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# LUTHER AND THE GERMAN REFORMATION

AS VIEWED BY E. BUONAIUTI<sup>1</sup>

## I

SUFFICIENT outlines have been already given about E. Buonaiuti's<sup>2</sup> programme and religious experiences, in the *Evangelical Quarterly* issue of October, 1937. The purpose of the following article is to bring into closer contact the student of religious problems with Buonaiuti's doctrinal views. It seems to me of great importance to unfold his attitude to Luther's Protestantism and the Reformation in general. In fact, his large volume on Luther and the German Reformation is not only a critical exposition (the first in Italy) of Luther's religious experiences; it is meant to be, above all, a setting of the drama of the Reformation in the general plan of the evolution of Christianity in the world. He wrote his essay when still in communion with the Roman Church (1926). Buonaiuti is a thorough modernist and too far advanced on modernistic lines to be in agreement with any evangelic denominations. His idea, however, of the corporate life of Christendom which is the main point in Buonaiuti's speculation, and may be considered the keynote of his criticism, is worth while being taken into account and enquired into deeply.

<sup>1</sup> A criticism by Dr. Casella of E. Buonaiuti's views will appear in the next number of this Quarterly.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> Ernesto Buonaiuti was born in Rome on June 25th, 1881. He is a Roman Catholic priest, and the director of "Religio", also the late professor of History of Christianity in the University of Rome. Buonaiuti is an extremely suggestive writer and teacher, and his intellectual output is vast and varied. Here is his bibliography: *Lo gnosticismo. Storia di antiche lotte religiose*, 1907; *Saggi di filologia e storia del Nuovo Testamento*, 1910; *L'isola di smeraldo (in collaborazione con N. Turchi)*, 1914; *Il cristianesimo medioevale*, 1916; *Sant' Agostino*, 1923; *San Girolamo*, 1923; *Sant' Ambrogio*, 1923; *Tommaso d'Aquino*, 1924; *San Paolo*, 1925; *Escursioni Spirituali*, 1922; *Voci Cristiane*, 1923; *Saggi sul cristianesimo primitivo*, 1923; *Apologia del Cristianesimo*, 1925; *Verso la Luce. Saggio di apologetica religiosa*, 1924; *Una fede e una disciplina*, 1925; *Gesu il Cristo*, 1925; *Francesco d'Assisi*, 1925; *Lutero e la Riforma in Germania*, 1929; *Pagine scelte di Paolo Sarpi*, 1920; *Il Misticismo medioevale*, 1928; *Le origini dell'ascetismo cristiano*, 1928; *Il Cristianesimo nell'Africa romana*, 1928; *La Chiesa Romana*, 1933; *Il messaggio di Paolo*, 1934.

*Tractatus Super Quatuor Evangelia di Giocchino da Fiore*, 1930.

*Giocchino da Fiore: i tempi, la vita, il messaggio*, 1933.

*Il Vangelo e il Mondo*, 1934.

*Pietre miliari nella Storia del Cristianesimo*, 1935.

I shall try to sketch as briefly as possible the main points of his study in order to bring out that focal idea, not without viewing it in the light of my own Evangelic and Protestant experience. Buonaiuti's treatise, indeed, leads us to deeper conclusions. Modern Christianity, and especially Evangelism, cannot be content to carry on, on the lines of past and half-dead traditions. A new basis is claimed for a new ecclesiology which cannot be any longer that of Rome. The Protestant Churches, so wide awakened to the new need, seem to fit this task and to meet it with renewed strength. And I am perfectly aware of the great calling Modern Protestantism is destined for, because of its ideal and spirit. What is the vital point in Buonaiuti's speculation that we can make our own? Where does the deep reason of his view lie, and whence does it draw its strength? These are vital problems and we have to face them.

On many a point I feel in agreement with our historian and not much hostile criticism will be found in these following pages. I want, however, at the very outset to state clearly that the main point of disagreement between the Roman Professor and myself lies in not viewing from the same angle Luther's experience of St. Paul. According to my views, Luther's religious experience of St. Paul is deeply, though imperfectly, Pauline. No contradiction, as far as the kernel of Luther's experience is concerned, can be found between St. Paul and the German Reformer. Buonaiuti's experience of the corporate life, however, I deem to be rather a necessary complement and fuller outcome of the whole Christian experience as realised by St. Paul. In order to deal as methodically as possible with the subject, I will first of all deal with the idea of tradition as understood by our writer, and his criticism of Luther drawn from Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. On this background Luther's experience, as nursed by his historical environments, will be better understood. This will constitute a further development of the subject. I shall deal, moreover, with the immediate historical causes determining the breakdown in Christendom and the consequences in the realm of religion, politics and philosophy. The efforts to restore unity in Christendom and the actual situation of the Churches, with regard to a new plan to bring about the longed-for reunion, will be considered with special reference to Buonaiuti's mystical experience of the corporate life.

## II

The tendency to emphasize the so-called corporate idea as being the brotherhood in which men become members of an organic whole, by sharing in a common life, is not new. Troeltch, moving on these lines, came to the conclusion that Religion is essentially social and not a private affair. "The essence of Religion is not dogma and idea, but cultus and communion, an intercourse of the entire community." The same view has been emphasized by Royce who finds the centre of Christianity in "Loyalty to the Beloved community". "Such community is an indispensable means of salvation for the individual man, and is the fitting realm wherein alone the Kingdom of Heaven, which the Master preached, can find its expression." Those writers seem to agree with Cyprian that to be a Christian means to be a Churchman. But the problem arises, where is the true Church to be found, if we refuse to identify the ideal community with any existing Church? We can, however, reach a sound conclusion if we try to disengage the accidental and temporary from the essential and permanent elements in Catholicism as well as Protestantism. Not only so, but I am perfectly convinced that the modernistic idea of the corporate life, as found by Buonaiuti, can be the logical outcome and complement of the Protestant ecclesiology, which is rather inclined towards individualism. In fact, the two ideas are not opposed to each other but complementary. Now the idea of tradition in Buonaiuti's speculation is the main idea. We have to set it in the light in which he understands it.

Buonaiuti's studies on Pauline mysticism and early Christianity have led him to the conviction that only a return to Church unity can save the modern world from a catastrophic issue. Very strong in him is the consciousness of being called to proclaim and promote such a unity. He, endowed with a mystical experience, is deeply convinced that neither politics nor economics nor mere culture can prove a check to the centrifugal individualistic forces of our modern world. Since the breakdown of the medieval-Christian world we need to move towards a new and higher religious synthesis, of which Rome is to be the central inspiration and head. The modern civilized world is only calculated to bring us not only into a political

and social, but also into a moral disaster. Supernatural cultural and spiritual forces and standards are the only means to control economics and politics. The pressing possibility of a world war, and the attempt at a League of Nations, recall the world to its duty of unity. The whole world, in fact, through science, economics, and culture, is daily becoming more intimately one. Either co-operation or war is the outcome of such a state of things. Political and economic centrifugal forces have to be turned into corporative agencies, and based on even deeper common cultural and religious inspiration. From this we can easily understand Buonaiuti's standpoint as regards tradition, that it is not only an organ of ecclesiastic functions but the most powerful means of union in the corporate life of Christendom. To him tradition means the strong bond of the corporate life of the world, the centripetal force apt to check the disruption brought forth by human passions and nationalism. According to Buonaiuti, the European spirituality went gradually through several stages of which the Reformation, the mother of German modern idealism, was the chief. During this process medieval ecclesiasticism and corporate life gradually broke down and led to modern nationalisms. Since the union of the peoples is the highest ideal of civilization, such stages have to be considered as moments of a slow dissolution. It is due to this standpoint that Buonaiuti's criticism of the Reformation and its outcome takes antagonistic lines to that of the reformed theologians who greet the Reformation as the highest achievement of the human spirit.

