VOLTAIRE'S PORTRAYAL OF THE REFORMATION

VOLTAIRE'S PORTRAYAL OF THE REFORMATION IN HIS ESSAI SUR LES MOEURS

by

ANTON GERRIT SPELT, B.A. (TORONTO)

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

December 1972

MASTER OF ARTS (1972) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(Romance Languages) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Voltaire's Portrayal of the Reformation in his Essai sur les moeurs

AUTHOR: Anton Gerrit Spelt, B.A. (Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. P. M. Conlon

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 158

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The purpose of this dissertation is to study Voltaire's portrayal of the Reformation in his Essai sur les moeurs. The particular aim is to determine the degree of understanding that Voltaire shows in dealing not only with the nature of the theological reforms themselves, but also with the many and varied influences these theological reforms exerted upon society in sixteenth-century Europe. A few general observations will be made on Voltaire's concept of history and of historiography as it is revealed in his account of the Reformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. P. M. Conlon for the kind assistance and encouragement he has given to me during the preparation of this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Voltaire views the Reformation generally in his Essai sur les moeurs as "cette grande révolution dans l'esprit humain" which not only radically changed man's religious beliefs but profoundly affected every aspect of society in sixteenth-century Europe.[1] It is our purpose in this dissertation to determine first of all the nature of the Reformation itself -- its theological reforms and their impact on European society as a whole. Having done this we can study more ably Voltaire's own portrayal of the Reformation and determine to what extent he understands the religious reforms and their numerous ramifications, political, economic and social for sixteenth-century Europe. Having established the degree of accuracy in his presentation of the Reformation in the Essai sur les moeurs we can make a few general observations about Voltaire's view of history and of the art of historiography.

In dealing with such a vast body of historical material known as the Protestant Reformation, we must necessarily define the scope of this dissertation. Our study will be confined to how Voltaire presents the Reformation

---

[1] Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs, ed. R. Pomeau (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963), II, 206, 217.

in continental Europe only. We shall not discuss the English Reformation since Voltaire himself devotes little time to it in his account. Furthermore, King Henry VIII's separation from Rome was not indicative of any religious revolt on his part, but rather was the result of the pope's refusal to co-operate in resolving his marital problems. Henry VIII had no intention of reforming basic Catholic doctrine and practice. The Protestant Reformation, in fact, did not gain a secure foothold in England until 1559 when Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne. Its arrival in England, then, was much later than on the Continent.

The edition of the Essai sur les moeurs used in this dissertation is published by Garnier Frères, and the passages dealing with the Reformation are found in volume II, pages 175 to 269. The following abbreviations will be used:

Essai: Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs, edited by R. Pomeau, 2 vols. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963).

Elton: G. R. Elton, Reformation Europe 1517-1559 (New York: Harper and Row Publ. Co., 1963).

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER I

LUTHERANISM

The posting of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the 31 October, 1517 marks what is commonly accepted as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Although he does not specifically mention this event, Voltaire refers to the sale of indulgences, the immediate cause of the Theses, and the most widely known cause of Luther's criticism.

From the opening paragraph of his chapter on Luther and the indulgence question we see a fundamental weakness underlying Voltaire's whole account of Luther's role in the Reformation. In attributing "cette grande révolution dans l'esprit humain et dans le système politique de l'Europe" to a quarrel between Augustinians and Dominicans over the sale of indulgences, Voltaire does not show true understanding of the theological reasons that led Luther to question the sale of indulgences (Essai, p. 217). Indeed Voltaire's failure to tie together in a logical manner the other reforms desired by Luther seems to indicate his unawareness of their theological basis, a basis to be found in Luther's personal religious experience. In fact, Voltaire describes as "très peu intelligible" the justification by faith alone concept which arose directly from Luther's religious experience, and

a concept which is central to the entire Lutheran doctrine (Essai, p. 218). A clear understanding of Luther's religious development to the year 1517 is necessary to satisfactorily understand his later theological reforms.

In 1505, when only twenty-one years old, Luther graduated from Erfurt University with a Master of Arts degree. All indications pointed to a successful law career so much desired by his father. After a few weeks of classes, however, Luther withdrew from his courses, too emotionally disturbed to continue. Of philosophical bent and brooding temperament, Luther had reached a crossroad in his life. With the major part of his education behind him, and faced with the necessity of providing for the future, Luther needed time to reflect. Prior to the start of his legal studies he suffered the loss through death of a close schoolfriend. Feeling very depressed and preoccupied with his own life and personal salvation, he grew increasingly restless. His anxiety was quickened by the religious nature of his parents and their influence on his early spiritual development.

Luther's family, if not zealous, was nonetheless devout and adopted all the precepts and daily practices of the Catholic Church. Understanding little of the theological significance of their beliefs, Luther's parents brought him up in an atmosphere of superstition and ritual whereby constant church attendance and participation in the sacraments as well as daily practices of piety ensured the pious of

salvation and protected him from the devil. Indeed, the devil as a distinct entity, always tempting Luther, frightened him as a young boy with images of personal damnation, and rendered the performing of acts of piety all the more imperative.

The merit approach to personal salvation instilled in Luther during his childhood was further stimulated by his university professors, almost all of Occamist training. This outlook on Christianity stressed the omniscience of God and His arbitrary selection of the elect from the damned. Man, in his infinite sinfulness after the fall, seemingly despaired of salvation. Yet the Occamists allowed room for man's free will to earn God's grace through the accomplishment of a sufficient number of good works.

Troubled by doubts of personal salvation and the advisability of pursuing a law career, Luther went home probably to consult his parents. Upon his return to Erfurt, an incident occurred which had a profound influence upon him. While walking back to the University as was his custom, he was caught in a violent thunderstorm and was knocked to the ground by a lightning bolt that struck nearby. Invoking St. Anne and promising to become a religious if he were saved, Luther fulfilled the oath a few days later by entering the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. It was this stroke of lightning which had crystallized Luther's decision to take holy orders, a matter upon which he had been brooding during

the preceding weeks.

Luther soon found spiritual contentment in the rigid discipline and security of daily routine. His conscientious work earned for him the respect of his superiors and advancement came rapidly. In the spring of 1507 he was ordained. In the fall of the following year he lectured for one term on moral philosophy and on the Bible at the newly founded University of Wittenberg. In 1512 he became assistant prior of the Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg to which he had been transferred, and in the same year he earned his doctorate at the University of Wittenberg. By this time he had acquired considerable importance in the intellectual circles of the town, an importance which grew no doubt with his appointment as preacher in the parish church in 1514, and with his assumption of new responsibilities two years later as District Vicar of the Augustinian Order. During this same period of time Luther's spiritual development progressed just as rapidly as his reputation. The reason is that he was revising his entire attitude to the means of acquiring personal salvation. The conclusions he arrived at launched the entire Protestant Reformation.

Determined to ensure himself of divine grace, Luther undertook in the monastery demanding works of self-mortification in excess of the already rigorous rule. He would fast for three days on end without touching a crumb. He would discard the few blankets permitted him on cold nights and almost froze on

occasion. On his conduct during the first months of cloister life Luther comments:

> I was a good religious and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a religious could have got to heaven by religious works it was I. All my brothers in the priory who knew me well will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer I would have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading and other works.1

Despite his efforts, Luther was left with a nagging doubt as he himself describes:

> After watchings, studies, fastings, prayers and other most severe exercises with which as a monk I afflicted myself almost to death, yet that doubt was left in the soul, and I thought "Who knows whether such things are pleasing to God?"[2]

Luther grew incessantly distressed. Despite his efforts at self-denial and striving to compensate for sin, Luther never felt that a sufficient number of good works had been performed to merit salvation. His anxiety grew into a sense of injustice and resentment towards the God of his childhood, as he explains:

> For however irreproachably I lived as a religious I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience nor could I trust that I had pleased him with my satisfaction. I did not love, nay rather I hated this just God who punished sinners and if not with "open blasphemy" certainly with huge murmurings I was angry with God.3

---

[1] J. M. Todd, Martin Luther: A Biographical Study (London: Burns and Oates, 1964), p. 23.

[2] C. S. Anderson, The Reformation Then and Now (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 16.

[3] J. M. Todd, op. cit., pp. 49, 50.

It became increasingly clear to Luther that he could not satisfy his conscience and still retain the merit approach to salvation.

Given in 1508 the lectureship on the Bible at Wittenberg University, a position which was made permanent in 1513, Luther felt obliged to read the Scriptures in the original and undertook the study of Hebrew for this purpose. It was during the course of his reading, probably in the fall of 1514, that he discovered the solution to his spiritual dilemma in the frequently cited principle of justification by faith alone. The "righteousness of God" which so often tormented Luther with images of Christ upon the Judgement Seat with clutched sword ready to smite all those who did not merit His grace acquired a new and truly satisfying meaning in Romans I, 17: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written the just shall live by faith". He found further proof in Romans II, 28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law". Luther now concentrated solely on the image of Christ upon the Cross, relying totally upon faith in Christ's redemptive power to obtain his personal salvation. Feeling as if a heavy burden had been lifted from his shoulders, Luther held his new discovery to mean a complete shift in responsibility for gaining salvation. The individual was no longer obliged to perform pious deeds to appease God, he was to place simple faith in Christ the Redeemer and in

God's divine promise as revealed in Scripture. Luther now rejected the religion of his childhood which stressed only the mechanical performance of good works as the most important path to salvation. Good works in themselves were of no avail if not accompanied by faith. Luther's denial of their efficacy did not mean, however, a rejection of the necessity to perform virtuous acts. Man's faith would naturally hold him to the imitation of Christ and the accomplishment of charitable works. In the light of Luther's central theme of justification by faith alone, the various reforms mentioned by Voltaire in an apparently arbitrary fashion fit coherently together in a logical pattern which Voltaire's presentation fails to indicate.

The first test of Luther's new approach to established Church dogma appeared in October 1517 on the question of the sale of indulgences. In 1515 Leo X, who was pope from 1513 to 1521, authorized the sale of indulgences once more so as to meet the heavy expenses of constructing St. Peter's Basilica. Although the official reason, it was not the only one. In 1513 Albert of Brandenburg had received the archbishopric of Mainz while already having secured that of Magdeburg and Halberstadt, contrary to canon law. In so doing he had amassed a considerable debt to the Fuggers, a prosperous banking family who had paid his pallium money. Pope Leo X agreed that one-half of the revenues of the new sale of

indulgences were to be used to repay this debt. John Tetzel, an eloquent and persuasive Dominican monk from Leipzig, was given the task of selling the indulgences in Saxony. He had a knack of reducing the complex doctrine to a simple epigram which completely falsified its true meaning so as to render the sale as lucrative as possible among the commonfolk:

> As soon as the coin in the coffer rings
> The Soul from out the fire springs.4

Luther was dismayed by the idea contained in this epigram because it was a total misconception of the true purpose of indulgences. In Tetzel's interpretation, Luther perceived a reliance upon the merit concept of salvation which he had just so painfully rejected. As the purchaser could obtain a plenary indulgence, he was led to believe that in helping to pay for St. Peter's, he was performing a good deed which instantaneously absolved all his sins, thus assuring him of salvation. He was also, so he thought, liberating loved ones from their punishment in purgatory. Indulgences, maintained Luther, only applied to the remission, partial or full, of penance imposed by the priest on earth in accordance with canon law, and had no bearing upon that required by God in purgatory. Indulgences had no effect upon the dead, neither did the Church's claim to supererogation,

---

[4]E. R. Chamberlin, The Bad Popes (New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1969), p. 241.

in itself a doctrine based entirely upon the efficacy of good works performed by saints in the past. The most the Church could do for the dead was to pray on their behalf. As for the effect of indulgences upon the living, they were not efficacious until the sinner had a contrite heart, that is to say, until he felt true sorrow for his sins. This point clearly nullified the value of indulgences bought to absolve in advance the punishment for sins which may be later committed, one of the numerous abuses in the Church described by Voltaire (Essai, p. 212). This point served to emphasize above all Luther's firm rejection of the efficacy of good works alone around which Tetzel's thriving business revolved.

Luther also posed in his Theses some troublesome questions which, he alleged, had been asked of him by shrewd parishioners. If, accepting hypothetically that Tetzel's arguments for selling indulgences were theologically sound, souls could be released from purgatory simply be means of a money payment, why then, by way of Christian charity, did not the Pope release all the deceased from their suffering? Why could not the Pope, being immensely rich, construct St. Peter's with his personal fortune instead of depriving the poor folk of their scanty income? Luther added a personal query concerning the value of indulgences as a Christian doctrine. According to Luther, the true penitent should freely accept punishment as a constant reminder of his ever sinful nature,

an ignominious inheritance from Adam which in itself ruled out any possibility of man's performing truly good acts. Consequently, money should not be spent buying indulgences, but should rather be used to support local charities.

In attributing the cause of the Reformation to a squabble between two jealous monastic orders over a profitable business venture, Voltaire may be blamed for oversimplification and ignorance in failing to pursue the matter more deeply. He is stating, nonetheless, Pope Leo X's first reaction to Luther's Theses.

Leo X did indeed consider Luther's Theses to be the result of indignation on the part of the Augustinians toward the favored Dominicans and reacted, according to Chamberlin, with "something between a smile and a sigh".[5] After all, the Pope had just escaped from an assassination attempt instigated in the College of Cardinals and in comparison considered Luther's protest as an amusement. Yet less than a year later, in 1518, he was to order Luther to come to Rome and to answer personally charges of heresy. Then in 1520 he was to officially demand that Luther recant or be excommunicated, whereupon Luther, as Elton puts it, "decisively burned his boats . . ." (p. 21) by burning the bull issued against him.

---

[5] Ibid., p. 243.

If Pope Leo X's first reaction to the posting of the Theses proved to be singularly mild in the light of their ultimate consequences, Luther's attitude was one of confusion and distress. He was not prepared for the charge of heresy labelled against him. By composing his Theses he thought himself only to be a devout Catholic attempting to clarify a confusing doctrine. The idea of a split within the Church would have horrified him. He made it clear that if any of his ideas were proved contrary to Holy Scripture he would revoke them immediately. Voltaire judges correctly when he writes:

> Si on avait dit alors à Luther qu'il détruirait la religion romaine dans la moitié de l'Europe, il ne l'aurait pas cru; il alla plus loin qu'il ne pensait . . . . (Essai, p. 217)

In posting his Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg Luther was only doing what so many professors had done before him. He was merely calling for a learned disputation on the abuses he had seen in the Church's sale of indulgences and was not openly condemning their purpose as defined by canon law. Voltaire is misleading, therefore, when he writes: "Après avoir décrié les indulgences, il examina le pouvoir de celui qui les donnait aux chrétiens" (Essai, p. 217). Granted he was questioning their value for the Christian, but he reserved final judgement until after a theological debate had taken place. The papal legate, Cardinal Cajetan, a renowned Catholic theologian

and head of the Dominican Order, itself staunchly papist, found no point in the Theses to be heretical, adding that he had found only errors in the document. Admitting himself to be confused over the indulgence issue, Cajetan asked the Pope to clarify the doctrine. The Pope agreed that Tetzel had seriously over-simplified the doctrine, and in his decretal Cum Postquam, promulgated in 1518, he reiterated basically what Luther had maintained in his Theses. The Pope did retain, however, the Church's claim to supererogation, stating that it was a petition only and offered no assurance of efficacy.

In light of such a conciliatory attitude why did Luther ultimately break with Rome? What cause had he to formulate by 1520, the year in which he burned the bull Exsurge Domine, the basic precepts upon which all his reforms were founded? Voltaire points out that Luther had not the slightest intention of separating from the Church, but only hints at why the separation did in fact occur when he writes that Luther, after having railed against (décrié) indulgences ". . .examina le pouvoir de celui [the pope] qui les donnait aux chrétiens" (Essai, p. 217).

Luther had no intention in his Theses of attacking the papacy and did not do so, but the Church authorities forced the issue and Luther found himself not debating the doctrine of indulgences but rather papal infallibility. This was the only tack the Church could take to effectively trap Luther

as it recognized the legitimacy of many of his complaints, but was unwilling to forfeit a profitable source of revenue.

Various churchmen between the years 1517 and 1520 confronted Luther with the question of the papal claim to speak with greater authority than Scripture. Tetzel whose current occupation was at stake took a hurried doctorate in order to refute the Wittenberg monk. He maintained that the pope alone could interpret Scripture. He hoped to nullify, thereby, Luther's claim that passages in the Bible refuted the efficacy of good works, the principle upon which his sale of indulgences depended. Tetzel stated as well that if the pope so decreed it, being infallible, indulgences could become efficacious for those in purgatory. In August 1518 Silvester Prierias, Master of the Sacred Palace and chief theological advisor to the Pope, vigorously asserted in a crude, insulting letter to Luther the supremacy of the pope which supersedes Scriptural authority, the pope being likened to the oracle of God. In October of the same year, Luther appeared at the Diet of Augsburg where Cardinal Cajetan was specifically instructed to avoid debate and simply to demand Luther's recantation. Desiring only to know wherein he had erred, Luther was told that his denial of the Treasury of the Church was a rejection of Pope Clement VI's bull, promulgated in 1343, which specifically authorized supererogation. Cajetan stressed this minor

point hoping to avoid a major debate on the Theses proper. Yet, as we have seen, for Luther supererogation directly opposed his fundamental tenet of justification by faith alone. Cajetan found himself unwillingly in the heat of controversy as Luther rejected Pope Clement VI's bull as being contrary to Scripture. He had in effect openly rejected papal infallibility. In 1519, Luther unwittingly carried his rejection of papal authority one step further when he engaged John Eck in disputation at Leipzig. John Eck, a professor at the University of Ingolstadt and a very shrewd and canny professional disputant, confronted Luther by asking his opinion of the heretic John Huss, whose condemned doctrines resembled many of Luther's. Luther replied that not all of Huss' ideas had been heretical according to Scripture. Eck had effectively forced Luther into doubting the authority of the General Council of Constance which had condemned Huss. Fully realizing the lengths to which he had now committed himself, Luther had no choice but to openly assert Scriptural authority over that of the pope and of the general council. He added that all faithful Christians, armed with proof from the Bible, could judge the accuracy of papal decisions on Church doctrine.

Luther had been drawn most unwillingly from a position as an innovator of slow and careful reform to the position of a dangerous heretic, ready to be excommunicated from the

Church. In general historical opinion agrees that this development was inevitable and only required time to manifest itself, that Luther's discovery in the Bible of the all important justification by faith alone solution to his spiritual dilemma would naturally support the final authority of Scripture over all other. The general consensus also concurs that during these years Luther laid the basic groundwork for most of his reforms, his new ideas concerning Christianity having been defined at this time.

What were Luther's most important reforms resulting from his new Christian outlook? From the indulgence controversy it becomes evident that the inward participation, the attitude of the individual, takes precedence over mere outward behaviour. Faith is all important. Religion becomes a highly personal experience between God and man. Theoretically no priesthood, no ecclesiastical hierarchy, was necessary to intercede on behalf of the individual, since "faith is the real priestly office; therefore all Christians are priests, whether man or woman, young or old, lord or servant, wife or maid, scholar or layman".[6] Hence Luther derived the phrase, "the priesthood of all believers". Yet Luther had no intention of abolishing the Church hierarchy. He wanted

---

[6]R. H. Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 489.

only to re-establish the priest in his proper social function -- that of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. Removing the clergy from their medieval pedestal of sanctity as a special breed of man before God, Luther brought them back into perspective, because in Luther's society the cobbler and the bishop, the merchant and the cardinal, all played equally important roles as defined by God.

If faith is the key to Luther's new religion, it is the Bible that directs this faith, that instructs it and strengthens it. Rejecting papal infallibility and the pope's claim alone to interpret Scripture, Luther put the Bible within reach of the common man. Since the Bible alone serves as the sole authority for the Christian it must be rendered as clear as possible in its meaning so as to be equally understood by all. In mentioning Luther's desire to translate the Bible into German Voltaire does not explain his reasons for doing so. Voltaire doubts the accuracy of Luther's German translation, citing only those critics who questioned Luther's sufficient command of Hebrew to undertake such a task, Andreas Carlstadt, a highly respected theologian at Wittenberg and Dean of Arts, testified readily to Luther's good knowledge of Hebrew. Furthermore, according to Fife:

> His [Luther's] fluent and highly personal style in writing medieval Latin and his wide and elastic vocabulary, the rapidity with which he acquired

> Greek and Hebrew in the midst of cloister and professional duties and the accuracy of his knowledge, all point to a scientific attitude in linguistic matters and to systematic and conscientious teaching.7

On the effect upon the reader of Luther's new translation Bainton comments in glowing terms:

> For the Germans Luther's rendering was incomparable. He leaped beyond the tradition of a thousand years. There had been translations before him of the Scripture into German reaching back into the earliest transcription of the Gothic tongue by Ulfilas . . . .But none had the majesty of diction, the sweep of vocabulary, the native earthiness and the religious profundity of Luther.[8]

Voltaire would have been more effective in criticizing the new translation if he had shifted his emphasis from Luther's knowledge of Hebrew to the actual content of Luther's new Bible. This approach, however, requires a true understanding of Luther's religious experience which, as we have already seen, Voltaire seems to lack. Take for example Luther's tenet of justification by faith alone. In the Hebrew and Vulgate texts the adjective "alone" is not present. While at the same time maintaining the absolute authority of the Bible in the original and insisting that Scripture "have the chief place and be its own truest and

---

[7] Ibid., p. 30.

[8] R. H. Bainton, Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), pp. 326-327.

clearest interpreter . . ."[9] Luther added in his German version this adjective which completely altered the sense of the original. Luther's reason was one of clarity and precision in translating, but in so doing he effectively overruled the explicit recommendation in the Beatitudes and the Epistle of St. James, which he labelled an "epistle of straw",[10] on the merit of good works. Neither does Voltaire point out the dubious value of Luther's new faith, based entirely upon a very subjective experience, being applied to all mankind.

As an aid to understanding the Bible, Voltaire asserts correctly that Aristotle in Luther's opinion was of little value (Essai, p. 221). Qualifications must be added, however, not to Voltaire's statement but to Luther's opinion of Aristotle in general. Aristotle's teachings on religious matters had little purport, as he denied the immortality of the soul and held the belief in the potential of nature to spontaneously create itself without the prior existence of some "fiat" that formed something out of nothing. Despite these limitations Luther should not have criticized Aristotle too vehemently in religious matters

---

[9] J. M. Todd, Martin Luther: A Biographical Study, p. 232.

