A THESIS

THE RELATION OF THE REFORMATION TO THE CENTRAL IDEA OF RELIGION

by

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem Stated

Has Protestantism a permanent religious value? Or to state it with reference to the movement out of which it grew, did the Protestant Reformation touch religion at its center, at its fundamental principle, and render a permanent contribution to it? Was the Reformation related to the central idea of religion? This is the problem with which this thesis is concerned.

2. The Need for its Discussion

The reason for such a study lies in the attitude which is taken in certain quarters today toward the Reformation and Protestantism. On the one hand, there is the growing movement within Anglicanism toward Roman Catholicism. Professor Preserved Smith in a study which he made of English opinion concerning Luther states that among representative leaders within the church there has been frequently expressed a tendency to disown and reject the Reformation. [1.] On the other hand, there has been a marked disposition of late among certain groups in America to disparage the Reformation, suggesting that it was inadequate, that it indeed served its day, but that a new Reformation is needed. The latter need may be valid and evident, but does it necessitate a discounting or rejection of the former?

1. P. Smith, English Opinion of Luther, p. 129-58

There are many experiences which seem necessarily connected with particular periods, particular forms of civilization, or particular races. It is inevitable that a movement of the nature of the Protestant Reformation should be quite differently estimated in the course of time and in accordance with the prevailing philosophical or religious point of view. There must be some criterion, however, by which its permanent value may be estimated. That touchstone is to be found in the contact which the Reformation had with that which is timeless and universal in religion, that central abiding principle which underlies all its varying expression. And therein lies the value of this endeavor.

3. The Method of Procedure

The method of procedure in making this investigation has been determined by two necessities: First, that of stating the essential nature of religion. It is patent that one's view of the contribution of the Reformation to religion will depend on one's conception of the nature of religion. Religion has many external forms and expressions, and the relation of any movement to religion may be found in one or more of its various aspects. A comparatively recent critic of the Reformation asserts: "The central religious contribution of Protestantism, hence also of Luther, is the abolition of the Catholic concept of the sacrament." [1] He is considering religion in its intelletual relationships, or in its theory of worship.

1. E. Troeltsch.(1917)

Another recent work states the contribution of the Reformation as "Freedom from Ecclesiastical Bondage." [1] There religion in its organization life is the underlying idea. Therefore, it is necessary, first of all, to determine - if, indeed, this be possible - what is the fundamental principle which belongs to and characterizes the religious life of all the race. This will involve a brief survey of a number of representative definitions of religion by modern psychologists and philosophers, and a review of some of the historical manifestations of religion.

Secondly, the method of procedure is of necessity determined by the nature of the Reformation in its religious aspects. This will lead to a two-fold investigation. On the one hand, there is general agreement among historians that Carlyle's principle that history is to be understood and interpreted only through the biography of individuals is strikingly illustrated in the Reformation. As one writer puts it; "We may say without exaggeration that the Reformation was embodied in Martin Luther, that it lived in him as in no one else, and that its inner religious history may be best studied in the record of his spiritual experiences and in the growth of his religious convictions." [2] And on the other hand, it will be our aim to examine the creedal formulas of the Reformation age with a view of determining whether that which was basic to the religious experience of the individual represents the consensus of thought of the Protestant group as a whole.

1. Eddy and Page, "Makers of Freedom", p.93 (1926)
2. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I., p. 193.

Our endeavor, therefore, will be to seek first/Luther's own record and interpretation of his religious experience; second, the relation of that experience to the development of the Protestant creeds; and finally, the permanent value of what thus seems to have been the fundamental of the Reformation movement as it is appraised by the standard of that which is the essential in all religion.

CHAPTER I.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION

The religious instinct is one of the most constant and enduring characteristics of mankind. It may vary greatly in its expression in beliefs and practices, but there dwells among all peoples some kind of a religious life. The problem is, amid all these varying expressions of the religious instinct in beliefs and rites, is there some fundamental, enduring aspect or principle that is common to all faiths, that represents the heart of religion.

1. The Fundamental Defined

A survey of definitions of religion, an understanding of which is essential to any adequate consideration of the subject of this thesis, reveals an inexhaustible list of authorities, representing many different viewpoints. John Morly once said that there are ten thousand definitions of religion, by which he meant that every one had his own idea of the nature of religion.

Viewed in terms of its intellectual nature, there is Professor E. P. Tylor's definition: "The minimum definition of religion is belief in spiritual beings." [1] And quite like it is Dean Inge's statement: "Our conscious-

1. Introduction to Science of Religion, p. 17.

ness of the beyond is, I say, the raw material of all religion." [1]

Religion may also be considered in terms of worship, as in the definition: "Religion is the worship of higher powers from a sense of need." [2] Or as Professor William Newton Clarke put it: "Religion is the life of man in his superhuman relations." [3]

Then there are more general definitions which combine two or more aspects. Professor Wundt regards religion as an intellectual search, "the endeavor after an existence that shall satisfy the requirements of the human mind." [4]

Professor William James, whose work "The Varieties of Religious Experience" marked the beginning of the modern psychological approach to religion, summarizes his conclusions in this sentence: "In the broadest and most general terms possible one might say that religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto." [5]

This conception is developed in more detail in such definitions as this by Dr. R. J. Campbell: "Religion begins when the soul consciously enters into communion with the higher-than-self as with an all-comprehending intelligence....It is the soul reaching forth to the great mys-

1. W. R. Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 5.
2. H. Menzies, History of Religion, p. 13.
3. Clarke, Outline of Christian Theology, p.1.
4. W. Wundt, Ethics, Vol. I., p. 59.
5. William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p.53

terious whole of things, the higher-than-self, and seeking closer and ever closer communion therewith." [1]

And Josiah Royce, another thinker whose words carry weight, follows in the same vein with the statement that "Religion is the consciousness of our practical relation to an invisible spiritual order.....The higher religions of mankind, religions such as Buddhism and Christianity, have had in common the notable feature, namely that they have been concerned with the problem of the salvation of man. [2]

Now it will be seen that at the heart of all these definitions, varying as they do, is the idea that religion is man's endeavor or experience in seeking relationship with that invisible, spiritual order or power which is God. These definitions may well be summarized in a statement which occurs in one of the most recent works on the subject of religious experience written by one whom Dr. Albert Clark Wyckoff describes as "one who is at home in this field and is building his whole course of lectures around the very latest findings in it. [3] He is therefore representative of the position now being held in modern psychology. He defines religion or the religious experience as "an experience of God and of our relationship with Him." [4] Thus he begins with a distinctly personal relationship

1. R. J. Campbell, The New Theology, p. 16.
2. Josiah Royce, Sources of Religious Insight, p.8.
3. Biblical Review, October, 1926. p. 621.
4. Kenneth Edwards, Religious Experience: Its Nature and Truth, p. 17.

with God. In other words, religion may be said to be the experience of attaining and maintaining relationship with God. That is its fundamental idea, its central aspect, its permanent principle.

2. The Fundamental Confirmed

A study of the history of religion confirms and verifies this conception. In truth, it may be said that the religions of the world represent the history of man's endeavor to find and know God, to enter into fellowship with Him.

In the Jewish economy this endeavor is represented in the book of Leviticus, that is, the law of priests or the book of offerings. There we find laws regarding sacrifices, the consecration of the priests, the ritual of the day of atonement, the laws of holiness - all with the objective of establishing the basis of fellowship between men and God. In its lofty conception of the grace and holiness of God, it impressed its devotees with the sense of their need of cleansing and restoration, and of their obligation to lead a life of righteousness. While purged of the immorality, injustice, and idolatry of other primitive systems, and containing lofty moral teaching regarding mercy and justice, kindness, truthfulness and chastity, it nevertheless is representative of those religions which by a system of sacrifices have expressed the universal attempt to find and know God.

Historic Christianity is in keeping with this fundamental principle of religion. Jesus recognized it and gave it new significance in his teaching that the individual spirit is the point of contact with the divine. To the woman at the well who thought of religion in terms of a place of worship, he said: "But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." [1] He interpreted religion as a fellowship between man and God, a relationship of loving, expressed toward God and one's fellow-men.

