen, was the Re-@iscovery of the Word of God - the Re-@iscovery of the Gospel of the Word: the Re-@iscovery of the Divine Sovereignty - the Re-discovery of the Gospel of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom: the Re-discovery of the Way of Salvation - the Re-discovery of the Gospel of salvation, received by faith alone. The fact that this gospel was to be preached to all - "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"¹ - and that ordinary people outside the ranks of the ministry shared in the fellowship of its service² - links it with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, re-discovered at the Reformation. And the fact that believers were to conduct themselves "worthily of the Gospel of Christ"³ links it with the Reformation's re-@iscovery of practical piety. In short, the re-discoveries of the Reformation studied in this thesis were ultimately one re-discovery - the re-discovery of the Gospel.

Two things important for our study remain to be said about the Gospel as evangelion. The first is that the evangelion is one, not many.⁴ Though we have grown accustomed to the plural form,

¹Mark 16. 15

²Paul thanks God for the members of the Church in Philippi, "for your fellowship in the Gospel" (*ἔπε τῆ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, 1.5*) and later in the same epistle speaks of women, "which laboured with me in the gospel" (*αἱ πρὸς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν μοι, 4.3*)

³Philippians 1. 27 - *μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε*

— J. B. Phillips - "Make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the Gospel of Christ."

⁴Luther in his Preface to the New Testament writes: 'Therefore let it first be known that we must rid ourselves of the delusion that there are four Gospels...on the contrary we must adhere to this:... the New Testament is one book, in which are written the gospel and God's promise.....Thus every man may be sure there is only one Gospel, only one book in the New Testament, only one faith, and only one God, who promises salvation.' Works, Deutsche Bibel, vi. 2

'Gospels,' that form would not have been understood in the apostolic age, nor probably for nearly a hundred years afterwards. Justin Martyr, writing about the middle of the second century, seems to have been the first to use 'Gospels' as a designation of the first four books of the New Testament - "the memoirs composed by the apostles."¹ Earlier writers are careful to use the singular to refer either to a single gospel-writing or to a set of such writings.² The four records are essentially four accounts of the one evangelion: they are not different gospels which derive their distinctiveness from the standpoint or personality of each of the writers. The evangelion is one, and the apostles speak with one voice when they refer to the gospel.

The second thing to be said is that the evangelion demands a response. It is not simply good news to be listened to: it is good news that demands action. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of a preaching of the gospel that was unavailing, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."³ And Christ makes it quite clear that His coming with the Gospel demands a response of repentance and faith: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel...and saying,...Repent ye and believe the gospel."⁴ It is only through the response of repentance and faith that the evangelion is good news at all.

Kerygma - The Proclamation of the Gospel

A generation ago the index of a book on the New Testament would scarcely have contained a reference to the word 'kerygma;' today

¹ Justin Martyr, First Apology, in Early Christian Fathers, vol. I, The Library of Christian Classics, (London, 1953), p. 286

² Cf. Didache, 8², Early Christian Fathers, p. 174: Ignatius, To the Philadelphians, 8², ibid., p. 110

³ Hebrews 4. 2 - και γαρ εσμεν ευγγελισαμενοι καθαπερ κηκεινοι αλλ' ουκ ωφελησεν, ο λογος της ακοης εκεινους μη συνκεκερασμενους τη πιστει τοις ακουσατιν'

⁴ Mark 1. 14, 15

no study of the message of the New Testament would be considered complete without adequate references to it.

This emphasis on the kerygma began for English readers with the publication in 1936 of Professor C. H. Dodd's book, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments, described by Professor A. M. Hunter as "one of the finest contributions to New Testament science in our time."¹

Professor Dodd argued that from a study of the speeches in the first part of Acts, confirmed by credal fragments in the Epistles, it is possible to reconstruct a definite pattern of apostolic preaching, called the kerygma. Though the word κηρυγμα itself occurs in the New Testament only nine times, its cognate κηρυσσω occurs more than sixty times. The essential meaning of κηρυσσω is 'to proclaim as a herald,' 'to proclaim with authority to all whom it may concern a message which the messenger has been commissioned to deliver.'² Through the work of Professor Dodd and other New Testament scholars who followed his lead, it is possible to reconstruct with some confidence the fundamental pattern of apostolic preaching - the kerygma.

