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THE NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM
AND THEIR REVIVAL IN THE GERMAN REFORMATION

By

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INTRODUCTION

THE NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM
AND THEIR REVIVAL IN THE GERMAN REFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject

1. The subject explained

There is probably nothing in the world more sought for by human nature than liberty from those things which interfere with happiness and success. Men seek this freedom in various ways—by rebellion to authority, by asceticism, by mystical contemplation, by altruistic and philanthropic activities. Yet there is nothing so evasive as this liberty and nothing so baffling to man's powers.¹

Because of the nature of his created personality, man is both an individual and a member of society. In the experience of living there is need for personal freedom, and for mutual cooperation and dependence for perfect happiness. But too often it is impossible, within the exercise of human personality, to prevent one person or a group of persons to completely dominate and suppress the freedom of the others in that society. So the world's history is a record of one continuous struggle of mankind against all manner of tyranny;

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1. Scherer, Christian Liberty and Christian Unity, p.7

and modern Western civilization has not been free from this conflict. Freedom-loving people today know what price has to be paid and is being paid at present to preserve the basic rights of all mankind.

But the problem of human freedom goes even deeper than this. Man, in living with himself and with others, has always been conscious that he is doing all things in the presence of an Unseen Divinity, and this ultimately leads to an experience of worship. He realizes that he stands in a relationship of dependence, obedience, and love toward his Creator—religious experience tells him this. Moreover he has the Bible, which is a timeless record of this fact. It is only natural, therefore, that along with man's struggle for personal, family, social, and political freedom there has been the struggle for the right to worship his Maker as he chooses. This effort has often been a hard struggle for religious freedom against all forms of superstition and priestcraft.

But more than this, there has been in man's experience a deep longing for inner freedom from all that shackles and inhibits one's mind, feeling and will, and prevents him from realizing and accomplishing that which he knows to be his highest and best duty to his God. He has had a burning passion to do all of God's will and thereby gain eternal life.

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2. Terms Explained

We find, therefore, that we must distinguish carefully between the use of the terms 'religious liberty' and spiritual or 'Christian freedom.' 'Religious liberty' is generally thought of in a broad sense, known in America as the constitutional right of every person to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience.¹

'Christian liberty' has a more restricted meaning and must not be confused with the general idea of religious liberty and tolerance. True, Christian Liberty is that inner spiritual freedom from sins which is the result of forgiveness and reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ, and it finally finds expression in all avenues of life. Christian freedom is condition of the heart, mind, and soul of an individual which determines all of his attitudes toward God and his fellow man. It is essentially what is meant by the state of salvation.

P. T. Forsyth differentiates between these two ideas of freedom in the following manner:

"In the modern sense religious liberty means the liberty of each citizen, as such, to be free even from God, to be an Atheist without loss of rights. But in the strict

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1. Hughes and Breckinridge; Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Religion, p. 34. The Pennsylvania State Constitution defines religious liberty thus: "All men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences; no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship or to maintain any ministry against his consent; no human authority can in any case whatever control or interfere with the right of conscience; and no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious establishments or modes of worship."

Christian sense religious liberty means freedom before God, in God, 'no condemnation,' freedom of intercourse with God, unhampered by guilt and the demands of a law which God has now made His own charge and become responsible for in Christ. It is the sonship of faith, the being at home, not in society, but in the Father's house and kingdom."¹

3. The Subject Stated and Delimited

In this thesis we propose to examine primarily the nature and principles of spiritual freedom, more specifically of Christian freedom as set forth by Jesus Christ in the Gospels and interpreted by St. Paul in his Epistles. We propose further to trace how the Gospel of freedom was lost in a growing ecclesiasticism known as Roman Catholicism in the centuries that followed, to be revived at last by an ever-increasing number of courageous souls during the Renaissance, in what at last proved to be the great resurgent movement of the Protestant Reformation under the leadership of Martin Luther and his colleagues. We shall study the story of Luther's emancipation of soul and some of his better known tracts in which he boldly sounded forth the New Testament principles of Christian freedom as they had not been preached for hundreds of years.

Incidentally, to this study of Christian freedom we shall have an opportunity to observe the broader question of religious liberty and 'freedom of worship,' which have been burning issues between Catholicism and Protestantism ever since the Reformation. The problem of religious liberty

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1. P.T. Forsyth; Faith, Freedom, And the Future, p. 201.

is of course very closely connected with that of Christian freedom, psychologically. Only the liberal man can afford to give to others the right to enjoy their freedoms. This is fundamentally the problem of authoritarianism and tolerance and it deserves a separate study. But this will naturally be considered in this thesis whenever it intrudes into the discussion of our more basic problem of Christian freedom.

B. Significance of the Subject

We feel justified in studying this problem of Christian freedom for the following reasons:

1) There is a rising feeling among many Protestants, among people whom themselves are religiously neutral, and even among many Catholics, that religious liberty, as one of the 'four freedoms,' is again being gravely threatened throughout the world today by Roman Catholicism. Recently in a meeting in a New York Methodist Church, Bishop Oxnam spoke of the Roman Catholic attitude toward religious liberty.

He said:

"This is a matter I regret to bring to you. It is a Protestant principle that religious liberty should be maintained. The Protestant will fight for the liberty of the Roman Catholic to worship, to educate and to serve in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. But in countries where Catholicism is predominant there have been discriminations....May I suggest that the Roman Catholic Church in every land in which it serves do unto others as it would be done by. It is going to be very difficult in some sections to have harmony."¹

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1. "New York Times" Saturday, June 23, 1945.

2) Not only does infringement upon religious freedom affect freedom of worship, but it seems to have its effect in social and political relationships. Many believe that the foundation for political democracy is religious liberty, which respects individual rights in this sphere. Apparently democracy has a hard time to thrive in Roman Catholic countries. Therefore a study of New Testament Christian freedom and the Reformation can prove significant from the standpoint of political freedom.

3) But even more than that, there is a strong conviction among those who understand the genius of Protestantism that the New Testament Gospel of 'Justification by Faith' is being endangered by Roman Catholic teachings and practices. They are the modern 'Judaizers,' who have perpetuated a misinterpretation of the Gospel of Christ which has inevitably resulted in inferior Christian living. It is for this reason particularly that this study is being made.

4) Finally this study is timely because of the continual danger Protestant Christians also have of falling back into subtle forms of legalism, which deny the true work of the Christian Gospel of grace and liberty. If New Testament Christian freedom, as made alive by Luther and the Reformers, was so vital to the founding of Protestantism, surely it must be vital to a living, progressive Protestantism today. The theme of orthodox Protestantism must ever be the freedom of the individual to accept with mind, feeling, and will the

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free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. With Philip Schaff we can say,

"Christian freedom is so inestimable a blessing that no amount of abuse can justify a relapse into a state of spiritual despotism and slavery."¹

Therefore in view of these four reasons the writer feels that this study of Christian freedom is timely for our present day and age. Not only our religious and civil liberties are at stake but the very preservation of the Gospel of Christ and all its blessings. The modern Protestant Church, with a Roman Church outside in open antagonism and many sects inside in divisive competition, must ever anew lay hold of this great Divine Secret of human life and salvation, freedom through Christ Jesus our Lord, if she is to fulfill her great Mission in the world. Such is the writer's conviction and to that end he intends this study.

C. Plan of Procedure and Sources

The first chapter will present the New Testament doctrine of Christian freedom. This will involve a close analysis of the doctrine of Christian freedom in the Gospels and Pauline writings.

Chapter two will point out some of the developments in early Christian experience, thought, and practice which slowly but surely deprived men of an enjoyment of that freedom which they might have had in Christ Jesus. We shall then

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1. Philip Schaff: History of the Christian Church, 2nd ed., Vol. VI, p. 15.

proceed to consider those influences which again awakened the slumbering heart of man after the Dark Ages to the rich heritage they had in the Gospel. For this, standard church histories will be used.

The third chapter will review Luther's rebellion and liberation from the deceptive practices of Romanism, and his determined stand against tyrannical ecclesiasticism. This will lead to the heart of the problem of Christian freedom as Luther set it forth in the Introduction to his Commentary on Galatians and his famous Reformation Tracts. A study of these works will summarize the principles of freedom that were basic to him.

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"For Freedom did Christ set us Free;
Stand fast therefore, and be not
again entangled in a yoke of Bondage."
Galatians 5:1

CHAPTER I

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

CHAPTER I

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

A. Introduction

In seeking to discover the basic principles of Christian freedom that were characteristic of the Apostolic Church one would naturally go to the New Testament for the necessary information. It is in the life and work and teaching of Jesus Christ that we believe we will find the key to the freedom of human personality. For when men came into contact with Jesus and gave themselves to Him with all their heart, soul, and mind a strange power seems to have come into operation in their lives which made all things new. It is the purpose of this chapter to discover the secret of Jesus' power to liberate men's souls.

To do this we must examine Jesus' saving and teaching ministry in its spiritual and social aspects, and then proceed to study Paul's experience of freedom through Christ and also his teachings on the freedom of the mind, spirit, and will. This will help us to understand something of the abiding character and the principles of this experience of freedom through Christ Jesus, known as Christian freedom.

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B. Christ and Christian Freedom

At the outset of His ministry Jesus showed his tremendous interest in men and women by His concern for their physical as well as their spiritual needs. In the first public appearance at Nazareth, after His Baptism, Jesus made clear to the people that that day hath the prophecy of Isaiah (chapter 61) been fulfilled in their ears. He declared to them that He had been anointed and sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to heal the broken-hearted, and to set at liberty them that are bruised.¹

However they arose in anger and defiance of His universal plan of a free salvation and attempted to cast Him down the hill. Nevertheless Jesus would not be defeated in His purposes, for as Scherer remarks:

"He could make no better beginning than to show that He, at least would not be bound by the chains of national prejudice, and human tradition which had held His people captive through so many centuries. Therefore He spoke as the Prophet of Liberty."²

This was plainly a proclamation of liberty; and the life, work, and teachings of Christ are best understood from this standpoint. Therefore we shall proceed to discuss these two phases of His work—both how He brought freedom to men's bodies, minds, and souls, and how He intended men to exercise freedom.

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1. Luke 4:17-21.

2. Scherer, op. cit., p. 14.

1. Saving Ministry—Christ the Mediator of God's
Gift of Freedom.

From reading the Gospel accounts of Christ's ministry one is impressed with two great facts: that of Christ's authority and power over the mind, body, and soul of man, and then of His impotence in the face of unbelief to exercise His power and authority. This is apparent from what happened in the incident at Nazareth.¹ Jesus's own townsmen refused to accept His authority, and so He was unable to do mighty works in their presence "because of their unbelief."²

The success of Christ's work was dependent upon the belief of people in His unique authority and power. Christ could only work among men of faith. This can be easily seen if we consider a few illustrations of the manifestation of Jesus's power to liberate men from physical and spiritual infirmities. Let us observe first how He liberated men's bodies through faith in Himself.

a. Health of Body by Faith.

The Gospels abound with illustrations of the healing ministry of the true liberator, Jesus. All throughout His active ministry Jesus went about healing twisted bodies, giving sight to the blind, and casting out demons. No one knew better than Jesus the importance of a healthy

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1. Intra, p. 12.
2. Mark 6:5-6.

body in order to serve God effectively. Let it be observed that the only thing necessary to call this force into action was faith in the power of Christ.

In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke there is a report of an incident of healing which illustrates the importance of faith. Jesus had been summoned by a ruler of a synagogue to heal his daughter, but while on the way, in the midst of a pressing crowd a woman was cured of a disease which money had been unable to heal. She had merely touched the hem of Jesus' garment and He turned to her with these comforting words: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace."¹

Jesus commended the faith of the centurion of Capernaum because he recognized and acknowledged the power of Jesus to heal: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."² He realized that Jesus need only say the word and his servant would be healed.

From these miracles of healing it is evident that Jesus had supernatural power over men's bodies, yet how necessary it was for them to have faith in Him. When He called forth power men realized that it was God's power in action and they marvelled.

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1. Luke 8:43-48.

2. Matthew 8:5-10.

b. Salvation by Faith.

Christ was not only the Mediator of God's power over the bodies of men through faith, but likewise He was the Mediator of spiritual freedom on the same condition of faith. It was His primary objective to "call sinners to repentance," and to "seek and to save that which was lost." He purposed to release man's spiritual nature from sin and self; for except his will or spirit, which is the seat of all sin and rebellion, is liberated by the power of Christ, man is not truly free to serve God and others. It is only by a higher power of constraining love that man's motives and desires are freed from sinful pride, jealousy, and selfish ambition. Thus the paradox of freedom: "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."¹

Therefore, if a man would find eternal life he must first lose his life by surrendering it to the authority of Jesus Christ, as Mediator between man and God. He must recognize Jesus' divine Sonship and authority by a full surrender of his whole self to God through Him. Only then could one become free and be able to worship God in spirit and in truth and so serve his fellow men.

In the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus seeking eternal life we find a perfect illustration of

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1. Matthew 16:25

one who was unwilling to surrender himself to God by putting his love for self, life, and pleasures in second place. He lacked faith to believe the words of Christ: that true life comes only by denying one's self and following Him.

An illustration of some who did believe Him was the case of the man sick of the palsy who was brought to Jesus on a cot to be healed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the man, "Son be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven."¹ But certain of the scribes doubted His authority so Jesus proved his power and authority to forgive sins by healing the man of his physical infirmity. He said to him, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." And the man arose at the word of Christ and went to his house.

When Christ spoke that way to men and they responded in faith, something happened; they were saved from their sins and received the gift of eternal life which began immediately. To give men spiritual freedom from self and sin was the highest and most essential work of Jesus; it was the ultimate goal of all other efforts.

