

THE REFORMATION  
FROM A  
BAPTIST POINT OF VIEW

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In this historico-theological essay, first published 125 years ago, Albert Henry Newman addresses the problem of “hero-worship” towards the Reformation, demonstrating that the Magisterial Reformers—such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin—must be accorded their failures as well as their triumphs. Newman, a subtle church historian, who combined scientific history with Christian piety, was widely respected for his learning and scholarly even-handedness. Prestigious scholars like the Protestant Philip Schaff and the Mennonite Harold S. Bender lauded Newman for his research in general church history and Anabaptist studies. Newman was the founding church historian at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, serving with the new seminary from 1908 through 1913. For more on Newman, see Glenn Jonas, “Albert Henry Newman,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 37 (2002): 28–51.

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## THE REFORMATION FROM A BAPTIST POINT OF VIEW

The Reformation of the sixteenth century, like any other great historical movement, may be approached in three ways. We may go back into the remote past and trace minutely the course of events that has here and now found its culmination; we may show that the seed-sowing and the soil being as they were, the harvest is precisely what might have been expected. Or, we may take the movement as we find it, analyze it into its constituent elements, trace the motives and aims of leaders and led, trace the immediate and remote moral and spiritual effects, test everything by the eternal principles of right and truth, as determined by conscience and the written Word. Or, again, we may view the movement as a link in the chain of the accomplishment of the divine purposes, knowing that the Almighty is able to make evil forces to co-operate with good thereunto. This last process we ought always to apply, so essential is it to the proper understanding of the ways of God to men. But we must beware of supposing that this process in any way precludes the first or the second process suggested. The knowledge that divine Providence has overruled a particular course of events for the accomplishment of beneficent ends by no means bars criticism of the actors; no more does it affect the fact that this series of events is itself the product of antecedent evil commingled with antecedent good.

And here we must remember that the cause of God on earth progresses not in straight lines like a railroad train across yonder prairie, but like yonder tossing ship on yonder surging ocean. It makes progress from age to age, but, owing to the perversity of men, not clear and constant progress. Sometimes it seems to lose ground; but, after all, the apparent loss is transmuted by divine alchemy into means of future gain.

Further, it is not enough that the actors in any great movement be shown to have been sincere. We are to judge according to the eternal principles of right and truth, not according to the conceptions of right and truth that may have been in the minds of such actors. My abhorrence of Moloch worship is not diminished, but rather increased, by my belief that parents often threw their children into the red-hot arms of the image *conscientiously*. The Inquisition is rendered none the less sickening by the certainty that many of its agents felt that in acting the part of incarnate devils they were doing God service.

### Baptist Maturity in an Age of Hero-Worship

And here, also, let me warn the reader against a tendency which Baptists share with others, but which in Baptists is more stultifying than in others, towards a blind hero-worship of certain religious teachers of the sixteenth century. Why, it is no uncommon thing to hear Baptist orators descant upon the virtues of these leaders in language which, *nominibus mutatis*, might properly be applied to the apostles! And that, too, when these very men would not have hesitated to urge our extermination by fire, sword, or water, if we had been their contemporaries, as they did urge the extermination of our brethren in Christ, and some of whose moral teachings were more Mormon than Christian. Let us test the titles of popular religious heroes to our adoration. In

so far as they apprehended the Spirit of Christ and manifested this Spirit in their words and in their deeds, let us honor them. If, however, we find contemporaries who more perfectly apprehended Christ, and who more perfectly manifested his Spirit in word and in deed, let us not hesitate to make these our heroes, although they may not have drawn to the support of their cause the unregenerate mighty of this world, and although they may have been hunted down like wild beasts by the men who, on the theory that might makes right, are generally regarded as the great champions of the truth. *Christ* did not convert men by nations, neither did *Paul*. *Mohammed* and *Charlemagne* did. *Hubmaier* did not make Protestants by nations. *Luther* did. *Christ* made individual, earnest Christians. *Charlemagne* made hypocrites and cringing slaves to external forms. *Hubmaier* made, with divine help, *self-sacrificing Christians*. *Luther* made *self-indulgent Protestants!*

