

## A testimony to sure faith and soul freedom

### WHY I AM A PROTESTANT

George L. Earnshaw Jr., in "Watchman-Examiner"

I am a Protestant because, to me, the Protestant witness comes closest to the life Jesus lived and taught. What counts most is not the fact that we call ourselves "Protestants" or "Catholics" but whether we are actually Christian in the most meaningful sense of the world—that is, as followers of Christ. There are thousands of our Roman Catholic friends who are living their lives closer to the pattern set by the Master than many nominal Protestants. However, in spite of the shortcomings of individual Protestants, I would still affirm that the Protestant emphasis comes closer to the example set by our Lord.

The Bible is the source book of my Christian faith. It tells how the bridge of communication from God to man was revealed in the Old Testament and mediated through a community called Israel. In the fullness of time, God chose to reveal His salvation fully through Jesus Christ. He sent His Son Jesus to live among us and show us the way. The method was simple and direct. When we are confronted by Christ and measure ourselves by His tremendous moral stature and inner purity, we become painfully aware of our own unworthiness. The gospel of Christ is, that if we will turn to God and surrender to Him in faith, He will receive us in spite of our own unacceptability. For that we need no other mediator.

In the year 312 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity. After this date a reversal of policy took place. Instead of hating and despising Christianity, the Roman Empire embraced the Christian faith—by Constantine's decree! It was after the reign of Constantine that the Christian church became remodeled after the efficient Roman state, and not too many centuries after the hierarchy began to dominate and dictate to the state.

#### The Emperor's Mantle

The pope, like the emperor after which he was patterned, assumed absolute power. Not only did he have power over the things of this world, but he controlled the life to come. Within the church of that time was the belief that the "saints" had left a rich storehouse of supernatural merit which the pope alone could control and administer. The theory was that if a human being on earth had not earned enough merit on his own, some of this stored-up merit could be applied to him and thus reduce the horrors of purgatory. Unfortunately, when the pope needed money, he devised a scheme of selling this merit which was called "indulgences." For a young Augustinian monk named Martin Luther, this misuse of papal power was the last straw!

From reading and studying his New Testament, Martin Luther had come to the profound realization that one cannot buy his way into God's favor. One can only come into a right relationship with God through an act of faith—a surrender of heart, mind, and soul to Christ. So, in protest, on the afternoon of October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his disagreements to the church door of Wittenburg and touched off the earth-shaking purge of the Roman Catholic Church which resulted in the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther did not start a new church—he merely went back and tried to recapture the message of Jesus. I am a Protestant because I believe with Luther that belief in Jesus is a faith freely given. Personal fellowship with God can be ours without the help of any earthly intermediary.

There is nothing in the life and teachings of Jesus which would give rise to an elaborate ritualism. I find nowhere in His teachings anything which authorizes any

hierarchy, or sacramental system, or praying to saints. There is nothing in His life that sanctions papal infallibility. There is no place in the New Testament where Mary is claimed to be a Saviour along with Jesus.

I am a Protestant because I feel that I must answer to God for my life. As there is personal faith, so there is personal responsibility. I must obey God rather than men. No one, not even a king or a church, can set up a channel and compel God to flow only through that channel. In the realm of religion we must not confuse God with the visible church in the world. I believe in the church. I love the church and have given my whole life to help spread its influence, but I do not define the universal church as having any institutional limits. It is whenever two or three are gathered in Christ's name that you have the church. It is the "fellowship of the redeemed," and it includes all who respond direct to God through Christ—Roman Catholics and Protestants alike.

Martin Luther said that "every man is his own priest." The process of salvation is like a ship going into a lock of a canal. The ship is lifted, not by what the ship does, but by what it receives. The ship is lifted from the inflow of water from a higher level. In this same manner our lives are lifted by the inflowing power of God's grace. It is not the church that saves us, it is the God who dwells within the church but is also above the church.

#### Free Access to God

I am a Protestant because I believe that I shall have to answer to God alone for my life and salvation. When the "Great Day" comes and I must stand face to face with the Almighty, I am convinced that nothing will save me but God's grace.

I am a Protestant because I believe in freedom. I do not want to be put in any ecclesiastical vice. There is something stifling about being held in a mold. There is something spiritually deadening about being told what to believe. When you define religion too narrowly, I feel that you kill some of its creativity and spontaneity.

God acts and works through personalities, and therefore I feel that every individual must be free to respond. The architects of our democracy also shared this conviction, and consequently wrote into our nation's constitution the guarantee for all groups to be free to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. Not only to worship, but to speak, write, and assemble without any outside restraint. Back of these constitutional guarantees was the belief that it is nothing other than arrogance to assume that any one individual or group of human beings could possess or control God's power. We are all limited and fallible human beings; we cannot fully grasp truth in its pure form. At best our understanding is partial and fragmentary. It is never perfect, never complete. Of course this does not take anything away from God. God is perfect and His truth is complete. As Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." So it is with the honest Christian—there is always a sense of tentativeness and humility, and there is the understanding that it takes all of us to express the truth of God. Thomas Jefferson once said, "If the channels of discussion are kept open, truth and right will ultimately prevail."

Freedom is best expressed in a democracy, whether you are talking about a church or a state. Protestants in general—particularly Baptists—have made provision for the democratic process within their churches, where the people choose their own pastor, elect their own officers, and where the principle of voluntarism rather than coercion is the rule.

Equally important with the individual joys is the fact that an atmosphere of freedom is the best guarantee against the tyrannies of Fascism and Communism. The

(Continued on Page 4)