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THE POSITIVE MESSAGE OF THE REFORMATION.[1]

By CANON W. H. RIGG, D.D., Vicar of Beverley Minster.

LAST year those in authority asked us to join with our brethren belonging to other groups in our Church in celebrating the Centenary of the Oxford Movement. Some of us responded to that invitation. Although we did not attend the Choral Eucharist in York Minster, yet we were present at the service immediately afterwards, when the sermon was preached by our own Archbishop, and also at the afternoon meeting. The York Evangelical Diocesan Association took for their subject in 1933 different types of Christian piety, and many of us listened with very great interest to one of the resident Canons of York Minster as he expounded to us, from an inside knowledge, the Tractarian type of piety. Without, we trust, compromising our position, we showed a Catholicity of spirit, which we hope will bear fruit in days to come.

1934 is also an important year, quite as important as was 1933, if not more so, in the history of the Anglican Church. Four hundred years ago the Act of Supremacy completed our separation from Rome, and, with the exception of a short interlude under Queen Mary, our Church took her place alongside the Reformed Churches of Christendom.

Furthermore, our Church is, by implication, a Protestant Reformed Church. By the Act of Settlement the Sovereign of this country must be a Protestant, and he must be in communion with the Church of England as by law established. It is interesting to notice that in 1608 " Papists, Protestants, Puritans, Brownists " are mentioned together, and the word Protestant is used strictly of those belonging to the Church of England in opposition to Puritans as well as Romanists. Archbishop Laud did not disdain to use the word at his trial.

" Nay, my lords, I am as innocent in this business of religion, as free from all practice, or so much as thought of practice, for any alteration to Popery, or any way blemishing the true Protestant religion established in the Church of England, as I was when my mother first bare me into the world." [2]

The late Bishop Stubbs, one of the greatest historians our Church has ever produced, repudiates in one of his visitation charges the idea of the name of Protestant as being a mere name of negation, as well as the notion that the maintenance of Protestant negation is the whole or the most important part of our religious work and history. He continues, " I should unhesitatingly reject

[1] A paper read at the Annual Conference of the York Evangelical Diocesan Association, held in St. William's College, York, on January 22, 1934.

[2] *William Laud*, by W. H. Hutton, p. 209.

the theory that regards Protestantism by itself, either at home or abroad, as a religious system devoid of spiritual constructive energy."

What after all is the meaning of the word, and when was it first used? Following the late Professor Gwatkin [1] it comes from the Latin word "protestari," a post-Augustan word found in Quintilian and frequent in law, and means "to profess," to bear witness openly (or declare). It has no inherent negative force as a protest against something, though it is often used as a declaration that the speaker's meaning has been misunderstood. So then, the word itself has already something positive about it. If we adhere to the meaning of the term it is a witness to some truth.

Let us now pass on to its historical origin. In 1529 the Diet of Speyer was held, the Roman Catholic delegates far outnumbering the Lutherans who were numerically in a very weak position. At the very outset the Emperor Charles V, through his commissioners, declared that a particular clause in the ordinance of 1526 should be rescinded. This clause provided that the word of God should be preached without disturbance, and that until the meeting of a general Council to be held in a German city each state should so live as it hoped to answer for its conduct to God and to the Emperor. The Emperor's decision was upheld by all the Roman Catholics who were present. Further measures were passed, the upshot being that everywhere the medieval ecclesiastical rule would be restored and ultimately the Lutheran Churches would be crushed.

It was this ordinance which called forth the celebrated Protest, read in the Diet on April 19, 1529, after all concessions had been refused, from which the name Protestant emerges and first makes its appearance on the stage of history.

It is interesting to see the form the protest of the Lutherans took. When forced to make their choice between obedience to God and obedience to the Emperor they were compelled to choose the former; and they appealed from the wrongs done to them at the Diet, to the next free General Council of Holy Christendom, or to an Ecclesiastical Congress of the German nation. The political side was uppermost in the usage of the word as there is no mention here of any particular doctrines, only an assertion of the liberty of particular Churches, and "Protestants" at first meant Lutherans as opposed alike to Roman Catholics and Zwinglians, and for some time the Lutherans both in Germany and our own country were designated as such. A further development took place, due partly to the Roman Catholics in labelling as "Lutherans" all those whom they deemed heretics, but also to the heretics themselves in adopting from the Lutherans the common name of Protestants. The unifying principle was the consciousness of a common cause against Rome. That is the justification for the common view held by the clergy, though we do not think it is so

[1] *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings, Vol. X, Art. on "Protestantism."

extensively shared by the laity of our Church, that Protestantism is merely a negative term and nothing more.