We need not apply at length this third method of considering our subject. All the world recognizes the fact that the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century forms a most important factor in the working out of our modern civilization and enlightenment, with its freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, with its spiritual religion as opposed to a religion of dead forms, with its apostolic missionary endeavor as opposed to medieval religious conquest. This we never weary of rejoicing in and thanking God for. Nay, I maintain that the fundamental principle of the Protestant revolution was the emancipation of the human mind from human authority, far as this was from being consciously recognized by the Protestant leaders. This is my unwavering conviction. Just so I believe that the capture of Christian Constantinople by the Turks was a factor that cannot be estimated too highly in the working out of the divine plan of Christian liberty and enlightenment. No thanks to the Turk. No thanks *a priori* to the leaders of the Protestant revolution. We are thus, I trust, in a position to put a fair estimate upon each individual, in accordance with historical facts, and we shall not be tempted to reverence an individual for the sole reason that he sustained an important relation to a movement which has, on the whole, resulted in good.

To understand the Reformation we must know wherein the need for reform lay. To appreciate this need we must have in mind, in broad outline at least, the course of events that led to the ecclesiastical rottenness of the sixteenth century, and that made the Protestant revolution possible.

### Early Christianity

From the close of the apostolic age onwards Christianity, the universal and absolute religion, soon conscious of its destined universality and absoluteness, shrank not from the stupendous task of realizing this universality and vindicating this absoluteness. Though it sprang up in the midst of Judaism, Christianity was not Judaism, still less did it have in common with paganism. Paganism and Judaism alike must be transformed, must be Christianized. Erelong it is perfectly evident that Christianity is absorbing paganism and Judaism far more rapidly than it can possibly assimilate them. The stomach of Christianity, sensitive at first, vomited forth these nauseating elements in the shape of Ebionism and Gnosticism. But this power of throwing off noxious elements became gradually less and less, until finally Judaism and paganism became part and parcel of the current Christianity. Persecution, while on the one hand it retarded this process, tended, on the other hand, to foster among Christians an overweening desire for such an amount of external power and prosperity as should render persecution impossible, and should give free scope to the world-subduing religion of Christ. The mighty fabric of the Roman Empire may ear-

ly have suggested to Christian thinkers the idea of a great world-wide ecclesiastical organization, as pure and beneficent as the empire was tyrannical and corrupt. When Constantine decided that his interest lay in the adoption of Christianity as the religion of the state, it was not the pure, simple, spiritual Christianity that Christ had established and that Paul had preached, whose representatives so promptly assumed the attitude of courtiers, and showed themselves at once such adepts in court intrigue. It was Christianity corrupted by two centuries of contact and conflict with heathenism and Judaism. No abrupt turn was made in the church's stream of tendency by this imperial recognition.

Catholicity, at the expense of holiness, had been for a century the leading feature of ecclesiastical policy. Now, almost the entire pagan populace was dumped into the church, and the small amount of holiness that remained was driven, from sheer dread of losing itself in this seething mass of rottenness to withdraw itself to the deserts, and there to devote itself to fruitless strivings after a state of impeccability. The earnest elements of Christianity having thus become *Buddhist*, the guidance of active Christian effort was left largely to worldlyminded, half-pagan bishops. The Roman hierarchy, with its claims of absolute spiritual and absolute civil authority, was a logical result of the sacerdotalism that was already growing apace in the Nicene age; that diabolical theory, in accordance with which a certain class of men, by virtue of ordination, has the spiritual power that Christ has given to his church, and that, too, apart from all consideration of personal character. The church is holy, priests are representatives and the only representatives of the church; therefore priests, as priests, are holy, and have power to mediate between God and man. Personally, the priest may be a libertine or an unbeliever. His priestly power is not thereby affected.

Moreover the theory, in accordance with which the end justifies the means, was early developed in the interest of the aggressive hierarchy. The well-being of the church, now identified with external power, came to be regarded as, of necessity, the thing of supreme importance to God and man. All laws, human and divine, may and must be set aside, therefore, if the interests of the church require it, and the hierarchy is to decide as to what the interests of the church require. This principle already acted on for centuries was formulated by Peter Damiani about 1050, and employed with great success by Hildebrand and succeeding popes.

Armed with these principles, with these claims, with the superstitious reverence always accorded to priestcraft by ignorance, the hierarchy was free to use all possible means for its own aggrandizement, and was enabled, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, to well-nigh realize its audacious claims.