2. Teaching Ministry—Christ's interpretation of man's responsibility in freedom.

In this section we propose to study how Jesus intended men to enjoy the life and express the freedom that they had found through faith in Him. He had to break down

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1. Matthew 9:1-8.

old ideas and build up new ones. He had to teach them how to worship God sincerely, how to live in love one toward another, and how to think on the nature of God, man, and the universe. He was trying to teach them that all moral laws have their roots in the law of love, and that loving God was more important than observing any ceremonial or sacrificial law. It was by His teaching ministry that Jesus taught the true meaning and implications of a life of freedom. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."¹

a. Freedom in Worship - Faith in God.

Jesus was greatly opposed to the traditional and legalistic forms of worship which were practised by the Jews of his day. Their religious and moral life revealed what their attitude toward God was. Religion only touched the surface of life; it failed to get through to the inner life where thought and motive controlled outward action. His attitude was reflected in His conversation with the woman of Samaria, "Neither in this mountain or in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father...and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."² True worship of God, Jesus said, was exercised in the freedom of the mind and in the knowledge of

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1. Matthew 22:37-39.
2. John 4:21-24.

truth. This kind of worshipper the Father seeks to be his worshippers.

So in the "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus was teaching the people that the nature of God demanded a worship, not of external observances and a technical keeping of the law, but of heart attitude—faith. His interpretation of religious conduct and activities did not contradict the Scriptures, although they did run contrary to many of the popular Jewish practices. Instead of the "ye have heard," Jesus said, "But I say unto you."¹

Against three habitual forms of worship which were often performed for the purpose of gaining personal honor and praise from men, Jesus warned them. He said, When you do your fasting, praying, and almsgiving, do them in secret that God may reward you. Jesus, in piercing to the innermost motives of man could discern that these exercises of worship were not accomplishing the purpose for which they were designed—that of bringing the worshipper nearer to God in a fellowship of faith and trust, and of reminding him of God's demand upon one's ethical living. Instead, these various means for religious life had become ends in themselves, a mechanical system of religious behavior.

For example in praying, nothing was further from the spirit of true worship than their "vain repetitions,"

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1. Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44.

and "much speaking."¹ Jesus struck a staggering blow at the Jewish liturgical system of prayers when He said, "After this manner, therefore pray, 'Our Father.'"² Thus He appeared as a spiritual emancipator to those who followed Him, by setting them free from the cumbersome and empty exercises of worship which had long been in vogue among the Jewish people. He taught them to believe in a personal God who not only demanded heart worship but who also was concerned in the welfare of each individual. Pure faith was to ask of God in the name of Christ and believe that it would be done—this is the essence of worship.

b. Freedom in Practice - Love to Man.

Jesus taught that spiritual living was more than a profession of loyalty to God by following the prescribed course of the law and its observances. Spiritual living, to be of any reality must naturally have its effect in one's contact with others—in the ethical and moral aspects of life. Nothing was further from freedom in ethical living than the hypocrisy of Pharisaic legalism.

Matthew gives sufficient evidence of this false and hypocritical religion and life in chapters five and twenty-three. The Pharisees prescribed right living according to Moses but did not live accordingly themselves. They put heavy burdens upon the people but did not help to move

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1. Matthew 6:7
2. Ibid. 6:7

them. They went to any amount of trouble to make a proselyte, but then made him "twofold more a son of hell" than themselves.¹ They tithed carefully but left undone the more important matters of justice, mercy, and faith. Jesus was only voicing the burden of the "writing prophets" when he said, "But go ye and learn what this meaneth, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"²

The problem of unethical living was not one of a lack of knowledge but of lacking the will to do right. In the seventh chapter of John, Jesus said, "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know the teaching."³ Jesus set forth clearly, in his teachings the implications of righteous living, both in its moral and social outreach. He was calling people to action: "Everyone, therefore that heareth these words of mine and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon the rock...."⁴

If you are inwardly free, having committed your life to God, you will be free to live it out in full accord to the will of God, in devotion to Christ and to others. You will not be judging others: you will do to them as you would have them do to you.⁵ Out of a heart of love you will serve God and others. Just as a good tree brings forth

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1. Matthew 23:15.
2. Ibid. 9:13.
3. John 7:17.
4. Matthew 7:24.
5. Ibid. 7:1, 12.

good fruit, so will a Christ-renewed heart and life bring forth works worthy of the kingdom of God. This is Christian freedom in practice, in ordinary human relationships.

c. Freedom of Thought.

In order to give the Jews spiritual life Jesus had to first set them free intellectually from the perverted teachings which had become foremost in their thinking and living. He attempted to make them free and independent in their thinking by releasing them from the chains of intellectual tradition.

Recorded in the eighth chapter of St. John's Gospel is an illustration of the stubbornness of their minds to accept the teachings of Christ. Jesus offered to them the blessings of freedom: "If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."¹ But they replied indignantly that they were Abraham's seed and had never been in bondage to any man. They thought only of political freedom; they were not aware of that more subtle servitude of a person's mind to self and evil, which prevents one from thinking straight. If men would put their faith in Christ they would be free to think for themselves and to control their own lives. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye

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1. John 8:32.

shall be free indeed."¹ Jesus was the Truth and He alone could set men free, for He was God's Word Incarnate.² And in the Supper Discourse He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."³

Jesus' method of teaching about God and the nature of personal righteousness was quite often by the use of parables: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."⁴ He made people think for themselves by teaching in parables drawn from everyday life. Those who persisted in their spiritual blindness could not understand the meaning of the parables, but to them who were receptive in mind and heart the meaning was revealed.

Jesus taught the loving and merciful character of God and the value of man's soul by use of three life-centered parables, which are recorded in Luke fifteen, of the lost sheep, coin, and son. The simple lesson from nature of the rain which falls on the unjust as well as on the just teaches the universality of God's love.⁵ The parable of the unmerciful servant teaches the scope of God's forgiveness, but also the ethical demand upon those receiving justice and mercy to go and do likewise.⁶

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1. John 8:36.
2. John 8:42.
3. John 14:6.
4. Mark 4:9.
5. Matthew 5:45-46.
6. Matthew 18:21-35.

In His teaching Jesus attempted to set men free from traditional and legal forms of worship and righteousness by getting them to think for themselves. The New Testament is a remarkable result of the freeing of the minds of men to think out for themselves the nature of God and man, and the relationship between God and man, and between man and man.

3. Summary

Christ makes men free, therefore, by liberating them in body, spirit, will, and mind, that they may serve God with their fullest and best capacities. The Gospel of Christ begins with the regeneration of a new and supernatural life through faith in Him, and affects every aspect of man's personality; readjusting every faculty of man to function in a normal relationship with God, for as Schaff says:

"It (the Gospel) lays hold of the inmost center of man's personality, emancipates him from the dominion of sin, and brings him into vital union with God in Christ; from this center it acts as a purifying, ennobling, and regulating force upon all the faculties of man—the emotions, the will, and the intellect—and transforms even the body into a temple of the Holy Spirit."¹

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1. Schaff, Vol. I, p. 432.

C. Paul and Christian Freedom

Of all who have discussed and written on the problem of Christian freedom two men stand out above all others—St. Paul the Apostle and Martin Luther the Reformer. They have been hailed as the champions of Christian liberty. Farrar acknowledges the outstanding work of these two men when he says:

"What Luther did when he nailed his Theses to the door of the Cathedral of Wittenburg, that St. Paul did when he wrote the Epistle of the Galatians. It was the manifesto of emancipation. It marked an epoch in history."¹

The life and teachings of Jesus contained the germs of social and spiritual freedom which ultimately predominated in the Apostolic Church, and it was St. Paul more than any other person who was privileged to champion the Gospel of freedom. In that famous Epistle of Freedom to the Christians in Galatia, Paul urges his readers to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."²

1. Paul's Experience of Freedom.

The conversion of Saul the Inquisitor into Paul the slave of Christ is a marvelous example of the transforming and liberating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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1. F. W. Farrar; Life and Works of St. Paul, Vol. II, p. 139.

It was while on a mission to destroy the Christian Church in Damascus that Paul faced squarely for the first time in his life the resurrected Christ and the issues of his own sinfulness.¹

This experience is related three times in Acts and one can see that the struggle in Paul's mind as he confronted this growing Christian fellowship was the fact of the humiliating death and resurrection of their leader. But when this fact broke in full force upon Paul's mind and heart and will, and the living Christ appeared before him in a vision, his message became that of Philippians, chapter 3: "Yea verily, and I count all things (heredity, circumcision, and a zealousness to keep the law) to be loss for the excellencies of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."²

Christian freedom, then to Paul, was absolution from both the fetter of the law and the condemnation brought upon him by the knowledge of his sins through the holy law.³ This experience of freedom came to Paul only after a struggle with the law, after renouncing his own self-righteous achievements, counting them as refuse, and by placing his confidence completely in Christ; it came by the simple, yet difficult

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1. Philippians 3:4-9.
2. Acts 9:1-2.
3. Romans 7:7-12.

act of believing in the living Christ as the only Mediator between God and man, one who had made propitiation for his sins.¹ It is any wonder that a cry of rejoicing breaks forth from Paul at the realization of freedom from this condemnation? "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.... There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death."²

This thought of Paul's freedom is expressed in these words of Professor Taylor:

"No one won his way to it with grander or more congenitally hampered genius than Paul. The Epistles to the Romans and Galatians reflect the tortuous arguments by which he had disentangled his feet from the fetters of the law in his struggle to attain the freedom of Christ."³

2. Paul's Doctrine of Christian Freedom.

The Apostle Paul not only had a profound experience of Christ's liberating power which sent him to all parts of the world as a witness to that power, but by his unusual abilities enabled him to understand and explain the meaning of Christian freedom to others. No one has been able to grasp more clearly than Paul the difference between a salvation by works and a salvation that is received by a living faith in God, that results in a life of faith in Christ to be lived out by the Spirit.

We shall consider several distinct emphases in Paul's writings which help to explain and interpret Christian

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1. Romans 3:25.

2. Romans 7:25; 8:1-2.

3. H. O. Taylor, Freedom of the Mind in History, p. 126.

freedom: his compelling aim to help men to place their faith in God through Christ as Mediator of spiritual life and freedom; his exhortations to exercise freedom properly, walking by the Spirit; and his constant efforts to release men from the bondage of religious law and tradition by awakening their minds and causing them to think for themselves.

a. Freedom of Spirit - Life in Christ.

It was only as a man was freed, as a bondservant, from the yoke of the law and ceremonialism that he was able to attain spiritual freedom. This was the purpose of the Gospel: to free the soul of the individual from the law which could never make one holy, and to make alive by imparting to one a righteousness which is of God by faith. To describe this experience of salvation and freedom Paul uses several metaphors from ordinary life. Two that he uses in Romans 5:1 are the law and punitive justice, and warfare and peace: "Being therefore Justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Another metaphor that was favorite with Paul was one of life and death: crucifixion, burial, and resurrection with Christ. By this Paul said that unless a man dies to self he cannot be raised to new life in Christ. This denoted the same surrender to Christ as Jesus Himself called for when He said that a man must lose his life in order to save

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it. A marvelous statement of Paul's utter surrender and devotion to Christ is found in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

Carrying the thought of 'new life in Christ' a little further, Paul speaks of becoming a "new creature." A beautiful statement of this is in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." Also, closely resembling these, there is the metaphor of the "putting on" of Christ: seeing that ye have "put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man."¹

In the fourth chapter of Galatians, Paul uses certain legal and social terms as metaphors to describe this same experience of spiritual emancipation. His readers were undoubtedly well acquainted with the meaning of 'redemption' and 'adoption' when he said, "that He (christ) might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."² In Christ the slave receives freedom. And as Deismann states it, "Justification is the acquittal of the accused, so redemption is the emancipation of the slave!"³

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1. Colosians 3:9-10.
2. Galatians 4:5.
3. R. Deismann; Paul, A Study in Social & Religious History, p. 174.

In these different ways Paul was trying to describe the free access to God by faith in Christ, which results in a life of perfect freedom in worship and prayer.

b. Freedom of Will - Living by the Spirit.

Having come into a new relationship with God through Christ, the Christian is likewise in a new relationship to his fellow men. In this new relationship Paul exhorted the Christian to exercise his freedom with discretion, knowing well the tendencies of human nature to misuse liberty. He warned against two dangers—license and legalism.

While on the one hand the Christian is free from the imposed dominance of the ordinances and commandments of God, he is not free to live without law to God and in society.¹ The Christian must see the law in a new light; he must no longer keep it as a requirement, but because of an inward compulsion which loves to obey God and serve others. As with Paul, the regulating principle in the exercise of freedom is love—love that acts in conformity to the best interests of others and to the ultimate glory of God.²

On the other hand the Christian is warned against becoming a legalist—that is, of slipping back into a bondage

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1. 1 Corinthians 1:21. And Galatians 5:13, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."
2. 1 Corinthians 9:10.

of merely keeping religious observances and laws for the sake of such. Paul valued this new-found freedom as a great treasure and exhorted those who had been called into the same grace to abide in it: "For freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."¹

Paul is telling us that the Gospel of freedom cannot be set forth in rules and regulations as was the old covenant, for Christ "made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."² Later in the same chapter, speaking of the unveiling of God by Christ, Paul declares that, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."³ The Spirit of God has thus become the controlling power in the Christian's life and he can be bound by no other law than the law of love.