The same conception of the central principle of religion is expressed by the apostle, the great interpreter of Christ. He found at Athens an expression of the longing to know God in an altar bearing the inscription, "To an unknown God." And to the Athenians he said: "The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He Himself giveth to all life and breath and all things; and He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth... that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." [2]

1. John 4: 21-24
2. Acts 17: 23-27.

A recent book entitled "The Permanent and the Passing in St. Paul" asserts that the heart of Paul's teaching and the permanent in it was that salvation was to be effected by communion with the Divine through union with Christ. [1] That was Paul's own personal realization. He was in union with Christ, all things had become new. A new strength, peace, joy were his possession. Just how Paul reached this experience and how he interpreted it is not pertinent here. It is sufficient to point out that his thought and experience were in line with this fundamental idea of religion, stated above, and as T. R. Glover puts it, he "won through to certainty and found God." [2]

It was this yearning of men for an experience of God and of relationship with Him which Augustine, who over three centuries after Paul was to reinterpret the Pauline doctrine of salvation by free grace, voiced in those familiar words: "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, untill it repose in Thee." [3]

This is the universal longing, restricted by neither age nor clime. Dr. Edmund Soper who surveyed the field of comparative religions in an extensive work says: "Religion is fundamentally the same thing whether found among wild men on an island in the South Seas or among the cultivated members of a Christian church. It is always a relation-

1. Bullock, The Permanent and the Passing in St. Paul, p. 162.
2. T.R. Glover, Paul of Tarsus, p. 93.
3. Augustine, Confessions, p. 1.

ship between man and higher powers, a relationship stimulated by a sense of need." [1]

The fundamental idea of religion then, has ever been man's relationship with the Infinite, however He may be conceived. And man's great question has been: How can I attain and maintain fellowship with God?

It is pertinent to ask, therefore, what contribution did the Reformation make to religion? Did it touch religion at this central point? Did it have an answer to the problem of religion such as to have a permanent influence upon the religious life of men?

If it can be shown that Luther's own religious experience was concerned with that which is fundamental to religion, and if the creeds of the Reformation period, representing the collective experience of the Protestant group, are found to be in harmony with that fundamental principle, then we will have the answer to the question in which this thesis originates, namely, the relation of the Reformation to the essential, and hence also, to the permanent in religion.

1. Edmund Soper, The Religions of Mankind, p.38.

CHAPTER II.

THE PREPARATORY BACKGROUND OF THE REFORMATION

The world into which Luther came was ripe for the Reformation. He came in the fulness of the times. That Luther was the man who by his own religious experience was to give the needed dynamic impulse to a successful Reformation is attested by the record of history. That the times were ready for such a prophet and leader was also demonstrated by the event. A brief restatement of the historical facts relating to the background of the Reformation is necessary to prepare for a consideration and understanding of Luther's religious experience as the chief factor in the initial events of the German Reformation.

1. Political

Politically, there were two conditions which helped to hasten the Reformation. First, there was the new importance and emphasis attached to western Europe as a result of the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The hope of reunion between the eastern and western branches of Christendom, the Greek and Latin Churches, was shattered. It also had a bearing on the intellectual awakening of the West. The fall of Constantinople caused the ejection of many scholars residing there, who sought the West and

helped make it the center of a new cultural development. [1]

In the second place, it was an age of national consolidation except in Germany and Italy. "Feudalism, with its liberties and lawlessness, was disappearing and compact nations were being formed under monarchies which tended to become absolute." [2] While in Germany that consolidation had not yet been consummated, and Germany was very much divided, yet there was a "strong, popular sentiment for unity in all the German speaking portions." Germany was one people; it was not one nation. It was under the nominal rule of the Emperor and its legislative body was the Diet, but neither possessed adequate means of enforcing governmental decrees, and the real power resided in the princes who ruled over the separate states. [3] As it later was demonstrated, this very condition contributed to the success of the Reformation in Germany.

2. Intellectual

Intellectually, "the Reformation was a continuance of that other great movement known as the Renaissance."

> "Other futures stir the world's great heart;
> Europe has come to her majority,
> And enters on the vast inheritance
> Won from the tombs of mighty ancestors -
> The seeds, the gold, the gains, the silent harps
> That lay deep buried with the memories
> Of old renown."

1. Cushman, History of Philosophy, 374, 375.
2. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I, p.19 Cf. Vedder, Reformation, p. xxv.
3. Vedder, Reformation, xxvi, xxvii. Cf. Robinson, Readings in European History, p. 31-36.

Thus does George Eliot describe that movement which, pervaded and characterized by Luther's leadership, made the Reformation at once possible and inevitable. Professor Beard says that Luther did what he did and what others could not do because "the fulness of time had come in the intellectual revival that was everywhere breathing life into the dry bones of European thought." [1] The Renaissance was a reformation of European intellect, a change that in several ways had an important bearing upon the reformation in religion.

In the first place, it was a revival of learning. Especially significant was its recovery of the ancient languages, the Hebrew and Greek, and of the Latin classics. In this phase it was known as humanism, which, of course, included more than literature in its scope. The poet Terence wrote, "I am a man, and all that concerns humanity is of interest to me." And so writing he gave expression to a characteristic mood of humanism. The interests of men, the beauty of art, the joys of life - these received a new emphasis in the recovery of the old literature.

The importance of humanism as far as the Reformation was concerned lay in the fact that "the humanist became the scholar, using all the resources of the art of printing to diffuse his classical knowledge." [2] And so the Hebrew

1. Beard, The Reformation of the 16th Century, p. 54
2. Hough, Evangelical Humanism, p. 86.

Old Testament, the Greek New Testament as well as the writings of the early church fathers and theologians became the possession of men like Luther. In this connection we meet the figure of Erasmus, the very prince of humanism, who has been called a typical Christian humanist. The relation of his work to the Reformation is suggested in the saying of his contemporaries, "Erasmus laid the egg which Luther hatched." [1]

On the other hand, the Renaissance resulted in a quickening of the intellectual life of the masses generally. Especially important in this connection was the aid given to the circulation of literature by the invention of the printing press. The Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455, was to prepare the masses as well as the learned for Luther's later appeal to the Word of God as the rule of faith and practice. Vedder says: "It is safe to estimate that fully a hundred thousand copies of the German Bible were in circulation in Germany at the beginning of the Reformation." [2] The "Praise of Folly" by Erasmus in which he assailed clerical vice and ecclesiastical superstition, also had a wide circulation and passed through twenty-seven editions in less than as many years.[3] Another result was the spread of formal education as evidenced in the rise of seventeen universities in Germany within a hundred and fifty years. [4]

1. P. Smith, Age of Reformation, p. 47f.
2. Vedder, Reformation, p. xvi.
3. Robinson, Readings in European History, p. 41 ff.
4. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I, p. 53.

Such, in brief, was the intellectual state of Germany out of which the Reformation grew. Hutten expressed the thought of multitudes when he exclaimed, "Oh, what a century! Souls are waking! It is a joy to live!" [1]

The relation of the Renaissance to the Reformation intellectually is well summarized in the following statement:

"But leaving individuals out of account, the Renaissance did more than some scholars have realized to make possible the Reformation. The very breakdown of mechanical authorities helped to prepare the way for more vital authorities. And the new joy in nature was not without a genuine relation to the new joy in God. If the Renaissance at its worst was pure (or impure) paganism, the foe of all noble religion, it must also be said that the Renaissance at its best was a sort of John the Baptist ushering in the profounder spiritual activities of the Reformation." [2]

3. Religious

But most important was the ecclesiastical and religious background of Luther's time and the Reformation. It may be summed up in three characterizations. First, there was the decline in the power and authority of the papacy, due to several causes. In the exercise of nominations for spiritual offices, it had over-reached itself. The pope's immense

1. Vedder, Idem, p. xxv.
2. Hough, Evangelical Humanism, p. 153. Cf. Gwatkin, The Knowledge of God, p. 221.

power of patronage had resulted in wholesale simony, due to the need of money for the papal treasury. This power had been thoroughly exploited by Pope John XXII. who was under the necessity of replenishing an empty treasury, and it had been carried to the limit by succeeding popes. Closely related was the right of appeal to the pope in all ecclesiastical cases by means of which immense wealth flowed into the papal treasury. On the other hand, as a further expression of the autocratic spirit and power of the papacy, there had arisen the great, strong, mendicant orders, which were creatures of the pope, chartered by him, and subservient to no one else, with the result that they were in constant conflict with the local and civil authorities. Coupled with all this was the moral decline of the papacy, a condition which reached something of a climax in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Vedder says, "It is not too much to say that, at the opening of the sixteenth century, Germany was seething with discontent, and at the verge of outbreak against thepapacy." [1]

A second condition, closely allied to the first by financial ties, was the ursurpation of the church and papacy of all matters pertaining to salvation and the religious life. What the church taught was the voice of God. To question the teaching of the church was to resist the authority of God and was worthy of excommunication.