[10] K. Adam, The Roots of the Reformation, transl. C. Hastings (London and New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1957), p. 51.

since his professors had never misled him initially in the limited value of Aristotle to theology. Luther still regarded Aristotle's contribution to other fields of knowledge very highly. In his reformed curriculum at Wittenberg University Luther still retained Aristotle's works on rhetoric, logic, politics and economics as compulsory reading.

Of the seven sacraments accepted by the Catholic Church Luther at first admitted three and then only two, as Voltaire indicates, these being baptism and the eucharist (Essai, p. 222). Luther ultimately rejected the others: ordination, confirmation, extreme unction, confession and matrimony as being unfounded in Scripture.

Voltaire describes also Luther's rejection of transubstantiation as being contrary to the Bible. Voltaire describes concisely yet vividly Luther's doctrine of consubstantiation by comparing it to melting iron in a flame (Essai, p. 219). This description is not Voltaire's alone, however, and does not show originality on his part. As for communion in both kinds, Voltaire deals with it apart from his description of transubstantiation as if the two doctrines were unrelated. He does give the Biblical reference which Luther used in supporting this reform (Essai, p. 220).

On the doctrine of baptism, once again Voltaire's

lack of theological insight prevents him from pointing out a major discrepancy underlying Luther's acceptance of this sacrament. According to Luther, faith alone on the individual's part renders the grace-giving sacraments efficacious. How can a baby ignorant in the ways of God receive grace and be saved? Luther found a dubious solution in the assertion that the communal faith of the congregation causes the baptism to be efficacious for the infant.

In the light of his new approach to salvation, Luther was obliged to reconsider the value that the Catholic mass had acquired in his day. Luther feared that, for the commonfolk, the mass had become a mere tool to personal salvation. The common man had come to believe that if he went to mass frequently enough, their cumulative salutory effect would ensure him of salvation. In discussing Luther's solution to this problem Voltaire tends to confuse the reader by not making a clear distinction between private and public mass for which Luther had two different remedies. Voltaire writes: "Luther crut qu'il était temps enfin d'abolir la messe privée . . . .La messe fut abolie dans la ville de Vittemberg, et bientôt après dans le reste de la Saxe" (Essai, p. 224). Luther abolished the private mass, but retained the public mass in a modified form, making it more meaningful to contemporary German society. Luther did away with private mass performed by the priest in seclusion,

considering it as being nonsensical insofar as the mass itself is a form of public worship requiring the participation and communal faith of a congregation.

Failing to explain Luther's reasons for reforming the mass, Voltaire describes inaccurately the manner in which Luther undertook to abolish private mass. Luther crystallized his views on the mass during his stay in the Wartburg in 1521 immediately after the Diet of Worms. Popular rumour has it that while living in this supposedly haunted castle Luther was taunted by the devil. The inkstand hurled at the devil, nuts bouncing off the ceiling and casks rolling down stairs are only some of the incidents described in the rumour. Despite the devil's very real existence for Luther, these ghostly occurrences were never substantiated by contemporary sources. Contrary to Voltaire's claim, therefore, Luther never attributed his abolition of private mass to the work of the devil (Essai, p. 224).

As for the celebration of public mass, Voltaire gives no account of Luther's reform. Luther removed the sacrificial concept of the Catholic mass. The mass was transformed into a "festival of gratitude"[11] in which congregational participation was encouraged by various

---

[11] R. H. Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther, p. 487.

innovations: the mass was celebrated in the vernacular, singing by the congregation was introduced, communion of both kinds was established, and the sermon was emphasized, thus giving the mass a much more instructive tone.

Voltaire implies unjustly in his account that Frederick the Wise was of rebellious temperament and desired the total breakdown of the Catholic Church, thereby encouraging Luther to abolish the private mass (Essai, p. 224). Frederick, however, was much like Luther in his desire for slow and careful religious reform. During Luther's stay in the Wartburg Frederick was deeply troubled by the all too swift reform introduced by the Zwickau Prophets and wrote to Wittenberg University in the following terms:

> We have gone too fast. The common man has been incited to frivolity, and no one has been edified. We should have consideration for the weak. Images should be left until further notice. The question of begging should be canvassed. No essential portion of the mass should be omitted. Moot points should be discussed.12

These are certainly not the words of an impetuous fire-brand reformer!

Following from his tenet of justification by faith alone, Luther called for the abolition of the monastic system and the secularization of monastic lands -- a logical

---

[12]R. H. Bainton, Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther, p. 210.

deduction not made by Voltaire. Monks who attempt to gain special favour before God by performing pious works of asceticism do so in vain according to Lutheran doctrine. Furthermore, monks are evading their basic social function to work actively in society. After all, was not Christ a carpenter? Celibacy is easily done away with because it is part of Church discipline and not Church dogma. Luther strengthened his rejection of celibacy with reference to the Biblical command to multiply and be fruitful. Voltaire risks leaving his reader with the erroneous impression that Luther married Katherine von Bora merely to emphasize his argument, when he writes:

> Les moines et les religieuses sortaient de leurs cloîtres; et peu d'années après, Luther épousa une religieuse nommée Catherine Bore. Les ecclésiastiques de l'ancienne communion lui reprochèrent qu'il ne pouvait se passer de femme: Luther leur répondit qu'ils ne pouvaient se passer de maîtresses. (Essai, p. 224)

Such was not the case as Luther did not marry until 1525, three years after he rejected celibacy.

Both Voltaire and Luther agree about the value of marriage. It serves to increase the population and acts as the basic unit upon which all of society is built. For Luther marriage is not a sacrament, since it is not a contract between God and man but rather between two people. Luther, nonetheless, almost rendered marriage hallow by utterly condemning divorce: "Divorce is anarchy and a

repudiation of one's calling as a husband or wife".[13] Since adultery is clearly prohibited in the Ten Commandments, Luther advised the practice of bigamy in cases where husband and wife no longer find each other compatible. Although the Bible strongly recommends monogamy, nowhere in the Scriptures is bigamy specifically forbidden. From this rather specious argument, Voltaire remarks with dry humour:

> Les réformateurs d'Allemagne, qui voulaient suivre l'Evangile mot à mot, donnèrent un nouveau spectacle quelques années après . . . . (Essai, p. 232)

Voltaire is referring to the Philip of Hesse scandal in which Luther put his beliefs on marriage to the test and was to discover that, although his view was not violating Scripture, it went beyond the limits that tradition and custom would accept.

Philip of Hesse dissatisfied with his first wife desired to remarry. His first marriage, however, was legal and therefore inviolable. Philip took Katherine Saal as his mistress and this caused him much spiritual disquiet as he was living in sin and could not participate in the sacraments. In these circumstances, Luther permitted Philip to have two wives, basing his decision upon Old Testament precedents and on the clerical right to alleviate the spiritual anguish of a parishioner. Realizing that he was breaking very strong custom, as well as the Emperor's specific orders, in

---

[13] A. K. Swihart, Luther and the Lutheran Church (London: P. Owen, 1960), p. 155.

sanctioning bigamy, Luther demanded of Philip the utmost secrecy. As Voltaire claims, time reveals such secrets (Essai, p. 234). Luther attempted in vain to avoid a public scandal by advocating "good strong lies" (Elton, p. 170). The result was a considerable blow to the Protestant cause, both morally and politically. The Catholics took full advantage of the scandal by accusing the Lutherans of moral decay in living outside the Church and Charles V, sparing Philip from the death penalty, required of him various concessions which weakened the Protestant Schmalkaldic League. In assessing the importance of the Hesse affair, Voltaire describes it as "une nouveauté" which resulted in nothing more serious than "un scandale paisible", and he thus greatly underestimates the gravity of the incident (Essai, p. 235).

Luther's fear of a mere outward show of piety either with good works or with the veneration of sacred relics was very real. Yet this fear never led him to condone iconoclasm, as Voltaire suggests (Essai, p. 220). Luther was very distressed at hearing of the destruction of Church property during his exile. Iconoclasm was not necessary for the truly faithful as these Christians would recognize that images in themselves are not sacred and therefore pose no threat to religion. Moreover, images could indeed encourage faith, not in themselves, but by

what they depicted or represented to the worshiper. Although he did not sanction the destruction of existing images, Luther, if he could start afresh, would question the forming of new ones as it seemed to him being of the Nominalist School, rather presumptuous of man in his ignominy to depict God's omnitience in human form.

These are, then, the basic reforms initiated by Luther all stemming from his concept of justification by faith alone. As has been pointed out, Voltaire continually shows signs of being unaware of this force underlying all of Luther's reforms. Voltaire's incomprehension appears all the more evident in the manner in which he describes Luther's rejection of the doctrine of free will. Voltaire refers to Luther's denial of free will in passing only, failing to connect Luther's rejection of this concept with his other theological reforms. In reality Voltaire should have mentioned Luther's rejection of free will at the beginning of his account giving to it the importance it deserves as being central to Luther's whole religious doctrine (Essai, p. 220). On the other hand, Voltaire does realize the importance of the Bible in determining the nature of Luther's reforms, but makes no attempt to explain this fact.

The most important works in which Luther expresses his ideas and discusses reform are: The Address to the German Nobility (August 1520), The Babylonian Captivity of

the Church (September 1520) and On the Freedom of a Christian Man (November 1520). Of these, Voltaire mentions only The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. This work was of prime importance in weakening the central power of the Church by advocating a reduction in the number of sacraments. It was through the sacraments that the Church claimed to either grant or refuse grace to its members thereby maintaining a firm grip upon them. The Babylonian Captivity . . ., however, was a work written in a heavy latin style and destined to be read by an educated few only. The other two works were written in German and as they could be read by the general public, they acquired more influence. The success of these two works was reflected in the surprising number that were sold. The Address . . . sold 4,000 copies within three weeks and after two years it had gone through forty-three editions. On the Freedom of a Christian Man, although not quite as successful, went through a respectable eighteen editions in the space of six years.

Voltaire does not think highly of Luther's style, labelling it "un style barbare" for "des esprits assez grossiers" (Essai, p. 221). His judgement appears in direct contrast to that of Moore who, unlike Voltaire, commands a thorough knowledge of German and who states that in order to be successful during the Reformation an author had to express

himself in a skilful manner. Judging by the public acceptance of the two works just mentioned, Luther apparently had this talent.[14] Speaking of Luther's ability to combine harmoniously style and content, Moore adds:

> En un mot la qualité littéraire de [son] oeuvre paraît dériver de l'accord entre l'auteur et le moyen d'expression qu'il s'est choisi. Luther est grand écrivain par cela même qu'il y a en lui un artiste, un homme du peuple, et un génie religieux et qu'il s'est crée un style où tous les trois ont pu donner chacun sa mesure.15

Voltaire does admit that Luther was capable of writing in a gentle style (Essai, p. 248). Such an admission, however, cannot temper Voltaire's harsh judgement of Luther's style in general. Voltaire's criticism stems perhaps from the fact that he considered French classical writing to be the highest literary art form in comparison to which all others, Luther's style included, seemed to pale.

On the other hand, Voltaire's criticism must not be completely distrusted, since Luther was on occasion very capable of writing in a crude manner, not only displeasing to Voltaire but to many of the reformer's contemporaries as well. Take, for example, Luther's bitter attitude after his Leipzig debate with John Eck. Pascal writes:

---

[14] W. G. Moore, La Réforme allemande et la littérature française: recherches sur la notoriété de Luther en France (Strasbourg: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres à l'université de Strasbourg, 1930), p. 12.

[15] Ibid., p. 26.

> Luther's polemic was carried on in a style which continually called forth rebukes from his friends. His temper was never in control, and he wrote with a hasty, imaginative, savage passion which often led him beyond the bounds of truth and expediency.16

Such intemperance on Luther's part was very evident in his ruthless attack on the peasants in Against the Murdering Thieving Hordes of the Peasants which appeared in 1525 and of which more will be said later.

It must be remembered that much of what Voltaire considered "grossier" was the earthiness and homeliness of Luther's style. Most of Germany was rural, Luther himself being of rugged peasant stock. As Voltaire held the peasants and lower classes in little regard, it is understandable that he regarded the robust earthiness of Luther's style unfavourably. Yet this very style proved to have great appeal for Luther's fellow Germans. The success of Luther's translation of the Bible in which Moses became a German and the road from Jericho to Jerusalem ran through the Thüringian Forest testifies to this fact.

Faced with Luther's persistent refusal to accept papal authority, the Church had no choice but to demand his recantation under pain of excommunication. In 1520,

---

[16] R. Pascal, The Social Basis of the German Reformation (London: Watts and Co., 1933), p. 59.

Pope Leo X issued the bull Exsurge Domine and ordered that all Luther's books containing heretical views be burned. Luther was given sixty days to recant. Upon hearing that some of his works had been burned in Cologne, Luther replied by burning the Exsurge Domine. Voltaire appears to confuse his facts by implying that Luther burned the second bull issued against him, namely, the Decet Romanum Pontificem. This second bull was not issued until January of the following year (Essai, p. 220). Voltaire writes mundanely that Luther proved himself bold in burning the papal bull (Essai, p. 220). Not mentioned in Voltaire's account, however, is the fact that Luther did so only with the knowledge of his personal secretary. What was a bolder gesture and fixed general attention on Luther was his burning of the books of canon law. Luther had in this way formally announced his break with Rome.

In burning the papal bull and the books of canon law Luther had, according to Voltaire, the support of many sympathizers (Essai, p. 220). Much of Luther's support came from the spirit of discontent with the corruption pervading the Catholic Church. Voltaire quite justifiably asks the question:

> De quel front un Alexandre VI, l'horreur de toute la terre, avait-il osé se dire le vicaire de Dieu? et comment Léon X, dans le sein des plaisirs et des scandales, pouvait-il prendre ce titre? (Essai, pp. 221-222)

Rodrigo Borgia, after having literally bought the tiara in 1492, was determined to become as powerful as his namesake Alexander the Great. Through outlandish nepotism, Pope Alexander VI continually strove to acquire wealth and influence for his children. To Cesare, his heir and hopeful founder of the Borgia dynasty, Alexander VI gave unceasing support, in particular when Cesare undertook to suppress all opposition with coercion through torture and poisoning, that "useful adjunct",[17] as Chamberlin puts it, for the politically ambitious.

The blatant licentiousness of Alexander VI's court gave way to the more refined pleasures of Pope Leo X's who assumed the papal throne in 1513 at the early age of thirty-six, having been made cardinal when only fourteen years old. Voltaire's description of Leo X as being a worldly, pleasure-seeking pope is borne out by historical evidence (Essai, p. 209). Pope Leo X's favorite saying was: "God has given us the papacy -- let us enjoy it".[18] This he did to his utmost. Leo X was determined to avoid the problems and worries of his predecessors by immersing himself as much as possible in festivals, banquets and above all in hunting, his favorite pastime. Greatly desiring happiness, he encouraged

---

[17] E. R. Chamberlin, The Bad Popes, p. 202.

[18] Ibid., p. 248.

people around him to be jovial, which proved to be a severe drain on the papal treasury. Voltaire does commend the Pope for one quality, namely, the civilizing influence upon European society of his lavish patronage of the arts, even if his patronage was somewhat out of context with his religious calling (Essai, p. 214). Voltaire's belief in the humanizing effect of the arts is visible here. Pope Leo X, who was born in Florence, itself the birthplace of the Renaissance, encouraged fully the study of classical culture and rewarded handsomely the painters and writers who frequented his court. Leo, whose favorite self-portrait depicted him fingering delicately a priceless manuscript, eyeglass in hand, was deeply flattered that his reign was proclaimed that of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom.

Historical evidence also bears out Voltaire's account of corruption in the Church hierarchy. Voltaire quotes Pope Pius II who reputedly said:

> . . .pour de fortes raisons on avait interdit le mariage aux prêtres, mais que pour de plus fortes il fallait le leur permettre. (Essai, p. 211)

At the Councils of Constance and Basel, held in 1414 and 1431 respectively, Emperor Sigismund suggested the abolition of celibacy because sexual licence was so common. Absenteeism resulting from the practice of pluralism was just as common. Voltaire writes that it was not unusual for a bishop to manage eight or nine sees (Essai, p. 211). Witness the holdings of the Cardinal of Estouteville who possessed at

one time an archbishopric, four bishoprics, four abbeys and three priories. As for the luxury of some ecclesiastics, Voltaire contrasts the poverty of the artisans and peasants who eked out an existence with their families while watching monks live in luxury befitting a king (Essai, p. 213). Such a comparison is not unwarranted when we consider that no less than eighteen bishoprics and archbishoprics in the German states were in the hands of the sons of princes at the outbreak of the Reformation. The upper Church hierarchy was reserved exclusively for the wealthy, one of the requirements for entry being proficiency in the tourney.

Much of the Church's wealth was derived from heavy taxation, a source of much lay discontent, as Voltaire describes:

> C'était le joug des taxes romaines qu'on voulait briser. Qu'importait, en effet, à Stockholm à Copenhague, à Londres, à Dresde, que l'on eût du plaisir à Rome? Mais il importait qu'on ne payât point de taxes exorbitantes . . . . (Essai, p. 218)

Let us take as an example the financial burden imposed by Pope Gregory VII who ruled from 1073 to 1085 and whose "net of taxation"[19] consisted of no less than eight or nine types of papal dues many of which were continued to Luther's day. The discontent described by Voltaire was not limited

---

[19] K. Adam, The Roots of the Reformation, p. 9.

only to Stockholm, London or Dresden, although through being situated on the periphery of Christendom their displeasure would be more pronounced, but it also affected the German states as well. The popes were becoming increasingly more greedy and short-sighted because they were degenerating into petty Italian rulers rather than strengthening their universal stewardship of Christendom.

Had the papacy acquired its proper cosmopolitan view as the shepherd of all mankind, it would still have had to confront the growing sense of nationalism which exerted a particularist influence on European unity. In his attacks on the papacy, Luther no doubt strengthened the sentiments of German nationalism. Forced to leave the Catholic Church, Luther was founding in essence a distinctly German Church in Wittenberg, shaped to meet the spiritual needs of those with whom he had the most contact. In contrast to this tendency, the predominance of Italians in German clerical offices became increasingly more apparent with Rome seen as the foreign oppressor. Among the various manifestations of this new German national spirit which included religious political and economic factors, we need only mention Luther's influence upon the development of the German language, since much of his writing was done in the vernacular.

To Luther's growing support, Voltaire adds that of a class of society which took up the Reformer's cause "sans

trop examiner les questions de l'école" (Essai, p. 220). Voltaire is apparently referring to the support given Luther by the peasants who totally misunderstood his objectives and who were ultimately to gain his bitter hatred.

The peasants interpreted Luther's attack upon the papacy as a sign to commence their own long sought political and economic reforms. It must be remembered that Voltaire takes a biased view of the peasants for whom human equality, "cette vérité dangereuse", should not apply in the political and economic sense as the peasants desired (Essai, p. 236). He is sympathetic, however, to the basic economic requests of these "sauvages" which he considers as "les droits du genre humain" (Essai, pp. 236-237). Some of the demands that Voltaire lists formed part of the Twelve Articles, the program of reform drawn up by the peasants.

Asked for his opinion of the projected reform, Luther replied that he adamantly opposed the use of violence by the peasants to obtain their demands. He was sympathetic to several of the demands and scolded the secular authorities, the princes, for their irresponsibility and blamed them for much of the peasant discontent. Luther vigorously maintained, however, that the secular authorities alone had the right to introduce economic reform and he warned the peasants not to take this responsibility into their own hands. Serfdom, one of the major complaints, was to be retained according to

Luther, since "every true Christian is content with his state; serfs can serve the Lord and win grace as easily as princes".[20]

When the peasants, very disillusioned by Luther's attitude, ignored his advice, calling him a servant of the princes, and revolted in 1524, Luther replied in his vicious attack, Against the Murdering Thieving Hordes of the Peasants. In this work Luther showed himself to be crude and ruthless in advising the princes to slaughter the peasants as one would a mad dog. Elton writes: "The tract remains a sad example of the crudity to which he could sink" (p. 60).

Luther's anger stemmed from the peasants' misunderstanding his theory of the priesthood of all believers. Human equality was to be understood only in the spiritual sense. Equality in the secular order was impossible: "An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of person. Some must be free, others serfs, some rulers, others subjects . . .".[21] In an ideal and truly Christian society, government is not necessary, but man's sinfulness requires it to prevent anarchy such as the peasants would create in

---

[20] R. Pascal, The Social Basis of the German Reformation, pp. 136-137.

[21] J. S. Schapiro, Social Reform and the Reformation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1909), p. 82.

revolting. Princes, despite their social neglect, must always be obeyed for the sake of peace and order. Philip Melanchthon, Luther's closest friend and fellow reformer, explains:

> For the sake of peace a Christian should be law-abiding, whatever the law may be; indeed, discontent hurts the soul's welfare. If serfdom exists, it should be left alone for the sake of peace. The Gospel does not require a change in the serf's condition, but it does require obedience to the government . . . .Whatever good is done to the government is done to God, and he who cheerfully bears burdens and taxes most truly serves God.22

Encouraged by the new role of authority ascribed to them, the princes eagerly adopted the Lutheran cause, lured all the more by the potential wealth to be gained from his policy of secularization, as Voltaire correctly indicates (Essai, p. 218). Voltaire's belief that the monies derived from this policy went into the construction of hospitals and other charitable works appears rather optimistic (Essai, p. 249). He expresses his general attitude towards the secularization of Church property in these terms:

---

[22] Ibid., p. 78. It may be asked of Luther on what grounds he challenged the Emperor who doggedly sought an end to the religious schism. Luther replied:

> For such honour and glory has been given to me by God's grace . . .that since the time of the Apostles no doctor, nor writer, no theologian, nor jurist has confirmed, instructed and solaced the conscience of the secular estates in so glorious and clear a fashion as I have done by the especial grace of God.*

*R. Pascal, The Social Basis of the German Reformation, p. 166.

> En général, toute nation qui a converti les couvents à l'usage public y a beaucoup gagné, sans que personne y ait perdu: car en effet on n'ôte rien à une société qui n'existe plus. (Essai, p. 249)

It is true that the potential for introducing beneficial social reforms with the revenues of secularization does exist as Voltaire claims, and in fact Luther, with his dominating influence in Wittenberg, did oversee such beneficial works. Yet in general, such was not always the case, as the responsibility for social reform depended entirely upon the whims of the princes who could do with the revenues of secularization as they pleased. A case in point where the revenues derived from such a policy were not invested for the common weal can be found in the blatant profiteering of the English Cecils, father and son, but this matter lies beyond the scope of the present work. Luther's religious reforms, in brief, received the support of almost all classes of society, from peasants to princes, who saw in his cause their own particular and multifarious grievances against the established order.

