Luther's system, in so far as it differed from the Catholic tradition, has two sides, one of which has been stressed more than the other in the picture of his doctrines which is usually given in Protestant countries. This aspect points out that he gave man independence in religious matters; that he deprived the Church of her authority and gave it to the individual; that his concept of faith and salvation is one of subjective individual experience, in which all responsibility is with the individual and none with an authority which could give him what he cannot obtain himself. There are good reasons to praise this side of Luther's and of Calvin's doctrines, since they are one source of the development of political and spiritual freedom in modern society; a development which, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, is inseparably connected with the ideas of Puritanism.

The other aspect of modern freedom is the isolation and powerlessness it has brought for the individual, and this aspect has its roots in Protestantism as much as that of independence. Since this book is devoted mainly to freedom as a burden and danger, the following analysis, being intentionally onesided, stresses that side in Luther's and Calvin's doctrines in which this negative aspect of freedom is rooted: their emphasis on the fundamental evilness and powerlessness of man.

Luther assumed the existence of an innate evilness in man's nature, which directs his will for evil and makes it impossible for any man to perform any good deed on the basis of his nature. Man has an evil and vicious nature ("*naturaliter et inevitabiliter mala et vitiata natura*"). The depravity of man's nature and its complete lack of freedom

to choose the right is one of the fundamental concepts of Luther's whole thinking. In this spirit he begins his comment on Paul's letter to the Romans: "The essence of this letter is: to destroy, to uproot, and to annihilate all wisdom and justice of the flesh, may it appear—in our eyes and in those of others—ever so remarkable and sincere . . . What matters is that our justice and wisdom which unfold before our eyes are being destroyed and uprooted from our heart and from our vain self."[31]

This conviction of man's rottenness and powerlessness to do anything good on his own merits is one essential condition of God's grace. Only if man humiliates himself and demolishes his individual will and pride will God's grace descend upon him. "For God wants to save us not by our own but by extraneous (*fremde*) justice and wisdom, by a justice that does not come from ourselves and does not originate in ourselves but comes to us from somewhere else . . . That is, a justice must be taught that comes exclusively from the outside and is entirely alien to ourselves."[32]

An even more radical expression of man's powerlessness was given by Luther seven years later in his pamphlet "*De servo arbitrio*," which was an attack against Erasmus' defense of the freedom of the will. ". . . Thus the human will is, as it were, a beast between the two. If God sit thereon, it wills and goes where God will; as the Psalm saith, 'I was as a beast before thee, nevertheless I am continually with thee.' (Ps. 73. 22, 23.) If Satan sit thereon, it wills and goes as Satan will. Nor is it in the power of its own will to

[31] Martin Luther, *Vorlesung über den Römerbrief*, Chapter I, i. (My own translation since no English translation exists.)

[32] op. cit., Chapter I. i.

choose, to which rider it will run, nor which it will seek; but the riders themselves contend, which shall have and hold it."[83] Luther declares that if one does not like "to leave out this theme (of free will) altogether (which would be most safe and also most religious) we may, nevertheless, with a good conscience teach that it be used so far as to allow man a 'free will,' not in respect of those who are above him, but in respect only of those beings who are below him . . . God-ward man has no 'free will,' but is a captive, slave, and servant either to the will of God or to the will of Satan."[84] The doctrines that man was a powerless tool in God's hands and fundamentally evil, that his only task was to resign to the will of God, that God could save him as the result of an incomprehensible act of justice —these doctrines were not the definite answer a man was to give who was so much driven by despair, anxiety, and doubt and at the same time by such an ardent wish for certainty as Luther. He eventually found the answer for his doubts. In 1518 a sudden revelation came to him. Man cannot be saved on the basis of his virtues; he should not even meditate whether or not his works were well pleasing to God; but he can have certainty of his salvation if he has faith. Faith is given to man by God; once man has had the indubitable subjective experience of faith he can also be certain of his salvation. The individual is essentially receptive in this relationship to God. Once man receives God's grace in the experience of faith his nature becomes

[83] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will.* Translated by Henry Cole, M.A., B. Erdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1931. p. 74.

