

## **MARTIN LUTHER AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION: LESSONS OF HISTORY**

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the life and times of Martin Luther, and his role as the protagonist of Protestant Reformation. It is now completely unacceptable to ignore the quantum of evidences in the archives, and to dismiss Luther as an arrogant heretic. Distortion of historical facts has over the years hindered objective and balanced interpretation of the role of Martin Luther in the Reformation movement. This study is aimed at unveiling the truth about the Reformation, especially the crucial lessons of history.*

KEYWORDS: Martin Luther, Protestantism, Reformation, Pope, Vatican

### INTRODUCTION

To whom do we attribute the positive and negative consequences of the Reformation to? Was the Reformation the outcome of Luther's rebellious spirit or a culmination of multiplicity of factors? Who was Luther in the medieval church? These are some of the puzzling questions that this paper will attempt to answer with historical accuracy. The historian, H. A. L Fisher has said that "the Reformation was a revolt against papal theocracy, clerical privilege, and the hereditary paganism of the Mediterranean races" (501). Fisher went on to say that the Reformation was also an insurgence of the laity against clerical immunities and excesses. But more than that, Fisher avers that the Reformation was a revival movement to reclaim the lost glory of earliest Christianity (501).

The Reformation occurred when it did according to Fisher because the abuses that were linked to papal government and the church were then felt to be grave beyond the toleration of a purified conscience. There was also a strong desire for a simpler and more spiritual form of Christianity. The Reformation coincided with the desires of secular authorities to appropriate the excessive wealth of the church to offset dwindling financial fortunes of the states.

The Reformation spirit was boosted by the rising tide of nationalism and the transformation of the papacy into an Italian state. Fisher described the Reformation as a great movement of intellectual emancipation which was a culmination of chains of events—apathy, doubts, criticism and protest which gathered momentum and degenerated into a brawling river of revolt and that: “A spirit of brilliant, forward-reaching enlightenment came into Europe, challenging traditional knowledge and shaming old abuses or superstitions by its scorn and mockery” (501, 502).

The Reformation was also a rebellion against the authority of the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. For the first time in world history, the secular engaged the sacred in dialectics. The Christian church, which was the repository and custodian of civilization, came under severe and intensive pressure. The authority, inerrancy and infallibility of the church were questioned. Metaphysical knowledge was condemned as sophistry and benighted illusion; the stage was set for the overhauling of Christianity. After series of protests from within and without, Martin Luther emerged as a towering prince and engaged the Papacy in a tough doctrinal disputation.

## BIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN LUTHER

Luther was born into a rugged, independent farming lineage at Saxony. The family had a reputation for deep religion and dignified poverty. Born to Hans and Margaret Luther on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany on Saint Martin's day, young Luther was named Martin in honor of the day of his birth. His father was a poor miner with a meager income that cannot afford sound and standard education for his son. His father was a stringent disciplinarian of the first order, with a predetermined zeal to train up his children as good Christians in a world of fallen morality.

Young Martin though promising proved very stubborn even at infancy and was always beaten by his parents. He was so frightened of his mother and father that on one occasion, he ran away. Martin's parents wanted their son to become a legal practitioner because they discovered from childhood that he was exceptionally brilliant and cleverly born with latent qualities that will catapult him into a legal luminary. Family sources have it that Luther loved music and he had an admirable voice. He used to go out singing in the streets of the town, and pay part of his school fees with the money he was given for his singing.

Luther's early childhood education was at the Cathedral School of Maburg, and Grammar School at Eisenach. At the age of 18, Martin had showed enough sign to convince his poverty-stricken parents that he was a genius with a mission on earth. He was sent to the University of Erfurt in 1501, to read law, but he opted for a life of solitude and contemplation. Martin refused to be a lawyer. His father was very angry when Martin, at the age of twenty-three, without telling his family, suddenly gave up his legal studies and entered a Monastery for Augustinian hermits in Erfut in July 1505.