The time limit given to Luther to recant in the bull Exsurge Domine had passed and the papal bull Decet Romanum Pontificem was ready early in the year 1521. To become effective and to officially excommunicate Luther it required the consent of the Emperor and the German princes. Keeping his election promise never to ban a subject unheard, Charles V

called a diet at Worms in 1521 and summoned Luther to appear. Upon his arrival, Luther received a hero's welcome from the crowds that thronged the streets. Voltaire likens Luther's coming to that of John Huss at Constance in 1414, recalling that Emperor Sigismund had revoked the safe-conduct issued to Huss and implying that Charles V might have done the same in Luther's case (Essai, p. 224). Luther, himself, also recalled the case of John Huss as he made his way to Worms. These fears were not unfounded as the papal legate, Aleander, attempted to persuade Charles, as Voltaire describes, into trapping Luther (Essai, p. 224). The Emperor did not want to share Sigismund's shame and maintained his word of honour in the typical Spanish tradition.

At the Diet Luther was given one last chance to recant. Voltaire writes in jest that Pope Leo X ought to have attempted to persuade Luther by offering him a cardinal's cap (Essai, p. 218). Such was almost the case when Aleander promised Luther a rich priory if he were to renounce his heretical beliefs! Since Luther remained adamant in his religious views, Charles V clearly saw his duty in requesting that the Diet hasten to ratify the imperial ban. Voltaire raises unfair doubts about the Emperor's religious intentions (Essai, p. 223). Voltaire suggests that Charles V was secretly in favour of the Reformation when in reality his sole desire was to curb it. Charles V did admit the possibility

of some reform of the most severe abuses in religious practices, but never did he question Church dogma. On the sincerity of the Emperor's religious motives in banning Luther, Elton writes:

> Charles quite consciously thought of himself as the heir of Charlemagne, the secular head of a united Christendom, God's vicar side by side with the pope whose spiritual rule it was his duty to defend . . . .Ever aware of his God-given mission, he could not face the Lutheran revolt with anything but unrelenting hostility. From first to last he was determined to end the schism, one way or another. (p. 37)

The Diet concluded with Luther's exile from the Empire. His heretical faith was banned and a committee established to enforce the decree. For eight years, as Voltaire accurately remarks, the Reformation developed unimpeded as Charles V, having moved to Spain, was too preoccupied with foreign affairs to concern himself with religious dissention in Germany (Essai, p. 238).

Voltaire is intrigued by a peculiar historical event that occurred shortly after the adjournment of the Diet of Worms -- that of King Henry VIII's personal sally against Luther in his Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, a work for which he earned the proud title of Defender of the Faith (Essai, p. 222). Voltaire mentions this event, not for its historical importance regarding the development of Lutheranism, but rather as evidence of the sometimes whimsical course taken by history, since the same Henry VIII was to become later an arch-enemy of the pope.

It was at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 that the reformers faced their first serious challenge from the Emperor. Voltaire mistakenly writes that at this Diet proposals for moderation were put forward (Essai, p. 238). In reality, the measures of toleration adopted at Speyer three years previously, at which time the Emperor and the princes agreed upon a temporary policy of religious toleration, were revoked and the Edict of Worms reinstated. The reformers replied with a stern protestation calling for full toleration in religious affairs. It was this demand that gave to the reformers their name of Protestants to which Voltaire refers (Essai, p. 238).

In his ceaseless hopes to end the schism, Charles V summoned another diet at Augsburg in the following year. In calling this meeting, Charles' desires were more ardent than ever as he wanted to obtain unity at home in order to recruit military aid against the Turks who were threatening the gates of Vienna. Asked to draw up a corpus of beliefs upon which a settlement could be based, the Protestants, led by Philip Melanchthon -- Luther was prevented from attending because of the ban -- produced the Augsburg Confession, a conciliatory document which made no mention of controversial points of doctrine such as transubstantiation and the priesthood of all believers. It did, however, mention the tenet, of justification by faith alone. The Confession, because of

its mild tone and its possibility of wide interpretation, acted as "une boussole", as Voltaire puts it, in guiding more orthodox thinkers into the Protestant camp (Essai, p. 238). Needless to say, the attempt at reconciliation failed as the most contentious issue of papal authority remained unresolved.

The close of the Diet brought the Edict of Worms again into force and gave the Protestants until April of 1531 to return to the Church. Faced with military threats, the reformers created the strong and unifying League of Schmalkalden in February 1531. The opposition did not materialize, however, as Charles was again preoccupied with foreign affairs. In desperate need of support against the Turks, the Emperor signed the Religious Truce of Nuremberg granting the Protestants religious toleration for the moment in return for military and financial aid.

The Emperor's continuous concern with foreign affairs permitted rapid expansion not so much of Lutheranism itself as the Protestant spirit in general. In fact, between 1525 and 1531, Lutheranism suffered a slight set-back in popular appeal.

The Erasmian humanists withdrew their support after the Peasant Revolt of 1524, although Luther vigorously denied any role in the rebellion. Because of their Lutheran sympathies, the humanists were wrongly accused, in their

view of harbouring the dangerous views of social egalitarianism which had led to the upheaval of the social order. Luther was aware of and greatly feared such a peasant revolt for he knew that it gave his opponents the exact excuse they needed for launching charges against him of inciting the people to revolt by preaching equality. His opponents made no effort to understand the exclusively spiritual nature of his notion of equality. Voltaire's assertion, therefore, that Luther lost none of his popular appeal after the rebellion can be seriously questioned (Essai, p. 237). The humanists' friendship with Luther was in any case a tenuous one at best since their basic views on man's fundamental nature were diametrically opposed. Luther's influence was further weakened by the rise of numerous fanatical sects which interpreted his doctrine to their fancy. Zwingli's Zürich also weakened Lutheranism by serving as a rival force with Wittenberg in directing the course of the Reformation.

Luther's seemingly "democratic" approach to the Christian faith in permitting individual interpretation of the Scriptures lost its appeal when the commonfolk discovered that Luther never really accepted this right. Granted the parishioners were free to discuss with their minister any point of doctrine that troubled them, but in the final analysis they were forced to accept what Luther set down as the true teaching of the Church, since he had full authority over censorship.

Sincere in his original intention to permit individual interpretation of the Bible, Luther was under the false impression that by translating the Bible into the clearest possible German, all those who read it would arrive at the same basic conclusions. Luther believed that his precise version of Scripture would be so self-explanatory as to leave no possibility of conflicting interpretation. Luther was disillusioned in his ideal by his experience with the Zwickau Prophets who, during his stay in the Wartburg, brought anarchy to Wittenberg by their inspired interpretation of Scripture. To prevent the chaos which such freedom could create, Luther undertook to introduce rigorous standardization of Church dogma and liturgical practice. He relied fully upon the secular authorities to maintain order by giving them complete control over the moral behaviour of the people as well as over the administration of marriage, tithes and Church discipline. The prince came to exert a powerful influence over the daily lives of his subjects. The popularity of such reforms may be clearly suspect, for as Pascal claims: "Luther had freed religion from one captivity to subject it to another enslavement".[23] If in the light of these events, Luther lost some of his appeal at home, abroad his new faith

---

[23] R. Pascal, The Social Basis of the German Reformation, p. 121.

enjoyed varying degrees of success and especially in Scandinavia where he gained quick recognition.

Judging by the title of his chapter: "Le Progrès du luthéranisme en Suède, en Danemark et en Allemagne", Voltaire sets out to describe the growth of Lutheranism in Scandinavia (Essai, p. 231). We can seriously question, however, whether Voltaire's success in his task goes beyond defining it. He deals almost entirely with the cruelty of King Christian II of Denmark and Gustav Troll, Archbishop of Upsala, in their attempts to gain power in Sweden. In reality, Christian II had very little to do with the actual introduction of Lutheranism in Scandinavia. Voltaire describes the collusion between the two men in their attempts to overthrow the Swedish government, but he fails to realize that Christian II had not the slightest intention of reforming Roman Catholic doctrine. Voltaire describes in sordid detail the massacre committed by this "Néron du Nord" after his coronation in Stockholm in 1520, but fails to indicate any relationship between these crimes and Christian's supposed break with Rome (Essai, pp. 231-232). In short, Voltaire's account of the cruelties committed by the King and the Archbishop has little relevance to the subject at hand -- the rise of Lutheranism in Scandinavia.

King Christian II played only a minor role in the Reformation in his country. Although he did separate from

Rome to the extent that all appeals on religious matters were to be sent to a special committee rather than to the pope, thereby placing himself effectively at the head of the Danish Church, Christian II had no more reforming desire than that of an early humanist. Willing to correct the major abuses, he never questioned the sanctity of existing Catholic dogma. Voltaire's account of Christian II's crimes appears, in essence, to be a further example of man's inhumanity as revealed in history, a subject on which Voltaire frequently commented with bitterness.

Lutheranism obtained its first strong grip in Denmark during the reign of Frederick the Wise of Saxony. Although attempting to follow a conservative and neutral path so as to avoid creating hostilities between Catholics and reformers, Frederick tended to favour the Protestant cause whenever possible. Lutheranism had already gained entry into Denmark through trade and the arrival of foreign students and had been quickly adopted in the intellectual circles where humanism prevailed. King Christian II had previously encouraged the immigration of Lutheran academics not for their faith but for their learning. Hans Tausen, the Danish Luther, had received part of his education at Wittenberg and by 1525 was preaching in Viborg in Jutland. A year later a printing press was set up there and kept active. At his coronation Frederick had promised to protect Roman Catholicism.

He kept his promise rather ambiguously by insisting that only God's Word be preached in Denmark. By 1527, he had openly declared his policy of not intervening against the Lutherans. Between the years 1529 and 1532, Frederick the Wise had filled the three most important bishoprics in Denmark with Lutheran sympathizsers. This was followed shortly afterwards with the appointment of a reformist archbishop to the see of Lund. By the time of his death in 1533, Frederick the Wise had successfully given Lutheranism a firm foothold in Denmark without causing serious civil disorder.

His successor, King Christian III, after winning the crown in battle, imprisoned the Catholic bishops and confiscated their lands, using the revenue to pay his troops. Such an action showed him to be a convinced Lutheran for he had thereby terminated the Catholic episcopacy in Denmark. Not bound by any coronation promise other than "to reverence Almighty God, His Holy Word and doctrines, and to promote the advancement of the Christian Faith",[24] Christian III invited highly reputed Lutheran divines to encourage the growth of Lutheranism in Denmark. In 1537, the King appointed seven Lutheran clergymen to the position of superintendent

---

[24]E. H. Dunkley, The Reformation in Denmark (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1948), p. 74.

or "bishop" of the newly reformed Church of Denmark. The final step in the reforming process was to formulate a Church Ordinance which clearly authorized the new Church's dogma and practices. This was done in 1537 and, with Luther's approval, it became law in 1539.

Falling under the rule of Danish kings, Norway followed the Danish example in its own Reformation. Mention must be made of Jorgen Erickson of Stavanger who played the leading role in having Lutheranism accepted in Norway.

After devoting considerable space in his account to the infamous deeds of King Christian II in Sweden, Voltaire devotes only a few lines to King Gustav Vasa, the real Lutheran reformer in Sweden. Voltaire may be justified in assuming that vengeance played a part in Gustav Vasa's decision to favour Lutheranism in his realm (Essai, p. 231). His father had been killed by Christian II in his massacre of the Swedish nobles and ecclesiastics. Vasa adopted the Lutheran cause as a means of seizing Church property and of obtaining badly needed revenue. The reform was guided by the Petri brothers, Olavus and Lars. In 1531, Lars Petri became archbishop of Upsala and administered the Church of Sweden. Olavus remained the spiritual leader of Church reform. Generally speaking, Lutheranism gained predominance very gradually in Sweden, contrary to Voltaire's opinion (Essai, p. 232). The structure of the Swedish Church remained

essentially unchanged unlike that of Denmark. The change-over was not without revolts, despite Voltaire's assertion to the contrary (Essai, p. 232). The peasants who connected Vasa's heavy taxation with the imposition of the new faith revolted, spurred on by pockets of Catholic resistance. Lutheranism became the official religion of Sweden in 1544, but by 1527 at the Diet of Västerås Gustav Vasa had already ensured its acceptance by acquiring control over Church property and religious teaching.

Again, just as Norway followed Denmark in religious affairs, Finland followed the example of Sweden, being under its jurisdication. Interestingly enough, it is Finland which is today the most Lutheran country in the world, ninety-eight percent of its population being of that faith. With Luther well established as the "apôtre du Nord", let us examine his acceptance elsewhere in Europe (Essai, p. 232).

In France Luther received his first sympathetic hearing from French humanists such as Guillaume Budé, Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples, and Guillaume Farel. All of Luther's major polemic writings were known in Paris by the end of 1521. The first sign of his penetration into the provinces appeared in Lyons in 1520 while reformed ideas did not reach Montbéliard until 1524. Despite two national edicts forbidding the sale and possession of his books, Luther's works were widely read as testified by the edicts in themselves

and by the number of violations listed in court journals.

Francis I, a devotee of Renaissance art and learning, was not naturally disposed to suppress the new religion, a policy aided, no doubt, by his political animosity towards both pope and emperor. His treatment of the Lutherans depended primarily upon the vacillating nature of his foreign policy. Until 1525, the new faith existed largely unmolested by the authorities, but during Francis I's imprisonment in Madrid his regent and mother, Louis of Savoy, a staunch papist, initiated rigorous suppression. This policy was continued by the King himself after his liberation in order to gain financial support from the Catholic nobles to ransom his son held hostage in Madrid.

Although persecution was to be the official government policy as from 1528, Luther's success in France varied in response to Francis' alliance with Protestant states abroad. Voltaire's assertion, therefore, that the French government was for a long time undecided about the acceptance of Lutheranism appears accurate (Essai, p. 222). It was not until the Placard Affair of 1534 that Francis I permanently banned the cause of reform in France. In this affair numerous posters were put up in the streets of several French towns criticizing the mass and the eucharist. In a foolish act of provocation, one of the posters was attached to the door of the King's bedchamber at Amboise while he was sleeping.

The King felt personally insulted and launched an unwavering program of persecution which effectively saw the end of Lutheranism in France.

In the Netherlands and Spain, religious policy was clear-cut. Lutherans had been rigorously suppressed in the Low Countries as early as 1520 with the issuing of the bull Exsurge Domine against Luther. In Spain, they never established a permanent foothold. Such was Charles V's loyalty to Catholicism that the destinies of Spain and of Catholicism were to become inextricably intertwined, Spain becoming the bastion of the Counter-Reformation. Voltaire's terse statement that Spain played no part in tumbling the tiara need not be doubted (Essai, p. 222).

Voltaire gives the impression that the Italians were affected little by Lutheranism (Essai, p. 222). Luther provided, of course, the initial spark which set off the Counter-Reformation which was to lead to a thorough revision of Catholicism. Yet the actual growth of his doctrine in Italy is difficult to establish because one cannot distinguish his true adherents from those who were faithful to Catholic doctrine, but antagonistic to abuses in the Church. In Venice, Lutheranism was well known and tolerated, the city being dependent upon international trade. Lutheran ideas were even discussed by the more liberal members of the papal Curia who sought Church reform. The Italian Reformation,

however, owed most of its vigour to Calvinist influences. Lutheranism failed to develop in Italy because of the lack of organization. It soon declined after 1530 when the papacy introduced suppression of heterodoxy, a persecution which reached its zenith under the direction of Cardinal Carafa. As Pope from 1555 to 1559, he gave his hatred of reform free play by not only suppressing the slightest variation from Catholic doctrine but also by stifling all intellectual thought and driving Italy into "mental stagnation" (Elton, p. 192).

Despite his failure at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Charles V was no less determined to see the schism in Germany ended. Other attempts were made, one being at the Diet of Regensburg in 1541. Again the question of papal infallibility separated both sides and the attempted reconciliation failed. In 1547 Charles V momentarily thought himself successful after having defeated the Schmalkaldic League and taking captive both the Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse. Success proved illusory as Voltaire ably points out (Essai, p. 205). The Emperor lacked the time and the resources to deal properly with home and foreign affairs simultaneously.

Charles V's continuous efforts proved futile and, in the spring and summer of 1555 at the Diet of Augsburg, the inevitable occurred. Lutheranism was openly accepted

on equal footing with Catholicism as the principle of "cuius regio eius religio" was adopted. Luther had died in 1546. Had he still been alive, he would no doubt have received this official recognition with mixed emotions. He would have certainly been happy that after a long and arduous battle he had won the right to profess his own religious views. Yet, at the same time, he would have felt dismayed that these views could not have been shared in a reformed and united Catholic Church. In October 1517, Luther could have neither foretold, nor would he have had any desire to forsee such a split within the Catholic Church. This separation having taken place, however, and Lutheranism having been firmly established as a distinct new religion in Europe, it is now time to turn our attention to Zwingli's efforts at reform in Switzerland. For as Voltaire indicates, Switzerland was the first country outside the German states to actively take up Luther's attack on Rome, an attack which took the form of Zwinglianism (Essai, p. 226).

CHAPTER II

ZWINGLIANISM

Of all the countries in Europe which followed Luther's example in seeking Church reform independently of Rome, the Swiss cantons of Berne, Basel and Zürich were the first territories outside the German lands to recognize the reformed faith. In fact, the rapidity with which the new religion was tolerated in these cantons causes us to believe that it was perhaps Lutheranism itself that was specifically adopted as the reformed faith of many Swiss. In Zürich, Zwingli was permitted a free hand to reform the Church as early as January 1523. In Berne, his beliefs were officially proclaimed early in the year 1528, while in Basel, official recognition was given to them in 1529. Given the geographical proximity of Zürich and Luther's Saxony as well as the numerous similarities in the religious beliefs held by both Huldrych Zwingli and Martin Luther, we have good cause to see in Zwinglianism a preponderant Lutheran outlook.

Zwingli, like Luther, adopted the Bible as the sole authority on the Word of God. All of his reforms, like those of Luther, were to have their basis in Scripture alone. Given its position as central to religious reform, the Bible had to be rendered as clear in its meaning as possible so that all who read it could understand it without difficulty or

confusion. This was in accordance with the Biblical command found in I Corinthians 14:8, and 9 where it is written:

> For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound,
> who shall prepare himself to the battle?
> So likewise ye, except ye utter by the
> tongue words easy to be understood, how
> shall it be known what is spoken? for ye
> shall speak into the air.

Zwingli, like Luther, set about to translate the Bible into the vernacular easily understandable to the commonfolk. His desire for a clear rendering of the original text was strengthened also by that same fear which troubled Luther: the rise of millennarian sects interpreting the Scriptures to their own particular fancy. Zwingli himself explains:

> If it should come to pass that every hot-headed
> crank should form a new group as soon as any
> new or strange idea came into his head, there
> would soon be so many sects that in every parish,
> Christ would be divided into numerous pieces.1

To accomplish his task of translating, Zwingli undertook the study of Greek and Hebrew and acquired, as did Luther, a good knowledge of these languages. Zwingli's success cannot be questioned. This is the opinion of Rilliet who, in commenting on "the extreme clarity of his style",[2] adds:

---

[1]O. Farner, Zwingli the Reformer, His Life and Work, trans. D. G. Sear, (Place unknown, Orchon Books, 1968), p. 59.

[2]J. Rilliet, Zwingli Third Man of the Reformation, trans. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), p. 105.

> He was an artist in language and could knock the nail on the head when it was a question of making Biblical expressions comprehensible to the simple man.3

Zwingli's views on the duty of the pastor, with one exception to be discussed later, differed little from those of Luther. Both reformers stressed the dual role of teaching the Bible and administering the sacraments. Both reformers placed the clergy and laity on equal footing with each other, all society being subject to the same responsibilities and penalties. Such equality, however, did not prevent Zwingli, like Luther, from adopting a selective attitude towards those who wished to enter the ministry. Not all people were suitably talented to answer the divine calling, one most onerous in nature as both Zwingli and Luther discovered personally, since the clergy shouldered a heavy responsibility in spreading the message of salvation. It was essential, then, that the clergy be carefully trained.

As for the Biblical message to be taught by the clergy, Zwingli and Luther were in full agreement. It was to centre around justification by faith alone as the sole means to salvation. Zwingli swept away in his Sixty-Seven Theses of December 1522 the whole raison d'être of the papacy, the invocation of the saints and the role of mediator assumed by

---

[3] Ibid., p. 66.

the Church hierarchy. Emphasizing the direct relationship between God and man, Zwingli's view of the new religion was as Christocentric as Luther's.

Consequently, Zwingli denied the efficacy of good works such as fasting. As a result he found himself the object of public controversy when he defended those who ate meat during Lent of the year 1522. The incident in question concerned the Swiss printer Froschauer who offered his employees sausage for dinner because the price of fish was too high. Zwingli strongly defended the interests of the printer claiming his action to be not unscriptural. Zwingli stressed the fact that fasting in itself had no salutory value for the soul, but he did allow the individual Christian the liberty to decide for himself on the matter.

The subject of fasting led Zwingli to discuss other practices of the Catholic Church which revolved around the merit approach to salvation. One of these practices was that of celibacy which Zwingli attacked in his Architeles, a work he completed in 1522. What prompted Zwingli to attack this particular practice at that time was his own marriage in the spring of the same year, for Zwingli was himself a priest. Zwingli did away with the vows of celibacy claiming them to be unfounded in Scripture and citing the example of the apostles all of whom, save Peter, were married.

The abolition of celibacy necessarily involved Zwingli on the topic of marriage with which he dealt extensively in his De vera et falsa religione completed in 1525 and which is generally considered to be the definitive work on his theological beliefs. Like Luther, Zwingli refused to regard marriage as a sacrament and consequently made it, as did Luther, a responsibility of the state. Zwingli differed fundamentally from Luther in that, although he considered divorce distasteful, he openly admitted it to be the only true solution to an incompatible marriage. Zwingli considered it foolish to retain a union in the physical sense when spiritually such a union no longer existed.

Having removed marriage from the list of sacraments Zwingli proceded to shorten this list further, as did Luther, and admitted baptism and communion to be the only true sacraments. On communion, both reformers agree in rejecting transubstantiation and the sacrificial nature of the eucharist.