It should perhaps be noted that some recent New Testament scholarship is not so sure that Professor Dodd and his disciples were justified in using the New Testament term kerygma to refer to the content of the Apostolic preaching. Professor Kurt Goldammer in an article on The Kerygma-concept in the oldest Christian literature in relation to new theological conceptions, in Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft,³ argues convincingly from a careful study of the use of the term in the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers that kerygma in the earliest Christian literature refers not

¹ Article on The Unity of the New Testament: the Kerygma, in The Expository Times, vol. LVIII, No. 9, June, 1947, P. 228

² Cf. G. Friedrich's articles on κηρυγμα, κηρυσσω in G. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart, 1933 seq.) III. 683 - 716

³ Kurt Goldammer, Der Kerygma-Begriff in der ältesten christlichen Literatur Zur Frage neuer theologischer Begriffsbildungen in Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 48, Nos. 1,2, Berlin, 1957

so much to the content of the message as to the manner of preaching it. His argument concludes:

Thus the present-day usage of this harmless expression is new and only partially has it weak support in the Canon and the oldest extra-canonical literature. It is not so much the legacy of the New Testament as the property of modern theological concepts. Why do we speak so mysteriously about the "Pauline Kerygma"? Why do we not speak simply and properly of the apostolic or Pauline preaching?

It is probably true that the term kerygma as applied to the content of the Apostolic preaching is more a fashionable term of modern biblical theology than of the Bible itself,² but it is unlikely that the trend towards this use of the term will be reversed, and in the discussion which follows it is used in the popular sense, as referring to the content of the Apostolic preaching.

Though New Testament scholars are not entirely agreed on the details of the kerygma, it seems that the message of the apostles can be summarised in such terms as these: Prophecy has been fulfilled, the new age has been inaugurated by the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who has been exalted as Lord to sit at God's right hand, and Who will come again to judge the world: therefore all who hear this message are called to repent and receive forgiveness of sins.³

¹Kurt Goldammer, op. cit., p. 100: Die heutige Verwendung des harmlosen Ausdrucks ist also neu und hat nur teilweise einen schwachen Rückhalt im Kanon und in der ältesten außerkanonischen Literatur. Er gehört somit zur modernen theologischen Begriffsbildung, nicht zum neutestamentlichen Gut.... Warum reden wir geheimnisvoll vom "paulinischen Kerygma"? Warum sprechen wir nicht einfach und angemessen von der apostolischen oder paulinischen Predigt?

²Cf. William Baird, What is the Kerygma? in Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. LXXVI, Part III, September, 1957, p. 184: Also, R. H. Strachan, The Gospel in the New Testament, in The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick, New York, 1951, vol. VII, p. 4

³T. F. Glasson, The Kerygma: Is Our Version Correct? in The Hibbert Journal, January, 1953, pp. 129 - 133, argues that Christ's return as Judge should be omitted, and the responsibility of witnessing should be added to the kerygma.

Before passing on from a definition of the kerygma to its particular relevance for our present study, two things should be noted. The apostolic kerygma does not differ in essence from Christ's own proclamation of His Gospel. While His death, resurrection and exaltation were still future, He did speak of them to His disciples, and His Gospel stressed emphatically that in Him God's eternal sovereignty was now invading the realm of evil and winning a decisive victory over the powers of wickedness.¹ The apostolic kerygma, in short, was not something new. Nor was it essentially different from the evangelion. The word εὐαγγέλιον is practically synonymous with κηρυγμα, just as the verb εὐαγγελίζεσθαι has essentially the same meaning as κηρυσσέν.² And the word εὐαγγέλιον is used as the object of either εὐαγγελίζεσθαι or κηρυσσέν. What difference there is between kerygma and evangelion centres not on the content of the message - that is the same for both - but on its quality. Evangelion has perhaps a rather more subjective reference: the gospel is 'good news' for the recipient. Kerygma is objective proclamation, referring to the activity of preaching. But essentially the two are the same.