The late Aubrey Moore, a contributor to *Lux Mundi*, and whose early death was one of the greatest losses our Church sustained during the latter part of the nineteenth century, adopts a threefold attitude towards the Reformation. First, the Papist view; secondly, the Protestant view, and third, the Secular or Sceptical view. Under the second heading he allows that many and widely different views are included, but then he utters these significant words:

"Still it is quite possible to single out a representative point of view which may rightly be called the Protestant view, and which, speaking generally, for in detail they differ widely, is the point of view of our own Church and of the German Lutherans. The Protestant view of the Reformation regards it as a return to Biblical Christianity, to the simple and pure doctrine of the Gospel, divested of all which Protestants regard as a later addition, as the 'ordinance of men,' and as a disfigurement of the primitive type of religion." [1]

Speaking for ourselves, living as we do in England, Protestant is not a word of which we may be in the least ashamed, provided that it is not understood to mean one who protests against not error merely but any practice which though innocent in itself is followed by the Roman Catholics, nor a narrow persecuting type of religion. Protestantism represents something very positive. Were we living in Germany, it would be better to call ourselves "Evangelisch," and probably avoid the word "Katholisch," and in the Creed use the words "Allgemeine Kirche" which would not exclude our Roman Catholic brethren from the Church of Christ, and at the same time expresses our allegiance to Christendom as a whole.

The Reformation, like any other movement in history, has its weak side, but to call it a "Defamation," or even to apologise for it, is to fly in the face of history. Professor Hamilton Thompson, in *Essays, Catholic and Critical*, says: "Contemptuous references to 'the so-called Reformation,' implying that it was a mere illusion, are out of date. They have never carried weight with serious historians, nor have they improved the credit of those who have indulged in them." And although it does not bear directly on our subject, yet in view of much that appears in the daily Press, we should like to make a further quotation from the same writer.

"The adverse verdict which has been passed upon the Reformation in the light of social and economic changes which accompanied and followed it depends upon a romantic and sentimental conception of the Middle Ages which is at variance with fact. In the breaking up of the medieval polity the Reformation took a prominent part, but as a consequence, not as a cause of a tendency which was present in every department of life and thought." [2]

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[1] *History of the Reformation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1890), pp. 4, 5.

[2] *Essays, Catholic and Critical*, S.P.C.K., 1926, p. 346.

Let us now come to closer grips with our subject. Looking at religion as a whole there seem to be two tendencies at work, simplification and enrichment, both having their advantages and both their dangers. Taking the dangers first. There is the simplicity of the Gospel, but it may be so simplified as in the end to deprive it of all power and appeal, and reduce it to a pale and thin abstraction. To use an illustration. Some are so busy in stripping the Christian Religion of all accretions that they remind us of a man engaged in peeling an onion; he goes on stripping it of its outer coverings in his efforts to reach the centre, and at length discovers that nothing is left.

On the other hand, enrichment or perhaps inclusiveness may be pushed to such an extreme as to do irreparable damage to the religion concerned. The original message may be so overloaded with extraneous matter that it is almost lost sight of owing to the mass of detail surrounding it. You cannot see the wood for the trees. Besides this, religion being essentially life, it must adapt itself to its environment, speak a language understood by the people of the age to which it appeals, enter into their modes of life, deal with their problems, sometimes by way of challenge, at other times by meeting their deepest needs and highest aspirations. Nevertheless, in the laudable effort to meet all these claims and demands, a particular religion may assimilate elements alien to its true nature and character. Instances could be drawn from a study of comparative religion showing, as e.g. in the case of Buddhism, how the impact of a particular age and people has transformed the religion involved beyond recognition, or if this needs some qualification, into something quite different from what its Founder intended it to be.

