

TWO SPIRITUAL POWERS AND A MAN ON THE FENCE

"Erasmus and Luther, viewed in connection with the Reformation, are the representatives of two great ideas,-of two great parties in their age, and indeed in every age. The one is composed of men of timid prudence; the other, of men of resolution and courage."

J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, D.D., History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, book 1, ch. 8, p. 43.

Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, and Ignatius Loyola, the leader of the counter-Reformation, both were men of resolution and courage. Luther and Ignatius formed movements which have now been at war with each other for centuries. Erasmus, attempting to remain neutral, strove to unite what he saw as the extremes in Christianity.

These three positions personified in the contemporaries Luther, Erasmus, and Loyola, still exist within Christianity today. Let us go to history and find out who these men were and what made them take the positions they did.

MARTIN LUTHER OF WITTENBERG:

"Since His Imperial Majesty wants a plain answer, I shall give him a plain answer without horns or teeth. Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments since I believe neither the popes nor the Councils alone, it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted one another. I am conquered by the passages of the Holy Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is bound in the Word of God. I can not and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to act against one's conscience. Here I stand. I can not do otherwise. God help me. Amen." Luther, cited in Luther the Leader, pp. 117, 118.

Martin Luther was son to John and Margaret Luther. The couple were living at Eisleben when D'Aubigne says:

"...on the 10th November, one hour before midnight, Margaret gave birth to a son. Melancthon often questioned his friend's mother as to the period of his birth. 'I well remember the day and the hour,' replied she, 'but I am not certain about the year.' But Luther's brother James, an honest and upright man, has recorded, that in the opinion of the whole family the future reformer was born on St. Martin's eve, 10th November 1483. And Luther himself wrote on a Hebrew Psalter which is still in existence: 'I was born in the year 1483.'" History of the Reformation, b. 2, ch. 1, p. 50.

During Luther's time the most renowned university in Germany was Erfurt. It was in the summer of 1501 that Luther's name was entered upon the enrolment book of the University of Erfurt. At Erfurt Luther studied law, but then felt called to the priesthood. John Nuelsen says:

"There were eight monasteries at Erfurt representing as many monastic orders. Luther chose the Augustinians because they were known both for the strictness of their rules and for the cultivation of theological learning. Luther's motive in becoming a monk was a purely religious one. He sought peace for his soul." Luther the Leader, p. 30.

It was as a monk in the order of the Augustinians that Martin Luther learned that "the just shall live by faith" and finally found peace for his soul. It was this new revelation that prompted him to nail the 95 theses to the cathedral door at Wittenberg.

Speaking of that time D'Aubigne says:

"Luther's name resounded every where from the pulpits of the Dominicans, who addressed themselves to the passions of the people. They called the bold doctor a madman, a seducer, and a demoniac. His doctrine was cried down as the most horrible heresy. 'Only wait a fortnight, or a month at most,' said they, 'and this notorious heretic will be burnt.' If it had depended solely on the Dominicans, the fate of Jerome and of Huss would soon have been that of the Saxon doctor [Luther] also; but God was watching over him." History of the Reformation, b. 3, ch. 8, p. 109.

Not all of Luther's contemporaries described Luther in the same light as the Dominicans. D'Aubigne quotes some positive descriptions of Luther, even by some who "could not endure his faith."

"The cause of all this dispute [over Luther] is the hatred of the monks towards learning, and the fear they have of seeing their tyranny destroyed. What weapons are they using against Luther? -clamour, cabals, hatred, and libels. The more virtuous a man is, and the greater his attachment to the Gospel, the less is he opposed to Luther. The severity of the bull has aroused the indignation of all good men, and no one can recognize in it the gentleness of a vicar of Christ. Two only out of all the universities, have condemned Luther; and they have only condemned him not proved him in the wrong." Erasmus, cited in History of the Reformation, b. 6, ch. 11, pp. 213, 214.

"Most excellent emperor [Charles V], you are on the point of destroying us, and yourself with us. What is proposed to be done in this affair of Luther's, except to ruin our liberty, and to crush your power? ...The priests alone set themselves against Luther, because he has opposed their enormous power, their scandalous luxury, and their depraved lives; and because he has pleaded, in behalf of Christ's doctrine, for the liberty of our country, and for purity of morals.

"O emperor! discard from your presence these Roman ambassadors, bishops, and cardinals, who desire to prevent all reformation Do not surrender your sovereign majesty to those who desire to trample it under foot! Have pity on us! Do not drag yourself and the whole nation into one common destruction ...Alas! we had hoped that you would deliver us from the Roman yoke, and overthrow the tyranny of the pontiff. God grant that the future may be better than these beginnings!" The knight Ulrich of Hutten, in a letter to Charles V., cited in Ibid., b. 7, ch. 6, pp. 233, 234.

