WAS LUTHER A DEVOTEE OF MARY?

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It may appear that the question which serves as the title of this paper is an idle one, but many recent and diverse expressions of opinion force one to take the question seriously. It is still not uncommon, however, to see such an antithesis between Luther and things Marian that even the possibility of raising the question seems to be precluded. Consider the recent statement of Fritz Viering, the Superintendent of the Evangelical Church at Hamm in Westphalia, Germany:

> In the Jesuit Church of the Gesù in Rome, one can observe the majestic monument at the grave of Saint Ignatius of Loyola...; it is a gigantic Marian representation. In one hand, there is a cross; in the other, a formation which one can well take as flames Under Mary's foot are entwined forms which symbolically represent the heretics Among one of these forms is found a book on whose rear cover is printed *Martin Luther.* Mary, the conquerer of the heretics, of the Reformation, the conquerer of *Martin Luther!* There are many ways of presenting Roman Catholic Mariology but anyone who overlooks what this statue on the grave of Ignatius of Loyola signifies does not understand Roman Catholic Mariology![1]

The author can testify that a similar explanation has been given of a figure lying beneath the feet of an Immaculate Conception statue outside the former college and church of the Jesuits in Paderborn, Germany

Contrast this attitude with the one which has gained some ascendancy since the Council In the semi-popular Marian magazine *Mary Today,* in an article entitled "Archbishop Gawlina, Martin Luther, and the Magnificat," the editor, Father Charles Lees, S M., introduced his subject with this declaration:

[1] *Die Römischkatholische Mariologie und die Botschaft der Reformation.* Hamm, Schriftenmission, 1955, p. 45 f.

> In modern dialogues between Catholics and their separated brethren, it is often ignored that, historically, the Protestant reformers did not attack devotion to Our Blessed Mother; that such an attack came from their successors. Catholics would find it difficult to disagree with Archbishop Gawlina's excerpts from Martin Luther.[2]

He then went on to quote from the well-known address of the Archbishop to the Fathers of the Vatican Council at a time when the schema of the Blessed Virgin Mary was being debated. The point that the Archbishop was making was that Mary as Mother of the Church, far from being an obstacle to union among separated brethren, was "the bridge and the road to true ecumenism." He adduced as support for this opinion the zeal of the Orientals in honoring Mary, and then went on to claim "even the founder of Protestantism himself has written many things about Mary in a spirit of great devotion" The Archbishop not only sustained his opinion by extensive quotations from Luther's dissertation on the Magnificat, written in 1521, but also from his mature period, e g , from 1533, 16 years after the publication of the 95 theses: "The creature Mary cannot be praised enough."[3]

These opinions seem to be widespread In a recent article written for the Irish Catholic public by Bishop Daly of Ardagh entitled "Luther Loved Mary,"[4] the author cites Luther's statement of 1522, after he had broken with the Church: "The veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths in the human heart" and proceeds to use Luther's own statements from the last period of his life (which he claims represents the Reformer's final teaching on Mary) to support his proposition that a return to the Marian teaching of the Reformation's founding fathers (especially Luther) would help to promote Christian unity. After citing some of Luther's doctrinal stands, he recalls his statement in a Christmas sermon of 1531 de-

[2] Vol. 56, No. 2. (March-April, 1965), page 26-28
[3] Lees, Charles SM, *art. cit.*, page 27.
[4] *The Word*, May, 1969, page 24-26

scribing Mary "as the most exalted of all women, the most precious gem in Christianity after Christ, and the woman who could never be praised too much." After applauding Luther's recommendation in a sermon on the Visitation in 1544 which asked that the Magnificat be sung in all churches every day, he goes directly to his last sermon at Wittenberg, in January, 1546, in which Luther asked the question:

> Is Christ alone to be venerated?
> Rather is not the Mother of God, too, to be honored?
> She is the woman who crushed the serpent's head
> Listen to us, Mary.
> Your son honors you.
> He refuses you nothing [5]

He then concludes:

> We can surely find in these passages good reason to hope that Mary, whom Luther loved, may be the heavenly means of leading Luther's spiritual children to rediscover the place and significance of Mary in Christian faith and devotion. It can scarcely be gainsaid, that, in this domain, as well as in others, a return to Luther would be for many modern Protestants a considerable step closer to Catholic tradition.

The Bishop rests his case with the conviction that he has proved that

> right until the end of his life, Luther preached on Marian feasts, expounded Marian themes, especially the Magnificat, extolled Mary's privileges, practiced and urged devotion to her [6]

In the same month a German Lutheran, Anna Paulson, writing a review on a full-length treatment of Luther's position on the veneration of Mary came to the categorical conclusion that, at least at the end of his life, Luther was not a devotee of Mary. She takes strong issue with recent Catholic opinion:

[5] Page 25
[6] *Ibid.*

> It is significant that recently from the Catholic side there has been proposed the opinion that Luther was a devotee of Mary and remained such and that the Evangelical Church which has gotten away from this devotion has lost something of the genuine doctrine of the Reformation

She claims that .

> This opinion is supported among other things by certain individual items of Luther's explanation of the Magnificat which is so ambivalent that even evangelical theologians have not been able to master it [7]

Finally she rejects any possibility of "devotion" on Luther's part.

If we were to accept any of these simplistic, uncritical, one-sided evaluations of Luther's Marian stance proposed by Bishops Gawlina and Daly, Father Lees, Superintendent Viering or Anna Paulson, we would simply have to answer "Yes" or "No" to our question and then show that Luther did or did not practice devotion This response we find impossible.

Although the author of the most complete work on the subject of Luther's position in regard to the veneration of Mary, *Hans Dufel*[8] claims that the question of Luther's attitude towards Marian veneration was scarcely treated in evangelical theology up to the present time, he himself adduces many testimonies to the fact that this theme has been a constant attraction. It has, indeed, been a point of controversy since the time of the great Reformer

Through four centuries his attitude towards Mary has been defended, excused, or indicted by theologians The diversity of opinion among evangelical theologians has continued to the present day Dufel ventures the opinion that one looking through the available material might be inclined to write a

[7] Anna Paulson, *Evangelische Kommentare*, Vol 2, No 5 (May, 1969), reviewing Hans Dufel's book *Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung*. Vandenhoeck, Goettingen, 1968

"History of the Judgment of Luther's Mariological Attitude in Evangelical and Catholic Theology"[9]

While it might be possible, using the sources brought to light by Dufel, to show that there were Protestant and Catholic theologians since the 1500's who disputed Luther's position in regard to Mary, for our purposes it will suffice to indicate the difference of opinion among selected theologians of this century,[10] which cuts across confessional lines.

2. *Protestant Positions in Twentieth Century*

First, the Lutheran authors Already in 1919, a cry of alarm had been raised by an evangelical writer against Mary's exclusion and an appeal was made to follow Luther's own attitude towards Mary

> The departure from the Evangelical Church has begun The army which gathered around Luther becomes smaller. . . , Many leave . . . who can no longer be warm in the Evangelical Church And the Evangelical Church is cold What must we do to hold Lutheran men of value? We must make our church warm. Who makes it warm? . . . We must call back our mother Mary[11]

Five years later in his work *The Prereformation Luther*[12] George Merz expressly treated Luther's devotion to Mary Merz sees the years between 1513 and 1516 as decisive not only for the works which led to the Reformation but also Luther's attitude towards Mariology He cites Luther's commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* as well as Marian sermons as an indication that even at this time Luther was changing in his attitude towards Mary.[13] In opposition to Merz, Bruno Margraf, referring to Luther's invocation to Mary in the Magnificat,

[8] *Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung.* Vandenhoeck, 1968, page 14.
[9] *Ibid*
[10] cf H Dufel, op. cit, page 25.
[11] Max Jungnickel from "Die Post", Berlin, Nov. 19, 1919 as cited in *Hochkirche* 13 (1931), 170
[12] *Der vorreformatorische Luther,* Munich, 1924
[13] cf page 51 ff

thinks that one has to admit that "he overcame the veneration of Mary much more slowly than is generally thought."[14]

These opinions which differed only as to the time that Luther overcame his Marian devotion were vigorously opposed by Friedrich Heiler, a member of the Lutheran High Church, who wrote at great length on Marian Devotion in general and Luther's in particular:

> This rejection of Marian veneration I can in no way justify by Luther. On the contrary, Luther belongs in the ranks of the great devotees of Mary Martin Luther fought only against certain forms of the Middle Age worship of the Madonna which appeared to him—partly wrongly, partly rightly—as aberrations from the true Marian veneration and as threatening the honor of her Son.[15]

How does Heiler justify such an extreme position? After citing the usual passages from Luther's early life and concluding with the Magnificat, Heiler makes the point that "Luther's pious childlike soul knew how to sing the praise of the Mother of God just as well as the greatest Catholic devotees of Mary." In fact, he claims, that "in Luther there existed in newer evangelical form the German Marian veneration of the Middle Ages" and that one should accord Luther a "place of honor in the history of the Marian cult" He maintains that Luther's evangelical veneration of Mary is displayed in the confessional documents of Lutheranism and is a very special way in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession.* And so profound was Luther's influence, Heiler claims, that his custom of preaching Marian sermons on the Marian feasts continued in the Lutheran Church a hundred years after his death. Following the example of Luther other great songwriters of the Reformation glorified

[14] *Der junge Luther als Genie. Beitrag zur Lutherpsychologie.* Leipzig, 1929, page 162

[15] Friedrich Heiler, "Die Gottesmutter im Glauben und Beten der Jahrhunderte," *Hochkirche* 13 (1931) page 172-203, but especially *Die Marienverehrung im Protestantismus,* pages 198-203. For the above see page 198.

the greatness of Mary's divine maternity. This lasting piety towads the Mother of God found an outlet in piety so that generally the celebrated pictures of the Madonna and her statues from the Middle Ages were retained in Lutheran churches According to Heiler, it was only the spirit of the enlightenment with its lack of understanding of mystery, and especially of the mystery of the Incarnation, which in the 18th century began the work of destruction [16]

During the same period the works of Hans Preuss, concerning the history of devotion, painted in glowing colors Luther's image of Mary and suggested a parallel with the artistic representation of Mary by Dürer.[17] Probably the most significant book of this period was the classic work of Robert Lansemann about the feast days of the saints at the time of the Reformation It contained a thorough treatment of Luther's thought about the veneration of Mary with the purpose of making the attitude of the entire Reformation in this question fruitful for the liturgical movement of the present time [18]

After the war, the question again preoccupied Lutheran authors. In 1949 Helmut Lamparter with the help of citations from Luther presented an evangelical picture of Mary but without putting any accent either on the positive or negative declarations of Luther. We might consider it a neutral treatment.[19] This was not the case with the treatise of the ecumenical Lutheran pastor, Hans Asmussen, who in his little book *Maria die Mutter Gottes*[20] showed Luther in a very posi-

[16] *art cit*, 200; cf also Friederich Heiler, "Evangelische Marienverehrung", *Eine Heilige Kirche* 28 (1955-56), fascicle 1, page 20f and 25

[17] *Martin Luther der Künstler*, Gutersloh, 1931, pages 32, 97, 194, etc. and *Martin Luther der Christenmensch*, Gutersloh, 1942, pages 106f, 208f; cf also *Die deutsche Frömmigkeit im Spiegel der bildenden Kunst*, Berlin, 1926, pages 143, 159

[18] *Die Heiligentage besonders die Marien-Apostel und Engeltage in der Reformationzeit*, Vandenhoeck, Gottingen, 1939, 209 p.

[19] *Die Magd des Herrn*, Metzingen, 1949 cf, also H Dufel, *op. cit.*, page 25

[20] Stuttgart, 1950

tive light in regard to devotion to Mary. This "revolutionary" work was followed very shortly by the work of a librarian Reintraud Schimmelpfennig about Marian veneration in German Protestantism.[21] Her book along with that of Asmussen was severely criticized for a lack of the critical spirit inasmuch as she and Asmussen placed Luther in the ranks of the greatest devotees of Mary.[22] Hans Dufel claims that the particular tendency of Schimmelpfennig's book is already clear in the title. He asks,

> "Can one in general—so we demand—speak about a history of the veneration of Mary in Protestantism? Do not Marian veneration and Protestantism mutually exclude one another."[23]

We might say that this very question of Dufel's is an indication of his own attitude

Around this same time (1953) an esteemed German author in the 4th edition of his classic work on the History of Dogma was categorically asserting that Luther completely gave up devotion to Mary as well as to the Saints.[24]

How then can we describe the Protestant position on Luther's Mariological attitude?

> In no way is it sufficient to describe him as a minimalist who criticized excesses and thereby remains halfway. He rises up against

[21] *Die Geschichte der Marienverehrung im deutschen Protestantismus.* Paderborn, 1952

[22] *Ibid*, page 18

[23] *op. cit*, page 26.

[24] Mit der Heiligenverehrung (idolomania santorum W 44, 727) hat Luther auch die Verehrung der Maria aufgegeben. Ihr stehe Ehre nur zu wegen der Inkarnation, aber jede weitere personliche Verehrung, wie auch Anselm und Bernhard sie gelehrt haben, ist verkehrt (Ti 1, 210 W 42, 143), denn nur Gott gebuhrt Gebet und Vertrauen (W. 10. 2, 407) Vor allem aber verwirrt Luther die Praxis, Maria als patrona und Mittlerin anzurufen, damit sie uns vor dem strengen Richter, ihrem Sohne vertrete, e g W 15, 477, 30, 2, 506 658. 671. 299, 34. 2. 255; 42, 134. (Seeberg, Reinhold, *Lehrbuch der Dogmen-geschichte*, Vol II, Basel, 1953 (4th edit), p 227.

> the motive of all devotion and is not ashamed to say that one has made of Mary a goddess and a mediatrix with Christ the judge, and all forms of veneration of Mary and the saints, all liturgies and pilgrimages, are according to him novelties which man must eliminate [25]

Can we accept this extreme position, the one taken by Hans Düfel, (op cit, *passim*) which has received the complete acquiescence of the above reviewer. Or are we to adopt as representative of Protestants, or at least Lutherans, the opinion of authors such as Heiler, Asmussen and Schimmelpfennig:

> Luther sharply criticized everything which was not related to Christ and he reckoned among those things many exaggerations in Marian veneration. Nevertheless he belongs in the ranks of the greatest Christian venerators of Mary.[26]

Prudence would indicate that neither extreme be fully embraced, but that we should seek the middle path.

3. *Catholic Positions in Twentieth Century*

Has the Catholic evaluation of Luther's Marian attitude escaped the pitfalls of extremism? A cursory examination would lead one to believe that it has not. Along with Protestants, Catholic theologians of this century, especially the Germans in closer contact with evangelical thought, were rediscovering Luther's attitude toward Mary. The Jesuit, Stephen Beissel, in his two-volume work about veneration of Mary written in 1910, referring to the numerous positive Mariological declarations of Luther, thought he could declare "Luther praises Mary's privileges with a certain warmth, especially in his later writings." He then considered the question of the polemic of the reformer against the proliferation of Marian devotions and declared that just as clearly and strongly as Luther recognized

[25] Anna Paulson, *art. cit.*, 293.
[26] Reinstraud Schimmelpfennig, "Die Marienfeste im Luthertum", *Oekumenische Einheit* 3 (1952), 94f

the privileges of the Mother of God, so much did he inveigh against the kind of veneration which was shown to her in the Catholic Church already by the Fathers of the Church and in the old liturgy [27]

One of the most renowned, if superseded, commentators on Luther in this century was Hartmann Grisar. He presents Luther's attitude toward Mary in a very positive vein.[28]

Probably the greatest living Catholic scholar on Luther, Joseph Lortz, made this judgment about Luther's Mariology in his work *Die Reformation in Deutschland.*[29]

> Luther did not renounce the veneration of Mary and the saints and he did not cease preaching on her feast days.

He demonstrates that through the abolishing of these feasts which took place in the following centuries there was an impoverishment in the Protestant Church and claims that conditions became such that Lutherans became proud about "the conquering of the Catholic or Middle Age remains which Luther himself had not succeeded in setting aside"[30]

In the 1930 edition of Buchberger's *Lexikon fur Theologie und Kirche,* G Soll declared:

> Luther wished first of all only to fight against abuses, not to abolish the veneration of Mary in itself. This way of looking at Luther remains true for many Lutherans in ancient and modern times.[31]

Father Saturnin Pauleser, O.F M. in his book *Maria und die Reformation*[32] advances the opinion that Luther himself was not only originally a fervent devotee of Mary, but also—at least in the essentials—he remained so his entire life. His claim is that the many declarations which warn against excessive

[27] *Geschichte der Verehrung Marias im 16 und 17. Jahrhunderte,* Freiburg, 1910, page 100.
[28] Three Volumes, Freiburg, 1911 Vol 2, page 571 f and 796
[29] Freiburg, 1940, Vol 2, page 304.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Freiburg, 1930, Vol 6, Column 897

Marian veneration can be explained by the fact that it was important to say this in Luther's time Brushing aside innumerable opposing passages in Luther, he interprets the Reformer as summarizing the idea of all Marian veneration in the words admitting her role as a mediatrix Luther had said, "She does not wish that you come to her, but through her to God." Saturnin comments· "What is this if not the fundamental Catholic position: "through Mary to Jesus"?[33] This is certainly to take the statement out of context and to go against the patent elimination of any mediation of Mary in so many statements of Luther. It would be hard to find any scholar now who would defend this judgment. However, even as balanced a theologian as Albert Brandenburg calls Luther "a renowned (ausgepragter) Marian theologian and personally a devotee of Mary" and speaks of his agreement with the confessional documents which spoke of Mary as "worthy of the highest honors."[34]

We come full circle with a recent xeroxed manuscript of a sermon of Rev F J Ripley given in Ireland entitled "Mary and the Modern Christian" in which the author dismisses Luther with the following statement "In the sixteenth century the attack of heresy concentrated on three vital matters: the pope, the mass, and the *Mother of God*."

Perhaps we can close our listing of representative Catholic theologians of the present day with one who is considered typical of the way in which Luther's Mariological attitude is considered from the Catholic side. The Jesuit, Albert Ebneter, in an essay entitled "Luther's Image of Mary,"[35] speaks of an anti-Marian prejudice prevalent throughout the world of Protestantism today and thinks that a consideration of the Mariological attitude of Luther would be a surprise for Protestants and

[32]Miltenberg, 1951

[33] page 9

[34] *Apology*, XXI, cf Albert Brandenburg, *Maria in der Evangelischen Theologie der Gegenwart* Bonifacius, Paderborn, 1965, p. 85.

[35] "Martin Luthers Marienbild", *Orientierung*, Zurich, 1956, No 7, pages 77-80 and No 8, pages 85-87 See especially pages 77-79

Catholics alike. He then gives positive declarations of Luther concerning the Immaculate Conception and not surprisingly refers to the invocation of Mary by Luther in his explanation of the Magnificat Throughout his short essay he induces numerous examples to support his stand that Luther preserved a veneration for Mary to the very end of his life But he has been severely criticized by men such as Hans Dúfel for exaggerations of the import of certain statements of Luther and for failing to take into account the entire context of Luther's declaration For example, when Ebneter says that Luther apparently had no difficulty speaking about the queenship of Mary, Dufel replies that is not correct because the reformer never used the term of heavenly Queen in the Roman Catholic sense and this is clear from the very explanation of the Magnificat (which Ebneter had cited) and the preaching of Sept. 8, 1522, in which Luther commenting on the *Salve Regina* asked "Is this not doing a dishonor to Christ that one gives to a creature what belongs to God alone?" And Dúfel is claiming that in the context that the idea of dominion or reign over people belongs to Christ alone according to Luther's thought.[36]

So it would seem that whether we consider Catholic or Protestant theologians, it is just as difficult to arrive at a consensus.

II. *Reasons for Difficulties in an Assessment of Luther's Marian Attitude*

Before delving into Luther's own life and works in order to answer our questions, it seems necessary to point out why both the scholars and popularizers of Luther's thought have encountered such difficulty Then being forewarned, we may have the modest hope of ourselves avoiding the consequences of such difficulties.