The advantages of simplicity in religion are not difficult to see. The good news it contains should be presented in such a manner that men of good will, whatever be their calling or station in life, be they educated or otherwise, may be in a position to make the proper response, their attention being drawn to the essentials. Thus are they helped to know the truth, and the truth shall make them free. True simplicity need not be poverty stricken or bare; in fact, it should be the very reverse. A simple fact or principle, by virtue of its very power to enter into every situation confronting mankind, reveals the wonderful resources it has at its command. Still more when it elevates and transforms those who adopt it.

If we were asked wherein lay the originality of our Lord's teaching, we do not think it would be right to say that He gave us truths about God never given before to mankind. Historically it is not correct to say that He was the first to proclaim the Fatherhood of God or God's love to mankind. His uniqueness lies in another direction. Although in line with the Prophets of Israel He taught the Holiness and Majesty of God, yet Fatherhood was the essential characteristic of the most High God in His teaching. God is Master of His world, and in His dealings with men possesses absolute authority over them; at the same time His love of and

goodness towards them are unbounded. In their attitude towards Him, while full of the deepest awe and reverence, yet childlike confidence in Him is the great essential. With regard to our Lord Himself, alone amongst the sons of men He lived in unbroken communion with His Heavenly Father, not fitfully, but at all times, and on every occasion. His life was characterised, not by getting His own way, but by doing the will of His Father.

Only one side of the Lord's uniqueness has been touched upon, but we have brought this forward to show the gain of simplicity. Other religions, notably the Mystery Religions, have more than hinted at the existence of a Supreme Being with benevolent intentions towards its worshippers; in any case, as anyone can read for himself, the most prominent figure of a particular Mystery Religion is full of pity and sympathy for the sorrows of those initiated into his or her mysteries. In our Lord's time in the Roman world, Syncretism was rife, that is to say, alongside of the particular god or goddess believed in and adored, other gods could be accepted. A man might be initiated into more than one Mystery Religion. This so-called catholicity of outlook, and it is not difficult to see that the Apologist of the Mystery Religion would make this claim, is more than counterbalanced by the confusion that it produces in the minds of the ordinary folk. It imperils, nay, it destroys the belief that the world is ruled by one Holy Righteous Will, Whose essence is love. The man who entrusts himself to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has nothing to fear. Demons may be many in number, but their power is limited. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. There need be no cause for anxiety provided that we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Now it may be asked, what has all this to do with the positive message of the Reformation? Whatever may be our views on the controversies which divide Christendom to-day, what has hitherto been said will meet with the approval on the part of all devout Christians. This may gladly be admitted, but our point is that a situation arose not altogether dissimilar to the one soon after Christianity began her career, at the time of the Reformation, and we venture to think has not altogether passed away, when in the interests of a real living faith a policy of destructive criticism was and is necessary. To the religious man the pulling down of religious belief for its own sake must always fill him with the gravest possible concern. He only pursues it for the sake of truth, and in order that the essentials of religion may shine forth all the more clearly, undimmed by the traditions and distortions of men.

The real affirmation of the Reformation, to quote Dr. Lindsay, "is that Christ fills the whole sphere of God," and the Reformers do not recognise any Theology which is not a Christology. The real faith, the faith which is trust, the divine gift which impels us to throw ourselves upon God, gives us the loving assurance of a living God who has revealed Himself and manifests to us His

loving fatherly heart in Christ Jesus, that is, the Christian religion in its very core and centre. "Here in Christ," cries Martin Luther, "I have the Father's heart and will, coming forth in love for my salvation; and the heresy of heresies is that which separates the mind and disposition of God from that of Jesus." [1]

It is very interesting to compare this with a passage which comes in a remarkably fine novel published last year called *A Watch in the Night* written by Helen C. White. She records a memory of her principal character, Jacomo, of how when he was a child,

"he had asked his tutor where all the world was before God made it, and the man had answered that it was nowhere, and then he had asked where God was if He was not sitting up there in the blue sky, when He made the world and the sky above it, and his tutor had answered that God was in no such place but only in Himself, for He had made time and space, too. Even now he remembered how his head had grown dizzy, and how, frightened of all those things which his tutor had said were beyond a child's comprehension he had run to his mother where she sat sewing among her maids, and had hidden his head in the folds of her heavy dress, clutching fast to one of her knees. He remembered how firm her knee had seemed as he sobbed against it, and how she had taken him into her lap and held him tight, until he had felt her tears like rain on his hot cheeks. So now in the night he turned in his great need to her who had held the dead Christ in her arms, and he asked the Mother of God to stand between him and that great mystery beyond."