In his De vera et falsa religione, Zwingli criticized as well the practice of monasticism for the same reasons as did Luther. In performing acts of asceticism in the hope of gaining divine favour, monks were, in fact, incurring God's displeasure by neglecting their social responsibilities. Furthermore, they proved to be a burden on society by not earning their own living. Zwingli intended to put secularized

Church lands to the same uses as proposed by Luther, namely, the undertaking of charitable works such as the support of the poor and needy.

Zwingli, again like Luther, planned to realize his reforms gradually and cautiously, relying first upon public support before instituting them. His "cautious peasant nature"[4] made him work with care and deliberation, always respectful of the authority of civil law. Civil law for Zwingli, as for Luther, should always be obeyed as was the case with secular government, since both were divinely ordained in Scripture. Man's sinful nature rendered the presence of a strong temporal authority necessary, and in stressing obedience to this authority Zwingli was as adamant as Luther.

From these numerous beliefs held in common by the two reformers, popular opinion misconceives Zwingli as a protégé of the Wittenberg monk from whom he received, deeply inspired, the basic ideas which gave impetus to his own reform in Switzerland. Zwingli admitted freely being greatly encouraged by Luther's bravely defiant attitude towards the papacy, a stand which encouraged Zwingli to his own reforms. Zwingli, however, steadfastly rejected any connection with Luther in the formulating of his own religious beliefs and claimed to have maintained complete independence from the Wittenberg reformer in this respect. A closer examination of Zwingli's

---

[4] O. Farner, Zwingli the Reformer His Life and Work, p. 39.

beliefs shows quite assuredly the accuracy of his contention since, compared with Luther, Zwingli held an entirely different approach to Christianity, an approach which effectively ruled out any master-student relationship between the two reformers.

Voltaire commences his account on Zwingli in the Essai by asserting that the Swiss reformer went farther than Luther in that he rejected completely the slightest corporeal presence in the eucharist, a position which earned for him the qualification of "sacramentaire", as Voltaire indicates (Essai, p. 226). Voltaire is justified in mentioning at the beginning of his chapter Zwingli's view of the eucharist as it was precisely this doctrine which, as will be seen, proved to be the most divisive between the two reformers. Voltaire shows, however, a lack of depth in his study by failing to explain Zwingli's attitude on communion, a view which reveals the reformer's fundamental difference from Luther as to the basic nature of Christianity, and which proved that the epithet "sacramentaire" is not truly applicable to Zwingli.

Zwingli and Luther met at Marburg in 1529 hoping to come to an agreement whereby their two reform causes could be united in a solid front against the Catholics. While understanding was sought, irreconcilable differences were found as the two reformers were at loggerheads over the physical presence of Christ's body in the elements of communion.

Their disagreement on this doctrine stemmed, however, from a more basic difference concerning the spirituality of religion. Both reformers reject transubstantiation as an "unscriptural piece of priestly magic" (Elton, p. 71). Yet Luther, basing his theory of consubstantiation on the ubiquitous nature of Christ's body imparted to the bread and wine by means of the participant's faith and the grace of God, stubbornly stuck to the literal meaning found in the Biblical passage of St. Matthew 26:26 where it is written: "This is my body". Zwingli unflinchingly held to the interpretation of the same passage as "This is [signifies] my body", and cited other passages from Scripture to support his view.[5] Bearing ever presently in mind the passage of St. John 6:63 "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing", Zwingli maintained that even if Christ were corporeally present such a presence would be of little value to human salvation, given Christ's human form as weak and susceptible as any man's. Zwingli viewed Luther's consubstantiation as unrefined and "cannibalistic".[6]

Zwingli considered the Holy Supper as a memorial, symbolic in meaning only. He held, unlike Luther, that grace

---

[5]In support of his claim to interpret "is" as "signifies", Zwingli referred Luther to various other passages from the Bible such as Genesis 41:26: "The seven good cows are [signify] seven years of plenty", and St. John 15:5: "I am [signify] the vine, you are [signify] the branches".

[6]J. Rilliet, Zwingli Third Man of the Reformation, p. 231.

was imparted to the communicant by the Holy Spirit alone when the truly faithful meditated upon what his communion represented. Zwingli denied any inherent grace-giving quality of the elements themselves when consumed with faith, as Luther believed. Zwingli's view of the eucharist, therefore, was more spiritual in nature than Luther's, rendering the description of him as "sacramentaire" a misnomer to the extent that he diminished the salutory value of the actual physical aspect of the communion.

Having rejected, Luther's consubstantiation as being unscriptural, Zwingli proceeded to attack it as irrational as well, arguing that Christ's body can not be in heaven and on earth at the same moment. Luther, because of his Nominalist training, stressed that Scripture cannot be subjected to the rational scrutiny of man as contended by Zwingli who believed in the clear logic of the Bible.

In denying the rationality of Scripture, Luther showed his belief in divine omnipotence because he placed God above the rules of natural law. Zwingli too accepted God's omnipotence as revealed in Scripture. But here again the two reformers disagreed about the meaning of omnipotence. The nature of their disagreement can be better understood if we first examine their attitude to the Bible in which the doctrine of God's supreme authority is found. Both reformers accepted equally the Bible as the sole source on the revelation of God's divine ways. Each reformer, however,

studied the Bible with a somewhat different attitude and with a view to different goals. Despite his admission to God's unquestioned power to do with Creation as He pleased, Luther stressed, nonetheless, the human aspect of the direct God-man relationship of Christianity. After having undergone a painful experience in his search for an assurance of personal salvation, Luther was most determined to hold God to His divine promise as revealed in Scripture that through faith the individual may acquire salvation. Having discovered this long-sought solution in the Bible in its literal form, Luther remained adamant in accepting Scripture literally and allowed no freedom of personal interpretation. Luther, in effect, admitted God's omnipotence only insofar as it did not violate its obligations as defined by Scripture. Luther's concept of Christianity was once again less spiritually refined than Zwingli's in that he held salvation to be acquired by specific physical means, namely the preaching of the Word, and participation in the sacraments. He added as well the value of images and music -- bear in mind Luther's beautiful hymns -- if these physical adjuncts helped to strengthen the Christian's faith. Elton writes on this characteristic of Luther's faith:

> Luther was a man who needed solid and palpable things to hold on to; he had a sufficient understanding of the spirit, but -- as the concrete, not to say carnal imagery and style of his writing show -- he visualized spiritual matters in earthbound form. (p. 72)

Zwingli, on the other hand, allowed nothing, not even His Word as revealed in Scripture to limit God's first causality. In pursuing his Biblical studies, Zwingli was not urged on by the dreadful fear of damnation that plagued Luther. Zwingli's only desire was to discover Christian truth as it is found in Scripture, thereby hoping to purify that religion in stripping it of all human adjuncts. Whereas Luther emphasized God's responsibility to man, Zwingli clearly stressed God's unquestioned omnipotence as the main conclusion of his Biblical research. To illustrate his point, Zwingli drew a logical consequence of God's sole causality: His will to be gracious not only to believing Christians but also to virtuous pagans such as Socrates. This salvation obtained without the aid of Scripture was totally incomprehensible to Luther.

In discussing the salvation of the heathen in Zwingli's theology, Voltaire shows himself unwittingly to be just as confused as Luther (Essai, p. 230)! Voltaire quite mistakenly attributes to Zwingli the liberal belief that God is not a tyrant saving only the elect of His choice, but is fair and impartial in being gracious to all men who show themselves sufficiently virtuous. In so deducing Zwingli's belief, Voltaire shows himself to be seriously lacking in understanding the core of Zwingli's whole theology. As a consequence of God's omnipotence, Zwingli professed a

belief in divine election whereby saving grace was arbitrarily granted to those whom God alone deemed worthy. Faith essential for salvation was permitted only to those who were the elect. Zwingli's Church was, as a result, more restrictive than Luther's and "anticipated the narrow and disciplined body of Calvin's Church" (Elton, p. 67).

Zwingli denied that images and music have value as an aid to strengthening faith. On the contrary, these additions to the service tend to distract the worshiper from meditating solely on the Word of God as preached by the pastor. Faith is a totally conscious experience for the chosen believer in that it changes his entire outlook on life. Possessing this capacity, faith has no need of "primitive physical stand-bys", and here one has a further example of the more spiritual quality of Zwingli's religion (Elton, p. 72). Luther too admitted such a capability in Christian faith, but he feared in Zwingli's emphasis upon it a propensity for illuminism and possible fanaticism.

Luther's fear was not altogether unfounded. Although he liked the Christian to accomplish acts of charity as a direct consequence of his faith, Luther had no liking for Zwingli's view that the Christian, and the pastor in particular, should require the civil government to impose certain religious beliefs upon the State. Luther subjected the Church to the will of the State. Zwingli forced the

civil government to accept the will of the Church. In holding to his belief that the Christian should fully live his faith, Zwingli expanded this belief to encompass the entire community and, he strove to create a theocracy which foretold, that of Calvin erected in Geneva a few years later.[7] Luther agreed that the secular rulers should govern by Christian precepts and thoroughly admonished the princes for not doing so because by their neglect, they were largely responsible for causing the Peasant Revolt of 1524. He added that if the princes neglected their spiritual duties, divine wrath would deal with them and not their subjects. In Zwingli's theology, room was made for the people to depose any ruler who neglected to govern in accordance with Biblical precepts. Such liberties granted to the commonfolk spelled potential anarchy in Luther's opinion. In the light of these fundamental differences of outlook the similarities in belief held by Zwingli and Luther appear more coincidental than intentional.

On this somewhat lengthy topic of Zwingli's theology, Voltaire says little in his remarks on Zwingli in the Essai,

---

[7]A clearer understanding of the various views on the question of Church and State can perhaps be gained in the interpretation of the sentence: "You shall live by faith". While Luther underlined the word "faith", taking it as the key to the gates of heaven, Zwingli stressed the word "live" in its purely temporal connotation in which the Christian would impose his faith on the community in every possible way.

and considerably less than what we find in his commentary on Luther's religious beliefs in the same work. Voltaire refers only to Zwingli's interpretation of the eucharist and his doctrine of election as it concerns the heathen, and in both cases Voltaire shows poor theological insight. Voltaire does, however, rightly see a progression in Zwingli's thought from that of Luther and carries it through to Calvin when he writes mockingly:

> Ainsi, tandis que ceux qu'on appelait papistes mangeaient Dieu sans pain les luthériens mangeaient du pain et Dieu. Les calvinistes vinrent bientôt après, qui mangèrent le pain, et qui ne mangèrent point Dieu. (Essai, p. 219)

As can be concluded from the above quotation Voltaire sees this progression only on a very superficial level, as he does not carry it through to include other Zwinglian doctrines such as that of divine election and its elaboration in Calvinism and that of a nascent theocracy which acquired its fullest social implications under Calvin's direction.

Voltaire shows more interest in Zwingli's appeal in Switzerland and to the manner in which his doctrines were adopted in Zürich, Berne and Basel, in particular, for these are the areas where Zwingli enjoyed his greatest success. Such an interest can perhaps be explained by

Voltaire's admiration of the democratic form of government as he saw it practised in England and which he again saw in evidence in the Swiss Reformation. The possibility that political and also religious reform could be realized in a peaceful manner, without the danger of violent upheaval, causes Voltaire to perk up his spirits, so frequently dejected by the evidence of human depravity as found in history. In an optimistic vein he writes:

> On alla aux voix; la pluralité fut pour la réformation . . . .Une bourgade suisse jugea Rome. Heureux peuple, après tout, qui dans sa simplicié s'en remettait à ses magistrats sur ce que ni lui, ni eux, ni Zuingle ni le pape ne pouvaient entendre. (Essai, p. 226)

Note in this quotation yet another example of Voltaire's incomprehension of Zwinglianism, as he, for whom the Bible was a book of fables, contends that no one, not even Zwingli himself let alone the magistrates who were judging his cause could understand the new doctrine!

Zürich adopted Zwingli's reform proposals quite peaceably and with popular consent. The democratic manner with which it was done was due in no small measure to Zwingli himself. During his childhood, his natural common sense was developed, as was his understanding of the importance of cooperation for the harmonious existence

of society. These qualities of Zwingli's character arose no doubt from the fact that he came from a large family (Zwingli had seven brothers and as yet an unknown number of sisters) and spent much of his early years on a small farm. His father, who was mayor of the local village, had an important influence on him as a young boy, for he taught Zwingli the responsibilities of citizenship as well as inspiring in him a deep interest in Swiss politics, an interest that was to last a lifetime. From his father's concern about the foreign threats to the Swiss Confederation, Zwingli developed a strong patriotic spirit and stressed the necessity of providing a strong army to defend the homeland.

Zwingli did not forget the moral lessons learnt in childhood when he later assumed a role of considerable public importance as common preacher of the cathedral of Zürich. He stirred up much public interest by preaching his boldly new religious doctrines, as Voltaire indicates (Essai, p. 226). Furthermore, he helped bring to a head disagreement between traditionalists and reformers. In the first place there was the "Lent incident" of 1522 in which he rejected fasting and,

subsequently, his defence of clerical marriages. The situation called for an urgent solution. In his desire for peaceful reform in accordance with popular consent, Zwingli asked the town councillors of Zürich to hold a public disputation in the town hall. This was done in 1523 and representatives of both Catholic and reformed outlook were cordially invited. As proved to be so often the case with such meetings, a deadlock was the result. The Zürich magistrates handed down their judgement: although not openly deciding in favour of religious reform, they did so tacitly by allowing Zwingli to continue his preaching unhindered. Thus, although the Reformation in Zürich did not break out spontaneously as Voltaire would have us believe, optimistic as he is about the efficacy of the democratic process, only time was now required as more and more representatives of the new faith were elected to the town council (Essai, p. 226). It was in 1525 that Zwingli finally triumphed in seeing the mass abolished in Zürich.

As for the acceptance of Zwinglianism in Berne, Voltaire writes that much the same process was used as in Zürich: evangelical preaching, public debate,

vote in council (Essai, p. 226). Much of the responsibility for the introduction of religious reform in Berne was shouldered by Canon Berchthold Haller. His task was not an easy one, given the existence of a wealthy and stable aristocracy based on commerce and unsympathetic to radical innovation of any kind. Haller's efforts were rewarded somewhat in the municipal elections of 1527 when a council of magistrates generally favourable to religious reform was elected. Difficulties arose soon after the election when parishes undertook their own separate Church reform, with the result that all semblance of unity and uniformity disappeared. Calling a public debate to resolve the issue, the town council invited Catholics and reformers to attend. The Catholics, however, failed to show up in sufficient numbers. With the arrival of Zwingli to serve as its spokesman, the cause of Church reform received a tremendous boost. At the conclusion of the debate in January 1528, the council rendered its verdict in a much clearer fashion than did that of Zürich by officially recognizing religious reform in Berne.

As for Basel, Voltaire sees the process of reform in the reverse, so to speak, insofar as the people were

not bound by the decision of the town council, but rather the council found itself obliged to accept the will of the people (Essai, p. 229). Voltaire's observation although of questionable importance to the process of reform, since ultimately any town council elected by the people will reflect to some extent their wishes, is accurate nonetheless. Zwingli's comrade and fellow reformer in Basel, John Hausschein, alias: Oecolampadius, who arrived in Basel and started his reform there in 1522, set about to convert the town's artisans. He brought about the removal of the local bishop, and early in the year 1529 he obliged the town council to consider a request to permit voluntary abstention from mass. This requestion was but one short step away from the abolition of the mass in its entirety which, in fact, occurred in February of that same year. Oecolampadius' task was facilitated in no small measure by the strong humanist atmosphere in Basel which was propitious to the publishing of reform literature. This atmosphere was inspired, no doubt, by the residence there of the prince of letters, Erasmus in 1516.

The manner in which Zwingli's reforms were carried

out in the major cities of Switzerland reveals another characteristic in the progression of theological reforms visible from Luther through Zwingli to Calvin, a characteristic not evidenced in Voltaire's account of Zwingli in his Essai. Where Luther relied upon the whims of a prince to institute religious reform, Zwingli depended upon the common consent of the people, as manifested in the town council, to implement his new beliefs. On this democratic potential, Dickens was prompted to write:

> To the Swiss Reformers, a city council with a strong lay element of cultivated Bible students seemed indeed a more perfect instrument than the godliest of Luther's godly princes.8

Zwingli added a more democratic element to Luther's idea of princely rule, an element which was to be expanded further by Calvin.[9]

Voltaire appears surprised that in a country he considered to be the most peaceful and contented of Europe Zwingli's reform sentiments should have acquired such ready

---

[8]A. G. Dickens, Reformation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Europe (London: Brace and World Inc., 1966), p. 118.

[9]It must be pointed out, however, that as Zwingli gained influence in Zürich he grew increasingly authoritarian. Faced with the threat of Catholic reprisals from papist cantons as well as subversive Catholic activity in Zürich, he grew adamant about the stringent imposition of a state-church that could control the daily lives of the laity in the smallest detail. In this sense he was almost as despotic as Luther's prince.

acceptance (Essai, p. 227). He attributes the Swiss' desire for Church reform to their hatred of monks and describes in considerable detail a public quarrel which arose from a squabble between members of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders. This bitter controversy ensued, it seems, from a heated argument as to which monastic order worshipped better the Virgin Mary. Be that as it may, and accepting the fact that ecclesiastical corruption was as pronounced in Switzerland as elsewhere, one minor squabble between two religious orders could hardly rock an entire country into the reformist camp. Other more important factors had to be present to effect such a radical change. Voltaire appears rather naïve, therefore, in attributing the outbreak of the Swiss Reformation to this one religious cause. His estimation of Switzerland as a peaceful and contented confederation proves singularly inept in light of the fact that it was social and economic unrest at home that determined much of the success that Zwingli's reforms would have (Essai, p. 227). Switzerland was economically dependent, having to import goods to satisfy many of its requirements, corn and salt in particular. The country's main source of income lay in the supplying of much demanded mercenaries which was made possible by over population and unemployment. The Swiss peasants suffered the same abuses as their counterparts in Germany, their oppressors not being feudal lords, but wealthy city oligarchies.

Constant tension resulting from fear and rivalry separated the poor forest cantons from the richer, more prosperous cantons of Zürich, Berne and Basel. Zwingli's desire for religious reform served, therefore, as a catalyst which led many social malcontents into siding with his cause.

Not all of Switzerland eagerly welcomed Zwingli's preaching, and the poor forest cantons of Zug, Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden remained staunchly Catholic in opposition to the new faith of their economic oppressors. Voltaire describes Zwingli's brutal death in the Second War of Kappel in 1531, a war which was the consequence of religious hostilities among the cantons (Essai, p. 230). Voltaire wrongly accuses the Catholic cantons of having started the war, as it was Zwingli who pressed for military conflict, believing it to be the only real solution to the religious differences separating the Catholic and reformed cantons. It was Zwingli who became disgruntled with the shaky truce that followed the First War of Kappel in 1529, and it was Zwingli who was responsible for the imposition of an economic blockade against the Catholic cantons in the hope of weakening them (Essai, p. 229). In any case, Zwingli's death won for him the appellation of martyr from those of his party and the scornful epithet of "hérétique détestable"

from the papists, as Voltaire indicates (Essai, p. 230).[10]

Zwingli's own death did not mean the end of his religious reform as well, for it ultimately lived on in the form of Calvinism as the two faiths were joined by the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 as Voltaire notes:

> La religion de Zuingle s'appela depuis le calvinisme. Calvin lui donna son nom, comme Américic Vespuce donna le sien au nouveau monde, découvert par Colomb. (Essai, p. 230)

It is Calvin and his efforts at reform to whom we must now turn to trace further the progression of religious reform that constituted the Protestant Reformation.

---

[10] It is interesting to note that Zwingli lying critically wounded on the battlefield was described by his close friend and reformer, Henry Bullinger, as facing heavenward, hands clasped and murmuring a silent prayer, while the Catholic chronicler, Salat described him as face down in the direction of his new abode.*

*J. Rilliet, Zwingli Third Man of the Reformation, p. 301.

CHAPTER III

CALVINISM

While the Zwinglian and Calvinist theologies were ultimately united in the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, it must not be lightly assumed that these two reformers were in full agreement on all theological issues. Voltaire would have the reader believe that such was indeed the case when he writes that both Calvin and Zwingli held the same views on communion and that their differences on other theological questions were of a minor order (Essai, p. 242). That such a union of two reformed theologies was in fact accomplished in a time of much religious hatred and distrust does show that Zwinglian and Calvinist religious outlooks did have many similarities. Yet to minimize, as does Voltaire, the basic differences between Calvin and Zwingli is to misunderstand and distort the theology of both reformers.

On the subject of the corporeal presence of Christ in the eucharist, Voltaire is justified in regarding Calvin's doctrine as essentially unchanged from Zwingli's when he writes, grouping the two reformers together: "Les calvinistes vinrent bientôt après, qui mangèrent le pain et qui ne mangèrent point Dieu" (Essai, p. 219). Both reformers adamantly rejected Luther's belief in consubstantiation and Calvin

remarked that:

> . . .to fancy Jesus Christ enclosed under the bread and wine, or so to conjoin him with it as to amuse our understanding there without looking up into heaven, is a diabolical reverie. (Elton, p. 220)

Thus while the two reformers did disagree about the extent of the spiritual real presence of Christ in the eucharist -- a doctrine too complex in nature to be discussed in these pages -- both rejected a carnal eating of Christ's body in communion. It is on the purpose of the communion that these two reformers disagreed, Calvin's view being unique to the Reformation. For the purposes of discussing this aspect of the communion, Zwingli may be grouped with Luther as having essentially the same views as the Wittenberg monk on the purpose of the eucharist. Zwingli and Luther viewed the Holy Supper as a means whereby the faithful communicant acquired salvation through divine grace. Calvin, on the other hand, saw in communion the way of obtaining the clearest possible knowledge of God. Luther and Zwingli regarded faith as the fundamental <u>modus operandi</u> of the grace giving miracle of the sacrament. If faith were not present in the communicant during his participation in the sacrament, this participation would be of no avail in the acquisition of salvation. Calvin considered faith itself to be the primary gift of the Holy Supper. Where faith was lacking in the communicant it was created by the Holy Spirit. Where faith was weak in the participant it was strengthened in communion.