The Monastery enjoyed respect under the supervision of Johann Von Staupitz (1429--1503), one of the best of the medieval monastics. Luther's ambition in the monastery was to seek peace with God. To achieve this, he studied the Bible deeply. Bill Austin has rightly observed that life and training in the monastery did not afford Luther the desired peace, and that when he conducted his first mass in May of 1507, he saw himself as being unworthy, a feeling that led him into a terrible sense of self-condemnation, depression and psychic imbalance (231).

He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1507. In 1510, Luther was sent to Rome on official assignment of the monastery. It was during this visit that Luther discovered the corruption of the Holy See and the obvious inability of the church to accomplish the purpose of God as required in the New Testament. When the new University of Wittenberg was opened in 1508, his ecclesiastical superiors selected Luther to join the foundation faculty. In 1511, Luther was appointed Vicar of the Augustinian Hermits, and Prior of eleven monasteries. In 1511, Luther became a Doctor of Theology and was meritoriously recalled to the University of Wittenberg as a professor of biblical studies (Atkinson 402). Martin Luther was married in 1526 to Katharina Von Bora, a former nun who escaped from a Cistercian cloister. They had six children. He stated that he married for three reasons: to please his father, to spite the Pope and the devil, and to seal his witness before martyrdom. Luther died on February 18, 1546, at Eisleben where he was born.

## LUTHER THE PROLIFIC WRITER AND PASTOR

Luther delivered ground-breaking lectures on Genesis (1512), Psalms (1513), Romans (1515) and Galatians (1516). Luther's eventful career as a biblical scholar covered three areas of concern: a teacher of theology, pastor and counselor. Until 1517, when he pasted his Theses, Luther was an unknown Augustinian monk, preacher and a university professor at Wittenberg. As a scholar-saint, Luther displayed a deep pastoral concern through devotional writings, free of polemics, but drew heavily from the Bible instead of the church fathers.

In 1517, he published the *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, which was a platform for him to challenge the philosophy of Duns Scotus and Biel, and also project Augustinian theology. It was in the same book that Luther condemned the Aristotelianism of the school-men (Scholasticism). Luther's Disputation was the foundation of the Reformation, which will culminate in years of intensive spiritual and mental torture, desperate struggle and alienation, which Luther went through. The primary intention of Luther in his writings was to lead the thirsty soul in its quest of godliness. Some of his writings include:

<i>Mediation on Christ Passion</i>	(1519)
<i>On Preferring to Die</i>	(1519)
<i>On The Worthy Reception of the Sacrament</i>	(1521)
<i>Comfort When Facing Great Temptations</i>	(1521)
<i>An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer</i>	(1519)
<i>Fourteen Consolations</i>	(1520)
<i>A Letter Of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution</i>	(1522)

<i>That a Christian Should Bear His Cross-With Patience</i>	(1530)
<i>Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks</i>	(1514)
<i>To the Saxon Princes</i>	(1545) (Rudolph 13).

## MARTIN LUTHER: A PSYCHOANALYTIC ASSESSMENT

A Psychoanalytic study of Luther reveals the fact that many experiences ranging from parental and societal influences affected his childhood. He inherited the peasant trait of spirituality and superstitions from his family. Luther also had a deep sense of cosmic alienation, the specter of purgatory and the wrath of God. Bill Austin writes on Luther's childhood spiritual development: "Luther's childhood exposure to excessive superstition and his natural sensitivity to spiritual meanings led him to interpret several incidents as warnings that he must get right with God" (231). The highest spiritual experience of Luther occurred on July 2, 1505, when he narrowly escaped instant destruction from a severe thunder storm near Stotternheim. Luther had the greatest shock of his life and vowed to Saint Anne (his father's patron saint) that if spared from death, he would become a monk (Austin 231).

Luther's personality and contribution to global historical development has become the prime concern of critical scholarship. Soren Kierkegaard described Luther as "... a patient of exceeding import for Christendom" (qtd. in Erikson 13-16). Erikson has observed that Kierkegaard did not mean to call Luther a patient in the clinical sense; but in a religious sense (patienthood), which manifested in archetypal dimension. Erikson, from a psychoanalytic perspective described Luther as a victim of adolescent crises of identity: "Luther, so it seems, at one time was a rather endangered young man, beset with a syndrome of conflicts. He found a spiritual solution not without the well-timed help of a therapeutically clever superior in the Augustinian order" (15).