There is a connected series of facts which seem so obvious that they should not need to be recalled except that experience

[36] *Ibid*, cf H Dufel, *op cit.*, page 29

has shown that in practice authors tend to forget them: the gradual evolution of Luther's reformational and Mariological thought, his own religious personality, his personal theological struggle, and even the contradictions which appear here and there in Luther's writings and which seem to have been no great disturbance for him The point, in short, is that there is not just one, but many Luthers Thus, as Father Thomas O'Meara has pointed out so well:[37]

> During any discussion of Luther and the Blessed Virgin we must keep uppermost in our minds that there was a development in his ideas, a change more or less drastic in each aspect of Marian theology This development has its beginning in Catholicism; it passes through contradictions, struggles, and uncertainties, and terminates in a new Marian viewpoint, one which Luther decided was christocentric, biblical, unexaggerated, and edifying

We might add that Luther's own religious personality contained two sources of his recasting of medieval Mariology. The first was his suffering under popular devotional abuses Superstition and exaggerations in the veneration of Mary were not difficult to discover, and Luther felt them keenly. He went to Rome in early 1510, and as he made the usual pilgrimages through the city, he was shown some milk from the Virgin's breast and some of Mary's hair.[38]

Because authors have not been sufficiently aware of the dynamics of change, works on Luther's Mariology have sometimes given a false picture. It is said Luther accepted the Assumption and yet forbade the singing of the Salve Regina; he preached an immaculately conceived and sinful Mary The *time element,* the *dating of Luther's remarks, is all-important.* Luther's Marian theological evolution in the years 1513-1527

[37] O'Meara, Thomas, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology,* Sheed and Ward, N Y, 1965, page 113
[38] cf *Ibid.*

has its *own coherence*, but the reformer's thought is definitely changing, and not always in the same direction.[39]

What Luther said in regard to the possibility of a reader being led into error regarding his attitude toward the Pope because of his earlier writing (very favorable up until 1519) can be applied to his attitude toward his veneration of Mary. In his Latin writing of 1545 he asked his readers to read his earlier writings "with judgment and even with much compassion." He then goes on to say, "Good readers you will attribute this error to my ineptitude. I was alone at first and surely inept and unlearned for treating such things."[40]

Add to these difficulties, related rather personally to Luther, those associated with the situation of the times, and one can readily see that it is no easy thing to fully grasp Luther's thought. First of all, as Martin Elze showed so well in a talk given at the University of Tubingen in 1965, the piety of the Middle Ages was deeply imbedded in Luther's theology.[41]

One Catholic author has recently described the century preceding Luther's as one "of profound faith, but with devotion often very unenlightened and burdened by many superstitions."[42]

Secondly, there is the open-ended situation, as far as Mariological dogma is concerned. It is certainly not of minor moment to be aware of Mariological edifices of later centuries. Certain

[39] cf *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[40] WA 54, 179, 22ff and 36ff. All references are to the Weimer edition (WA) and all translations are the author's own unless noted otherwise. WA Tr (Tischreden = Luther's Tabletalks. WA Br (Briefe) = Letters. The first number indicates the volume, the second the page, and a third (if given), the line.

[41] Published as "Zuge Spatmittelalterischer Frommigkeit in Luthers Theologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 62 (1965), 381-402.

[42] Foi profonde, mais dévotion souvent mal éclairée et écrasée parfois sous les scories de maintes superstitions. ainsi pourrait-on qualifier la moyenne du sentiment religieux du XV siècle. Au plan de la théologie proprement dite, il faudrait étudier la *Sacri Canonis missae Expositio de* Gabriel Biel (1488). (Baciocchi, J. de, S.M. "La Crise du XVIe Siècle sur l'intercession", BSFEM, Vol. 24 (1967) p. 5.

important declarations about Mary were three and four centuries away from solemn definition. While it may be true that scholars are aware of the theological note according to the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption in the 16th century, yet it seems right to assume that there may be a certain unawareness of the "suppleness" permitted in the area of Mariological thought [43]

The latest French ecumenical work on Mary claims that it is not astonishing that the Reformers showed such little interest in Mariology, since, "in many respects it was an open and disputed question "[44]

Preoccupied above all with the restoration of preaching the Gospel, they showed less concern for a yet "unfixed" Marian *doctrine* than for the *practice* of the Marian cult which seemed to them mixed with superstitions and contradictory to the glory which belonged to God and Christ above.[45]

Thus it would be a mistake to think of Luther as being preoccupied with Mary He was critical in the measure in which Mariological declaration conflicted with what he considered essential points· the primacy of grace, the transcendence of God, the unique Mediatorship of Christ, etc.[46]

[43] Bosc, Jean, *La Mariologie des Réformateurs,* BSFEM (1963), p 17.

[44] Donc dans ces domaines être extremement prudent en face des affirmations comme aussi des silences des réformateurs C'est après eux surtout que les lignes de clivages' vont affirmer, les oppositions se durcir et la mariologie catholique va se developper et ajouter à son corps de doctrines de nouvelles definitions; c'est ensuite également que le protestantisme deviendra de plus en plus méfiant à l'egard des manifestations mariologiques, jusqu'a envelopper parfois d'un total silence la personne de la Vierge Marie Par rapport à ces developpements ulterieurs, les reformateurs apparaissent comme des témoins gardant dans le domaine de la mariologie une liberté très large

Il n'est donc pas etonnant que les Réformateurs du XVI siècle se soient peu interessés à la question mariale Cell-ci reste encore à bien des égards une question ouverte et controversée, le dogme sur ce point n'étant pas encore défini par l'Eglise (Philibert, Zobel, Maryvonne Caplain, Hébert Roux, and Alexis Kniazeff, *La Vierge Marie,* Paris: Mame 1968, p 71

[45] *Ibid*

[46] cf Jean Bosc, *op. cit.,* p 17

Finally, we must be aware of the situation of Marian devotion at the end of the 15th century It is well resumed in an article by Fr. J de Baciocchi.[47]

> Marian devotion, already very fervent and widespread, increased still more at the end of the Middle Ages and developed new and typical aspects The calamities undergone during the 14th and 15th centuries (the Hundred Years' War, the Great Western Schism, the Eastern Schism, the epidemics) had certainly developed among Christians a terror of divine justice and the need of taking refuge in the Mother of Mercy. . . . It is not by chance that the iconographic theme of the protecting mantle of Mary became widespread for the most part during the 15th century In order to escape the Pest, one invoked especially Our Lady of Grace or Our Lady of Succour This recourse to Mary . . was stimulated and encouraged by the diffusion of the accounts of miracles, several collections of which "became the vogue" in the 15th century. It is at the end of this century and at the beginning of the next that the cult of Our Lady of Loretto becomes widespread . and at the same time, under the influence of the Dominican, Alan de la Roche, the rosary devotion regains its popularity. . In a more general way, it is on the eve of the Reform that the cult of the Saints realized its greatest expansion.[48]

It is in this ambiance that we must now consider Luther's life and works

III *Luther's Marian Attitude Before the Reformation*

As a Catholic theologian, Luther was a man of his times as he himself recalled on many occasions

Like every pious man, Luther called upon the saints.[49] The attitude of Luther toward Marian veneration is like his attitude toward the veneration of the saints Mary for him, as for all

[47] *art. cit*, p 5-20
[48] *Ibid*, p 5.

men of the time, was the greatest of the Saints, to be called upon in a very special way.[50]

As a young student, when he accidentally wounded himself with his dagger in the neighborhood of Erfurt (April 16, 1503), he was in danger of death and called upon Mary: "O Mary, help." About this invocation he remarked later, "At that time I would have died trusting in Mary." At night when the wound reopened, he again called upon Mary. He tells us that he wished to die calling upon the Mother of God.[51] This experience shows clearly how steeped Luther already was in the piety of the Church.

As Fr O'Meara has said:

> Before his ideas began to change, Luther was imbued with that Marian piety almost natural to the medieval Christian In his table talk he reminisced on an event which highlights his early life. At that critical moment when he was so frightened by lightning that he vowed he would enter a monastery, he cried to Mary's mother· "Help, dear Anne; I will become a monk!"[52]

> Fr. Lortz says· "Over the band of saints and holy patrons the mother, Anne triumphed, in whose enthusiastic veneration a deep respect for motherhood was expressed. And over her, the Blessed Virgin. The strongest homage was given to her. Everything was dedicated to her and bore her name . . her praise never ceased at this time."[53]

He refers to certain Marian practices of his youth such as

[49] cf WA 49, 712, 17 and 20, 36, 388, 20; Tr 5, 95.

[50] Cf. W Delius, *art. cit.*, 410

[51] Da habe ich in Todesnot geschrien: "O Maria, hilf!" (Ich war, fugt er hinzu, auf Mariam dahingestorben—nicht auf den Herrn Christus, will er sagen) Endlich sei der Chirurgus gekommen, und man habe ihn nach der Stadt zuruckgeschafft Aber in der Nacht habe die Wunde wieder zu bluten begonnen, und wieder er die Muttergottes anrufen mussen. (WA TR, 1, 46, 18, No 119 (1531) (cf Meissinger, K, *Katholische Luther Die deutsche Tragödie*, 1521, p 192)

[52] *Op. cit*, p 114

[53] V Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutcheland*, I, p 98

"vowing to fast on bread and water on Saturday for the Blessed Virgin"[54] and calling upon Mary and the saints for help,[55] and judges them very harshly His vow, he claims was "made, not to God, or to Mary, but to the devil, because it was not commanded,"[56] and invoking Mary for help came about "because I was not able to know that Christ could help me as well as the mother. I even looked upon him as a Judge."[57] In fact this description of the medieval piety with which he was imbued is a theme he frequently returns to throughout life This is the image of Christ he claims he had.

> Christ the Judge . . . frightful, and we have looked upon him as a strict angry Judge with a sword in His hand and threatening us as if He wished to give us a blow on the head [57a]

With this Christ in mind, he claims he and his fellow Christians were led by the Papacy to see Mary and the saints as intercessors [58] On one occasion he even goes so far as to say that he and his fellow Christians "confessed *with the mouth* that Christ had redeemed them from the tyranny and the servitude of the Law, but nevertheless we really felt in our hearts that He was a lawgiver, a tyrant and a judge more formidable than Moses himself."[59]

[54] WA 25, 510.
[55] WA 34, 1, 38
[56] WA 25, 210.
[57] *Ibid.*
[57a] WA 17, 1, 430, 18
[58] WA 45, 86, 1
[59] WA 40, 1, 561 Christus judex Allgemeines· (Christus haben wir) schredlich gemacht und ihn gehalten fur einen strengen zornigen Richter, als der ein Schwert in der hand fuhre und droben sitze, als wollte er uns fur den Kopf schlagen" (17, 1, 430, 18) .. Sub papatu Christum inculcavimus, quod venerit ad iudicandum . et quod debeamus pro peccatis nostris satisfacere et postea constituere sanctos intercessores et Mariam. Quando Christum inspexi, vidi diabolum" (45, 86, 1). Mein herz hatte diesen Gekanden von Christo geschopft, das er ein Richter, ware, dem ich am Jungsten Tage muste Rechendchaft geben von allen Worten und Merten" (47, 99, 35). cf Preuss, Hans, *Martin Luther der Künstler*, Gutersloh, Bertelsmann, 1931

There are almost innumerable examples to prove that Luther regarded Christ as a terrible judge during his early period[60] So much for his life in general, especially before he became a religious As an Augustinian monk Luther found himself in a circle in which the Marian cult was very highly honored and practiced[61] In Mary's honor the Augustinians wore a white robe and scapular A legend of the order recounted that St. Monica had received this habit from Mary herself. Everyday the Augustinians greeted Mary in the afternoon with a hymn and there even existed among them a fraternity of the Cincture of Our Lady When Luther came to Wittenberg, he encountered the giant Catholic Church which supposedly contained among other things pieces of hair, the garments, the mantle of Our Lady, and even wax from the candle she held in her hand as she lay dying[62] In a sermon on August 15, 1516, after praising Mary very highly as the "Purest adorer of God" who extols God alone himself above all and "who is without an idol," he adds, "She does not put forth any merit of her own, no work; she only passively acknowledges herself to be the mother and the recipient of good works, not the doer of them."[63]

[60] Kommentar zum Galaterbrief, 1531, 10 Okt; Gal 4, 5; WA 40, 1, 561 Hs. Ego ex pestilenti doctrina sic Christum habeo im Kopff, ut non etc . . . Ego semper contemplabar Christum ut iudicem, non quod sic, ut Paulus. .! Ego falsum Christum non possum ex corde treiben, quod semper metuo Christum, quod velit occidere et quod expostulare mecum velit hoc non fecisti' hunc finxi exacte, saeverissime et hab mich gehalten ad Mariam et Sanctos . . Nos adulti, pestifera Papistarum imbuti doctrina quam imis ossibus ac medullis imbibimus, de Christo concepimus opinionem prorsus diversam ab ea, quam Paulus hic proponit Ut maxime enim fatebamur ore Christus nos a Tyrannide et servitute legis redemisse, revera tamen corde sentiebamus eum esse legislatorem, Tyrannum ac iudicem magis formidabilem ipso Moyse. Cf. Scheel, Otto, *Dokumente zur Luthers Entwicklung*, 2nd Edit, 1929, Tubingen, Mahr, (Siebeck, p 27.)

[61] Cf Stephan Beissel, *Geschichte der Verehrung Mariens in Deutschland*, 1909, p 269f

[62] According to O. Scheel, *Martin Luther*, Book II, third edition, 1930, p. 333 and S Boehmer, *Der junge Luther*, fourth edition, 1951, p. 51.

[63] WA 1, 60f, 77

In the Marian Augustinian atmosphere, Luther was greatly influenced by some of the most influential Marian Saints and writers Along with Saints Bernard and Anselm, Luther had accepted the Mariology of the Church Other influences on him were Nicholas of Lyra and Cassisdorus[64] We can declare the agreement of Luther with this Mariology of this period He accepts the old church meaning of Mary's name as *Amara Maris* or *Stilla Maris,* as "bitter sea" or as "a most pure drop of the sea of the condemned mass of the human race "[65] Luther agrees with the ancient Church that not only the genealogy of Luke but also that of Matthew gives the family tree of Mary He declared himself in favor of Mary's descent from David by reason of Isaias 11:1.[66] His acknowledgement of the perpetual virginity of Mary, that is, virginity before birth, in birth, and after birth, is explicit and he uses such formulas of Mariology as *de ventre clauso utero,*[67] without the seed of man[68] ever-virgin[69] Agreeing with Duns Scotus he accepts the Immaculate Conception as a truth,[70] and the Divine Motherhood and the Council of Ephesus. With Jerome he defends Mary against Helvidius, whom he considers a fool[71]

By reason of this theology of Mary one can easily cite, especially in the pre-Reformation period, many honorable declarations of Luther about Mary "The Virgin is the most pure adorer who sees God in all things She depends upon no creature. Everything leads her back to God "[72] He closed a sermon for the feast of Mary's Assumption in 1516 with the invocation: "Oh most blessed Mother, Oh worthiest of Virgins think of us and grant that also to us the Lord should do such great

[64] WA Tr 5, 154; WA 43, 581
[65] WA 1, 107.
[66] WA 25, 132, 18
[67] WA 3, 136
[68] WA 3, 459, 10
[69] WA 17, 2, 474
[70] WA 53, 640.
[71] WA 53, 640
[72] WA 1, 61, 78

things."[73] In the resolutions of the 95 theses Luther rejects every blasphemy against the Virgin and thinks that one should ask for pardon for any evil said or thought against her.[74] If, later on, Luther recalled the time of his Marian veneration and said he had called upon Mary and had put her in the place of Christ and had given Christ the place of Judge,[75] the fact of his ardent devotion cannot be questioned. He even maintained that he had given "many kisses" to Mary.[76] "Looking back, he reminisced, I see that my heart was accustomed to depend upon her."[77] He even declared at this time he called upon Mary and Jerome rather than Christ.[78]

As a theologian, in treating the subject of Marian veneration, he took St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St Anselm as models.[79] Bernard was especially dear to him, since he had a special love for Jesus in his humanity.[80] But later on he was to find fault with Bernard because of his statement in the sermon *Missus est angelus* and other places in his writings.[81] He was especially incensed against Bernard since he claimed that because of his writings a blasphemous picture of the Last Day had been painted. In the picture the Son falls before the Father and shows him his wounds, John and Mary intercede for us with Christ, and Mary shows the son her breasts with which she had fed him.[82]

Scotus, too, was probably known to Luther in his teaching on the Immaculate Conception, for Luther explains clearly the Catholic position on this point, however, as O'Meara writes, we do not find any mention of that distinctly *Scotist* contribu-

[73] WA 1, 79
[74] WA 1, 622
[75] WA 30, 2, 299, 22, 37, 205, 23.
[76] WA 46, 663, 34
[77] WA 47, 644, 7
[78] WA 47, 344, 38
[79] WA Tr 1, 219, 7
[80] WA Tr 5, 154, 6, 43, 581, 11.
[81] WA Tr. 1, 45, 24
[82] WA 33, 83, 29

tion to the doctrine—Christ's preserving and prevenient redemption of Mary.[83] The influence of Gabriel Biel seems important to some, but is yet unproved.[84] Summarizing Luther's theological and devotional attitude towards Mary we can say that there is no doubt that he was thoroughly imbued with the Marian doctrine and practice of the time. As O'Meara observes:

> We have sermons on the Assumption where he asks Mary to make us good servants of God We have a eulogy of Mary as God's finest creation. Reflecting upon this time in his life, Luther says that his mentality was Catholic, embracing the commonly accepted though not yet defined teachings on the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.[85]

We see no reason not to accept Luther's own assessment of this period of which he says, referring to Mary, that he had "hung his heart upon her."[86]

IV *Luther After The Reformation*

1 *Doctrine*

Although the chief concern in this paper is Luther's devotion to Mary; yet, since devotion is (or should be) based on doctrine, we must rapidly review the Reformer's principal doctrinal positions relating to Marian theology

A *Divine Maternity*

Luther admitted the two doctrines which had been defined by the Church before the Reformation without any qualifications. Here the dating is unimportant, since the firmness of Luther's conviction never varied. He always had the greatest respect

[83] *Op. cit.* p 115
[84] cf W Delius, *art. cit* 410.
[85] *Op cit*, 115.
[86] WA 47, 644

for the definition of the Council of Ephesus In 1539, in a treatise entitled *The Councils and the Churches,* he declared:

> The Council of Ephesus did not establish anything new in the faith but it defended the ancient faith against the novel obscurity of Nestorius The article, according to which Mary is the Mother of God, was really in the Church since the beginning. It was not something completely new made by the council; but, on the contrary, it was supported by the Gospels or the Holy Scriptures.
>
> In St Luke (1:32) we find that the angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin that it is of her that the Son of the Most High is to be born. St. Elizabeth says, "What is this to me that the Mother of my Lord comes to me?" The angels proclaim together at Christmas "today a Savior is born for us, who is Christ the Lord" In like manner, St Paul (*Galatians* 4:4) says, "God sent his Son born of a woman." These words which I hold for true, really sustain quite firmly that Mary is the Mother of God.[87]

Luther often insists that Mary gave birth to Christ as a true Person, with his humanity and divinity. She did not bring forth a "separate man" Like the Fathers of Ephesus, he sees the "Theotokos" as a necessary concomitant and defense of Christ's Divinity·

> Non solum Maria est mater eius qui natus, sed eius qui ante mundum natus a Patre in aeternum, a matre in tempore et insimul homo et Deus Ideo Maria Deum et hominem peperit[88]

[87] WA 50, 591, 22 to 592, 5.

[88] WA 40, III, 708 *In Enarratione Isaiae* (53) Luther declares Peperit Maria non separatum hominem, quasi seorsim ipsa haberet Filium et seorsim Deus suum Filium Sed eundem, quem ab aeterno Deus genuit, peperit ipsa in tempore Erlanger Ausgabe, *ex. cop. lat.* 23, 476 cf also Stakemeier, E "De Beata Maria Virgine ejusque cultu juxta reformatores," *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo.* Rome, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1962, p 427. For other places in Luther's writings in which he professes and defends the Divine Maternity, cf WA Tr 5, 629, WA 40 (3), 703-708, WA 53, 642; 47, 702, 53, 610, 25, 132, 10, 325 It would really be a monumental task, as E. Stakemeier intimates

B. *Perpetual Virginity*

Again it cannot be doubted that Luther professed faith in Mary's perpetual virginity throughout his entire life and in the corporal sense in which it had always been understood For him it was an article of faith[89] whether it is a question of the virginity *ante partum*[90] *in partu*[91] or *post partum.*[92] It is a great miracle that Christ received his origin from a woman alone, and this is the meaning he attaches to St. Paul's description in *Gal.* 4:4 "born of a woman "[93] He defends the absolute reality of Mary's conceiving and giving birth to Christ in true human flesh and humanity against the Manichaeans who claimed Mary gave birth to Jesus as a Spirit [94]

In defending Mary's perpetual virginity, he uses the argument from Scripture which is exactly the contrary of the one he and the Augsburg Confession will use against the invocation of Mary and the saints:

> Undoubtedly there is no one so powerful that, depending on his own intelligence, without Scripture, he would maintain that she did not remain a Virgin [95]

With the Catholic tradition, he unswervingly maintained that it would be entirely false to conclude from Mt 1.25—"before they came together," that Mary did not remain a Virgin after the birth of Christ This is neither to be said nor to be believed.[96]

(*art cit;* p 427), to even enumerate all the places in which Luther preached this truth.

[89] WA 11, 319.

[90] WA 2, 535; 17 (2), 457; 11, 320; 49, 174, and 182; 51, 176; 54, 207; 45, 436; 40 (3), 656

[91] 17, (2), 457; 7, 549; 11, 320, 3, 136, 19

[92] 11, 320; 49, 174 and 182; 51, 176; 54, 207.