Now this may be taken very seriously in spite of its occurring in a modern novel. The authoress has given a very sympathetic and faithful transcript of the religious life of the time just after the death of that great and wonderful Saint, Saint Francis of Assisi. The Reformation, of course, took place some centuries afterwards, but the teaching the quotation conveys would be held by countless souls at the time when Martin Luther lived. It is not difficult to imagine the comments he would make. We can imagine him saying, "I sympathise with the poor child, and as a grown man such questions and others raised by the Scholastics have made me feel dizzy and thrown me into a state of utter bewilderment. When I think of God I am terrified beyond measure. All is dark. It is in Jesus Christ, His dear Son, I behold His gracious countenance. I bury my face into the folds of His humanity, and then I feel He grips me and assures me that the God who made me is a God of grace. In my need I turn not to the Mother of God but to the Christ Himself."

This quotation of Helen White's is a good illustration of the need for the negative element to be brought out in the Reformation for the sake of emphasising the simplicity of the manifold grace of Christ. When the soul in her great need turns to the Mother of God, this implies an utter failure to grasp the real meaning of the Incarnation which was to span the vast gulf which lies between God and man, and to see in the perfectly human life of Jesus of Nazareth the Father's heart, His purpose and His grace.

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 472, 473, 430.

In Tennyson's well-known words:

> " For wisdom dwelt with mortal powers,
> Where truth in closest words shall fail,
> When truth embodied in a tale
> Shall enter in at lowly doors.
>
> And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds
> More strong than all poetic thought."

From the positive view of Evangelical Religion it was necessary to lay violent hands upon teaching which directed men's affections to our Lord's Mother, to the Saints and veneration of relics, inasmuch as these diverted men's minds from the Christ Himself.

Here in passing may we just make a comment on a position advocated by Dr. Edwyn Bevan in his most admirable book on *Christianity*? He states in his chapter on the Reformation that the Invocation of Saints in Heaven may be shown to be consonant with New Testament ideas of intercession. " The common Protestant argument, that Jesus is the one Mediator, is clearly wide of the mark, since if this meant that a Christian should not ask the prayers of anyone but Jesus, it would rule out his asking the prayers of a living fellow Christian, a practice which the New Testament sanctions." [1] But our reply begins with a question. Is it so wide of the mark? since even Dr. Bevan has to allow that " the worship of Saints in popular Catholicism has in practice often differed little from polytheism." Practices which so easily lapse into superstition are condemned by that very liability. But further, you are dealing with the unseen world, and when the Christian is on his knees his whole attention should be concentrated on God, on God in Christ, and the unseen dead as viewed in Christ. Do the unseen dead know what is going on in this world? We do not know. Being with Christ doubtless they are praying for us, but they will do this without our asking. The Reformers were right in emphasizing the fact that we should direct our thoughts in our worship to God as revealed in Christ, that we should make our confession of sin to Him, and to Him alone, and that our Communion should be with Him and with Him alone. In our opinion we Evangelicals are not doing wrong in copying their example and imitating their reserve and still more that of the New Testament.

Now Martin Luther was neither a Philosopher nor, in the sense that Calvin was, a Theologian. He was a Christian prophet, a man who did not arrive at truth after having carefully thought it out and surveyed it from different angles, but rather by intuition. The truth came to him in flashes. He would reach the heart of a problem in moments of extraordinary insight, but there was nothing systematic about his thinking. Narrow and one-sided, he often failed to see the logic of his own position. In certain respects he resembled Jeremiah. Both men were reformers, not by choice but

[1] *Christianity*, The Home University Library (Thornton Butterworth, London, 1932), p. 163.