The following points about the kerygma are important for our present study:

1. The kerygma stressed the fact that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled. As the Apostolic preachers proclaimed the central truths of Christianity with the Old Testament in their hands, they said, "This is that!"³ A distant hope had become reality: the new age to which the prophets and the whole Old Testament had looked forward was here: God's promised intervention was now contemporary. It was not something completely new: it was something that had been long foretold.

¹Cf. Luke 11. 20 f.

²In I Cor. 15, 1, 14 εὐαγγέλιον and κηρυγμα are used in the same context with fundamentally the same meaning.

³Cf. Acts 2. 16.

2. The kerygma was essentially positive proclamation. The characteristic mood of the New Testament is indicative rather than imperative. As John Baillie put it:

The New Testament does not say, 'Ye shall know the rules, and by them ye shall be bound', but 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Hence its fundamental proclamation (its kerygma, as it is in the Greek) is set not in the imperative but in the indicative. The aorist indicative is indeed the New Testament's favourite tense. 'God so loved that he gave...'

The Gospel is not good advice or good example: it is good news, the proclamation of the supreme act of God. At the heart of the kerygma of the New Testament was the proclamation of irrevocable victory, manifested and guaranteed in the Resurrection.

3. The kerygma of the New Testament was essentially one. There were not many kerygmata: there was but one. That is the most significant thing in the trend of New Testament studies inaugurated by Professor C. H. Dodd's thesis. The pattern of the kerygma is traceable through the whole of the New Testament. As Professor J. S. Stewart has put it,

running right through the New Testament from start to finish, reappearing steadily through all the variations of Evangel and Epistle, Acts and Apocalypse, history and homily, pastoral preaching, beating out like the deep recurring theme of a great symphony, there is the announcement - brief, trenchant and authoritative - of certain historic events of final and absolute significance, the mighty acts ~~in~~ in which God had visited and redeemed His people.²

Most clearly seen in the early speeches of Acts and in Paul's Epistles, the pattern of the kerygma is discoverable in all the New Testament writings. The Gospel according to Mark in particular is simply expanded kerygma: the shorter epistles like I Peter and I John have it as their central motif: the first chapter of the Book of Revelation with its affirmation of fundamental Christian

¹ John Baillie, Invitation to Pilgrimage (London, 1942), p. 51

² J. S. Stewart, A Faith to Proclaim (London, 1953), p. 13

truths¹ sets the framework for the revelations of the rest of the book. As Professor A. M. Hunter puts it,

Through the variegated fabric of the New Testament, now clear and conspicuous, now veiled and hidden, runs the golden thread of the apostolic preaching.²

Amidst all the variety of the writings of the New Testament, the kerygma is the one unmistakable strand of unity.

4. The kerygma speaks of a crisis demanding personal response.

One of the basic elements of the kerygma was the fact of judgment. It was, as Professor Dodd has said,

a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in an eschatological setting from which those facts derive their saving significance.³

Jesus "was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead."⁴ That fact lent compelling urgency to the call to repentance and faith. Quite literally, the Christian proclamation is a critical message, for *κρίσις* is judgment. And always at the heart of it is an insistent, urgent call to personal response.

What, then, is the relevance of our study of the gospel as kerygma for our contention that the gospel re-discovered at the Reformation was not new but old? Every point regarding the kerygma that has been made above is cogent evidence that the Reformation Gospel was essentially a re-discovery.

1. The fact that the kerygma had its roots in the Old Testament is evidence that in the gospel in every age man is confronted by the eternal purpose of God, not new but as old as God's gracious dealings with men.

2. The Gospel as proclamation (kerygma) of good news (evangelion) of God's redemptive, victorious action in Christ, was,

¹ Revelation 1. 5 - 8

² A. M. Hunter, The Unity of the New Testament: the Kerygma in The Expository Times, vol. LVIII, No. 9, June, 1947, p. 230

³ C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments, p. 47

⁴ Acts 10. 42.

as we have seen,¹ precisely the Gospel of all the Reformers.