The Christian germ was almost lost in this baleful accumulation of human and satanic machinery; but it was not wholly lost, neither, indeed, could it be in accordance with Christ's promises. It was perfectly sure, sooner or later, to come forward with new vigor, to cast off this accumulation of corruption, and to go onward in its Christ-appointed mission of spiritually subduing the world.

### **Medieval Reformation Principles**

The reformation of the church was not inaugurated by Luther, nor by the representatives of the New Learning, nor yet by Wyclif or Hus. It began much earlier. We see the so-called heretical (properly *Biblical*) parties protesting with terrible earnestness against the corrupt hierarchy just when this hierarchy is attaining to the summit of its power, rigid insistence on uniformity of belief and worship bringing out and greatly increasing the latent Christian life. The

very means that the hierarchy successfully employed for its aggrandizement—crusades, inquisition, political intrigue, scholastic theology, indulgences, etc., co-operated in their after effects for its overthrow. A system so utterly anti-Christian could maintain itself only by the complete dethronement of conscience in its subjects. So long as human nature retains any of this God-implemented faculty of discerning between right and wrong, no such system can long survive its complete establishment.

These Biblical opponents of the hierarchy exterminated, in great measure, by fagot and sword, the hierarchy made still more arrogant and unscrupulous by its cruel triumph, the papacy captured by the king of France and made subservient to French interests, the papal schism having resulted from efforts to free the papacy from French thralldom, the national spirit having already, from various causes, been developed, it would have been strange if *Christian patriots* had not arisen in the various states of Europe to cry out against the extortions and oppressions to which their fatherlands were subjected by a foreign and unfriendly hierarchy, and it would have been still stranger if such patriotic churchmen had not met with a hearty response from all classes of society. Such movements were the Wycliffite in England and the Hussite in Bohemia. In these movements the following elements entered: (1) *Patriotic*—Directed chiefly against the fleecing of the people by foreign priests, who performed no service in return for their extorted revenues. (2) *Realistic*—The leaders of these movements were realists; they believed in the reality of the one universal church, corresponding to an exalted ideal. The church of their day had apostatized, financial corruption lay at the root of the degeneracy of the age, the corrupt hierarchy represented in their view Antichrist. They sought to purge the church of corruption while maintaining a hierarchy. A reform based upon realism could not be radical, could be only transient. Unless the roots of hierarchy are destroyed, it avails little to lop off here an excrescence and there an excrescence. (3) *Biblical*—The Biblical element being partially apprehended, but shorn of its power by the realism just mentioned.

These movements offered, for a time, stout resistance to ecclesiastical tyranny. But they were destined to be swept away in the tide of corruption which they made no adequate effort to stay.

Then came the *Mystics*, men of profoundly speculative minds, led by despair of reforming and spiritualizing the church, and through the study of the Neo-platonic writings to an exaggeration of the importance and capacity of the inner life—to a pantheistic identification of man with God. Here the vital idea, taken apart from its pantheistic setting, is the need of a personal appropriation of Christ. Outward forms are of no account. We must become united with God. God being in us and we in God. By contemplating God we become one with God. By contemplating Christ we become one with Christ. The pantheistic element was so transcendental as to affect comparatively few. The tendency toward striving after individual and conscious union with Christ had a much wider influence. But mysticism was indifferent to external order, and could not of itself bring about a radical reform.

Next came the *Revival of Learning*, with its contempt for scholasticism, its temporary return to Platonic paganism, its restoration of the study of the Scriptures in their original languages, its contempt for human authority, and its consequent promotion of freedom of thought.

Here, then, we have five grand elements of opposition to the corrupt hierarchy: The Biblical, the Realistic, the Patriotic, the Mystical, the Humanistic. From the Realistic not much could be expected. Its antagonism to the Biblical would be likely to more than counterbalance its power for good; the Patriotic was likely to be contaminated by avarice, and to introduce a vast amount of corruption into any religious movement with which it might be connected. The posi-

tion of Humanism in a religious reformation could only be an ancillary one, yet its aid was absolutely indispensable. Singly, each of these elements had entered the arena, and each had failed of immediate success. The time was coming when all of these elements of opposition were to combine, and the fabric of the hierarchy might well have trembled in the face of such a combination.