The Spirit of Christ having set the sinner free, he is no longer to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit, for "as many as are led (driven) by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."⁴ The Christian does not live by the law, but rather by the Spirit, because "in Christ, he is a new creature,"⁵ and "Christ is the end of

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1. Galatians 5:1.
2. 2 Corinthians 3:6.
3. Ibid., v. 17.
4. Romans 8:4, 14.
5. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

the law."¹ Thus the 'letter' has been conquered by the 'Spirit,'² and the only free man is in Christ and walks by the Spirit, having the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.³

c. Freedom of Mind - Thought Founded upon Faith.

A third distinct teaching of Paul in interpreting Christian freedom was his aim for intellectual freedom. It is evident that he sought to inform men's minds, awaken their understanding, stir their reasoning processes, and quicken their judgement.⁴

To understand the problem that Paul and other Jews faced in accepting Christ, one must appreciate the hold that the 'letter of the law' and rationalism that went with it had upon their minds and hearts. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life." Even Moses realized the necessity of the heart controlling the mind in worshipping God; he said, "And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."⁵ And regarding the moral law, Moses said, "that thou therefore keep and do them, with all

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1. Romans 10:4.

2. Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6.

3. Galatians 5:22-23.

4. H. T. Kuist; Pedagogy of St. Paul, p. 71.

5. Deuteronomy 30:6.

thy heart, and with all thy soul."¹

What happened was that the Jews failed to heed these exhortations; they reduced the commandments of God to a legalistic code, which resulted in more of an intellectual exercise of Rabbinical hair-splitting, than a genuine experience of a living faith in God. The 'writing prophets' attempted to call men back to faith by teaching them that a man's righteousness, or his relationship with God was determined solely by his personal attitude toward God and his fellow men. These efforts were all quite unsuccessful.

However, it was Jesus, as we have seen, who was able to liberate men's minds and lead them to faith in God through Himself. Paul understood the issues perfectly. The problem of legalism versus faith forms the central theme of much of his writing. It is the dominant issue in Galatians and appears in Romans, Philippians, Colossians, and even in the Pastoral Epistles.

Galatians, chapter 3 reveals Paul's attitude toward the law as a part of Jewish history. He argues conclusively that the Law was only intended to be a tutor to bring men to Christ, and now that faith had come they were no longer under a tutor, for "ye are sons of God through faith in Christ."² Now, as sons of God they were no longer

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1. Deuteronomy 26:16.
2. Galatians 3:24-25.

bondservants; they are free in Christ; they are mature and able to judge God's will, working out their own salvation.¹

In view of this fact, Paul never considered the law to be evil, for it represented the highest religious experience of ancient patriarchs and prophets. It was good, Paul reminded his readers, but it was not able to give life, "for if there had been given a law which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law."²

As it is, what is most needed is a religious experience through Christ which would enable men to fulfill the righteousness of the law in their lives, and this experience is Christian freedom.

In order to have a stable philosophy of life—to think soundly on God, man, and the universe—man must first have personal faith in God and His supreme revelation of love in Christ, for as Paul says, "casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."³ "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him....But we have the mind of Christ."⁴

Therefore, Paul's continual exhortation was to "be not fashioned according to this world, but be ye trans-

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1. Philippians 2:12.
2. Galatians 3:21.
3. 2 Corinthians 10:5.
4. 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.

formed by the renewing of your mind;"¹ "have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus;"² and "set your mind on the things that are above, not on things that are upon the earth."³

D. Summary

We have seen that Paul was thoroughly at one with Christ in teaching that Christian freedom involves three important factors: 1) the divine liberating power of God in the soul when one surrenders to Jesus Christ as his Mediator; 2) the necessary response of faith on the part of man to this power; 3) and man's willingness to worship God by faith and serve his fellow men by love.

Paul was thoroughly convinced that in Christ alone there was true freedom for man, in body, mind, and spirit—from imposed laws and customs, from the guilt and penalty of sins, and to overcome temptations of the flesh; and that becoming like Christ was the aim of the Gospel. Therefore as Philip Schaff says,

"Christianity aims, first of all, to redeem men, without regard to rank or condition, from that worst bondage, the curse of sin, and to give him true spiritual freedom; it confirms the original unity of all men in the image of God, and teaches the common redemption and spiritual equality of all before God in Christ; it insists on love as the highest duty and virtue, which itself inwardly levels social distinctions; and it addresses the comfort and consolation of the Gospel particularly to all the poor, the persecuted, and the oppressed."⁴

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1. Romans 12:2.

2. Philippians 2:5.

3. Colossians 3:2.

4. Schaff; op. cit., Vol. I, p. 446.

"Each age stands on the shoulders of the past,
though sometimes its feet slip painfully."

CHAPTER II

STRUGGLE FOR CHRISTIAN FREEDOM WITHIN THE CHURCH

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A. Introduction

The Christian Church in the post-Apostolic age was characterized by Roman persecutions and a rapid spread, followed by Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the State religion. With the merging of the Church and State, the ecclesiastical powers of the Roman Church grew gradually until it was supreme in the Roman world. The Church by the eleventh century held full sway over all the peoples of Western Europe; nearly every phase of public and private living was controlled by the papacy—the body, mind, and soul of men were in complete subjection to papal authority in political and secular affairs, papal control of secular education, and papal infallibility in matters of religion.

By the middle of the 13th century the power of the Church began to wane; moral and spiritual life above all else was ripe for reform; however several attempts in this direction failed to produce any lasting change. Seemingly the Gospel, as a vital life-giving and transforming power in the lives of men had become shrouded by elaborate doctrines and ceremony. Nevertheless, within the Church

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there were occasionally men who had cleared away the clouds that veiled the Gospel of Christ's redeeming love and were bold enough to assert, in the face of strong Catholic opposition, their views of the true nature of Christian freedom even to the loss of their own lives.

In this chapter we propose to trace the struggle of Christian freedom to survive within the Roman Catholic Church, by first observing the Gospel as it was transmuted into a system of ecclesiastical institutionalism and how in time the true meaning of Christian freedom became obscured; and then by tracing how a vestige of Christian freedom was nourished by many sincere Catholics and finally grew to full blossom during the lifetime of Martin Luther. In short, this will be a brief study of the struggle of human personality to attain full liberty in body, mind, and soul during the period from the close of the Apostolic Church to the Protestant Reformation.

B. The Gospel Systematized and Obscured.

In the Apostolic Church a living faith in the heart of every believer had been the bond of spiritual unity; however in the Medieval Church an external authoritarian organization, consisting of a priestly and confessional type of religion was substituted for the unity of the Spirit. We will attempt to point out the leading causes which were

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at work to suppress and smother the true Gospel of Christian freedom as taught and made possible by Jesus Christ, and as was interpreted by the Apostle Paul—forces that succeeded partially, if not wholly for a time, in bringing the human personality into servitude to that which increasingly limited personal faith and freedom.

1. Faith in God Through the Church and its Priesthood.

The Apostles once proclaimed that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," and "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house," as the only way to find salvation and eternal life; but less than five hundred years afterward men were seeking salvation in an infallible authoritarian Church, through the mediation of a priesthood and a complex system of sacraments.

a. An Indispensible and Authoritarian Church.

Basing its claims on a perverted interpretation of Jesus' words to Peter—"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church...and I will give unto thee the keys of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"—the Roman Catholic Church has established her claim as the sole interpreter of Holy Scripture and the only Church of Christ, outside of which there

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is no salvation.¹ Although this was not officially decreed until the 14th century it nevertheless was taught and believed by portions of the Church from the middle of the 3rd century on.²

This claim to universal sovereignty is fatal to human progress and to the spirit of free inquiry. It has resulted in not only universal spiritual authority over all its subjects, but it assumes and exercises the same rights in secular matters. In the Middle Ages this amounted to absolute power over both souls and bodies of men.

Instead of following Jesus' method of soul-winning the Church of Rome adopted policies similar to those of the Roman State—the subjection of the whole world to its spiritual and temporal domain. Jesus refused to use personal coercive power to dominate men, but was controlled in every action by the principle of love and freedom. However Catholicism failed to imitate his example and instead adopted policies of tyranny and bigotry. The primary aim of the Church to save souls by its teachings and example was replaced by selfish external motives for power and authority.

b. Rise of Sacerdotalism.

The rise of the sacerdotal theory, that the

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1. Matthew 16:31.

2. Decreed in 'Unam Sanctum' bull by Pope Boniface VIII, in 1303. But as early as 255 Cyprian was teaching that the Church of Christ is an episcopate, with the bishops, and he who is not with the bishop is not in the Church, and he who is not in the Church of Christ has no salvation. W. Walker: A History of the Christian Church, p. 70.

ministry possesses attributes of a priesthood, made its appearance in the Christian Church probably not earlier than 200 A.D., likely from the example of heathen priesthood and given support by the old Jewish economy.¹ Though Tertullian is the first writer to suggest the term, he insists strongly in the universal priesthood of believers.

This conception of a special priesthood, once it had become popular, had the effect of exalting the clergy and separating them from the laity as a higher order.² From the standpoint of Christian freedom many unfortunate evils have resulted from this doctrine of a special priesthood.

First, the Roman Church has taken from God the right to dispense salvation and placed it in the hands of her bishops and priests, regardless of their personal character.³ These men alone have the power to mediate between man and God by offering the sacrifice of the Mass for man's sins. Obviously this contradicts the New Testament teachings that Christ is the High Priest who has offered one sacrifice for the sins of all men forever, that every believer is a priest unto himself, and that he may enter with boldness the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus.⁴ The Roman system robs the individual of his right to seek sal-

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1. G. P. Fisher: History of the Christian Church, p. 54.
2. Ibid.
3. Donatist controversy in N. Africa during St. Augustine's time.
4. Hebrews 10:10-12, 19.

vation through personal faith in Christ.

In the second place, sacerdotalism has been invaluable to the Church as a unifying force. Dr. L. H. Lehman is of the opinion that the secret of the Roman Church's power is rooted in the conviction that people are dependent upon the priesthood for their salvation.¹ Walker's opinion confirms this statement: "Here, then, was the great control of the priesthood over the laity until the Reformation, and in the Roman Church to the present."² Undoubtedly this doctrine and practise was one of the most important influences in destroying New Testament evangelical Christianity in the early centuries.

c. Other Doctrines Fatal to Christian Freedom.

Several other doctrines fundamental to the structure of this sacerdotal form of theocracy are those of the Mass, Confessional and Penance, Indulgences, and Purgatory. In fact the seven sacraments of the Church are aimed to control life from the cradle to the grave.

The "Sacrifice of the Mass" was formerly a daily pagan ritual and was almost wholly adopted by Christianity—the candles, consecrated wafer, the Holy water, and the incense—as a sacrifice offered to God in imitation of Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross.³

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1. Cf. Converted Catholic Magazine, January 1945, p. 6.

2. Walker: op. cit., p. 275.

3. Cf. Converted Catholic Magazine, December 1944, p. 259.

The sacrament of Penance, necessary for those who sin after baptism, was developed through the centuries until it came to have three elements: contrition of heart, confession by mouth, and satisfaction by good works. The confessional aspect of this sacrament is vitally important to the Roman hierarchy because it adds strength to the organization by keeping those in authority in personal touch with every member.

Another custom closely connected with Penance is Indulgences. This practice seems to have proceeded from barbarians in England and was finally developed into an elaborate system of supererogation from the treasure of the saints. Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury is the reputed author of penance for a money payment. At first it was a substitute for fasting and other satisfactions but later it took on an atoning efficacy: one could be granted extra-merit for special services rendered to the Church.¹

The doctrine of Purgatory stemmed from Alexandrian philosophy which taught the necessity of purifying fires for the souls of dead men.

Together these doctrines teach that the individual is not saved unless he does these outward works and observances which have been imposed upon him by the Church as a source of gain and means of influence. They contradict the

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1. Cf. Schaff: op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 384.

New Testament teachings that the sacrifice of Christ was completed once for all for the sins of all people—an Atonement for both guilt and penalty due to sins.¹ These doctrines have been largely responsible for destroying individual freedom of access to God by faith for justification. It was as if the priest himself actually held the keys to heaven or hell by virtue of his office, and he could calibrate the heinousness of each sin to the minutest extent. This was all without warrant from Scriptures.

2. Worship Formalized.

The union of the Christian Church of Rome with the Roman State and the rapid spread of Christianity to the heathen nations did not Christianize the State or the world, but instead the Christian Church absorbed many of their ideas and customs. With a few changes and additions Christianity in Rome became nearly identical with the pagan religion and superstitions of that ancient city. Roman Catholic writers boast of the fact that their religion cannot be identified with primitive Christianity! Not only has it borrowed its worship, laws, morals, and dogmas from pagan religions in the past but it expects to continue to do so in the future.²

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1. Hebrews 10.

2. Cf. Converted Catholic Magazine, December 1944, p. 257, which quotes from Dr. Karl Adam, Roman Catholic priest-professor at University of Tuebingen, Germany. His book is The Spirit of Catholicism.

a. Elements of Mystery and Superstition.

Many popular religious tendencies of the age were allowed to thrust their fangs into the Christian people through the medium of worship. The elements of mystery and superstition that were found in connection with certain acts of worship such as the Mass, festivals, processions, and other customs, gained a tenacious grip upon the worshippers, for all were addressed to eye, ear, feeling, and imagination, rather than to the intelligence and the will. For instance in the celebration of Mass, people were fascinated and satisfied emotionally in the miraculous changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ when the priest pronounced "ex opera operatum." All was automatic, in a foreign tongue, and demanded no effort or response on the part of the people. While the senses and imagination were entertained and charmed, the heart rarely was warmed and nurtured.