3. The fact that there is but one kerygma is significant in that there cannot be another. If there is another, it cannot be the true gospel. Paul makes it quite clear in II Corinthians 11.4 that to come with another Gospel is to preach another Jesus Whom he had not preached,² and in Galatians 1. 7 that 'another Gospel' is 'a travesty of the Gospel of Christ.'³ At the heart of 'another Gospel' is man's attempt to seek salvation by his own means and by his own endeavours. When that happens - as it happened in the Judaizers' insistence on the Law, and in the medieval conception of merit - the one Gospel needs to be re-discovered, as in truth it was re-discovered at the Reformation.

4. The demand of the kerygma for personal response is matched, as we have seen, by the Reformers' thought of the gospel as personal encounter, where the Holy Spirit brings the believer to the place of faith's response.⁴ In an interesting and stimulating study of early Christian preaching, by one of a group of Swedish theologians at Uppsala University, a rather different approach is made to the subject of the Apostolic kerygma.⁵ Among the elements that Professor Bo Reicke finds in it is "Conversion, including Admonition and Invitation." "Admonition" is "the reproof of existing wickedness," and is really an Old Testament emphasis, though it must be given its place in New Testament preaching as a background to "Invitation." "Invitation" is of the essence of New Testament preaching, as men are called to enter the Kingdom. If these two features are essential elements of the New Testament kerygma - and Professor Bo Reicke gives convincing evidence that they are - what have we here but Luther's teaching of the roles of the Law and the Gospel? Both have their place in the response which alone makes

¹ supra, p. 310

² ἄλλων Ἰησοῦν κηρύσσεται ἐν οὐκ ἐκηρύξαμεν

³ ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον... μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

- J. B. Phillips' translation

⁴ supra, pp. 307 ff.

⁵ A Synopsis of Early Christian Preaching, by Bo Reicke, in The Root of the Vine, by Anton Fridrichsen and other members of Uppsala University, Eng. trans. (London, 1953), pp. 128ff

the gospel effective for salvation.

It seems clear, therefore, that, whether we think of the New Testament Gospel as evangelion or kerygma - good news or proclamation - it was that Gospel in all its fullness that was re-discovered at the Reformation. It was not new but old.

Didache - The Implication of the Gospel

Professor Dodd's influential study of the apostolic kerygma¹ was based on the distinction which he drew very sharply between kerygma and didache, between the pattern of the preaching of God's saving acts and the pattern of ethical instruction in the early church, between the proclamation of what God had done for men and the teaching which declared what God expects men to do.

Some scholars have argued that Professor Dodd drew the line of distinction too sharply,² and certainly it must not be pressed too far, lest we find ourselves with two gospels instead of one. But the distinction between kerygma and didache must be stressed, if only to emphasise the relationship between them. The Biblical order is, first the kerygma, then the didache.

It must be stressed that the didache was an essential part of the gospel. To omit it would be to set aside a great part of the teaching of Christ and the ethical and pastoral sections of the Epistles. The whole point of the Epistle of James is that faith as the acceptance of certain truths without works is dead: his epistle is didache through and through. But it must also be stressed that didache severed from evangelion and kerygma is like a tree cut off from its roots. That is the point made by Professor A. M. Hunter in his The Unity of the New Testament:

Obviously any presentation of the Christian Faith in the twentieth century which claims to be truly Christian must bear a real relation to the preaching of the first apostles. If

¹The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments

²e.g., R. H. Strachan, "The Gospel in the New Testament, in The Interpreter's Bible (New York, 1951), vol. VII. p. 4:
Floyd V. Filson, Jesus Christ the Risen Lord (New York, 1956)
p. 34

³H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word, pp. 29, 30

that be so, preaching which finds the heart of the Gospel in, say, The Fatherhood of God, or the ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount, must be regarded not as unchristian, but as a failure to 'continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.' (Acts 2 : 42). It is didache, but it is not kerygma. Not primarily in these terms did the apostles preach. Any preaching today which aims to be in line with the original Gospel must conserve the essential affirmations of the Apostolic preaching.¹

But to say that is not to say that the ethical implications of the gospel can be omitted or ignored. The didache did not come first; it must be preceded by the kerygma: but, no less, the kerygma must be followed by the didache.