because in their hearts there was as it were a burning fire shut up in their bones which they could not contain (Jer. xx. 9). Both were men of strife and contention to the whole earth, and here again not by choice but predestinated by God. Sensitive and affectionate, they both became, when the occasion demanded it, like walls of brass. Most of all were they like each other in fulminating God's wrathful judgments and witnessing to His covenant of grace. In spite of his inconsistencies, both moral and spiritual, Martin Luther was essentially the greatest religious force of the Reformation of the first generation, though Calvin was probably the finest figure and the great constructive genius of Protestantism in its second phase. Without necessarily subscribing to his particular views, we in England do less than justice to one of the finest figures the world has ever seen. Before passing an opinion upon him let a man read the chapter on Calvin in the *Cambridge Modern History* on the Reformation, written by the late Dr. Fairbairn, and he will probably feel that his views concerning the great Reformer will need to undergo some revision.

Reverting to Martin Luther, the service it seems to us that he performed for Christianity is that he proclaimed to an age which had wellnigh forgotten it that the Christian Gospel is a Gospel of grace. In much of his thinking Luther was a Medievalist through and through. With many he shared the view before his conversion that God was over and against him. God was the sternest of Judges. Luther relates that when he was a boy in the parish church his childish imagination was inflamed by the stained-glass picture of Jesus, not the Saviour but the Judge, of a fierce countenance seated on a rainbow, and carrying a flaming sword in His hand. Being very introspective, he would be called in modern psychological language an Introvert; his attention was directed inwards to his own feelings—the state of his mind and conscience. Enthroned within him was the moral imperative or conscience whose demands were of so august a nature and whose deliverances so little accorded with his own desires that he could only ascribe them to one source, one source only, and that was God. As Karl Holl, in one of his most penetrating studies on Luther, sums it up, Luther's religion is "Gewissensreligion," a religion of conscience.[1] Not being a philosopher Pantheism possesses no attractions for Luther. He is too alive to the tremendous gulf existing between the creature and the Creator to believe that the oppositions between them can be reconciled and overcome in an All-embracing Unity. Thus we can understand Luther's attitude towards God. He approaches Him entirely from the moral side. The more he tries to meet the moral claims, the commands of God thundering within his own soul, the more he feels his utter inability to meet them. Nay, rather with his increased insight into the will of God, sin has a stronger hold of him, it grows in his endeavour to resist it, and thus the wrath of God flames upon him. There stands over

[1] *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, 1. Luther (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1927), p. 35.

against him God in His awful Majesty and Power, his dread and terrible antagonist. At last he is reduced to a feeling of utter helplessness and misery, having tried every avenue that was then known to him to find a way of escape, to satisfy the just and inexorable demands of God, but "the 'Holy' does not grow in man's garden." It was for this reason Luther became a monk, so that by a life of extreme self-denial, asceticism, prayer and good works he might change God's attitude towards him, a guilty sinner.

Then, one day, as he was reading the Epistle to the Romans in his cell his eyes were opened, and the revelation came to him which entirely changed the course of his life, and incidentally of Europe as well! The truth flashed upon him that the righteousness of God could only become his by trust. Not the mere assent of the understanding to certain truths about God and His revelation but the conviction that by placing himself in the hands of Christ as his personal Saviour, he was accounted righteous, and thereby entered into living fellowship with God. No longer was he under law, but under grace. Merits, indulgences, penances, profit and loss account did not come into the reckoning at all. The faith which makes us throw ourselves upon Christ does not involve a life of ease and quiet, as Luther has expressed it so well, "It is a living, busy, active, powerful thing, faith; it is impossible for it not to do us good continually. It never asks whether good works are to be done; it has done them before there is time to ask the question, and it is always doing them." [1]

Now we are not prepared to stereotype Martin Luther's experience and make it normative of Christian experience, but we believe the heart of his message is fundamentally true, especially if we bear in mind his pregnant remark that God's wrath is the mask of His love, and that, as he recognised afterwards, all this opposition of God is really battering the soul into such a state that she may see her utter need of Him, and helplessness without Him, and that only in Him and through Him can she be lifted up to those heights which God, because He is God, requires her to reach. We cannot live before God without forgiveness of sin. To quote Holl again: "Thus does Luther see through the darkness and storm of the Divine wrath right into the loving will of God; he perceives as he wonderfully expresses it, 'under and above the "no" the deep secret "yes" which God speaks to him. Unter und über dem Nein das tiefe heimliche Ja.'" [2] Canon Ottley, formerly Principal of Pusey House, has truly said: "Martin Luther recalled men's minds from a false to a true conception of faith; from blind and mechanical reliance on a complex system to simple trust in a living person, the Divine Christ." [3] That is the great positive message of the Reformation.