Contributing toward this type of supernatural worship was the continually lowering standards of morals and education. There was increased ignorance among the masses of people with the invading hordes from Northern Europe. Nor has the Church ever made any attempt for a general, free educational movement among her peoples. We agree with William Inge that,

"Superstition is no doubt a powerful weapon in the hands

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of a hierarchy; but its edge is blunted by every advance in knowledge and education, so that the sacerdotal form of theocracy can flourish only among backward peoples, who in fact are kept backward by the exigencies of hierarchical policy."¹

b. Liturgies and Sacraments.

Until the time of Justin Martyr worship was looked upon as a spontaneous living expression of religious experience. But as the second century drew to a close new motives and foreign ideas became apparent. Together with the intermingled elements of paganism which after a few centuries entered the Church, consciousness of Christ as Redeemer was obscured and the joy and peace which predominated in the early church were lost.

In the development of liturgies we notice that there were fixed orders of worship which developed even in the early church; however the services were simple, containing prayer, singing of hymns, Scriptures, preaching, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Everyone participated in the service.² But by the fifth century the services became formal and amplified, with the people having less chance to respond. Written liturgies and prayers are found to be the regularly accepted form from the fifth century on. The liturgies of Pope Gregory (580-604) gradually attained almost exclusive prevalence in the Latin church, and was

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1. W. R. Inge: Platonic Traditions in English Religious Thought, p. 4.
2. W. D. Maxwell: Outline of Christian Worship, Ch. I-III.

sanctioned by the Council of Trent.¹

The cardinal fault of religious worship came to be the undue predominance of the liturgical element over the didactic. Latin established itself as the sacred language in all of the liturgies, whether used in Rome or in Germany. The liturgy centered in the eucharistic sacrifice, around which all of the prayers revolved. The sermon was dispensed with by most churches as early as the fifth century as being not essential to the purpose of the service. In fact most of the priests were too ignorant to prepare a sermon and often to even read sermons of the Fathers.²

The Schoolmen of the 12th and 13th centuries wrought out the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments. Their number was fixed at seven: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage. The sacrament were supposed to have virtue inherent in themselves, being a visible sign of an invisible grace, and were necessary to salvation. This theory, based on false and one-sided interpretation of Scripture, and held together by argumentation, "substituted the mechanical efficiency of sacramental grace for the Saviour into whose immediate presence the soul has right to approach through penitence of heart and prayer."³

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol., III, p. 534.
2. Ibid., Vol., IV, p. 400.
3. Ibid., Vol., V, p. 708.

c. Symbolism, Images, and Holidays.

Other aids to an external and sensual type of worship were the use of symbols, images, painting and architecture, and religious holidays. With the change in legal and social position of Christianity, the former primitive and simple church buildings and furnishings were gradually displaced with the richer and more magnificent. The interior was carefully decorated and ornamented with costly stones, images and paintings. Although the clergy before the fourth century resisted these attempts to sensualize Christianity by external representations, they soon became general and resulted in reverence and worship of images and saints.

The emblem of the Cross was the earliest symbol of Christianity, and soon the dove became significant of the Holy Spirit, and the fish represented the Savior's name and office. The sign of the cross by motions became popular as a token among Christians and gradually a magical efficacy was attached to it—especially to be performed in times of danger.

Following pagan customs, the Roman Church changed the observance of the Sabbath to the first day of the week to coincide with the day that had been dedicated to the Sun-god, Sol. Likewise were many other religious days instituted: December 25, the birthday of the Sun-god Mithra, was set as the date for the celebration of Jesus' birthday.

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It is sufficient to say that these practices contributed to the formalizing of worship by an external emphasis upon the imagination and senses, and less and less accent on intelligent worship of Christ in spirit and truth.

d. Mariolatry and Saint-worship.

Augustine deplored the situation that had become so widespread in the Christian Church of the worship of martyrs and saints. Philip Schaff says that we cannot "possibly mistake the succession of pagan worship of gods and heroes, with its noisy popular festivities."¹

In common with ancient Egyptian and Roman customs the Roman Church to this day teaches that the deceased cannot obtain eternal rest in the next world without the help of prayers and funeral rites. The long list of patron saints in Catholicism are patterned after the Roman gods which were invented to protect the various vocations of men.

In the 4th century the Church elevated the Virgin Mary, who had already been revered as the highest model of maiden purity, to the position of "the mother of God" and finally to a sinlessly holy co-redeemer.² The title assigned to her by the Church was identical to that of the Goddess Venus—"Queen of Heavens." The worship of Mary, has in many cases formed the larger part of devotional services,

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1. Schaff: op. cit., vol., III, p. 377.

2. Ibid., p. 410.

both in public and in private. The Church, by 431 had officially sanctioned the custom of invoking Mary and the saints for their intercessors.

Thus, as we have observed, the syncretism of Christianity with pagan cults and practises robbed the Gospel of Jesus Christ of its spiritual power and removed personal responsibility to God, and the obligation to live a just and holy life. Formalized worship added much to the already legalistic tendencies of the new Roman system of salvation through a Priesthood and sacraments. These forces were indeed fatal to Christian freedom.

3. Roman Catholicism and its Ethical Legalism.

Taylor says that, though the person and words of Jesus have been as strength and ineffable comfort to millions:

"yet the faithful historical student may look vainly for the tangible moral effect of Christianity upon the Roman Empire. The level of conduct remained much as before, only declining with the decline of civic strength and virtue."¹

The Roman Empire was in the process of decline by the time Christianity had forced her way into Rome. The moral aspect of this decline had a most unfortunate effect upon the practical emphasis of the Gospel of Christ. There is no need to mention specifically all of the vices and forms of flagrant wickedness that were so universally prevalent through-

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1. Taylor: Freedom of the Mind in History, p. 188.

out the Empire except to call attention to the fact of their influence upon Christianity.

a. Decline in Christian Living.

Even in Paul's day the Church was not "without spot or wrinkle," and much less could we expect it to be so even one hundred years later, especially with many coming into the fellowship with no religious background similar to Judaism, and with a lack of trained leaders to educate the converts.

For the first two and one-half centuries the Christian attitude was that of separation from the social and political life of the world. This theory of aloofness from the world was comparatively short lived as far as the average Christian was concerned, because with the favorable change of the civil government's attitude toward Christianity, many people joined the Church as the popular religion of the age.¹ They did this without having experienced the vitality of a personal faith and without noticeably altering their outward life.

Walker points out that the Church's own conception of itself was changing from that of a communion of saints to that of an agency for salvation.² This outlook helps to explain the increasing emphasis upon sin rather than grace, and the sacraments invented to deal with the problem of sin.

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1. Walker: op. cit., p. 102.

2. Ibid., p. 103.

Inversely, this extreme emphasis upon sin with such a system of salvation as the necessary remedy, had an inevitably demoralizing effect upon the spiritual life of the people.

This type of religious worship was legalism in the truest sense, for a person need only depend upon the sacraments and indulgences to counteract the effect of his sins; there was no longer a moral compulsion that stirred the individual to a spontaneous life of holiness in Christ. To use James Stewart's words, the "ethical nerve" of Christianity had been cut and men were once again in bondage to the "letter."

b. Asceticism and Monasticism.

A second effect of the degraded moral and ethical standards of the Empire upon Christianity was that of asceticism. This tendency grew to be the ideal for the more serious-minded when common Christian practise became more lax.¹ Those who entered upon an ascetic life looked upon the world as a "mass of perdition" out of which men ought to flee.

Asceticism is not peculiar to Christianity, for it may be found in ancient oriental religions, especially in India, and among the Jews, Greeks, and Egyptians. Christian asceticism grew mainly out of the dualistic concept of

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1. Fisher: op. cit., p. 61.

the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. They literally forsook the world, which Christ had prompted the disciples to forsake in spirit only.

With the cessation of martyrdom (260 A.D.), asceticism was recognized as the highest Christian achievement and therefore led many to a more intense pursuit of it. They had forgotten that Jesus emphasized soundness of body and the development of the whole personality by disciplining properly the fleshly nature. This soon led to monasticism and came to be regarded as more estimable than the practise of active virtues. The extreme formalism and coldness of church worship also drove many to this freer and more direct approach to God. The irony of this is that the monastic movements soon became most formal themselves.

The life of poverty, celibacy, and contemplative retirement was regarded as the Christian ideal: the result being a two-fold evil. Psychologically it formed a double standard for Christianity. The higher ideal was too elevated and difficult for the common Christian to attain, and it naturally tended to discourage his efforts. Then it took from society the type of Christians most sorely needed to be an example to and to serve others--the more pious and serious-minded Christians.

Monasticism idealizes the forsaking of all personal freedom in order to attain spiritual freedom; however because

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of the nature of man's personality this led to complete bondage of body, mind, and will. Jesus Himself set no double standard for discipleship, for He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."¹

4. Gospel of Freedom Lost in Thought.

The Gospel of Christ was the freeing of the human mind and spirit by the transformation of men and women into new creatures in Christ Jesus. We have seen how Jesus put a personal experience and faith in God the Father through Himself before all speculation and reasoning. But only two centuries passed before the Church had transformed the Gospel into the measure of man's understanding, and this meant the loss of the freedom of thought: dogmatism had bound their minds.

At the time of the entry of Christianity into the world, Roman and Greek civilizations were on the verge of a rapid decline. An observer of this period states that the intellectual world already "seemed tired, its energies relaxed and degraded."²

By the close of the second century the intellectual desire had lost its force and the various branches of literature in the Greek and Roman world were in a state of

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1. Matthew 16:24.

2. Taylor: op. cit., p. 128.

decadence. The civil law either didn't care or was unable to conquer and prevent the envading barbarians from barbarizing Roman civilization—intellectual, commercial, industrial, and political. The result was lowering of mental vigor and individual freedom.¹

Intellectually, intelligent men were no longer finding satisfaction in rational investigation; they were looking to attain an inner peace which usually was sought in some religion. Thus the heart and mind of man were being prepared for the Christian Gospel.

a. Growth of Christian Theology.

On the other hand in accepting the Christian Gospel men were able to think it only in terms of their varying thought forms, and likewise in arguing and explaining it, the Gospel was cast in moulds of their minds.

1) Influence of Greek Philosophy.

Of the numerous religious and philosophical cults which were moving about the world and preparing men's minds for the acceptance of Christianity, Gnosticism, Stoicism, and Neo-Platonism were most outstanding. As the Gospel of Jesus Christ came into contact with this philosophical mood it began to be indelibly affected by the characteristics of the age. While the Gnostic heresy did not succeed in per-

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1. Taylor: op. cit., p. 75.

manently deforming Christianity it did leave its effect of Hellenic and oriental elements upon it.

Gnostic and Manichaeism, for example, left the Church with a permanent ascetic tendency. Emanating from Alexandrian teachers was the blending of the doctrines of Plato and the Old Testament by allegorizing methods. As a result of many serious attempts by Christian theologians to bridge the gap between Greek wisdom and Christianity the truths and facts of the latter were many times made to suffer at the hands of speculative reason and philosophy.

Foremost in his ability to refute Gnostic heresy was Origen (185-253) who made use of allegorical and mystical method interpretation, developing it in detail and often losing himself in "fancies and wildest vagaries."¹ With the exception of Chrysostom and Jerome, none of the Fathers had a clear idea of grammatical and historical exegesis. Philip Schaff says of Augustine:

"He ruled the entire theology of the middle age, and became the father of scholasticism in virtue of his dialectic mind....For scholasticism thought to comprehend the divine with the understanding, and lost itself at last in empty dialectics...."²

2) Influence of Roman Law.

Only through the categories of their own thought-processes could the educated men of the Roman Empire receive

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol., II, p. 521.
2. Ibid., Vol., III, p. 1018.

the Gospel. Roman influence was more distinctly that of transforming the Gospel into the moulds of Latin rhetoric and Roman law.¹ Tertullian's name is outstanding in this development. Patristic Christianity bent the Gospel to fit the dogmatic moods of their own minds by constructing for the Church its doctrinal beliefs and sacramental practices which have survived, with but little change, until the present. For example Augustine felt the Gospel of Christ as a vital power, especially through Pauline interpretation, "but he reasoned in the categories of Greek philosophy and after the composite manner of Latin rhetoric and Roman Law."²

In spite of the intense efforts of scholarship to formulate the Gospel into creeds, together with the increased energies expended to combat heresy, there was little effort made to educate the many new converts with the facts and truths of Christianity. The Gospel was gradually being made over into commands, threatenings, and promises to be feared and respected. The result was as Celsus expected it to be when he cried, "Only believe, only believe!" He knew that if the emphasis could be shifted from a life to be lived to a system to be submitted to, Christianity, as a powerful influence would soon waste away an any other religion.

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1. Taylor: op. cit., p. 132.

2. Ibid.

b. The Bible neglected in education of the people.

The Bible, as the teacher of the true way of life, was neglected and in its place was substituted man-made laws and catechisms. There was no incentive for reading the Bible, so naturally less and less emphasis was put upon its practical teachings and as a result low moral standards were common among the majority of Christians and even among the clergy. Substituting Church tradition, catechisms and rule for the Bible the minds of men gradually withered: there was no need to think for oneself, the Church had done all of that. You were not asked to understand what you believe or why you worshipped God at all: this was left up to experts. Not only was the result a loss of intellectual freedom, but also a loss of social and any possibilities for political freedom.

c. Scholasticism - Contribution of the Middle Ages.

The main intellectual contribution of the Middle Ages to the forming of Christian belief is known as Scholasticism. Within the bounds of traditional Church theology the minds of the school-men were free to work. They adhered strictly to the given materials and truth, that is to the authoritative translations of the Scriptures of the Church Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries, yet they developed and enlarged antique conceptions into polished and systematic organs of logic and knowledge.