That is the point of the Sermon on the Mount and the ethical injunctions of the New Testament Epistles. These are not laws issued for the obedience of unregenerate men: they are the Law of Love for those who, by the grace of God, have made their response to the proclamation of the Gospel and have become citizens of His Kingdom. The didache is for their instruction and edification, and for theirs alone.

Just as it is possible to discover the general pattern of the apostolic kerygma, so it is possible to discover the general pattern of the apostolic didache.² Converts are exhorted to lay aside the kind of conduct which may have been natural enough in their pre-Christian days and to accept completely new moral standards, "to put off," as Paul expresses it, "the old man and to put on the new."³ Then some of the demands of the new way of life are set forth, with special emphasis on purity and sobriety, humility and readiness to forgive. Then are detailed some of the implications of the Gospel for family, social and community life. In such general terms, with large variations of detail to suit particular situations, was set forth the demand of the Gospel on those who had received its message of God's redeeming grace.

¹A. M. Hunter, The Unity of the New Testament (4th ed., 1952), p. 31

²Cf. C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 20 ff.

It is not necessary to traverse again the ground which has been covered already in the section on "The Ethical and Social Implications" of the Reformation. But it is worth reiterating that this conception of the didache as a necessary implication of the kerygma is not new but old. The formulation of the Law at Sinai did not begin with demand, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" it began with proclamation: "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." First there was the kerygma declaring the mighty acts by which God established the covenant with His people: then the didache, which detailed the obligations implied by that covenant.

Later Judaism made a distinction between Haggada, the exposition of Biblical truths, and Halakha, detailed legal enactments for conduct - a distinction analogous to the Early Church's distinction between kerygma and didache. When the Church of the New Testament made that distinction, and insisted in effect that the kerygma must precede the didache, and that, at the same time, the didache must follow the kerygma, its emphasis was not new but old. And when the Reformers made the same distinction and insisted on the same order of precedence, it was a re-discovery of the full gospel of the Word of God.

Such a re-discovery was then imperative, for, in medieval preaching, ethics had been divorced from the Gospel, and the Church had failed to 'continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine' (Acts 2. 42): kerygma had been superseded by didache. T. B. Kilpatrick writes,

It may be urged that preaching of a negative and denunciatory kind was needed in ages characterized by fleshliness and brutality, and that it did produce beneficial results. This need not be gainsaid; and yet such preaching does not truly represent the Message of the New Testament.¹

And yet God has never left Himself without a witness. In the

¹T. B. Kilpatrick, New Testament Evangelism (London, 1911), p. 94

creeds and to some extent in the liturgy of the Church the kerygma was still set forth for any who had ears to hear.¹

To say that the Gospel was re-discovered at the Reformation is not to say that the Gospel had been entirely obliterated in the preceding centuries. The Apostolic kerygma still lived on, never completely choked by the debris which had accumulated around it. As Luther wrote,

Even under Antichrist, Christ has with might preserved baptism, the bare text of the Gospel in the pulpit, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed, so as to preserve many of His Christians and thus preserve His Church.²

Among the instruments which contributed ~~much~~ to its survival in the witness of the Church was the Apostles' Creed. While the legend that this Creed was the actual work of the Apostles cannot be accepted - in its present form it dates from the early fifth century - it is truly Apostolic in the sense that it preserves the essential affirmations of the Apostolic preaching.³ Its second article -

I believe in...Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead -

is in essence a revised and enlarged version of the Apostolic kerygma.⁴

¹Cf. J. S. Stewart, A Faith To Proclaim, p. 14 - "It can moreover be shown that it was this same apostolic kerygma which at a later day determined the structure of the creeds and the liturgy of the Church."