Faith was an essential part of the eucharist for all three reformers, but where for Luther and Zwingli faith played a salutory role, for Calvin it was the means of acquiring a fuller understanding of the divine ways of God. That with faith man could also obtain personal salvation Calvin would not deny, but even this salvation, acquired through faith in the sacrament, serves to render man's awareness of God all the more distinct. In dealing too summarily with Calvin's view of communion by likening it completely to that of Zwingli, Voltaire overlooks Calvin's unique contribution to the Reformation, a contribution which lay in ". . .the redirection of theological thinking from the [strictly] human problem of salvation [as prevalent in Zwingli and more particularly in Luther] to the transcendental problem of the universe" (Elton, p. 217).

From Calvin's concept of the eucharist there emerges the three basic tenets which form the foundation of his entire theology. Firstly, Calvin stresses the absolute sovereignty of God. Hall remarks that "Calvinism is essentially a passionate theocentrism: its central dogma is the sovereignty of God".[1] McNeill expands on this central doctrine of Calvinism when he writes:

---

[1]B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, The Historical Association (London: G. Philip and Son Ltd., 1956), p. 20.

> Calvin's world, from stars to insects, from archangels to infants, is the realm of God's sovereignty. A reverent awe of God breathes through all his work. God transcendant and unapproachable in majesty and unsearchable wisdom . . .is the commanding theme to which Calvin's mind ever reverts.2

Secondly, Calvin emphasizes that man's sole duty in life is to recognize this sovereignty and to reverence it above all other things. It is for this reason that Calvin commences his catechism with the explicit instruction: "What is the chief end of human life? To know God by whom men were created" (Elton, p. 215). How is this knowledge of God's sovereignty to be attained? Faith alone constitutes the sole means for the acquisition of such a knowledge and forms, therefore, the third basic precept of Calvin's theology.

These precepts are to be found in Calvin's renowned work, Christianae religionis institutio first published in 1536, and more commonly known as the Institutes of the Christian Religion. It appears surprising that Voltaire does not mention this work in his presentation of Calvin because most historians readily attribute to it the characteristic of being the most influential single force to shape and

---

[2]J. T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 209.

direct the progress of the Reformation. The highly reputed Calvin scholar McNeill, cited earlier, says of the Institutes that it is one of the few books to "have profoundly affected the course of history".[3] Excluding its great import as a theological tract alone, Calvin's French translation of the Institutes, the Institution de la religion chrétienne of 1541, plays a pioneering role in the development of the French language, second only perhaps to the linguistic contribution of François Rabelais, since Calvin used as yet an unrefined vernacular in explaining clearly the most complex of religious doctrines.

Calvin was in full agreement with Zwingli on the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty over man and the universe. Calvin arrived at this conclusion, however, in quite a different manner than did the Zürich reformer. For Zwingli, God's omnipotence proved to be a basic Christian truth clearly deduced from his careful reading of Scripture. For Calvin, this truth was to manifest itself upon him personally in an indelible fashion.

The time of Calvin's "sudden conversion"[4] to Protestantism of which he speaks in the Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms is not precisely known, other than

---

[3] Ibid., p. 119.

[4] B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, p. 14.

that it occurred possibly late in the year 1533. In any case, this was a year of decision for Calvin who at the age of twenty-four was faced with the problem of choosing a career. The death of his father two years previously had released him from the obligation of pursuing a legal career for which he had just completed his studies. The following year, 1534, would mark Calvin's twenty-fifth birthday at which time he would have to enter the priesthood or else forfeit the benefices he had acquired during his childhood. In the meantime he was engaged in obtaining a humanist education and thoroughly familiarizing himself with classical literature for which he had developed a deep interest. Briefly, Calvin was faced with three possible alternatives: the pursuit of a legal career, entry into the priesthood, or the following of an academic career in the humanist tradition.

The decision was not Calvin's to make, however, as God had a fourth alternative prepared for him which was suddenly revealed to Calvin by means of his religious conversion. Calvin describes this conversion as that of a sudden awareness of God's authority and power over him. Calvin came to the sudden realization that his future did not lie in any of the three alternatives evidently available to him, and not even within the fold of the Roman Catholic Church itself, but rather in the Protestant camp where he was to proclaim through secluded study and writing, the

absolute sovereignty of God. When the persecution of Protestants became too severe after the Placard Affair of 1534, Calvin left France to settle in Basel and dedicate himself to the exposition of his new religious beliefs in the Institutes. But God in His eternal plan had not yet finished with Calvin and once more Calvin was to feel God's hand of authority directing the course of his life.

In 1535 Francis I had relaxed slightly his campaign of persecution, allowing the return to France of all exiled Protestants who promised to recant within six months of their arrival in the country. Calvin took quick advantage of this respite to return to his native Noyon to settle family business and to bring back to Switzerland with him a younger brother and sister. Returning to Basel via Strasbourg, Calvin found his way blocked by imperial troops and was forced to make a detour that took him to Geneva. Intending to spend only one night in Geneva, Calvin was to spend the rest of his life there, save for a brief exile, reforming Geneva as a testimony to the supreme will of the divine. There he met Guillaume Farel who, having found the task of reforming the city too onerous for one man, pleaded with Calvin to stay and help him. Indeed, it was in the person of Guillaume Farel that God once more revealed to Calvin His sovereign will as Calvin himself explains:

> Farel . . .strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies . . .he proceded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance when the necessity was so urgent . . .I felt as if . . .God from heaven had laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me . . .I was so stricken with terror that I desisted from the journey which I hand undertaken![5]

Calvin's awareness of the supreme will of God was awakened in a much more real and personal manner than was Zwingli's. It is fitting, therefore, that Calvin's personal seal should bear the inscription "prompte et sincere" as Hall describes:

> Calvin was turned from the way he wanted to go, to follow, prompt and sincere, the dominating will of the sovereign God, to obey Him, and in all things to give Him the glory.[6]

Convinced through personal experience of God's omnipotence, Calvin strove tirelessly to impress upon man his sole duty in life to recognize and reverence this sovereignty. Man is to accomplish his duty through faith. But to what or to whom is this faith to be directed? Calvin replied that through faith in Christ alone is this knowledge to be truly acquired. Niesel explains:

---

[5] B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, p. 17.

[6] Ibid., p. 17.

> . . .according to Calvin, God has disclosed Himself in Jesus Christ and we must therefore hold fast to this One and not attempt to seek God outside the Mediator.7

Calvin's theology is as Christocentric as Luther's or Zwingli's. Christ is essential in Calvinist theology not as a redeemer of man as Luther continuously emphasized, but rather as a mediator imparting to man the knowledge of the divine.

With His ascension into heaven, however, Christ is no longer present among men to reveal the glory of God. It is precisely for this reason that Calvin lays great stress on the Scriptures as the sole means by which man can learn of the teachings of Christ as revealed in the account of His disciples and contemporaries. Man is still capable, therefore, of pursuing his knowledge of God through faith in Christ -- not the physical Christ to be sure -- but rather through faith in the description of Christ's person and His teachings about God as revealed in Scripture. It is for this purpose alone that man must study the Bible with complete trust in what it relates, as Calvin himself describes:

> We must read Scripture with the intention of finding Christ therein. If we turn aside from this end, however much trouble we take, however much time we devote to our study, we shall never attain the knowledge of the truth.8

---

[7] W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, transl. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 119.

[8] Ibid., p. 27.

Calvin did not differ from Luther or Zwingli in his emphasis upon the Bible as the sole authority on the Word of God. Yet he did vary from these two reformers as to the manner in which the Bible is to be read and interpreted. A close reading of the Biblical text with emphasis upon its literal meaning as prescribed by Luther is of no avail according to Calvin. Nor is Zwingli's emphasis upon reason and a rational interpretation any better in Calvin's estimation. To read the Bible profitably, man must first be inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to receive and comprehend the message the Bible has to offer. According to Calvin:

> It is by the grace of God that Scripture mediates to us the living Christ. The Holy Spirit must unfold to us the treasures of the words of Scripture if our study is to lead to this goal.[9]

Luther's approach to Bible study would, therefore, be fruitless in Calvin's opinion as a simple reading of the text without divine inspiration would result in no comprehension of the true meaning of the words, whereas Zwingli's rational approach appeared too presumptuous in the belief that man through reason can grasp the knowledge of God's sovereign majesty which is acquired through faith alone. Herein lay

---

[9] Ibid., p. 30.

Calvin's main objection to Zwingli's general view of Christianity. Despite his emphasis upon God's omnipotence, Zwingli still held man in sufficient esteem as to render him capable, thanks to his own intelligence, of speculating on the nature and purpose of God's will.[10]

As to the interpretation of Scripture, Calvin alone of the three reformers considered the whole of Scripture to be equally authoritative. Unlike Luther who considered the New Testament alone to be the heart of Scripture after the coming and crucifixion of Christ, Calvin stressed the Old Testament in combination with the New as revealing the coming of Christ and His revelation of the knowledge of God. Calvin agreed that in the New Testament man's perception of Christ is much more distinct than in the Old, and in fact he likened the description of Christ in the New Testament to the description of Christ in the Old Testament as a

---

[10]Take as an example, Zwingli's rational explanation of the existence of evil given God's omnipotence and infinite wisdom. According to Zwingli's reasoning, God in His wisdom deliberately created man with a propensity for choosing evil over good, and God purposely tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit and fall from grace. God intentionally caused man to become the victim of His wrath and of eternal damnation for the purpose of revealing all the more vividly His infinite mercy in gratuitously saving a certain chosen few whom He had caused to be totally undeserving of this kindness. On the purpose of evil, Calvin, for his part, could do nothing other than to maintain silence, believing that "to be ignorant of many things [in religion] which it is not possible nor lawful to know is to be learned".*

*R. N. C. Hunt, Calvin (London: The Centenary Press, 1933), p. 127.

"colourful picture" to a "schoolboy outline".[11] Yet at the same time he avoided Luther's emphasis upon the redemptive role of Christ in the New Testament by claiming that both testaments were essential in proclaiming the incarnation of Christ and His teaching about God.

It is through faith directed and inspired by the Holy Spirit that man can read about and understand the sovereignty of God in the Bible. Calvin goes further by stating that not only is God's glory revealed in Scripture but also man's total depravity and sinfulness. Man learns about the fall of Adam which has rendered all humanity corrupt. In stressing this characteristic of man, Calvin differs in no way from either Luther or Zwingli and, like these two reformers, Calvin asserts his belief in man's inability to reacquire God's grace through his own efforts. In acknowledging the inefficacy of good works, Calvin follows the other two reformers by abolishing all Catholic practices based on this principle.

It was his painful awareness of the inefficacy of good works which led Luther to ask the question of how man can obtain personal salvation and which led him through a painstaking study of the Bible to the solution of justification by faith alone. For Calvin, such a quest seems unwise and fruitless as the problem of personal redemption is not

---

[11] W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, p. 107.

man's prime concern. By recognizing God's omnipotence, man comes to an understanding of God's divine providence and by the term providence Calvin means in particular God's care for man and the whole of Creation. In His infinite wisdom, God has set a purpose and destiny for every living creature in accordance with His eternal plan:

> . . .God by His particular providence sustains, fosters, and cares for every individual thing and being which He has created, down to the tiniest sparrow. We do not realize the whole splendour of God until we see that He tends every creature and guides it to its goal.12

Man's eagerness to inquire about his own salvation appears, therefore, to be vain and fool-hardy.

Belief in God's providence necessarily involves for Calvin the acceptance of the doctrine of predestination, a doctrine accepted as well by both Luther and Zwingli. Calvin's originality lay, however, in the unique interpretation which he gave to the doctrine. Luther only adumbrated a belief in predestination, preferring rather to emphasize the more pleasant prospect of man's key to salvation through faith in Christ. Zwingli drew the concept of predestination as a logical deduction from the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and, in postulating the possibility of grace for the heathen, he was intent mainly on illustrating more vividly

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

God's omnipotence. Although he firmly believed that faith was given only to the elect, Zwingli, like Luther, preferred to stress Christ's redemptive purpose for mankind. Where both Luther and Zwingli liked to think of predestination only in terms of the number of God's elect, Calvin rendered the possibility of salvation much more remote by emphasizing the vast number of the reprobate and, in so doing, he added a new feeling of awe and gravity to this doctrine. For in the Bible, only the fortunate elect are specifically referred to, leaving unmentioned the fate of the damned which Calvin now brought to the fore.

Calvinism may appear as a bleak and depressing religion. Strangely enough, Calvin's preaching invigorated his followers with new courage and determination to confront the social, political and economic chaos of a world which they believed to be on the verge of imminent collapse. To this point, the emphasis has been put on Christ's role of mediating to man an awareness of God's sovereignty. Yet not all of mankind is destined to damnation, since God in His eternal plan has predestined an elect few to salvation and it is for these few alone that God grants the gift of faith in Christ. Unlike Zwingli, Calvin maintained that faith in Christ is not a conscious experience as God alone knows His elect. Since man cannot know his ultimate fate, all he can do is to hope that he is numbered among the chosen. This

hope is by no means weak and despairing, for it constitutes the very strength of Calvinism: man's hope springs from the knowledge that, if numbered among the elect, no earthly disaster, be it political, social or economic, can cause him to fall from grace and that whatever hardship man must traverse in daily life he can look forward with reassuring certainty to eternal blessedness. Moreover, the very possibility of hope in human salvation awakens in man a deep understanding and reverence of divine glory, as God in His infinite mercy has granted grace freely to those of His choosing who are totally undeserving in their depravity of this blessing.[13]

If man's chief purpose is to acknowledge God's sovereignty, how is this worship to be rendered? Calvin believed that only through complete obedience to God's will as revealed through Christ in Scripture can man sufficiently honour His omnipotence. Consequently, in his concept of the Church, Calvin lay much stress on its duty to compel man by means of strict discipline to a proper obedience to God's authority. Both Luther and Zwingli admitted the importance of discipline in the systematizing of proper worship, but

---

[13]Torrance makes the interesting comparison between Lutheran and Calvinist theologies when he describes the former as based on the principle of conscious faith in Christ the Redeemer and the latter as based on pure hope alone in God the Almighty and His mercy (Elton, p. 218n).

Calvin alone of the three reformers incorporated into his Church a special body known as the consistory, specifically designed to deal with such matters. Where Luther and Zwingli relied upon the State to enforce proper worship, Calvin gave his Church sole jurisdiction over the administration of discipline. In fact, charged with the duty of paramount importance to protect the sovereignty and honour of God, the Church for Calvin "became so overwhelmingly a disciplinary institution that one is sometimes in danger of forgetting that he also demanded of it true preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the sacraments" (Elton, p. 220).

Having incorporated this disciplinary body into his Church structure to ensure man's obedience to God's authority, Calvin so designed the rest of his Church government as to enable God's will alone to prevail in its daily operation. Consisting of four offices, the pastor whose duty it is to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments, the doctor who is responsible for interpreting correct Church dogma and instructing the young, the elder whose function is to supervise the proper religious and moral conduct of the congregation, and the deacon whose duty involves the care of the poor and sick, Calvin's Church is purposely organized on the principle of shared and elective rule. Elton comments:

> It [Calvin's Church government] had popular even democratic possibilities well marked in it, with election rather than appointment from above as Calvin's principle of operation. (Elton, p. 227)

By nature of its shared administration which itself necessitated cooperation of the various offices with each other and with the congregations, Calvin's Church government could not be dominated by the desires of any single person, ambitious of personal rule, as occurred in the Lutheran Church. Christ alone is to be recognized as the Head of Calvin's Church, and God's sovereign will alone is to be obeyed. Given the democratic nature of the Church government, only those suitably gifted and inclined to the divine calling are to be elected to office and if they prove themselves inept, they can be effectively deposed. Calvin's system of Church government proved even more democratic than Zwingli's in that Calvin's Church was capable of and meant to be directed by the local congregations independently of any secular government. It was precisely this capacity, as we shall see, which gave Calvin's Church its great strength.

Voltaire appears to be aware of the democratic quality of Calvin's Church when he writes: "Sa religion est conforme à l'esprit républicain . . ." (Essai, p. 243). He fails to add, however, that it was Calvin's Church which proved to be perhaps the most authoritarian of all the reformed Churches. Unlike Luther and Zwingli who depended

upon the vital cooperation of the secular government to ensure the very existence of their Churches, Calvin was always wary of allowing secular authorities to interfere in his Church administration. In constructing his Church with its own well defined, compact and efficient governing body having autonomous control over religious discipline including the powerful tool of excommunication, Calvin introduced to the Reformation a Church quite unique in character: it had the essential capacity of exerting its authority independently of the whims and desires of petty princes and local town councils and was not threatened, therefore, in its existence and effectiveness by unsympathetic secular rulers. Voltaire appears unaware of this most important quality of Calvin's Church when he attributes Calvin's departure from Geneva to his refusal to accept the use of leavened bread in the eucharist as the Genevan town council requested (Essai, p. 243). The use of leavened bread which constituted part of the Bernese rite adopted by the Genevan government was not the key issue in Calvin's mind. He did not care whether leavened or unleavened bread was used in communion, but he was deeply concerned that the secular authorities should not dictate religious practices to the Church as this threatened the autonomy and very power of the Church.

In emphasizing the Church's duty to instil in man reverence of God's omnipotence by complete obedience to

His divine will, Calvin involved his Church in the daily lives of the people. Their daily occupations, for instance, were to be conducted always according to strict Christian principles as proof of the people's obedience to God's will. The implications for secular rulers of this all embracing Church authority appear clear as Calvin held civil authority to be properly fulfilling its earthly function only when temporal rulers strove as good Christians to aid the Church by creating an environment propitious to its growth. The secular government exists solely as an aid to the Church in proclaiming the sovereignty of God's will, as Niesel notes:

> [Secular government] can have no other aim but that this One should tower far above all others and exercise His sovereign sway over all.14

Calvin did explicitly state that tyrannical rulers must be obeyed and patiently endured, for having received their authority to rule from God they are sent by Him to punish an impious people. Despite their God-given authority, however, those rulers who order the Church faithful to disobey divine will must themselves be disobeyed for usurping God's supreme sovereignty over mankind.

Calvin aimed, then, at creating a true theocracy in which the Church, secure in its existence and confident of its function, given its independent structure, would provide

---

[14]W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, p. 232.

strong leadership and a sense of direction to the State and would closely supervise the religious and moral life of the entire community, enforcing where need be with its own effective discipline true obedience by all members of society alike to the supreme will of God. The Catholic historian Kampschulte summed up concisely the proposed effect of Calvin's Church when he wrote:

> It is the Church which gives to the life of the State its character, its colour and tenor, its contents and its goals.15

It was only after twenty-six years of ceaseless labour, however, that Calvin was able to achieve for his Church in Geneva the position of influence described by Kampschulte. It took twenty-six tiring years for Calvin to transform Geneva, a city of moral turpitude as described by Voltaire (Essai, p. 242) and renowned as such throughout Europe, into a veritable God-fearing theocracy to which Elton refers in the following terms:

> The easy-going, dissolute, unstable city of the past emerged as a grim, solid, elevated community of psalm-singing churchgoers reporting each other to the ever-watchful consistory and anxiously exchanging "fraternal correction" in public meetings. (p. 231)

As Voltaire indicates, Calvin played no role in the early stages of Genevan reform (Essai, p. 242). It was not

---

15 W. A. Mueller, Church and State In Luther and Calvin; A Comparative Study (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 126.

Calvin who was responsible for deposing Catholic rule in Geneva, as this was done before his arrival there in 1538. Voltaire describes the existence of the two religious parties in Geneva, but does not mention by name either Guillaume Farel or his secretary Antoine Froment who were responsible as early as 1532 for lighting the first spark of religious revolt in Geneva (Essai, p. 241). Voltaire gives the impression that the Bishop of Geneva and representative ruler of the Savoyard overlords was forced to flee after the adoption of the reformed religion in Geneva by the town council in 1535 (Essai, p. 241). In reality, the Bishop fled the city two years earlier, never to return again, when hostilities broke out between Catholic and Protestant supporters, although he was not officially deposed from office until 1536 at which time the Savoyard armies were beaten by Genevan and Bernese troops. Voltaire gives the impression that it was indeed the Genevan council which officially adopted the reformed faith after carefully weighing for two months the evidence gleaned from public debate (Essai, p. 241). In actual fact, the public disputation served little purpose as the Bishop prevented his clergy from attending. Although the Protestants easily gained the upper hand in the debate, it was the slow and indecisive response of the city fathers which motivated the people to take matters into their own hands by smashing images and

looting church property. Only after having personally pleaded with the council to take a stand one way or the other could Farel convince it of opting for the cause of reform. Protestantism received official recognition in November 1535 and one year later Farel supporters gained a majority in the elections and commenced a programme of reform to rectify the calamitous state of moral decay which was rampant throughout Genevan society.

Historical evidence amply bears out Voltaire's account of the corruption in Catholic Geneva where debauchery, drunkenness, gambling and licentious behaviour were part of daily life, where poor church attendance and sermons frequently punctuated by unruly conduct were the inevitable results of an ignorant and uncaring clergy, incapable of proper religious and moral instruction, and where even imprisonment was considered a sign of social distinction (Essai, p. 242). Faced with this onerous task of reforming single-handedly such a corrupt society, it is little wonder that Farel pleaded for Calvin's aid and that Calvin accepted only by sheer terror of divine wrath when Farel cursed him with eternal damnation.

In reading Voltaire's account of Calvin and his reform of Geneva, the reader is left with the general impression, however, that for Voltaire Calvin was dominated by a tyrannical temperament and motivated by a passion for

personal rule when he undertook to reform that city. This impression is conveyed by Voltaire's use of such words as "domination", "amour-propre", and "espèce de conquérant" (Essai, p. 242), as well as "esprit tyrannique", and "persécution" (Essai, p. 243). Voltaire is no doubt aiming at creating in the reader a sympathetic understanding of his condemnation of Calvin who, in his blind intolerance, had Servetus unjustly condemned to a brutal death. It cannot be denied that Calvin acquired during the last years of his life an unquestioned personal authority over religious affairs in Geneva. That this rule was not intentionally personal but rather for the sole glorification of God's sovereignty has been clearly established by Calvin's concept of the Church and the purpose of man's existence. Consequently, Voltaire's statement that Calvin "avait usurpé un tel empire dans la ville de Genève . . ." can be considered a misjudgement of Calvin's true aims (Essai, p. 247).