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These men endeavored to be free in the exercise of their minds, yet the basis of their thinking was directed and determined for them by "Church Doctors." Nevertheless there were some free thinkers, as Abelard and Anselm, who anticipated the time when man's functions of thinking would be enlarged. It is not my purpose to elaborate this point.

5. Summary.

The truth of the Gospel of freedom as made possible by Christ through His death and resurrection, and as interpreted by the Apostle Paul, was almost fatally impaired by the legalistic spirit of the Roman Church. The Gospel was robbed of its transforming and liberating power by the syncretism of Christianity and paganism; men were robbed of their right to think for themselves and to believe anything except Romanism. This was accomplished by the merging of Church and State into an ecclesiastical power with political pretensions which reached its height during the Crusades. The most audacious claims were made by Popes Innocent III and Gregory IX (1198-1241): pope is vicar of Christ, supreme sovereign on earth, and infallible. And finally New Testament Christian theology was robbed of its vital and living spiritual power by its being interpreted in terms of secular thought and the intellectual system of the day.

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C. Renewed Progress Toward Christian Freedom.

Many forces and movements contributed to the liberation of the human mind and spirit from the yoke of Medieval tyranny, which finally broke forth in full force in the person of Martin Luther. Schaff states that "No great movement in history—except Christianity itself—was so widely and thoroughly prepared as the Protestant Reformation....The inner most life of the church was pressing forward to a new era."¹

Some of the most important evidences of man's need and desire for freedom—religiously, intellectually, and socially from the ecclesiastical bondage and superstitions of Romanism—will be discussed.

1. Revolt Against Tyranny of Roman Theocracy.

Human nature instinctively rebelled against the whole system of the Roman Church which had become so completely domineering over all phases of life—spiritual, social, political, and intellectual.

a. Spiritual Authority Questioned.

Men were beginning to question the audacious claims and authority of the Church, to free themselves from needless mediations of a priest, and to regain the freedom of the Gospel. As Taylor says, "these people were no

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol., VI, p. 14.

longer a docile herd of sheep for the spiritual shepherding and temporal fleecing of one Papal Church."¹

The scandalous example of the popes was followed by the cardinals and priests and thereby weakened the respect of the clergy. The evil practices and scandals of the clergy were inconsistent with the Church's claims to infallibility and indispensability in all matters of religious faith and practice. And furthermore, the worldly aims of the papacy seemed to the more religious man to be inconsistent with the true interests of the Church. Thoughtful people had no confidence in the spiritual work of priests whose lives did not back up with holy living high claims established by their office.

Men were finding that Christian belief based on arbitrary dogma gave no intellectual and religious comfort and were therefore turning to mysticism. By the middle of the 14th century William of Occam taught that the authority of Scriptures is alone binding upon the Christian and not the decisions of popes and councils when they contradict Scriptures. Nor is it surprising that they were strong advocates of reducing the power of the pope and general councils in the following period. Gerson and D'Ailly, among other reformers, made attempts to limit the absolute power of the pope to that of a constitutional monarchy but failed.

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1. Taylor: op. cit., p. 139.

Slowly, however, the sceptre of power was gradually being removed from the pope. Never after the Babylonish Captivity and the Great Schism did the papacy regain her power.¹ The profound feeling that the Church must be visibly one was offended and in popular regard the papacy sank tremendously.

b. Temporal Authority Questioned.

With the development of the more modern concept of the State during the 14th and 15th centuries, the passions and pride of nationalism began to assert themselves. Self-conscious states soon rebelled openly against Rome's right of administering secular affairs and thus as a wedge, the spirit of nationalism began to separate the Church from the State. The Catholic writer, O'Brien, is convinced that the growth of nationalism is one of the most important factors in the lessening of papal power and the splitting of Christendom.¹

W. K. Inge has keen insight into the workings of secular history when he says that:

"A church can rely on brute force when it is in close alliance with the secular arm, and as a rule it is only an anti-popular government which cares to pay the price of such an alliance."²

The centralizing tendency of the European countries during the 12th and 13th centuries was the forerunner

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1. Cf. O'Brien: The Reformation.

2. Inge: op. cit., p. 3.

to the conception of European monarchy which arose a little later. This spirit of national political unity, together with the added effect of national languages, cultures, laws, and institutions, tended to isolate each nation and to cause divisions in the Church's hierarchial organization by withdrawing from her control.

The prestige of the papacy began to wane rapidly when she could no longer be of use to the political and economic interests of the English, French, and German nations. Her asserted authority was tested and denied in the conflicts between Boniface VIII and Philip, John XXII and Louis of Bavaria, and between other popes and national parties. This change was indispensable to the work of the Reformers who would need state protection from the opposition stirred up in the Church.

The States, however, went a step further when they increasingly demanded the control of church government. The forming of national churches slowly curbed the power of the Universal Church. Although this in itself was not concerned in the Church reform it did make the pope's effort to crush the Reformation less effective.¹

Dante, Marsiglio, Willian of Occam, and many others took a similar position with the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in insisting that the power of the emperor is

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1. L. P. Qualben: History of the Christian Church, p. 209.

derived divinely from God, as is that of the pope and the Church. Neither is above the other, nor do they overlap in authority. Even St. Peter had made this clear when he said, "Fear God, honor the king."¹

c. Economic and Social Unrest.

There were several signals of economic and social unrest which contributed to the general spirit of revolt against Rome. The middle and lower classes were antagonized by feudal exploitation and the added burden of Church taxation. The earliest successful peasant revolts against European chivalry were in Switzerland.¹ In Bohemia the poor nobles led the peasants in a successful revolt. Much of the hatred arose from the intolerable pressure of the clerical exploitation. However, this system not only provoked antipathy on the part of the middle and lower classes, but among the princes and lords there was much resentment because of the financial drain on their lands by the Roman Church.

The invention of printing, the discovery of new lands with increased commerce, and the beginnings of many new industries contributed to the progress of civilization and indirectly to a revolt against papal dominion.² With the enfranchisement of towns during the 11th century society became centralized and with this change the laical

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1. I Peter 2:17.

2. T. M. Lindsay: History of the Reformation, Vol., I, p. 95.

3. G. P. Fisher: The Reformation, p. 31.

spirit of civil and social rights became alive in both middle and lower classes.

There were several famine years in the period from 1490 to 1503 all over Germany and during this time the most determined and desperate social uprising took place. The social and economic unrest was seething with bitter class hatred and whatever the irritation between any two classes may have been the blame was always placed on the other. Lindsay summarizes the social and economic situation thus:

"It was into this mass of seething discontent that the spark of religious protest fell—the one thing needed to fire the train and kindle the social conflagration. This was the society to which Luther spoke, and its discontent was the sounding board which made his words reverberate."¹

2. Search for Freedom in Worship.

Until a half century before the Reformation the German people as a whole displayed much outward pious anxiety to profit by all the ordinary and extraordinary means of grace. They built costly and beautiful churches, bought many indulgences, went on pilgrimages, visited shrines, revered relics, and celebrated jubilies as no other nation did.²

a. Evangelical Reformers.

But in the face of a morally and spiritually

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1. Lindsay: op. cit., Vol., I, p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 115.

decadent Christianity there were many voices crying out for reform and a return to "heart religion." Groups such as the Albigenses and Waldenses, as early as the eleventh century began to revolt against Romanism as a barrier to finding God; they stirred the hearts of men with a sincere desire to live lives of purity. As Lindsay states it,

"The great Reformation was a religious movement inspired by the irresistible desire to get near God, and it fulfilled its aspiration by bursting these barriers asunder and sweeping them away."¹

This evangelical faith became widespread among the simple and pious people as a result of the influential work of the Lollards, the Hussites, and the Brethren of Common Life. Contributing to this work was the wide circulation of the Bible and devotional literature and the evangelical preaching of all reform parties.

Inge is careful to point out that the Waldensians were the first in the history of Christianity to advocate social reform as a part of Christian ethics.² These "sects," as Troeltsch named them, would admit no double standard of Christian morality for clergy and laity. With uncompromising determination they refused to accept the secular and social order as morally defensible and "went straight back to the ethics of the 'Sermon on the Mount.'"³

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1. Lindsay: op. cit., Vol., I, p. 156.
2. W. R. Inge: Protestantism, p. 30.
3. Ibid., p. 31.

They were Biblical Christians, Protestants before the Reformation, going back to the New Testament as their only infallible rule of faith. The contribution that the Waldensians and similar 'sects' made toward the movement for the revival of the Gospel of Christian freedom can hardly be estimated.

b. German Mystics.

Another class of men who indirectly helped to prepare the way for a spiritual revival of Christian freedom were the Mystics of Germany. They were men who formed groups with the express purpose of securing purity of heart and life through union of the soul with God. Anselm of England is one of the earliest representatives of this type of religion; he combined mysticism with theology. The supreme work of the mystics was Thomas a'Kempis' "Imitation of Christ."

The most popular and influential mystics were Meister Eckart and John Tauler. Eckart, the first theologian who wrote in German, was more speculative than Tauler, an admirer of him who was more devotional and practical. These two men, with others, had specific missions in preparing the way for the Reformation; Eckart by his heretical spirit which provoked revolt against the authority of the mediaeval Church, and Tauler who proclaimed the virtue of

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simple faith and immediate communion with God by an emphasis upon pure devotion and daily living, rather than ritual exercises.

The leading features of mysticism were the teaching of a pure life and higher religious experience; Christ Himself the Mediator between the soul and God instead of a Church and priesthood; the use of the Scriptures instead of the Canticles; the emphasis on instruction and preaching in the vernacular, appealing to laymen as well as to clerics.¹ These men had a wide and effective influence through preaching and by the written word. Luther himself was to be greatly influenced by the writings of Tauler.

c. Radical Reformers.

There were several important radical reformers who anticipated the Protestant movement. Probably the greatest among these was John Wycliff in England who openly opposed the papacy by publicly defending the right of the people to have the Scriptures in their own tongue. Strongly influenced by the writings of Wycliff, John Huss of Bohemia also exalted the Scriptures above the dogmas and ordinances of the Church. In Italy the outstanding precursor of the Reformation was Savonarola who directed his eloquent invectives against papal tyranny and immorality.

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol., V, part 2, p. 241.

These reformers dissented openly from the Church's ritual and doctrinal teachings and advocated strongly many moral and social reforms. They evidenced freedom of mind in asserting that the Roman Church had erred, for in their opinion she had not been true to their interpretation of the New Testament.

These reformers insisted upon the right and responsibility of every priest to preach freely the Gospel without let or restraint from a hierarchy. Wycliff and Huss, especially, set themselves clearly against the whole theory of papal and church infallibility and the sacerdotal power of the priesthood to pen and shut the kingdom of heaven. Huss' martyrdom stirred the Bohemian nation and probably did more in preparing for Luther's revolt than any amount of writing which he might have done.

The highly liturgical and external religion of Romanism failed to give satisfaction and peace of heart and mind to multitudes. Men found no means of expression in this rigid and formal exercise of worship where the priest was regarded as the mediator, the one who dispensed all of the graces. A few of these men bravely broke forth to have their spiritual longings satisfied in a real and personal communion with God.

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3. Concern for Moral Reforms.

Roman Catholic writers such as Rev. J. A. O'Brien of Notre Dame admit candidly that there was crying need for general papal and church reform for several centuries prior to the Protestant revolt.¹ The greatest blame for the corruption and abuses of the Latin church has been rightly placed, on the church leaders. Discipline and training among the religious orders and clergy had practically vanished only to be replaced by idleness and dissipation, ignorance, and superstition.

a. The Crying Need.

From within and without the Church there came protests and complaints of the secularized tyranny of the papacy and of the ignorance, vulgarity, and immorality of popes, priests, and monks.

The bartering of purely ecclesiastical rights for the armed support of a sovereign became a popular practice and finally led to benefices and the right of investiture which weakened the power of the Roman curia. The unity of papal authority and discipline was further weakened and nearly destroyed by the Babylonish Captivity and the Western Schism.² O'Brien's conclusion is that the outstanding factor which operated for over two-hundred years to prepare

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1. O'Brien: The Reformation, p. 8.

2. Babylonish Captivity, 1305 to 1376; Great Schism, 1378 to 1417.

for Luther's disruption of Christendom was "weakening of the moral authority and prestige of the papacy in both the spiritual and temporal spheres."¹

The general spiritual level and the populace was naturally no higher than the moral and spiritual level of the clergy. Christianity had become so legalized that piety no longer sprang from a personal union of the soul with Christ but was regarded as a mechanical performance of so many good works. To mention the worst, remission of sins could be bought with money. Instead of preaching from the Bible, the priests were concerned mostly with indulgences, alms, pilgrimages, and processions. Saint-worship and image-worship, superstitious rites, and ceremonies obstructed the direct personal worship of God.²

b. Attempts Made.

Early attempts at reform by Gerson and D'Ailly were intended to reduce the pope's power from that of an absolute to that of a constitutional monarchy and to place the universal church before a general council, as alone infallible and supreme. When a Church council met at Pisa in 1409 most of the delegates feared any move toward liberalism and urged only a general church reform. The cardinals promised that the pope elected would carry out a satisfactory

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1. O'Brien: op. cit., p. 11.
2. Schaff: op. cit., Vol., VI, p. 10.

reform. However, this reform was never attempted and the situation continued. Several attempts of later councils to reform likewise died out with practically no permanent good done.¹ The blame for these failures is often placed on the reigning popes who were not the least concerned about moral reform: their chief concern was in re-establishing the papacy to her former power, and embellishing the Churches of Rome.