We must now pass on to the second great truth which is imbedded in Protestantism, though like Christianity herself centuries

[1] Quoted by Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 431. [2] *Op. cit.*, p. 75.
[3] *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Methuen & Co., London, 1896), Vol. ii, pp. 217, 218.

were necessary to realise its implications. Luther, and here surely he was not alone, together with all the Reformers, appealed to the individual conscience. In the last resort for the individual the right, or better, the duty of private judgment, is of paramount importance. That does not imply that the individual can believe what he fancies, or that he does not accept any authority whatsoever, but in the last resort the Christ of the Creeds is not his Christ until he receives Him.

The Reformation did not solve the problems between reason and authority, freedom and order, and the individual and society. These are burning questions to-day, and by no manner of means can it be said concerning them, in spite of loud voices to the contrary, that the last word has been uttered. So then, when others far more competent than we are in dealing with these subjects have failed, it would be the height of unwisdom to suggest any solutions of our own. Before, however, settling any difficult question, two things are necessary; first, to examine our own presuppositions, and secondly, to try to possess as far as possible all the relevant data without which no true and proper judgment can be formed.

Very often it is taken for granted that if God has revealed Himself to man it can only be through an infallible Church or an infallible Book. The Reformers denied that the Church required a visible head, and that throughout the ages it had been kept immune from error. Unfortunately the exigencies of controversy drove them to take up, what we believe to be, an entirely untenable position, namely, to stake their all on an infallible Book. In fairness to them it must be remembered that this was not just simply a dogma. They believed in the Bible because, when they read it, it bore witness to its divine character in their own hearts by the witness of the Holy Spirit, Testimonium Spiritus Sancti. In this respect we are sure they were on the right lines; where they went astray was in the assumption that because God had spoken to them in the Bible, or, if you prefer, that because in the Bible they found the words of eternal life, this great discovery of necessity involved the belief in the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures, or that every part of it is equally inspired.

Bishop Butler's warning must always be borne in mind.

> "Since, upon experience, the acknowledged constitution and course of nature is found to be greatly different from what, before experience, would have been expected, and such as, men fancy, there lie great objections against: this renders it beforehand highly credible, that they may find the revealed dispensation likewise, if they judge of it as they do of the constitution of nature, very different from expectations formed beforehand."[1]

His position is "of what inspiration, or revelation, would or should be we are bad judges. To say beforehand how God will reveal Himself is beyond our competence to decide." As it has been wittily summed up: "We may not argue that, because we think it ought to be so, because we should like it to be so, because

[1] *Analogy*, ii, iii, § 5.

it would be very convenient in many ways if it were so, therefore it is so." [1]

On the other hand, the Reformers provided us with very valuable data for arriving at the truth, previously ignored by the Medieval Church. We have already stated that the ultimate court of appeal, though not of authority, which can only be God Himself, is to the private judgment of the individual. Let us reiterate the warning that the handing over of responsibility for arriving at the truth must be left to the individual's own conscience, he cannot delegate it to any human authority. This does not imply that he should ignore the experience of the Christian Church understood in its widest sense, but it does mean that he is not under obligation to accept unconditionally the statements of other human minds, even though these minds may make divine claims on behalf of their assertions. What he must do is to make a humble submission to God's will, and to go where the Truth leads him. Should the Truth, as he believes it, lead him into the Roman Catholic Church, it can only be by an act of private judgment that he accepts her claims in preference to any others.