### **A Reformation Taxonomy**

We might form a useful and interesting classification of the various reforming parties of the sixteenth century, on the basis of the degree in which these elements entered into each. We should say, e.g., that the Erasmian movement was preponderatingly Humanistic. The Biblical element was, theoretically at least, taken account of by Erasmus, but with so little earnestness as to be of trifling moment—there was no mysticism, no patriotism, little financial interest. The Lutheran Reformation represents a combination of all five of the reformation forces, with a marvelous capacity to shift ground from one to another, according to the exigencies of the time. Few religious leaders ever expressed greater devotion to the Scriptures than Luther, and in controversy with the Romanists he made the Scriptures the only rule of faith and practice. Yet we shall see that even Scriptures must adapt themselves to his theories or suffer the penalty of de-canonization, and church authority was of some account when rites retained by him were shown to lack clear Scriptural authorization. So, also, Luther was, from the first, impelled largely by patriotic motives. Nothing contributed more to his success than the contagion of his patriotism. “There never has been a German,” writes the Catholic historian Dollinger, “who so intuitively understood his fellow-countrymen, and who, in return, has been so thoroughly understood; nay, whose spirit, I should say, has been so completely imbibed by his nation, as this Augustinian friar of Wittenberg. The mind and the spirit of the Germans were under his control like the lyre in the hands of a musician.” Like Wyclif and Hus he believed, at the outset, in a universal organic church, with a single head, and desired only to restore the existing church to a state of purity. Again, Luther was greatly indebted to medieval mysticism. His personal absorption in religious matters, as well as some features of his theology, are due to this influence. Again, Luther owed much to Humanism, and was himself essentially a Humanist. His contempt for Aristotle and the Schoolmen, his devotion to the study of the Scriptures in the original languages, his love of freedom (for himself), resulted directly from Humanistic influence. Luther’s enormous power and success were due largely to the fact that he combined in his own person all the reformatory elements that had come down to him from the past.

In Zwingli and Oecolampadius, leaders of the Swiss Reformation, the Patriotic, the Humanistic, and the Biblical elements prevailed, the second in a stronger form, and the third less intensely than with Luther. We see in them almost none of Luther’s churchly Realism and almost no Mysticism.

In Calvin the Patriotic spirit has become cosmopolitan zeal for the spread of the Gospel. He could say, “to the French first,” but he was sure to add, “and also to all the world”—at least “to all Europe.” He was Humanistic to the extent of fully appreciating the importance of classical and philological learning; but Humanistic indifference and Humanistic liberalism found no place in Calvin. He was Biblical, intensely Biblical, as he understood the Bible; yet he interpreted the Bible by Augustine, rather than tested Augustine by the Bible. The Bible as he understood it—that is, the Augustinian system of doctrine as elaborated by himself—was to Calvin no loosely fitting garment, which he could assume or doff as expediency might dictate, but rather bone of

his bones and flesh of his flesh. He would have died for these views, just as he did live and labor for them.

The Socinians represent Humanism with its Erasmian external respect for authority laid aside. They had all of Luther's contempt for extra-Lutheran authority; and, in addition to this, a contempt for Luther's own. They had no remnant of Realism, no Mysticism. They respected Biblical authority, but insisted on interpreting the Scriptures in accordance with the requirements of reason. Their apprehension of the Scriptures was not profound, and their religious zeal rarely led them to court persecution.

With the Anabaptists the Biblical principle, apprehended on its positive and on its negative side, held the first place. This was combined with Mysticism (in some cases a purely Biblical Mysticism, in other cases a Neo-platonic, semi-pantheistic Mysticism), and, in some cases, with pre-millenarianism; the false Mysticism, when it preponderated, leading to the rejection of fundamental doctrines—denial of the importance of the written Word in comparison with the divine *Logos* always present to enlighten the believer, indifference to external ordinances, modification of the commonly received views of the person and work of Christ, etc.; the pre-millenarianism sometimes leading to fanaticism, and to an utter wrecking of Christian life. Pre-millenarianism, in connection with a desperate and frenzied socialistic movement, is responsible for the Munster kingdom, with its horrors.