It is worthy of note that these efforts were all for reform within the Church; there were no demands for revolution, still less for secession, until after Luther himself was excommunicated.

4. Intellectual Awakening.

For many centuries the world had been intellectually tired but with the rebirth of the ancient classics and a renewed interest in literature, especially putting it into the vernacular, a new stage in the advancement of the civilization of Europe was approaching.

a. Renaissance.

The revival of learning, art, science, and literature, known as the Renaissance, was to a large degree pagan and skeptical in Italy and did not contribute toward reform except as it produced a reaction in the north. In Germany, France, and England satire and invectives proved the most

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1. Council of Constance, 1414; Council of Basle, 1431;
Council of Ferrara, 1438.

effective weapon against ecclesiastics and monks. Hallum states that "The greater part of literature in the Middle Ages, at least from the 12th century, may be considered as artillery leveled against the clergy."¹

b. Humanism.

"Germany," says Inge, "was astir with intellectual curiosity and zest for knowledge."² In Germany the Renaissance was cultivated in a religious spirit. Erasmus, the 'Prince of Humanists,' by his writings and personal influence was the foe of superstition and ignorance. He promoted a knowledge of the Bible by his translations of the New Testament and early Church writings into the vernacular. His writings opened the eyes of men to the cheats and follies of daily life and the abuses that infected Roman Catholicism.³

The anti-scholastic reactions of Reuchlin, Colet, Erasmus, and others, combined with a vital religious experience helped invaluablely in preparing the minds of people for religious reform. This reaction evoked a critical spirit against the existing institutional doctrines and systems; but most important it gave a potent impulse to the renewed study of Scriptures and early Christian writings by laymen.

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1. Fisher: The Reformation, p. 33. Quoted from Literature of Europe, by Hallum, p. 150, Vol. I.
2. Inge: Protestantism, p. 35.
3. Taylor: op. cit., p. 138

The revolt against scholasticism was disintegrative force at work in the intellectual sphere. Moreover even among the theologians there was division into two main groups—realists and nominalists. Men were feeling about for new aspects of truth "and they were growingly determined to accept no authority which would hinder them in their determined pursuit of truth."¹ This was essentially a revolt of private judgment against popular faith and church orthodoxy.

It is impossible to evaluate the effect that the intellectual awakening had in preparing for the religious revolution of the 16th century. However it is certain that with every advance in knowledge and education the hierarchy's powerful weapon of superstition was blunted.²

5. Summary.

As we have discovered, the Reformation was preceded and necessitated by several factors. Chief of these was the loss of Christian freedom—individual access to God, justification by faith through Christ, an internal heart religion of worship and virtuous living for laity as well as clergy, and the right of men to use and interpret the Scriptures according to their minds and consciences.

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1. Carlyle: The Christian Church and Liberty, p. 111.
2. Inge: Platonic Traditions in English Religious Thought, p. 4

Our concern in the first part of this chapter has been to trace the loss of Christian freedom in the Christian Church, discovering if possible the contributing influences and causes. These we found to be 1) the authoritarianism of the Church and its clergy in all secular (political, judicial, and social) and religious life, taking the place of Jesus Christ the only true Mediator, and individual freedom; 2) legalizing of worship as a result of syncretism of Christianity with mystery and superstitious cults; 3) the resulting effect of church corruption and decline in morals, which was reacted against by increased numbers of those who followed an ascetic type of life; 4) and the effect of a formal systematized theology and general loss of freedom of thought.

In the latter part of the chapter we were careful to point out the main forces and causes that renewed progress toward freedom and finally the revolt of Luther. Again following the established procedure we pointed out the general revolting spirit against the authority of Roman Catholicism which robbed men of personal faith in God through the Mediator Christ; the various movements which were in search of this revitalized worship; the failure of the Church to make the reforms which people were demanding; and the contribution of the intellectual awakening.

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The four centuries preceding the outbreak of the Protestant revolt was an age stirred by the spirit of progress and freedom. As Schaff says, "The snows of a long winter were fast melting before the rays of a vernal sun."¹ This period was consciously and unconsciously initiating a movement for the emancipation of the human mind and life—religiously, intellectually and socially.

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 2.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,

He sets the prisoner free."

CHAPTER III

LUTHER AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

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LUTHER AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

A. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have shown how the New Testament doctrine of Christian freedom was misinterpreted and gradually became obscured, to be replaced by Church authority, traditions, doctrines, and legalism. We then indicated the various evidences of a longing for and striving after freedom, which ultimately broke forth in full force within the mighty life and work of Martin Luther.

It is the purpose of this chapter, first to study Martin Luther's own experience of the liberating power of the Gospel, both from the forces of sin and the ecclesiastical Church; and then to investigate his understanding of the meaning and scope of Christian freedom, especially as he sets it forth in his three early tracts, "Address to the German Nobility," "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," and "Freedom of the Christian Man." Thereby the writer will endeavor to show how Martin Luther recaptured the New Testament Christian freedom for himself and was able to interpret it so convincingly to an age restless and yearning to be freed that he became the leader--among others--of a great fellowship of Christian believers, a "priesthood of all believers," known as the Protestant Church, dedicated to a

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life of simple faith in God through Christ, man's High Priest and only Mediator and Advocate.

B. Luther's Personal Experience of Liberation

Nine years before Columbus discovered America, a son was born into the home of peasant miners in Saxony whose life was destined to change the whole course of the world's history. "By the keenness of his thinking, the vitality of his spiritual experience, and the warmth of his devotion, the firmness of his faith, and the robustness of his courage, Martin Luther became one of the foremost liberators of all time."¹

Martin Luther is acclaimed by many as the most heroic figure since the time of Paul. To the modern world he was the pioneer of the road to spiritual freedom. Without him and his powerful leadership the Reformation might have been delayed and the world today would be other than it is.

It may be closer to the truth to say that the age was molded by Luther, than that Luther was a product of his age. To be sure Luther's growth was effected in the atmosphere of his day, but the secret of his great strength did not lie in this, in the force of his intellect, in the strength of his will, in the originality of his genius, or in his undaunted courage; "but in the depth and force, the

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1. K. Page: Living Abundantly, p. 178.

vividness and reality of his religious experience; kindling and fusing all the forces of his great nature."¹

In order to understand the genius of Luther's unprecedented work as a liberator and reformer we must penetrate to the center of his life and personality--to his religious nature and experience.

1. Inward Spiritual Conflict

Until the light of the Gospel of redeeming grace broke upon him, Martin Luther's life might well be summarized as the striving of a human soul for peace with God. It was the mighty effort of a soul to recover the truth of salvation from sin through Christ, by faith.

McGiffert observes that in his earlier life Luther's conception of the Church was not altered even when the religious thinking of his day was questioning the truth of the traditional doctrines. His confidence in the Catholic system was absolute, until he began to be shaken out of it by practical considerations.

Driven into a monastery by fear of the divine wrath of God, Luther observed every detail of discipline--celibacy, night watches, self-mortification; and attended every pious exercise of worship--penances, mass, prayers and fastings; with the hope of escaping from sin and temptation.

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1. R. H. McKim: Present Day Problems, p. 302.

Though he was held up as a model of sanctity by his brethren, he himself was disappointed with his own failure to throw off temptations of anger, envy, hatred, and pride.

Luther says:

"When I was the most devout, I went a doubter to the altar, a doubter I came away from it; if I had confessed my penitence, I still doubted; had I not I was in despair." 1

Luther was passing through the conflict between the law of God and the law of sin. He found himself impotent in his own strength to keep the law of God and cried out for deliverance from this condemnation. Some of his brethren tried to relieve him of his mental suffering but had little success. One confessor admonished him sharply: "You are a fool. God is not angry with you; it is you who are angry with God." 2 However it was Staupitz who finally gave him comfort and guidance.

2. Light of the Gospel Breaks

From 1507, when Luther became a priest, until 1516 he was in the process of working out his salvation. With the help of his friend Staupitz, who taught him that true repentance does not consist of self-imposed penances and punishments but in a change of heart and faith in Christ, Luther was gradually directed from his sins to the merits of Christ, from the law to the Cross, from works to faith, and

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1. Eddy and Page: Makers of Freedom, p. 101.
2. A. C. McGiffert: Martin Luther, the Man and His Work, p.31.

from scholasticism to a study of the Scriptures. Luther, in a letter to Staupitz, says that he was his spiritual father and "first caused the light of the Gospel to shine in the darkness of his heart."¹ He had encouraged Luther to study Augustine, Tauler, and the Scriptures, and in the latter, especially the prophets and Pauline writings. In these he caught glimpses of evangelical doctrine. At the University of Wittenberg as a professor, Luther studied intensely the Pauline Epistles, his eyes continuously fastening upon the words of the prophet cited by Paul, "the just shall live by faith." In experience, Luther gradually came to a realization of the meaning of "justification by faith" in Christ without understanding its conflicting implications with traditional Church creed and piety built upon Thomistic Scholasticism.

While in Rome, Luther was consciously and unconsciously being prepared for his life's work. He found the moral and spiritual conditions exactly the reverse of what he had expected. The papal court and the clergy were living in such riotous luxury and immorality that in later years, when these experiences returned to Luther's mind, his faith in the Roman Church and hierarchy was shaken and finally destroyed. He ran from one church to another, to crypts and catacombs, "like a crazy saint," with an unquestioning faith

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 119.

in the legendary traditions of the Church, but found no peace in his soul. However the words of the Apostle Paul, "the just shall live by faith," impressed themselves more and more upon his mind during his stay at Rome, and on his long journey home the full meaning of the nature and method of salvation burst upon him. "Here I felt at once," he says, "that I was wholly born again and that I had entered through open doors into Paradise itself."¹

But not yet was Luther ready to break from the one Apostolic Church. His eyes were just beginning to be opened. Providentially, between 1512 and 1517, Luther's teaching in the University of Wittenberg more and more led him into a direct study of the Bible. His lectures on the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, in which he set forth the doctrines of sin and grace, and the comfort of the Gospel for all peoples, kept deepening his convictions on the Gospel of freedom.

Although at this time he made no formal anti-Catholic statements, he increasingly became more and more evangelical. In the pulpit, Luther was most influential, for his preaching reached the heart and conscience of his people as well as their minds. As Melancthon tells us, the sermons of Luther "were born not on lips, but in his soul," and were destined to shake the ecclesiastical foundations of Europe.²

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1. Ibid., p. 128.

2. A. L. Simpson: Pioneers, p. 234.

In the introduction to his Commentary on Galatians Luther speaks of the difference between "Christian righteousness" and all other kinds of righteousness. "Christian righteousness," or the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ, like the others (political, ceremonial, and law) is the gift of God, but unlike them is not active, but passive.

"For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer another to work in us, that is to say, God. Therefore it seemeth good unto me to call this righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, the passive righteousness."¹

"Briefly, I rest only upon that righteousness, which is the righteousness of Christ and of the Holy Ghost."²

3. In Conflict With the Church

With his new and vital experience of a salvation of peace and assurance by faith in the redemptive work of Christ, Luther was driven to test the beliefs and practices of institutional church and life about him. In no way could this experience square with the current theories of salvation, in which acts, penances, and satisfaction had a prominent part.

Several providential events gave Luther the opportunity to reflect on this new principle and bring it into distinct consciousness, for as yet (early in 1517) he had no intention of either reforming the Church or breaking from it.³

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1. Martin Luther: Commentary on Galatians, p. 132.
2. Ibid., p. 133.
3. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 144.

The first of these events was the appearance of Tetzel, the indulgence seller, who provoked a protest from Luther against the mischief and abuses resulting from this traffic.

Furthermore, Luther was convinced that this system as practiced, was diametrically opposed to the "remission of sin as a free gift of grace to be apprehended by a living faith", and likewise he felt it his duty to protest.¹ He preached against it, wrote to bishops in opposition to it, and finally was moved to write and post his 95 theses on the door of the Church of All Saints at Wittenberg. Luther says that he himself did not clearly understand at this time the questions of indulgences, but he was certain that they could have no spiritual value. He did not condemn indulgences but condemned the abusive use of them.

No one accepted his challenge to a debate: the students and professors at Wittenberg were of one mind. But the fire had been kindled. In a few weeks the Theses had been copied, translated, printed, and spread to all parts of Germany and Europe, being received with hearty response everywhere. Little did Luther realize at this time the hazardous position that he was placing himself in, for as McKim says:

"He was publicly assailing the supremacy and stability of that vast and mighty organization which called itself the Catholic Church, which claimed absolute supremacy over

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1. Ibid., p. 154.

the consciences of men, which in the estimation of all Christendom, carried the keys of Heaven and Hell, and which demanded and received obedience from kings and emperors as its vassals."¹

4. Events Leading to a Final Break

The controversies which issued from Luther's Theses failed to scare him into renouncing his position. On the contrary he was forced to defend himself on Scriptural grounds; but since, on the ground of Scripture and traditions of the early church Fathers his opponents could find no proof for indulgences, the controversy finally resolved itself into a question of the authority and infallibility of the pope and general church councils.²

Luther's contention that the authority of the Bible was to be preferred to that of the whole church, led him to the proposition that the supremacy of the Roman Church was unsupported by either history or Scripture. In the Leipzig Disputation (1519), Luther for the first time was left with nothing but the Divine Scriptures, his private judgment, and his faith in God on which to stand. The importance of this theological debate lies in the marked progress in Luther's emancipation from the papal system, for now "the ship of the Reformation was cut from its moorings, and had to fight with the winds and waves of the open sea."³

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1. McKim, op. cit., p. 307.
2. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 169.
3. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 169.