[93] WA 2, 535

[94] WA 27, 474-486

[95] WA 11, 320

[96] Quare ex his verbis non concludendum est Mariam post partum

He even becomes quite vehement at the claim that Mary had Christ and other children by Joseph [97] If the Gospel speaks of the brothers of Christ, this is no difficulty for Luther For him they are simply relatives [98] He firmly maintains that after Mary "knew that she was the Mother of the Son of God, she did not wish to become the mother of the son of man, but remained in that gift."[99]

So far did Luther go in defending Mary's virginity, not only as realized in the New Testament, but also as undeniably predicted in the Old Testament, that he brings a smile to the faces of modern exegetes and perhaps a wish that they could have lived at an earlier time. He declared that *Isaias* 7·15 prophesied the virginity of Mary[100] and was so certain of his interpretation of "almah" that he promised to give one hundred gold pieces to anyone who could prove that the word did not signify "virgin" but simply "a non-adult woman "[101]

C *Immaculate Conception*

Following in the footsteps of St Augustine, Luther saw some kind of intimate connection between maternity, virginity, and the Immaculate Conception, since he together with the Doctor of Grace taught that original sin was propagated by generation, inasmuch as concupiscence dominates in the generative act.[102] Much more of an influence than the Doctor of Grace was the

tori sociam fuisse Quod ideo nec dicendum nec credendum est. WA 11, 323; cf. S Hieronymus, *Commentarium in Evangelium Matthaei*, Lib. I, in cap I

[97] WA 11, 314.

[98] Si evangelia loquuntur de fratribus Christi, hoc de cognatis est intelligendum—WA 46, 723; 48, 998, WA Tr 5, n. 5839

[99] WA 48, 579; cf. also 41, 630

[100] WA 47, 704; 11, 71; 11, 320; 36, 145f

[101] WA 53, 640; 53, 634f

[102] WA 17, 11, 282-288; S Augustinus, *De nuptiis*, II, 21, 36 (PL 44, 457): "Sic insinuantur haec duo, et bonum laudandae coniunctionis, unde filii generentur, et malum pudendae libidinis, unde qui generantur regenerandi sunt ne damnentur"

thought then current. At the time of the Reformation, the idea that Mary was exempted from original sin (Immaculate Conception) was the subject of controversy, and was even denied in Dominican circles; however most theologians maintained a middle position. They taught that the physical generation of Mary had been submitted to original sin (according to the Augustinian doctrine which teaches that the animation of the embryo is after conception), and Luther concurred In a long sermon for the day of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, 1527, he espoused this conviction [103] It is noteworthy that Luther himself with considerable consistency down to the time of his death in 1546 accepted the Immaculate Conception of Mary [104] Luther overcame the knotty problem of universal original sin, which he also maintained, by suggesting Mary was conceived in sin, but in the moment when her soul entered her body sometime after conception, a direct intervention of the Holy Spirit preserved her from the taint of original sin. The redemption of Christ was thus appropriated to her in a special way before the completion of Christ's work as in the case of the Old Testament church.[105]

The objections brought up against Luther's retention of belief in the Immaculate Conception can usually be solved by the distinction he repeated so many times between the active and passive conceptions on the one hand and the inchoative and perfect passive conception of the other The active conception, i e ; the generative act on the part of the parents, to which corresponded the beginning or inchoative passive conception on the part of the offspring, interested Luther only inasmuch as

[103] cf. Thurian, Max, "Problèmes posés aux Protestants par la Mariologie" BSFEM 20 (1963), p 83

[104] Festpostille—two 1527 editions, WA 17 (2), 287-289. Sermon at the First Vespers of the Annunciation of the BVM—WA 36, 143, House sermon for Christmas (1533)—WA 37, 231; *Vom Schem Hamporas und vom Geschlecht Christi* (1543)—WA 53, 640 *Wider das Papstum zu Rom* (1545)—WA 54, 207.

[105] cf. Andrew Weyermann, "Mary in the Church: A Lutheran Position", Vol. 49, No 5 (*American Lutheran*, May, 1966).

he thought along with Augustine that it is by this means that original sin is transmitted For him this is only *physical* conception, i e., of the body before the animation or the infusion of the soul. Although for moderns, it is difficult even to speak of the body's being the subject of sin apart from the soul, Luther apparently saw no difficulty in attributing original sin to Mary, but not to Christ, *in this sense*[106] But with regard to the infusion of the soul in the perfect passive conception, in which the person comes into being, Luther would not admit any original sin in Mary.[107] Thus for Luther, Mary remains

> in the middle because Christ who is immediately living as soon as He is conceived, is at the same time moment full of grace; other men are devoid of grace at both the first and second conceptions. Now, even though the Blessed Virgin Mary was devoid of grace in the first conception, she was full of grace in the second, and rightly so, because she was also the medium among all generations.[108]

Luther then goes on to distinguish very beautifully between body and soul in the various kinds of births:

> She was born from a father and mother, but gave birth without a father, she became a mother of the Son, partly spiritually and partly bodily, since Christ was conceived of her flesh as well as of the Holy Spirit. But Christ Himself is the father of many children without a carnal father and mother. Just as she is truly the middle between carnal and spiritual generation, finishing the carnal and beginning the spiritual, so she is rightly in the middle among conceptions. Whereas other men are conceived in sin in soul as well as in body, Christ is without sin in soul as well as in body Mary is in between these two in body, devoid of grace, but in soul, full of grace.[109]

[106] cf. WA 4, 693; 10 (3), 331, 46, 136, 47, 860 Stakemeier, *op. cit.* 435 calls this last citation ambiguous

[107] WA 4, 694; cf. also Biel, *op. cit*, 43 and Stakemeier, *op. cit* 435. Luther may well have depended upon Biel for this distinction.

[108] WA 4, 694

[109] *Ibid.*

Luther's final attitude can probably best be described by saying that he believed the truth of the Immaculate Conception himself, but did not consider it necessary to impose it, since he did not find it formally and expressly taught in Scriptures.[110] Although Protestant authorities dispute the fact that Luther continued to believe in the Immaculate Conception until the end of his life, the Luther scholar Arthur Carl Piepkorn, of Concordia Seminary after a long and careful study, has sustained Luther's unswerving acceptance of the Immaculate Conception [111]

D *Assumption*

For Luther the Assumption seems not to be so much a matter of doubt as of little importance and this is perhaps the reason, as Max Thurian affirms,[112] that Luther did not pronounce clearly on this subject, but was content simply to affirm it It is in this sense that Walter Tappolet interprets the Reformer's sermon of August 15, 1522, the last time Luther preached on the Feast of the Assumption. Luther had said:

> There can be no doubt that the Virgin Mary is in heaven. How it happened we do not know And since the Holy Spirit has told us nothing about it, we can make of it no article of faith.[113]

and then explained the significance for him:

> It is enough to know that she lives in Christ, as God is described in Mt 22. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living . ."[114]

If in 1530, he uses strong language in his *Admonition to the*

[110] cf Stakemeier, *op. cit.*, p 450
[111] Interview with author on Nov 29, 1968.
[112] *Mère du Seigneur*, p 124
[113] WA 10 (3), 268, 13 to 269, 1 Tappolet, *op cit.*, p 55
[114] *Ibid*

Ministers, calling for the elimination of the Assumption as an aspect of the "hypocritical Church,"[115] the accent should be placed more on his animosity towards the Church and the celebration of one of its feasts than on the fact of the Assumption. Even what Tappolet considers "the most important place," a sermon on the Feast of the Visitation 1544, is capable of this benign interpretation:

> The feast of the Assumption is totally papist, full of idolatry and without foundation in the Scriptures But we, even though Mary has gone to heaven, should not bother how she went there We will not invoke her as our special advocate as the Pope teaches The Pope takes away the honor due to the Ascension of our Lord, Christ, with the result that he has made the mother like her Son in all things[116]

In summary, we can say that if the Feast is rejected, it is for reasons extraneous to the fact itself, which Luther never denied Essentially, as Luther himself said in the same sermon the reason he does not celebrate it, "although she has gone to heaven" is that he sees it is a source of justifying invocation of Mary

> "We should not call upon her because of it and trust in her intercession . . . and thus shame and dishonor the Ascension of our dear Lord . . . and (like the Pope) make the Mother like to the Son in everything."[117]

E. *Non-Defined Doctrines*

Although not part of Catholic defined dogma on Mary, there are two other generally-accepted privileges or functions of Mary which are found in Luther's writings and we treat them here, since they are of some consequence for an understanding of Luther's own devotional stance No one acquainted with

[115] WA 30 (2), 351.
[116] WA 52, 681.
[117] *Ibid.*

Luther finds the first doctrine surprising: Mary as a *figure* or *model of the Church;* but the second, although closely allied to the first in Luther's thought, seems at first glance to be alien to a Lutheran framework. I refer to the "spiritual maternity" of Mary

1) *Figure of the Church*

Being convinced theologically that Mary as presented by Scripture is the figure of the Church Mother, Luther makes his own interpretation about the sword in the prophecy of Simeon:

> What is the significance of the fact that Simeon addresses himself solely and personally only to Mary, his Mother, and not to Joseph? This undoubtedly means that on earth the Christian Church remains the spiritual virgin Mary and that it will not be destroyed although even its preachers, its faith and its Gospel, the spiritual Christ, will be persecuted; even though Joseph will first die, then Christ will be martyred and Mary will become a widow, being deprived of her son, she will nevertheless remain constant and great sorrow will pierce her heart Thus, the Christian Church will remain always a widow, and her heart will be pierced because Joseph and the holy fathers die and the Gospel is persecuted; she will have to suffer the sword, however she will remain always even to the last day [118]

Luther applies an ecclesiological typology to the personages of Mary, Elizabeth and Anne by way of a spiritual meditation

> Now anyone who wishes to can meditate more deeply on the spiritual signification. Mary represents Christianity after the synagogue. Elizabeth remains at home. This is the people under the law of the synagogue Although they were a pious people, they were enveloped by many exterior precepts Mary, who goes over the mountains, but with modesty, represents the Christian people who march freely here below under the sky. but who in their liberty are filled

[118] *Kirchenpostille 1522*—WA 10, 405, 12, to 406, 3

with humility, not making it a covering of propaganda as among false Christians [119]

In his Table Talk, Luther calls Mary "the new Church" comparing her with the old prophetess Anna, who representing the Synagogue perceives the prophetic sign when Christ enters the temple.

"She (Anne) is old at the time of Christ's birth, but Mary is young. In reality she was beginning a "new Church."[120]

If Mary is the figure of the young, free, suffering Church, she is also the figure of the Church Mother·

According to our physical birth we differ, but in Baptism, we are all the first-born of the Virgin, that is of the Church, who is the pure Virgin, in Spirit; she possesses the pure Word of God, she is pregnant with it; (as Max Thurian indicates there is a play on words here in German "schwanger gehen" which means concretely "to be pregnant" but also figuratively signifies "to meditate in one's heart[121]) then we are truly first fruits in order to belong to our Savior.[122]

Pastor John Bosc claims that along the lines traced for us by Luther

it is completely normal to see in Mary a figure of the Church, for she is truly the exemplary sign of grace and at the same time the witness closest to the Incarnation. By the same token, she is the very type of the Church in its relation with Christ.[123]

If Luther's innumerable references to Mary as a figure of the

[119] Sermon of July 2, 1523—WA 12, 615, 5 to 616, 1
[120] WA tr V, No 5840, 377, 33 to 35
[121] *op cit.*, p 258, note 52
[122] Sermon of February 2, 1534—WA 37,287, 35 to 288, 2.
[123] *op cit.*, p 24

Church are accepted by Protestants, the same cannot be said of a doctrine which for the most part he connected with it—Mary as a spiritual mother in Christianity.

2) *Spiritual Maternity*

Because of its evident practical application in a life of devotion, Luther's thought here should be treated more completely. As Max Thurian observes:

> Luther considered Mary in her role as a Figure of the Church, and he considered her also as a spiritual Mother in the Church, by reason of our intimate communion with Jesus, the son of Mary. Surely these affirmations often very poetic, should not be detached from the context of his predication. All the same, the coherence of his thought on this point shows that Luther gave a real place to Mary in his faith and his piety and he had a family conception of the Church . . He rediscovered in Mary a spiritual mother in the Church Mary is his true mother, Christ, his brother, God his father.[124]

Let us trace Luther's thought in the Reformation period. In a sermon for Christmas, 1522, he waxes lyrical:

> Oh, this is the great joy, of which the angels speak. It is the consolation and the superabundant goodness of God, that man is able to exult in such a treasure Mary is his true Mother, Christ is his brother, God is his father.[125]

At Christmas the following year, Luther declares:

> I do not believe that there is a person among you who would not abandon his mother to be the son of Mary. And you can obtain this More than this—it is offered to you, and it is a much greater joy than if you embraced your mother physically.[126]

[124] *art cit*, p 93, cf also *Marie Mère du Seigneur*, p 251
[125] *Kirchenpostille, 1522*—WA 10, 72, 19 to 73, 2
[126] WA 11, 219, 34

The following morning he added.

> This child is given to us a gift, and we are the children of Mary; we can hear the song of the Angels [127]

Five years later, in 1528, he returns to the same theme; but adds a note of caution·

> Truly Mary is our Mother but if we wish to build on her (auf sie bauen) to take from Christ his honor and his function and give them to his Mother, that would signify a denial of the sufferings of Christ [130]

The next Christmas Luther insists on Mary's motherhood of believers as a consequence of their union with Christ.

> Mary is the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of all of us even though it was Christ alone who reposed on her knees. . If he is ours, we ought to be in his situation; there where he is, we ought also to be and all that he has ought to be ours, and his mother is also our mother.[131]

The French Protestant theologian, the recently-deceased Jean Bosc, advises some circumspection in interpreting what he calls the "extremely vigorous affirmations of Luther on this point "[132] If one can say with Luther that Mary is our Mother, yet, following the Reformer's own precisions, it can never be so proclaimed that it weakens in any way whatsoever the unique honor of Christ. It is the solicitude for the central place and the sufficiency of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which conditions the place given by Luther to Mariology.[133]

This is not idle advice, since Luther himself, in spite of his

[127] WA 11, 224, 8
[130] WA 28, 402, 29
[131] WA 29, 655, 26 to 656-7.
[132] *art. cit.*, 24
[133] Ibid.

proclamation of Mary's spiritual motherhood, sharply criticized what he considered an idolatrous misuse of this doctrine. On a number of occasions he put it quite clearly:

> Idolatry has been fashioned out of Mary by the papists who tell us that Mary was given as a mother to whom we should have recourse But you should remain in Christ crucified . . . They have said (about *John* 19, 26) John accepted her *into his own,* namely, *as a mediatrix;* they are speaking impiously. I understand: *into his own,* namely, *home.* He takes care of her as a poor widow in his house I will take the child and forget the mother, as much as it is possible If I have this Savior, I can set up no saint as a Savior [134]

It is clear that this new interpretation of Luther means a rejection of the hallowed tradition which designated these words as a "small gospel." It was a custom in the Middle-Age-Church, in the time between Easter and Pentecost, to use this passage in the Mass According to Otto Clemen no place in scripture was preached more than the passage from *John* 19:25-27 which was called the "Pearl of the Passion" And since the time of Bonaventure no other passage had led thouands of thousands of Christians to the fervent practice of Marian devotion.[135] Even the teacher of Luther at Erfurt, Johann von Paltz in a book which appeared in 1490 (*Himmlische Fundgrube*) had praised Mary by reason on this passage of Scripture to such an extent that he claimed that she had suffered with her son, and in a certain way in his place, and with still greater pains [135a]

2 *Devotion*

After considering in a general way Luther's doctrinal stances, we can now approach his devotional position. Since we have

[134] WA 28, 616, 29, 43; 32, 263 and 268.
[135] *op. cit.,* p 17.
[135a] Th. Kolde, *Die deutsche Augustiner Congregation und Johann von Staupitz,* Gotha, 1876, p. 178

just treated his doctrine on Mary as a figure of the Church, it seems logical that we begin with the fact that Mary was for Luther an entirely admirable creature.

A *Praise and Honor*

There cannot subsist any doubt that for Luther Mary was the most praiseworthy of women No matter what period of his life we consider his writings are replete with the most beautiful praises of Mary.

In presenting Luther's thought as the major part of a magnificent collection of the Marian thought of the great reformers[136] Walter Tappolet introduces the section "Our praise of Mary according to Luther's thought," by this question "How can we not honor, praise, and esteem Mary when the Holy Ghost himself praises her?" and then quotes from a writing of the Reformer in the last period of his life·

> She (Elizabeth) cannot deny that she (Mary) is a woman to whom no other woman in the entire world is comparable, and her fruit cannot be likened to any other conception. This she cannot deny, since the Holy Ghost does not lie who speaks about this through the mouth of Elizabeth, who is filled with the Holy Spirit Mary herself sings about it. The Holy Ghost praises her above all women . . . so she sings and gives praise to God the Magnificat is her song which she sings in response to the words of Elizabeth and it is likewise from the Holy Spirit . . [136a]

Let us consider a few of the innumerable tributes of Martin Luther to Mary's privileges, functions and virtues

It is evident from the *Foreword* of Luther's *Explanation of the Magnificat* (1521) how much he respects her as he asks "this same tender Mother to obtain for him the grace to explain her song in a profitable way."[137] This entire work, in spite of a

[136] *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren,* Katzmann, Tubingen, 1962
[136a] July 2, 1539, WA 47, 832, 6214
[137] WA 7, 544 f, cf also Hans Preuss, *Martin Luther der Künstler,* 194.

quite discernible reformation tone regarding God's transcendence and man's nothingness, is filled with the greatest respect for Mary. Besides the invocation to Mary at the beginning and end, we have the famous passage in which Luther most beautifully extols the Mother of God

> "This Divine Maternity gained for her privileges so lofty, so immense, that they surpass all understanding In fact, from it comes to her such honor, such beatitude, that she is, out of the entire human race, the unique person who is superior to all, who has no equal, because she alone possesses such a Son in common with the heavenly Father.. Therefore, this sole title of Mother of God contains all honor, for none can say of her nor announce to her greater things, even though he had as many tongues as the earth possesses flowers and blades of grass; the sky, stars; and the sea, grains of sand What it means to be Mother of God must be considered in one's heart.[138]

In spite of the most strenuous criticisms of the actual practice of Marian devotion, Luther never deviated from this opinion to the end of his life: Mary was always to be honored, as a matter of record Luther himself never stopped preaching on her feast days and remained true to his own statement of September 1, 1522: "The veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths of the human heart."[139]

In a Christmas sermon of 1531, Luther speaks of Mary as the "highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ" He goes on to claim that "she is nobility, wisdom, and holiness personified We can never honor her enough Still honor and praise must be given to her in such a way as to injure neither Christ nor the Scriptures."[140]

Luther never ceases to exalt her. In a burst of lyric enthusiasm, on the Feast of the Visitation, 1532, he describes his own reaction:

[138] WA 7, 572-3
[139] WA 10, III, 313
[140] WA 34, 2, 497 and 499

> She, the mistress of heaven and earth, is to forget all her goods, to have a heart so humble that she had no shame to wash the diapers and to prepare the bath of John the Baptist like a domestic (in the house of Elizabeth) What humility! It would have been perfectly right to prepare for her a golden carriage led by 5,000 horses, and to cry out and shout as the carriage passed, "Look, the woman who is passing by is above all women, in fact above the entire human race!" . but no, she travelled the long journey on foot . . . and she is already the Mother of God! It would have been proper that all the hills skipped and danced![141]

Five years later, likewise preaching for the Feast of the Visitation, he marvels at Mary's humility in the face of Elizabeth's great praise, which he makes equivalent to "No woman is like you. You are more than Eve or Sara, blessed above all nobility, wisdom, and sanctity"[142]

We cannot dispute the fact that Luther honored Mary and wished her to be honored. As Preuss has observed,

> Mary is and remains for Luther worthy of honor or veneration. He always maintains this although he changed the reason for it. For him the main reason is not that she has given us Christ, but that she is a model for our acceptance of Him.[143]

There remains the question *how*. Luther himself responds in the Magnificat and many other places:

> One should honor Mary as she herself wished and as she expressed it in the Magnificat. She praised God for his deeds. How then can we praise her? The true honor of Mary is the honor of God, the praise of God's grace God has given Mary the honor to be the Mother of God and this honor we all wish to give her, to praise her highly, and to hold her in respect. But we must thereby

[141] WA 36, 208, 19-26
[142] July 2, 1537—WA 45, 105, 7 to 106, 1
[143] Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Maria bei Luther*, Gutersloh, 1954, p. 26
[144] WA 1,60, cf 7, 193, 553, 560, 565, 568, 575; 11, 60; 15, 477, 480; 17 (2), 320, 32, 265; 34 (2), 496

straightway enter the right path, and this way is Christ, for Mary is nothing for the sake of herself, but for the sake of Christ and she bore Christ for me, not herself.[144]

Putting it negatively,

One must not attach himself to the mother of God and depend upon her, but through her he must press on to God. Mary does not wish that we come to her, but through her to God.[145]

How this is to be done in a practical way will be shown in the subsequent sections

B. *Mary's Virtues Proposed for Imitation*

Luther signaled out a few of Mary's virtues for praise and especially for imitation

1) *Model of Virtues in General*

There is no doubt, as H Preuss has observed, that for Luther Mary is eminently imitable, since she is for him a very special illustration of all that God's justification and redemption meant to him:

Mary is, on the one hand, an example of the dealings of God with men and on the other hand an example for us men of the way we should relate to God (exemplum pro nobis).[146]

It is no surprise then that throughout his entire life Luther praised the exemplary virtues of Mary and proposed them for the imitation of Christians.[147] On various occasions he proposes

[144] WA 7, 564, 567, 568, 569, 574, 10 (3), 316; but especially 10 (2), 407.