*“Per questo il nostro apprezzamento della funzione storica della Riforma e dei suoi derivati prossimi e remoti, e naturalmente antitetico a quello dei teologi riformati, che vi scorgono un processo ascensionale verso le supreme affermazioni della autonomia dello spirito.”*

The main dissent between the Lutheran message and the Catholic tradition lies in the different way of understanding revelation, and consequently spiritual salvation. According to Luther, revelation had its long toilsome course in history till the day in which, by the redemption of Christ, it took a definite and immutable shape. Revelation is, therefore, all shut up and circumscribed, rather crystallized, as it were, in the Book which even if not literally infallible, brings the message of redemption which everybody can, through experience, take hold of and assimilate. Viewed from the Catholic standpoint,

on the contrary, God's revelation expresses itself as a living organism which grows by means of the traditional teaching and ferments in the consciousness of the brethren linked up in one faith and one hope of the one Church.

Luther's standpoint, therefore, in determining the means of spiritual salvation, meant automatically the shifting of the central principle of tradition. According to him, the certainty of salvation is born of a subjective, personal experience. It is here, in this central category, that the reformed tradition has cut itself out of the Catholic one. The man whom Döllinger, no more than sixty years ago, described as the greatest German of his time, the genuine hero of the spirit who embodied the German nation, comes forward on the stage of history bearing about himself still an air of mystery and enigma. Rarely in history have such men, so paradoxical and so contradictory in themselves, made their appearance, says Buonaiuti. He acknowledges Luther's gigantic personality, his deepest insight in the secret of universal life, his manifold and fertile temperament, a musician who was able to make of his theology a poem, and who gained the most precious title to the grateful memory of German posterity with his translation of the Bible, which could somewhat correct and neutralize the dreadful pessimism of his message. On the other hand, Buonaiuti's criticism on Luther's work and message is unforgiving and perhaps the most severe ever issued from the pen of a critic. He charges the monk with the tremendous responsibility of having introduced into the historical tradition of Christianity such a germ of dissolution as to break the unity, and split asunder the visible bond of Christendom. In his opinion, Luther's drama is the drama of our modern world. It might have been the drama of a soul in despair, seized upon by the impossibility of reaching his moral ideal. It was, instead, the beginning of an immense religious revolution. Luther's experience proved to be the seed of a formidable disintegration. The very individualism of Luther's message could not possibly become a practical and ideal programme of any organised Church without contradicting itself. He views Lutheranism, therefore, as a paradoxical thing, grown into the texture of the Christian tradition. Hence its precarious vitality, owing to the spiritual movement of Germany when she was expanding. And hence, also, the root of its failure. To Buonaiuti, moreover, it means a sign of

ignorance to attribute great originality to Luther's message, since he takes out of the previous mystics his definite standing. Rather, he sees in Luther the man who, helped by a peculiar historical circumstance, lifted up a standard of rebellion against the Empire and the Roman Curia, the man whose anticatholic hostility reached its highest climax, when it discovered Satan's action in the whole of the Roman organization. Furthermore, he seems to look upon Luther as a man psychologically ill, whose perturbed spirit and exasperated mind led him astray from genuine evangelical piety as when he wrote: "I cannot pray without cursing."

### III

It is well known that Luther is rather limited as regards the sources of his thoughts, but the hints we find here and there in his writings are enough to trace approximately the path along which his religious experience has developed. However, the personal experience of a Christian, says Buonaiuti, whether it arises from an enquiry on the corporate life, or on the problem of the individual salvation, has logically to be connected with the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. The fundamental writing of Luther, in fact, which was brought lately to light, is his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. It was discovered in the Berlin Library, and it is the commentary Luther gave out from Wittenberg's University Chair in 1516. In this commentary Luther's message rings out with prophetic accents in a flight of sweeping enthusiasm and mysticism. Luther was eager to get into the very thought of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans. He was hindered from doing so, he says, by a dryness of heart and by an expression: "The righteousness of God is revealed in it." I hated it, he says, this very word "righteousness of God" as interpreted philosophically in the sense of God's formal justice or active righteousness. He says, he felt himself vexed with such a God whom he addressed; "was it not enough that the poor sinners had to undergo punishment? was it also necessary that God through his Gospel would add pain to pain and would threaten us with the spectre of his wrath and anger?" By day and night he was always enquiring into that text, eager to know the inner meaning of it, when one day those words yielded to him their full meaning. "I understood then that the righteousness of God whereby the righteous

lives is the very same righteousness that springs from faith. The meaning of the sentence, therefore, was thus understood by me. The righteousness of God which reveals itself through the Gospel is that passive righteousness whereby God in his mercy justified us through faith, as it is written—'The just lives by faith'. At this point I rejoiced in myself and I felt as though the doors of Heaven opened to me. All of a sudden the whole texture of the Scriptures changed to my eyes, and whereas I hated these words before, now I was driven to love them and exalt them. The Pauline quotation was to me in truth a heavenly door. When later I was reading St. Augustine's *De spiritu et littera*, I was amazed beyond expression to come across such quotation showing how he himself had interpreted in the same way, the righteousness of God as that justice whereby God clothes us when he justifies us, and though St. Augustine's expressions are still imperfect, and though he is not clear enough as regards imputation, I felt highly satisfied in realizing that he spoke of that righteousness of God whereby we are justified." This explicit and solemn witness of Luther, remarks Buonaiuti, raises not a few problems. In what really does consist this sudden discovery to which Luther connects his satisfaction? Again, is it correct that Fathers and Doctors of the Church had interpreted that Pauline passage in such a way? The central outlines of Luther's doctrine, as a matter of fact, can be already discovered in his spirit several years before the supposed discovery of 1519. Here is a very eloquent quotation from a sermon preached on the day after Christmas in 1514 or 1515.

"Ideo cum simus carnales, impossibile est nobis legem implere sed solus Christus venit eam implere, quam nos non possumus. Nam quod erat impossibile legi, ait apostolus (Rom. viii. 3), in quo infirmabatur per carnem, ecce impossibile est lex propter carnem. Verumtamen Christus impletionem suam nobis impertit, dum seipsum gallinam nobis exhibet ut sub alas eius confugiamus et per eius impletionem nos quoque legem impleamus. O dulcis gallina! O beatos pullos huius gallinae! Secundum patet, quia ideo imponit, ut quaeratur gratia et agnoscatur evacuaturque sapientia carnis. Per legem cognitio peccati (Rom. iii. 2). Nam si cognoscatur, quod nullis consiliis, nullis auxiliis nostris concupiscentia ex nobis possit auferri, et haec contra legem est, quae dicit:—non concupisces—et experimur omnes invincibilem esse concupiscentiam penitus, quid restat nisi ut sapientia carnis cesset et cedat, desperet in semetipsa, pereat et humiliata aliunde quaerat auxilium, quod sibi praestare nequit? Ideo dicit, quoties volui congregare, etc. Ecce quomodo etiam offert gratiam non quaerentibus."

Luther's deep and rich spiritual life would automatically lead him to interpret Paul in the light of his own personal



experience, so that when in April, 1515, Luther was working out his commentary, his system in its main outlines had already taken place in his spirit.

To understand St. Paul, says Buonaiuti, in all the shades of his thought without distorting, impoverishing, disguising his message is an extremely difficult task. According to our critic, Luther, by taking literally from St. Paul some expressions, lost sight of their mutual connection and failed to grasp their original contents. The superficial observer might, indeed, gather from St. Paul's letters upsetting and apparent contradictions. In fact, if sometimes the apostle seems to look at the problem of salvation from a strictly individualistic standpoint, through a pure connection between the believer and God's righteousness, at other times the claim of a charismatic discipline and of a corporate life break through so mightily, that the first formulations and statements are completed, corrected, as it were, and welded into a more perfect whole. According to St. Paul, the Church is the mystical body of Christ realizing and multiplying itself through history. It is only through the Church that it is possible to adhere to Christ. The chief fault of Luther is the lack of an ecclesiological basis and the lack of the consciousness of the duty linking up the single individual to the body of the faithful. He failed to grasp that the Church being constituted through a solid discipline, organised by the very means of the Pauline apostleship, it becomes absurd to reproduce entirely the experience of Paul by doing violence to the logical nature of tradition. Something of the kind can be said even about Augustine's position which is hardly one of equilibrium. If, in his daily and pressing battle against pagan doctrines, Augustine spoke of sin and grace in such marked and definite terms as to embarrass anyone who tries to reconcile them with human freedom, yet in his later campaign he elaborates such an ecclesiological doctrine that the greatest Pauline creation, namely: the mystical body, finds in it its highest realization. Even Augustine spoke of a "servus peccati" and of a "servus justitiae", but what in Augustine was a mystical vision, backed and underlined by a definite ecclesiology, avoiding all the dangers of individualism, has become in Luther a poor deformation of the Christian anthropology and of the doctrine of salvation. Did Luther catch the hidden and stupendous harmony of Paul; was he thoroughly original in its interpretation? Buonaiuti