1. Vedder, Reformation, p. xlvi. Cf. P.Smith, Age of the Reformation, pp. 20-22; Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I, pp. 10-17.

In its doctrine of the future life the church had cemented its hold on the souls of men. "For by its doctrine of purgatory, of the intercession of saints, of the possibility of release from torture through the intercession of the church, so that those so favored could pass from this place of suffering at once to Paradise, the church riveted the last and most effective link in the chain to bind men's souls into complete and abject submission." [1] It was in this connection that there developed the practice of indulgences which was to bring matters to a crisis in the experience of Luther.

On the other hand, there was an earnest longing of the hearts of men for better things. The spirit of reform had found expression in the Councils of Pisa (1409), Constance (1414-18), and Basle (1451). The reforms outlined in these councils were utterly disregarded by the Roman Curia, but they revealed the trend of the times and were even carried out to an extent by the individual rulers as in the case of William of Saxony. [2] There were humble believers, who kept burning the fires of evangelical religion, developing a kind of non-ecclesiastical religion in which they settled for themselves and brought within thesphere of their own lives much that had been supposed to belong exclusively to the clergy. There were the mystics who, "without either defending or assailing Roman doctrine, ... sought to attain highest and purest knowledge

1. Vedder, Reformation, p. xliii.
2. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I., p. 1

through direct communion with God. Fisher, describing the mystical life as one of feeling in which the preference of intuition to logic is seen, which seeks knowledge through light imparted by feeling rather than by the processes of the intellect, but which results in the indwelling of God in the soul, in the consciousness, calm and holy, of His presence, says, "With these (the mystics) the religious training of Luther and his great movement have a direct historical connection." [1] Or as Professor Curtis puts it: "The mystics, with their personal intimacy with the Unseen and their devotional confidence and freedom, and on the other hand, the Humanists, with their knowledge of an old world new found, painted men in the same direction."

Another group were "The Brethern of the Common Life" whose efforts in the establishment of schools, in the diffusion of religious instruction, and in the spread of the scriptures did much in quickening and keeping alive personal religion. [2]

There was also the memory and tradition of the earlier reformers: Peter Waldo, emphasizing evangelical truth, and a life of practical service after the pattern of Christ; Wyclif in England, called by D'Aubigne the grandfather of theReformation, protesting against ecclesiastical abuses and heresies in doctrine and practice; John Hus in Bohemia denouncing papal abuses and clerical vices, holding to the right of private judgment and to the Holy

1. George P. Fisher, The Reformation, pp. 59-62.
2. See Hyma, "The Christian Renaissance", Chap. VIII.

Scriptures as the sole ultimate rule of faith, and going to the stake for his beliefs; Savonarola in Florence, thundering forth his philippics against the sins of his day in church and state, crowning his work with his death. These "Reformers before the Reformation" had all come into contact in their personal religious experience with the heart of religion, they had attained fellowship with God, and the convictions gained by that relationship made them forerunners of a coming day, inaugurating movements that stimulated religious aspirations and convictions in the people and so hastened the Reformation. [1]

This was the atmosphere into which Luther came. This was the background which was to influence and shape his religious life and send him forth a leader of a far-reaching movement.

1. P. Smith, Age of Reformation, pp. 34-35.

CHAPTER III.

LUTHER'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the times into which Luther came were ripe for a revolution. The Reformation was bound to occur, necessitated by "the logic of history." Men go on, criticizing and fretting under unsatisfactory conditions, but enduring them, till a time comes when the limit is reached, a crisis occurs, and the spark is struck which sets off the explosion. And so it was Luther whose religious experience was to be the dynamic, the guiding spirit of the Reformation. As was suggested previously in the quotation from Lindsay[1], the Reformation is mirrored in Luther's religious experience, which is the key to an understanding of the inner history of the movement in which he had so great a part. Harnack says, "He (Luther) was the Reformation."[2] Understand Luther and one can understand and interpret the relation of the Reformation to religion.

His experience was many-sided and might be considered from a number of different viewpoints. A complete analysis of his religious life is not within the scope of this thesis. For the purpose of this study, the approach must be restricted to the relation of his religious experience to the central idea of religion, the attaining and maintaining of an experience of God and of relationship with Him. Did Luther

1. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol I. p.193.
2. Harnack, History of Dogma, Vol. VII. p.170.

in his experience touch the heart of religion? And if so, how?

1. His Entrance into a Monastery

The first outstanding landmark in Luther's religious experience is his entrance at the age of twenty-one into the Augustinian Eremite Convent at Erfurt, July 17, 1505. In seeking reasons for this act and the significance of it with respect to this particular study it is necessary to consider Luther's early religious training and experience.

The first factor in his training was the influence of his family and home. His parents were humble people--- Luther says of them, "I am a peasant's son. My father, grandfather, and ancestors were all peasants."[1] But though poor, they were respectable, and gave to Luther the best training within their powers.[2] Pious and devout, they instructed their son in the traditional religious teachings and beliefs of the day. He learned the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments.[3] He was a true son of the church, nurtured in its words and sacraments. On the other hand, it is likely that the character of his religious training in the home did much to cultivate in him that keen sensitiveness to spiritual realities, especially as connected with one's relationship to God, which made his religious experience the cause later of a new understanding and realization of the paths that lead to God. Luther later in his life

1. Luther's Works, Halle ed., xxii:55
2. McGiffert, Martin Luther, p.4
3. Jacobs, Martin Luther, p.9.

stated: "My parents dealt with me so severely that I was completely cowed. My mother once beat me for the sake of an insignificant nut, until the blood came. Her strictness and the rigorous life she compelled me to lead drove me into the monastery and made me a monk."[1] It is probable that the strictness of his early training gave him an exceedingly keen consciousness of sin, of moral responsibility, coupled with the prevailing conception of God as a severe and awful judge. It represents the beginning of his search for peace and fellowship with God, the constraint of a conscience that was not to be satisfied except with reality.

His biographers state that during his student years, first at Madgeburg, then Eisenach, and finally at Erfurt University, where he studied law in accordance with his father's plans for his future career, he showed no unusual predilections for a life of piety. He lived the average religious life of his day, interested greatly in his studies and receiving the title of "the philosopher" from his fellow students.[2] Yet Malthesius, his friend and intimate friend to whom Luther related much of his experience, is responsible for two important statements which reveal the trend of his religious development. The first is that Luther had in his room the old motto, "Bene orasse est bene studuisse," and in accordance with it, he began each day with prayer. He was keeping alive what faith his heart had grasped from the instruction of his youth. The

1. Luther's Works, Erlangen, 61:274.
2. McGiffert, Luther, p. 15.

other record is that in his wanderings one day through the library at Erfurt, he found a Latin Bible. Malthesius states that Luther had never before seen an entire Bible, and that it greatly moved and interested him. And he lamented that, during his entire university career, he had never heard either a gospel or a psalm properly explained.[1] Luther himself made the statement much later in his life: "Thirty years ago no one read the Bible. It was unknown to all. The prophets were not mentioned nor could they be understood. When I was twenty years old, I had not yet seen a Bible. I thought there was neither gospel nor epistle except what was contained in the Sunday lessons."[2]

The importance of his discovery of the Bible does not become evident at once in the record of his experience. Its significance is that, though the Bible was more or less available in his day and no doubt was known to an extent, yet the normal religious training in a devout home, in the parish church, and in school and university, did not afford contact with or a knowledge of the Bible.