[146] Horst Dietrich Preuss, "Luthers Hauptgedenken uber Maria, die Mutter des Herrn," in *Luther Mitt. der Luther Gesellschaft*, 26 (1955), p. 20

different groups of virtues. Thus explaining the Annunciation, he says·

> Three virtues of Mary are recommended by Luke the Evangelist. a profound humility, a chaste modesty, and especially great faith [148]

On other occasions he signals out love and meditation along with faith [149] One point seems clear· if Luther admitted the primacy of love of God and neighbor[150] his accent was on humility and faith because of their close association with some of the principal tenets of the Reformation.

2) *Humility*

In order to understand the sense in which Luther proposes Mary as a model of humility, we must clearly see from the outset that for the Reformer, humility was not properly speaking a virtue, but rather a state, a kind of nothingness, an annihilation in the sight of God. In his celebrated exposition of the *Magnificat,* Luther recalls the words of the *Regina Coeli*: "He whom you have merited to bear" and rejects them His reasons are worthy of note if we are to grasp his idea of humility:

> These words do not prove anything, for they are also sung of the holy cross, which was of wood and could merit nothing. Therefore, this is how these words must be understood· that she who was to be the future Mother of God should be a virgin of the tribe of Juda and should believe the Angel so that she might be apt, as Scripture says of her· just as the wood has no other merit, no other dignity, than that of aptness for becoming a cross. Thus the dignity of this future maternity was nothing else but an aptness and an ordination to it so that it might be a pure grace (gift) and not be the effect of any merit whatsoever.[151]

[147] cf Stakemeier, *op. cit.,* p. 450
[148] WA 52, 682
[149] WA 1, 78, 7, 188, 7, 548, 12, 458; 36, 207, 37, 245, 37, 337.
[150] cf WA 36, 209 to 214 and 46, 472 to 473.
[151] WA 7, 573

How different this is from the traditional Catholic explanation which we see in the *Summa Theologica.*[152]

> Beata Virgo dicitur meruisse portare Dominum Iesum Christum, non quia meruit Deum incarnari, sed quia meruit ex gratia sibi data illum puritatis et sanctitatis gradum, ut congrue posset esse mater Dei.[153]

In perfect consonance with this denial of merit in any sense in the Incarnation of Christ, Luther does not translate *humilitas* by *humility* but by *nothingness* or *vileness.* He makes his meaning clear by his explanation of God's way of acting Instead of choosing some rich, high, noble, mighty queen or duchess or the daughter of some great man (he names the daughters of Annas and Caiphas), he casts his most merciful eyes upon Mary in order that no one would glory in himself that he would be or is worthy, but would recognize that the grace and beneficence of God is not due to his merit or worthiness [154]

Luther then explains the meaning of Mary's humility for us

> We may learn what the right honor should be, with which man should serve her How must we speak to her? Look at the words and we can learn what to say "O blessed Virgin, Mother of God, how is it that you were so little, nothing and despised and God has given you his grace and richly looked upon you and worked such great things in you? You were not worthy of it and the grace of God in you was incomparably beyond all human merit Oh, it is well with you Blessed are you from this hour unto eternity that you have found such a God." You cannot think that she should take it amiss to hear that she is named unworthy of such a grace, for there cannot be any doubt that she herself

[152] II, q 2, a 11, ad 2

[153] Likewise II Sent, dist. 4, q 3 a I ad 6· non meruit incarnationem, sed supposita incarnatione, meruit, quod per eam fieret, non quidem merito condigni, sed merito congrui Cf Augustinus, *De peccatorum meritis* II, 24.

[154] WA 7, 568-9.

> knew her unworthiness and lowliness which God looked upon out of pure grace and not because of any merit of hers [155]

For Luther then, Mary's humility, and especially our imitation of it, is an acknowledgement of one of the principal tenets of the Reformation *God alone* [156]

It is not a surprise, then, that a modern author writing recently could come to this conclusion at the end of a book devoted exclusively to Luther's views on humility.

> Humility is at the center of his theology. For the theological attitude of Luther until the very end of his life, it is decisive. Humility was without doubt the very kernel of the piety of Luther from his entrance into the cloister until his death [157]

3) *Faith*

Luther's views on faith are similar to his opinions on humility Mary's faith is an acknowledgement of the *God alone* principle Already in 1516, he looks upon Mary as "the most pure worshipper" of God "who magnifies God alone above everything."[158] The significance of Mary's faith for Luther is well described by Jean Bosc

> She is the human creature typical of the (reception to) God's election, since she receives and holds everything from the gratuitous dispensation of her God and because she places her full confidence in the Word of the Lord.[159]

[155] Ibid. cf also 7, 565 and 570, 7, 752-775.

[156] Cf. D Flanagan, "Marian Theology in the Ecumenical Discussions", *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol 33, no 4 (Oct, 1966), p. 355, 352-357.

[157] Rudolph Damerau, *Die Demut in der Theologie Luther*, Schmitz Verlag, Giesen, 1967, p. 303; for a further discussion of the meaning of the word *humilitas* as used by Luther cf E Ellwein "Das Reformatorische Bild der Maria", *Zeitwende* 24 (1953), 494f.

[158] WA 1, 60-61.

[159] *art. cit.*, 22

Thinking of Luther's insistence on this last aspect, Stakemeier opines that the faith expounded by the Reformer is not the theological virtue made perfect by charity, but "a fiduciary faith, which charity follows."[160]

But let us allow Luther to speak for himself as he proposes Mary's faith for our imitation and indicates its significance. "Mary teaches us to believe that God alone is powerful and to sanctify His Name, i e , to preach God and His Grace alone and nothing else."[161]

It was especially in considering the scene of the Annunciation that Luther extolled Mary's faith:

> Mary has a firm faith. If she had judged according to reason, she should have said that it was a devil speaking to her at the Annunciation, not an Angel If we meditate upon these things our faith will become stronger.[162]

He makes the application to the Virgin Birth·

> The virgin birth is a mere trifle for God; that God should become man is a greater miracle; but most amazing of all is that this maiden should credit the announcement that she, rather than some other virgin, has been chosen to be the mother of God.[163]

The greatness and firmness of Mary's faith seems to have always impressed Luther and he often repeated the conviction expressed in the last citation.

> We shall hear how Mary had such a great faith as is seldom found in Scripture so that we may be led to believe, for this Gospel offers us doctrine and warning.[164]

[160] *art. cit.*, p 439, cf WA 40 (1), 228-230, 40 (2), 353; 5, 33; 6, 202; 8, 106

[161] WA 52, 692.

[162] WA 15, 478; cf also 7, 189

[163] *Ibid;* translation of O'Meara, *op. cit.* 124

[164] WA 17 (2), 399 commenting on *Luke* 1·26, cf also WA 17 (2), 400 He also adduces Mary's conduct as offering an "example of firm faith and confidence" (WA 21, 62f).

Finally, let this one statement stand for all the others which testify to the uniqueness of Mary's faith:

> Mary was not only holy. She was also the mother of the Lord. With trembling and reverence, before nestling him to herself, she laid him down, because her faith said to her, "He will be the 'Son of the Highest'." No one else on earth had this faith, not even Joseph.[165]

C *Intercession and Invocation*

If the imitation of Mary's virtues posed no real problem for Luther, this is not true of the common devotional practice of calling upon Mary in order to ask for her intercession with Christ her Son In any consideration of devotion for the average Catholic, one of the primary considerations is certainly that of prayers addressed to Mary, or at least said in her honor. The legitimacy of invoking Mary and the correctness of a belief in her intercession are unquestioned presuppositions in popular devotion This was true at Luther's time, but because of the prevalent abuses and even more because of the principles of the Reformation, they could not remain unexamined for any length of time We are now at the very heart of our examination of Luther's devotional attitude, at least if we understand devotion as it is commonly accepted. We will therefore show Luther's gradual rejection of the invocation of Mary, examine his reasons, and show what application Luther himself made in the various Marian prayers, the celebration of feasts and the usage of devotional images

1) *Evolution of Luther's Thought on the Invocation of Mary*

First of all, a preliminary remark. If the Mariology of the Reformer must be seen in connection with Luther's idea on the veneration of the saints, the contrast should not be forgotten

[165] Martin Luther, *Christmas Sermons*, transl by R Bainton, Muhlenberg, Philadelphia, 1948, p 39-40

As Walter Delius has put it, "The Reformer has expressly made a difference in his attitude towards Mary and the other saints, basing himself upon the gospel."[166] He maintains that Luther entirely abandoned the veneration of the saints but he maintained a veneration of Mary his entire life.[167] So if the starting point of any kind of description of what was Luther's attitude towards Mary has to be his attitude toward the veneration of the saints within which it is contained,[168] yet as O'Meara points out, "there is much more to Marian theology *than veneration and the idea of intercession,* so we can examine its development independent of the theology of the saints."[169] Thus, we intend to keep this factor in mind, but not allow it to predominate

The development of the veneration of the saints probably reached its apex just before the Reformation. So, the establishment of Luther's position towards the veneration of the saints must take into consideration the circumstances of the Church in which Luther grew up and in which he dedicated himself as a monk, priest, and theologian.[170]

Theologians who have studied Luther's writings generally tend to agree that there are two periods to be distinguished in the history of Luther's attitude toward Mary and the saints: 1) 1513 or 1516 to 1522 and 2) 1522 to 1532 and thereafter.[171] For Stakemeier, the successive alienation of Luther from this veneration is directly proportional to his growing acceptance and clarification of the reformation principle that God alone is

[166] *Geschichte der Marienverehrung.* Munich, 1963, 206

[167] *Ibid.* Brandenburg agrees with him even while claiming (correctly we believe) that Luther wandered far from the Catholic tradition here *op cit.*, 206

[168] Walter Delius, "Luther und die Marienverehrung," *Theologische Literaturzeitung,* 1954, number 7-8, p 410

[169] *op. cit*, p 115, emphasis added

[170] cf O Scheel: *Martin Luther,* 1921, p 26, following, J Koestlein, *L Theologie I-II,* 1901, Th. Harnack, *L Theologie I,* 1862, II; 1886; H Preuss, *L. der Christenmensch,* 1942, p 104 following, R. Schimmelpfennig, *op cit.,* and H D Preuss, *Maria bei Luther,* Gutersloh, 1954

operative in such a way that even in the just there cannot be any merit.[172] Let us trace Luther's odyssey from invocation to disregard of Mary and the Saints:

a) *First Period—1513-1522*

The first signs of his criticism of Marian veneration are shown in the lectures on the Psalms (1513-16) and specifically in his treatment of *sola gratia.* Here for the first time we encounter reserve about the invocation of the saints.[173] The year 1516 can perhaps be seen as a first turning point for Luther. During that year he criticized the invocation of the saints and the legends connected with them,[174] and expressed his fear that the faith in the power of God and Christ suffered because of the invocation of the Saints.[175] For Luther (from 1516 on) the saints are seen more as models of the humble believer than as a precondition or prerequisite of salvation.[176]

It is curious to observe the different interpretation that O'Meara and Stakemeier give to the same sermon for the Assumption, 1516. The latter cites it as a proof that in this first period Luther retained the veneration and invocation of the saints, as well as of Our Lady The former refers to it as an indication that Luther is giving voice to thoughts (presumably disturbing ones) which have been on his mind for several years.[177] Both are selective in their citations. O'Meara insists on the change Luther is undergoing whereas Stakemeier stresses his continuity with the traditional Catholic invocation. Let the reader be the judge. First O'Meara's use of Luther—

[171] cf Stakemeier, *art. cit.*, p 440 and O'Meara, *op. cit.*, p 115 sq.
[172] *Ibid.*
[173] WA 4, 634, 12 ff
[174] WA 1, 150, 412 ff.
[175] cf Delius, *art. cit.*, 410, cf WA 79, 276, 30
[176] cf WA 3, 647; 4, 237, 31, 10, 6, 130, 10, 12, 382, 20, 17, 2, 475; 38, 506, 4; 42, 637, 10; 45, 713, 27; 49, 42, 29, 380, 11, 51, 67, 3, 179, 53, 543, 37.
[177] Stakemeier, *art cit.*, p 442; O'Meara, *op. cit*, 115

> The Blessed Virgin sees God in all things.... Although Elizabeth with great perception sees that Mary is the Mother of God, even more perceptively the Virgin sees God in all things; He alone is great Therefore, the most pure venerator of God is the Blessed Virgin, who magnifies God above all things; she has no idols She boasts of nothing herself, nothing of merit, no work; she is, by her own admission, purely passive and a receiver, not a doer of good works [178]

Then Stakemeier's:

> O beautiful Virgin! How she refers everything to God . (Stakemeier's omissions) Finally we should notice that since the Blessed Virgin prophesied that she would be called blessed by all generations, it is fitting that every Christian man should applaud, praise, and rejoice because by her we have received the fruit of life. She has served us and still serves us willingly.. (Stakemeier's omission). O happy mother! O most worthy Virgin! remember us, and grant that to us the Good Lord may do great things.[179]

The reader could be pardoned for wondering if we are considering the same sermon, but we are Probably O'Meara is on the right track, since he refers to· "other Marian sermons during this year" in which Luther "protested against the figures of Mary and the saints obscuring the power of God and of the saving blood of Christ."[180]

The next year the question of *indulgences* led Luther to the denial of human merit and especially of works of supererogation Naturally this influenced his attitude toward the veneration of the saints. There are important declarations of Luther in this regard in thesis 58 and in the Resolutions [181]

His developing thought on indulgences led him to make a clear distinction between "intercession" and "the power of the keys "

[178] WA 1, 61, 77-79
[179] WA 1, 78-79
[180] *Ibid.*, p 116
[181] Cf WA 1, 236, 605 ff

> Communionem sanctorum, quod quilibet pro altero laborat, sicut membrum pro membro, sed hoc fecerunt in vita, et si nunc facerent, intercessione potius quam *potestate clavis* id fieret[181a]

In 1519, on a number of occasions, Luther expressed his belief in the invocation of the saints. In February he declared:

> I say and profess this with all of Christianity that we should honor and invoke the saints, for who would deny that God even today works wonders through the bodies of the saints and their burial places.[182]

Towards the end of the same year, in an oft-quoted sermon, Luther still recommended that, as a preparation for death, one should call upon Mary It is interesting to note the context in which this statement appears, since it reaffirms so clearly the Catholic consciousness of the communion of saints, especially at the more important moments of life:

> A Christian does not die alone, but God looks upon him, and then the angels, saints, and all Christians, the total body, as it were, runs to the member to assist him [183]

In the same sermon, referring to the reception of "the most holy body of Christ," he calls Holy Communion "the sign and promise of the communion of all the angels and saints, who love me, care for me, pray for me ."[184]

The consequence of this union is that one should "invoke all the holy angels and especially his angel and the Mother of God . . ."[185] since God has commanded "that the Saints should love and assist all who believe."[186]

[181a] WA 1, 607-608 Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute (1518)
[182] WA 2, 69-70
[183] WA 2, 695
[184] *Ibid.*, 694
[185] *Ibid* 696
[186] *Ibid*

In another sermon in 1519, entitled "On the Most August Sacrament of the True Body of Christ," he describes very beautifully the necessary relationship between this body and the Communion of Saints·

> The essence and work of this Sacrament is the communion of Saints For this reason, the common name is synaxis or communion, that is community, and to communicate means to accept this community . and this because Christ with all the Saints is the Mystical Body.[187]

He then advises anyone who is sad to receive Holy Communion and "seek aid among the total community of the Mystical Body."[188] In a perceptive remark, Stakemeier[189] suggests that perhaps there is an allusion here to the later opinion of Luther that the community of saints, and not individual ones, should be invoked.[190]

Whatever may be the truth here, it is certain that reformation principles were already having their influence Luther was starting to refer to the "foolishness" of those who "think the saints have the power to do such things, whereas they are only petitioners and all things are done by God " Then he lays down this rule. "Therefore, they are to be invoked in such a way that God is invoked and honored through them."[191]

By the next year (1520) the incipient negative attitude was gaining momentum. Luther's principle for Marian theology appears in a sermon on the Feast of the Assumption: If Mary detracts from Christ and God (and Luther is becoming more convinced that she has done so in the past), then we must practice christocentric moderation Mary must be honored, but Christ must be the center of this veneration Mary exists for Christ alone, and this is the view of the Bible.[192]

[187] WA 2, 743
[188] WA 2, 745
[189] *art. cit*, 442
[190] Cf WA 18, 393
[191] WA 2, 69-70
[192] WA 4, 634, cf O'Meara, p 116.

Here, it becomes clear that he wishes to see Mary only in the light of Christ:

> I think that the only reason why nothing is found in the Holy Scripture about the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, is that we should not be concerned about how it happened and leave Christ aside and seek our salvation in any other place than where it should be sought. God has set him up as standard so that we, in our striving will hold fast to him, for when the standard is lost, then the fighters are killed. One may honor the Mother *but for the sake of the Son.*[193]

This last sentence is from now on the theological foundation of all of Luther's declarations about Mary On it is his commentary on the Magnificat will be built[194] This work, written in 1521, must surely rank among the greatest of his writings on Mary.

Some see in this work a death knell to the Saints and the traditional viewpoint on the invocation of Mary. It is claimed that it is the turning point of Luther's position regarding Mary, especially because of his explanation of the text of the Vulgate, *respexit humilitatem ancillae suae.* It has been advanced that up until the time of Luther, at least in popular presentations, this verse was proposed as a proof that, because of her humility —and this was taken as an attribute of *merit*—Mary became the Mother of the Son Luther went back to the Greek word *tapeinosis,* translated it by *nothingness,* and came to the conclusion that God looked upon Mary's unworthiness and her *unmerit* in calling her to be the mother of God[195] Thus he replaced the traditional dogmatic ontology with the new structure relating to justification by faith Mary then becomes an

[193] WA 4, 634, 12 ff

[194] WA 7, 544 ff cf E Ellwein, "Das reformatorische Bild der Maria," *Zeitwende,* February, 1953, 494ff and H Lamparter, *Die Magd des Herrn,* Metzingen, 1949

[195] Cf Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Magnificat* (St Louis· Concordia, 1960), p 4

example, and even the foremost example, of the fact that men without any merit of their own are given the grace of God. Thus any reason for the mediation of Mary is removed and likewise any grounds for the invocation in order to obtain her intercession.[196]

However true this may seem to be using hindsight, it is probably much more realistic to accept Grisar's appraisal:

> His *Exposition of the Magnificat* has frequently been taken as proof of Luther's great piety. It indeed contains many good thoughts even apart from those relating to Mary, but in numerous passages the author uses his pen . . . for vindication of his new teachings on the state of grace It should be borne in mind that the printers started on the book just before the Diet of Worms, and that it was intended to attract and secure the support of the future rulers of the Saxon Electorate Luther was also engaged at that time on his work against Catharinus, in which he attempts to reveal the Pope in his true character as anti-Christ. When, after the Diet of Worms, he continued his work on the Magnificat, he was certainly in no mood to compose a book of piety on Mary. The result was that the book became to all intents and purposes a controversial tract [197]

While it is true that we can detect germinal expressions of Luther's personal theology, these views, especially his views on Mary, have not reached their full originality. Dozens of very Marian passages could be quoted: Mary is Queen, free of sin —but this commentary is a work of transition [198]

It is undeniable that the Magnificat Commentary is a work of transition in a period of change. Luther himself at this time did not perceive the contradiction which he was so keenly aware of later between a "non-meriting person" and a powerful heavenly intercessor Listen to Luther's easy reconciliation of powerlessness and invocation

[196] cf Anna Paulsen, *art. cit*, p. 293
[197] H Grisar, S J, *Luther* (St Louis B Herder, 1915), IV, pp 501-502
[198] O'Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 117

> I say Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing; God does all We ought to call upon her that for her sake God may grant and do what we request Thus, also, all other saints are to be invoked, so that their work may be every way God's alone.[199]

In his explanation, Luther considered the abuses introduced which made Mary not only the final end of veneration, but led men to attribute to her what belongs to Christ and God alone. According to Luther, it surely is an outstanding grace that God has destined Mary to be the mother of his son, but is in no way a reward for her virtues, even if they, in various ways, were extraordinary. God saw that Mary was "apt" for the assuming of this extraordinary office, which she also immediately proved by the acceptance in faith of the angelic message But this should not lead men to attribute to Mary what belongs to God alone Luther goes so far as to say:

> It is better to do injury to Mary than to the grace of God Yes, one cannot do her any greater injury than to say that she is not likewise created like any other creature. But injury has been too lightly done to the grace of God, this is dangerous and contributes nothing to the love of Mary.[200]

Yet, in the final analysis, it cannot be said that the writing of the Magnificat in 1521 represents a decisive and radical rupture with the past. Luther still writes with some reserve Besides, there is the direct "Mary is to be invoked so that God,

[199] Luther will soon resolve this problem in his distinction between Mary as a vocal intercessor and as an advocate who truly accomplishes something for her clients, an advocate who has special access to the King. The first (a Furbitterin) Luther accepts; the second (a Fursprecherin) he rejects Mary and the saints, like ourselves, are poor and weak; they have no special claim on God No other creature's work can help man Luther's spiritual struggle has led him to depend upon God alone. He would not abandon this confidence to make Mary an intercessor, understood as mediator Cf Luther, *Commentary on the Magnificat,* Concordia, St. Louis, 1960, p 34 and O'Meara, *op. cit.* p. 117.