## CONFLICT WITH THE POPE

Luther has been celebrated as the greatest and most courageous personage in church history. A man whose views and actions altered world history permanently. At the age of 34, Luther started serious doctrinal controversy with the Papacy. In October 31, 1517, the Augustinian Monk nailed his 95 Theses at the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg in the German State of Saxony. Luther called his 95 Theses "Disputation for Clarification of the Power of Indulgences". Luther believed that salvation resulted from 'justification by faith alone' (Latin, *Sola fide*) and not from priestly absolution or works of penance. Secondly, he taught that forgiveness is granted solely because of God's grace (*Sola gratia*) and not by the authority of priest or popes. Finally, Luther contended that all doctrinal matters must have the confirmation of the Scriptures only (*Sola scriptura*) and not by popes or church councils. The result of Luther's teaching was that some people in the church refused to acknowledge the authority of the pope. By 1521, Luther became the most controversial person in Continental Europe and was instantly identified as the most serious enemy of the Vatican.

From 1517 to 1522, Luther and many critics of Roman Catholicism in Germany became uncomfortable with the authority and primacy of the papacy. Theologically, Luther rejected Thomism, and denied the authority of St. Thomas as well as the superiority of the

magisterium. Luther rejected the criteria of interpretation of Vatican and adopted the philological and historical analysis used by Erasmus and other humanists in their bid to rediscover the original Scriptures (Cantor 137). Luther was courageous enough to attack variety of abuses by the Papacy and insisted that "the documentary basis of the papal position rested on forgery and misrepresentation and that positive evidence in the Scriptures denied the authority of priest or prelate in the early Christian church" (Cantor 137).

## SALE OF INDULGENCES

As a strategy to increase the lean revenue of the church, Pope Leo X entered into a pact with the powerful house of Hohenzollern, which had the political ambition to dominate Germany. A member of that house, Albert of Braden was already in control of two episcopal sees, and was in the process of securing the most vibrant and economically vibrant archbishopric in Germany, that is Mainz. Pope Leo X who gained notoriety as one of the worst popes in the hierarchy of corrupt popes reached an agreement to appoint Albert as Archbishop of Mainz with a bribe of ten thousand ducats.

Pope Leo X officially permitted Albert to raise the sum through the sale of indulgences in his territories. Half of the proceeds were to be sent to the Vatican for the building of the Basilica of Saint Peter, which Pope Julius II completed. Albert appointed the Dominican John Tetzel, a fraudulent cleric to sell the indulgences in Germany. Tetzel displayed unscrupulous business wizardry to achieve his aims. Justo Glonzalez observes that Tetzel and his collaborators deceived members of the public to belief that purchase of indulgence made the sinner "cleaner than when coming out of baptism and "cleaner than Adam before the fall and that "the cross of the seller of indulgences has as much power as the cross of Christ," and "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" (21).

Tetzel's action and claims aroused bitter resentment among the learned, who were convinced that the doctrines of the church has been commercialized for cheap profit. The corruption in the church which was concealed became manifest. German nationalist sentiment and the nostalgia for ecclesiastical autonomy also received a boost. The idea of permitting the living to buy indulgence for those already dead and for those in purgatory was first mooted and implemented by Pope Sixtus IV in 1476. Austin has also recorded another lie which Tetzel and his co-workers employed to manipulate and exploit the religious public.

The people were told that the money they contribute will be used to rebuild St. Peter's Church in Rome, while in reality only half of the money was to go to Rome, and the other half was secretly pledged to pay off a personal ecclesiastical debt. "Albert of Brandenburg, a prince-Bishop, coveted the archbishopric of Mainz, but he already held two bishoprics and it was against canon law to hold more than one. And besides he was too young to have any... Albert borrowed the needed money from the Fugger Bankers using as security the promise of an indulgence campaign..." (230).