"The whole world is lying in the thickest darkness. This man alone sees the light." A priest named Bugenhagen, cited in Ibid., p. 233.

"I observe that the greater their evangelical piety and the purer their morals, the less are men opposed to Luther. His life is praised even by those who cannot endure his faith." Duke George of Saxony, cited in Ibid., b. 3, ch. 6, p. 101.

"Brother Martin Luther is a very fine genius, and all that is said against him is mere monkish jealousy." Pope Leo X, cited in Ibid., p. 102.

"...having received and read the theses in his parsonage, shook his head and said in Low German: 'Dear Brother Martin! if you succeed in overthrowing this purgatory and all these paper-dealers, you will be a fine fellow indeed!'" An aged priest of Hexter in Westphalia, cited in Ibid., p.103

"[Luther] supplies the place of all my friends; he is greater and more admirable for me than I can dare express. You know how Alcibiades admired Socrates; but I admire Luther after another and in a Christian fashion... Every time I contemplate Luther, I find him constantly greater than himself." Philip Melancthon, cited in *Ibid.*, b. 7, ch. 6, p. 233.

Ellen G. White, speaking through inspiration, spoke thus of Luther:

"Foremost among those who were called to lead the church from the darkness of popery into the light of a purer faith, stood Martin Luther. Zealous, ardent, and devoted, knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for religious faith but the Holy Scriptures, Luther was the man for his time; through him God accomplished a great work for the reformation of the church and the enlightenment of the world." *The Great Controversy*, p. 120.

"Oh that there were seen in this day, so deep abhorrence of self, so great humiliation of soul before God, and so earnest a faith when light is given, as were manifested by Martin Luther! True conviction of sin is now rarely experienced, superficial conversions abound, and Christian experience is dwarfed and spiritless. And why is this? Because of the false and fatal education given by parents to their children, and by ministers to their people." *Signs of the Times*, 5-31-83 (chapter entitled "Martin Luther-His Character and early Life").

John Nuelsen quotes one of the most renowned Latinists of Luther's day, Peter Mosellanus. Mosellanus described Luther as follows:

"...middle stature, his body thin and so wasted by care and study that nearly all his bones may be counted. He is in the prime of life. His voice is clear and melodious. His learning and his knowledge of the Scriptures are so extraordinary that he has nearly everything at his finger's ends. Greek and Hebrew he understands sufficiently well to give his judgment on interpretations. For conversation he has a rich store of subjects at his command; a vast forest of thoughts and words is at his disposal. He is polite and clever. There is nothing stoical, nothing supercilious about him, and he understands how to adapt himself to different persons and surroundings. He is always lively, cheerful, and at his ease, and has a pleasant countenance, however hard his enemies may threaten him, so that one can not but believe that Heaven is with him in his great undertaking." Cited in *Luther the Leader*, pp. 81, 82.

INIGO LOPEZ [IGNATIUS LOYOLA] OF SPAIN:

"Let us suffer everything, rather than surrender." Loyola, cited in *History of the Reformation*, b. 5, ch. 1, p. 352.

Inigo was born into a noble family, eight years after Luther. He had been raised in the court of Ferdinand the Catholic and learned the art of chivalry.

When the governor of Navarre was at war with the governor of France, Inigo and a few nobles were asked to defend the fortress Pampeluna, within Navarre, from the French. The nobles seeing the superiority of the French troops, made the decision to withdraw.

D'Aubigne says it was Inigo who "conjured" them to fight against the French. "Let us suffer everything, rather than surrender," said Inigo. However, when he found them unmoved he accused them of "cowardice" and "perfidy" and went himself alone into the fortress. *The History of the Reformation* describes the battle that took place:

"Upon this the French began to batter the walls with their powerful machines, and soon attempted an assault. Inigo's courage and exhortations inspirited the Spaniards, who repelled the assailants with arrows, swords, and battle-axes. Inigo fought at their head: standing on the ramparts, his eyes glistening with rage, the young cavalier brandished his sword, and the enemy fell beneath his blows.

"Suddenly a ball struck the wall close by him; a splinter from the stone wounded him severely in the right leg, and the ball recoiling with the violence of the blow, broke his left leg. Inigo fell senseless.

"The garrison surrendered immediately; and the French, admiring the courage of their youthful opponent, had him taken in a litter to his parents in the castle of Loyola. In this lordly mansion, for which he afterwards derived his name [Ignatius Loyola] Inigo had been born...