[200] 1521—WA 7, 573, 27-30

through her will, may give and do those things which we ask." It does not radically alter Luther's verdict, for him to add this caution: "In this way all saints are to be invoked so that the entire work remains that of God alone "[201]

b) *Second period 1522-1532*

There was a dramatic change in Luther's attitude after 1521 Within one year, Luther was stressing the fact that if it happens that one in calling upon Mary forgets her son, then it is something evil. Besides, he began to claim that invoking Mary and the saints was superfluous when man has Christ In a letter to John Lang on May 29, 1522, we see the change in his previous position·

> The whole world is asking about the veneration of the saints so that I am forced to give a public judgment about it I would wish that these questions were not raised, for no other reason than that they are not important and so many questions, as Paul says (1 *Timothy* 1.4) are endlessly raised.[202]

He attributes this preoccupation with superfluous and unimportant questions to Satan and then says that everything should be directed to Christ so that it will become clear that the veneration of the saints was not important, even though it can be conceded that it is allowed and good. He then gives practical advice After saying it is foolish to occupy ourselves with unimportant things, he predicts that "the cult of the saints will fall away without any action on our part when it is ascertained that it is not important and that Christ alone was on Mount Tabor " Luther goes on to say something which may appear to us quite strange in view of the public, official, printed invocation of Mary the previous year in his Magnificat:

[201] WA 7, 601 Cf also WA Tr, 4, 227-228, n 4331, E Stakemeier, *op. cit.* 443
[202] BR II, 501, 547, 548

> For this reason the cult of the saints dried up in my regard so that I do not know how and when I stopped calling upon the saints and was content with one Christ and God the Father.

He then returns to a more nuanced position.

> But I cannot approve of everyone among us who simply condemns the venerators of the saints, for the weak must be led slowly and not upset. It must be first established that the cult is not important but that there must be respect for the saints. My little book will speak about this.[203]

After studying Luther's writings during the year 1522, we find it difficult to agree with O'Meara's contention that we cannot "pinpoint the moment of change." True, there are inconsistencies and reversals, but the fundamental, dramatic shift does take place in 1522.[204]

1522—The Decisive Year

Probably the most important declaration of Luther about the invocation of Mary came in his sermon of September 8, 1522, in which he claimed that Mary could be our *Furbitterin,* but never our *Fursprecherin.* The distinction he wishes to make was that one expects of a *Fürsprecherin* (advocate) that she reconciles us to Christ and God by her merit as the holiest of women and that he call upon her for grace because of it. After declaring that the honor of the mother of God consists in the fact that she was "a special child of God" and that she was "graced above all other women," he makes the point that he does not wish to make a goddess or an idol out of her. It is in this context that he explains the difference between *Fursprecherin* and *Furbitterin.* He says:

> We do not wish to have her for a *Fürsprecherin* but we wish to have her for a *Fürbitterin,* as we have the other saints. Now we

[203] *Ibid.*
[204] Cf. O'Meara, *op. cit.,* p. 119.

have placed Mary so far above all the choirs of angels, next to her son and Lord, that dishonor and harm is done to her loving child. This is a great injustice and I claim that if she were on earth that she would weep blood about such dishonorable honor. Man should leave her in the honor which has come to her and respect her as a child of God. Yes, even see her as mother of God and praise God in her the same way that she herself has done in Magnificat. Grimmental, Oetigan, Einsiedeln, (pilgrimage centers) ach, and so on, but go into the house of the neighbor who is in need and what you would spend on a pilgrimage, give to him! This I say about the honor of the saints [205]

Considering the crucial importance of this one sermon, a fuller citation is in order Luther begins.

You know, my friends, that deep in the heart of men is inscribed the honor with which one honors the mother of God; yes, it is even so deep that no one willingly hears anything against it, but extols her more and more. Now we grant that she should be honored since we are enjoined by the Scripture to receive one another with honor, as Paul says (Romans 12 10); so man must also honor her. Above all she must be rightly honored, but the people have "fallen" so deeply in this honor that she is more highly honored than is right and there are two harmful results of all of this: a rupture with Christ inasmuch as the hearts of men are more directed to her than to Christ himself. Christ is put behind in darkness and entirely forgotten!

The other result is the harm done to the common folk; for when the Mother of God and her service are held in such high esteem, poor, indigent Christians are forgotten I gladly allow you to hold her in high respect, to praise her greatly, but only insofar as there is no law made about it. Thus the Holy Scripture itself has described nothing about her birth so that no one should set his heart on her. But now the priests (here Luther uses the contemptuous expression *pfaffe*) and monks wish to extol the honor of women and have so

[205] September 8, 1522—10 (3), 325, 13 to 326, 17

> highly extolled Mary that they have made out of this humble servant a goddess after the manner of the heathens. To arrive at such a position they have to use lies and to turn Scripture around to say things which do not belong to it. You see that the gospel which was read today refers to Christ's birth and not to Mary's . . yes I willingly allow that one honors her, but I ask that those who honor her should not make lies out of Scripture[206]

Luther then goes on to explain the two baneful results Of the first, the weakening of the honor and the recognition of Christ he says:

> We are called Christians after Christ, because we depend upon him alone and are his children and heritage, in this respect we are like the Mother of God herself and Mary's brothers and sisters; otherwise we do injury to the holy blood of Christ, for through his blood all of us are cleansed from sin and made partakers of his goods. In this respect we are likewise holy as she And if she received greater grace, that did not happen because of her merit but because of the mercy of God, for we cannot all be the mother of God. Otherwise she is like to us inasmuch as, by the blood of Christ, she has come to grace as we have

All of this leads to an important conclusion·

> Therefore, you can yourselves measure how far we should carry the honoring of the saints; namely, only so far that we do no injury to Christ This happens when we accept the blood and passion of Christ, on which alone we set our heart and on no other saint. Therefore, honor the mother of God, but do not remain with her, but press forward to God and set your heart upon him and do not remove Christ from the center and know that we are all brothers and sisters [207]

The second danger pointed out by Luther is the most interesting in our days when we speak so much of the church of the

[206] WA 10 (3), 313, 15 to 315, 16
[207] WA 10 (3), 315, 10 to 316, 11.

poor He claims that when eyes are raised to heaven towards God's holy ones, the saints on this earth are forgotten He says that he does not forbid men to honor saints, but nevertheless he would like them to be acquainted with the distinction which Scripture makes about those whom we are commanded to honor.[208] Later on he adds in a practical vein.

> You have no command to build churches, to make chalices and mass vestments, but you are commanded to help the poor, and these are the friends of whom Christ speaks who will receive us into everlasting dwellings (Luke 16, 9).

He then considers the words of the *Salve Regina* about the Virgin Mary:

> "Hail, queen of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope" Is not this too much? Who wishes to justify that she is our life, our sweetness and our hope when she herself indicates that she is a poor vessel? This prayer is sung through the entire world and bells are rung! It is the same with the *Regina Coeli*, it is not better that she is called Queen of Heaven. Is not this a dishonor of Christ that one gives to a creature what belongs to God alone?[209]

Near the end of his sermon, he says·

> Gladly will I admit that she prays for me, but that she should be my confidence and life, that I will not admit and your prayer is as agreeable to me as hers! Why? Because if you believe that Christ is likewise in you as he is in her, you can likewise help me, as she does![210]

By 1522 we have a virtual elimination of saints' intercession, which is opposed to the confidence to be placed in God alone.

[208] WA 10 (3), 317, 1-4
[209] 10 (3), 321, 15-18
[210] September 8, 1522—10 (3), 322

After 1522

If after 1522 we see some development, the groundwork has been thoroughly laid this year.

In 1528, he was asked by the authorities of the Wittenberg Cathedral whether they should eliminate the invocation of the saints from the liturgy as had been done for a long time already in the city church.[211] So in his *Confession of the Lord's Supper* (1528), he supported the attack against the invocation of the saints.[212]

The same year, in another writing, Luther justifies the harshness of Christ's answer to his mother at Cana with the remark that

> Christ must have understood that with the passage of time his mother would be given more honor than Christ himself, namely that she would be considered as a mediator and advocate (*Fürsprecherin*) between God and us . .

Luther then proceeds to claim that Christ wishes to show that in the relationship between God and man, neither Mary or any other one of the saints, be she ever so holy, can enter. He concludes that if someone else other than Christ had said what our Lord said, then he would certainly have been considered a heretic, but since Christ himself has said this, it can be seen how greatly involved in error are all those who entrust themselves to her intercession and who lead the poor commonfolk to the same practice.[213]

In 1529, in the Great Catechism, he takes a dim view of invoking saints and speaks of idolatry as an act of the heart which "searches help and consolation among creatures, saints, or the devils, and has no thought of God . "[214]

[211] Br. II, 389 f
[212] WA 26, 389.
[213] Winterpostille 1528 WA 21, 65, 5 to 16
[214] Baciocchi, art cit, p 6

The following year we have the appearance of one of the most developed texts of Luther's on the question. It bears the curious title of "The Letter on the Art of Translating and on the Intercession of the Saints." In it the intercession of the Saints is judged as problematic, since there is no scriptural attestation But worse still, Luther claims, is the fact that "gods have been made out of the saints in order to make of them patrons to be invoked . and a special force and power has been attributed to each saint in such a manner that God Himself has become completely idle and the Saints have been allowed to act and create in his stead."[215] He further declared:

> In Divine Service one should undertake nothing without God's command . . The people only too easily allow themselves to be seduced and to place their confidence in the saints instead of Christ . . . The light of the gospel is now so bright as the day that no one is guiltless when he remains in darkness "[216]

The same year the Reformer confessed that he had managed to free himself from the veneration (in the context, it would seem to mean "invocation") of the saints only with the greatest difficulty Then, no doubt judging from his own experience, he declares that since the cult of the saints leads men away from confidence in Christ, all invocation of the saints in which we ask them to pray for us must be condemned and abolished as a human invention not founded on scripture.[217]

Before the close of this year, the first Protestant profession of faith had appeared. Composed by Luther's disciple, Melanchton, but approved by the Reformer, it became known in history as the Augsburg Confession Its importance merits a special consideration in our treatment of the Protestant-Catholic con-

[215] Cf. Baciocchi, *art. cit.*, p. 6.

[216] WA 30, 2, 643 ff; See also 22, 174 and 26, 108

[217] WA 30 (2), 644 However, almost at this very same time he was perhaps making a very subtle distinction between *asking*, but not *invoking* the saints Cf. WA 30 (2), 694: Sicut in hac vita ab alus orationem rogamus.

troversy over the invocation of the saints We content ourselves here with indicating its place at this moment of Luther's development.

It is interesting to note that Luther's attitude toward the saints influenced him in very practical situations. For example, in 1531 in a letter in which he tried to comfort his own mother in her sickness, he said:

> Dear mother, be thankful that God has not allowed you to remain in the papist errors in which we were taught to rely on our own work and on our monkish holiness and look upon our Saviour, not as a comforter but as a gruesome Judge and Tyrant, so that we had to flee to Mary and to the saints and could place no grace or trust in Him.[218]

On the Feast of the Visitation the next year (1532) Luther commented on what he called the misinterpretation of the verse in the Magnificat "See, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (*Luke* 1·48b) and the faulty translation "full of grace" in the Angelic Salutation According to Luther, they lead to the opinion that grace comes from Mary and thereby to frightful idolatry

> Here (in the Magnificat) we must not forget the frightful idolatry which we were taught earlier and which has assumed such terrible proportions in the papacy She, the loving virgin, says· "All generations will call me blessed", that is, will praise God's grace in me and say of me how God has wonderfully honored me that he chose me among all virgins that I should bear the saviour of the world in my womb through the Holy Spirit and should bring him into this world; but it does not follow from this that one should call upon the virgin Mary, that one should entrust himself to her intercession, and should expect all (from her) in spiritual and temporal necessities—an idolatry to which the pope has directed the people It can be permitted that they rest content simply with praising her[1] But to

[218] May 20, 1531, Br VI, No. 1820, 105, 68 to 75

pray to her, to await her intercession and help—these things should be reserved for Christ alone, as he says: "Whatever you ask for in my name, that I will give you." (John 14:13) The pope however, wishes that we should pray in the name of the virgin Mary. That is not right and means that we do not praise Mary, but profane her in the worst possible way and make of her an idol![219]

c) *After 1532*

The last period of the Reformer's life saw no change in the attitude of Luther, if it were not a progressive hardening against any form of invocation. In 1537, another confessional document, the *Articuli Schmalcaldenses,* written by Luther himself, reiterates his stand, but implies that for the common people, invocation is so much of the essence of the devotion to the saints that with its discontinuance, the entire cult would disappear His argumentation is as follows. "Even if the saints pray for us perhaps even in heaven, it does not follow we should invoke them or honor them as patrons If this idolatrous reverence of the angels and dead saints is removed, the entire remainder of the cult will no longer be dangerous and will be consigned to oblivion."[220]

This same year Luther appeals once more to his personal experience. Looking back on his past life as a monk and reviewing his conduct in temptations and difficulties, he recalls his penitential practices, his trust in his own good works, his invocation of the saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary and describes his state. I would "flee from God as if from the devil, for there was no heart in me which allowed me to say: I believe in God and trust that He will be gracious to me." Quite clearly and simply, Luther now perceives an unalterable opposition between trust and confidence in God and the invocation of the saints.[221]

[219] WA 52, 692, 316.
[220] Articuli Schmalcaldenses II, 25, *Die Bekenntnisschriften,* 425
[221] Oct 6, 1537, WA 46, 660, 15 to 26.

Once more in 1537, Luther complains that Christianity has forgotten the principal source which is overflowing with the richness and fullness of grace and, instead of calling upon Christ, calls upon his mother as one by whom this grace should be sought He compares two texts of Scripture and says that "Alone these words· 'Hail Mary, full of Grace' remain in use, and the text has been entirely forgotten which says: 'We have all received of his fullness grace.' "

For Luther, a favorite illustration was St. Bernard whom he accuses of having recommended to the faithful that they call upon Mary as mediatrix in place of Christ:

> St. Bernard has taught that one must have the saints as helpers in need and the Virgin Mary as a mediatrix and call upon her as Mother of our Lord so that she will show her Son her breast and that he will become gracious towards us and will allow his wrath to subside. No, it is not a question of presenting the breasts of Mary Something else must be done We must always have in mind this declaration which Christ himself gave us—that he has come not to judge and condemn but to save (make happy) what was lost and condemned. When we hear this declaration and true teaching of the gospel, our spirits will be again enlightened and we will not ask anything more from the saints.[222]

And now Luther injects a personal note: "But this I likewise feel that I now do not pray to God with the earnestness and energy as I prayed before to the saints!"

The period 1540-44 saw some of the harshest judgments on Marian invocation In the *Protocol* and the *Introduction to the Translation of the Bible,* Luther compares the Marian cult to the service of Baal among the Israelites. Referring to the place in Jeremiah 11·13: "For as numerous as your cities are your gods, O Juda! As many as the streets of Jerusalem are the

[222] September 15, 1537—WA 46, 655, 17 to 22
[223] Preaching on the gospel of Matthew 18-24, 1537-1540,, WA 47, 276, 7 to 17.

altars for offering sacrifice to Baal," Luther declares that the Jews had too much to do with Baal just as we have too much to do with Mary.[224] Referring to Marian devotions as the rosary and the Marian psalter Luther in his *Sommerpostille* of 1544[225] asked what they were except substitutes for speaking to the living God. They were honoring dumb Gods who could not speak with us, who could give us no understanding or trust In the same year, 1544, he speaks about the shameful lies and fables of the monks about the rosary.[226]

Towards the end of his life, less than one year before his death, again looking back on his own conduct and on the devotion of the Church to Mary, Luther came to the conclusion that in the cult of Mary and the saints, Christians many times do not act otherwise or better than the heathens He points out that the heathens called upon Mercury, Diana, Venus and they changed from one deity to the other He excuses them because at that time there was no Christ whom they could know. He then asks, "What have we done?" and replies "that we have named churches after the saints, after Mary and other saints" This might seem like a very minor objection and in no way probative, but he goes on to say:

> The whole world has prayed to Mary, "Mother of God have mercy on me" I also did this when I was a papist. I thought every day of three saints in my mass, but I did not think of my lord Christ. Oh and there were so many pilgrimages Why? We sought forgiveness, etc,

After pointing out that the papacy still acts in this same way and after referring to the blindness with which he accepted this in his youth, he concluded with a question:

> Is this not a lamentable thing that we did not know the Savior,

[224] December 13, 1540,—Bi IV, 96
[225] WA 22, 174, 36 to 175, 4
[226] *Sommerpostille 1544* WA 21, 329, 11 to 19

but were victims of a gruesome error? . No one knew the loving Savior.[227]

In one of his very last sermons, in early 1546, Luther returns to our theme and illustrates the danger of the theological reasoning which he saw as the basis of the invocation of Mary He uses an example borrowed from a sermon by St. Bernard and becomes highly critical·

> God commands that we honor our parents. I will invoke Mary, she will pray to her Son for me, and He will pray to His Father, who will hear the Son. From this we have the picture which represents an angry God to whom Christ shows his wounds whereas Mary shows Christ her breasts Look at what is done by the beautiful bride, the wisdom of reason. Mary is Mother of Jesus Christ. Certainly Christ will hear her. Christ is a severe judge . I will invoke St George, St Christopher, etc.[228]

After reviewing all the evidence of the last thirty years of Luther's life, it seems impossible to agree with O'Meara who contends that in "the final period of his life Luther does not forbid praying to . . . Mary "[229] Our personal conviction would be in full concordance with the judgment of Fr Stakemeier who contends that "gradually Luther came to deny the intercession of Mary and dissuaded or excluded her invocation "[230]

2) *Protestant-Catholic Controversy about Intercession and Invocation of Mary*

a) *John Eck, Melanchton and Luther*

The sermon of Luther on the Feast of the Nativity, 1522, was the signal for the beginning of a controversy which has con-

[227] April 19, 1545, WA 49, 712, 29 to 713, 24
[228] Oeuvres IX, p 346; cf Bacıocchi, *art. cit.* p 7.
[229] *op. cit* , 120
[230] *art. cit* , 450

tinued down to the present day. Immediately men such as Alfeld, Vehe, Emser, and Cochlaus[231] entered the fray, but by far the most important adversary of Luther's doctrine seems to have been John Eck. Professor of Theology at Ingolstadt since 1510, he was at first on good terms with Luther, but from 1519 on, he engaged in a polemic with Luther that was destined to endure until his death three years before Luther's, in 1543. He can certainly be counted among the most active and detested enemies of the Reform.[232]

In 1525 there appeared his *Enchiridion Against the Lutherans* which corresponds to the *Loci Communes* of Luther's disciple Melanchton. This work went through 90 editions and translations and attempted "with much more erudition than intellectual penetration," according to Father J. de Baciocchi,[233] to justify the Roman Catholic doctrine by an appeal to biblical and patristic sources

According to the Cologne edition of 1600 (pages 144-157), this is his defense of the veneration of the saints:

> The saints should be invoked, as the friends of God, to intercede on our behalf, and although they are saints, they should not be adored with a cult of latria, because this is reserved to God. However, a cult of dulia is their just due

This thesis is supported by two theological arguments which were not entirely disowned by the Reform

1. Christ intercedes for us in his humanity. If then Christ the Head prays for us, why do not his members, the Saints, following his example, do likewise?
2. The faithful on earth intercede for one another. Why would not the dead saints do the same for the earthly pilgrims? As a matter of fact, "They are more perfect in charity, more powerful with God, and spiritually more pure"

[231] Cf Stakemeier *art cit*, 450
[232] Cf Baciocchi, *art cit*, 80
[233] *Ibid.*

John Eck tries to anticipate Lutheran objections. If one should say that it is unworthy of the Saints to occupy themselves with earthly affairs, then it is still more unworthy of Christ, whom the New Testament recognizes as one intercessor. If, on the contrary, it should be claimed that the role of an intercessor is something too exalted to be extended to others besides Christ, then how can one maintain that the faithful on this earth intercede for one another, and we know that God himself wishes this intercession He then adduces *Ezechiel* 22.30-31 and *Romans* 15·30-32 in support.

Before his presentation of these theological arguments, Eck had proposed some scriptural arguments, which turned out to be rather weak Among them are found: *Jeremias* 15:1, *Job* 33:23-25 and *Genesis* 48·16.[234]

Farther on, he presented some arguments from tradition, summarized the fundamental objection of Luther and proposed a solution which, it could have been foreseen, would be unsatisfying. He phrases the objection·

> Christ and God alone should be invoked, for He alone suffices, He alone is entirely generous and merciful, loving us more than all the saints.

To which, Eck replies.

> We recognize that we must pray in the name of Jesus and with confidence, but this does not exclude the saints, since by the members, we pray in the name of Jesus, their Head.