Mackinnon's insight into the unconscious process of Luther's gradual emancipation from Romanism is stated in these words:

"Exaltation of papal power not only tended to intensify the reaction against it; it drove Luther to turn the searchlight of historic criticism more intently on this provocative theory, only to find increasingly cogent reasons for his counter-theory that the pope was the very anti-Christ of Daniel and the Apocalypse."¹

Luther's opponents despaired of converting him and hoped to end the whole controversy by obtaining a papal bull of excommunication. The bull was secured but failed to cause Luther and his friends to be burnt; instead the bull was burned by Luther. That was the signal of final separation, emancipating Luther and the Protestant world from the tyranny which for centuries Rome had exercised over the intellect and conscience of men.

Given a final chance to repent, at the Diet of Worms (1521), Luther said, "It is not wise, it is not safe for a man to do anything against his conscience," and "Here I stand; I can not do otherwise. God help me! Amen."²

5. Conclusion

Thus we see that Luther found personal freedom in Christ; he was emancipated in body, mind, and soul from the condemnation of sin and the oppression of the Roman Church,

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1. J. Mackinnon: Luther and the Reformation, Vol. II, p. 160.
2. McKim: op. cit., p. 311.
Also, Fisher: The Reformation, p. 110.

under which he found himself unable to carry out moral and spiritual reforms. From this time on, Luther entered into a mighty crusade to liberate others; in his campaign against the Roman Church, his most powerful weapon was his pen. Within four months after the Bull of Excommunication had been issued (June 15, 1520), Luther had written his three most effective reformatory works: "The Address to the German Nobility," the "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," and the "Freedom of a Christian Man." Speaking of these, Schaff says,

"The first two are trumpets of war, and the hardest blows ever dealt by human pen to the system of popery; while the third is peaceful, and shines like a rainbow above the thunderclouds."¹

C. Luther's Doctrines of Christian Freedom

With this picture of the Reformer's life and experiences until his break from the Church, we may proceed now to study in detail the important principles of Christian freedom which Luther called into action and reaffirmed to the peoples of Europe. By word of mouth and by the printed page Luther made known to all the Gospel of Christ which liberates from the bondage of sin and every other bondage that prevents Christian men and women from worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 205.

We intend to examine, especially, what Luther had to say in his three famous tracts in regard to Christian freedom. It is not the intention of the writer to study in detail the content of each work by itself. Rather we shall follow an outline similar to the one developed in the previous chapters and observe what these documents say on: the problem of the individual and church authority; freedom in worship and all that this implies; and finally the social and ethical application.

1. Freedom of Mind--Problem of Authority.

Martin Luther reached his inner freedom through the free judgment of his own mind. Professor Taylor says,

"His intellectual faculties were inflamed and energized by the religious impulse which drove unto God, demanding a union through the institutions of faith and love, a union in no wise to be mediated through a priest or through any limping, hopeless good deeds on the part of Luther. If ever the mind of man worked in its essential freedom, Luther's mind worked free in the preparation of his spiritual manifesto, 'The Freedom of a Christian Man.'"¹

When Luther denounced the usurpations of the Church and pretensions of the pope, he attacked the citadel of their authority by making conscience and Scripture the only sources of final authority.

a. Bible, the Only Rule of Faith and Practise.

As we have already stated, Luther was forced out of the Roman Church because he defended his position on the

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1. Taylor: op. cit., p. 141.

basis of Scriptural authority and refused to recant. In reality he was only being true to his oath "to preach the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures faithfully, to teach it purely, to study it during his whole life, and to defend it by discussion and writing so far as God should enable him to do so."¹

Speaking of the supremacy of the authority of the Scriptures, Luther in the "Address to the German Nobility" argues that the pope is as much in subjection to the rule of the Bible as anyone. This is the third wall which Luther speaks of, that needs to be torn down:²

"For when the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to reprove him, and to constrain him. . ."

"But all their boasts of an authority which dare not be opposed amount to nothing at all. For this presumptuous authority is nothing; he has no such authority, and he is quickly overthrown by a text of Scripture; for Paul says to the Corinthians, 'God has given us authority not for the destruction, but for the edification of Christendom.'"³

Luther's conviction that the authority of the Bible was supreme over the Church, Pope, and Councils became stronger as time went on. He asserted, vindicated, and established the right of the common man to possess and read the Bible in his own tongue. In the words of Horatious Bonar:

"Shut up and fettered the word of God had been for ages; as dead tongue concealed it; priests warned men against

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1. Simpson: op. cit., p. 238.
2. Luther speaks of three "walls of Jericho," which the papacy had erected about itself, that must be torn down. The other two will be mentioned later.
3. A. Holman: The Works of Martin Luther, vol. II, p. 78.

reading it. Luther took it from its cell; opened it, held it aloft; told the men of his age that it was their special book. Now it had a free course!"¹

The Bible was thus made so popular that tradespeople, artisans, ploughmen, as well as doctors and theologians made a daily study of it.

By the faithful and diligent labors of Luther, more than any other person, the Scriptures were restored to their rightful place of honor, above church tradition and authority. Luther maintained that the Scriptures were the basis and foundation of his entire work, the standard by which every doctrine and rule must be judged, and against which no pope or council could rightly decree anything.

Luther's uncompromising insistence upon the supreme and final authority of the Scriptures undermined the whole fabric of Roman Priestcraft, Popery, and Superstition, and thus laid the foundation for civil and religious liberties, freedom of thought, and rights of conscience.²

b. Individual Right to Interpret the Bible.

In perfect freedom of mind Luther asserted the rights of the individual conscience. How he placed the supremacy of conscience, along with the Scriptures, above all political and churchly authority may be clearly seen in the often repeated statement of Luther: "It is not wise, it is

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1. McKim: op. cit., p. 314.
2. Ibid.

not safe for man to do anything against his conscience." Speaking of this occasion, Carlyle says that this was "the greatest scene in modern European history; the point, indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilization takes its rise." 1

The exclusive papal claim to interpret Scriptures was one of the three 'walls of Jericho,' which the papacy had erected about itself, that Luther pulled down in his first great tract of liberation, "Address to the German Nobility." Previous to this, in a controversy with Eck, Luther argued that only to the clear teaching of the Word would he submit, and then only when read with his own eyes, not those of other men. Even then there was the matter of proper interpretation which he maintained was possible only by the enlightened conscience of the individual Christian under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This in principle, though not fully realized by Luther, meant the right of private judgment. He was much aware of the abuses that would accompany this principle of freedom and therefore did not advocate absolute rights of the human mind, yet his own mind exemplifies a striving for this ideal.

In Luther's works we see that he believed that the individual has the right to read and interpret the Scriptures:

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1. Eddy and Page: op. cit., p. 107.

"They (the popes) have themselves usurped this power, and although they allege that this power was given to Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to Peter alone, but to the whole community."¹

The age had no idea of toleration and Luther was no exception, for as McGiffert says, "His treatment of opponents (Protestant as well as Catholic) grew more bitter within the passing years."² Precisely at this point Luther failed to carry through the principle of freedom and toleration, allowing others to enjoy a right which he in practice, at least, claimed for himself. Taylor's keen insight into the phenomena of the human mind throws light on this problem of intolerance: "Within the range of their vital convictions, human beings are rarely tolerant."³ It should be said to Luther's credit that his brand of intolerance did not allow the punishment of unbelief and heresy as crimes.

It should be emphasized that the key-note of the Reformation in Germany was the reassertion of the rights of the individual conscience. To the world, the importance of this liberation of the human mind and personality cannot be over-estimated, for in placing the majesty of Truth above all earthly pomp and power, a new stage in the progress of intellectual freedom and civil liberties was marked.⁴

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1. Holman: op. cit., p. 75.
2. Eddy and Page: op. cit., p. 116.
3. Taylor: op. cit., p. 136.
4. Ibid., p. 147

2. Revitalized Worship.

Several principles of Christian Freedom fall under this division; principles that were the foundation of New Testament Christianity, but which the elaborate ritual system of the Roman Church had obscured for all but a few of the more spiritual. Luther's "Babylonian Captivity of the Church" dealt with this sacramental system, apart from which the needed reform in religious worship and morality could only come. In the place of superstition and imagination in worship Luther substituted a simple faith and child-like trust in God's mercy and grace. Thus he met the universal need of man for direct, personal communion with God and complete assurance in His Divine love.

In the area of Christian worship the principles that Luther insisted on as being essential, are: (1) "justification by faith," (2) "priesthood of all believers," and (3) a balance of the Word and the Sacraments. He was mainly positive in his arguments, putting very little emphasis upon the negative doctrines of confessional, penances, and indulgences.

a. Justification by Faith.

The change which took place in Martin Luther's life when he grasped the full significance of salvation by grace and felt the peace and assurance which he found only through faith in Christ, was the driving force of all his later efforts to liberate the human mind and soul from the bondage

of Roman authority.

The principle of 'justification by faith' which manifests itself in love and all good works, operates conversely in the Catholic System, in that a man becomes a believer and justified before God only on the basis of external works and observances. This cardinal doctrine of 'justification by faith' is set forth eloquently in "The Freedom of a Christian Man."

In this tract, Luther discusses at length the futility of man's attempt to render himself righteous by his own works in God's sight, the function of the law to teach us our moral impotence, and the necessity of depending solely on Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promise and the law, to give us salvation. There can be no dependence whatever in external things for salvation, but faith and trust in the Word of God. In Luther's words: "God alone commands, He alone fulfills."¹

In trusting God solely for salvation, faith does three things: it justifies, imputing righteousness to man; it honors God by acknowledging Him to be true and righteous, and worthy of our confidence, thus making His promises effective; and it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is to be united with her bridegroom.²

Only by faith of the heart, Luther insists, can a

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1. Holman: op. cit., p. 318.
2. Cf. Ibid., pgs. 317-320.

man truly worship God since He "cannot be worshipped unless you ascribe to Him the glory of truthfulness and of all goodness which is due Him." This, he says, is the very highest worship of God.

b. General Priesthood of all Christians.

In the "Address to German Nobility," Luther first of all brings out clearly the fundamental Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers. He says, "Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2--'Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,' and the book of Revelation says, 'Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings.'"¹ In asserting this principle Luther denied both the special powers of the clergy and the unlimited authority of the Church over the faith and life of Christendom.

In this priesthood Luther insisted that every Christian is set apart to come to God in prayer by himself, for "in the New Testament, the external priesthood is overthrown, for it makes prayer, access to God and teaching common to all men."² In his work, "The Freedom of the Christian Man," Luther says,

"Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, because as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another the things of

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1. Ibid., p. 66.

2. R.M. Edgar: Genius of Protestantism, p.164: quoted from Luther's work, "Abuse of Mass."

God. To this glory a man attains, surely not by any works of his, but by faith alone."¹

The Christian ministry was regarded by Luther as an office to which suitable men are elected by the congregation of priests. There is no distinction between the laity and clergy except that of office. In lamenting the man-made distinction between the clergy and laity of the Catholic Church, Luther said that injustice was done to the Biblical words, 'priest,' 'spiritual,' and 'ecclesiastic' when they are transferred from all Christians to those few who are mischievously called 'ecclesiastics.' Luther's own words in "Freedom of the Christian Man" are:

"For Holy Scripture makes no distinction between them, except that it gives the name 'ministers,' 'servants,' 'stewards,' to these who are now proudly called popes, bishops, and lords and who should by the ministry of the Word serve others and teach them the faith of Christ and the liberty of believers."²

This emphasis led to the emancipation of the laity from priestly control and gave them participation in church affairs, with the stewardship of public teaching and preaching reserved for those specially fitted for these offices. Christ was once again thought of as the only true mediator between man and God.

In summarizing the influence of this doctrine on Christian life, Schaff states that,

"It destroyed the distinction between higher (clerical

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1. Holman: op. cit., p. 324.
2. Ibid., p. 326.

and monastic), and lower morality; it gave sanctity to the natural relations, duties, and virtues; it elevated the family as equal in dignity to virginity; it promoted general intelligence, and sharpened the sense of individual responsibility to the Church....The principle of the general priesthood of the laity found its political and civil counterpart in the American principle of the general kingship of men, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, that 'all men are born free and equal.'¹

c. Place of Word and Sacraments.

For several years before the Reformation began, Luther had increasingly been giving the Bible a larger place in his own personal life, in his teaching at the university, and in his preaching. He did not at the time rebel against the sacraments or even suggest that they were unnecessary. But the time came when he was forced to decide as to their inherent value. Speaking of Luther's attitude toward the Sacraments, McGiffert says:

"Though Luther long remained unconscious of his inner independence of them, when the conflict came and he was threatened with their loss he discovered he could do without them, and the discovery proved a new charter of liberty for himself and in the end for multitudes of others."²

Luther repudiated the claim that the Sacraments were absolutely necessary to salvation in his second thunderous manifesto, "The Babylonish Captivity of the Church." Never was a man more independent of external means, and more fearless in declaring their needlessness. Sacraments, he said, are nothing more than signs of the forgiving love of

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1. Schaff: op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 208.
2. McGiffert: Martin Luther, the Man and His Work, p. 174.

God in Christ. While they may be advantageously used as an aid to faith, the true Christian should never be slavishly dependent on them.

He attacked the Sacrament of Holy Communion by arguing for the right of the laity to receive the cup as well as the bread;¹ by denying the miraculous change of the elements (transubstantiation);² and by rejecting the teaching of the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ in the mass. The Mass, which is the heart of the Roman Catholic worship, Luther attacks as the "most wicked of all."³ The other sacraments, except baptism he rejects because they cannot be proved from Scriptures. And although he gave a real and important place to the Sacrament of Holy Communion in public worship, Luther put greater emphasis upon the Word, which alone inspires true worship.