There are cumulative weight of evidences to buttress the point that Luther did not have any idea of the fraudulent arrangement between Albert and the pope. In 1516, Luther openly questioned the doctrinal basis, and ethics of indulgence, with a powerful declaration

that the pope does not have any scripturally validated authority to back up his self-arrogated power to release souls from purgatory. Luther proceeded to attack the perversion of the doctrine of grace, the externalizing of the sacrament of penance and the trapping of conscience in a legalism that is at variance with, the prescription of the New Testament.

## EXCOMMUNICATION OF LUTHER

In April 1518 Luther addressed the triennial meeting of Augustinians at Heidelberg where he discussed exhaustively topics like 'God's righteousness, law and gospel, sin, grace, free will, faith, justification by works and justification in Christ. Luther's utterances and doctrinal position were at variance with the official Roman Catholic doctrines. Since the pope was unable to extradite him, because Luther preferred to be tried in Germany. The authorities of the University of Wittenberg and the Elector of Saxony pleaded for Luther to be tried in Augsburg on October 8, 1518.

The first trial was presided over by the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534), thereafter John Eck, (1486-1543) tried Luther at Leipzig in 1519 for a whole week and it was at this occasion that Luther disregarded and refuted the primacy of the Papacy and infallibility of sacred councils. The battle line was now drawn. Vatican leaders at Leipzig reached a consensus that Luther has fallen into the Hussite heresy to his detriment and that Luther has arrogantly pitted himself against "fifteen hundred years of history and theological wisdom of the best and greatest theologians and infallible utterances of all the popes in history. In repudiating the supremacy of the popes and of the general councils, it was claimed, that Luther had regard for his personal opinion above that of the Christian church..." (Cantor 138).

Luther accused the papacy of corrupting the church, ignoring the Scriptures, and misleading innocent and ignorant Christians astray. In an open letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, he castigated and humiliated the papacy with impunity: "The Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as-against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny" (Three Treatises, 135, 46). Luther won the lecturers and the entire university community at Wittenberg to himself through extreme radicalism.

The University congregation gathered on daily basis to hear Luther's sermons and rebellion against his church. Cantor writes: "Using the pamphlet as a propaganda medium, Luther reached beyond the walls of Wittenberg to the rest of Germany and eventually to all Europe. His writings were eagerly sought by printers. The torrent of abuse which he showered upon the papacy could not be stopped" (138). Luther was very confident of himself and his actions. The target of Luther's attack was the *Roman Curia*. In a letter to the pope, Luther declared:

I have resisted and will continue to resist your See as long as the spirit of faith lives in me. Not that I shall strive for the impossible or hope that by my efforts alone anything will be accomplished in that most disordered Babylon, where the fury of so many flatterers is turned against me; but I acknowledge my indebtedness to my Christian brethren, whom I am duty-bound to warn so that fewer of

them may be destroyed by the plagues of Rome, at least so that their destruction may be less cruel (Three Treatises 268).

It was the desire of medieval Catholicism to have Luther ignominiously excommunicated as a heretic and finally executed by the church as a criminal. That was not possible. In 1520, Pope Leo X issued a bull *Exsurge Domine*, condemning 41 errors of Professor Luther and inviting him to recant. On 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1520, Luther burnt publicly the papal bull along with the Code of Canon Law in the presence of the dons and students of Wittenberg University; amidst large scale scorn and mockery. After a long delay and cautious indecision, on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1521, the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem* excommunicated Professor Luther from the Catholic Church. Excommunication order on Luther did not reduce the problem of the Vatican; rather it escalated and aggravated.

### THE DIET OF WORMS

In April 1521, Luther was summoned to and arraigned at the imperial Diet of Worms by the secular power, at the appeal of the Papacy. He was tried by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, a staunch Catholic, as well as by the six Electors of the German State and other leaders and dignitaries, religious and secular. Under a unanimous decision, Luther was placed under both papal and imperial ban as an outlaw. However the ruler of his own German State, Elector Frederick of Saxony, who by use of force, stealthily kidnapped Luther, 'the morning star of Protestantism' and offered him shelter in Wartburg Castle.