He then adduces the liturgical practice of ending the prayers with "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here Eck introduces another reason for having recourse to this intercession: God wishes that we respect the order of things and that in raising ourselves to superior levels, we should

[234] According to the Vulgate. "Angelus . . . benedicat pueris istis, et invocetur super eos nomen meum, nomina quoque patrum meorum. . . "

follow the "hierarchical order"—an idea dear to Pseudo-Dionysius. As for ourselves, we will have less fear of this "consuming fire," who is God, if we are able to reach Him through the intermediary of the saints "We have good reason to fear that we will disappear before his face just like the wax melts before the fire (Ps 68 3); this is why we look for mediators and intercessors."

Finally John Eck thought that his thesis would be more acceptable to the Reformer who had brought up the idea of Christ as the Unique Mediator (1 Timothy 2.5), if he distinguished two kinds of mediators: a mediator of redemption and a mediator of intercession. This allowed him to reconcile the unicity of Christ as mediator of redemption with the multiplicity of mediators of intercession, the saints

Five years later (1530) the first confessional document of the Protestant faith appeared, the *Augsburg Confession.* Although not written by Luther, it had his full approval. As Fr Baciocchi has pointed out[235] it was a very moderate document, evidently written in such a way as not to harden the opposition of Charles V, for whom it was intended. Article 21 deals with "the cult of the Saints" Starting on a positive note, it sees no difficulty in proposing the saints as models to be imitated, and on this point it is perfectly in accord with many passages in Luther's writings.[236] Surprising there was not even any explicit opposition to the intercession of the saints in heaven on behalf of their fellow Christians on earth. What is rejected is the *invocation* of the saints "to invoke the saints or to ask help from the saints."

[235] *art. cit*, 7.

[236] Some saints were especially put forward as models by Luther Francis (WA 8, 579, 26, 27, 123, 25, Tr. 5, 415 f, 616) whom he nevertheless judged critically later on (WA 42, 495, 24; 47, 338, 15), Elizabeth of Marborg (WA31, 1, 201, 7, Tr 3, 489, 1), Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Bernard of Clairvaux (WA 15, 194, 36; 53, 411, 20), Martin of Tours (WA 49, 709, 3224) and especially Christopher (WA 27, 385, 9; 32, 32, 20; 29, 498 following, 34, 2, 524, 8; Tr 6, 308—Cf. *Delius, art. cit*, 410.

Two motives are adduced for this refusal.

1. Scripture does not teach it, but
2. Scripture does teach us that Jesus Christ is the "sole Mediator, Propitiator, Pontiff and Intercessor."

Later on the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession* would point out a corollary of the second motive. It is necessary and sufficient to invoke Christ

> "Confessio nostra probat honores sanctorum. Nam his triplex honor probandus est Primus est *gratiarum actio.* Debemus enim Deo gratias agere, quod ostenderit exempla misericordiae .. Secundus cultus est *confirmatio fidei* nostrae ... Tertius honor est *imitatio* primum fidei, deinde ceterarum virtutum .. Hos vero honores non requirunt adversarii Tantum de invocatione quae etiamsi nihil haberet periculi, tamen non est necessaria, nixantur. Praeterea et hoc largimur, quod angeli orent pro nobis .. De sanctis etsi concedimus, quod, sicut vivi orant pro Ecclesia universa in genere, ita et in caelis orent pro Ecclesia in genere .."[237]

In the history of the controversy, the Augsburg Confession is far less important than the *Refutation of the Augsburg Confession*[238] and the response to it, the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession.* The former was written in 1530, the same year as the *Confession* by Eck and a number of other theologians; whereas the latter was written by the author of the *Confession,* Melanchton In the *Refutation* we find an accumulation of proofs from authority coming from the Fathers and from Scripture Eck's application of scripture is rather contestable, although one point seems proved beyond all possibility of dispute· there are numerous verses in scripture which point out the intercession of the living for one another and they do support Eck's argumentation about mediators of inter-

[237] *Apol Conf Aug , XXI; Die Bekenntnisschriften,* 317-318
[238] Cf *Corpus Reformatorum,* XXVII, col. 123-128

cession for this earth But, of course, this was not the main point that he was trying to prove. Eck's conclusion adds nothing new to his previous work, but does rephrase it:

> Christ is our first and principal advocate, but the saints are members of Christ and conform their will to that of Christ. When they see Christ, their Head, praying for us, can we possibly doubt that they do what they see Christ doing?

For our purposes the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession* is much more important than the *Confession* itself, since it contains a detailed response to the *Refutation*[239] and develops arguments for the proposals contained in the *Confession.* A brief summary follows:

The only points established by the *Refutation,* so says the Apology, are.

1 the saints must be honored
2 fraternal intercession must be practiced among the faithful on earth

But this is not the point in contention: it is the invocation of the saints in heaven by the earthly pilgrims, of which Tradition does not speak before Saint Gregory.[240]

Then Melanchton refers to some positive statements of the *Confession,* claiming that it approves the honor given to the saints The *Apology* gives three reasons·

1 God is to be thanked for the gifts and the enlightenment which he spreads through the saints.
2 The victory of grace over sin in the lives of the saints confirms our faith
3. We can profit by imitating their faith and other virtues.

It is a shame that Catholics show no interest in these points

[239] cf *Article 21.*
[240] Cf *PL,* LXXVI, Col. 1238

and only battle in favor of the invocation of the saints which not only involves dangers but also is unnecessary.

Having said this, Melanchton does not argue against every kind of intercession for the pilgrim Church on the part of the saints Because of *Zacharias* 1:12-13, he acknowledges that the angels intercede for men As for the men who die in sanctity, Scripture says nothing about them, but one can admit that they pray for the Church in its totality just as living Christians pray for one another.[241] "It does not follow," the Apology continues, "that the saints should be invoked" There is no direct denial of this invocation, but simply the observation that since scripture gives us no recommendation about it, we cannot have any certitude concerning it

> Prayer ought to start from faith, but how are we to know if God approves such an invocation? And how can we know this without the attestation of scripture that the saints are aware of the prayers of each one? To attribute to them the knowledge of our secret thoughts is to divinize them

Melanchton then claims that the papists cannot answer his objection about the lack of a scriptural foundation for the awareness of our prayers on the part of the saints They have no right, he claims, to impose a prayer of uncertain value, which does not proceed from faith. He then makes a dubious application of "quod non est ex fide, peccatum est" from *Romans* 14:23.

As for the arguments of Tradition brought up by the *Refutation,* Melanchton rejects them as being too recent: the ancient prayers, he claims, mention the saints, but do not invoke them.

[241] According to P Y. Emery, in his *L'unité des croyants au ciel et sur la terre,* Taizé, 1962, pp 128-130, "there is a certain advantage in this statement of global intercession It can be affirmed on the basis of the charity of the saints, without building on theories of the knowledge that they might possibly possess of our precise needs and our requests"

After this rather able defense, he proceeds with his counter-attack. Catholics, he claims, not only have recourse to the intercession of the saints, but also to the propitiatory value of their merits: "This can in no way be sustained, for here we have the proper honor of Christ entirely transferred to the saints." The attempt of his adversaries to escape this objection by distinguishing a unique mediator of Redemption, Jesus Christ, and many mediators of intercession (the saints) is in vain, for:

1. In practice the saints are considered mediators of redemption (propitiators)
2. Even the idea of the saints as mediators of intercession has no consistent biblical foundation, and it eclipses the role of Christ and transfers to the saints a confidence that we will obtain mercy which ought to repose in Christ. One falsely attributes to Christ a greater severity and to the saints a greater indulgence; confidence is placed in the mercy of the saints rather than in the mercy of Christ, and one flees from Christ in order to seek out the saints. Thus, in reality, the saints are turned into mediators of redemption.

There follows some reasoning on the part of Melanchton which would seem to indicate that external conditions (abuses) had more to do with the above reasoning than is perhaps generally admitted

If only this were a question of popular deviations! But we have here also the "opinions of the learned," for example, Gabriel Biel, who, in his commentary on the Canon of the Mass, has God commanding us to have recourse to the merits of the Saints and to their prayers in order to obtain salvation. And other papists write things "still more absurd"[242]

[242] For some idea of Biel's Marian doctrine, see the recently-edited *Canonis Misse Expositio*, Heiko A Oberman and William J Courtenay Steiner, editors, Wiesbaden, 1963, part 1, lectio XXX, p 302-333 in which the author analyzes Mary's role of intercession from the viewpoint of her inclusion in the *Communicantes*

It is not only the theologians whom Melanchton takes to task, but also the liturgical texts themselves, e g , the formulas which accompany the sacramental absolution in confession.

> The following formula of absolution is (with the Catholics) in widespread use. "the Passion of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the merits of the most blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints be for you unto the remission of your sins" Here absolution is pronounced that we be reconciled and considered righteous not only by Christ's merit but by merits of other saints. Some of us saw one master of theology die Now they had summoned a monk, a theologian himself, to console the dying man with nothing but this. Mother of grace, protect us from the enemy, receive us in the hour of our death Although we grant that blessed Mary *prays for the Church,* is it really she that receives souls at death, who conquers death, who gives life? What is Christ doing, if Mary does these things? Although Mary is most worthy of the most excellent honors (*dignissima amplissimis honoribus*), nevertheless by no means does she intend to be equal to Christ, but rather desires us to consider her and imitate her example But experience itself shows, that in the common conviction, the Blessed Virgin entirely replaces Christ. It is she, whom they have tried to appease, as if he were not the propitiator, the reconciler, but only the judge and avenger to be feared . We know that only Christ's merits are propitious for us . . and we cannot trust that we are to be regarded as justified by the merits of the Virgin or of other saints.[243]

Arguing theologically, Melanchton declares that the function of propitiator (reconciler) presupposes two conditions·

1. A divine ordinance about which we are informed, with the command to address ourselves to the person who has been selected, according to scripture, this exists only in the case of Christ
2. Merits on the part of the propitiator capable of satisfying for the sins of others, by reason of a divine imputation. This, too, is

[243] *The Symbolic Books of the Evangelic-Lutheran Church* . . . Goettingen, 1930, Vol I, pp 321-323

> reserved to Christ whose "merits are given to us so that because of our faith in these merits, we are considered just when we believe in him, just as if we had them by the right of personal merits

Without these two conditions, confidence, and consequently prayer, is without a foundation. We simply cannot depend on the merits of the saints "Nec est confidendum quod justi reputemur meritis Beatae Virginis aut aliorum sanctorum"

Finally there are two attacks.

1. on the specialization of certain intercessors in connection with special needs or dangers "Saint Anne is charged with the procurement of financial resources, Saint Sebastian, with preservation from epidemics and so on. These practices are evidently derived from pagan models.
2. on the current abuses a more or less idolatrous cult of the images of the saints, to which is sometimes attributed a miraculous power, legends about the so-called miracles, devotions which are more or less superstitious, such as the rosary, etc.

The Articles of Smalkalde, a profession of faith composed by Luther himself in 1537, can be seen as a complement to the doctrine expressed by the Reformer's disciple. In article II *on the Mass,* we read·

> The invocation of the Saints is also one of the abuses introduced by the Anti-Christ, it is contrary to the first and most important article, and destroys the knowledge that we have of Christ. It is likewise neither prescribed nor counselled; moreover, there is no example of it in Scripture, and even if it were a precious good (which it is not), we possess everything a thousand times better in Christ And even if the angels in heaven, just as the saints on earth, or perhaps also those who are in heaven, intercede for us (as Christ Himself also does), it does not follow that we should invoke and worship the angels and the saints, observe fasts, feasts, and Masses in their honor, offer them sacrifices, dedicate altars and churches to them, establish foundations dedicated to their cult, and serve them in still other ways, considering them as saviors and attributing to them individ-

ually all kinds of help and to each of them a special power, as the papists teach and practice. This is idolatry, for to God alone belong such honors.

As a Christian and saint living on earth, you can intercede for me, not in one distress, but in all situations. However, this does not oblige me to worship you, to invoke you, to honor you by feasts, fasts, and sacrifices, to celebrate Masses in your honor and to rest my hopes of being saved on you. There are many other ways in which I can honor you and show my love and thank you in Christ. If this idolatrous honor given to the angels and dead saints is suppressed, other honor will have no detrimental effect. It will even be promptly forgotten As a matter of fact, from the moment when there will no longer be any advantage or help, either spiritual or temporal, expected of the saints, they will leave them in peace both in their tombs and in heaven. for no one will have great solicitude for celebrating their memory, and paying them respect and honor in a disinterested manner just out of love for them.

b) *Summary of Protestant Doctrine on Intercession-Invocation*

1. *Intercession* of the saints (Mary in particular):
   1. No refusal—there seems to be a positive admission of intercession as an authentic form of a communion of saints
   2. This admission, however, is not whole-hearted, because of the lack of sufficient attestation in scripture.
   3. The object of the intercession of a saint is limited to the general needs of the Church after the coming of the Kingdom of God. This is done in order to avoid two risks:
      1 More or less positive speculations about the psychology of the elect.
      2. Doctrinal and devotional abuses of the "papists" on the specialization of heavenly intercessors.
2 The complete refusal of the *invocation* of the saints for three reasons:
   1. This practice is not willed by God, since it is found

nowhere in scripture. It is thus completely suspect in its origin, sinful man.

2. No matter what the theories may be, it presupposes and, in practice, demonstrates a lack of recognition of Christ, the unique Mediator and Redeemer, who is transformed into an inexorable judge. If one places this confidence in the *merits* of the saints, he transfers to them the redemptive and propitiatory function of the unique Savior
3. The popular practices in the devotion to the saints oppose the first commandment in varying degrees since they direct toward saints the adoration due to God alone and are encrusted with superstition and idolatry.[244]

c) *Summary of Catholic Doctrine*

With the death of Luther in 1546 and the holding of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the first period of controversy on this subject comes to an end. So it would be well to record here the decisions of this counter-Reformation Council When it treats the subject of intercession and invocation, the Council begins by recommending them and justifying them[245] and then invites the bishops not only to exercise vigilance on the manifestation of this cult but also to combat the abuses[246]

> The Holy Council asks all the Bishops and others who have the task of teaching that, according to the usage of the apostolic and Catholic Church which has come down to us from the earliest times of the Christian religion, and according to the common sentiment of the Fathers and the decrees of the councils, that they should carefully instruct the faithful, especially on the intercession of the saints, their invocation, the honor due to their relics and the legitimate use of their images They will teach them that the saints reign with Christ and offer to God their prayers for men; that it is good and useful to invoke them. . and to have recourse to their prayer, to

[244] cf Baciocchi, *art. cit.*, 20
[245] *Denzinger* 1821 or 984
[246] *Denzinger* 1825 or 988.

> their aid and to their assistance, with the purpose of obtaining benefits from God through His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, our sole Redeemer and Savior
>
> Those who claim that it is wrong that one should invoke the saints who enjoy eternal happiness in heaven, those who pretend that the saints do not pray for men, that it is idolatrous to invoke them to pray for us in order to obtain their aid for us, that this practice is contrary to the word of God and opposed to the honor of Jesus Christ, the sole mediator of God and of men (cf. I *Timothy* 2:5), or finally that it is stupid to pray vocally or mentally to those who reign in heaven—all of these have impious convictions.

It can be seen that in this text of the Council, there is no involvement in theological reasonings The Fathers were content simply to recall the traditional doctrines on the veneration of the saints, their relics and their images, and they based their positive thesis and their condemnation of the contrary opinions only on arguments of authority, and more precisely on the authority of custom, the Fathers, and the councils.

We have a twofold affirmation here.

1. The saints in heaven intercede for men
2. It is "good and useful", (the word "obligatory" or "necessary" is not used) to have recourse to their intercession with God, in order to receive aid and assistance and this, by the *mediation of Christ,* (and not outside it)

Starting with this double affirmation, we have the condemnation of the contrary opinions, which are not called *heresy* but *impiety* These errors are put under five headings.

1. The saints in heaven are not to be invoked.
2. They do not pray for men
3. It is idolatrous to solicit their particular intervention
4. This invocation contradicts the word of God and fails to recognize the unique mediation of Christ
5. It is stupid to invoke the saints (what is understood here is that they have other things to do than to listen to our

[247] *op cit.,* p 118

supplication and they do not even have any knowledge of them)

In the same decree, the Council asks with insistence that pastors of souls *combat the abuses* which may manifest themselves in the cult of the saints, in particular:

1. Celebrations which lead to intemperance, to disorder, to immorality.
2. Superstitious ideas and practices in the invocation of the saints or in the cult of their relics or images
3. Suspect innovations in matters of devotion, iconography, or accounts of miracles

To sum up the work of the Council of Trent—while trying to preserve what was healthy and useful in the cult of the saints, one should eliminate all excesses and real deviations which have provoked the denials of the reform and which justify them in part

3) *Luther's Theological Reasons for the Denial of Invocation*

What Brother Yves Pierre Emery writes about the reform in general can be applied to Luther in particular. His teaching is partially bound to the circumstances of his time and, in a particular way to the popular devotion of the end of the Middle Ages, in which the certitude of the prayers of the saints played a great role and involved a great risk—one which was often not avoided—of assuming a first place in piety and leaving Christ in the background with a resultant perversion of devotion True as this is, it seems more just to us to say that it was Luther's own theology of God and justification by faith which gave the death blow among Lutherans to the traditional Catholic doctrine on the invocation of Mary and the other saints [248]

Following the traditional division of the exclusive Reformation principles, we would like to analyze Luther's rejection of such invocation by application of the principles.

[248] Cf Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, Gutersloh, 1962, 256.

a.) Scripture alone
b) God alone
c) Christ alone
d) Grace alone

a) *Scripture Alone*

While it is easy to point out that Luther is inconsistent in his use of the principle *sola scriptura,*[249] it would be too little to say, as O'Meara does, that *sola scriptura* "may be a strong factor, but is not the guide in his dealings with Mary"[250] Seemingly to grant more weight to "Luther's dislike of what seemed "papists superstitions" and "his desire to make the pardon of God through Christ uniquely and freely accessible to every Christian"[250a] than to Luther's principles of *sola scriptura* is to falsify Luther's thought. It was precisely because of what he believed he saw in Scripture that he evinced such violent opposition to "papist" superstition and desired to make Christ's redemption available to all without any interference from Mary or the saints Whether Luther's view of Scripture is considered "one-sided"[251] or explained by his subtraction from the teaching authority of the church or his own reliance on personal experience, the fact remains, as Stakemeier has so well stated:

> Moved by the principle of "scripture alone," he wished to retain only those dogmas, which he found enunciated formally and expressly in scripture [251a]

[249] For example, Luther always maintained the perpetual virginity of Mary, even though Scripture did not provide him with arguments for the Virginity after childbirth and on the other hand the Scriptural feast of the Visitation, even though celebrated and entirely scriptural, irritated Luther for the reason that it was apparently linked to Rome

[250] *op. cit.,* p 122

[250a] *Ibid.*

[251] H J Brosch, "Eine katholische Antwort auf die evangelischen Bedenken einer dipolaren Mariologie," *Maria im Kult,* 1964, 203.