asks. Truly Paul speaks of flesh (σάρξ) and spirit (πνεῦμα) and sets the former in contrast to the latter. Nevertheless, our historian says, strictly speaking Luther has kept nothing of Paul's mystic and anthropologic conception but the outward forms. In fact, though Paul distinguishes in the clearest way between σάρξ and πνεῦμα, he never thinks of these two elements of our inward life as developing on autonomous lines, each following the inner logic of its dynamics and free from any mutual connection or interference. According to Paul, Christians even in the flesh have got the aptitude to live in the Spirit. On the other hand, even after having reached our transfiguration in Christ and our salvation, we feel at the same time the necessity of some duty to which willingly we submit ourselves, because of the very reason that we belong to a religious society, namely, the Church. It is just in the light of this charismatic organism that St. Paul was able to solve the antithesis so rudely marked out by him between flesh and spirit. Luther, on the contrary, just because he thought the intimate adhesion to Christ sufficient to reach the full freedom independently of any external connection with discipline and tradition, altered and perverted Paul's dualism. In fact, he seems not to distinguish between flesh and spirit but rather between flesh and faith, for, according to his interpretation of the Pauline message, it is only faith which saves the interior man. But according to St. Paul, a nobler and more efficacious virtue than faith itself is "agape", viz. the mutual love and brotherhood which lies at the very root of our redeemed life and which compels us to submit ourselves to the laws required by the edifying of the body of Christ. It is a deep gulf, therefore, according to Buonaiuti, that which separates Paul's spiritual position from Luther's.

The very same misunderstanding plainly appears from Luther's *de libertate christiana* which writing is supposed to be one of the most Pauline outputs of the Reformer. His dealing with the subject is laid on two basic motives, clothed into the two following aphorisms: 1. The Christian is the freest of all beings, subject to none. 2. The Christian is the meekest servant of all, subject to everybody. Luther has to demonstrate it. He claims to do so, starting from the anthropological premises of St. Paul, as regards the two elements, spiritual and physical. By means of the former, man is called spiritual, interior,

new (*καινός, νεός ἄνθρωπος*), and by means of the latter, carnal, exterior, old (*παλαιός ἄνθρωπος*). Drawing the consequences of such premises, we are led to the conclusion that as regards his interior nature man is absolutely free from anything worldly, because the transfiguring breath of faith and his holding up to Christ have made him a new man like Adam before his fall. His inner life has no link whatever with the outward world, nor any connection with social, political, cultural institutions. He gets hold of Christ through faith, and through faith he reaches his full freedom. But by means of driving to a one-sided expression the experience described by the apostle between flesh and spirit, the monk failed to grasp the harmonic and organic process through which man's spiritual activity develops. In Paul's anthropology, permeated through and through by a mystical realism, the *σάρξ* has lost all its power under the overpowering, sweeping action of the spirit or *πνεῦμα*. "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17). Indeed, he who has been transformed by the spirit of the Lord will not allow any longer his corrupt nature to take the upper hand. By means of adhesion to the collective life and the continuous exercising of love in the agape, the outward man is absorbed in the inner man and deeply grafted in it. The spirit, through its mighty power, smothers and destroys man's fleshly instincts. So, what to St. Paul was a purely pedagogic and pragmatistic distinction to point out a higher standard of life and harmony, in Luther's vision takes the shape of a clear-cut dichotomy splitting asunder the religious and ethic process. To adhere to Christ in Luther's experience means essentially to realise a personal and incommunicable act of faith; to Paul's, on the contrary, communion with Christ meant rather the engrafting in the Church the mystical body of Christ living throughout the ages as a visible reality. St. Paul's exceptional corporate experience seems not to distinguish any longer between mystical body and visible body. The Lord who outlives has still his flesh in the world. The new flesh (*σάρξ*), wherein the Christian is engrafted by the act of adhering to the risen Christ, is the Church.

After the Epistle to the Romans amongst St. Paul's writings that to the Galatians comes into prominence in Luther's religious experience. The law's dispensation yielded to the spirit's dispensation. In the law of Moses the letter which killeth was

overruling. In the new dispensation, on the contrary, it is the spirit which quickeneth. This is the main motive unravelled by St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians. He was addressing those who thought necessary for salvation the formal observance of the old Mosaic legislation. Again, according to Buonaiuti, Luther takes literally the Pauline conception and engrafts it into his experience, perverting unconsciously its meaning and bearing. He therefore draws out the conclusion that works commanded by any law are of no value and the doctrine of salvation by faith alone is the true one. The Reformer's anger shows itself in its strong attacks against any external practice, against any subordination to concrete discipline and ecclesiastic administration. The same argumentations Paul has used in his antilegalistic controversy, the very same objections he tried to break down, come forth again in Luther's exegesis. But alas! how different is the religious position of the two! The apostle's controversy reached to its highest when he, after having demonstrated the sufficiency of the Christian renovation to realise the Kingdom of God, addresses himself: what is therefore the law for, and why was it imposed? Luther instead says, once we know man to be justified independently of the works of the law, what is the law for? Why was it imposed as a yoke upon the unwilling and feeble human will?

Anything can become vain and sterile at a certain point along the progressive working of God in history. Nevertheless, the Mosaic law had its own mission. It was twofold, it was calculated to inspire us with our deep and ever-returning sense of sinfulness; it was also a useful guide to Christ. The law, in fact, is a signal of alarm that may give us, automatically, as it were, the sensation of our natural disability. On the other hand, since this law appears unable to bestow upon us the necessary energy to overcome ourselves, it was meant to be an efficacious pedagogic means towards the Christ by inspiring us with the continuous consciousness of our feebleness to reach salvation through our own forces alone. Once again Luther takes from Paul the thought of the apostle suggested and explained by the exceptional circumstances of the anti-Judaizing polemics, and in so doing he disguises, as it were, the apostle's conception. Full salvation through Christ's merits once proclaimed, the problem arises: what is the law for, and what are the works for, if a single act of faith can save us? Strange!

Theoretical formulations sometimes seem to create the most equivocal expressions bearing resemblance to truth. In Luther's enthusiastic description of salvation through faith alone, the sublime message of Paul seems to come to life again, but the resemblance is only apparent. Paul, in fact, in order to find a link of connection between the two dispensations, which are not contradictory to each other, but grow, on the same line, to a higher level, can grasp, through his powerful intuition of life and history, the possibility that the essence of Christ's redeeming power frees us from any positive law, even from the natural law, and places us, automatically, in the sphere of the highest abnegation, the life of the spirit. In one of the most highly-thought-out pages of his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle of the Gentiles proclaimed that Christian salvation is the outcome of a hope blossoming amongst the throbs of anxiety and disquietude. It means that even in the certainty of our salvation given us by the spirit the new creature is never free, a kind of anxiety rising from its new initiation. Luther, on the contrary, however, trying hard to fit in the scheme of his religious experience the sense of the daily labour, proves a failure. In his experience, the working out of the good becomes something secondary, accidental, even superfluous; unsteady.

Even St. Paul could get a higher and higher idea of Christ's nature as he viewed it in the light of his increasing faith in his redeeming work, but St. Paul did not suppress the law in the new dispensation, rather he subordinated it to the requirements of the corporate life. The apostle understood Christ's message as the heritage of mankind, and, linking up ethics to soteriology, gave the faithful a new rule and a new sanction to discipline. On the contrary, Luther's soteriology is born of a pressing need of individual salvation. For this account both his ethics and his ecclesiology appear destitute of any solid basis. Lutheranism, therefore, may be said to be a disguise of the Pauline theology. "Il luteranesimo è così una mimetica parodia del paolinismo."