With the full support of the university community at Wittenberg, and the political backing of Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony and the intelligent counseling of Luther's best friend, the gentle Greek scholar Philip Melancthon, the struggle to have Luther killed became tough for the Papacy. Luther immediately had a reputation as an advocate of the common people. His courage in publicly challenging the pope and emperor fetched him massive popularity across Europe.

Among the enemies of Luther, none was more important than the young newly elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V. from Spain, the grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, who like his grandmother, had a strong desire to reform the church. Charles V came to Germany for the first time in 1520. He was in the town of Worms to conduct his first diet and use that opportunity to address the German question. Charles V was known for his unwavering loyalty to the pope and the Roman Catholic faith. He would have executed Luther to please the pope, but not for his youthful inexperience and the sensitive political atmosphere at Germany.

Charles was crowned emperor at the age of nineteen after much intrigues and money politics. Looking at his pedigree, the young emperor saw himself as the personal champion of the Papacy and a strong defender of the status-quo. The emperor knew that if he should permit the Germans to assert their independence over the church, they may proceed to fight for self-determination and political independence. At Worms, Aleander, papal representative at Germany pressurized Charles to call up Luther's case.

Even though Charles was convinced about Luther's guilt, there was need for political caution because Luther has finally become a national hero, a symbol of German nationalism. Any careless decision over his life could have plunged Europe into armed conflict. After much debate, Charles decided to write the "honourable and respected" Luther a polite letter,

inviting him to appear at Worms with a promise of personal safety. The purpose of the invitation was not to give Luther the opportunity to defend himself. Luther was asked if a pile of his Latin and German writings were really his, and, if so, whether he would be willing to recant what he had said. With an uncommon courage and pride fortified by a sense of massive support across continental Europe, Luther admitted that he was the author. As to the second question, Luther requested for a little while to reflect on it.

The following day, Luther addressed the diet in Latin which he repeated in German. He admitted that he had been over violent in his confrontation with the Papacy, but that it cannot be denied that pope's decrees had tormented the consciences of faithful Christians, especially in Germany. If he should revoke those things which he had said against the pope's conduct, the pope will become tyrannical. But if there is a strong evidence or argument from the Scriptures, he would accept to recant:

Unless I am convinced by the evidence of Scripture or by plain reason for I do not accept the authority of the pope or the councils alone, since it is established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. God help me. Amen (qtd. in Harbison 52).

The emperor had no other option than to outlaw Luther, who had rejected the binding authority of the pope. Papal representative in Germany, Aleander was directed to draft the Edict of Worms. The Edict which was promulgated on 1521, declared Luther an outlaw based on the following grounds: "That he questioned the recognized number and character of the sacraments, impeached the regulations in regard to the marriage of the clergy, scorned and vilified the pope, despised the priesthood and stirred up the laity to dip their hands in the blood of the clergy, advocated a brutish existence and was a menace to church and state alike" (Robinson 301). The Edict of Worm declared Luther an outlaw hence a *persona non grata*. All citizens were forbidden not to give the heretic food or shelter. Everybody had the duty to arrest Luther and hand in him over to the emperor. The Edict also placed a permanent ban on Luther's books and ideas. Robinson notes that it was an offence to buy, sell, read, preserve, copy, print, or cause to be copied or printed, any of the books written by Martin Luther. "Neither shall any one dare to affirm his opinions, or proclaim, defend, or advance them in any other way that human ingenuity can invent notwithstanding that he may have put some good into this writing in order to deceive the simple" (qtd. in Robinson 301).