[84] *op. cit.* p. 79. This dichotomy—submission to powers above and domination over those below—is, as we shall see later, characteristic of the attitude of the authoritarian character.

changed, since in the act of faith he unites himself with Christ, and Christ's justice replaces his own which was lost by Adam's fall. However, man can never become entirely virtuous during his life, since his natural evilness can never entirely disappear.[85]

Luther's doctrine of faith as an indubitable subjective experience of one's own salvation may at first glance strike one as an extreme contradiction to the intense feeling of doubt which was characteristic for his personality and his teachings up to 1518. Yet, psychologically, this change from doubt to certainty, far from being contradictory, has a causal relation. We must remember what has been said about the nature of this doubt: it was not the rational doubt which is rooted in the freedom of thinking and which dares to question established views. It was the irrational doubt which springs from the isolation and powerlessness of an individual whose attitude toward the world is one of anxiety and hatred. This irrational doubt can never be cured by rational answers; it can only disappear if the individual becomes an integral part of a meaningful world If this does not happen, as it did not happen with Luther and the middle class which he represented, the doubt can only be silenced, driven underground, so to speak, and this can be done by some formula which promises absolute certainty. *The compulsive quest for certainty, as we find with Luther, is not the expression of genuine faith but is rooted in the need to conquer the unbearable doubt.* Luther's solution is one which we find present in many individuals today, who do not think in theological terms: namely to find certainty by elimination of the iso-

[85] Cf. "Sermo de. *duplici institia*" (Luthers Werke, Weimar ed. Vol. II).

lated individual self, by becoming an instrument in the hands of an overwhelmingly strong power outside of the individual. For Luther this power was God and in unqualified submission he sought certainty. But although he thus succeeded in silencing his doubts to some extent, they never really disappeared; up to his last day he had attacks of doubt which he had to conquer by renewed efforts toward submission. Psychologically, faith has two entirely different meanings. It can be the expression of an inner relatedness to mankind and affirmation of life; or it can be a reaction formation against a fundamental feeling of doubt, rooted in the isolation of the individual and his negative attitude toward life. Luther's faith had that compensatory quality.

It is particularly important to understand the significance of doubt and the attempts to silence it, because this is not only a problem concerning Luther's and, as we shall see soon, Calvin's theology, but it has remained one of the basic problems of modern man. Doubt is the starting point of modern philosophy; the need to silence it had a most powerful stimulus on the development of modern philosophy and science. But although many rational doubts have been solved by rational answers, the irrational doubt has not disappeared and cannot disappear as long as man has not progressed from negative freedom to positive freedom. The modern attempts to silence it, whether they consist in a compulsive striving for success, in the belief that unlimited knowledge of facts can answer the quest for certainty, or in the submission to a leader who assumes the responsibility for "certainty"—all these solutions can only eliminate the awareness of doubt. The doubt itself will not

disappear as long as man does not overcome his isolation and as long as his place in the world has not become a meaningful one in terms of his human needs.

What is the connection of Luther's doctrines with the psychological situation of all but the rich and powerful toward the end of the Middle Ages? As we have seen, the old order was breaking down. The individual had lost the security of certainty and was threatened by new economic forces, by capitalists and monopolies; the corporative principle was being replaced by competition; the lower classes felt the pressure of growing exploitation. The appeal of Lutheranism to the lower classes differed from its appeal to the middle class. The poor in the cities, and even more the peasants, were in a desperate situation. They were ruthlessly exploited and deprived of traditional rights and privileges. They were in a revolutionary mood which found expression in peasant uprisings and in revolutionary movements in the cities. The Gospel articulated their hopes and expectations as it had done for the slaves and laborers of early Christianity, and led the poor to seek for freedom and justice. In so far as Luther attacked authority and made the word of the Gospel the center of his teachings, he appealed to these restive masses as other religious movements of an evangelical character had done before him.