Luther never succeeded in amalgamating organically the two aspects of Christ's society, the inner or invisible and the visible one. St. Paul, by identifying the organism of the faithful with the Lord's body, succeeded in keeping back from any contamination and perversion the two distinct spheres to which the Church belongs. Luther, instead, has drawn his soteriology only from his inner experience. In fact, when he tried to make

universal his experience and to give it an ecclesiastical organization he met with a task beyond his own strength. His position, indeed, was intrinsically contradictory. Naturally, politics took the upper hand and threw him in such a chaos that the German ecclesiastical discipline would suffer by crumbling to pieces.

The Communion of the Saints, in fact, is not only a membership or fellowship of believers in the same message, these being independent of one another. The Communion of Saints, which etymologically reads Communion of Holy Realities, is the brotherly participation in the same means whereby the believers are enabled to realize their own salvation. By reducing such a communion to the individual call of the faithful, Luther endowed the individual with the right to set his moral religious problem by itself and to solve it personally. Thus he crumbled the visible Church to dust and gave vent to a most wild individualism. In fact, his ecclesiological statements, in which he put his own soul and which are ringing with high enthusiasm, are those exalting the invisible Church and the infallible Word of God. In Luther's soteriologic conception, the mystical body expressed in a discipline and a rite is but a phantom. Luther's ecclesiology is, therefore, but an aggregation of units who have got the assurance of salvation. Such is, in the main, Buonaiuti's criticism of Luther's religious experiences with regard to Paul's interpretation.

#### IV

Buonaiuti, as already said, most emphatically affirms that no great originality can be claimed on behalf of Luther. This assertion can be proved to some extent, at any rate, by enquiring into Luther's theological training, into those circumstances, inward as well as outward, whereby his crisis of conscience drove him to such a dramatic revolution which still affects the whole of the Christian society. Four stages may be rightly considered in Luther's toilsome experience. The mystical stage which follows upon his nominalistic one and two later ones, namely: the prophetic and the apocalyptic.

Two currents of thought were certainly playing their part in Luther's education according to the two opposite issues of scholastic philosophy as centred in St. Thomas Aquinas, a peculiar figure of philosopher and believer whose strong mystical

elements are even to be found in his metaphysics. On the other hand, St. Thomas, by vindicating the autonomy of dialectics, reacted, as it were, on his mystical principles. As a matter of fact, mysticism and rationalism can be found in St. Thomas at the same time. When the historical moment wherein it was possible for Thomas Aquinas to construct his religious synthesis was over, his doctrines as regards faith in connection with dialectics did not prove as spontaneous and vital as ever. This synthesis was the outcome of peculiar historical circumstances. Soon Eckart and Occam displaced the terms of the problem of human knowledge beyond dialectics. In fact, the two great currents of thought around which the fourteenth-century scholastic speculation turns, are the rationalistic-Pelagian whose highest embodiment materialized in Occam and the mystical one whose chief exponents are Eckart and Tauler. The latter laying stress on the Thomistic doctrine of the "Ens" and driving to the utmost conclusions some Thomistic principles issued in affirming the oneness between finite and infinite. The former dissolving the great synthesis harmonizing nature and grace, faith and knowledge, freedom and supernatural guidance, as it had been created by the genius of Thomas, so severed faith from reason as to leave this latter at the mercy of a merely subjective knowledge, and to make faith a mere act of the will. Gabriel Biel was the one who disseminated Occam's doctrines. In the fifteenth century it was the official text of the German Universities. Luther himself expresses his love for Biel and Occam.

"Gabriel (Biel) scribens librum super canonem missae, qui liber meo iudicio tum optimus fuerat. Wenn ich darinnen las da blutte mein hertz. Bibliae autoritas nulla fuit erga Gabrielem. . . . Studiosus methodi Occam ingeniosissimus erat; illius studium erat res dilatare et amplificare in infinitum. Thomas est loquacissimus, quia metaphysica est seductus" (DE 43).

The first initiation, therefore, of Luther to the theological conceptions of sin and redemption was underlined by philosophy and apologetics all imbued with gnoseologic subjectivism and exterior soteriology. Occam, by limiting the dialectic categories to "qualitates mentis", set the transcendent reality beyond the grasp of reason. Faith, therefore, revelation and salvation in Occam's doctrine play the part of purely outward happenings with their consequent relativity and contingency in ethics and

theology, and thrive on a conception of human nature substantially Pelagian.

All this, undoubtedly, explains Luther's stress on external soteriology of a purely imputed righteousness.

It was on this intellectualistic background that Luther's mind moved. A glimpse at his spiritual experience will give us a fuller understanding of his inner life and explain to us better, especially through the political circumstances of the time, the inner soul of the Reformation.

Luther confesses to have done his best to practise to the uttermost the rules of his order.

*"Ego in monachatu Christum quotidie crucifixi et falsa mea fiducia, quae tum perpetuo adhaerebat mihi, blasphemavi. . . . Totus eram deditus ieiuniis, vigiliis, orationibus, legendis missis, etc. Interim tamen sub ista sanctitate et fiducia iustitiae propriae, alebam perpetuam diffidentiam, dubitationem, pavorem, odium et blasphemiam Dei, eratque iustitia illa mea nihil aliud quam latrina et suavissimum regnum diaboli"* (Comm. in Ep. ad Gal., DE 53).

But, says Buonaiuti at a certain point, the high ideal of Holiness to which the Reformer had tried to devote his own life failed him. Between his ethic programme and his daily life, the chasm yawned wider and wider, bringing the monk into the grips of an unspeakable dismay. Luther was fretted by a tremendous doubt whether he could be saved. It was his great pain. His monastic life did not give him assurance of salvation. Then he found himself confronted by a forked road: either the path of submission and closer appeal to God's grace in order to bear the burden of his daily life, or the path of a proud appeal to a higher righteousness able to coexist with his faulty state of conscience. Manifold coefficients drove the stubborn and disquieted soul to the latter alternative. No material need, but thirst of perfection had led him to the monastic life. He was eagerly looking into the sources of the heavenly doctrine, especially the New Testament, in order to discover God's will.

During the moments of his dismay, a mysterious figure acts as his comforter and teacher; it is John Staupitz. It was he who softened the overpowering feelings of Luther's soul and gave him some clue. Staupitz seems to have given Luther the first impulse along the destined slope. Luther calls to recollection with pleasure one of the colloquies he had with Staupitz, when he discovered the true meaning of the word penance.



“ This word of thine,” he wrote, “ came right through my soul like an arrow, and since then, I began to consult the Scriptures where they speak of penance. And as before, there was to me no bitterer word than that: ‘ penance ’, now this word sounded to my ears pleasant and sweet ” (letter to Staupitz on May 20th, 1518).

The great similarity between Gerson and Luther’s experience is still a more important point as to our enquiry. Luther’s initiation to Gerson’s mysticism was very fruitful. Amongst the best ecclesiastic writers he deems Gerson to be the one who got a very deep experience about those underground temptations born of doubt and dismay as to our salvation.

“ Solus Gerson scripsit de tentatione spiritus, alii omnes tantum corporales senserunt, Ieronymus, Augustinus, Ambrosius, Bernardus, Scotus, Thomas, Richardus, Occam; nullus illorum sensit, solus Gerson de pusillanimitate spiritus scripsit. . . . Solus Gerson, valet ad mitigandas conscientias, ipse eo pervenit ut diceret: Ah, es muss ich nitt alles ein todt sund sein: facere contra papam, nicht ein schepler anziehen, horas nicht petten, etc. Es ist nicht so gross sindt.”

Much did Luther indeed learn from Gerson. These temptations of uncertainty and anxiety whereby he was assailed were calculated to give Gerson’s experience a mighty hold on Luther’s soul. Gerson had compared the mere life of the Christian to a tetragon. It was enough to inspire the disquieted mind of the monk with a sense of calm and trust. Moreover, Gerson says that only the orientation of our spirit is what counts. When it is towards Christ, nothing can move it. He makes use of this image. The Christian is as a hart hunted to death by a pack of fierce hounds. These are our doubts and temptations about salvation. The hart has to flee, but, as he feels the dogs near to him, he leans against a tree to defend himself. So it is with the Christian, he leans against the cross of Christ and defends himself. This is the very simile that Luther resorts to, and this is practically the whole of the Lutheran message, says our historian.