In support of his claim that Calvin was tyrannical in realizing Church reform in Geneva, Voltaire gives various examples of Calvin's "persécution" of people like Castellion, Pierre Ameaux and the wife of the Syndic, Ami Perrin (Essai, pp. 243, 247, 248). With regard to Castellion who sought the position of doctor in the Church, the dispute between the two men centred upon Castellion's holding unorthodox religious views which prevented him from satisfying the

examining board. Calvin was, albeit, head of the examining committee but he did not force Castellion to leave the city because of personal jealousy, as Voltaire claims. Calvin would have gladly relinquished his post as reformer for a more sedate occupation in private study -- rather Castellion was flouting God's own Word in contradicting Calvin on theological matters and such disrespect of God's sovereignty could not be tolerated (Essai, p. 243). Here it must be clearly pointed out that Calvin was not propagating his own personal brand of theology as Voltaire would like to have us believe when he writes: ". . .tous deux [Luther and Calvin] brûlant de l'ardeur de se signaler et d'obtenir cette domination sur les esprits qui flatte tant l'amour-propre . . ." (Essai, p. 242). Rather he felt himself to be sincerely inspired by God directly to proclaim true Christianity and would, no doubt, vehemently object to the later appellation of his theology as Calvinism. As for Pierre Ameaux, Calvin can hardly be suspected of vying for personal gain in imprisoning this magistrate and former dealer in toys and cards -- a fact conveniently omitted by Voltaire -- for, it seems, Calvin enforced a rigid ban on gambling and consequently deprived Ameaux of much of his income. Ameaux's insolence in insulting Calvin was not taken by the reformer as a personal insult, but as an act of disobedience to divine will in not recognizing that gambling was offensive

to God. In the case of Mme Perrin, who was of impetuous and unruly temperament, it was a question of simple disobedience to Church law, and that she was called before the consistory to account for her misconduct in dancing does not reflect on Calvin's part any desire for personal authority. Any mecreant member of Genevan society could be expected to account for his action before the consistory, and indeed that the Church law was applied with equal vigour to an individual of Mme Perrin's reputation revealed Calvin's desire to have the consistory function independently of and unbiased to social standing in the community. Mme Perrin's case serves to reveal, moreover, the effective power of the consistory over all classes of society.

A review of Calvin's personal goals serves to effectively negate Voltaire's view of him as the tyrant of Geneva. As has been shown, Calvin sought originally to pursue the cause of religious reform in secluded study and by means of his pen alone. We have seen how Calvin attempted to shirk Farel's plea for assistance. Furthermore, after his exile from Geneva in 1538, Calvin went to Strasbourg and spent there the three happiest years of his life engaged in revising his Institutes and busily pursuing an active and satisfying role in the religious life of that community. It was at Strasbourg also, as Voltaire indicates, that he embarked upon a brief but happy married life with the widow of an Anabaptist (Essai, p. 243). It was, then, with great

dismay and with tears in his eyes that Calvin received the earnest call for his return to Geneva. He himself comments on his return: "There is no place under heaven that I am more afraid of".[16]

Had he the desire for personal rule over Geneva, Calvin would still have found himself confronted with too much political opposition to exert an uncontested authority. Voltaire himself states that Calvin was banned from the city "parce que sa doctrine ne s'accordait pas en tout avec la dominante . . ." (Essai, p. 242). Calvin's religious zeal had pushed him to try and impose too quickly upon the Genevans the immediate acceptance of his Confession of Faith, and when they proved reluctant to accept it, he excommunicated the city en masse. His subsequent unpopularity strengthened as well by his dissatisfaction over the interference of the town council on the subject of the Bernese rite, prevented Calvin from carrying on any meaningful reform and he was forced to flee the city. When asked to return in 1541, Calvin was to find the Genevans' warm hospitality deceptive. He was given free lodging by the city and as much money and assistance as he required to continue his reform program. Yet, when Calvin attempted to give the consistory sole jurisdiction over discipline by conferring upon it the power of excommunication, he met with the immediate opposition

---

[16] B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, p. 25.

of the city fathers who claimed for themselves the right to supervise the moral standards of Geneva. It was in this atmosphere of constant mutual distrust and rivalry of jurisdiction that Calvin was obliged to win out slowly for his Church the position of unquestioned authority that it ultimately acquired.[17] Calvin was on various occasions about to resign his post, faced by a hostile secular government, only to have the city magistrates cede ever so slightly to his requests in order, it seems, to retain him for further harassment. We must agree with Hall's judgement, then, when he writes:

> It is absurd to suggest that Calvin rode triumphantly into Geneva . . .and thereafter took charge of the city and abolished its intellectual freedom and civil liberties and eventually became master of the citizens' minds, souls, and bodies. In reality Calvin [embarked] on a tremendous struggle to maintain his aims of religious integrity and moral discipline: several times he seemed to have lost and to be once again in danger of summary dismissal. Until 1556 he was not even a citizen of Geneva: he had no political status, he was a leading minister of the city, a servant of the council -- and nothing more.18

---

[17] It was in 1553 that, faced with a hostile civic administration run by Libertines who opposed his rigid moral standards Calvin wrote to Bullinger in Zürich: "Tout ce que nous leur [the magistrates] disons est suspect; même si j'affirmais qu'il fait jour en plein midi, ils se mettraient à en douter".*

*F. Wendel, Calvin, sources et évolutions de sa pensée religieuse (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), p. 64.

[18] B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, pp. 26, 27.

In critizing Calvin for his harsh and hot-headed approach (dur and emporté) to religious reform in Geneva, Voltaire apparently overlooks the viability of the alternative confronting Geneva (Essai, p. 242). Voltaire readily censures Calvin for his religious intolerance, referred to as "haine théologique" (Essai, p. 245), and makes the cynical comment that:

> On ne réussit guère chez les hommes, du moins jusqu'aujourd'hui, en ne leur proposant que le facile et le simple; le maître le plus dur est le plus suivi: ils ôtaient aux hommes le libre arbitre, et l'on courait à eux.
> (Essai, p. 243)

Voltaire neglects to indicate what possible benefits the opposing Libertine party could offer to Genevan society by its deliberate flouting of consistory rule in loose living. In proposing greater freedom by claiming that questions of religion and morality were of a strictly personal nature, this party may appear to echo Voltaire's own desire for tolerance on these issues, but where they advised freedom they understood anarchy, and where they emphasized personal decision-making on questions of morality they intended debauchery. In brief, the Libertine party could only offer to the citizens a return to Geneva's decadent past, as Hall explains:

> . . .the opposition which came from the sensual "Libertins" not only shows the lack of political maturity amongst many leading citizens but also reveals that the opponents of Calvin's moral fervour and statesmanlike efficiency in civil life could only offer to turn Geneva into a land of Cockaigne run by an oligarchy of blustering swordsmen indifferent to the cultivation of either letters or religion.19

It is the death of Michael Servetus which reveals most vividly for Voltaire Calvin's vituperative nature. By reserving for a separate chapter the discussion of Servetus' death Voltaire shows its importance in revealing this characteristic of Calvin. Should the reader still misinterpret the significance of the Servetus case in his portrayal of Calvin's nature, Voltaire explicitly states his purpose when he writes: " . . .je la place [the death of Servetus] ici pour mieux faire connaître le caractère de Calvin . . ." (Essai, p. 246).

Voltaire leaves no doubt in the reader's mind about his own opinion of the death of Servetus which he variously describes as "cruelle" (Essai, p. 243), "barbare" (Essai, p. 244), and as a "catastrophe déplorable" worthy of "indignation et pitié" (Essai, p. 246). That Voltaire is bitterly angry with Calvin for having persecuted Servetus solely for his religious beliefs is clearly shown as well

---

[19] Ibid., p. 32.

in his personal correspondence in which he scarcely refers to Calvin, his theology, or his followers without making reference to the brutal death of Servetus.

Throughout his presentation of the Servetus affair, Voltaire continually attempts to exonerate the Spaniard and to render the Genevan reformer contemptible in the reader's eye. Voltaire points out the irony and sense of ludicrousness of Calvin's persecution in the light of time and geographical location (Essai, pp. 245, 246). In stating that Calvin was formerly a proponent of religious tolerance Voltaire is on safe ground historically because Calvin's Preface to the Institutes contains an appeal to King Francis I to stop his persecution of the Protestants in France. Voltaire censures Calvin for ignoring his own recommendation and having Servetus executed. Voltaire notes what appears to be, in his mind, the effrontery of Calvin in persecuting the Spaniard in Geneva, when Calvin himself, were he in France only a few miles distant, would likewise be hunted as a heretic.

Voltaire attempts to show the injustice of Servetus' death by revealing the fundamental similarity of the theologies of the two men (Essai, p. 246). In taking as an example the doctrine of the Trinity, Voltaire has no solid basis for his reasoning and, in attempting to vindicate Servetus in this manner, Voltaire, who has shown himself on previous

pages to be incapable of comprehending complex theological questions, proves not so much the innocence of Servetus as he does his own misunderstanding of how Servetus' religious views clashed with those of Calvin. Where Calvin emphasized the eternity and coexistence of Christ the Son with God, Servetus claimed that Christ did not exist prior to the Incarnation but rather was the distinct result of the union of the divine Word (Logos) with the totally human Jesus at his birth. Servetus preached, therefore, a type of sub-ordinationism in which Jesus Christ was distinctly inferior to God, thereby incurring Calvin's hatred.[20] Although the dispute over the Trinity was the most celebrated between the two men as this doctrine constituted the central theme of Servetus' De trinitatis erroribus, published in 1531, other religious questions proved equally contentious. Such doctrines as that of original sin, rejected by Servetus who professed a belief in man's capacity for mystical union with God, given man's innate spark of the divine, and that of free will, firmly adhered to by Servetus, showed that, contrary

---

[20]Guillaume Farel described succinctly the basic difference between Calvin and Servetus on the doctrine of the Trinity when he stated that Servetus died because of a misplaced epithet in his contention that Christ was not the eternal Son of God but rather the Son of the eternal God.*

*R. H. Bainton, Hunted Heretic (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953), p. 214.

to Voltaire's claim, the religious differences between Servetus and Calvin were too fundamental for their theologies to be essentially identical.

Voltaire's lamentation of the death of Servetus as the destruction of not only a man but also of valuable knowledge potentially useful to the progress of mankind, for Servetus was a highly reputed doctor, is certainly justifiable (Essai, p. 244). Yet this legitimate regret must not overshadow Servetus' sheer foolhardiness in visiting Geneva -- a fact not mentioned in Voltaire's account.

Servetus was well aware of Calvin's enmity toward him and knew the risks he was taking in going to Geneva. The two men had corresponded with each other as early as 1546, seven years before Servetus' arrival in Geneva, and were well acquainted with each other's theological views. In his comments on their correspondence, Voltaire clearly shows Calvin to be the aggressor and instigator of hostilities, when he writes:

> Ils disputèrent par lettres. De la dispute Calvin passa aux injures, et des injures à cette haine théologique, la plus implacable de toutes les haines. (Essai, p. 245)

In reality it was Servetus who resorted to the use of insulting comments in his letters to Calvin. Servetus was the first to open the correspondence by asking Calvin for his opinion on various religious issues. Not satisfied with the reformer's reply, he wrote back in an arrogant tone which

prompted Calvin in turn to admonish the Spaniard and then to cease all further correspondence with him. Servetus, however, was not yet content to keep quiet and sent Calvin a copy of the Institutes annotated with numerous disparaging marginal comments. Servetus also forwarded to Calvin a manuscript copy of his yet unpublished Christianismi restitutio along with several letters containing injurious remarks about Calvin's person and religion. Voltaire draws special attention to these letters which he claims Calvin treacherously sent to Vienne -- a small town near Lyon -- along with the manuscript of Servetus' new book to be used as evidence against the Spaniard at his heresy trial conducted at Vienne early in 1553 (Essai, p. 245). Voltaire condemns Calvin as well for having participated by means of an envoy in the actual trial (Essai, p. 245).

In Calvin's defence it can be stated accurately that he never parted with his copy of the restitutio, nor did he ever participate by means of an emissary in Servetus' trial. As for the letters, they were not sent to Vienne of Calvin's own volition. Calvin had no desire to persecute Servetus as long as the Spaniard stayed out of Geneva. Calvin could have readily incriminated him much earlier if he desired, since he knew the real identity of the accused who was hiding behind the pseudonym of Villeneuve, and since he possessed a copy of Servetus' heretical restitutio as much as six

years before its publication in 1552. The fact, that the letters in question were sent to Vienne resulted from a petty argument between two cousins, De Trie and Arneys, in which Calvin found himself a reluctant third party. Having been mocked by his cousin for living in Geneva, a city of impious reputation, De Trie in turn warned Arneys of condoning the harbouring in Lyon of such infamous heretics as Servetus. Arneys immediately undertook an investigation which led to the arrest of Servetus and his subsequent trial. Lacking sufficient evidence to convict him, the court was about to let Servetus free when De Trie, who was searching frantically for conclusive evidence to back up his charge, happened upon the incriminating letters in the Calvin-Servetus correspondence. It was only with the greatest difficulty that De Trie obtained from the reluctant Calvin the possession of these letters which he immediately forwarded to Vienne. Although it cannot be asserted that Calvin was blameless in permitting De Trie to procure the letters referred to by Voltaire, neither is Voltaire justified in writing that Calvin alone was responsible for creating hostilities with Servetus in their correspondence, or that Calvin assumed an active part in Servetus' trial at Vienne.

The reason for Servetus' coming to Geneva still remains a subject of much contention on the part of historians. Was he, as some assume, in league with the Libertine party in

the hope of ridding Geneva of Calvin and his religious reform, or was he simply too curious and took all the risks to see in person this celebrated reformer with whom he was acquainted only through their acrimonious correspondence? During his trial, Servetus claimed that he was only passing through Geneva on his way to Naples to set up a medical practice. This explanation was accepted by Calvin despite attempts by the public prosecutor to prove Servetus to be a political subversive. In any case, Servetus was condemned on theological grounds alone.

For Voltaire, however, even Servetus' execution for his religious views in themselves was a violation of international law since Servetus was not involved in any disruptive preaching of his religious beliefs while in Geneva (Essai, pp. 245, 246). Voltaire's assertion is not wholly correct to the extent that, although Servetus did not participate in any unlawful preaching of his theology while in the city, he did intentionally distribute, a couple of months before his arrival in Geneva, numerous copies of his heretical Christianismi restitutio which greatly angered Calvin and caused him to view Servetus' subsequent physical presence in the city as a threat to the religious welfare of the Genevans.

Voltaire is accurate in his description of Servetus' capture at the Inn of the Rose and in his account of Calvin's

unscrupulous manner of having him imprisoned (Essai, p. 245). Calvin circumvented Genevan law, which required the informer to accompany the accused to prison, by having his personal secretary accuse Servetus. As for the trial and execution of Servetus, however, Calvin did not conduct himself at all according to Voltaire's account in which we read:

> Quand son ennemi fut aux fers, il lui prodigua les injures et les mauvais traitements que font les lâches quand ils sont maîtres. Enfin, à force de presser les juges, d'employer le crédit de ceux qu'il dirigeait, de crier et de faire crier que Dieu demandait l'exécution de Michel Servet, il le fit brûler vif, et jouit de son supplice . . . . (Essai, p. 246)

Although it cannot be denied that Calvin played a predominant role in having Servetus executed, he did so by just and legal means and with all the propriety that the situation permitted. Servetus was given the opportunity of not only an oral debate but also a written defense of his beliefs, and his request for a general appeal of his case to the surrounding Swiss cities was granted. Contrary to Voltaire's statement, it was not Calvin but rather Servetus who conducted himself in an unruly manner by hurling invective at the reformer and misusing the opportunity of a verbal reply by scrawling insulting comments over Calvin's manuscripts. Had Servetus shown the slightest modesty and willingness to discuss his views intelligibly, Calvin was confident that Servetus would have saved himself, but it was his insolent conduct which

nullified any sympathy he might have gained for his cause.

Faced with the sentence of death at the stake, Servetus was not denied the opportunity of recanting to the last. Indeed, Calvin, when asked by Servetus to visit him in prison, urged Servetus to repent and save himself. Contrary to Voltaire's implication, Calvin did not attend the execution and in fact attempted to have the sentence changed to death by beheading, a more humane method (Essai, p. 246).

In vilifying Calvin by attempting to show him as having brutally persecuted Servetus for his religious views, Voltaire is aiming at furthering his own cause of crushing the "infâme", that is to say, religious intolerance. Voltaire is also using the Servetus case as an example of Calvin's tyranny over Genevan society. He fails on both counts, however, and reveals his own misunderstanding of the temperament and outlook not only of Calvin but also of sixteenth-century religious reformers in general. Calvin's treatment of Servetus was not as barbaric as Voltaire pictures it and, moreover, his religious intolerance of the Spaniard cannot be considered fairly as an adverse reflection on Calvin's character. Voltaire, for whom Christianity was a grand fabrication on the part of the clergy and secular rulers to oppress and take advantage of the people, could not understand that for the devout reformer, tested in his beliefs by

persecution, religion was a powerful and vital force which gave meaning to man's existence on earth. Voltaire could not understand that for Calvin and his fellow reformers toleration on theological matters was equated with impiety and that anyone advocating its practice was surely marked for damnation in permitting free expression of heresy to besmirch the true Word of God.[21] Voltaire's attack on Calvin and his religious intransigeance is seriously weakened, then, in the sense that while Voltaire and post Reformation historians may easily condemn Calvin for his religious intolerance, the fact remains that Calvin acted in full accordance with the moral precepts and religious climate characteristic of his own era. He can be accused, therefore, of neither religious intolerance nor desire for personal rule in having Servetus put to death as a dangerous heretic, for in so doing he met with the general approval of his contemporaries.

Despite his exile and the ever present hostility of the Libertines, Calvin could look back at his life's work

---

[21]It may be argued that Calvin himself was incurring God's wrath by advocating to Francis I the toleration of Protestants. This argument is faulty, since for Calvin the ruling Catholics were no more than detestable calumniators of true Christian doctrine and in order for the reformed faith to gain ascendancy a policy of toleration must be adopted -- a policy to be cancelled, no doubt, once the true preaching of God's Word had been established.

in Geneva with some satisfaction knowing that, although the process of reform never stops, he had succeeded in transforming Geneva from a city of moral disrepute to a city renowned throughout Europe for its religious fervour, moral integrity and high standard of living -- a level of achievement that not even Voltaire could challenge, despite his criticism of Calvin's method. A quick perusal of the daily proceedings of the consistory reveals the wide scope of its jurisdiction over the people: a widow admonished for chanting the "requiescat in pace" over the grave of her deceased husband, an individual fined for possessing the immoral books La Légende dorée and Amadís of Gaul, a woman aged sixty censured for marrying a man of twenty-five, and a warning issued to a person who claimed that the pope was an honest man. Calvin had succeeded in establishing a Church which involved itself with every aspect of daily life from dress and speech to personal comportment in both work and play. Even the choice of Christian names for infants was supervised with an eye to propriety. With a system of secret informers and the threat of excommunication ever present, the consistory inspired a sense of fear and respect in the hearts of all. Calvin's influence extended even beyond the field of Church reform as he was responsible for introducing diverse social improvements. These included the appointment of night watchmen, public health care and the construction of the most advanced sewage disposal system in

Europe at that time. It is with good reason that the French writer and Calvin's contemporary, Doumergue remarked that Calvin's monument was:

> . . .une Genève devenue à la fin du XVI^{e} siècle tranquille, ordonnée, pieuse, lettrée, savante, aisée, polie, quand, avant Calvin, ce n'était qu'une grande bourgade . . .[and that] une obscure villette savoyarde s'est changée en une glorieuse cité européenne.22

The death of Calvin in Geneva in 1564 marked the passing of the third and last of the three great religious reformers of sixteenth-century Europe. Yet the Protestant Reformation was not confined solely to the framework of the established Lutheran or Calvinist Churches. There existed in European society of that era various groups of religious malcontents who, although they found no spiritual fulfilment in the Catholic Church and agreed on the need of Church reform, still failed to find satisfaction in the religious alternatives proposed by Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. It is to these radicals, whom Voltaire correctly groups under the general title of Anabaptists, that we must now turn our attention.

---

[22]B. Hall, John Calvin Humanist and Theologian, p. 35.

CHAPTER IV

ANABAPTISM

The term Anabaptism is not characteristic of the theology of one religious sect in particular, rather it can be applied collectively to the numerous individual sects each with varying theological views which arose as a broad movement in reaction to Lutheranism in particular and, in later years, to the Zwinglian and Calvinist theologies as well. Luther's conservative nature, his unwillingness to change the social and political framework in the realization of his reforms, and his desire to carry out his religious reform even within the existing structure of the Roman Catholic Church appeared much too timid and disappointed many enthusiastic Church reformers who hoped for the overthrow of the entire Catholic hierarchy as a prelude to a new puritan era of pious living. The Anabaptist movement was started, therefore, to fill the spiritual needs of the more radical religious reformers who found Luther's reforms not bold enough.

Although it was composed of many individual sects with diverging religious viewpoints, the Anabaptist movement as a whole possessed a central core of religious beliefs which were held by all the sects and which provided the movement with its unity and strength. As Voltaire indicates,

the term Anabaptism is derived from the concept of rebaptism (Essai, p. 236). Other than stating that Christ was baptized as an adult, Voltaire does not explain why the Anabaptists rejected their baptism as infants and required the rebaptizing of all their members (Essai, p. 236). The rejection of infant baptism was necessitated by the Anabaptists' concept of the Church. The true Church of Christ can only consist of those members who as "free agents" consciously choose to live in accordance with the strict moral and religious code of Christianity (Elton, p. 94). Only those people who willingly decide to imitate the life of Christ can be considered as members of the true Christian Church. The sacrament of baptism is to be administered to those followers of Christ as a visible sign of their entry into His Church. To administer baptism to infants is therefore meaningless, as the young, unaware of its significance, are incapable of consciously acknowledging their commitment to live in Christ.