[251a] *art. cit ,* 448

Time and time again we encounter this argument. God and the Bible do not prescribe that we should solicit the intercession of the angels and the saints He even goes so far as to say that it would be tempting God to introduce into cult elements which God has not approved. Thus

> we must not counsel or approve that the dead saints should be invoked in order to ask for their intercession, but we should rather condemn and lead men to avoid such a thing [252]

What does this principle of "scripture alone" really mean? In theory, it signifies that scripture is the one normative rule of faith Conversely, it implies that with the rejection of tradition and infallible magisterium of the Church as norms of faith, all dogmas are excluded which are not explicitly and formally taught by Scripture. If it is true, as Stakemeier maintains, that "all reformers supplemented the 'scripture alone' in some way from tradition," this must be understood of Luther in a special sense. Not only did he claim, as the rest of the reformers did, that he retained the doctrine of the first four councils because it was in accord with Scripture,[254] but he also interpreted the sense of Scripture in a certain way, since he introduced a new conception of inspiration, when he claimed that the words of Scripture are only inspired inasmuch as they "show forth Christ"[255]

The principle of *sola scriptura* has been a source of contention between Protestants and Catholics down to the present day Hébert Roux, in a recent ecumenical book[256] stresses the revolutionary character of the introduction of this principle·

[252] cf. Baciocchi, *art. cit.*, p 7
[253] *op. cit*, p 474
[254] Here one might add that it was also related to Apostolic tradition as the Fathers of the Church declared on many occasions. Cf Stakemeier, *art. cit.*, 475.
[255] "Christum sapiunt" Cf Stakemeier *op. cit.*, 474
[256] *La Vierge Marie*, p 75

> In affirming the formal principle according to which nothing can be held as a truth of the faith unless it is explicitly conformed to the word of God directly received and understood in Scripture, the Reform introduced to the methods of thought, and even to the very conception of theology of the epoch, a decidedly new, if not revolutionary way of approaching the truths of the faith

On the other hand, there are Catholic authorities of the present day who would not only deny the validity of the principle but even its revolutionary character inasmuch as they would claim that it never existed Here is the way Father Stakemeier expresses it·

> In reality the divergence of the doctrine of the reformers from Catholic Mariology does not come from Scripture itself, but from the prejudiced reform principles by which they interpreted the Scriptures, neglecting the most ancient traditions, already taught by Justin the Martyr and by Irenaeus, which indicated the association of the Mother of God with Christ [257]

No matter what the diversity of Catholic and Protestant opinion about the validity and even originality of the Protestant contribution of *Scripture alone,* it is a fair question to ask: what should we think of the argument of the silence of scripture? It is not difficult to admit with Brother Emery of Taizé that if we

> prove that no passage, no verse of Scripture can give a positive foundation to an affirmation, this is an argument of weight, but this is not the same thing as proving the falsity of the affirmation, since theology is not an argumentation based on separate biblical verses

It is rather a reflection "which begins as treatment of the most unimportant as well as the most essential subject from

[257] *op cit*, 476
[258] *op cit*, 139.

the viewpoint of revelation taken in its ensemble." Moreover, it has the task of finding and coordinating as fully as possible what is explicit in revelation with "the hidden underlying implications, which are not expressed in the text of scripture "[258] It certainly would be legitimate to demand if in this question of the invocation of the saints, Luther has sufficiently taken into account the teaching of Scripture itself on the union which exists between all the members of the mystical body, be they on this earth or already glorified in heaven, with Christ their Head.

b) *God Alone*

The principle of "God alone" is so closely allied with the two following principles of "Christ alone" and "grace alone" that we need not be detained long by a specific consideration, since in general all that we say about "Christ alone" and "grace alone" can be applied to "God alone" This principle, according to Luther, means that in the work of salvation even that cooperation of the free will which proceeds from and is preserved by the gift of grace is excluded If it is true that the Reformers did not think of man as a blind instrument, but as of one who knows his need of God, nevertheless, as Luther said, "Free will makes nothing except an idol, because it wishes to act in divine things,"[259] or as the Reformer put it on the Feast of the Purification in 1521, "Here free will is entirely dead."[260] If we can summarize Luther's thoughts and make an application to Mary, we would say that according to the Reformer, the creature receives from a God who does everything the dignity of being able to act so as to receive grace, and in this sense to cooperate with grace Mary freely consents, obeying God in faith and charity. "Fiat mihi" are words which signify that Mary passively accepts as well as freely consents to God's word[261]

[259] WA 13, 39
[260] WA 9, 573
[261] Cf Stakemeier, *art cit.*, 476

In this connection, Luther's exegesis of the words "Who is powerful" in the Magnificat is very instructive He explains the words in this way:

> There is no one who does anything as Paul (Ephesians I) said: "God alone works all in all," since all the works of all creatures are the work of God . . . He is so almighty that in all and through all and above all, nothing is done except by His power alone . . . this is the opinion of the Holy Mother of God in these words: "There is nothing that is mine in all these great works, but He had done such great things to me Who alone does all and Whose power alone works in all. . . ." Therefore I say· Mary does not wish to be an idol. She herself does nothing, God does everything [262]

If we interpret this statement of Luther's literally, we arrive at the annihilation of man in his most important characteristic· his liberty, his freedom It is therefore rather important to bear in mind a thought of Karl Barth on this subject:

> It can be seen immediately that the formula "God is all, man is nothing" as a description of grace, would not only be a terrible simplification, but also a complete nonsense Nothing—that is, vowed to nothingness—such would be and such is man without the grace of God, man, inasmuch as he voluntarily deserts God. But God, by the gift of His Son, and by the fact that in Christ He has reconciled the world with Himself, is in reality *all* in order that man might not be *nothing,* but precisely that he should be the man of God and that, as such, *he should* himself also *be all,* in his place, in his plan, in his proper limits [263]

c) *Christ Alone*

From the principle *"God Alone"* is deduced the principle "Christ Alone" whose importance for the Mariology of the Reformers was very perceptively described by Scheeben·

[262] WA 7, 574-575
[263] *Dogmatik IV,* p 94 following

> Protestantism, inasmuch as it believes in the divinity of Christ, considers Mary as the slime of the earth, from which the first Adam was formed, not as a person associated with Christ in an intimate and mutual spiritual association. This is indeed perfectly in accord with the doctrine of the Reformers concerning the nature of man, which is, as it were, a work which is not entirely converted by grace and which, receiving grace, is not able to cooperate, whereas according to the Catholic doctrine Mary represents the passive and active reception of regenerative grace [264]

Luther's conviction about the centrality of Christ and his corresponding opinion that in theory, as well as in practice, the invocation of Mary stands in radical opposition to this centrality, was expressed on many occasions by Luther, and it is the source of some of his harshest criticisms of Marian invocation and devotion It took a number of forms. The most frequent one seems to be the absolute exclusion of any idea of Mary as mediatrix. "We have no other mediator, not Mary, not the apostles, but only Christ."[265] He expresses his anger that the terms mediatrix, advocate and reconciler, which belong to Christ alone, are attributed to Mary.[266] Using the support of Scripture, he says those things which were written of Mary in the New Testament "were written, not because of her but alone because of the one person of Christ "[267] In this connection, interpreting Christ's words to Mary at Cana: "Woman, what is this to thee and to Me?", he says·

> Christ knows that the time will come when men will give Mary

[264] Scheeben M J, *Dogmatik* V, Par 274, No 1525, and VI, 2, Freiburg i B, 1954, 309 Scheeben here is speaking of the doctrine "De servo Arbitrio" as explained by Luther Cf WA 18, 600-787, especially 18, 720 f Congar, Y. M J, O P, *Christus, Maria, Kirche,* Mainz, 1959, 17-39, shows that Luther even denies the merit of Christ in his humanity This argument is more fully explained by M Lackmann, *Verehrung der Heiligen,* Stuttgart, 1958, 141-144

[265] WA 11, 60

[266] WA 21, 65.

[267] WA 10 (1), 429

> more honor than He Himself receives. They will make her mediatrix and advocate between God and mankind... So He points out here that it is not to her we should come but to Him. It is Christ that stands between God and man [268]

On another occasion, he explains why there is "nothing of the life of the divine (Divae) virgin in Scripture":

> in order, that what customarily happens should not take place Leaving Christ aside, we seek our salvation somewhere where we should not in the least seek it .. Indeed the Mother is to be revered but on account of the Son. Who would doubt that the Son is to be more honored. She did not seek her own glory, but always that of her Son, as her canticle shows in such an excellent manner.[269]

Luther feared that the invocation of Mary implied an active role in the work of salvation[270] and thereby obscured the work of Christ who alone died for us. In this light we can understand his statement. "Since Mary did not die for us, she is to be honored only as the Mother of God because of Christ "[271]

Some of Luther's strongest criticisms are reserved for Saint Bernard whom he at one time highly revered because of his love for the humanity of Christ He took this saint to task on many occasions, because he claimed that Bernard led men to invoke Mary as mediatrix [272] He even went as far as to say that by such invocations, Mary is venerated as an idol [273]

It was this idea, that men had made of Mary an idol, that drew forth Luther's most biting remarks As the following citations will show, he often connected this idea with the consideration of Christ as a fearful Judge who was then replaced by His merciful Mother·

[268] WA 32, 263, 286, see also 21, 65
[269] WA 46, 34, Lat —Sermon of July 2, 1520.
[270] Cf Zobel, *op cit.*, p 92; also p 74
[271] WA 29, 243; 4, 634
[272] WA 47, 276—between 1537 and 1540
[273] WA 52, 692—around 1532

> Unfortunately there has been fashioned out of the humble servant of the Lord, a goddess, an idol. Men have fled from Christ the stern Judge to the mantle of Mary

Because of this, Luther even claims that Mary would weep blood over this if she were on earth at his time [274]

It was Luther's contention, one often expressed in his sermons, that the veneration of Mary was based on the fact that one saw in Christ only a strict Judge. He not only criticized the preachings and writings of his day for their deficiency in this regard, but he often alluded to the false pictorial representations of Christ as a judge of the world, throned above the rainbow, with his foot on the world, and with a sword and a switch in his hands Often this representation is connected with Mary's role as an intercessor, as she shows her Son her breasts to make him propitious This picture, for which Luther often blames Saint Bernard, draws forth his most caustic comments [275]

In short, according to Luther, Christians have made out of the saints, not the models of virtues, especially of faith, but "shields and protection" against Christ the judge.[276]

It is interesting to note in this connection what Hartmann Grisar, S J, had to say about Luther's accusations concerning the obscuring of Christ. He contends that it was quite clear in the liturgy of Luther's time that this accusation was simply not so He gives a number of examples from the official liturgy of the Church However true this may be, Luther's contention was that in popular piety this forgetfulness of Christ, this obscuring of his centrality, actually did take place.[277]

Luther's contribution to Mariology is described by the writer

[274] WA 7, 568, 29, 10 (3), 325, 5, 21, 25, 28, 616, 1, 30 (2), 299, 3, 30 (3), 312, 3, 47, 198, 31; Cf also Hans Preuss, *Luther Christenmensch*, 107

[275] Cf. WA 21, 65, 31 and the references given in the previous citation

[276] WA 15, 643.

[277] Cf *Luther*, Volume II, Freiburg, Herder, 1911, 571

of the only full-length treatment of the subject, Hans Düfel, as a restoration of Christ to his rightful place Whereas during the course of centuries Christology had been more and more pushed from its rightful place and replaced with Mariology, Luther's contribution was to have joined Mariology once more with Christology.[278]

d) *Grace Alone*

The description of Luther's thought on the three principles given above leads inevitably to his thought on *grace alone.* It is here that we can most clearly see Luther's rejection of Catholic Mariology and especially any idea of his invoking Mary to obtain her help in working out salvation If the Reformer refused Catholic Mariology in principle, it was due to the fact that this Mariology (is and was) connected so inextricably with the concepts of merits and grace (God's work and man's cooperation). It is because the entire action and all the merits of redemption are concentrated in the sole and unique human-divine person of Jesus Christ that no place can be found for Mary. With this idea in mind Luther insisted upon the principle of *grace alone* (and corresponding *faith alone*) and was led to exclude the Virgin Mary "as a cooperating element in the central event of the history of salvation and to reserve for Christ alone the total faith of the Church and its prayer."[279] According to Luther's viewpoint, all that one could say of Mary in regard to the salvific plan of God is based on God's election of her and his predestining her to be the human creature who would receive the grace of God in the most intimate and the most immediate way. She is the type of the creature who is pardoned and receives grace from God and who places all her confidence in him. But anything which would occasion the placing of Mary in another order than that of grace, that is,

[278] Cf Albert Brandenburg, "De Mariologia ac cultu Mariae apud Protestantes," *De Maria et Oecumenismo,* Rome, 1962, page 506

[279] Cf Hébert Roux, *op. cit.,* p 73.

the idea of an active role in salvation, is deliberately avoided. The commentary on the *Magnificat* brings this point to light. There is nothing in Mary's conduct which is able to be considered as a cooperation in redemption.[279a] Luther here expressly declares that God gives us salvation "without any meritorious works,"[279b] and further elaborating this point, he interprets the humility of the Virgin Mary as nothing else but her annihilation in the sight of God, in which Mary is the most noble example of this annihilation above Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene.[280] The absolute exclusion of merit on the part of any creature is for Luther a logical consequence of "God alone" and "Christ alone," as he understands these principles, and surely the most decisive and most inclusive point of difference with the Catholic theology.[281] How greatly the exclusion of all merit from the works of men opposes the traditional Catholic theology can be seen from St Thomas' explanation:

> Merit of man before God is not possible without the presupposition of a divine ordination in such a way that man receives from God through his own work a reward, to which God ordered it by his power.[282]

This is precisely the point According to Luther's interpretation of Scripture, God does not ordain men to do works which he will crown with a reward, which is called merit To the Reformer, this would seem like robbing God of His power and glory, which can be shared with no man.

D. *Practices of Devotion*

The principles of the Reformation, which so strongly influenced Luther in his attitude towards the Virgin Mary and

[279a] Cf J Bosc, *op. cit.*, p 22
[279b] WA 7, 559.
[280] WA 7, 559, 560; Cf WA 7, 564 and 7, 569
[281] Cf WA 1, 77-78 and WA Tr, 4, 4331: January 1539
[282] *Summa Theol.*, I-II, Question 114, Article 1.

which eventually led to a total exclusion of her invocation, also had their effect on practical matters of devotion, for example, the celebration of Mary's feasts, the use of traditional prayers connected with Mary's honor and finally the veneration of her images

1) *Celebration of Marian Feasts*

The very reason that we have so many statements about the Virgin Mary from the pen of Martin Luther is due to the fact that he preached on the occasion of her feasts It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Reformer preached more about Mary than Catholic priests do in this era of the church's history. At first, of course, Luther celebrated all the usual Marian feasts in vogue at his time, including the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception. Although, as we have seen, one can argue very reasonably that Luther retained belief in these two doctrines his entire life, as a matter of record he did not celebrate them later than 1523. He also dropped the feast of Mary's Nativity which he celebrated for the last time in 1522 and finally retained only those feasts for which an explicit foundation could be found in the biblical accounts.[283] The Annunciation and the Purification were preserved as "Feasts of the Incarnation of Christ"[284]

Luther was quite explicit in giving this reason for the celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation

> Even though this feast is thought to be instituted in honor of Mary, we preserve it in order that we might give thanks to God for the inexpressible grace that the Lord clothed Himself today in our flesh and blood, which is the honor of all of us, and not of Mary alone [285]

[283] Cf. Max Thurian, *op cit.*, p. 274; and Stakemeier, *op cit.*, p. 447 and 448

[284] Cf O'Meara, *op cit.*, 122

[285] WA 426, 226 Lat

The Feast of the Visitation seemed to have caused Luther embarrassment at times. On one occasion he claimed that it was "completely papist" but said that even so he "would let it stay."[286] It was his idea that the Reformed Church should change this feast and make it one of devotion to God, a festival calling for the imitation of the Virgin's faith and humility.[287] He gave as a reason for keeping this feast: "to praise and give thanks with Mary that God has given us such a great work. We do not want to make an idol out of Mary, but to celebrate it for God's honor."[288]

2) *Marian Prayers*

a) *Magnificat*

It is well known that Luther often preached about the Magnificat, especially on the feast of the Visitation According to Luther, Mary here gives us her solemn song of praise, a summary of the entire history of the world He even calls the Magnificat the "highest divine service" (Hauptgottesdienst) of the New Testament[289] Two years before his death, on the Feast of the Visitation in 1544 (he asked that in all churches the canticle of the Magnificat should be sung daily, since it is inspired by the Holy Spirit[290]

b) *The Hail Mary*

A rather perceptive remark of Walter Tappolet[291] helps us to understand Luther's attitude towards the Hail Mary:

> If Mary is given the place of Christ and is called upon as advocate and as mediatrix, then certain customs or usages that are not bad in themselves can be turned into idolatry. Such is the case (for Luther) with the Hail Mary. The attitude of Luther is not simple.

[286] WA 20, 449
[287] Cf O'Meara, *op. cit.*, 122
[288] WA 27, 229
[289] WA 37, 472, 10 f.
[290] WA 49, 492; cf WA 29, 451
[291] *op cit*, 124

We can find in his works positive declarations on this subject and these are not only from the time before the Reformation

Let us trace the history of Luther's thought on the Angelic Salutation during the first decade and a half of the Reformation.

To a question posed by George Cunnelt, a pastor in Eilenburg in 1520, as to how the preaching should be begun and closed, Luther answered:

> so that the word of God may be fruitful for us and pleasing to God, you should beforehand call upon His divine grace and speak a heartfelt *Hail Mary* or *Our Father.*[292]

On the Feast of the Annunciation in 1522, he becomes more cautious about the Hail Mary. In his commentary on the text he says:

> There you see that there is contained no prayer, but simply praise and honor. Just as in the first words of the *Our Father* there is no prayer, but praise and honor for God that He is our Father and is in heaven. Therefore, we cannot make out of the *Hail Mary* either a prayer or invocation, for it does not seem right to us that we should give these words a wider meaning than the Holy Spirit Himself has given them.

Then Luther becomes practical. He claims that we make use of the Hail Mary in two ways: 1) as a meditation inasmuch as we recall the graces which God has given Mary and 2) as an expression of our desire that she would be recognized on this account by every man and be held in respect.[293]

Once he had adopted this position, he seems never to have abandoned it In the same year, in the chapter of his *Little Prayer Book* in which he explains the Hail Mary, we can discern

[292] June 15, 1520—WA Br II, No 300
[293] March 25, 1522—WA 17 (2), 409, 8 to 17.

not only his attitude towards the use of the Hail Mary, but we can see therein a compendium of the Mariology of his time:

> First, she is *full of grace,* so that she may be recognized as without any sin. That is a high and great thing, for God's grace fills her with all gifts and frees her from all evil. Secondly, *God is with her,* that is, that all her actions and receptivity are godly and take place in her by God's actions and, therefore, He protects and preserves her from everything which could be harmful to her. Thirdly, she is *blessed among women,* not only in the fact that she is free from all tribulation and pain and has given birth while preserving her integrity, but also that he was fruitful and had conceived the fruit of her womb by the Holy Spirit—something given to no other woman. Fourthly, that *her fruit is blessed,* that is, the curse is taken away which all children of Eve were subject to and which leads to their being conceived in sin and being guilty of death and damnation But the fruit of her womb is alone blessed and we are all blessed through Him.

After this short "Mariology," Luther returns to the idea of the Hail Mary as a prayer. He claims that

> No one blasphemes this Mother and her fruit so much as those who bless her with many rosaries and who have the Hail Mary always in the mouth, for these are the very persons who blaspheme the Word of God and the faith to the greatest degree!

Then Luther gives his own views of how the Hail Mary should be used He claims that there are two ways of really blessing this Mother and her fruit—a way according to the flesh and one according to the spirit. The former way, he points out, is "with the mouth and the words of the Hail Mary" and this way he refers to as "blasphemy". But the second way, the spiritual way, is with the heart by which

> I praise and bless her child Christ in all His words, works and sorrows. This no one does unless he believes correctly, for without

> such a faith no heart is good, but is by nature full of curses and blasphemies against God and His holy ones [294]

Surely Luther's conclusion is confusing—one might have thought that he was simply excluding the Hail Mary as a prayer of the "papist", but it would seem from his closing words he is really only saying that it should be pronounced with faith:

> Therefore, if one does not believe, he should be advised to leave the Hail Mary and all prayers alone, for of such persons, it is written: "His prayer must be sinful"—(Psalm 109 7).[295]

In this same prayer book, in the catechism section, in which he places the Hail Mary immediately after the Our Father, he warns: "no one should put his trust and confidence in the Mother of God or in her merit, for such confidence belongs only to God."[296]

Perhaps Luther's meaning becomes clearer in a sermon that he preached on March 11, 1523 It has come down to us in a shortened Latin version. The contents of the sermon, inasmuch as they relate to the Hail Mary, are very interesting Luther mentions that a Christian must know three things: the Ten Commandments, the faith (the Apostles Creed), the Our Father. He then makes mention of the Hail Mary and gives as his reason for doing so that he does not wish to pass over it, since it is in use, but unfortunately, for the most part, has been abused He then explains his point:

> Mary should be honored, but Christ should not be neglected because of this. We must again return to the right track Christ has done everything for us It cannot be said of Mary· "I believe in you", that would be a blasphemy against God This honor belongs to God alone, for we have no other mediator, neither

[294] *Ibid.*
[295] WA 10 (2), 408, 13 to 409, 22, 17 (2), 409, 8 to 410, 12
[296] WA 10, (2), 407, 8f

> Mary, nor the Apostles and the Prophets. This is the right faith—that we come to the Father through Christ. If Mary had not had this faith, she would not have been blessed. To keep this faith inviolate we must all be on our guard against honoring Mary too much.

He then complains of the common teaching of Mary as mediatrix which is accompanied by the portrayal of Christ as a strict Judge whom Mary renders gracious. He returns to his description of the Hail Mary and advises us that:

> It were best that the Hail Mary should entirely be laid aside because of the abuses connected with it. It is no prayer; it is a formula of praise (Lobpreis). When we think of it in this way, we use it correctly, but this is not the custom. Man prays in order to attain something.

He then proceeds to point out that Mary is on the same level as we are, in support of his contention that we really should not pray to her:

> We are brothers and sisters of Mary; we call her Mistress of the world, Queen of the Heavens. She is bodily virgin and is adorned with more gifts, but these are exterior advantages; in spiritual things, she is not better than we since she has no other Christ, no other Gospel, than we have. I would wish that the Marian cult were removed alone because of the misuse.[297]

This famous statement of Luther's must be seen in its context. It certainly cannot be used to support any contention that Luther purely and simply wanted to destroy the Marian cult, for in the same sermon he goes on to declare that the Marian cult must be dealt with in such a way that we remain in the faith and serve our neighbors, because nothing is perfected except through a firm belief in God and love of neighbor. He then concludes:

[297]WA 11, 59f.