This was the religious background of the young man of twenty-one who entered the monastery so suddenly. It has long been a question of much discussion as to what circumstances or combination of circumstances occasioned it. There are the stories to the effect that one or more of his companions had died suddenly from a plague that had broken out. Another report is that he was greatly moved by the impression made upon him

1. Jacobs, Luther, p. 29.
2. P. Smith, Conversation, p. 9.

when in a severe thunder storm, he narrowly escaped death.[1] The suggestion in both cases is that he was stirred anew or for the first time with a deep sense of need, perhaps of saving his soul. Luther himself made several statements in explanation of it. To his father he wrote a letter in 1521 at the time of his renunciation of his monastic vows in which he says: "It is almost sixteen years since I took the monastic vows without your knowledge or consent....I well remember telling you that I was called through a terrible apparition from heaven, so that, when face to face with death, I made a vow; and you exclaimed, 'God grant it was not an apparition of the Evil One that startled you.'"[2]

He also states that he entered the monastery because he doubted himself; that in his case the old saying was true, "Doubt makes a monk."[3] And there is the statement quoted previously that the strict training and discipline of his mother drove him into the monastery and made a monk of him. The only possible explanation or conclusion is that through these and perhaps other experiences of which we are ignorant, he was aroused to a great desire to save his soul, a sense of need, a consciousness of God's wrath against him for which he had no defense.[4] His keen sensitiveness to the majesty of God as a wrathful Judge, creating in one awe and fear, the absolute "luminous consciousness," is revealed in a sermon by him on Exodus xx preached later in his life when he had also discovered

1. McGiffert, Luther, p. 17 Cf. Lindsay, Vol. I., p.197; and Jacobs, Luther, p. 21.
2. Currie, Letters, p. 87.
3. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I., p. 197.
4. Harnack, History of Dogma, Vol. VII. p. 181.

the grace of God. He says:

"But He assaileth a man and hath such a delight therein that He is of His Jealousy and Wrath impelled to consume the wicked.

"Then shall we learn how that God is a consuming fire.... Wilt thou sin? Then he will devour thee up. For God is a fire, that consumeth, devoureth, rageth; verily He is your undoing, as fire consumeth a house and maketh it dust and ashes.

"Yea, He is more terrible and frightful than the Devil. For He dealeth with us and bringeth us to ruin with power, smiteth and hammereth us and payeth no heed to us. In His majesty He is a consuming fire. For therefrom can no man refrain: if he thinketh on God aright, his heart in his body is struck with terror.....Yea, as soon as he heareth God named, he is filled with trepidation and fear."[1]

We are not told what it was that he doubted. It would appear, however, that he doubted whether he could save his soul except as he gave himself over entirely to a life apart from the world, and sought for fellowship with God. He took the way accepted by his day, the only way he knew, that of self-denial, strict asceticism. He was touching religion at its central principle, that of relationship to God. His sense of a conviction of sin robbed him of the peace that such a relationship should give. He therefore undertook to satisfy the longing of his heart to know God, not realizing yet that God was also seeking him with greater longing.

1. Luther's Works, Erlangen, pp. 210.

2. His Spriitual Struggle.

The longing that led Luther into the monastery inspired and characterized his activities there. He had come face to face with an all-absorbing problem, the deepest that can agitate mind and heart till one has found a satisfying answer, the question of attaining complete devotion to and fellowship with God.

From the beginning he gave himself over with great ardor to the achievement of his desire. His novitiate followed the usual course of menial duties, but he was early relieved of this phase of the monastic life, due probably to his extra-ordinary learning and brilliance.[1] This released him for studies in various fields which led later to his appointment as a University professor of theology. But the objective of all his activity was not academic knowledge but peace of mind and heart.

The record of this phase of his experience is one of failure and disappointment in his quest. He began the study of the Bible along with those works in speculative theology by the masters which he would naturally encounter in his reading.[2] He says: "At length I found a Bible in the library (Erfurt) and when I entered the monastery I began to read it, to re-read it, and to read it again."[3] In that he was encouraged by the rules of his order. The Augustinian Hermits, to whom the cloister at Erfurt belonged, originated in 1256 by the union of eight minor orders, receiving its name from St. Augustine.

1. D'Aubigne, History of the Reformation, Vol. I., p. 174.
2. McGiffert, Luther, p. 35.
3. P. Smith, Conversations, p. 9.

Among the new requirements of the special congregation (an organization within the order of which the Erfurt convent was a part) was that of study in the Scriptures.[1] But Luther found little help or encouragement evidently in his Biblical studies from his companions. He says with reference to it, "Formerly when I was a monk they despised the Bible. No one understood the Psaltery. They believed the Epistle to the Romans had some disputes about matters of St. Paul's time and was of no use to our age. Scotus, Aquinas, Aristotle were to be read. But I loved the Bible. When I began to apply myself to the Psalms, I first tried to get the general argument and then to understand the meaning of every word."[2]

His failure to find in the Scriptures at this period in his struggle the light he needed was due to his bondage to the tradition and error of his day as to the method of finding peace. Monasticism representing the best answer of the church on the subject, said that it was by prayers, fastings, ascetic practices, meditations that the soul was made fit for God's presence. And the prevailing philosophy of the day agreed with this. Lindsay states that the two teachers of theology at the Erfurt convent were John Genser of Paltz, and John Nathin. The former retired in 1507. They were both followers of Gabriel Biel, Peter d'Ailly, and William of Occam, their common master. It was Nathin who is said to have advised Luther, "Brother Martin, let the Bible alone; read the old teachers; they give you the whole marrow of the Bible;

1. Jacobs, p. 26.
2. P. Smith, idem, p. 10.

reading the Bible simply breeds unrest."[1] And Lindsay adds, "Afterwards he commanded Luther on his canonical obedience to refrain from Bible study. It was he who made Luther read and re-read the writings of Biel, d'Ailly and Occam, until he committed to memory long passages; and who taught the Reformer to consider Occam 'his dear Master.'"

But they were a hindrance, rather than a help, in his quest of fellowship with God. For theheart of their doctrine of salvation was that man must work out his own salvation, man can do all that he wills. Their philosophy and teaching taught the theoretical, possibility of a perfect fulfillment of all of the commandments, even of love for God; man achieves freedom from the guilt and eternal punishment of sin only if he sincerely hates and loathes evil. That can be effected by the cultivation and complete domination in one's heart of love for God. The royal road to peace is that of absolute humility, contrition, penance, love.[2]

"Luther was one of those real men who built on experience and not on theory."[3] He tried to work it out in the approved fashion of the day, a life of penance. He went beyond the customary methods and imposed other severe punishments and activities upon himself. "I imposed on myself additional penances; I devised a special plan of discipline for myself."[4] When in his teaching later he got behind in the prescribed

1. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I, p.200, Tischreden, Preger 1.27
2. Böhmer, p.91. ff.
3. Glover, Pilgrim, 209.
4. Luther's Works, Erlangen, 46:64.

prayers so that he could not say the appointed hours for a whole week, or sometimes from two to three days, "Then," he says, "I would take two or three days off, and would eat and drink nothing until I had said all the prayers omitted. That made my head so crazy that for hours together I never closed my eyes, and became deathly sick and went out of my senses. And when I got better and tried to read, suddenly my head would go bad again. Thus God drew me as it were by force from that rack of prayer. So you see how much I was captive to the traditions of men.[1]

He says of it all, "The truth is, I was a pious monk, and I held my rule so strongly that I can say, "If a monk ever reached heaven by monkery, I would have found my way there also."[2]

But of the failure of such a course to bring his desired peace with God, he states: "For so long a time I labored and tortured myself into fasts, vigils, prayers, etc., that I thereby might attain the assurance. But for my whole life, my heart could not be assured that God was well pleased with the work that I had done or had certainly heard my prayer. Even when I prayed most devoutly every day and confessed most fully, and said mass and did the very best, if any one had asked me, 'Are you sure you have the Holy Ghost?' I must have answered: 'God forbid that I should be so presumptuous. I am a poor sinner. I have done this and that, but know not whether it has certainly pleased God.' For fifteen years, I

1. P. Smith Conversations, p. 13. - bf. Jacobs, Luther, p. 25.
2. Luther's Works, Erlangen, 31,273; bf. McGiffert, Luther p.27.

was just a pious monk and yet never advanced so far as to be able to say, 'Now I am sure that God is gracious to me', or 'Now I have sought and experienced that my devotion to my order and my strict life have helped me towards heaven.' Never was I able to say, 'O God, I know that my prayer, made in the name and faith of Christ, Thy dear Son, pleases Thee and is assuredly heard.'"[1] All the exercise of self mortification whereby he attempted to secure God's favor failed to win for him that joyful communion of soul which belongs to one who has come into fellowship with a reconciled and loving father.