## GERMANY AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Echoes of rebellion against Catholicism championed by a renowned German priest and professor of theology, Martin Luther were received with the highest sense of patriotism and national consciousness in Germany. Before the revolt, Germans were already fed up with Italian domination of the Vatican. Germans made Luther a hero and the Reformation had the passion of a national struggle for self-determination in ecclesiastical leadership. Luther received maximum support from his country. Fisher has this to say on the advantages which Luther had as a German:



A great part of his power lay in the fact that he was German to the marrow. All the strength, all the weakness of the German character was reflected and magnified in his passionate temperament, its tenderness and violence, its coarseness in vituperation and old-fashioned Biblical piety, its music and learning. Its conviviality and asceticism... its paroxysms of contrition and heady self-confidence. Not since Barbarossa had there been a German so typical of his age and race as this emaciated but very typical Saxon friar, with his rough combatant ways, his clear ringing voice, and unending command of words, jests, images, and arguments (503).

Luther actually had great confidence in the support from Germany. The most reliable and focused backing came from Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, who did much to protect and conceal Luther from the enforcement of the Edict of Worms. As Luther got nearer to Eisenach from Worms, kidnapped by his friends and taken to the Wartburg, a castle owned by the Elector of Saxony. Luther lived there to escape any danger from the action of the emperor.

While in the hiding, Luther translated the Bible into German. He completed the translation of the New Testament before his exit from Wartburg in March, 1522. Luther's greatest bequest and intellectual contribution to humanity, was his Bible translation project. For ten months, in the security of Wartburg, Luther devoted himself to writing and to Bible translation. He translated the Greek Scriptures into German from Erasmus's Greek text. The Hebrew Scriptures followed later. Luther's Bible turned out to be just what the common people needed. It was reported that five thousand copies were sold in two months, two hundred thousand in twelve years. The providential role Frederick the Wise in granting accommodation and security to Luther at Wartburg is a great historical point. Fisher writes on the personality of the Elector of Saxony:

Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, was one of those men who, without being either powerful or in any way brilliant, influence history from the respect which they inspire, and by the opportune exercise of a kindly and paternal moderation. A mild, prudent, peace-loving ruler, proud of his chapel choir, his pictures and his castles, and of the university of Wittenberg of which he was the founder, and much occupied with pious Biblical exercises, Frederick gave to the new movement just that encouragement which was most necessary to carry it through the critical early stages of its growth (507).

Still from Germany, Luther received total support from the university community in Wittenberg, which was catapulted into the principal seminary of Lutheranism and an alternative and radical citadel to the traditionalism and conservatism of the Sorbonne. Fisher posits thus: "It was in this little centre that the national mind of Germany, as it was affected

by the passions and events of that tumultuous age, was first expressed in language which all Germans could understand" (598).

Apart from the fact that Luther was a German, it was also glaring that the translation of the New Testament into German evoked national pride and boosted patriotic ego. As far back as 1520, Luther in his *Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, urged the princes to unite and destroy papal power in Germany. Luther mounted pressure on the prince to confiscate ecclesiastical wealth and to abolish indulgences, dispensations, pardons and clerical celibacy. Luther criticized Papacy's financial exploitation of Germany: "Now that Italy is sucked dry, they came into Germany, and begin, o so gently. But let us beware, or Germany will soon become like Italy.... They skim the cream off the bishoprics, monasteries, and benefices, and because they do not yet venture to turn them all to shameful use, as they have done in Italy" (Three Treatises, 28, 29).

Luther opened the eyes of Germans to the corruption, immorality and dishonesty of the Papacy, and challenged all Germans to rise up and resist the pope. National consciousness and patriotic feelings were heightened. Luther again exploded:

How comes it that we Germans must put up with such robbery and such extortion of our property at the hands of the pope? If the kingdom of France has prevented it, why do we Germans let them make such fools and apes of us? It would all be more bearable if in this way they only stole our property; but they lay waste the churches and rob Christ's sheep of their pious shepherds, and destroy the worship and the word of God. As it is, they do nothing for the good of Christendom; they only wrangle about the incomes of bishoprics and prelacies, and that any robber could do (Three Treatises 30, 31).