The Anabaptists differed widely from Luther in their concept of the Church. Luther maintained that the true Church was found only in heaven as God alone knows His chosen. The visible Church, therefore, was to include all members of society, the damned and the faithful alike. For the Anabaptists, God's Church was found on earth and membership in it constituted inclusion among God's elect. The Anabaptists considered themselves to be God's saints on earth and they

acquired a confidently superior attitude to the world of the reprobate around them. They rejected earthly institutions as the work of the corrupt. They refused to recognize the authority of the ungodly princes and to fulfil their normal social obligations such as the payment of taxes, the bearing of arms in the defence of the State, and the obedience to the laws and jurisdiction of secular courts. As Voltaire indicates, the Anabaptists considered that the divine inspiration they claimed to receive was proof of their discipleship in Christ and their election, but more importantly they viewed it as the sole means by which God, to Whom alone they submitted obedience, would reveal to them His divine will (Essai, p. 236). Voltaire fails to make the important point that in emphasizing dreams and visions as the medium used by God to manifest Himself to His chosen people, the Anabaptists minimized almost entirely the value of the Bible as an authority on the Word of God. This shift of emphasis from the visible written Word of Scripture to the secret and highly personal inner light was a major factor which led to the fanatical behaviour of many of the Anabaptist sects.

Through divine inspiration the Anabaptists clearly understood their duty to consist in the creation of a suitable environment in which to erect the true Christian Church, an environment as free as possible of the corruption and ungodliness which pervaded the society in which they were then

living. Having established their Church, they were then to await the Second Coming at which time they, as God's elect, would inherit the earth from the unrighteous. At this point all similarity ceases among the various sects as each group had different approaches to the creation of a suitable environment for the true Church.

Considered by itself, Voltaire's account of the Anabaptist movement in the Protestant Reformation can only give a one-sided and therefore erroneous impression of its theology and religious goals. By referring only to Müntzer and John of Leyden as typical Anabaptist reformers, and by summarizing the whole Anabaptist theology in the quotation: "Je ne suis pas venu apporter la paix, mais le glaive", Voltaire has the reader believe that the whole movement was characterized by a savage millennarian quest for the blood of the ungodly, and that only by a determined extermination of the damned could God's chosen people create an environment propicious to the growth of the Christian Church (Essai, p. 236).

That Müntzer's militant religious views often blacken the reputation of the entire Anabaptist movement is quite understandable. Had he been successful, Müntzer's religious reform would have had disastrous consequences for European society since he urged the poor and oppressed to take up arms and slaughter their ungodly oppressors -- the princes and

clergy. Yet Müntzer's sanguinary brand of religious reform cannot be considered as characteristic of Anabaptism in its entirety. Voltaire creates a false impression when he writes:

> . . .il n'y eut que les anabaptistesqui, toujours transportés de leur rage aveugle et peu intimidés par l'exemple de leur chef Muncer, désolèrent l'Allemagne au nom de Dieu. (Essai, p. 238)

Voltaire overlooks other Anabaptist sects which preached the principle of meekness and long suffering instead of religious hatred and war. He ignores the contribution of such reformers as Conrad Grebel, Michael Sattler, and Jacob Hutter. These Anabaptists maintained that only by peaceful means could the Church of Christ be erected, and that only in an environment of quiet seclusion could the elect of God await the Second Coming of His Son.

Conrad Grebel was a patrician in Zwingli's Zürich who in 1524 fell out with the Swiss reformer on the concept of the Church. Grebel lay great stress on the necessity of a "gathered Church" consisting only of those disciples of Christ capable of following to the letter the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (Elton, p. 94). Such a quality of steadfastness would prove essential in maintaining the pacific nature of the true Church. As God's saints on earth the members of His Church would have to establish their holy community in isolation of the world of the unrighteous, rejecting completely its social and

political institutions and values. In so doing, however, they would incur the hatred and persecution of the ungodly, and yet, by the very nature of their election, they would have to suffer patiently in full obedience to the divine commandment: "Thou shalt not kill". Moreover, their ability to accept the tribulations imposed by the damned without recourse to hostile reaction would prove the Church members to be the truly elect and favoured of God.

Michael Sattler, another Anabaptist of Zürich, professed essentially the same beliefs as did Grebel. He too believed that only in a community totally removed from the corrupt society of the time could God's elect truly live in accordance with His precepts. He too stressed the need for passivity in the face of oppression as a quality of the true Christian's character. What distinguishes Sattler as an Anabaptist reformer, however, is the striking manner in which he illustrated his belief in non-violence, a belief for which he was, ironically, to pay with his life. Sattler's refusal to accept the use of violence even against the Turk could not possibly be condoned by the secular authorities. For they were witnessing the threatened collapse of European civilization before the invading Turkish horde, which was already menacing the gates of Vienna. Yet by their very desire to combat the Turkish menace, the secular authorities were unwittingly sharpening the poignancy of Sattler's claim

to non-violence, no matter what the circumstances. Sattler shrewdly pointed out that, while the Turk was truly a Turk in the flesh, knowing nothing of Christianity which explicitly forbids killing for any reason, the secular rulers of Europe, who prided themselves on being the defenders of the Christian faith, were the real Turks in spirit and therefore the real heathen for condoning the use of violence against the invader. The secular authorities proved Sattler's point forthwith by having him put to death.

The Anabaptist sect founded by the Tyrolese reformer Jacob Hutter may serve as a further example of the peaceful side of Anabaptism. Hutter's religious influence extends to the present day in the form of Hutterite communities whose pacific, industrious and God-fearing members reflect faithfully the religious goals of their founder. Hutter stressed in particular the communal nature of his sect, maintaining that Christian brotherhood and charity could best be expressed in the common possession of land and goods.

These three Anabaptist reformers are only a few examples of non-violent Anabaptism which was just as prevalent in the movement in the 1520's and 30's as was Müntzer's militant sectarianism. Numerous other Anabaptist reformers shared their peaceful goals -- reformers such as George Blaurock, John Denck, and Balthasar Hubmaier who effectively disproved Voltaire's claim that the Anabaptist movement had wholly violent origins (Essai, p. 240).

Nonetheless, Voltaire's description of the Anabaptist movement in terms of the religious activities of Müntzer and John of Leyden does reflect the generally accepted historical opinion of the movement. For the movement, considered in its entirety from the historian's unique vantage point, looms large as a cruel and hostile aspect of the Protestant Reformation. The moderating influence of such gentle natured reformers as Sattler or Hubmaier had little effect on the movement as a whole in the face of the blood-thirsty millennarian visions of a Müntzer or a John of Leyden. Even the non-violent approach to religious reform preached by Grebel ended in vicious persecution by the secular authorities who understandably viewed the Anabaptists' refusal to pay taxes, bear arms or recognize the jurisdiction of secular courts as a veritable threat to the safety and welfare of European society. Such persecution could only be intensified when Anabaptist reformers in the Müntzer vein not only refused to accept such earthly institutions but also vowed to actively destroy them by concerted killing of the ungodly.

Thomas Müntzer was born in Stolberg, Thüringen, in 1488 to a family of modest comfort. Having completed his university training, he was ordained. Soon disenchanted with the priesthood, however, Müntzer turned to Luther, but Luther too was unable to alleviate his spiritual discontent.

It was not until 1523, when he accepted a cure in Zwickau, that he found spiritual contentment in the radical religious views of Niklas Storch, a weaver in that town. Although he does mention him by name, Voltaire does not indicate that it was Storch who first inspired Müntzer with his fanatical visions of world conquest by the elect of God (Essai, p. 236).

Storch did not differ from other Anabaptists in his belief that the true Church of Christ consists of God's visible elect on earth, and that through divine inspiration God communicates to His chosen people. Storch maintained as well the duty of the elect to dissociate themselves completely from existing society in order to construct the true Christian Church. The dangerous aspect of Storch's Anabaptism lay, however, in God's divine revelation to him that the coming of Christ was imminent, and that the existing world of the damned would soon collapse. To hasten this process of final destruction, it was the sacred duty of the elect, as God's saints on earth, to undertake the extermination of the unrighteous. By killing the ungodly, the elect would also be carving out in society itself sufficient room for the creation of their own godly community. This militant attitude was in direct contrast to Grebel's belief in a peaceful withdrawal from existing society. Voltaire is quite accurate in citing as a succinct summary of Storch's and Müntzer's theology, the brief Biblical quotation: "Je ne suis pas venu apporter la paix, mais le glaive" (Essai, p. 236).

Müntzer successfully carried the radical theology of Storch one step further by introducing what in effect was class warfare. He stated specifically that it was the peasant and the town artisan, the miner and the small merchant, the poor and the oppressed who, as the unfortunate victims of a rapidly changing economy, constituted God's real elect, and who, as His instruments of divine justice, were to kill the unrighteous -- the rich money-lenders and the powerful princes. This very exclusive concept of the elect leads Voltaire to state that Müntzer was a proponent of social egalitarianism: "Ils [Müntzer and Storch] développèrent cette vérité dangereuse qui est dans tous les coeurs, c'est que les hommes sont nés égaux, et que si les papes avaient traité les princes en sujets, les seigneurs traitaient les paysans en bêtes" (Essai, p. 236). Indeed he was, but in a very specific and idealistic sense only.

Voltaire views Müntzer erroneously as the defender of the common people in fighting for equitable treatment on the economic and social level (Essai, p. 236). He views Müntzer as having aroused the hostility of the lower classes to their secular overlords in the hope of acquiring better living conditions or, as Voltaire phrases it "les droits du genre humain" (Essai, p. 237). Müntzer maintained to the contrary that his concept of social egalitarianism could not be realized until the age of millennium had actually arrived

when the elect, living in true Christian brotherhood, would naturally share all property and goods in common. Until such time, however, as God's kingdom on earth had truly been established, the elect would have to bear social and economic injustice. Moreover, in defining God's elect as consisting solely of the tax burdened peasant, the struggling artisan reduced to penury through inflation, and the small merchantman threatened by the competition of large trading companies, Müntzer was purposely playing upon their economic difficulties and emphasizing their hardships as an essential factor in the realization of his millennarian dreams. Müntzer firmly believed that the economically less fortunate were farther removed from the temptations of avarice and luxury. Tempted less by worldly possessions, the poor would be more religiously inclined and, as God's saints on earth, would more readily answer His call to prepare for Christ's coming by exterminating the unrighteous. This process of extermination would take some time, however, as the poor were not sufficiently freed from ambitious hopes of acquiring wealth. It was Müntzer's divine task to prepare them to shun and despise all material gain and devote themselves completely to their divinely imposed mission.

Müntzer acquired a considerable following throughout Thüringen. This was not because of his eschatological beliefs as such, as shown by the concrete, worldly demands of the

various peasant manifestoes in the war of 1525, but rather because of the manner in which the lower classes could profit materially from certain aspects of his militant theology. The peasants rejected Müntzer's idea of the scorning of worldly possessions as a means to acquiring greater zeal in their divine mission. Rather, viewing themselves as God's elect in attacking the unrighteous -- the rich and the powerful -- the peasants aimed at hastening the arrival of the age of the millennium by forcibly redistributing wealth in the here and now.

Having thoroughly inflamed the local population by his provocative preaching, Müntzer was forced to leave Zwickau by order of the town council. After wandering in Bohemia for several months during which time he was expelled from Prague because of his views, Müntzer returned to Thüringen in 1523 to accept a cure in the town of Allstedt. Once again he came into conflict with the local authorities, and this time he attracted the attention of Duke John, brother of Frederick the Wise. Asked by Duke John to preach a sermon summarizing his theology, Müntzer boldly invited the Duke to enter the Church of Christ and, as an elect, to undertake the war of extermination against the ungodly. Duke John hesitated and asked Müntzer to halt temporarily further preaching of his views until Frederick the Wise had reviewed his case. Müntzer interpreted the Duke's reluctance to

support him as a denial of the divine will and therefore he ignored the Duke's order, travelling to Mülhausen where once more he continued his prophetic mission.

Müntzer did not by any means take this city by storm as Voltaire suggests (Essai, p. 237). There was in Mülhausen, before Müntzer's arrival, an ex-monk by the name of Heinrich Pfeiffer who had won the confidence and loyalty of the poorer burghers and of the large number of paupers in his successful attempt to overthrow the ruling oligarchy. Müntzer was not able to substantially weaken this following. Similarly it is not possible to support Voltaire's claim that Müntzer was hypocritical in profiteering from the wealth of the townfolk while preaching equality and generosity (Essai, p. 237). Voltaire considers it remarkable that Müntzer had gained the support of the lower classes, and that he had become their leader in the Peasant War of 1525 (Essai, p. 237). This astonishment arises, no doubt, from Voltaire's suspicion of Müntzer as having ulterior motives in befriending the people of Mülhausen, and from the fact that Müntzer himself was of well-to-do stock, traditionally unsympathetic to the problems of the lower classes. Voltaire appears to be unaware of Müntzer's own situation, for he was reduced to poverty by his frequent wanderings. Müntzer often referred to his own indigence as a means of encouraging the trust of the commonfolk.

As for Müntzer's role in the Peasant War of 1525, Voltaire over-estimates his influence when he implies that Müntzer was the leader of the entire movement (Essai, p. 237). No doubt Müntzer would have eagerly accepted such a position as the leader of God's elect throughout Germany, but for his own part, Müntzer's role in the revolt was limited to instigating an uprising of the peasants of Thüringen against the troops of Philip of Hesse. Believing the Peasant War to be the first stage in the preparation for the Second Coming, Müntzer boldly led his followers on to the fields of Frankenhausen. His confidence in divine protection was quickly shattered when his followers were easily routed, for as Voltaire indicates, the regular troops had little difficulty in defeating the poorly equipped insurgents (Essai, p. 237). Contrary to Voltaire's description, Müntzer was beheaded by the troops of Ernest of Mansfeld (Essai, p. 237). If Müntzer did not live to witness the coming of the millennium, John of Leyden certainly did, for John of Leyden not only preached about the kingdom of God, but actually proclaimed its arrival in himself as the harbinger of Christ.

It was in the town of Münster that God's kingdom was to make its first earthly manifestation. Münster became Lutheran in 1523 under the direction of Bernt Rothmann, one of its chaplains. It was not to remain Lutheran for long, however, for in the previous year several Anabaptist preachers

had arrived there, having been expelled from the neighbouring Duchy of Julich-Cleves. They had little difficulty converting Rothmann who, in turn, converted Bernt Knipperdollinck, his close friend and leader of the influential cloth-merchant guild. Zealous in his new faith, Rothmann urged the acceptance of a communal society in Münster as an immediate goal for which God's people could strive. The doctrine of shared prosperity won quick approval among the poor of Münster and resulted in a great influx of unemployed and propertyless from different European lands. Several times the Lutheran town council attempted to expel Rothmann but without success for, as Voltaire states, the Anabaptists swiftly gained power in Münster (Essai, p. 238). The Lutheran preachers were hounded from the churches and the rich Lutheran burghers were so harassed that they fled from the town, leaving all possessions behind. As yet, however, the Anabaptist movement in Münster lacked proper leadership and organization. Such qualities were provided by John Bockelson (Jan Bockelszoon) who arrived in Münster in 1534. Sent as an apostle of John Matthys (Jan Matthyszoon), a baker in Haarlem, Bockelson was to prepare the town for the arrival of his spiritual mentor.

Born in Leyden, Bockelson grew up in that part of the Netherlands where Anabaptism expressed itself in the most militant, bloodthirsty manner. In the 1520's Leyden was the

centre of the burgeoning cloth industry of the Netherlands. The nature of this industry created a mass of semi-employed and under paid workers who were ripe for the propagation of millennarian dreams of social egalitarianism.

Bockelson was efficient in his task. Proclaiming that the world would cease to exist before Easter of that year, and that only the community of God's elect in Münster would be saved, he created such an influx of new converts that in the annual elections of 1534 the Lutheran party was deposed from power and Anabaptism was adopted as the official faith of the town.

Under the direction of Matthys, who had now arrived in Münster, all Catholics and Protestants were forcibly evicted. Their hardship was great because they left the city in mid-winter. Those who refused to go were compelled to be rebaptized, and it was made a capital offence to profess any faith other than Anabaptism. The eviction of the Catholics and the Lutherans from Münster resulted in the outbreak of hostilities between the city and neighbouring German princes who immediately lay siege to the town. Matthys was killed at Easter of 1534 when he led a small band of men in a divinely inspired sortie against the besieging armies. Before he died, Matthys was able, however, to carry out several religious reforms which brought Münster closer to what he believed to be the ideal city of God.

Rothmann's dream of a communal society was realized when Matthys confiscated the property of the emigrants. All their possessions were collected and placed in a central depot from which the poor were allotted supplies according to their needs. The surrender of money to the State was considered a duty of the true Anabaptist, and all those who hesitated were forced to do so. Private wealth was abolished as was private property when Matthys forbade the locking of doors. Houses were to be open to all. Like Müntzer, Matthys believed that God's elect consisted of the poor and he regarded their ignorance as saintly because it was proof of innocence. Consequently, all books and book learning, the Bible excluded, were condemned. This particular reform enabled Matthys to determine which religious beliefs were to be tolerated in Münster.

The death of Matthys allowed Bockelson to assume the leadership in establishing God's kingdom in Münster. If God ruled through Matthys, His prophet, it was now Bockelson himself, as Voltaire states, who ruled directly over the people of Münster by the grace of God (Essai, p. 239). With his coronation as king, Bockelson declared the kingdom of God to have arrived in Münster.

Bockelson's character prepared him admirably for the role he was about to play. Having spent his youth in that part of the Netherlands propitious to the most violent form

of Anabaptism, Bockelson's fanatical religious views were intensified by an unstable temperament. He was an unsuccessful tailor and, like so many others in the same circumstances, he blamed society for his failure. As he was very emotional, he was deeply interested in drama, and was himself an avid playwright. His interest in the dramatic was furthered, no doubt, by his propensity for apocalyptic visions and dreams. A veritable megalomaniac, his own fantastic play was about to unfold in Münster on the most grandiose and violent scale.

Bockelson's coronation was quite simple, contrary to Voltaire's contention, but he was soon to leave no doubt in the people's minds that he was king and would rule as one (Essai, p. 239). Voltaire makes reference to the commemorative coinage -- itself of no monetary value, all money having been abolished by Matthys -- struck by Bockelson (Essai, p. 239). This coinage bore the inscriptions: "The Word has become Flesh and dwells in us" and "One King over all. One God, one Faith, one Baptism".[1] Bockelson renamed the gates and streets in his honour and claimed the right to christen infants. Once crowned, he attired himself in the most magnificent robes and wore rings, chains and spurs

---

[1] N. Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 272.

of the finest gold. His large suite of councillors and courtiers were all similarly clothed. His queen, Divara, the widow of Matthys, held a separate court and had numerous personal attendants. Bockelson had a massive throne built in the town square and draped with a gold cloth. When about to hold court in the square, he would be heralded by a loud fanfare. A personal bodyguard would cordon off the square and keep an ever watchful eye on the proceedings. Bockelson's personal coat of arms, described by Voltaire, was indicative of the power to which he aspired (Essai, p. 239). Depicting a globe pierced by two swords combining the power of both the pope and the emperor, Bockelson's coat of arms showed that he sought dominion both spiritual and temporal over the whole world.

Bockelson was to reveal himself capable indeed of acquiring the power represented in his coat of arms. He abolished the existing town council and introduced an absolute monarchy with the appointment of twelve elders, each in charge of a district of the town and responsible directly to him. Bockelson introduced capital punishment for almost every form of misbehaviour, including lying, slander and avarice, as well as for acts of insubordination, whether committed by a wife against her husband, a child against his parent, or the people against the will of the government.

Moreover, he introduced a rigorous moral code for

God's chosen people, a code which even included polygamy. Far from being a ploy for greater sexual freedom, the practice of polygamy was considered by Bockelson as the compliant obedience of a holy people to God's specific commandment to multiply and be fruitful. That such a practice was made possible was due to the fact that the women of Münster outnumbered the men by as many as three to one. Many emigrants had left their womenfolk behind in their haste to flee Münster. There were, as well, many ex-nuns who re-entered civilian life when their convents were secularized. Bockelson defended the practice of polygamy by citing the Biblical precedent of the patriarchs of Israel who themselves had several wives. Furthermore, as Münster was in a state of constant siege, he wanted to provide protectors for its women. Bockelson himself showed the way for the rest of the male population by marrying fifteen women, five more than Voltaire alleged (Essai, p. 239).

Bockelson's reform program included, too, the abolition of superfluity of every kind among the people of Münster. Rather than sharing their prosperity in fraternal love, as both Rothmann and Matthys had planned, the people were as poor as ever, forced to hand over to the king, under pain of death, all excess food and clothing. Bockelson had apparently received a vision informing him that all but the barest necessities were considered to be sinful before God. Mean-

while, Bockelson and his court lived in the greatest luxury, the king claiming himself to be dead to the temptations of the world and the flesh. All his past failures were undoubtedly amply reversed in this manner.

Voltaire's estimate of Bockelson as being courageous and stalwart in his fight against the blockade and in the grips of an increasingly acute famine is tarnished considerably when we realize that he himself, as king, suffered few of the hardships of the commonfolk. If anyone went hungry it was certainly not Bockelson (Essai, p. 239).

Voltaire makes reference to the twelve apostles sent out by Bockelson to announce his reign throughout Europe (Essai, p. 239). However he does not link their mission with the King's hopes of arousing outside help to relieve God's kingdom from the armies of the unrighteous. Although all twelve messengers were killed, there were signs of scattered support for Bockelson, especially in his native Netherlands. As Voltaire states, there was in Amsterdam an Anabaptist uprising in which, for a brief time, the city hall was invaded (Essai, p. 239). There was, moreover, the formation in Groningen of a small army of Anabaptists who hoped to march on Münster, and relieve it from the enemy. This attempt failed, as well as that in which three ships of Anabaptist soldiers were sunk in the river Ijsel.

Failing in his attempt to muster assistance from outside the town, Bockelson was fully prepared to have God's elect die of starvation rather than to surrender to the damned. Only by the use of terror could he maintain the loyalty of the citizens. Yet during the last few days of the siege, not even Bockelson's apocalyptic visions of divine assistance in turning the cobblestones into bread could retain the support of the people and, with the aid of a few deserters, the enemy armies were able to storm Münster, attacking its fortifications at their weak points. Bockelson was tortured to death in 1536, as Voltaire recounts, on the orders of the deposed Bishop of Münster (Essai, p. 239).