3. His Attainment of Peace.

From this long and severe struggle Luther at last emerged victorious with the longing of his heart attained. Great help was given him finally by several of his monastic associates, wiser than he in experience even though they did not perhaps follow through to the conviction Luther reached in his interpretation and application of that experience. Luther tells of an old monk to whom he once confided his mental anguish and who said to him, "My son, do you not know that God has commanded us to hope?" And another pointed out to him the words of the creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."[2] Perhaps, if one may judge from Luther's own statements, the most helpful of his advisers was John von Staupitz, vicar-general of his order. Staupitz was a man of noble family, imposing in

1. Idem, 17: 13ff.
2. Luther's Works, Erlangen, 19:200.

appearance, of liberal culture, of a deeply mystical type of Christianity, a graduate of Tubingen, and dean of Wittenburg.[1] He became acquainted with Luther and his spiritual conflict. Luther confessed to him the secrets of his heart with the utmost freedom. When Luther spoke of his fear of Christ, Staupitz answered, "That is not Christ, for Christ does not terrify; He only consoles."[2] Years later Luther wrote: "If Dr. Staupitz, or rather God through Staupitz, had not aided me in this I would have long since been in hell."[3] Staupitz warned against the danger of trusting his own powers, and taught man's inability to do aught except by the grace of God, upon which man is to implicitly trust. It is also stated that Luther was instructed in the true meaning of repentance by Staupitz, that it is a habit, or state of the heart and life, rooted in love to God rather than an act or succession of acts.[4] An expression of this is to be found later in the first of the Ninety-five Theses.

Yet it was the Bible which eventually clarified his understanding, brought the needful light, and opened to him the gates of a new experience. Luther states, "I wandered long and knew not where I was. I felt a need but knew not what it was until I came to the place in Romans, 'The just shall live by faith.' That helped me. There I saw of what

1. Jacobs, Luther, p.31. bf. McGiffert, Luther p. 31.
2. Luther's Letters, De Wette, 4:187.
3. Idem, 1:116.
4. Jacobs, Luther, p. 31; also McGiffert, Luther, p. 31.

justice Paul speaks. In the text 'justice' comes first. So I put together the abstract and the concrete, and came to know my trouble and distinguish between the justice of the law andthat of the gospel. Before that nothing helped me, for I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I thought them all one, and said Christ differed from Moses only in degree and in time, but when I saw that the law was one thing and the gospel another I broke through my difficulties."[1]

And again he is reported in his conversations to have stated: "These words (Roman 1:16,17) were ever running in my mind. For I had not been able to understand the phrase, 'the righteousness of God,' wherever it stands in the scriptures otherwise than that God was both righteous himself and judgeth righteously. Sometimes I would ply myself too warmly with this text. I stood and knocked if haply there might be someone to open unto me, but there was no one to open. I did not know at all what it meant until I came in my reading to the words, 'The just shall live by faith.' This sentence is an explanation of the righteousness of God. When I discovered this I was filled with a joy passing all others. And thus the road was opened to me when I read in the Psalms, 'In thy justice make me free,' that is, 'In thy mercy make me free.' Prior to that I dreaded and hated the Psalms and other parts of scripture whenever they mentioned the 'righteousness of God' by which I understood that he himself was

1. P. Smith, Conversations, p. 12.

righteousness and judged us according to our sins, not that he accepted and made us righteous. All scripture stood at a wall until I was enlightened by the words, 'The just shall live by faith.' From this I learned that the righteousness of God is that mercy of God by which he justifies us through grace."[1]

The dating of these experiences raises a problem that is not pertinent to this study. Luther himself designated the period from late Autumn 1512 to March 1515 as a period of crisis in which he reached the turning point referred to above.[2] A study has been made of his manuscripts and classroom notes during this period which show that by 1512 the statement of Roman 1:17 had become central in his thinking and indicated the trend of his experience.[3]

Just previous to this then came his trip to Rome (15) which had an important part in the development of his thinking, especially in helping to sever him from his fruitless confidence in works. He went in behalf of his order to represent it in certain business pending before the papal court.[4] He went with the personal hope and purpose of making there "an unreserved confession of all the sins that he had ever committed.[5] To him Rome was still the Holy City and it was

1. P. Smith, Conversations, pp. 128, 129, 130.
2. Luther's Works, Weimar, 45:86.
3. Böhmer, Luther in the Light of Recent Research, pp.82,83.
4. McGiffert, Martin Luther, p. 37.
5. Jacobs, Luther, p. 31.

with the greatest anticipation that he undertook the journey there. He tells how with joy he greeted the sight of the city. "On arriving, I fell on my knees, and raised my hands to heaven, and exclaimed, 'Hail, Holy Rome. I greet thee, thou Holy Rome, thrice holy from the blood of martyrs.'"[1] In the spirit of an eager pilgrim he sought out all the holy and notable places, said mass as many times as he could, and sought to avail himself to the full of the spiritual benefits and blessings of the city.[2] But his experience opened his eyes to the state of religion among the Italians and he was horrified again and again by the things which he felt were a travesty on religion. Mentioning the city of Rome later, he said, "Since now the Lord God has got me into this dreadful, hateful business, I would not have missed seeing and hearing what I did in Rome for a hundred thousand florins. I had to guard myself constantly lest I should commit some offence against God, but what we see, we relate. For Bembo, a very learned man, said after he had carefully considered the whole matter, that Rome was the cess-pool of humanity and of the whole world. And someone has written:

> 'Who seeks to live a holy life, from Rome must take his flight,
> For everything is there allowed, except to be upright.'"[3]

These experiences came back to him in later years and helped strengthen his opposition to the authority of Rome.[4]

1. Jules Michelet, Life of Luther written by himself, p.15.
2. Lindsay, Reformation, Vol. I, p.207.
3. Hazlitt, Table Talk, p. 362.
4. McGiffert, Martin Luther, p. 45.

One experience is said to have occured at Rome which reveals the direction of his spiritual experience at this time. In accordance with a custom of the day for visitors to Rome to ascend on their knees the Santa Scala, which tradition says was the marble staircase in Pilate's palace, which our Lord ascended when brought before Pilate, Luther attempted this task, seeking the special indulgence which its accomplishment promised. However, when he was half-way up the stairs, there flashed through his mind the words, "The just shall live by faith." They took on new meaning for him in that moment; he rose to his feet and walked down the stairs and out.[1] Thus was he prepared for the realization, growing even then, and shortly to come a full realization, that his search for peace, for fellowship with God was not to be earned by his own merit but to be received by faith in the love and mercy of God in Christ.