"On these strong walls [of the fortress Pampeluna] was kindled an enthusiasm destined afterwards to oppose the enthusiasm of the reformer [Luther], and to breathe into the papacy a new spirit of energy, devotedness, and control. Pampeluna was destined to be the cradle, as it were, of the rival of the Wittenberg monk." Ibid., pp. 352, 353.

During his recuperation, Loyola took up the legends of Flowers of the Saints. These fanciful books so inspired Loyola that D'Aubigne says:

"As soon as his health was restored, he determined to bid adieu to the world He departed alone, in great secrecy, for the solitary dwellings that the hermits of St. Benedict had hewn out of the rocks of Montserrat. Impelled not by a sense of his sins or his need of Divine grace, but by a desire to become a 'knight of the Virgin,' and of obtaining renown by mortifications and pious works." Ibid, p. 353.

LUTHER AND LOYOLA:

Sometime later Loyola went to the little town of Manresa where he stayed for ten months in a cave. The History of the Reformation describes the state of Inigo at this time and how his experience contrasted with that of Luther's. D'Aubigne says:

"Strange thoughts then entered into his [Loyola's] heart. Finding no consolation in confession or in the various ordinances of the Church, he began, like Luther, to doubt their efficiency.

"Was there, at that time, any difference between the monk of Manresa [Loyola] and the monk of Erfurth [Luther]? Unquestionably, - in secondary points: but the state of their souls was the same. Both were deeply sensible of the multitude of their sins. Both were seeking for reconciliation with God, and longed to have the assurance [of being right with God] in their hearts...

"These two great men of the sixteenth century, these founders of two spiritual powers which for three centuries have been warring together, were at this moment brothers; and perhaps, if they had met, Luther and Loyola would have embraced, and mingled their tears and their prayers.

"But from this hour the two monks were destined to follow entirely different paths. Inigo, instead of feeling that his guilt was sent to drive him to the foot of the cross, persuaded himself that these inward reproaches proceeded not from God, but from the devil; and he resolved never more to think of his sins, to erase them from his memory,

and bury them in eternal oblivion. Luther turned toward Christ, Loyola only fell back upon himself.

"Visions came ere long to confirm Inigo in the conviction at which he had arrived. His own resolves had become a substitute for the grace of the Lord; his own imaginings supplied the place of God's Word. He had looked upon the voice of God in his conscience as the voice of the devil; and accordingly the remainder of his history represents him as given up to the inspirations of the spirit of darkness.

"Luther, on taking his doctor's degree, had pledged his oath to Holy Scripture, and the only infallible authority of the Word of God had become the fundamental principle of the Reformation. Loyola, at this time, bound himself to dreams and visions; and chimerical apparitions became the principle of his life and faith." Ibid., p 354.

Ignatius Loyola founded the order called the Jesuits or Society of Jesus on August 15, 1534. The order was sanctioned by Pope Paul II, September 27, 1540.

Ignatius created his Spiritual Exercises as a tool in becoming the master of the imagination of man. Once the imagination was mastered the will and reason was also mastered. Forces were then imbued which made the individual virtually unable to resist it's impulse.

Talking of the Jesuits Ellen White says:

"The first triumphs of the Reformation past, Rome summoned new forces, hoping to accomplish its destruction. At this time, the order of the Jesuits was created, the most cruel, unscrupulous, and powerful of all the champions of popery....The Great Controversy, p. 234.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM.

"It is dangerous to speak, and it is dangerous to be silent." Erasmus cited in Ibid., b. 1, ch. 8, p. 44.

Not all in Luther's day had the thoughts of Loyola. There was yet another thinking not of the Papacy and yet separate from Luther. This thought can be seen in the man, Erasmus.

D'Aubigne in contrasting the position of Erasmus with that of Luther says:

"While Luther desired a thorough reform, Erasmus, a friend of half-measures, was endeavouring to obtain concessions from the hierarchy that would unite the extreme parties. The vacillations and inconsistency of Erasmus disgusted Luther. 'You desire to walk upon eggs without crushing them,' said the latter, 'and among glasses without breaking them...'" Ibid., b. 11, ch. 9, p. 413.

"At the epoch of the Reformation, Erasmus was the leader of the moderates; he imagined himself to be so, but without just cause; for when truth and error meet face to face, justice lies not between them. He was the chief of that philosophical and academical party which, for ages, had attempted to correct Rome, but had never succeeded; he was the representative of human wisdom, but that wisdom was too weak to batter down the high places of Popery. It needed that wisdom from God, which men often call foolishness, but at whose voice mountains crumble into dust. Erasmus would neither throw himself into the arms of Luther, nor sit at the pope's feet. He hesitated, and often wavered between these two powers, attracted at one time towards Luther, then suddenly repelled in the direction of the pope." Ibid., b. 6, ch. 6, p. 213.