Although Luther accepted their allegiance to him and supported them, he could do so only up to a certain point; he had to break the alliance when the peasants went further than attacking the authority of the Church and merely making minor demands for the betterment of their lot. They proceeded to become a revolutionary class which threatened to overthrow all authority and to destroy the foundations

of a social order in whose maintenance the middle class was vitally interested. For, in spite of all the difficulties we earlier described, the middle class, even its lower stratum, had privileges to defend against the demands of the poor; and therefore it was intensely hostile to revolutionary movements which aimed to destroy not only the privileges of the aristocracy, the Church, and the monopolies, but their own privileges as well.

The position of the middle class between the very rich and the very poor made its reaction complex and in many ways contradictory. They wanted to uphold law and order, and yet they were themselves vitally threatened by rising capitalism. Even the more successful members of the middle class were not wealthy and powerful as the small group of big capitalists was. They had to fight hard to survive and make progress. The luxury of the moneyed class increased their feeling of smallness and filled them with envy and indignation. As a whole, the middle class was more endangered by the collapse of the feudal order and by rising capitalism than they were helped.

Luther's picture of man mirrored just this dilemma. Man is free *from* all ties binding him to spiritual authorities, but this very freedom leaves him alone and anxious, overwhelms him with a feeling of his own individual insignificance and powerlessness. This free, isolated individual is crushed by the experience of his individual insignificance. Luther's theology gives expression to this feeling of helplessness and doubt. The picture of man which he draws in religious terms describes the situation of the individual as it was brought about by the current social and economic evolution. The member of the middle class was

as helpless in face of the new economic forces as Luther described man to be in his relationship to God.

But Luther did more than bring out the feeling of insignificance which already pervaded the social classes to whom he preached—he offered them a solution. By not only accepting his own insignificance but by humiliating himself to the utmost, by giving up every vestige of individual will, by renouncing and denouncing his individual strength, the individual could hope to be acceptable to God. Luther's relationship to God was one of complete submission. In psychological terms his concept of faith means: if you completely submit, if you accept your individual insignificance, then the all-powerful God may be willing to love you and save you. If you get rid of your individual self with all its shortcomings and doubts by utmost self-effacement, you free yourself from the feeling of your own nothingness and can participate in God's glory. Thus, while Luther freed people from the authority of the Church, he made them submit to a much more tyrannical authority, that of a God who insisted on complete submission of man and annihilation of the individual self as the essential condition to his salvation. *Luther's "faith" was the conviction of being loved upon the condition of surrender*, a solution which has much in common with the principle of complete submission of the individual to the state and the "leader."

Luther's awe of authority and his love for it appears also in his political convictions. Although he fought against the authority of the Church, although he was filled with indignation against the new moneyed class—part of which was the upper strata of the clerical hierarchy—and although

he supported the revolutionary tendencies of the peasants up to a certain point, yet he postulated submission to worldly authorities, the princes, in the most drastic fashion. "Even if those in authority are evil or without faith, nevertheless the authority and its power is good and from God. . . . Therefore, where there is power and where it flourishes, there it is and there it remains because God has ordained it."[86] Or he says: "God would prefer to suffer the government to exist no matter how evil, rather than allow the rabble to riot, no matter how justified they are in doing so . . . A prince should remain a prince no matter how tyrannical he may be. He beheads necessarily only a few since he must have subjects in order to be a ruler."

The other aspect of his attachment to and awe of authority becomes visible in his hatred and contempt for the powerless masses, the "rabble," especially when they went beyond certain limits in their revolutionary attempts. In one of his diatribes he writes the famous words: "Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him he will strike you, and a whole land with you."[87]

Luther's personality as well as his teachings shows ambivalence toward authority. On the one hand he is overawed by authority—that of a worldly authority and that of a tyrannical God—and on the other hand he rebels against

[86] *Römerbrief*, 13, 1.