### Three Medieval Errors

Such were the instruments. Now, just what was to be accomplished? Ecclesiastical theory and practice were to be thoroughly purified. What were the fundamental errors of the medieval system that needed to be eradicated? I conceive that there were three. First and foremost. *Sacerdotalism*. Given Sacerdotalism, and what follows? If priests as representatives of the holy Catholic church, are, without reference to personal character, mediators between God and man, have power to bind and to loose on conditions imposed by themselves, men are no longer responsible to God for their lives, but to men. Holiness before God is of infinitely less importance than scrupulous obedience to the regulations of the priests. Religion thus comes to be a mere matter of outward form. From Sacerdotalism flowed as naturally as a stream from its source superstitious adoration of images, shrines, etc., all forms of ritualism, the practical repudiation of Scripture authority, the domination of church over state, the obliteration of moral law as founded on the nature of God.

The second great evil of the medieval system was the *union of church and state*, the idea that the church and state are coincident. *Caesaro-papacy* is almost as objectionable as papacy. We shall have occasion later to see the disastrous consequences of such union, especially for the church.

Thirdly, the practical *annulling of Scripture authority*, which, as has been said, resulted from Sacerdotalism.

For anything like a complete reformation of Christianity at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the abolition of the union of church and state, the destruction of Sacerdotalism, and the reinstatement of the Scriptures in their place of paramount authority, would have been absolutely necessary.



## The Reformation Response

Let us take Lutheranism as the most influential element in the Protestant revolution, and as fairly representative of the entire politico-ecclesiastical movement, and test it by the categories that have been laid down. Did Lutheranism employ to the best advantage the pure elements of opposition to the hierarchy that had come down from the past, rejecting the vitiating elements? Did Lutheranism secure the ends whose accomplishment was indispensable to a pure reformation—the reinstatement of the Scriptures as the guide of faith and practice, the abolition of Sacramentalism, the abolition of the unhallowed union of church and state? We shall see.

I said that in Lutheranism the five elements of opposition to the hierarchy were combined. Yet these elements could not possibly be combined harmoniously. The pure elements could not fail to be vitiated by combination with the impure. The final result could not be pure. If a given movement be purely Biblical, it may be at the same time Mystical, for there is a Biblical Mysticism; it may be at the same time Biblical, Mystical, and Humanistic, in a measure; but Biblical, Mystical, Humanistic, Realistic, Political, it could not possibly be without inner inconsistencies and incoherencies. Hence we find the character, the actions, and the writings of Luther—his writings furnish an almost perfect index to his character, all sorts of inconsistencies.

### Biblical?

Luther could be Biblical when it suited his purpose. When he would refute the claims of the hierarchy no man could urge the supreme authority of the Scriptures more vigorously than he. But does he always so urge it? Let us see. When James is quoted against his favorite doctrine of justification by faith alone—with marvelous audacity worthy even of his legitimate successors, of the modern Tübingen school, he turns upon the luckless epistle and denounces it as a “right strawy epistle.” So, also, he contrasted the Gospel according to John, with the other Gospels, greatly to the disadvantage of the latter. So, also, the Book of Revelation was not of such a character as divine inspiration would have given. Other books of Scripture fared no better. Again, when he came into controversy with rigid adherents to the Biblical principle, he no longer held that that only is allowable in ecclesiastical practice which is sanctioned by Scripture, but that it is sufficient if prevalent practices are not *distinctly forbidden* by Scripture.<sup>1</sup> His Roman Catholic opponents were not slow to see Luther’s inconsistencies, and they made vigorous use of them in their polemics.

Again, Luther apprehended the great Biblical doctrine of the universal priesthood of Christians, and the consequent right of every Christian to interpret the Scriptures according to his own judgment, enlightened by the Spirit. Yet practically he made his own interpretation the only admissible one, and did not hesitate to revile and persecute those that arrived at results different from his own.

Again, Luther apprehended that most important Biblical doctrine, justification by faith. He saw in the failure to recognize this doctrine, the ground of all papal corruptions. Instead of tempering this doctrine by the complementary teachings of the Scriptures he really made it the supreme criterion of truth. Whatever Scripture could not be made to teach justification by faith alone was for Luther no Scripture at all.

So, also, while professing to give the first place to Scripture, he practically put Augustine in the first place, interpreting Scripture by Augustinian dogma, rather than Augustinian dogma

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<sup>1</sup>See *Baptist Quarterly Review*, Vol. V, pages 417, sq.

by Scripture. It is evident, therefore, that Luther did not hold to the Biblical principle purely and consistently.