Central also in Luther is the doctrine of the “ concupiscentia invincibilis ”. He identifies it with the original sin which has destroyed our ability to do good. Here lies the whole kernel of his theory of the passive justice. This theory springs forth from a paradoxical experience of a contrast felt between an ethical ideal beyond our power and an all-powerful will of the certainty of salvation. The faithful has to acknowledge himself

justified even through the feeling of his inevitable sins. When the faithful can get the certainty of being at the same time sinner and justified he will have realised the mysterious ideal of Christian perfection.

“ Numquid ergo perfecte iustus? Non, sed simul peccator et iustus: peccator re vera, sed iustus ex reputatione et promissione Dei certa. . . . Ac per hoc sanus perfecte est in spe, in re autem peccator, sed initium habens iustitiae, ut amplius quaerat semper, semper iniustum se sciens. . . .” (Scholia on the Letter to the Rom., iv. 7).

Such an experience, affirms our writer, cuts off religion from ethics and soteriology from the Church. The radical incompatibility of this position with the traditional conception of the religious perfection, worked out in the partaking to a common faith, in the common bond of one visible discipline is evident.

This incompatibility was waiting for an opportunity to break forth. It was given by the preaching of the indulgences by Tetzel. Buonaiuti, even acknowledging that fiscal reasons break through the preaching of the indulgences with insistence and flippancy, affirms that in its pure essence the doctrine of the indulgences is nothing but the complete application of the principle which lies at the very roots of the corporate life. Before Tetzel started his propaganda, the monk's soul had already gone through its spiritual process, freeing religious life from any visible partaking of charisms and even any external discipline. Yet time and external circumstances were not enough to give Luther the opportunity of drawing out of his personal experience their logical consequences. But in the year 1517 Luther's hostility against this parade of an external discipline was thoroughly aroused. On October 13th, 1518, the faithful entering the Church adjoining to Wittenberg Castle could read the ninety-five theses that Martin Luther was ready to discuss in public.

Undoubtedly the Reformation proved a triumph of the free religious culture and of the German National spirituality. But the tremendous consequences of a movement inspired with such absolute freedom, were soon felt and are still acting strongly in Christendom. Without such a principle, without, namely, a control and external sanction, Melancthon affirms, no religious movement can be carried on in a right way. Even Luther was

confronted by the same problem. And it may be said that he realized its terms very well. But he was going on unsteady and faltering. He taught that good works are born of faith automatically when we are invested by Christ's merits; and truly, viewed in the plan of the Lutheran soteriology, these words did not mean any yielding to licentiousness or any such thing. But it was easy to draw out of this theory the conclusion that all works being good in themselves, when wrought by a Christian, the Christian works the good automatically and that no evil can be imputed to him. Such was the teaching of Giovanni Agricola. This teaching seems, however, theoretically consistent with Luther's doctrinal prepossessions. In fact, if to the believer the complete adhesion to Christ is everything, both ethic and religious life will carry on through two thoroughly different lines.

Moreover, philosophic speculation was greatly affected by Luther. He has undoubtedly opened up the way to the later philosophy for which object and subject are identical. It may be said that the whole of these last four centuries dialectics worked out the conception of the self-realizing Being, which is the postulate of absolute idealism, eliminating the very basis of every religious life, viz. transcendence. Modern thought had identified with history that divine which Luther thought to see in grace and predestination. To a superficial observer it may seem that whereas Luther in breaking down tradition opened up the way to human progress, the Church, which stiffened itself in its old schemes and shut itself up in dead formulas, has hindered the development of religious life. This might be partially true, but the Lutheran message had to reckon with more serious inconveniences. Catholicism, according to our historian, made up for its losses by bringing out of her bosom an overpowering mystic revival whose only fault lies in not having fully accepted and embodied that very same programme that proved so vital and efficient in the Middle Ages. To-day, the German Christians repudiate the Old Testament as being the religious witness to one race. They forget that to throw into isolation one race means a crime against civilization itself, since this is the bond of races. The Aryan Christians proclaiming the purity of the race are even contaminating the Lord's Prayer by adding to it a petition for the purifying of the German blood. In the light of this daring fact we wonder whether the Lutheran

Church is at death's door. Nevertheless, there is a counter party. It is a rebellion of those pastors who withstand the contamination of politics and Church. These proclaim the spiritual autonomy of the Church, without which the very essence of the Christian message grows meaningless. These pastors, however, are not Lutherans [any longer, Buonaiuti affirms and herein he realizes also Luther's purely national message.

## V

The consequences of the Reformation may be detected and studied better by following the controversy between Luther and Erasmus. The duel fought by those two prominent figures at the dawning of the modern age, reveals in germ the fight carried on by our modern culture which seems to be now brought to an end. The Reformation was at least as much a reaction against renaissance as a development of it. This Erasmus understood; and since he was devoted both to the extension of human learning and to the moral reformation of Christendom, his ambiguous attitude in the convulsion of his time is easily understood and, indeed, justified. He desired a Reformation but not the Reformation which actually occurred. Nowadays German Protestantism seems to be inspired by Erasmus rather than by Luther; and modern criticism, viewing the Reformation in the light of historical research about early Christianity, seems to acknowledge Erasmus' views. The hostility between Luther and Erasmus who, at the beginning, was rather in agreement with Luther, became harsher and harsher. The two champions at the dawn of the modern age could not understand each other. Erasmus, deeply learned in the early Christian literature, felt the whole charm of it. Erasmus' temperament was essentially pragmatistic in as much as he clung to the progressive development and betterment of men. He was even prone to sacrifice to his purpose some purely cultural elements. Erasmus was deeply conscious of the Gospel's pedagogic function, as running on lines of mutual love, through adhesion to Christ. He was, therefore, most hostile to any rebellion, for, according to his views, spiritual revolution led fatally to dissipation and the crumbling of ethics. He doesn't hesitate to show his willingness to sacrifice even some truth rather than to promote scandals and uproar.

“Solus esse volui, ne quam praeberem factionis speciem,” and again, “meo quidem iudicio, magis expedit rebus humanis aliqua ex parte deserere causam veritatis, quam omnia miscere tumultu. Sunt quidam corporum morbi, qui minore malo tolerantur, quam tolluntur. Ita sunt quidam errores, quos minore pernicie dissimiles quam convellas.”

Such a character was naturally driven to set itself against Luther. Two different tempers, the one easy to contradict himself; impulsive, violent; the other cold, circumspect, shrewd, naturally sympathetic and sarcastic. Erasmus is a Churchman, he knows and appreciates, indeed, the full value of tradition.

A few years after Christ's death, Paul himself instructing his Churches, speaks of traditions (*παράδοσεις*) which he received and faithfully transmitted. St. Vincent of Lerin stated in the first half of the fifth century that that is undoubtedly Catholic, which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all. In truth, Catholicity stands on two pillars, as it were, both necessary to its structure, the biblical revelation and tradition. By means of these the Christian life draws as from its source its nourishment. Tradition does not create anything. Its task, therefore, is only in elaborating and developing the potential elements of revelation. The deep pragmatistic instinct works out, and organises historical religion. Revelation, as embodied in the Gospel and in the Canon, enjoys large possibilities of application. The consciousness of believers will always be able to draw from it the suitable resources to meet the needs of the corporate life. By means of this elaboration guided by a permanent organ, religion avoids the risk of individualism. Christian religion has a revealed deposit to be transmitted from generation to generation, and to which every century brings its contribution in order to understand it more fully. Luther, on the contrary, claims the exclusive authority of the written word. According to him, every tradition has to be taken away or, at any rate, freed from its dangerous elements. “To my eagerness to proclaim Christ's word,” he says, “what do they answer? They show patristic comments; elaborated rites. I enquire deeply in the causes and trace them to their origin. They show me the long-lived working out of history. I appeal to facts, I ask them to say by what power they do such and such things. They answer: we did it and we do it. Therefore in the place of reason they put the will, in the place of genuine authority the right, in the

place of the right a constituted Church. I shout: 'Gospel, Gospel', and they answer, 'Tradition, Tradition'."

Driven to cope with Luther, Erasmus displayed his great cleverness in choosing the problem that lay hidden behind the Reformation itself, the problem of freewill. In his treatise, Erasmus aimed at setting down according to their traditional values the problems of grace and liberty.