That he gained at last what he sought is certain. Out of anguish of spirit and deep despair he came into an experience of light, of sweetness, of certainty, to which thewhole tone of his life henceforth and of all his writing was to witness. One excerpt from a letter written April 8, 1516 to George Spenlein, an Augustinian brother, will suffice to show how he who had long been the seeker, now may be the guide and counselor of the blind. To Splenlein he writes:

"Now I would like to know whether your soul, tired of her own righteousness, would learn to breathe and confide in the righteousness of Christ. For in our age the temptation

1. Lindsay, Vol I, p. 207. Cf. Vedder, Reformation, p. 11.

to presumption besets many, especially those who try to be just and good before all men, not knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. Thus they long seek to do right by themselves, that they may have courage to stand before God as though fortified with their own virtues and merits, which is impossible.

"Therefore, my sweet brother, learn Christ and him crucified; learn to pray to him, despairing of yourself, and saying: 'Thou, Lord, Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am thy sin; thou hast taken on thyself what thou wast not, and hast given me that I was not.' Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to seem to yourself, or to be, a sinner. For Christ dwells only in sinners. For that reason he descended from heaven, where he dwelt among the righteous, that he might dwell among sinners. Consider that kindness of his and you will see his sweetest consolation."[1]

That which he was able so well to urge upon his Augustinian brother was now his own possession and experience.

4. The Testimony of the Ninety-Five Theses To His Experience

Three crucial events in the life of Luther are recognized landmarks in the historical development of the Reform-

1. P. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, Vol. 1., p. 34

ation. They are:

1. The posting of the Ninety-five Theses, October 31, 1517, inviting a discussion of the matter of Indulgences. This event has been called the birthday of the Reformation.[1]

2. The burning by Luther of the papal bull of excumminication which had been issued against him, December 10, 1520. It has been said that modern history began that day.

3. The Diet of Worms, April 17, and 18, 1521, followed by the imperial edict against Luther whereby his cause became national, European. J. A. Froude, himself a rationalist, calls "the appearance of Luther before the Diet of Worms the most notable spectacle witnessed on the planet since Christ stood before Pilate."[2]

In each of these events Luther's spiritual experience was manifested; that is, his conduct, his course of action in each, was determined by the consciousness of fellowship with God which he had found and by the convictions which had grown out of that experience. A brief review of his attack on indulgences, the first of these crucial experiences but representative of his attitude in the other two, will show how the fundamental principle of religion as realized in Luther's experience was related to these events and confirmed by them.

1. Böhmer, Luther, p. 120
2. P. Smith, Harvard Theological Review, April 1917, p.147.

In the year 1517 there appeared in Germany a Dominican preacher and papal agent, Tetzel, raising money for the new St. Peter's church and the papal coffers. His method was that of selling indulgences, whereby papal pardons were granted which not only released the living from penalties imposed upon them ecclesiastically but purported to free the dead and the living from the pangs of purgatory. A long history of development attaches to the idea of indulgences, going back it is claimed to the New Testament teaching and practice of public confession of sin against another, and developing until the sale of indulgences was the most popular and satisfactory method of supporting the papal needs.[1] The inducements which they carried are suggested in the well-known words of John Tetzel, "Do you not hear your deceased parents wail and cry out: 'Have mercy on us. We are suffering grevious punishment and pain from which you can save us with a trifling alms.'"[2] That was the spirit and appeal of indulgences as Luther found them. And it was in a mild attack on them in the form of a challenge to debate that Luther, still the loyal Roman monk, posted his Ninety-five Theses.

The question is, What was the significance of that act with respect to the religious experience of Luther? In the light of our previous study of his spiritual develop-

1. D'Aubigne, Reformation, Vol. 1., 271-273
2. Böhmer, Luther, p. 129

ment, it is safe to say that it was the inevitable expression of a heart which had experienced God's grace in the forgiveness of sins and the attainment of peace. A man whose whole life had been unsettled, until the truth made it firm, must of necessity out of loyalty to his own experience resist this attempt that was being made upon his new found treasure. It is needless to state that Tetzel was not disturbing Luther's own experience. But as a parish priest with souls in his charge he could not but be disturbed as he saw the error which was leading them blindly into a position of false assurance, and also of dissatisfaction, for he had found that there was but one royal road to peace and fellowship. For their sake and for the truth's sake, he must attack the error.

There is no suggestion in Luther's writings that he realized he was instituting a reformation. But all the interests of the church were on the side of Tetzel and to attack him meant to shake the whole existing structure literally to the very foundation. For that is what resulted, and Luther found his position changed from that of the comparative obscurity of a monk into that of representative and leader of the religious longings of a nation.

The gist of what Luther's protest involved was that no man, or group of men, or church had the right to interpose its authority between the soul of man and his God. Thesis One goes to the root of the question at issue. "Our Lord

and Master, Jesus Christ, in saying, 'Repent ye' intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence."[1] It is the opinion of Dr. Julius Köstlin that the "key to the entire theory of Luther is found in that which he presents in the very first thesis, i.e., his Biblical conception of repentance."[2] Repentance is more than sacramental penance; it is a state of mind, the entire life of the believer. In theses 36 and 87 he asserts that one who is truly penitent, has no need of indulgences, since God himself gives him plenary pardon and any further assurance from the Pope is superfluous. Thesis 62 answers the teaching of the treasury of merit based on the infinite merit of Christ's death and the accumulated merit of the saints with the strong statement: "The true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."

The principle for which he was striving and which later was given definite expression in his writings, such as "The Freedom of a Christian Man", was that of the general priesthood of Christian people as the true source of religion. He said, "It is faith that makes men priests, faith that unites them to Christ and gives them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit whereby they become filled with all holy and heavenly power."[3]

1. Luther, The Ninety-five Theses
2. The Theology of Luther in its Historical Development and Inner Harmony, By Dr. Julius Köstlin, Vol.1, p.326
3. Philip Schaff, Luther as a Reformer, A Symposiac.

Around Luther as the expression and champion of this truth thousands of Germans gathered. In his experience they found expressed the longing and hunger of their own hearts. Cardinal Newman once said, "No great work was done by a system; whereas systems rise out of individual exertions." [1] Out of Luther's experience in contact with the essential aspect of religion, the experience of a man at peace with God, a Reformation arose and Protestantism was born.

1. P. Smith, Harvard Theological Review, April 1917, p. 148.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REFORMATION CREEDS.

Two major lines of investigation were outlined in seeking an answer to the problem of this thesis, namely, the relation of the Reformation to the central idea of Religion: First, a survey of the record and an interpretation of the personal religious experience of Luther in which the Reformation found its leader and dynamic. Second, an examination of the representative creedal formulas of the Reformation period to determine whether that which was basic in the religious experience of the individual represents the consensus of belief of the Protestant group.

In the preceding chapter we saw that Luther's experience brought to him the conviction that the central point of religion is the relation of the heart and conscience to God. It was this conviction that was expressed in those crucial events which became the great landmarks of the Reformation.

Our problem now is to determine whether or not that same conviction was expressed in those symbols of the Reformation period that became the crystalized sentiment of those whose faith and experience they represent.

That creedal formulas should come is in keeping with the nature of religious experience. Dr. Philip Schaff said: "Faith, like all strong convictions,, has a desire to utter itself before others. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' 'I believe; therefore, I confess.' This is the origin of Christian

symbols and creeds. They never precede faith, but presuppose it. They emanate from the united life of the church." [1]

In a sense Luther himself uttered the first creedal formulas of the Reformation. Certain of his writing were at least the intellectual background of the later formal statements. Their influence is suggested by Professor Curtis in this statement: "Though not in themselves a confession in any general sense, the Ninety-five Theses of Martin Luther at Wittenberg in 1517 against the theory and practice of indulgences, cooperated with his famous disputations (eg., at Heidelberg, 1518, and at Leipsig 1519) and with his powerful tracts in precipitating confessional formulations. The Theses, Disputations, and Tracts had references to restricted doctrines but their united effect was to provoke heart-searching revision of the whole current system of doctrine in so far as it contained accretions to the ancient Catholic creeds." [2]

1. The Augsburg Confession

The first general creedal formula of the Reformation was the Augsburg Confession, presented at the Diet of Augsburg, 1530. The occasion was the convocation of the Diet by the Emperor Charles V. in the hope that the divided religious groups, Roman Catholic and Protestants, might be united again and would join in the common cause against the Turk. It was at the suggestion of Dr. Gregory Brück, chancellor of Saxony, that the Reformers were asked to

1. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. 1.,p.4
2. W. A. Curtis, History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith, p. 139.

present a statement of their position in writing so that there might be a common basis of discussion in the attempt to remove the misunderstanding and differences between the parties.