[87] "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants" (1525); *Works of Martin Luther*, translation: C. M. Jacobs. A. T. Holman Company, Philadelphia, 1931. Vol. X, IV, p. 411. Cf. H. Marcuse's discussion of Luther's attitude toward freedom in *Autorität und Familie*, F. Alcan, Paris, 1926.

authority—that of the Church. He shows the same ambivalence in his attitude toward the masses. As far as they rebel within the limits he has set he is with them. But when they attack the authorities he approves of, an intense hatred and contempt for the masses comes to the fore. In the chapter which deals with the psychological mechanism of escape we shall show that this simultaneous love for authority and the hatred against those who are powerless are typical traits of the "authoritarian character."

At this point it is important to understand that Luther's attitude towards secular authority was closely related to his religious teachings. In making the individual feel worthless and insignificant as far as his own merits are concerned, in making him feel like a powerless tool in the hands of God, he deprived man of the self-confidence and of the feeling of human dignity which is the premise for any firm stand against oppressing secular authorities. In the course of the historical evolution the results of Luther's teachings were still more far-reaching. Once the individual had lost his sense of pride and dignity, he was psychologically prepared to lose the feeling which had been characteristic of the medieval thinking, namely, that man, his spiritual salvation, and his spiritual aims were the purpose of life; he was prepared to accept a role in which his life became a means to purposes outside of himself, those of economic productivity and accumulation of capital. Luther's views on economic problems were typically medieval, still more so than Calvin's. He would have abhorred the idea that man's life should become a means for economic ends. But while his thinking on economic matters was the traditional one, his emphasis on the nothingness of the individual was in con-

trast and paved the way for a development in which man not only was to obey secular authorities but had to subordinate his life to the ends of economic achievements. In our day this trend has reached a peak in the Fascist emphasis that it is the aim of life to be sacrificed for "higher" powers, for the leader or the racial community.

Calvin's theology, which was to become as important for the Anglo-Saxon countries as Luther's for Germany, exhibits essentially the same spirit as Luther's, both theologically and psychologically. Although he too opposes the authority of the Church and the blind acceptance of its doctrines, religion for him is rooted in the powerlessness of man; self-humiliation and the destruction of human pride are the *Leitmotiv* of his whole thinking. Only he who despises this world can devote himself to the preparation for the future world.[88]

He teaches that we should humiliate ourselves and that this very self-humiliation is the means to reliance on God's strength. "For nothing arouses us to repose all confidence and assurance of mind on the Lord, so much as diffidence of ourselves, and anxiety arising from a consciousness of our own misery."[89]

He preaches that the individual should not feel that he is his own master. "We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions. We are not our own; therefore, let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient

[88] John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by John Allen, Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, Philadelphia, 1928. Book III, Chapter IX, 1.

[89] *op. cit.*, Book III, Chapter II, 23.

for us according to the flesh. We are not our own; therefore, let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours. On the contrary, we are God's; to him, therefore, let us live and die. For, as it is the most devastating pestilence which ruins people if they obey themselves, it is the only haven of salvation not to know or to want anything oneself but to be guided by God who walks before us."[40]

Man should not strive for virtue for its own sake. That would lead to nothing but vanity: "For it is an ancient and true observation that there is a world of vices concealed in the soul of man. Nor can you find any other remedy than to deny yourself and discard all selfish considerations, and to devote your whole attention to the pursuit of those things which the Lord requires of you, and which ought to be pursued for this sole reason, because they are pleasing to Him."

Erich Fromm Escape From Freedom 1941
These are Fromm's thoughts on Luther and the period he lived in. I feel they are relevant and interesting. I have no extensive knowledge of Lutheranism or of current Lutheran Denominations. I merely find Fromm's word interesting and have no desire to offend sincere persons of faith.
T.J.L.