²Martin Luther, Works (Philadelphia, 1915-32), V. 26

³Cf. A. M. Hunter, The Unity of the New Testament: the Kerygma in The Expository Times, vol. LVIII, No, 9, June, 1947, p. 230

⁴The Descent into Hades is an apparent addition (it is not found in the old Roman Creed of Rufinus - c. A.D. 390 - which underlies the Apostles' Creed), but Calvin insists that it cannot be omitted from the Gospel, provided it is properly understood. He takes it to refer to the spiritual agony that Christ underwent for us, as equivalent to 'the pangs of death.' See Institutes II. xvi. 8ff.

The extent to which the use of the Apostles' Creed in the worship of the Church served to maintain the Apostolic kerygma through the Dark Ages may be measured by its popularity in the medieval Church - a popularity attested, as D. H. Hislop has pointed out, "by the fact that it might be said in the vernacular when the Mass or Nicene Creed was recited."¹ Its constant use in the services of the Church meant that, however overlaid by the other things, the fundamental facts of the Gospel were still being proclaimed.

The place of the Church's liturgy in maintaining the Apostolic kerygma is more debatable. While it may be true that in the worship of the Church, culminating in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the life, death and resurrection of Christ were kept before the eyes of men, it must not be forgotten that, just in so far as the Lord's Supper had become the Mass - man's renewed offering of Christ's sacrifice to God rather than a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice offered once for all - the essential message of the Gospel had been obscured. The Church's worship in some measure may have kept alive the memory of a great redemption, but it had ceased to be an undistorting reflector of the Gospel. And so, when the time came for the re-discovery of the Gospel at the Reformation, there was needed, too, the re-discovery of truly Scriptural worship in which the Gospel could be expressed.

NOT HISTORICAL MERELY BUT CONTEMPORARY

Let three distinguished scholars of today underline the need for a fresh re-discovery of the Apostolic and Reformation Gospel.

Writing in 1936, Professor C. H. Dodd declared:

Much of our preaching in Church at the present ~~time~~ day would not have been recognized by the early Christians as kerygma...²

¹D. H. Hislop, Our Heritage in Public Worship (Edinburgh, 1935), p.

²C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments
(London, 1936), p. 5.

Writing in 1947 about modern English preaching, in his book on the Preaching of John Calvin, Dr. T. H. L. Parker asserted:

If we had to find an historical parallel for the contemporary situation, we should turn to the later Middle Ages rather than to the Reformation.¹

Writing in 1953, Professor J. S. Stewart asked:

What then is our basic need?....It is a rediscovery of Christianity as a vital relationship to a living Christ.²

If these assessments of the situation are accurate - and there is no reason to doubt them - it is evident that there is need for a contemporary re-discovery of the Gospel - in three senses.

(a) The Gospel must be re-discovered as kerygma, the proclamation of God's answer to man's dilemma and man's despair, the heralding of His mighty acts in Jesus Christ crucified, risen and exalted. The Gospel must be preached not as an ideal or a demand but as a declaration of the mighty acts of God in Christ for a world's redemption.

(b) The Gospel must be re-discovered as evangelion, the good news of God's salvation. At the heart of that good news are the Cross and the Resurrection - the Cross telling of atonement made and reconciliation accomplished, and the Resurrection telling of victory won over all the principalities and powers of evil.

(c) The Gospel must be re-discovered as personal encounter. To say that is not to accept the view of Professor Rudolf Bultmann that the Gospel is personal encounter and nothing more. Bultmann makes a distinction between "historical facts" and "historic encounter," and argues that the Christian kerygma has nothing to

¹T. H. L. Parker, The Oracles of God: an Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin (London, 1947), p. 128

²J. S. Stewart, A Faith To Proclaim (London, 1953), p. 143.

do with facts which happened in Palestine between A.D. 1 and A.D. 33, but with the Christ Who in the Word calls men here and now to faith. The kerygma for him is not "a merely historical account which, like a reporter's story, reminds a public of important but by-gone facts....it is, by nature, personal address which accosts each individual, throwing the person himself into question by rendering his self-understanding problematic, and demanding a decision of him."¹ He declares:

Christ, the crucified and risen, meets us in the word of preaching and nowhere else. It would be an error if we were here to ask what was the historical origin of the message, as if this origin could justify its legitimacy. That would mean that we were wishing to establish faith in God's word by means of historical investigation. The word of preaching meets us as God's word, and when we confront it we cannot ask any questions as to its legitimacy. Rather does it ask us whether we are willing to believe or not.²

Some of Bultmann's followers would go on to claim that Bultmann is the true disciple of Luther, and that his views are the true outworking of Luther's doctrine of sola fide.³

But Bultmann's thesis omits the elementary fact that the kerygma of the New Testament specifically proclaims a saving act of God that is bound to history, an actual intervention of God in the historical world of space and time. The word of preaching is not only a word that encounters us and demands our decision: it is at the same time a message of a historical event which happened in a particular place at a particular time. The Apostolic kerygma had its roots in fact: "That...which we have heard, which we have

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. K. Grobel (New York, 1951), I. 307

² R. Bultmann, Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen (Munich, 1941), pp. 66f, cited Paul Althaus, The So-Called Kerygma and the Historical Jesus (Eng. trans, Edinburgh, 1959), pp. 27,28

³ e.g., F. Gogarten, Entmythologisierung und Kirche, 2nd ed., (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 104, cited Althaus, p. 47: Emmanuel Hirsch, Die Auferstehungsgeschichten und der Christliche Glaube (Tubingen, 1940), cited Althaus, p. 44

seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life....that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you..."¹

To claim that Bultmann stands in lineal succession to Luther overlooks the fact that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, re-discovered from the Bible, is inconceivable apart from his conviction of the credibility of Holy Scripture and the historical reality of the history to which it bears witness. "Therefore," to quote Professor Walter Kunneth of Erlangen University,

it appears somewhat absurd to describe Bultmann as an executor of the last will and testament of the Lutheran Reformation....²

But it is possible, as the Reformers so clearly realised,³ to see the Gospel as personal encounter, without questioning for one moment the historicity of the Gospels. It is not necessary to follow Bultmann in "de-mythologizing" the New Testament so that its kerygma can be stated in existential terms, in order to maintain the truth that the kerygma is meaningless apart from personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It is history, but it has to be taken out of history and become contemporary experience. And the work of doing that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit alone Who can make the Gospel a contemporary reality for us. It was so at Pentecost. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," said Peter on that tremendous day.⁴ This is that: prophecy had become reality; history had become contemporary fact. And so it is still. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel must remain nothing more than a story of days that are gone. "He shall receive of Mine," said Christ, "and shall shew it unto you."⁵ That is to say, it

¹I John 1. 1,3

²In an article on "Dare We Follow Bultmann?" in Christianity Today, vol. VI, No. 1, Oct. 13, 1961, p. 28

³supra, pp. 307 ff.

⁴Acts. 2. 16

⁵John 16. 14

is the Holy Spirit Who alone can make Christ's forgiveness, Christ's presence, Christ's victory, Christ's power, an authentic contemporary experience. It is the Holy Spirit Who takes the Gospel out of history and ratifies it redeemingly in every heart and in every generation. There is no gift we stand in greater need of today. And it is ours for the asking. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"¹ It is that gift which makes the Gospel, in every age, God's re-discovered answer to man's desperate need, "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."² And that supreme re-discovery, in the twentieth century as in the sixteenth, is the essence of reformation.

¹Luke 11. 13

²Romans 1. 16.

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Explanatory Note on Classification:

Since the thesis is concerned not only with the doctrines of the Reformation but with the re-discovery of these doctrines from the Bible and, to some extent, from the Fathers, it has been thought advisable to sub-divide the Primary Sources into two sections: I. Pre-Reformation Writings, including (i) the Bible; (ii) the Apostolic Fathers; and (iii) the writings of the Medieval Period: II. The Writings of the Reformation Period, including (i) editions and translations of the writings of the Reformers; (ii) Reformation Confessions and Catechisms; and (iii), on the other side, the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Section III includes all Secondary Sources consulted, under the title, Post-Reformation Writings.

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