In appealing to the Bible, and refusing to recognise tradition, the Reformers asserted a principle which must never be forgotten. The acid test for the Christian is whether a particular doctrine is in accordance with the mind of Christ. Certainly if it is contrary to His spirit it must there and then be rejected; it has already pronounced its own condemnation. The objection may be made that tradition often helps us to arrive at the meaning of a particular saying of our Lord's on the ground that those living nearer the New Testament times are in a better position to know what He meant than we are. Our reply to this is in the negative. A study of ancient writers, notably the Fathers, indicates, as Newman saw, that they were by no means agreed on Christian doctrine, and further, that, when they became Christian, they brought their heathen past with them which often affected their apprehension of the Gospel. It was a saying of a very great Church historian, we believe it is Harnack, that only one person understood St. Paul in the early Church, and that was Marcion, and he did not understand him! After all, for the first century we must go back to the original sources, which is, of course, what every secular historian does in studying a particular epoch, movement or person. Tradition need not be ignored provided that it is not taken at its face value, and that it undergoes a very critical examination. Nevertheless, it was a step of capital importance when the Reformers insisted on men going back to the original sources, and, though they may have sometimes handled them in an arbitrary fashion, that is only another instance of their sharing the limitations of their age just as we do ours.

When we hear it said in influential quarters that the ages which settled the Canon of Scripture should determine our outlook on

[1] *Catholicism and Christianity*, by C. J. Cadoux (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1928), p. 107.

Christian doctrine and practice we cannot help thinking of Professor E. F. Scott's answer, "The Church in the end selected those writings which had selected themselves." Three great positive results flow from the Reformers' insistence upon private judgment and their appeal to the Bible.

Sooner or later toleration was bound to make its appearance. Now we must be perfectly fair. Neither Martin Luther nor Calvin were tolerant as we deem tolerance to-day. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 has been hailed as the birth of religious liberty; but as Professor Pollard has urged in the *Cambridge Modern History*, "it is mockery to describe the principle which underlay it as one of toleration." "Luther enunciated the principle of religious liberty, of individual priesthood. But he and his followers imposed another bondage, which went far to render this declaration ineffectual." [1] Yes, but the seed had been sown. If men and women are allowed to think for themselves, they are bound as time goes on to agree to differ. Furthermore, by appealing to the Bible, and in particular to our Lord Himself, with His definite refusal to apply force in the furtherance of His kingdom, it being partly for that reason He went to His cross, men came to see that the only weapon by which Christianity can be advanced is love. We who are sons of the Reformation repudiate with all our hearts the policy of persecution. Our opposition to Rome is not merely on religious grounds, from a religious point of view she must be given free play, but also from the uncomfortable conviction still prevailing amongst us, which we would gladly have removed, that were the influence of the Roman Church to be paramount in any country she would still persecute those who disagreed with her, since, so far as we know, she has never officially renounced the policy of persecution. Underlying the Protestant view of toleration there is a deep religious conviction that Christ's kingdom can only be advanced by spiritual means. Truth, although it may take a long time in overcoming error and falsehood, yet because it is of God must prevail. It does require much faith to launch the Christian religion on to the world, and to believe that by its own inherent power and beauty it will win men's hearts, but experience proves that whatever setbacks Christianity may sustain, yet, because she is true, she has nothing to fear provided that those who belong to her are true and loyal to Christ. It is because we believe in Christianity that we know she can be left to take care of herself, if only those who belong to her let the Christ work in and through them.

Secondly. The Reformation has indirectly made the Church more Catholic in the widest sense of the word. Priesthood is not confined to a particular class; it belongs to all God's people. Sacrificial terms are not avoided in the New Testament, but they are not used of any particular rite nor are they applied to any particular body of men within the Christian Society. Order there must be in the Christian Church, and we who belong to the Anglican Church consider that episcopacy is the best form of government, and we believe that it is the best guarantee of Christian unity. But to relegate those

[1] The *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. ii, pp. 277, 278.

belonging to certain Christian bodies to God's uncovenanted mercies and make out that their sacraments are invalid since they do not possess what is called the Apostolic Succession and are not governed by Bishops is to read into the New Testament what is not there. To adopt such a position must fill a man with intense sorrow, at least, if he holds it with an air of triumph he has to that extent departed from the spirit of Christ. One of the positive results of the Reformation is that it has delivered us from the belief that the organisation of the Christian Church is of primary importance and has relegated it to a position of secondary significance. It is interesting to note that Dr. Bevan, in the book already quoted, says:

"For Catholics it is a matter of faith that the system of the second century goes back in essentials to Jesus Himself, and had obtained ever since there was a Church at all: all bishops derived their authority by transmission from bishops ordained by one of the Twelve or by St. Paul. This cannot be proved from the New Testament and other Christian documents of the first century. . . . Those, however, who form their theories on the documentary data of the first century alone, apart from Catholic belief, practically all come to the conclusion that the Catholic system of the second century was not original, but a development of the third and fourth generation." [1]

Precisely, unless it can be proved that in our original sources, above all, in the mind of Christ, Episcopacy and all it involves are *essential* to Christianity, we have no right to take up any different attitude.

Modern scholarship, which is indifferent to any particular views held by the Reformers and is simply concerned with truth, support them in their main contention, and we may welcome their conclusions that the Christian Church is not tied down to any particular system of organisation.

Thirdly. One of the great and most important differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is the adoption on the part of the former of the double standard of life. It makes its appearance very early in the Christian Church. In the Didache occurs the exhortation: "If thou canst bear the whole yoke of the Lord thou shalt be perfect; if not bear as much as thou canst." There is a higher standard to which the Saints of God will conform or endeavour to imitate, and there is a lower standard which is all that can be expected of the average man. This is a tremendously difficult problem, and we are bound to admit needs to be faced far more seriously than it has been by Evangelical writers. Any parish priest with some experience in dealing with souls will know how difficult it is not to lower the Christian standard, but that if he pitches the standard too high he may be making it quite impossible for the ordinary man in the world to be a Christian.[2] Is not accommodation of some kind necessary? Otherwise vast numbers of men and women will be altogether alienated from Christianity. On the

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 61, 62.

[2] As a Bermondsey lad, many years ago, asked the writer of this article, "Mr. Rigg, do you think that if I kept all the Commandments but two, it would be all right?"

principle that half a loaf is better than none at all, is it not advisable to adopt the principle of accommodation? This is the line of policy openly embraced by the Roman Catholic Church, though whether we can be quite content with Dean Inge's statement of her position when he says, "The Roman Church, which takes human nature as it is, accepts the fact that many Christians do not feel called to be perfect," [1] is more than doubtful. Not thus can she be so summarily dismissed. For those who wish to pursue the subject further we would recommend Dr. Kirk's fifth lecture in his book on the Vision of God.[2] At the same time we believe that the Reformation was right in asserting that Christianity recognised only one standard, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect," and in refusing to deal with human nature as it is since the human nature concerned is the human nature which has undergone regeneration effected by the Spirit of God.

Whatever forms the double standard has assumed at the present time there is no doubt that during the sixteenth century it had taken on a most reprehensible form typified by the altar-piece at Magdebourg which made such a lasting impression on Luther. It represents a great ship sailing heavenwards, no one within the ship but priests or monks, and in the sea laymen drowning, or saved by ropes thrown to them by the priests or monks who were safe on board.[3] To live the highest life men and women need not feel that they must live either the celibate life or go into a monastery or nunnery. Every calling in life should be looked upon as a vocation, and strictly speaking the distinction between sacred and secular, however convenient it may be to preserve in certain respects, does not really exist. A man may be called to live the single life, and does he refuse, for him it is sin; another is called to the married state, then for him it is the Call of God to embrace it with all its joys, yes, and its responsibilities as well.

This paper does not profess to be exhaustive, but it must now be brought to a close. It is, however, by emphasising the positive side of Protestantism that we shall best be preserving her true spirit. Without subscribing entirely to the following analogy, since, whether we be Protestants or Roman Catholics humility becomes us all, yet it is well to remember that, should the electric light fuse, farthing dips are infinitely better than nothing at all. So then, unless we both preach and live out what is best in the Protestantism of the sixteenth century it means that the electric light has failed, and I for one would far rather have the farthing dips of Roman Catholicism than the appalling darkness of negation. One side of the great positive message of the Reformation cannot be better summed up than in Luther's opening words concerning Christian liberty, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none: a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."

[1] *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* (Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd. London, 1930), p. 67.
[2] *Bampton Lectures*, p. 1928 (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1931).
[3] Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 198.