The death of Bockelson marked the rapid decline of the militant form of Anabaptism started by Müntzer thirteen years previously. As has been shown, and contrary to Voltaire's assertion, Anabaptism did not become a peaceful movement in contrast to its violent origins (Essai, p. 240). It is rather that the quiet form of Anabaptism introduced by such reformers as Grebel and Sattler lived on in the work of men like Menno Simons who, when he was converted to Anabaptism in 1536, started the Mennonite sect whose communities are still in existence today, bearing faithful witness to the peaceful goals of their founder. Wrong in his contention that the Anabaptist movement arose from violent origins, Voltaire is mistaken also in his belief

that later Anabaptist sects owed their peaceful nature to their Unitarian beliefs (Essai, p. 240). We have only to note that the peaceful Mennonite communities consisted of both Unitarians and orthodox holders of the Trinity. It can be stated in general that Voltaire's account of the Anabaptist movement is a very inaccurate one. His attempt to render historical justice to the movement by showing later Anabaptist sects to be peaceful in contrast to their predecessors, because of their Unitarian views, reveals his ignorance on two separate accounts. Firstly Voltaire attributes a false sense of importance to Unitarian theology. Secondly, he reveals his total unawareness of the peaceful form of Anabaptism which developed equally with the militant, thereby providing an account one-sided and misleading in nature.

So far we have seen to what extent Voltaire is successful in his presentation of the theological reforms themselves -- "cette grande révolution dans l'esprit humain", as he calls it -- and how these reforms affected the existing social order of sixteenth-century Europe (Essai, p. 217). It is now our task to discover from Voltaire's presentation of the Reformation his concept of history and his approach to the art of historiography.

CHAPTER V

VOLTAIRE'S VIEW OF HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

From reading Voltaire's account of the Reformation in his Essai we can make various observations about his view of history in general. Voltaire reveals several points of view on the subject of causation in history. The first theory is based on man's inhumanity to man. According to this theory, history is composed of a series of events testifying to man's egotistical nature and his capacity for deceit and cruelty in the satisfaction of his own desires. Voltaire cites the corruption of the Catholic hierarchy as an example of how vice can dominate the virtues that people have. He writes:

> Il y avait . . .partout des hommes de moeurs très pures, des pasteurs dignes de l'être, des religieux soumis de coeur à des voeux qui effraient la mollesse humaine; mais ces vertus sont ensevelies dans l'obscurité, tandis que le luxe et le vice dominent dans la splendeur. (Essai, pp. 213, 214)

Voltaire shows how rulers use power for their own ends when he describes the manner in which King Christian II of Denmark brutally massacred his rivals (Essai, p. 231). He relates how, in his opinion, Calvin utilized the power of religion and his influence as a religious reformer to strengthen his personal rule over Geneva (Essai, pp. 242, 243, 247).

In contrast to the view of history as the continuing

story of man's cruelty to man, Voltaire suggests an opposing concept, that of man's capacity for progress where tolerance and peace, rather than persecution and war will eventually prevail. Voltaire sees in the Reformation indications that man is approaching this ideal. He gives as an example the reply of the Protestants to the Catholics' query of how those of the reformed faith can acknowledge Luther and Calvin as their religious leaders, dominated as these reformers were by their narrow-minded attitudes on theological questions and their stubborn intransigeance to opposing views (Essai, p. 248). The Protestants claim that while they profess the religious beliefs expounded by Luther and Calvin to be true Christian doctrine, at the same time they are not obliged to accept, and indeed do not assimilate into their own personal behaviour the heated passions and the blind intolerance characteristic of these reformers. To render their contention more poignant, the Protestants maintain that the harshness of their religious leaders should not reflect on themselves or on their beliefs, just as the Catholics contend that the numerous and very evident faults of Popes Alexander VI and Leo X should not be considered as necessarily indicative of their own character and faith. Voltaire interprets this argument as "sage" adding:

> . . .la modération semble aujourd'hui prendre dans les deux partis opposés la place des anciennes fureurs . . . .L'esprit de philosophie a enfin émoussé les glaives. (Essai, p. 248)

Intimated in his portrayal of the Reformation is Voltaire's "great man" theory of historical causation. Related to the concept of progress in history, this theory operates on the principle that occasionally men of outstanding character and genius appear on the historical scene to direct and encourage the growth of man. Although he cannot be ranked with a Louis XIV, a Henry IV or an Albert the Great, as Voltaire would admit, nonetheless, Servetus had, in Voltaire's opinion, the spark of genius in him. As a "très savant médecin" Servetus could contribute to the progress of mankind in his own perhaps less spectacular manner, but no less indelible fashion than the great kings of history (Essai, p. 244).

Directly opposing the concept of progress in history is Voltaire's belief in the power of fate, mysterious and whimsical as it plays with man's thoughts and actions. Reference has already been made in this regard to the seemingly irrational turnabout of Henry VIII who, having won from the pope the title of "defender of the faith" for his polemic work against Luther, had become one of the pope's bitterest enemies. Voltaire can only attribute this ironic circumstance to "[l]a bizarre destinée qui se joue de ce monde" (Essai, p. 222).

Still another concept of causation in history is apparent in Voltaire's account of the Reformation, and again this view conflicts with the idea of human progress. The theory in question is based on the cyclical principle of recurring events and patterns in history. Voltaire writes:

> La grande société chrétienne ressemblait en un point aux empires profanes qui furent dans leurs commencements des républiques pauvres. Ces républiques devinrent, avec le temps, de riches monarchies; et ces monarchies perdirent quelques provinces qui redevinrent républiques. (Essai, p. 230)

Consequently, Voltaire expects the Protestant sects, who at first were weak and tolerant by necessity, just like the Catholic Church in its infancy, to become just as powerful and oppressive as the Catholic Church, at which time new splinter groups will break away to start the cycle anew.

From the numerous and conflicting theories of historical causation revealed in his study of the Reformation, it appears that Voltaire lacks a consistent view on the nature of historical development. On the purpose of history, however, Voltaire is quite explicit. Echoing Bolingbroke's celebrated adage that history is "philosophy teaching by examples",[1] Voltaire writes: "On peut, ce me semble, tirer un grand fruit de l'histoire, en comparant les temps et les

---

[1] J. H. Brumfitt, Voltaire Historian (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 42.

événements" (Essai, p. 196).

In his study of the Reformation, Voltaire draws various lessons which ought to be learned and applied by his contemporaries. Voltaire gives particular attention to a certain Genevan law in his account of Calvin and Servetus, according to which the accused had to be accompanied in prison by the accuser until sufficient evidence had been accumulated to substantiate the accusation (Essai, p. 245). Greatly admiring this law, Voltaire suggests that it be imitated elsewhere, namely, in France where false accusations by unidentified informers constituted common legal practice. On the topic of international law, Voltaire draws attention to the blatant injustice committed by Calvin against Servetus in having him put to death. It has already been shown, however, that Voltaire's complaint is not entirely justified (Essai, p. 246). In stressing the nature of this injustice Voltaire hopes to perhaps draw the attention of those in authority who could prevent similar miscarriages of justice in the future. In his enumeration of the various Protestant reforms of the Church, Voltaire gives special emphasis to the secularization of monastic lands, a policy which in his opinion can prove valuable in providing funds for needed social reforms (Essai, p. 249). Another illustration of history teaching by examples can be found in Voltaire's severe treatment of King Christian II of Denmark (Essai,

p. 231). In revealing the King as a monster and a tyrant Voltaire shows the historian to be a judge of man and his conduct in society. Implicit in his condemnation of King Christian II is his belief that those rulers who choose to behave as cruel tyrants shall pay for their misdeeds by being judged as such in the pages of history.

In light of his clear conception of the value for man of the study of history, we can now re-evaluate Voltaire's view of historical causation. Although it has been stated that he lacks a consistent opinion on the subject of causation, varying from an optimistic view of progress made through the efforts of talented individuals, to a pessimistic attitude where the whims of fate and man's cruel and egotistical nature direct the course of events, Voltaire seems to imply that if history can teach, man can learn. Learning from the past, man can make progress in the future. Human progress is often slow and sometimes appears to stop completely. At these times Voltaire would naturally suggest in his disappointment various pessimistic theories of causation. Yet always present within him is that undying faith in man's capacity for self-improvement based on historical hindsight, a faith testified to by the very presence of Voltaire's historical works themselves.

From reading his account of the Reformation in the Essai we can make a few general observations about Voltaire's

concept of historiography. In his presentation of the Servetus case Voltaire purposely assures the reader of the historical accuracy of his account. He writes:

> Nous ne faisons ici que rapporter les faits et les opinions sans entrer dans aucune controverse, sans disputer contre personne, respectant ce que nous devons respecter et uniquement attaché à la fidélité de l'histoire. (Essai, p. 247)

For Voltaire, the historian's prime concern lies in the presentation of historical truth -- what actually occurred in the past.

It is evident from the above quotation, moreover, that to strive for historical accuracy, the historian must, in Voltaire's opinion, adopt an impartial attitude toward his subject matter. In his portrayal of the Reformation we see indications of where Voltaire attempts to do justice to those of whom he writes, recording the evil they did as well as the good and the praiseworthy. Reference has already been made to how Voltaire views Pope Leo X's patronage of the arts as having had a refining influence on European civilization, despite the fact that the Pope lived "dans le sein des plaisirs et des scandales" (Essai, pp. 214, 222). In his account of Luther's reforms dealing with vows of celibacy and the secularization of monastic lands, Voltaire attempts to render a fair judgement as well. He admits that those monks who married were guilty of breaking their vows, yet at the same time they could not be thought of as

"libertins" in so doing, as the Catholics contended (Essai, p. 224). Similarly the Catholics were not justified in accusing Luther and Calvin of relaxing the strict moral code in secularizing monastic lands, for as Voltaire accurately remarks, these reformers transformed society as a whole into one large cloister (Essai, p. 243). The best example of Voltaire's desire for an impartial handling of historical material can be found in his treatment of Calvin. Voltaire leaves no doubt in the reader's mind about his acute dislike for Calvin whom he blames for Servetus' cruel and unjust death. At the same time, Voltaire shows himself sufficiently unbiased toward Calvin as to acknowledge the tireless work and unfailing energy which earned for him in Geneva "un nom célèbre et un grand crédit" (Essai, p. 248).

In order to arrive at historical truth Voltaire believes too, that the historian must have an analytical mind. The historian must always be inquisitive as to the cause and nature of historical events. Voltaire shows himself to be of such spirit on various issues in the Reformation. When he writes of Charles V's attempt to stop the development of religious revolt in his empire, Voltaire ascribes Charles' failure very succinctly and accurately to his unfavorable military situation. For greater clarity and precision Voltaire compares Charles' military position to that of Charlemagne several centuries earlier, noting the strengths of the latter

in relation to the weaknesses of the former (Essai, p. 205). As to the question of why the Swiss gave such ready acceptance to the Protestant faith, Voltaire writes in an inquiring tone:

> Quand on voit ainsi la nation la moins inquiète, la moins remuante, la moins volage de l'Europe, quitter tout d'un coup une religion pour une autre, il y a infailliblement une cause qui doit avoir fait une impression violente sur tous les esprits. (Essai, p. 227)

He then proceeds to analyze the cause. In his analysis of how Luther's attack on Rome contributed to the outbreak of the Peasant War, Voltaire shows a shrewd awareness of cause and effect. The peasants interpreted Luther's defiance of religious authority as a signal for their own uprising against secular authority (Essai, p. 237).

Voltaire is not always accurate, however, in his analysis of the cause and nature of historical events. Perceptive in his explanation of why Charles V could not arrest the growth of Protestantism in his German lands, Voltaire is less accurate in his account of the reasons for the Emperor's desire to halt the spread of the new faith. He shows us Charles V weighing carefully the pros and cons of supporting the reformed faith (Essai, p. 223). Indeed, he depicts the Emperor studying the advantages and disadvantages of defying Rome by becoming Protestant. As has been pointed out, however, the Emperor never doubted his duty to provide unwavering opposition to the heretical faith

and to strive for the reunification of Christendom. Voltaire's searching study of why the Swiss were so soon converted to Protestantism results in a disappointing analysis of a minor religious squabble between the Franciscan and Dominican Orders as to which monastic order rendered greater reverence to the Virgin Mary (Essai, p. 227). This petty quarrel was by itself incapable of causing the Swiss Reformation. Still another example of Voltaire's inaccurate analysis of historical events can be found in the case where, although he is accurate in his judgement that Luther's questioning of papal infallibility spurred the peasants on to their own revolt, he draws a false conclusion that the Peasant War had no adverse effect on Luther's prestige and influence as a religious reformer (Essai, p. 237).

The need for an analytical approach to the study of history must be accompanied, in Voltaire's opinion, by a definite basis upon which to select true from erroneous events of the past. For Voltaire the test of the veracity of an historical occurrence is the rationality of that occurrence. Voltaire believes that man thinks and acts according to logical principles. Consequently, any historical event of human origin which appears in Voltaire's mind to be unreasonable is either untrue and never occurred or else was the work of a crafty individual seeking to take advantage of the gullible.

In studying the Reformation from a rational point of view, Voltaire severely limits his historical perspective and understanding of the past. The clearest example of this defect in his approach to historiography is found in his misjudgement of Calvin's purpose in reforming Geneva and in persecuting Servetus. Voltaire is incapable of understanding, because of its apparently illogical nature, the deep religious conviction which motivated Calvin to reform Geneva for the greater glory of God and which prompted him to persecute Servetus for having besmirched God's glory with his infamous doctrines. Voltaire doubts, therefore, the sincerity of the religious conviction of Calvin whom he suspects of seeking personal gain in undertaking to reform Geneva.

In his striving to recount faithfully the events of the past as they occurred, the historian must not forget that he is employing an art form demanding all his creative talents. Voltaire emphasizes that historical accounts must be interesting, even entertaining, to read, and not just informative. On various occasions he adds touches of humour to his portrayal of the Reformation in order to enliven its appeal to the reader. Instead of excommunicating Luther, the Pope, in Voltaire's opinion, ought to have appeased the unruly monk by offering him "un chapeau rouge", symbolic of the power, prestige and wealth of a cardinalate (Essai, p. 218). On the complex doctrine of the eucharist which was the subject

of much hot-tempered controversy among the reformers, Voltaire adopts a light irreverent attitude. Amusingly, he summarizes the whole complicated issue in two concise sentences:

> Ainsi, tandis que ceux qu'on appelait papistes mangeaient Dieu sans pain, les luthériens mangeaient du pain, et Dieu. Les calvinistes vinrent bientôt après, qui mangèrent le pain, et qui ne mangèrent point Dieu. (Essai, p. 219)

With regard to the Philip of Hesse scandal which he casts off lightly as "paisible" (Essai, p. 235), he remarks humorously that few men have dared to follow Philip's example of having two wives because " . . .il est rare qu'un homme puisse conserver chez soi deux femmes dont la rivalité ferait une guerre domestique continuelle, et rendrait trois personnes malheureuses" (Essai, p. 234).

In summary, Voltaire's concept of historiography serves to strengthen his belief in the capacity of history to teach. His hope is that by a consciencious effort to study the past in a fair, closely analytical, and rational manner, the historian can discover new insights into history, beneficial to man, which were formerly obscured by pre-conceived notions of the past based upon cultural and religious prejudices.

CONCLUSION

In his portrayal of the Reformation Voltaire shows generally poor insight into the theological problems which confronted religious reformers of sixteenth-century Europe. He frequently misunderstands and therefore misrepresents in his account the religious beliefs of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and the Anabaptists. His analysis of the political and social ramifications of the reform in theology vary in accuracy from astute judgement to simplistic and erroneous explanation. It can be stated in general that to read Voltaire's account of the Reformation solely for what it describes about the Reformation is to obtain a largely distorted and untrue picture of that period in European history.

Greater benefit can be derived from studying how Voltaire, in writing his account of the Reformation, refines the art of historiography. Voltaire's historical method represents a great improvement over that employed by seventeenth-century French historians. Voltaire severely criticizes the "naive credulity", the lack of "critical sense" and the national and religious prejudices of such historians as Mézeray and Daniel, Maimbourg and Sarrasin.[1] He criticizes

---

[1] J. H. Brumfitt, Voltaire Historian, p. 26.

Bossuet for his blind acceptance of Scripture in its literal meaning, and for his faith in the fantastic tales recount by the ancients.[2]

Voltaire introduces into his own work the importance of ascertaining historical fact, and he suggests that historical accuracy can be achieved by the adoption on the historian's part of an impartial and analytical approach to the study of the past. Such is the relevance of these suggestions made by Voltaire that they are adopted and practised by many present-day historians in their own research.

Voltaire's failure to provide an accurate portrayal of the Reformation, in light of the knowledge gained from modern research, cannot be attributed, therefore, to his impartial and analytical approach to the study of history. His failure may be due in part to the unavailability in his time of source material accessible only to the modern historian. More important, however, is the fact that Voltaire studies from a purely rational point of view an era largely irrational in its outlook. His emphasis upon reason applied to the study of the past constitutes a major flaw in his concept of historiography. This flaw was not Voltaire's alone, but that of Eighteenth-century Enlightenment as a whole which viewed man and the universe as subject to the forces of natural law. Voltaire's application of reason to the study of the past was generally accepted by his contemporaries

---

[1] Ibid., p. 31.

as the correct approach, since it was Voltaire who expounded this rational method in the article "Certitude historique" in the Encyclopédie.

Failing to provide an accurate account of the Reformation in his Essai, Voltaire does, nonetheless, give a very broad one as he touches on almost every aspect -- religious, political, social and military -- of European civilization. He succeeds in describing the Reformation, with its often long, dry and seemingly endless theological debates, in a light and humorous manner, thereby making his account interesting and entertaining to read.

The greatest value for the reader to be found in Voltaire's portrayal of the Reformation lies perhaps not in his humorous and entertaining style, nor even in his contribution to the art of historiography, valuable though this contribution may be, but rather in his optimistic belief that history can teach and that man can progress by studying his past. This belief remains viable to man throughout the ages, and in particular to modern man, faced with the many world problems of today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Voltaire

Essai sur les moeurs. Edited by R. Pomeau. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963.

Voltaire's Correspondence. Edited by T. Besterman. 105 vols. Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1954.

Books and Pamphlets

Adam, K. The Roots of the Reformation. Translated by C. Hastings. London and New York: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1957.

Anderson, C. S. The Reformation Then and Now. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966.

Bainton, R. H. Hunted Heretic. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953.

---------. Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950.

Black, J. B. The Art of History: A Study of Four Great Historians of the Eighteenth Century. London: Methuen, 1926.

Bloch, M. The Historian's Craft. Translated by P. Putnam. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1953.

Bottiglia, W. F. Voltaire: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Brandi, K. The Emperor Charles V: The Growth and Destiny of a Man and of a World Empire. Translated by C. V. Wedgwood. London: J. Cape, 1939.

Brumfitt, J. H. Voltaire Historian. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Calvin, J. On God and Political Duty. Edited by J. T. McNeill. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1956.

Chamberlin, E. R. The Bad Popes. New York: The Dial Press Inc., 1969.

Champion, E. Voltaire études critiques: l'homme l'écrivain, le critique, l'historien, le courtisan, le patriote, Voltaire et la révolution. Paris: A. Colin, 1921.

Cohn, N. The Pursuit of the Millennium. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Commager, H. S. The Nature and the Study of History. Columbus, Ohio: C. E. Merrill Books Inc., 1966.

Dickens, A. G. Reformation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Europe. London: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1966.

Diderot, D., ed. Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des matières. 17 vols. Paris: Briasson, 1751-1765.

Dray, W. H. Philosophy of History. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

Dunkley, E. H. The Reformation in Denmark. London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1948.

Elton, G. R. Reformation Europe 1517-1559. New York: Harper and Row Publ. Co., 1963.

---------. The Practice of History. New York: T. Y. Crowell Co., 1967.

---------, ed. Renaissance and Reformation. New York and London: Macmillan and Collier-Macmillan, 1967.

Farner, O. Zwingli the Reformer His Life and Work. Translated by D. G. Sear. N.p.: Orchon Books, 1968.

Fife, R. H. The Revolt of Martin Luther. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957.

Hall, B. John Calvin Humanist and Theologian. The Historical Association. London: G. Philip and Son Ltd., 1956.

Hillerbrand, H. J. Landgrave Philip of Hesse 1504-1567; Religion and Politics in the Reformation. St. Louis: St. Louis Foundation for Reformation Research, 1967.

Hunt, R. N. C. Calvin. London: The Centenary Press, 1933.

Jacobs, H. E. Martin Luther the Hero of the Reformation. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898.

Lanson, G. Voltaire. Paris: Librairie Hachette, n.d.

Merriman, R. B. The Rise of the Spanish Empire in the Old World and in the New. 4 vols. New York: Cooper Square Publishers Inc., 1962.

Moore, W. G. La Réforme allemande et la littérature française: recherches sur la notoriété de Luther en France. Strasbourg: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres à l'université de Strasbourg, 1930.

Mueller, W. A. Church and State in Luther and Calvin; A Comparative Study. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965.

McGee, T. D. The Political Causes and Consequences of the Protestant "Reformation". New York: D. and J. Sadlier Co., 1853.

McNeill, J. T. The History and Character of Calvinism. New York: Lutterworth Press, 1956.

Pascal, R. The Social Basis of the German Reformation. London: Watts and Co., 1933.

Pomeau, R. La Religion de Voltaire. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1969.

Rilliet, J. Zwingli Third Man of the Reformation. Translated by H. Knight. London: Lutterworth Press, 1964.

Schapiro, J. S. Social Reform and the Reformation. New York: Columbia University Press, 1909.

Smith, P. The Life and Letters of Martin Luther. Boston and New York: H. Mifflin Co., 1911.

Stoughton, J. Footprints of Italian Reformers. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1881.

Swihart, A. K. Luther and the Lutheran Church. London: P. Owen Ltd., 1960.

Todd, J. M. Martin Luther: A Biographical Study. London: Burns and Oates, 1964.

Torrey, N. L. The Spirit of Voltaire. Oxford: The Marston Press, 1963.

Véniot, J. Histoire de la réforme française. 2 vols. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1926.

Wendel, F. Calvin, sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950.

Articles and Parts of Books

Brumfitt, J. H. "History and Propaganda in Voltaire", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, XXIV (1963), 271-287.

Dagens, J. "La Marche de l'histoire selon Voltaire", Romantische Forschungen, LXX (1958), 241-266.

Foster, F. H. "Zwingli's Theology, Philosophy and Ethics" in S. M. Jackson, Huldreich Zwingli the Reformer of German Switzerland 1484-1531. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901.

Rosenthal, J. "Voltaire's Philosophy of History", Journal of the History of Ideas, no. 16 (1955), 151-178.

Saunders, R. M. "Voltaire's View of the Meaning of History", University of Toronto Quarterly, no. 22 (1952), 44-54.