The actual drafting of the Confession was done by Melanchthon, for Luther, being under the imperial ban, was urged by his friends not to leave the protection of Saxony. Wisely he obeyed, but went as far as Coburg where he was in constant touch with the Reformers by letter, cheering, encouraging and advising Melanchthon in the task of writing the Confession. His correspondence during this period is most illuminating, not only in its revelation of Luther's own personal faith and courage, but also in the evidences of his influence in advising and encouraging Melanchthon in the task of writing the Confession. The Confession itself was prepared on the basis of a previous draft and with conscientous care. [1]

Schaff suggests that it required no little moral courage on the part of the signatories to sign the document in view of the immense political and ecclesiastical power of the Roman Catholic Church at that time. When warned of the possible effects of his signature, the Elector John of Saxony nobly replied, "I will do what is right, unconcerned about my electoral dignity. I will confess my Lord, whose power I esteem more highly than all the power of the earth." [2]

1. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine, p. 272ff.
   Cf. Vedder.
   The Reformation, p. 320
2. Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I., p. 226.

These circumstances attending the formulation of the Augsburg Confession have been stated here in order to provide the proper background for answering the question of the relation of the confession to the central idea of religion. The point at issue at Augsburg was an apology, or better, an exposition of the beliefs of the Protestant party and their objection to certain practices of the Roman Church. Our question is, is the Confession related to that which is the fundamental principle of religion, the attaining and maintaining relationship with God?

A survey of the Confession reveals at once that that which was central in the experience of Luther, that which was the rallying point of those whose convictions were expressed by the Reformation, is also the center of this creedal formula. Indeed, it inspires the whole. It had been the experience of Luther and others that only through faith in Christ as the revelation of God's forgiving mercy and love is fellowship with God to be attained, not by works and the observing of ordinances. This experience the Confession formulates in the principle of justification by faith. It is stated near the beginning of the Confession in Article IV, is implicit in the succeeding articles and is developed at length with respect to faith and works in Article XX. A few quotations from these articles will suffice to illustrate the fact.

Art. IV. "Also they teach, that men cannot be Justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith, when

1. Augsburg Confession, pp. 9, 10, 16-19
Robinson, Readings in European History p. 108.

they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, hath made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight, Rom. 3 and 4."

Art. VI. "Also they teach, that this Faith is bound to bring forth Good Fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but not that we should rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification are apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: 'When ye shall have done all these things, say, We are unprofitable servants.' The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: 'It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ, is saved; freely receiving remission of sins, without works by faith alone.'"

Art. XX. deals specifically and at length with that which had been crucial in Luther's religious experience, the inadequacy of works, representing men's effort and self-righteousness, to bring peace and fellowship:

"Forasmuch therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the church, has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:

"First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith, when we believe that we are received in favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation (I Tim. 2:5) in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him.....

"But though this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation , because consciences cannot be pacified through any works, but only by faith, when they are sure that, for Christ's sake, they have a gracious God. As Paul teaches (Rom. 5:1) 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.'

"Heretofore consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works, nor did they hear any consolation from the Gospel. Some persons were driven by conscience into desert, monasteries, hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. Some also devised other works whereby to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. There was very great need to treat of and renew this doctrine of faith in Christ, to the end that anxious consciences should not be without consolation, but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ."

Thus did the Reformers at Augsburg faithfully witness to the experience of their hearts as interpreted by the Holy Scriptures in their teaching on faith and justification. As Schaff points out, the Reformation as represented in the

Augsburg Confession stands for the religion of freedom, for the experience, evangelism and spiritual simplicity of the Bible, for the immediate communion of the soul with Christ through personal faith.[1]

Furthermore, the Augsburg Confession stands for an abiding experience. "The righteousness of Christ instead of man's righteousness is the first foundation stone upon which Protestantism is built."[2] And today the Augsburg Confession, enshrining that principle, is the accepted creedal symbol of the United Lutheran Church. Its worthiness is well phrased by Professor Curtis with whose quotation we leave the discussion of this particular confession: "Its profound loyalty to the best traditions of the Catholic Church, and the great fathers, its faithfulness to Scripture, none the less impressive because it is unlabored and unobtrusive, and its deep note of evangelical experience, have secured for it a sacred place perhaps beyond all other confessions in the living faith of its ministers and people."[3]

2. The Canons of Dort

Another of the great Reformation symbols is known as the "Canons of the Synod of Dort," ratified in the National Synod of the Reformed Church, held at Dordrecht, in the years 1618 and 1619, one hundred years after the posting of the Ninety-five Theses by Luther. Dr. James Orr says that the situation

1. Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, p. 308.
2. Rust, Modernism and the Reformation, p. 71.
3. Curtis, History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith, p. 142.

which necessitated this creedal statement was not a new dispute but an old one, i. e., the conflict of Augustinianism versus Pelagianism. Here it was a semi-Pelagianism in dispute with Calvinism as developed during the last half of the Sixteenth Century.[1]

The party which presented the issue dealt with by the Synod of Dort was known as the Remonstrants. The religious system of thought which they represented was called Arminianism, after James Arminius, its leader. He was a ripe scholar; had formerly been a pupil of Beza, and was an able man. He died in 1609. A little later, in 1610, his followers set forth the creed of Arminianism in a document titled the "Remonstrance" and addressed to the States of Holland and West Friesland. It was from this document that the Remonstrants received their name. It set forth in five points the Calvinistic doctrines which the Arminian party rejected, and in five other points stated the Arminian position. It was in answer to this "Remonstrance" that the Canons of Dort were formulated by the Synod of Dort which was attended by delegates from England, sent by James I., and by members of a number of other Reformed Churches.[2]

The question at issue between the two parties centered largely in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and involved such questions as predestination and election, the power in man to resist God's grace, and similar problems. The center of the answer of the Synod of Dort was the upholding and

1. Orr, The Progress of Dogma, p.
2. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine, p. 338
   Cf. Fisher, Reformation, p. 474,5; Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I, p. 240.

declaring of the priniple of efficacious grace.

With this understanding of the issue involved in the formulation of the Canons of Dort, we may now ask the question applied to the Augsburg Confession: Is this creedal symbol related to that which is fundamental in religion, the attaining and maintaining of relationship with God?

Here again a study of this creedal statement reveals its allegiance to that which was basic in the Reformation and is fundamental in religion. One cannot discuss the question of election and predestination except as one recognizes that the greatest question in the world is one's relationship with God. Throughout these canons there is implicit the idea of man's relationship with God as the central, fundamental thing in religion. The particular contribution of this creed to the question is its discussion of God's part in effecting the fellowship of peace and love which was the experience of the Reformation.

It will not be necessary to quote from the Canons at any length. We shall simply note and point out those articles which deal especially with the underlying question of this thesis.

Articles III, V, VI, VII, of the First Head of Doctrine establish the point that it is God who seeks men. The desire for fellowship with Him comes first from Him. Long before we knew Him he was seeking us.

The Second Head of Doctrine deals especially with the death of Christ which becomes the basis of fellowship between

men and God and the blessing of which is appropriated by faith. In Articles V and VIII of this head the Reformation doctrine of faith is again seen although it is not stated formally and in the detail of the Augsburg Confession. That was not necessary, however, inasmuch as in the "Confession of Faith" of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, revised in the National Synod, at Dordrecht, 1618, 1619, Article XXII reaffirmed the Reformation Doctrine of Justification by Faith as experienced by the earlier reformers and as formulated in the Augsburg Confession.