The problem of the freewill is central to anthropology and ethics. Is man able to contribute to his own destiny or is he driven by a mysterious force? Are human actions responsible, or are they the spontaneous outcome of blind forces? Luther started with a paradoxical conception of the original sin. Sin has deeply corrupted human life so that it is no longer able to do any good. Mankind is automatically led to do evil. Salvation can only be given by Christ, whose grace, overpowering us, lifts us up to a spiritual atmosphere, where good is the spontaneous outcome of faith.

Erasmus becomes the true exponent of the Christian tradition of the problem of freewill. Christian tradition, indeed, gave us such a solution of the problem that can be called, a masterpiece. It saved liberty without which no ethical life can exist, and grace without which no religious life exists. Erasmus's treatise is marked by a deep sense of allegiance to tradition. He proclaims that it is not always useful to find out clear doctrines; what is necessary, is rather to bring forth useful doctrines. These we have to apprehend; to fathom the mysteries it is not ours 'religiosius adorantur incognita quam discutuntur impervestigabilia'.

The most elaborate reply of Luther in 1525 is "de servo arbitrio". He reveals in this treatise the very depths of his soul. His attitude to the solution of the problem is the very attitude wherefrom the whole of modern cultural life took its start, and its inspiration, in open contrast to the traditional Christian thought. To understand the "de servo arbitrio" we have to get back to Luther's religious experiences. In the monastery the monk, in his utter dismay, wondered whether he could ever reach salvation. In the light of his mystical experience, he slowly elaborated the doctrine of the invincible concupiscence, and of Christ's imputed merits. Because of original sin, man is destined to do evil, but yet he has got the mysterious possibility, even living in sin, to feel himself redeemed and saved through

Christ's imputed merits. If human actions, therefore, are of no value in the process of salvation, it is only natural that free-will is nothing but an illusion (*merum mendacium*). Thus the Lutheran doctrine, issuing into the problem of predestination, makes us beings at the mercy of a mysterious law of providence. Indeed, the divine foreseeing of providence has necessarily to involve efficacious actions. Luther, in disagreement with the traditional teaching, has in a certain sense taken away the barriers dividing the human from the divine, the finite from the infinite. He saw in life an unceasing theophany. Any ecclesiastic mediation has been taken away, the divine and the human slide into each other. We are nothing but the continuous realization of God's being; even sin may be said to be divine. From this standpoint, it is easy to realise the deep connection between the Lutheran theology and modern idealistic philosophy of Protestant Germany. Luther professed his faith in a transcendent God, but more or less consciously he lingered over immanentism.

To Luther, contingency is but our inability to grasp the inner and infallible reason of things. "Everything which happens, even if it seems contingent to us, is in reality necessary if we look from God's standpoint." For God's will is always necessary. The notion of contingency is born of our limitation in understanding. It is a pure illusion. Truly every action of ours is what is necessarily worked by God in us. Life and history are nothing but divine activity projecting itself in time. Only God is free, Luther concludes, because he only can do and undo, will and not will. Divine omnipotence cannot coexist with human liberty.

"Omnipotentiam vero Dei voco, non illam potentiam, qua multa non facit quae potest, sed actualem illam, qua potenter omnia facit in omnibus."

Luther's anthropology reveals itself here in all its dismaying pessimism. A clear dichotomy there exists between flesh and spirit. Everything which is carnal is fundamentally evil. Between God and Satan there is no medium. Using a graphic picture, Luther compares man to a beast of burden on which God or Satan rides. Erasmus, on the contrary, clever humanist and historian, feels the necessity to keep a balanced position in the problem. Historical Christianity, acutely remarks Erasmus, swings necessarily between two antithetic positions which are those of Pelagius and Augustine. Even in taking up Augustine,

the Church was compelled to put into his doctrine some Pelagianism. In fact, if the latter would destroy a genuine soteriology, the former, driven to its extreme conclusions, destroys the true value of human ethics. By over-emphasizing one of the two antithetic terms, we break down the equilibrium on which the organized Christian tradition stands. Luther broke it. If God, says Erasmus, works directly in us through the imputation of Christ's merits, the whole world's grace is bound up within the boundaries of each individual soul, and the ecclesiastical function is automatically suppressed. Erasmus refused energetically to take part in the awful revolution raised by Luther. "Always and at any time I avoid allying myself to Luther, always submitted to the Catholic discipline, I bow to its verdict." He trusts that the revolution would quickly subside and, borrowing from Tertullian the argument based on prescription, he vindicates for the Church the possession of its liberty.

## VI

The Lutheran propaganda could not do without the help of the princes, without whose backing, as Melanchthon wrote in 1529, Reformation would have undergone the same destiny as Plato's laws which are only written down and held up in his philosophic treatises. When this abnormal experience tried to embody itself in an ecclesiastical organization, which cannot exist without ethic discipline and a positive law, Reformation was driven to what was its strength, but at the same time its slavery. Its allegiance, namely, to the State. Luther, who realized within himself a tremendous dualism between the law and his own weakness, affirms our critic, should have logically denied all religious life. On the contrary, he tried to justify his freedom from the moral law, and he deceived himself in thinking that to be righteous as far as religion is concerned, it was not necessary to be righteous as far as morality is concerned, since *man* meant to him to be *sinner* by the very nature of his soul on account of original sin. To Luther, then, political values and religious ones tread on widely different paths. If by chance they come into conflict with each other, then the religious man has to give place to the political. In this way Luther, in the very name of moral and religious principles, withdrawing from religious control the political



sphere, invested the State with autonomy even in the sphere of morality. His conception, therefore, of political life involved a germ of state-idolatry.

According to Luther, the Church is not bound by external disciplinary links; it springs off from the free and invisible participation of the soul in the one message of salvation. Outside this experience, therefore, it is useless to look for any visible hierarchy. Luther thus by stripping the Church bare of its proper characteristics, transplanted automatically the supernatural into the sphere of those institutions which Christian tradition had subordinated to the Church. Thus Luther gave the State the right to set itself up as the unique source of human ethics, and to free itself from any possible control. Paul and the primitive Christians had framed into a kind of a mystical hierarchy the constitutive elements of human nature. Luther, on the contrary, setting the flesh against the spirit as realities unable to be harmonized into a visible and disciplined religious society, has automatically given the upper hand and the most absolute claims to politics. Whereas from Paul's attitude the universal Church was born, from Luther's doctrine the dissolving element came forth to crumble to pieces the Christian society and to concentrate the ethical values in the State's hands. This naturally is but the consequence which lay hidden in Luther's 1520 programme. "*Cuius regio illius est religio.*" Luther, by denying the claims of the visible Church, was fatally driven to attribute a sacred character to the State in contradiction with the traditional teaching. The conception of the absolute ethical State may have its origin in Luther. At any rate, Luther acknowledged the lawfulness of the lay power to interfere with the ecclesiastical administration. In this lies the whole drama of modern civilization. Zwingli himself regretted that Luther stopped half-way and that he allowed the princes to do what the Curia did and that he had lost the sense of proportion. He says to Luther: "Thou settest thyself against the Curia to lean against thy princes, thou hast betrayed the gospel." It started the beginning of a discord between the Germans and the Swiss Reformers.

To-day we are witnesses of the tremendous crisis of Luther's message. The Church of Germany to-day leans towards an absorption into the ethical State. Luther started a vigorous attack against the contaminations (and such they were) of the

Church, but on freeing the Church from an external magistracy he enslaved it. The Church being once freed from its visibility, would have been an easy prey of political greed and State's monopoly. Instead of freeing the Church from the world, Luther will give the world a better opportunity to enslave the Church. Neither will he prove successful in saving the Lutheran Church from being absorbed into the chasm he opened.

## VII

It can't be said that the Catholic society was able to understand the tremendous danger into which the Lutheran message was pushing the Catholic discipline and patrimony. The whole of the Roman organization did not react as quickly and as adequately as the danger would have required. When the breakdown of Christianity comes to its utmost consequences, Latin Catholicity will produce out of itself most outstanding figures of heroes. Orthodoxy will be prone to assume a more definite and rigid shape to get over any possible danger of further dissolution, but the resistance drawn up by such orthodoxy will not by any means be an overwhelming one.