After several efforts and strategies, the collective consciences of Germany for a revolt against the *Roman Curia* became inevitable. The first shock was the exit of monks and nuns from their monasteries in Wittenberg. Some of the monks and nuns married, images of saints were destroyed in the churches and there was opposition against the celebration of the mass. Luther came out of his hiding to protest against the sudden and violent changes that took place. Luther's counsel was not heeded, and the crises degenerated from peasant revolt to a civil war in Germany. The Reformation ultimately led the people of Germany into a bloody thirty year war, which ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

## PROTESTANTISM AND THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE

Protestantism as a movement in world Christianity was the outcome of the Reformation. The word is derived from the Latin *protestatio* which is interpreted to mean "to protest," or "to declare openly". Protestantism is an organized and continuous rejection of some of the fundamental doctrines of Roman Catholic Church. E. M. Uka posits thus: "Contemporary Protestantism must therefore be viewed in relation to these two accents: firstly, as a protest against some of the claims and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and secondly as a rigorous and positive affirmation of what Protestants regard as the witness of the Christian message in its distinctiveness and purity" (25).

The name "Protestant" was derogatorily given to the Christian party at the Diet of Speyer in Germany in 1529. It is interesting to observe that demographers have described a greater part of Euro-America as "Protestant". Protestant culture along with Western technology, capitalism, democratic tradition and educational ideals has been carried to the whole world. Classical Protestantism, or magisterial reformers can be traced to some late medieval reformers in Roman Catholic Church - the Hussites (followers of John Huss, 1371-1415) in Bohemia; the Wycliffites and Lollards (followers of John Wycliffe), in England; and the followers of Savonarola (1452 - 98) in Italy. But it was in the 16th century that the Roman Catholic monk, Martin Luther (1483-1546) "... experienced a recovery of grace and began to propagate his teaching at the expense of his and others loyalty to the existing Catholicism." (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 99).

Protestantism also signified the splitting of Christianity. The rise of the reformers was the beginning of the end of a united Christianity in Europe: "Never again could the civil and religious realms cohere on a transnational basis. The ancient spiritual center of the culture had been criticized and questioned, and western men could never again so easily unite on values as they had before the rise of Protestantism" (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 99).

Protestant principle is a term that is to be found in the theology of Paul Tillich. Van Harvey has described the Protestant principle in Tillichian theology as: "...the confession that grace is not bound to any finite form, that God is the inexhaustible power and ground of all being, and that the truest faith is just that one which has an element of self-negation in it because it points beyond itself to that which is really ultimate" (197,193). Outside Tillichian theology, Protestant principle is interpreted to mean an outline of Luther's theology, which forms the central tenets of contemporary Protestantism.

Luther's disagreement with the church was purely and basically theological in nature. It was Luther's opinion that righteousness depended not on merit earned through man's good work, but on God's saving act in Jesus Christ. C. P. Williams has this to say on the difference between the Protestant and Catholic views: "It marked a basic difference in theological approach between the Roman Catholic understandings of Justification as analytic arising from something in the person justified- and the Protestant understanding of it as synthetic arising from something provided from outside" (*New Dictionary of theology* 539). Luther was convinced that good works and the discipline of body and mind are not the basis of salvation, "...and since faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inner man cannot be justified, freed or saved by any outer work or action at all , and that these works, whatever their character, have nothing to do with this inner man" (*Three Treatises* 281).

Luther and other reformers were united in their commitment to Scriptures as the only and final authority in matters of doctrine. Even though the magisterial reformers had great respect for tradition, especially the decisions of the early church fathers and resolutions of early church councils, they however, rejected, any subordination of Scriptures to tradition. The doctrines and theology of Roman Catholic Church are formulated through the synthesis of sacred tradition, sacred Scriptures and the magisterium of the church, which was rejected completely by the radical reformers. The Reformation movement did not have any political agenda. There was no intention to wield political power as medieval Catholicism did. The radical reformers advocated a sharp separation between the church and state.