It is evident, therefore, that in this creedal statement, the essential principle in religion, the experience of God and of relationship with Him, is basic to the discussion of the particular points at issue. It is the same permanent, fundamental idea that dominated the Reformation, that was central in the experiences of its leaders, and expressed in its literature. It is that which related this symbol with the former and with those which followed. As Dr. Schaff says: "The absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ and his gospel in doctrine and life, in faith and practice, is the animating principle, the beating heart of the Reformation and the essential unity of Protestantism to this day."[1]

3. The Westminster Confession.

In bringing this discussion of the Reformation symbols to a close, brief mention should be made of the Westminster

1. Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I., p.206.

Confession of Faith. Its date, 1646 puts it somewhat beyond the Reformation period proper. For that very reason it is worthy of consideration in this thesis as a representative creed of the Post-Reformation period.[1]

Further value is to be found in it with respect to the problem of this study because of the fact that none of the issues which called forth the previous symbols account for the writing of this confession, by far the most exhaustive and extensive of them all. The necessity of stating the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith, which animated the Augsburg Confession, was lacking at Westminster. The doctrine of the sacraments with respect to the Reformed position over against that of the Lutherans, which called forth the Heidelberg Catechism, had been settled and was not in question in 1646. The doctrine of God's Sovereignty in grace and election was likewise not a crucial point at issue. Yet, nevertheless, it reveals upon examination the same insistence and emphasis on the central, essential principles of religion which were basic in the other symbols.

A few references will indicate the spirit of the Confession.

Chapter XI. I. "Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone:.....they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith;

1. Fisher. The Reformation, p. 437,438
Cf. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine, p. 359.

which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."

II. "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the lone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."

It will be observed at once that the foregoing statements express the very essence of the Reformation experience in finding God through faith. Chapter XIV discusses the nature of the faith whereby one trusts in God and becomes justified before him. In Chapter XVI the old question of the relation of works to faith is taken up, with the same emphasis which Luther's experience gave to the Reformation teaching on the subject. "They are the fruits in evidences of a lively faith." But "we cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but, when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants." [1]

Thus does the Westminster Confession join with the other Reformation symbols which with one accord, "from deep, spiritual struggle and experience" testify to faith in the love and mercy of God as revealed in Christ as the all-sufficient answer to the longing of men's hearts to know God, expressed in the question: What shall I do to be saved?

1. Westminster Catechism, Cf. Schaff. The creeds of Christendom.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis a definite criterion was established for estimating the religious aspect of the Reformation, namely, its relation to the fundamental of religion, to its essential enduring principle. Through a study of a number of psychological and philosophical interpretations of religion and a survey of religion in some of its historical manifestations, the main idea of religion was found to be an experience of God, the attaining and maintaining relationship with Him. What then, in the light of the study that has been made of Luther's religious experience, in which the Reformation is mirrored, and of the creedal formulas of the Reformation period, representing the consensus of Protestant thought and experience, may we conclude with respect to the question underlying this thesis.

Two conclusions force themselves on one as a result of this investigation. First of all, it is evident that the Reformation was thoroughly and fundamentally in line with the main idea of religion. Though it had its political, intellectual and social antecedents, its originating causes, the crucial events that forwarded it, and the creedal statements that later expressed it, were all related to the heart of religion, man's attainment of fellowship with God.

As typically represented in Luther's religious experience "The Reformation started from a question of conscience: How shall a sinner be justified before God? And this is only

another form of an older and broader question: 'What shall I do to be saved?'"[1] That, we saw, was the meaning of Luther's entrance into the monastery. Around his search for peace and his finding of God and reality the whole movement swung.

The answer of the Reformation to this question just stated involved several great truths: First, the insufficiency and inadequacy of the accepted methods of the day-- ascetic practices, good works,-- to win peace of heart. Luther expressed the verdict of his experience in one sentence: "Works never bring peace to the conscience."[2] And his verdict became the sentiment of the Reformation. One has said: "It is impossible to estimate the service which Luther has done to society, by opening men's minds to the truth that it is not only possible to enter the kingdom of God without either submitting to Rome or entering a monastery, but that Rome and monasticism may be hindrances rather than helps toward leading a truly Christian life. This truth Protestantism has never forgotten; indeed, its fundamental principle may be said to be the religious freedom of the individual from the power of any particular church."[3] At least, that freedom is a corollary of the material principle of the Reformation ennunciated in the doctrine of justification by faith.

The second great truth involved in the Reformation was that religion is a personal, spiritual experience. Religion means not rites, and ceremonies and sacraments, but peace with

1. Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, Vol. I. p.205.
2. P. Smith, Conversations, p. 126.
3. A. Plummer, The Continental Reformer, p. 86.

God and confidence in his forgiving love. Professor Gwatkin states it thus: "The first principle of the Reformation is the old belief that knowledge of God is direct personal experience. If the knowledge of God is direct and personal, it must in the end be a personal experience, depending on personal character, not on any action of other men." [1] Or as Soper expresses it: "It declared clearly and unhesitatingly that the soul of man stood immediately in the presence of its maker and that it could have direct dealings with him without ceremonies or ritual or sacraments or priest. The church had its place but not as an essential mediation between men and God." [2] Hence, Luther and the Reformation stood for what is called the general priesthood of all believers. "The Christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to none," according to Luther. [3]

A further fact which comes out of this review of the religious nature of the Reformation is that Luther and his fellow Christians of the Reformation turned from the authority of the church to find the way and assurance of fellowship and peace in the Word of God as revealed in the experience of others who had experienced God. It was not an unchartered journey upon which they set forth in the freedom of their religious experience. Rather

1. Gwatkin, The Knowledge of God, p.222
2. Soper, The Religions of Mankind, p.318 Cf.Eucken in "The Platonic Tradition, W.R.Inge, p. 30.
3. Luther, The Freedom of the Christian Man.

they recovered the old guides found in the Holy Scriptures. Harnack, speaking of Luther, said, "What he restored was nothing less than the religious way of understanding the gospel, the sovereign right of religion in religion." [1]

The essence of the whole matter is in the answer which the Reformation set forth to the question: How can one attain fellowship with God? Its answer was the formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith. "A personal faith is the condition of inward peace." [2] This was the core of Luther's experience; it was the burden of the Reformation creeds. The desired end of the soul's search is in the discovery that one may trust unconditionally in a Righteous God who has revealed himself in Christ. Religion for Luther became seeking and finding God in Jesus Christ, letting one's heart find its peace and repose in quiet trust and confidence in Him. The Reformation testimony in the experience of Luther and in the statement of the creeds is that "the Christian religion", in the words of Harnack, "is living assurance of the loving God who has revealed himself and opened his heart in Christ,-- nothing else. Objectively it is Jesus Christ, His person and work; subjectively, it is faith; its content, however, is the God of grace and therefore the forgiveness of sins, which includes adoption and blessedness. For Luther (and conse-

1. Harnack, The History of Dogma, Vol.VII., p. 171.
2. Allen, The continuity of Christ Thought, p.226.

quently for the Reformation) the whole of religion was combined in this circle." [1]

So to men grown weary of religious forms and rites that answered not the desire of their hearts and kept them from the way to peace with God, the Reformation with a fresh message, based on a living experience, threw open the gates of new life -- a life of peace and of joy and victory. "It was a draught of living water to the thirsty, a breath of fresh air to those fainting in the desert." [2]

The second outstanding conclusion is that it is safe to say that in the Reformation we find a permanent contribution to the question of religion. It touched the main idea, the central aspect, the enduring fundamental principle of religion. It follows then that its relationship is one of abiding value. In enriching the permanent idea in religion, it made itself in its testimony a permanent contribution. We saw how in three different creeds, each confronted with a different problem, there was nevertheless as the basis of each the same testimony to the reality of a personal relation with God through faith. Our creeds may change in time and give way to newer formulas. There may conceiveably be a need today of the recognition in creedal expression of the modern categories of thought. But no creed can express the deep realities of Christian thought

1. Harnack, The History of Dogma, Vol.VII, p. 184.
2. Vedder, the Reformation, p. 385.

and experience and omit the basic principle enunciated in the symbols of the Reformation. The Reformation was born in the hearts of men, longing for and seeking God, and it stands for an abiding experience of attaining and maintaining fellowship with Him.

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