Truly Christianity may be called a series of Reformations, since it was always in need of reformers from its very beginnings. St. Paul is the first reformer in the history of Christianity. He himself in the face of one-sided interpretations of the Christian message, trying to shape it into a legalistic conception, proclaimed the universality of the Gospel. He gave the Magna Charta to a Christian society by constituting a Church. Marcion in the second century, St. Augustine in the fourth, even scholasticism may be said to have attempted and proclaimed a Reformation. Yet all the efforts of reformation which emerged during the Middle Ages were apt to be absorbed more or less by the official authority of the Church. In such a way the spirit of reformation caused a new attitude, within the boundaries of the Christian society, and its efforts were not lost. But when official Christianity reached the highest pitch of its expansion and power, and Europe lay at the foot of the pontiff, a strange phenomenon took place. The attempts of reformation were such that the Church proved unable to absorb them. Rather she thrust them out. Attempts of reformation were realized by the "spirituali italiani", but they were stifled by the Church, which turned

them into pure monastic orders. The sixteenth century Reformation met with a worse destiny. It was not absorbed by the Church. She repudiated it with the dreadful result of a deeper breakage in the unity of Christendom. The Church was not able to absorb the spirit of the Reformation. In the face of the Reformation, the papacy took an unforgiving attitude in spite of eminent Churchmen, foremost amongst whom was Cardinal Contarini who tried to absorb that part of the Reformation which seems in agreement with the central traditions of the Catholic religion. The attempt was in vain. Contarini, very learned in theology and in patristic literature, belonged to that current of the "spirituali". These assumed towards the message of the Reformation a rather benevolent attitude.

It may be asked whether in the doctrine of justification as schemed by Luther there was nothing capable of being woven into tradition and able to satisfy at the same time the mystico-individualistic tendency the Lutheran message was so pregnant with. The "spirituali" thought that there was such a possibility. Should this have prevailed, this new doctrinal strain would, in all probability, have led the Church of Rome and the Counter-Reformation the other way round.

Contarini held a twofold justification, the inherent one, investing, purifying and transforming our nature and Christ's justification which is a pure gift given to us. A short scheme of this theory is to be found in the letter about justification edited by Hunermann.

*"Promissio Dei, cui firmiter credit ac propterea fidem concipit, est, ut inquit beatus Thomas in prima secundae, quod Deus remittat peccata et iustificet impium per mysterium Christi,—Ipse enim est factus auctor salutis omnibus credentibus in eum. . . . Nihilominus non redditur iustificatio et sanctificatio operibus, ut Paulus inquit, ut in locis innumeris dicit beatus Augustinus et Thomas in prima secundae expresse, sed debetur fidei, non quod mereamur iustificationem per fidem et quia credimus, sed quia accipimus eam per fidem. . . . Hi Protestantes appellant apprehensionem non ea significatione quae pertinet ad cognitionem intellectus, sed significatione. . . . qua scilicet illud dicimus apprehendere, quo pervenimus et quod post mortem nostram attingimus. Attingimus autem adduplicem iustitiam, alteram nobis inhaerentem, qua incipimus esse iusti et efficimur consortes divinae naturae et habemus charitatem diffusam in cordibus nostris, alteram vero non inhaerentem, sed nobis donatam cum Christo, iustitiam inquam Christi et omne eius meritum. Simul tempore utraque nobis donatur et utrumque attingimus per fidem."*

It was nothing but a simple effort at the dawning of the Counter-Reformation to meet the need of the Reformation,

and avoid the tremendous consequences of splitting up of Christianity, the diplomatist had foreseen. This doctrine, undoubtedly, was a hazardous effort to save the meritorious value of the works strictly bound up together with the inner experience of faith. It claims to be strictly Pauline. The Pauline clause, faith working through love, *πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη*, is over and over again called forth by Contarini.

Rome felt upon herself the necessity of withstanding the Reformation by defining her anthropological and soteriological doctrines; a great wall of defence against Luther's individualism. In the council of Trent the Jesuit conception of salvation got the upper hand. The decree about justification "de justificatione" is a pattern of concise theological statement. It lays down the wall of partition between the two Christian denominations. Since it was proclaimed, on January 13th, 1547, a gulf separates Catholicism and Protestantism in western civilization. A chasm lies between the two standpoints. Tradition's function was not still organically and definitely worked out into a scheme till the Counter-Reformation. It was just during this period that the Church of Rome had the opportunity to determine in its councils the meaning and the bearing of tradition in the religious Christian development.

Buonaiuti in his book on *The Church of Rome* traces the causes of this cleavage to its origin. According to him, the sources lie, not only in the rebellious monk, as Buonaiuti delights to call Luther, but also in the attitude the Church of Rome was assuming in the face of the ever-returning events. The official Church, stiffened already in its traditional ideas, and fearing an outburst of enthusiasm and spontaneity, chose to resort to Aristotle's metaphysics and to its tool, the Inquisition. It meant, however, more serious danger for the Church. As a matter of fact, he affirms elsewhere, it may be said that both Reformation and Counter-Reformation came out of the same scholastic philosophy, which rapidly developed different orientations, out of which the most antagonistic spiritual attitudes arose.

Buonaiuti refuses to call the movement brought forth in the sixteenth century a true Reformation. Francis of Assisi, Joachim of Flores and Peter Waldo, are to Buonaiuti the only three Reformers; the three figures whose aim was to bring Christianity to its real primitive spirit. They profess that the gospel of Christ has to be preached only through the army of

love. The Church, however, did not accept their reformation. It was only natural in a time in which the Church, represented by Innocent III, could not feel herself possessed with the spirit of St. Francis. But having broken her own programme by rejecting St. Francis' reformation, the Church had to undergo the German one. She, by smothering the genuine spirit of Francis and by turning his social message into a religious order, was unfortunately caught by such a storm that even to-day the whole of civilization is suffering from it.

A new era seems to dawn to-day; new forces and thoughts are hammering out the shape of things to come. The attitude of German Protestantism towards Rome nowadays differs widely from that of a century ago. An impetus of a fresh aspiration to reunion and peace seems to burst out from the chaos into which European civilization was thrown by the world wide war. Germany to-day in revoking Luther's figure has set aside its dithyrambic lyrism. She seems rather to be engaged in a deep self-examination and drawing a balance-sheet of its profit and losses during the four centuries of separation.

All denominations to-day crave for unity. Stockholm and Lausanne conferences would be real ecumenical ones if Roman representatives would partake in them. When in 1541 Melanchthon and Contarini strove to bring about a form of concordat to save Christendom from an awful breakdown, it was Luther who prevailed over Melanchthon that he should not yield. To-day it is Rome which does not want to yield. But it is not any compromise or made-up reconciliation that is required. When at the setting of the Roman Empire, the various religious faiths tried a reconciliation into a great syncretism, it meant death to them. For syncretism betrays an inborn weakness. The historical process of Christianity is undergoing a much deeper crisis than ever. The crisis is in the very spirit of Christianity, it lies at its very roots, and we may ask ourselves what will survive of this disruption of our Churches. Had we Christian faith, we would bring forth and work out that deepest Christian unity embodied in Augustine's words: "Let us acknowledge one another, brothers, in God and in Christ, for where the love of God abides there are Christians and there is the true only Church." It is the consciousness of being one in Christ which is required to-day above all.

## VIII

From what has been said, one thing emerges crystal clear. It is the new effort of the whole of Christendom in its best streams to realize a reunion which may fulfil Christ's hearty desire "ut unum sint". Buonaiuti's corporate idea is undoubtedly a great achievement in the new consciousness of Christendom, and has to be widely utilized. It is worthy, indeed, of being widely spread and disseminated. The Roman schismatic attitude and the one-sided, or too short-sighted Protestantism need very badly a common platform upon which they can meet and find a way of understanding in a real Pan-Christian or ecumenical experience. Deep and wide is in Buonaiuti the consciousness of this need. It is the keynote of all his books, and the splendid lyricism of his ideas is all stamped with the corporate note. His vast knowledge of the religious development in history, and of the working out of Christianity in the general plan of the religious activity in mankind, enables him to see and to understand the need of an ecumenical Christianity, which is not a mechanical approach of half-dead denominations living on the relics of their past tradition, but the outburst of a Christian spirit which we call revival. This is, indeed, one of those Christian, truly evangelic values of which Buonaiuti is a herald and an upholder.