Luther and other reformers taught and defended the doctrine of universal priesthood of believers. The immense implication of this doctrine was the demolition of the hierarchical ministerial structure, and the chasm between the clergy and the laity. Medieval Protestantism understood the work of the ministry in a functional rather than in ontological sense. Williams writes: "While the emphasis on the priesthood of believers did radically alter the layman's perception of the role of the ordained minister in relation to his access to God and salvation, its implications with respect to gifts in the body of Christ were generally not followed" (New Dictionary of Theology 539).

Protestantism rejected the seven sacraments of Catholicism and endorsed baptism and the lords super. The sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist was rejected. Luther personally rejected four of the seven sacraments outright: confirmation, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction. Cantor has this to say: "Luther asserted that both bread and wine should be given to communicants, not just bread, as was the usual practice. Church dogma held that bread and wine were transformed during the performance of the sacrament into the body and blood of Christ; Luther believed that the bread and wine remained physically, present, although Christ's body and blood were present too" (139).

## CONCLUSION

There is a consensus among scholars that the Reformation and the eventual split could have been averted if church leaders were magnanimous enough to accept reforms. Matthews and Platt have said that the church could have reformed the clergy and avert the rising tide of anti-clericalism if the Papacy had been morally and politically strong, but unfortunately by 1500 the popes were deeply involved in Italian politics and fully committed to worldly ambitions. "The church also lost power to secular rulers, who were determined to bring all their subjects under state control. By 1500 the English and the French kings, to the envy of other European rulers, had made their national churches relatively free of papal control" (356). It was unfortunate that the call for reforms was not heeded. Church leaders at the time failed to see the church as *semper reformanda* (always in need of reform). Iwe has this to say:

It is most unfortunate and tragic that at a time most critical for the unity of Christendom, when a more vigorous and enlightened leadership by the Papacy would have saved it, the See of Peter in Rome was occupied by a pope evangelically and pastorally impotent, ecclesiastically vacillating and politically and diplomatically scheming and swayed by worldly interests.... The critical fate of Christendom was not a priority on his agenda. How unfortunate! (39).

The church did not have a competent, focused and intelligent leadership during the period of the Reformation. Pope Clement VII who occupied the Seat of St. Peter at that time was a wrong person. Iwe has this to say: "The Reformation demonstrates how unfortunate and tragic it could be for the church at any time to have on the venerable Seat of Peter a vacillating and worldly wise pope with no ability for vigorous and efficient leadership and no

far-sighted evangelical-pastoral vision" (42). Iwe has also identified the error of mis-assessment. Rome did not take Luther serious. Luther was unreasonably ignored. The pope was very confident that Luther will fail, and the church will forge ahead as a united body. "There is no convincing evidence that Luther's revolt provoked a concerted action from Rome or that it was a top priority on the pope's or emperor's agenda... And quite conceivably, the torch of Luther at Wittenberg was regarded as a mere bubble or transient squabble among infatuated German clergy" (37).

The underrating of Luther's effort and capabilities culminated in the failure of the Vatican to convene a general council. Pope Clement VII was clearly hostile to such an idea, and the College of Cardinals rejected it. Iwe is convinced that if the religious forces and resources of the church were promptly mobilized in a general council that the splitting of Christianity could have been averted. "No sincere and scholarly theologian now ever doubts that if a pope like Pope John XXIII had been on the Chair of Peter, instead of Pope Clement VII, that an ecumenical council would have been promptly summoned and that Luther would have been an expert at such a council and not a rebel" (41).

The lessons and legacies of the Reformation are still with us. Perhaps, there was a clear absence of magnanimity in the person of Pope Clement VII. If the Pope was magnanimous enough to display positive and peaceful pastoral spirit, the whole history of the church in the sixteenth century would have taken a very different turn, a sweeping reform within the church could have taken place and the church remained united for a long period. Richard Holloway:

A reading of history shows that, time and time again, an act of magnanimity at a particularly significant moment would have stopped or slowed the unfolding of some great tragedy. ... Magnanimity is largeness of heart, generosity of soul; it is the kind of human sympathy that succeeds in loving its enemy and often, thereby, turns enemies to friends. It is seen most dramatically after battle and is not infact uncommon among soldiers and athletes who struggle with each other (28).

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