### **Mystical?**

How fared it with the Mystical? There is no doubt that the writings of the German Mystics had an important place in Luther's own individual development. I shall not call in question the fact that he remained persistently a man of profound spiritual life, that his personal religion was and remained of an inward character. But I am still more fully convinced of the fact that the Mystical element was almost entirely lost to his followers. The general effect of his preaching, so far as I can judge from his own statements and those of his most intimate friends, compared with those of his opponents, was not in the direction of personal religious experience, but rather of a dead faith and a blind assurance. The preaching and writings of Luther were destructive, not constructive. He could, by his denunciations, undermine papal authority, and bring the doctrine of salvation by works into utmost contempt; but if I mistake not, he failed signally to develop an apostolical in the place of a monkish piety in his followers. I think, then, we may say that the Mystical element among the reformatory forces was not made the most of by Luther and his followers—certainly little of it appeared among his followers. It was almost supplanted by the doctrine of justification by faith alone, generally apprehended in a semi-antinomian way.

### **Humanistic?**

How far was the Humanistic element utilized? Certainly Lutheranism would not have appeared when it did, nor as it did, without Humanism. Certainly Humanism had an important place in the personal development of Luther, and especially of Melancthon, Zwingli, and Calvin. It was Humanism that led Luther from 1512 onwards to combat with so much zeal Aristotle and the scholastic theology. It was Humanism that led him to study the Scriptures in their original languages. It was Humanism that furnished him with many of his ablest supporters. But this is an altogether different thing from saying that Humanism here found its full utilization. Humanism was liberal and tolerant. Humanists thought for themselves, and were willing, for the most part, to accord to others the same privilege. True, this toleration sprang largely from religious indifferentism; but whatever its source, it was a thing sadly needed in that generation. The Reformers were, for the most part, intolerant. They believed that the truth should have free course; but then each one was perfectly confident that he had apprehended the entire scope of the knowable, and was far from recognizing the right of others to think and to teach *perversely*—that is, contrary to his own views.

Again, Humanists were averse to dogmatizing. Lutherans had no sooner thoroughly overthrown Scholasticism than they introduced an era of Protestant Scholasticism, with the same deadening and de-spiritualizing effect as had marked that of the Middle Ages.

Humanists believed in bringing about reformation through the sheer force of the truth. They did not object to reforms introduced by state authority, but neither did they urge such religious revolutions. The new learning, thought Erasmus, will clear away all superstition and darkness. This done, abuses will vanish in the face of enlightened public opinion. The Reformers had far more faith in external compulsion, and far less in the inherent power of the truth. Thus we see that neither the Biblical nor the Mystical, nor yet the Humanistic element, was fully apprehended and made to yield all the fruit that was in it, by Luther and his followers.

### The Accretions of Romanism in the Reformation

The fourth element, the Realistic-hierarchical, is to be conceived of rather as a negative than as a positive force, rather as Ephestos' fetters than as Hermes' wings to a thorough reformation of the church. Under this head I mean to include all the anti-Scriptural and Romanizing elements that clogged the Protestant Revolution. In as far as this prevailed, the Biblical, Mystical, and Humanistic, were sure to suffer. I think I can show that more of the accretions of Romanism remained amongst the Reformers than most readers suspect.

1. The most vicious point in Luther's system was the maintenance of the union of church and state. As the uniting of church and state had done more than everything else together to corrupt the church; as this union always furnished the most unyielding obstacle to reform; so its retention by Luther made it absolutely impossible that any thorough reformation of the church should find place. The impossibility of a purely religious reformation of a State church lies in the following considerations:

First, the political relations of states are such that they rarely move without reference to temporal interests. Religion may furnish the ostensible motive, but when we are admitted into the confidence of the negotiators in politico-religious movements we shall almost always see that the matter of lands and dollars furnishes the decisive moment.

Secondly, admitting, as a possibility, the purely *religious* motives of the authorities in any politico-religious movement, the consciences of the people and their religious ideas are not the consciences and ideas of the authorities. The people, as a body, were at that time very likely to conform outwardly to the ecclesiastical arrangements of their rulers; yet who would be credulous enough to think that the entire spiritual status of a whole nation could be changed in a day or in a year? The Spirit of God does not work in this way.