His idea of salvation, however, to be realized only through a corporate life, is not in contradiction with the kernel of Luther's experience, according to my views. Buonaiuti's experience is rather a complement and a higher fulfilment of Luther's experience when we divest it of its unessential elements and weave it into the scheme of the genuine experience of St. Paul. In the light of religious history, and of Christianity especially, a full corporate life would undoubtedly put Christianity along the genial lines of Erasmus' experience and programme.

On the other hand, we cannot accept medievalism. In the light of a sound criticism this would be impossible. Medievalism has had its day, and it is useless to cry over times already gone by. The solution of the problem depends rather on what we understand to be the essence of Christianity. What is the essence of Christianity? In agreement with George Tyrrell, though he is the greatest of all modernists, I do believe

that the essence of Christianity is to be found in Catholicism, as well as in those evangelic bodies which get hold of Christ and make him the centre of their life. "In Catholicism we find (says George Tyrrell in his *Christianity at the Cross Roads*), amid many accretions, no doubt, but in a scarcely altered form, all the leading ideas of Jesus as determined by the steady progress of criticism towards impartial objectivity," and again, "Whatever Jesus was, He was in no sense a Liberal protestant . . . . All that makes Catholicism most repugnant to present modes of thought derived from Him. . . . *The difficulty is not Catholicism but Christ and Christianity.* So far as other Christian bodies are true to Christ, they are faced by the same problems as are modernists."

A further, if not less important, point at stake, in the present state of things, lies in the struggle between the claims of authority as held by the Roman Church and the claims of personality as held by extreme Protestantism. Here also we have to realize that "The rights of authority and the rights of personality; the development of the community and the development of the individual are not conflicting but complementary ideas" (Tyrrell). Christendom's chaotic state to-day is due in large measure to this conflict aroused by misunderstanding and by the one-sided developments worked out in our organized Churches. Protestantism has forgotten one side of the religious life, Roman Catholicism has forgotten the other.

We hope, however, that the broken principle of unity and authority may be one day restored. Although Protestantism is weakened by division, the forces of its personality are there ready to be organized and focused. Out of such rich material a new world can come. While the Roman Church, with its system of centralization that makes the Pope the sole and only responsible personality in the Church, has declared an uncompromising attitude towards Liberalism or progress, Protestantism is entirely free from such a bias, and thus avoids that utter decay of interest in the welfare of the body on the part of passive and irresponsible members, which the Church of Rome may indeed complain of. On this ground, Protestantism can indeed hope for a new reformation on the line of Erasmus. This is what Buonaiuti looks for.

Protestantism, however, is too young to be said to have fully found itself, but its vital spirit gives us great hope of a

vigorous and long career ahead of it. In its bosom there is nowadays brewing a new leaven of life, since its attitude is inspired by a deep consciousness of the fundamental unity of all the Christian bodies. In such a spirit, Protestantism can further the union of Christendom. Its aspiration, however, to reconstruct, as it were, the mystical body of Christ is already being put into operation. Many are the efforts made by our contemporary Protestantism. The Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, and on Faith and Order, speak more loudly than words. A great achievement of Protestantism, moreover, lies in drawing the Eastern Church towards the Pan-Christian Movement. The evangelical revival in the Eastern Church—even within the boundaries of her tradition and autonomy—is one of the greatest tasks that Protestantism is carrying on. Efforts have not been made in vain indeed.

Dr. Karl Barth, the world-famous theologian, on the problem of re-union, after having set forth the conditions necessary for the re-union of Christendom, says: "It is beyond controversy that only through the satisfaction of these conditions could a living Church be led to unite with other Churches. But the conditions are plainly such as to make the union of the Churches a task which is so lofty and arduous beyond measure, a task of super-human magnitude. If these things are so," he concludes, "*then we do not evade the question concerning the task of Church union, we answer it in the only possible way, if we revert to the principle that in Christ alone this task is fulfilled, that his voice and summons alone can bring this union into being.*" As far as I can see, the great theologian goes indeed to the heart and core of the vital problem; and the solution he brings forth is the only one and true solution that the problem can be given.

Undoubtedly, the world to-day is sick for unity. Humanity for the first time in history seeks for a general understanding and desires to organize itself, as such all over the world. Men look for the "Point fixe" of Pascal, the whole of historical development claims almost inevitably human unity, in spite of any human instinct which puts us into a "bellum omnium contra omnes". But this deep contrast springing forth from the depths of our nature cannot be overcome but through religion. Christianity is the only doctrine which can achieve the synthesis between being and becoming, movement and immobility. It is a religion of action alone able to set in check



the ever-returning forces of disruption and dissolution wrought by our lower instincts. Doctrinal statements and formulas are certainly but a small contribution to the real union of Christendom unless they are vitalized and almost absorbed into a focus of a high mystical element which alone enables us to get over the deeply and widely different doctrinal positions. A startling example is given in a work recently issued, *Revelation* (edited by John Baillie, London, Faber & Faber), in which men such as Barth and Bulgakoff, Father d'Arcy, Bishop Aulen, Eliot and Orton, prominent representatives of conspicuous Christian denominations, try to explain each from his own standpoint the basic concept of revelation. This shows that no agreement can be possibly reached on a purely theological ground. Only an extra-theological element, viz. a powerfully mystical one, can be able to amalgamate and unify the scattered members of Christendom. It is the conception of the mystical Christ, projecting Himself throughout history.

They say that we must return to the point of departure from which we have taken the wrong road. If the Middle Ages were essentially the era of spiritual and religious activity, says a Catholic writer, ought we not to feel more strongly the deeper affinities which draw us towards them, in spite of the modern epoch, if our chance of salvation lies in returning to spiritual and religious values and enter the "New Middle Ages"? But we don't see that there can be to-day any "New Middle Ages" outside the deeply-felt consciousness of Christ in the individual as well as in the community. The New Middle Ages cannot be other to us but Christ in the power of His compelling personality. This, and only this, can associate men and women, and create the new ecclesiology on broader and far sounder basis. The genius of synthesis possessed by the Middle Ages and their sense of unity can be only re-created through Christ who is the true and only centre. And since no other sound basis can be found for a sound ecclesiology, we have to revert to the Pauline experience, Christ centred, faith centred and experimental as we find it expressed in Ephesians ii. 14 and following. Indeed, in Christ alone, the walls of partition are broken down and we are reconciled to God in one body. In Him all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a Holy Temple in the Lord. This consciousness, which all Churches should promote with all their might, can be the only

solid ground of unity. Such consciousness deeply realized in the Churches would, consequently, lead to a deeper understanding to frame the corporate life of the faithful into those human traditions which are sometimes necessary scaffolding and channels for a sounder stability and quicker propagation of the Christian message.

Buonaiuti is the man whose soul is set on fire for the higher ideal of a united Christendom. His over-laying stress on the corporate idea perhaps makes him somewhat under-rate the absolute value of the individual. The Kingdom of God is certainly a social fact, but it is also an individual one. Though the individual is but a tiny part, as it were, in the whole process of the Kingdom—and just because of this, the gospel views the individual destiny as rooted in the general plan of salvation—yet it is an essential part in as much as the Kingdom cannot be conceived without it. And this means, in other words, that the individual personality enjoys an absolute value.

Yet it is true, the corporate life has been thrown into the shade by our Churches which forget that such a loss is fatal to Christendom and to civilization. Buonaiuti has a vivid consciousness of the unfortunate, actual position in Christendom to-day, and he, the thinker, and the brilliant writer, raises up his voice ringing with prophetic accents, to rescue this vital element of the Christian message from an awful wreckage which is ultimately the wreckage of our Christian civilization. He is an enthusiastic herald of two truths which are absolutely basic in Christian life and which bestow upon it a most firm outline; the antipagan attitude characteristic of any true Christian soul and the corporate life issuing in the marvellous creation of Paul's religious experience; the mystical body of Christ. This modern prophet who vindicates the values of the spirit and stands alone against proscription and persecution, is truly the triumphing voice of the spirit over brute matter.

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