In a book on Worship, Evelyn Underhill points out that Luther and Calvin rescued for Protestant worship the truths of the primitive Christian balance of the Word and the Sacraments. They acknowledged the absolute priority of God, the genuineness of His revelation, and the sacramental authority of His Word. In Evangelical worship the Word became objective and holy, rather than the Blessed Sacrament, as in Catholicism; for without the preaching of the Word sacraments

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1. Cf. Holman: op. cit., p. 178-87.
2. Ibid., p. 187-94.
3. Ibid., p. 194-6.

are of little value.¹

For Luther, the message of the Gospel was liberation and assurance, and worship was man's humble and grateful response to God's mercy and grace.

3. Ethical Outreach of Christian Freedom.

As we have suggested, Luther's controversy and break with Catholicism was largely the result of a growing concern for practical everyday Christian living. In contrast to the overemphasis of special religious rites which in themselves were supposed to gain for one special favor with God, Luther insisted that the common virtues which find expression in the ordinary relationships of life are far more important. McGiffert evaluates this emphasis in these words:

"This difference in the estimate of life was more decisive than any other difference of doctrine between Luther and the Roman Church, at this time or any subsequent time. In it was wrapped up the promise of the new world."²

Luther not only attacked the existing system of religion and life in general but gave specific recommendations for a practical and reasonable reform. In his first great treatise, "Address to the German Nobility," Luther struck at the sole claims of pope and hierarchy to promote reform and advocated that the German Emperor, princes, and nobility take a hand in the needed religious, moral, social, and economic reforms.

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1. E. Underhill: Worship, p. 278.

2. McGiffert: History of Christian Thought, Vol. II, p. 20.

Christian freedom to Luther, as we shall discover, was nothing static or passive: it was vital and active. In reality it was the Word of God being applied to every avenue of life. We are aware of Luther's faith in God to restore society to a higher level of living when governed by Christian principles.

a. Good Works and Freedom -- Love.

One of Luther's most important contributions to Protestant thought was his affirmation of the natural right and obligation of every Christian to do service to God and his fellowman, even in the normal trades and occupations of life, rather than the unnatural restrictions of asceticism which limited the effectiveness of Christianity. It is often said of Luther that he dignified labor and exalted the common man.

This theory, sometimes referred to as a "universal call to sanctity," is based on the doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers.' In conformity to this principle, Luther believed that every legitimate business ought to be consecrated to God, everyday should be holy in a sense, and every moment dedicated to God, whether in business, enjoyment, or worship.

In his beautiful tract on "The Liberty of a Christian Man," the Reformer sets forth in a profound way the paradox of Christian liberty, and brings together these two ideas of grace, or faith, and works:

A CHRISTIAN MAN IS A PERFECTLY FREE LORD OF ALL,
SUBJECT TO NONE.

A CHRISTIAN MAN IS A PERFECTLY DUTIFUL SERVANT OF ALL,
SUBJECT TO ALL.¹

In this he shows wherein true liberty exists: in Christ, not from Christ.

The inner or spiritual man is freed by the Gospel of Christ from sin, laws, and mandates: he is subject to none by virtue of his faith. Yet he is subject to all by virtue of the love which he has received through faith: here works, which are a manifestation of faith, begin. He explains that the good works that we do flow from God into us and out unto others. We have so "put on" Christ that it is as if "He had been what we are."² Referring to I Corinthians 13, Luther says that the "love that seeketh not her own" is the genuine rule of a Christian life.³

While the Roman Church has always recognized good works as contributory to salvation, Luther and those of the Protestant faith have always insisted that "good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works."⁴ Neither can a Christian man be idle, for his good works need to join his body in loving and praising God. Luther consistently warns again and again that "the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love

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1. Holman: op. cit., p. 312. Also cf. I Corinthians 9:19.
2. Ibid., p. 342.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 331.

in obedience to God, and considers nothing except the approval of God, Whom he would in all things most scrupulously obey."¹

In summarizing Luther's view of good works we shall quote his own conclusion:

"We conclude, therefore, that a Christian man lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love; by faith he is caught up beyond himself into God, by love he sinks down beneath himself into his neighbor; yet he always remains in God and in His love, as Christ says in John i, 'Verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.'"²

b. Church and State -- Moral and Social Reforms.

Under the Roman system discipline was controlled wholly by the Church. There had been crying appeals for reform in the Church for at least two centuries before the Reformation began, but the Councils and popes failed to accomplish any real change. It was the honest resolve of Luther and other reformers to secure the necessary discipline for reform.

In the third and longest section of his "The Address to the German Nobility," Luther turns his protests and appeals for the reform to the temporal authorities. The first proposal is that there be the recognition of two separate powers, the spiritual and temporal, with the temporal power of each nation free from the ecclesiastical rule of Rome. Rome should

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1. Ibid., p. 329.
2. Ibid., p. 343.

be honored and obeyed in spiritual things as long as she is true to Christ.¹

In religion and everything else he believed that Germany should manage its own affairs and live its own life. Its spiritual authority should be vested in the hands of German ecclesiastical authorities. In attempting to break the foreign yoke of popery and the false claims of the clergy, Luther insisted that religious leaders possessed no prerogatives not belonging to the right of all Christians. They should be appointed to serve religious things, and were subject to the people, not lords over them.

He believed in the divine right of civil authorities for the punishment of the bad and protection of the good. "They are supreme in their own lands and the clergy are under their jurisdiction as completely as anybody else."²

Speaking of this "trumpet call" to the German nation, McGiffert says that, "Liberties from the domination of the spiritual power, from the dependence upon its offices, and from dread of its penalties, was one of the watchwords of the book. In it a new age was foreshadowed."³

The first abuse that Luther advocated reform of was that of indulgences. Equally destructive of spiritual life was the confessional.⁴ Together these two abuses were the

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1. Ibid., p. 104.

2. Ibid., p. 70.

3. McGiffert: Martin Luther, the Man and His Work, p. 167.

4. Holman: op. cit., p. 249-50.

strongest means of discipline in the Church; both were highly commercialized and thus promoted the material interests of the Church without bettering the moral and ethical standards. In the interests of higher morals and Christian living a new start had to be made.

Luther's program for reformatory action included, besides the abolition of ecclesiastical power over the state and creation of a German Church and council, numerous internal religious reforms. Some of these were the abolishment of mendicant orders, regulation of begging, and inspection of all convents and nunneries; restriction of luxury in dress and spice trade; condemnation of houses of prostitution, traffic in annuities, and excesses in eating and drinking; reduction of festivals and holidays; permission of the clergy to marry; and the improvement of schools and universities.¹

None of Luther's writings, it is said, produced such an instantaneous and far-reaching effect in Germany as this one to the German nobility. Although Luther was not the first to urge these reforms, he was the first to do so in such a complete program. He was merely voicing what earnest men had long been thinking.

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1. Ibid., pgs. 133-162.

D. Summary.

In this chapter we have studied the experiences and struggles of Luther in gaining an inner freedom from sin and an external freedom from Romanism, and the principles that were fundamental to his reformed theology and practice of Christian living.

It was through a study of the Scriptures that Luther was able to become free in Christ, and growing out of his own vital experience of Christian freedom was the conviction that the whole Roman system was legalistic and un-Biblical, depriving men and women of the true freedom which Christ had made possible. And until the truth of this freedom in Christ could be recovered there would be no permanent reform. Thus, Luther criticized the Church openly, challenging her defenders to find Scriptural basis for her attitude of supremacy, her system of priesthood and customs of worship; but this was impossible, so he chose to suffer excommunication rather than compromise truth.

In place of the false theories and practices of Romanism, he affirmed several New Testament principles which have ever been fundamental to evangelical Protestant belief. Briefly these are, (1) the supreme and final authority of the Scriptures and the right of every Christian to read and interpret them; (2) justification by faith in God through the completed sacrifice of Christ; (3) the priesthood of all believers, with lay rights equal to those of the clergy; and finally, (4),

the call of every Christian to live a holy and consecrated life, one lived out by the spirit of love rather than law. So by use of the Scriptures Luther reaffirmed to the people of his land, and to the whole world in time, the true meaning of freedom in Christ, or Christian freedom.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. General Summary.

The purpose of this thesis has been to study the history of Christian freedom from the time of Jesus Christ to the Protestant Reformation, in order to discover what principles of primitive Christianity are fundamental and permanent, and to analyze the nature of Christian freedom in order to determine its meaning and implications for present-day Christian living. The introduction stated the fact of the natural desire in human nature for freedom in all realms of one's personality, but how certain factors and powers in the history of the world had prevented man's attaining this freedom.

With this in mind the writer proceeded to study Jesus' desire and efforts to make men free--in body, mind, and spirit--in order to love God with their whole heart, mind, strength, and soul. The Apostle Paul received the benefits of this freedom in a marvellous way and in his teachings it was seen that he had a profound understanding of the meaning of freedom, being essentially one with Christ in explaining its meaning.

The second chapter was a historical study of Christian freedom--from the time of the Apostolic Church to the Reformation: observing the reasons and causes for the obscuring and almost complete loss of freedom in the Roman

Catholic Church, with the attendant religious, moral, and social effects; and then tracing the growing concern and increasing attempts that were made to revive New Testament Christian freedom, making it possible for Martin Luther to call forth a religious, moral, and social reform on the basis of his own personal discovery of freedom.

Then a study was made of Luther's personal experience of liberation as a preparation for understanding his conception of Christian freedom as he set it forth in the early years of the Reformation. It was found that Luther preached, taught, and wrote on the basic principles of New Testament Christian freedom as they had become real to him, especially as a result of studying the Pauline writings.

Several principles of truth regarding Christian freedom were seen to be necessary, not only in the time of Christ and Paul, but also during the following centuries. The result of being deprived of the knowledge of Christ and the Scriptures was the lack of true spiritual freedom before God, and effects of such religious teaching and experience was a sadly degenerated Christianity. Luther and the many Reformers of his day found peace of heart and mind because they turned personally to the Bible, discovering for themselves the truths of Christian freedom.

In summary these truths or principles were, first in importance, the great fact of the sole Mediatorship of

Christ between God and man. He sets men free from the power and guilt of sin; He makes all men priests unto God, thus barring the need of any earthly and human mediator or priesthood. This truth embodies two Christian doctrines of freedom: 'justification by faith' and the 'priesthood of all believers.'

The second truth, in order of treatment, was that of Christian freedom in worship--this based on the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers. This is the first important aspect of man's new possibilities and responsibilities as a son of God, one free in Christ. He worships God in spirit and in truth, not according to legal forms and ceremony, nor by observing special days and laws.

Another aspect of freedom is the ethical or practical. A man is free and lord of all, yet a servant of all. Freedom is exercised within the boundaries of love. The man that is free in Christ will do nothing that causes another to stumble and sin; he fulfills the second commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This has been called, freedom of will.

The last freedom that has been formally discussed is freedom in thought. Jesus sets men's minds free in order for them to think more clearly of God, of man, of their relationship to one another, and of men's relationships to one another. Freedom of thought or intellect is founded upon faith in God.

B. Conclusion.

It has been seen, therefore, that when one surrenders to Christ as Lord and Savior and becomes his bond-servant, he is set free in these three ways: in spirit, in will, and mind. Each one of these freedoms is dependent upon the others, and they all are the expression of a basic obedience and loyalty to the One True Mediator. Now when one of these freedoms is impaired or threatened the others all likewise affected. We must guard each one with jealous care.

This study of the meaning of Christian freedom and all of its psychological implications for spirit, will, and mind, as expressed in the introduction, the writer believes is of utmost importance for: a) the personal life of the individual Christian--for his life within his religious community, and for the proper relationship between denominations; b) for the necessary liberation of those who are living under authoritarianism, Catholic or otherwise; c) for the proper safeguarding of religious freedom as set forth in the Bill of Rights of our government, and for the safeguarding of all the basic freedoms. In short, this fact of Christian freedom is fundamental to all aspects of Christian culture. It involves, basically, the preaching of Jesus Christ as Savior and Reconciler unto God, and teaching all that that experience of faith in Him implies in the way of Christian life and service.

a) This means that each Protestant denomination must look to itself and examine herself in the light of God's Word and their faith in God through Christ, to see if they have, either personally, or as a group, slipped into any form of meaningless legalism which is not justified in one's own time by a living faith in God. It is incumbent upon Christians to interpret and apply Christ's principles of love, service, and sacrifice in terms of the actual reality of their own situation. This means a life of prayer, worship, service, and willing obedience to the living Christ and not a mechanical application of any code of ethics.

b) Moreover we must be always ready to interpret to our Catholic brethren, and any who are living under a similar authoritarianism, the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all humans who may claim to be representatives of His. For He stands victorious and ever-living in the experience of men since the day of His Resurrection, and His Presence banishes for all time the performance of any sacrifices and like mysteries. He has brought all things of the spirit, will, and mind within reach of every believing soul, and we are all priests through Him of the mysteries of heaven. It is perfectly fulfilled and understood in Him.

c) If the nature of religious freedom is properly understood and valued, we have nothing to fear in our relationship to those communions who know it not, for we will be able to detect the root of any attempt to abrogate this

fundamental right of man. When we protect religious freedom we protect the freedom of expression (radio, press, movies), freedom from want and from fear of tyranny.

Surely Christian freedom, as made possible by faith in God through Christ, is so inestimable a blessing that Protestants should strive diligently to prevent any destruction of it, similar to what happened for the many centuries preceeding the Protestant Reformation.

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