Thirdly, the very process of transferring people suddenly from one communion to another, without any exercise of volition on their part, tends to foster in their minds the notion that religion is a mere matter of outward form. We might almost say that the heathen themselves are more accessible to purely religious influences than those brought up to believe that they are Christians by virtue of their membership in a State church, apart from any choice of their own. A sense of carnal security is thus engendered antagonistic to any earnest efforts for salvation.

The leaders of the Protestant Revolution made Protestants by states as far as possible. Temporal advantages furnished the chief motive to most of the rulers. A thoroughly corrupt Christianity could not fail to be the result.

I believe that all the possible ill effects of a politico-religious reformation were realized in the Protestant Revolution of the sixteenth century.

2. Infant baptism has always gone hand in hand with state churches. It is difficult to conceive how an ecclesiastical establishment could be maintained without infant baptism or its equivalent. We should think, if the facts did not show us so plainly the contrary, that the doctrine of justification by faith alone would displace infant baptism. But no. The *establishment* must be maintained. The rejection of infant baptism implies insistence on a baptism of believers. Only the baptized are properly members of the church. Even adults would not all receive baptism on professed faith unless they were actually compelled to do so. Infant baptism must, therefore, be retained as the *necessary concomitant of a state church*. But what becomes of the justification by faith? Baptism, if it symbolizes anything, symbolizes regeneration. It would be ridiculous to make the symbol to forerun the fact by a series of years. Luther saw the difficulty; but he was sufficient for the emergency. "Yes," said he, "justification *is* by faith alone. No outward rite, apart from faith, has any efficacy." Why, it was against *opera operata* that he was laying out all

his strength. Yet baptism is the symbol of regeneration, and baptism must be administered to infants, or else the State church falls. With an audacity truly sublime the great reformer declares that infants are regenerated in connection with baptism, and that they are *simultaneously justified by personal faith*. An infant eight days old believe? “Prove the contrary if you can!” triumphantly ejaculates Luther, and his point is gained. If this kind of personal faith is said to justify infants, is it wonderful that those of more mature years learned to take a somewhat superficial view of the faith that justifies?

3. In the very idea of a religious establishment is implied the maintenance of the establishment. The toleration of dissent is antagonistic to the integrity—nay, to the very existence—of an establishment. The idea that two forms of Christianity could, with any good results, exist side by side in a given state, seemed almost as preposterous to Luther as it did to Philip II or to Catherine de Medici. Though schismatic themselves, the Reformers had a horror of schism almost as decided as that of the Romanists. The tendency of Protestantism to individualism and endless sectarianism was a reproach which Romanists delighted to heap upon Protestants; and the Reformers did not know enough to admit the fact, and to justify it. The necessity for uniformity of religion felt by civil and religious leaders alike, and the necessity of giving the lie to Roman Catholic reproaches, led the Protestant civil rulers, with the hearty co-operation of the Protestant religious leaders, to persecute to the death those that dared dissent from the established religion.

I maintain that it was the most natural thing in the world, circumstances being as they were, that a Reformation should be attempted and carried out, just as it was attempted and carried out. A political revolution seems to have been inevitable. Religious affairs were already so intermingled with political affairs that we can hardly conceive of a great political revolution which should not involve the overthrow of the hierarchy. It was the most natural thing in the world that the movement should have begun from the religious side. Considering that the hierarchy was sure to make use of civil and ecclesiastical power combined for the suppression of any movement that threatened the overthrow of the hierarchy, it was perfectly natural that the religious and the political reformers should have clung close together, or that the two elements should have been combined in the same individuals. Again, it was natural that the politico-religious reformers should have striven to retain full control of the movement, to keep the ranks solid. It was natural that the political elements during the times of outward danger should have greatly preponderated over the religious.

But in a religious movement deserters from the ranks on the one side or the other should be hunted down and slain. All this was natural, was to be expected. But in a religious movement we demand not what is *natural*, but what is *Christian*; not the methods of the practical politician, but the methods appointed by Christ. We demand that the men to whom we pay homage as apostles of Christ be swayed not by worldly motives, but by purely Christian motives. We demand faith, not in the arm of flesh, but in the Lord, such faith as does the right regardless of consequences, assured that God will take care of the consequences.