> Whoever possesses a good (firm) faith, says the Hail Mary without danger! Whoever is weak in faith can utter no Hail Mary without danger to his salvation [298]

Five years later (1528) Luther declares of the Hail Mary:

> It is a great text, because the Mother is blessed and even more, because the Son is such a great Child. Still there is no one on earth who truly prays the Hail Mary Whoever once rightly prays it, prays it more often. But it was prayed perversely. just as the hypocritical Jews prayed so often, but perversely [299]

c) *Hail Holy Queen and Queen of Heaven*

The Reformation turned against all prayers and songs that contained unevangelical statements. One meets very frequently the denial of the *Salve Regina* in which Mary is pictured as the queen of mercy and our life, our sweetness and our hope. The *Regina Coeli* is likewise cast aside.[300]

Luther's earliest statement about the *Salve Regina* is found in his preaching in the year 1514.[301] Here Luther cites the *Salve Regina* as a corollary for his position that Christ and all the saints are witnesses for what is referred to in the *Salve Regina* as our miserable life in this valley of tears [302]

In the first years of the Reformation he began to express doubts. He wonders aloud if in the *Salve Regina* and the *Regina Coeli* too much is not said about Mary:

> Is not this to do a dishonor to Christ if man attributes to a creature what belongs to Christ alone? Thus man allows himself unguarded

[298] WA 11, 61, 25 to 32
[299] WA 27, 232, 17 to 23—July 21, 1528
[300] Robert Lansemann, *Die Heiligentage besonders die Marien-Apostel- und Engeltage in der Reformationszeit.* Goettingen, Vandenhoeck, 1939, p 118.
[301] Hans-Ulrich Delius, "Luther und das 'Salve Regina' ", *Forschungen und Fortschritte,* Vol 38, Number 8 (1964) p. 250
[302] WA 4, 603, 16

> words. I will gladly admit that she prays for me, but that she should be my comfort and my life, that I will not accept . . . Your prayer is as agreeable to me as hers.[303]

In the important sermon of March 11, 1523[303a] in which he spoke about wishing "that devotion to Mary were entirely abolished only because of the abuses" it is quite clear that he includes the *Salve Regina* as one of the abuses. His contention is that a distorted, falsified picture of Christ is given: a "Judge sitting in heaven, not concerned about our affairs, but who would give life after death to those who led good lives and who could be reconciled in our favor only by His Mother."

What a distortion this is, "since you can see that all the articles of the faith relate to Christ, not Mary."

The following year (1524), Luther refers to the *Salve Regina* as blasphemous inasmuch as the name of *life* and *hope* is taken away from Christ in favor of Mary[304] and Mary is made into a goddess with her feasts, songs and antiphons.[305] In a curious passage eight years later Luther tells us that

> Mary is sung about as the queen of mercy although it is only to the *church* that this atribute should be given, for only the church rules over death, sin, hell and so on and indeed not through her own but alone through the merits won by Christ.[306]

By the 1530's Luther was stern in his condemnations. "The Salve Regina says too much. The Papists have made Mary an idol,"[307] yet it can certainly be argued that Luther is not really against the expression "queen"—he even names Mary "Queen above all things,"[308] and as late as 1533 he calls her "Mistress

[303] WA 10, 3, 312ff.
[303a] WA 11, 60f.
[304] WA 15, 115, 13f.
[305] WA 30 (2), 348, 5ff and 25ff.
[306] 40 (2), 558, 3 *(1532)*.
[307] Cf. O'Meara, *op. cit.*, 120.
[308] WA 36, 209, 11.

and Empress above all "[309] He is against the attributing to her all power as if she had this from herself [310] Luther's attitude is conveyed by his *solicitude* that no idols be made of her, for she does nothing God does all things [311]

A final judgment of Luther about the Salve Regina is found in the year 1537 in a marginal note to the bull of Pope Paul III.[312] Luther writes here—"not to be prayed!"—giving us a reason that it is thought that God can be more easily appeased through the *Salve Regina* than through the blood of his Son, although the bull itself has nothing in this exaggerated form.

3) *Use of Images*

Luther's attitude towards statues, pictures, icons, representations of all kinds was formed by his reformation principles He not only excluded what he termed "adoration" or "idolatry" in the use of images, but he was sharply critical of those who would be seeking to obtain merit by the use of images; however, he definitely cannot be counted among those who opposed images in themselves. Let us see what his attitude is in practice.

Iconoclasm was a by-product of the Reform which Luther strictly forbade He looked upon the destroyers of images as fanatics who thought that their work of destruction was a meritorious work,[313] and he explicitly defended his own use of images

> So even the destroyer of images (Bildersturmer) will have to leave me a crucifix or a Marian picture, or even the picture of an idol, as long as I do not pray to it, but have it as a remembrance [314]

Then declaring that only idolatrous pictures are forbidden,

[309] WA 37, 93
[310] 52, 627ff
[311] 7, 573, 16ff On this point also see R Lansemann, *op. cit*, p 117.
[312] 50, 115, 7 to 12.
[313] WA 18, 70, 18, 80-82
[314] WA 18, 70 and 77ff.

he defines them as those "in which man places his trust," and continues, "let the others remain If I have a painted picture on the wall and I look upon it without idolatry, that is not forbidden to me and should not be taken away from me."[315]

He is quite definite in his convictions, that the Old Testament prohibitions do not hold.[316]

> Nothing else can be drawn from the words "Thou shalt have no strange gods before me" except what relates to idolatry. But where pictures or sculptures are made (used) without idolatry, the making of such things is not forbidden.[317]

A sermon on Deuteronomy in 1529 reiterates the same doctrine.[318] Applying his theory of idolatrous picture worship to those images in which man sets his trust, Luther on many occasions finds that images of Mary fit this description. "If one should put his trust (in the picture) that Mary will help him, there we have an *idolatrous* picture. But I would not forbid the other pictures in which man recalls a past event."[319]

As we have seen earlier[320] he held St. Bernard responsible for pictures in which Christ was presented as a stern judge and Mary as a merciful reconciler These representations were the object of his special wrath.

"Some have painted Christ Himself sitting at the right hand of the Father full of wrath and thus would flee to Mary. This is the work of Satan."[321] Hans Preuss claims these representations were very common in the late Middle Ages and he refers, in particular, to a giant stone sculpture of Christ as the fearful judge on the North side of the city church of Wittenberg, with

[315] WA 28, 677f
[316] WA 10 (3), 35, 10 (3), 28, 16, 440-445; 28, 677-678
[317] WA 18, 69, 25
[318] WA 28, 677f
[319] WA 28, 677f
[320] e g, cf footnotes 223, 228
[321] WA 48, 321.

which Luther must have been very familiar[322] He often refers to St Bernard explicitly in connection with the representation of the "protective mantle of Mary":

> St Bernard has been painted by the artists in such a way that he is praying before the Virgin Mary who is showing her son Christ the breasts from which he has sucked, ach, what kisses we have given Mary, but I do not prefer the breasts of Mary, for they have not redeemed me nor made me blessed[323]

The monks in their sermons have followed Bernard's lead: "the sermon of the monks painted the Virgin Mary in such a way that Christ had three arrows in his hand Mary holds her mantle above them so that men would not be punished."[324] "this is really preaching the devil"[325] One should do away with such paintings.

Closely allied to these paintings which had idolatrous overtones for Luther, were those which represented Mary's intercession (not replacement of, as some of the others) with her Son[326]

Even those artists who painted too glorious a picture of Mary were taxed with being unfaithful to the *grace alone* Reformation principle In his explanation of the Magnificat, Luther took to task· "the artist who has so painted the Virgin for us that nothing lowly, but only the most exalted thing is to be seen in her."

He goes on to say that artists should rather try to represent: "how in her are found together the overflowing riches of God

[322] cf *Martin Luther der Kunstler*, p. 37.
[323] WA 46, 663 (around 1537; cf. also WA 47, 257, 9 and 33, 83, 38). An example of this kind of representation is found in *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* edited by Lutz and Perdrizet, illustration 138
[324] WA 47, 276; 33
[325] WA 33, 83, 41 Cf also Christian Rogge, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[326] Cf WA 46, 663; 47, 257; 48, 321,—around 1537
[327] WA 7, 569, 12 and 32.

and her deepest poverty; the divine honor and her nothingness; godly dignity and her lowliness"[327]

It would seem to be clear from all the foregoing that if Luther was unwilling to go as far as the Second Council of Nicea, which approved the cult of images, yet he did accept the didactic ends approved by the same council[328] He saw them as the "books of the poor" and as adapted to human nature as well as to God's way of acting with men[329] On one occasion he even went so far as to say that "one cannot grasp spiritual things unless images (pictures) are made of them"[330] This rather inclusive statement of the power of an image had followed Luther's declaration that "God became man or else he could not have been grasped" which he supported by Christ's own statement· "He who sees me, sees the Father."[331]

Luther himself wished to retain images of Mary in homes as well as in Churches. Stakemeier claims that it is certain that the Reformer had a picture of Mary in his own private study[332] If not all Luther scholars would express the same certitude,[334] yet it is beyond dispute that the sepulchre of Luther has a Marian sculpture. Dying at Eisleben on February 18, 1546, he was buried in the church of Wittenberg at whose doors he had posted his 95 theses almost thirty years previously Luther was buried by the tomb of Henningus Goden The sculptural chamber had been adorned by Peter Vischer in 1521 with a sculptural representation of the coronation of Mary entitled: "The Holy Trinity Places the Crown (on Mary)," and the epitaph on the Goden monument contains these lines:

[328] cf von Campenhausen, "Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengesch*, 68 (1957), 128

[329] *Ibid.*, 120-122

[330] WA 46. 308, 3 and 19.

[331] *Ibid.*

[332] cf. *art. cit.*, 449 and the passages of Luther on which he bases himself.

[333] WA Tr. 5, 623, n 6365; 2, 207, n 1755

[334] O'Meara, *op. cit.*, 124, shows himself more reserved, simply quoting W. Delius, *op. cit.*, 415 for his assertion that "many authorities think that Luther himself had a picture of Mary hanging in his room"

Ad summum Regina thronum defertur in altum·
Angelicis praelatia choris, cui festus et ipse
Filius occurrens Matrem super aethera ponit[335]

V *Luther's Final Verdict on Mary*

The question we posed at the beginning: Was Luther a Devotee of Mary? can now be seen from the perspective of our review of his writings and actions of his entire lifetime, but especially during the last thirty years of his life. In order to avoid any undue security in the opinion that we will propose, let us first note two contradictory opinions which purport to use as their basis the last sermon of Luther at Wittenberg, on January 17, 1546, just one month before his death. The Lutheran scholar, Julius Koestlein, in a monumental two-volume series on Luther's theology considered in its historical development[336] thinks that Luther is, among many other warnings, giving his final admonitions against the Marian cult. On the other hand, Stakemeier quotes these words from the sermon:

> Num solus Christus adorandus? Vel non potius etiam sancta Mater Dei honoranda? Haec est mulier quae contrivit caput serpentis Audi nos Nam filius te honorat, tibi nihil negat. Bernardus nimium dixit de Evangelio "Missus est angelus . . ." Quia de solo Christo dictum· "Hunc audite" Item "Ecce Agnus Dei.", etc Non de Maria, angelii Gabriele.[337]

and then declares that it "shows that Luther never totally withdrew his heart from devotion towards the Mother of God."[338] Who is right? Can any really satisfying answer be given? It seems to me that no response can be given unless some framework is adopted in which we attempt to include all that we might mean by devotion Although, in this post-Vatican II era,

[335] E Stakemeier, *op. cit.*, p 449
[336] Steinkopf, Stuttgart, 1883, Vol. 1, p 616.
[337] WA 51, 128-129
[338] *op. cit.*, 447.

there might be many objections levelled against Mariological propositions advanced by Father Roschini, yet it seems to me his division of devotion is unexceptionable and, most important for our needs, sufficiently inclusive:

1. *Veneration,* by reason of the divine maternity, with regard to Christ
2. *Love,* by reason of a spiritual maternity with regard to all the mystical members of Christ.
3. *Gratitude,* by reason of her coredemption or cooperation in the acquisition of all graces
4. *Invocation,* by reason of her cooperation in the distribution of every single grace.
5. *Imitation,* by reason of her singular sanctity.
6. *Servitude,* by reason of her universal queenship [339]

Let us now try to analyze briefly these various components of devotion:

1. *Veneration or Honor*

There can be no doubt that Luther wished that Mary be honored His sermons are so replete with her praises that they stand as examples to all Christian preachers and perhaps in a special way in this supposedly anti-Marian age! O'Meara has well described his especially attractive Christmas sermons·

> They contain beautiful passages on Mary, lines where poetry and religious exaltation make him forget his polemic His spirit and voice strive to describe the reality of God made man and the splendor of the woman who was his mother.[340]

Beyond any possible doubt, and absolutely untouched by any criticism, sharp and exaggerated as it may be when polemics carried him away, is the fact that Luther wishes that Mary be

[339] *Summula Mariologiae,* Rome, 1952, 196-197.
[340] *Op. cit* , 124.

highly honored because she is the Mother of the Son of God and our Savior. Even though he claimed that this fact as well as her perpetual virginity or any of her many virtues cannot help us, he maintained they still compel us to have a great reverence for her. In the final analysis, however, it is a question of *how* Mary is to be honored We must always remember that, for Luther, the incarnation of the Word, (the taking on of flesh by the Son of God) saves us. Here are Luther's own words:

> The Christian Church is holy through the Holy Spirit, and through nothing else. . God does not wish to make me holy through Mary or through the invocation of the saints But this we should do: we should honor her as the Mother of God; but her merit cannot help me but alone, "Verbum caro factum est" helps and saves me[341]

It seems to me that this statement of Luther seven years before his death, gives us the clue for understanding not only Luther's seemingly harsh statements but also the sweeping generalizations of some Protestant authors that Luther rejected Catholic veneration of Mary. For example, H. D. Preuss[342] considers Luther as completely opposing the Catholic veneration of Mary. He quotes the Reformer as contending that such veneration

> is entirely opposed to the self assessment of Mary as the New Testament shows her to us. She does not say "my soul magnifies itself greatly...." She does not raise herself above man or she would herself have gone to hell So man should not sing about her and her goods but about God who has looked upon her. .. People who speak about the enduring merit of Mary contradict the Magnificat, her own words.[343]

In this citation one can see an appeal to fundamental ref-

[341] January 6, 1539—WA 47, 644, 28 to 32
[342] *op. cit.*, p 27.
[343] WA 9, 517.

ormation principles. With this in mind, I would propose that for Luther, it is not a question of veneration or *not,* but *how* it is to be accomplished. There is a constant solicitude on Luther's part (and surely not a misplaced one considering the history of Marian devotion in his day) that God and Christ should not be slighted, but there is no gainsaying the fact that, for Luther, she is to be venerated Consider these statements:

> Indeed she is to be venerated, but the Son is to be venerated a thousand times more.[344] She is the wood and he is the gold, and only he is the sole mediator We do not have another mediator. neither Mary nor the apostles nor the prophets but only Christ alone.[345]

and

> The creature, Mary, cannot be praised enough, but when the Creator himself comes and becomes our ransom—that is what is wonderful [346]

If it is possible to find strong statements of Luther which seem to deny all veneration of Mary, yet their content has to be considered as well as the contrary weight of so many more nuanced criticisms and positive declarations on Luther's part

> No one should make a law concerning the veneration of Mary Holy Scripture has written nothing either about her birth or her life That is monkish lies The gospel concerns itself with the birth of Christ not about Mary's birth. If one is to honor her, he ought not make a liar out of Scripture. Christ has placed Marian veneration in the darkness and entirely forgotten it [347]

[344] WA 11, 227
[345] WA 11, 60.
[346] WA TR 4, 4433.
[347] cf WA 7, 568, 29, 10, 3, 312ff; 325,5; 21, 25, 28; 28, 616, 1; 30, 2, 299, 3; 30, 3, 312, 3; 47, 198, 31

> In summary, if you wish to honor the mother, so act that you preserve the faith inviolate There is no danger if you never remember the mother If you add the mother, there is danger because you may place your confidence in her in some way and reduce the rights and honor of Christ.[348]

Considering texts of this kind as non-probative, the question is not if, but the *why and the how.* Luther is always quite clear on the *why*:

> Mary has not died for us Therefore, she is only to be honored as the mother of Jesus *for his sake.*[349]

She can only be seen as pointing to her Son, directing us not to herself, but to Him. Luther makes an application of Mary's word at Cana to all Christians. "Do whatever He tells you. This word should be painted as her picture—such an excellent fine word it is "[350]

Even if, as pointed out in the Magnificat, Luther can become almost ecstatic when he thinks about the high dignity of Mary and the honor due her as the Mother of God, yet he is so conscious of relating all honor of Christ and God and ascribing no merit to any creature that he can seemingly reduce Mary's function to that of being a "dwelling place" of God [351] In this regard, the Reformer describes Mary as saying:

> I am nothing but the material in which God works I have accomplished nothing in this event, and so let no one praise or *honor me because I am the mother of God.* Let God and his work be honored and praised in me.[352]

How honor Mary then? By following reformation ideas on the transcendence of God and the nothingness of man:

[348] WA 11, 60.
[349] WA 29, 243, 8, 4, 634, 16, 42, 143, 40
[350] WA 27, 29, 29.
[351] WA 7, 555.
[352] WA 7, 573.

> A true veneration of this mother and all the saints would be that we acknowledge their humility (lowliness) and the mercy of God.[353]

Luther gives us a practical example of how one should praise Mary. He says not

> With many Salve Regina antiphons No, but in this way· see how in spite of the fact that she was a poor servant maid that God has looked upon her lowliness In this way, God alone will be praised. Therefore, when we do honor her, why do we wish to praise her (by saying) that she has everything?[354]

2. *Love*

Although the statements that we have adduced earlier,[355] in which Luther speaks of Mary as mother, may not be probative of his acceptance of a Catholic stance on the spiritual maternity of Mary, yet they show an undeniable tenderness and love of Mary, the Mother of God His sermons, especially the ones for Christmas, are filled with expressions of great tenderness towards the Virgin Mother. So love was undoubtedly a component of his Marian devotion

3 *Gratitude*

It would surely be impossible to claim that the reasons given for gratitude to Mary by Roschini—coredemption or cooperation in the acquisition of all graces—played any part in Luther's Marian devotion; yet, it might be maintained that expressions of thankfulness are not absent from Luther's writings, at least in the sense that a gratitude to God is expressed for the example of Mary and the saints. Of course, this would be minimalism, according to Roschini's way of understanding this requirement of devotion

[353] WA 11, 143, 5
[354] WA 12, 613, 17 (2) 320.
[355] Cf p 22

4. *Invocation*

Categorically denying the validity of the reason that Roschini gives for invoking Mary—her cooperation in the distribution of every single grace—Luther I believe, eventually arrived at the rejection of any invocation of the Mother of God. Here I am in full agreement with Stakemeier[356] who is in opposition to O'Meara's opinion on this point.

5. *Imitation*

Just as surely as we can claim that Luther eliminated all invocation, just as certainly can we maintain that the Reformer insisted on the imitation of the Christian virtues found in Mary, especially humility, obedience, trust, and above all—faith. This is abundantly clear from our previous citations of Luther in the section on virtues The only doubt that can subsist is whether the Reformer's interpretation of virtues changes them in such a way that there is little correspondence to the ordinary meaning ascribed to virtues such as humility and faith in Catholic circles.

Along this line, it is interesting to note that a famous contemporary of Luther, one who engaged in sharp polemics with the Reformer, Erasmus, described the components of the Marian cult as veneration, praise, invocation and imitation. He especially insisted on the last one:

> The last component has so much more importance than the others that without it the others remain unfruitful and (one can even say) it alone includes all the others [357]

[356] Referring to Luther's statement of Oct. 6, 1537, (WA 46, 660), he claims that the Reformer rejected invocation. He likewise adduces Luther's very late expression (1544) of sorrow that he had been led to invoke Mary (WA 40 (3), 719) Cf Stakemeier, *art. cit., in fine.*

[357] Lit Virg Opp V 1112 (1329B) Christ matr. Opp V 548 (657EF, Cf. Auer, Alfons, *op. cit*, note 365).

G. Servitude

Although I find the various statements on Mary's Queenship too ambiguous and inconclusive to arrive at any firm conclusion about Luther's final judgment on this point, I am quite convinced that even, admitting Mary's Queenship, he would not see in it the kind of domination (even benevolent) that servitude implies.

VI. *Luther, a Devotee?—Only a Complex Answer Possible*

Was Luther then a devotee of Mary? However much there may still subsist a legitimate difference of opinion on this question, I would submit that if both a definite "yes" or "no" answer can seemingly be justified by an appeal to Luther, yet either response is a definite disservice to the complexity of Luther's Marian theology—and thus to the truth In short, a simple answer spreads confusion and while a complex answer may not be as clarifying as we might wish, yet it more closely approaches the truth The answer will always have to be complex if it is to take sufficient account of the varied factors in Marian devotion A response in the final analysis, then, must include a refusal to be caught in the trap of positive affirmation or absolute rejection, into which so many past Catholic writers have fallen, and an acceptance of the complexities occasioned by Luther's own personal struggle, the violence of his reaction against real abuses in Marian piety, the development of Reformation principles and Luther's own changing position. This will all lead to a *description* of Luther's attitude towards Mary, rather than an attempt to answer a loaded and unfair question This said, I would submit that it is beyond all reasonable doubt that Luther *loved* and *venerated* (honored or praised) Mary personally and *imitated* the evangelical virtues he saw displayed in her life Likewise, no one can doubt that he wished all Christians to follow him along these lines

As for *gratitude* and *servitude* to Mary, only in the most restricted sense can any argument be adduced that Luther either

recommended or practiced these parts of Marian devotion.

Finally, in spite of the fact that some scholarly opinion still maintains a contrary opinion, I would maintain that the Reformer eventually rejected any form of *invocation*.

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