Let us then sum up concisely the achievements of Luther: (1) He overthrew the papal authority in Germany. (2) He secured the recognition of the doctrine of justification by faith, and thereby overthrew a vast amount of medieval superstition, to a great extent sacerdotalism, on which the whole medieval system rested. (3) He greatly promoted individualism, freedom of thought on the part of individuals, although this was not his desire, and he fought against it with might and main.

These things he accomplished in part voluntarily, in part involuntarily. Thus, I trust, we have seen alike the defects and the merits of the movement.

### Faithful Witnesses in the Reformation

But the *truth* was not without its witnesses in that generation. Hosts of men were to be found among those that came under the influence of the leaders of the Revolution, who laid hold with eagerness upon the Biblical aspect of the movement, and who had faith enough to adhere firmly even unto death to the teachings of the Bible. They believed that the New Testament sets forth a church of the regenerate. They read Christ's words, "My kingdom is not of this world," and they had faith enough to take Christ at his word. These men were the choicest fruit of the Protestant Revolution, men of learning and profundity of thought, men of conscience, consistent men, men who could abide no dallying with the truth. Luther and Zwingli had professed to make the Bible the supreme and all-sufficient guide. These men demanded something more than outward profession. They recognized the principle as true, and they demanded that it be unconditionally adhered to. If the Bible is the standard, they argued, why retain papal forms which have no sanction in the Bible; why allow the unregenerate and evidently irreligious to partake of the ordinances of the church side by side with the truly regenerate? Why baptize infants, seeing that there is no Scriptural authority for it, and that it is utterly antagonistic to pure church membership?

At Zurich these consistent reformers early became dissatisfied with the temporizing course that Zwingli was pursuing. They urged upon him the necessity of abolishing every vestige of popery. They urged upon him the unsuitableness, the unscripturalness of carrying on a religious movement in subservience to the civil magistracy. Zwingli justified his course in retaining the unregenerate in the church by a perversion of Christ's saying, "He that is not against us is for us," and of the parable, wherein it is commanded to let the tares grow with the wheat, till the harvest. He answered in a similar way their objections to his subservience to the civil magistrates. He admitted that adult baptism was preferable to infant baptism, and that baptism was commonly bestowed in the early church only after candidates had been instructed in the Word, and were able to give an account of their faith. But Zwingli's faith was weak. He could not consent to forego the patronage of the mighty. When the earnest Christian men of Zurich withdrew themselves from the established church, and instituted worship of their own, making re-baptism a condition of entrance, Zwingli saw at once that in this separation was involved the rejection of infant baptism, and he set himself to defend infant baptism, and to malign and persecute the men of God who dared to be loyal in the face of danger and death.

"The truth is immortal," wrote Dr. Balthazar Hubmaier, the great Baptist leader of the sixteenth century, on the title-pages of all his books.<sup>2</sup> He thought he possessed, and he did possess, the truth. He preached the truth, he lived the truth, he died heroically at the stake for the truth. The principles that he taught were too exalted for his age. He was hunted down by Protestant and burned by Roman Catholic Scribes and Pharisees. But these principles, the supreme lordship of Christ, the supreme authority of Scripture, the necessity of regenerate church membership, the independence of the local church, absolute freedom of conscience and freedom in manifesting religious thought and feeling in religious life and in church organization, have, in their marvelous extension and general recognition justified abundantly the faith of this man of God.

It is never really expedient to sacrifice the truth. Let us teach the truth, let us live the truth, let us suffer for the truth, if need be; and our reward will not be wanting when we come to

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<sup>2</sup>I have used the language of this paragraph in an article entitled, "Baptist churches Apostolical," printed in Jenkins' "Baptist Doctrines."

stand before him who is the Author of truth, nay, who is the truth himself. Verily, the truth is immortal!

### **Hubmaier or Luther?**

Hubmaier or Luther—which? The man that, at the very beginning of his career, could write the ablest plea of the age for liberty of conscience, who showed forth an apostolic faith and suffered an apostolic martyrdom, or the man who put himself at the head of a politico-religious movement, who drove to despair and to death such as refused to yield to his *ipse dixit*, whose controversial language was more becoming to a fish-woman, than to a theologian, who did not blush to hold out the most unworthy inducements to those whose alliance he would gain, whose arrogance was equaled only by his exceeding bitterness of spirit?