Marcus Dods says:

"Certainly in any endeavour to estimate the character of Erasmus, we must take into account his nervous temperament. It was this which made him so deeply sensitive to physical pain, so averse either to its infliction or endurance. It was this which made him at once intensely alive to the current of public affairs, and shy of the responsibility and danger which beset a leader of opinion." Erasmus (and other essays), p. 14.

At the young age of nine, Erasmus was left an orphan. He was a priest's son and had been named after the fourth-century bishop, Saint Erasmus. "Desiderius" means "beloved" in Latin. Erasmus was sent to an Augustinian monastery and in 1492 the Bishop of Cambrai made him a priest. Marcus Dods says:

"In Erasmus's own letter to Grunnius, -a letter vitalized by indignation, -we have a moving sketch of his youthful difficulties and troubles, of the unscrupulous arts used to entrap him into the monastic life, and of his unfitness for such a life by reason of his delicate constitution, which disabled him from enduring the smell of fish without a headache, and from getting to sleep again after rising for service during the night. In the Colloquies, he makes use of his own college experiences to expose some of the grievances under which students at that time laboured, and which, as he tells us, drove some to madness, and doomed others to leprosy or blindness for life. We see him in the college Montaigu, rising from a filthy bed, coughing out of his throat the damp which had distilled from the moldy walls, and shivering out in the darkness and frost to break the ice from the well and draw the fetid water, scarcely distinguishable from the pestilential sewers that flowed or stagnated close by. By means of his letters it is easy to trace him indomitably fighting his way out of ignorance, poverty, obscurity, ... publishing books at almost every printing office in Europe, everywhere making some friends and many enemies, always learning and always making startling use of his learning, until he stood the recognized first scholar of the world." Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

Perhaps the greatest thing that Erasmus did for the reformation was to publish his Greek and Latin version of the New Testament. Of this text Ellen White says:

"Wycliffe's Bible had been translated from the Latin text [Latin Vulgate], which contained many errors ... In 1516, a year before the appearance of Luther's theses, Erasmus had published his Greek and Latin version of the New Testament. Now for the first times the Word of God was printed in the original tongue. In this work many errors of former versions were corrected, and the sense was more clearly rendered." The Great Controversy, p. 245.

"He [Erasmus] showed that they must not even rest contented with the Vulgate, which swarmed with errors; and he rendered an incalculable service to the truth by publishing his critical edition of the Greek text of the New Testament - a text as little known in the West as if it had never existed... 'It is my desire,' said Erasmus, on publishing his New Testament, 'to lead back that cold disputer of words, styled theology, to its real fountain. Would to God that this work may bear as much fruit to Christianity as it has cost me toil and application!'" History of the Reformation, b. 1, ch. 8, p. 42.

It was Erasmus' New Testament which was used for our authorized King James Version. The translators of the King James Version wrote in their dedication to King James:

"...the zeal of your majesty toward the house of God doth not slack or go backward but is more and more kindled, manifesting itself abroad in the farthest parts of

Christendom by writing a defence of the truth which hath given such a blow to that man of sin as will not be healed."

In describing the writings of Erasmus, Marcus Dods says:

"There is no appearance of effort; he seems to carry a light which makes obvious to him what other men have probed after. He finds natural utterance for what all other men have been trying to say. Under the smile that ripples everywhere on his page, and that now and again breaks into uncontrollable laughter, he is still profoundly in earnest, and each sentence is alive with a real purpose....

"He [Erasmus] excites contempt, not indignation, against the objects of his satire. He laughs ill-doers out of countenance, and leaves it to others to use the lash. Neither is he a buffoon who makes fun of everything, nor a mocker who sneers at what is good as well as at what is corrupt; but he is discriminating, and merits the praise which has been accorded with less justice to another, that 'no satirist has to answer for fewer attacks on what is valuable.'" Ibid., pp. 33, 38.

However, when it came to the reformation and involvement with doctrine, Erasmus, took a mild position. D'Aubigne describes Erasmus' desire for peace and unity:

"'A disadvantageous peace,' Erasmus used to say, 'is better than the most righteous war....' He thought-and how many Erasmuses have lived since, and are living even in our own days! he thought that a reformation which might shake the - Church would endanger its overthrow...

"'Those who bring the sea into new beds,' said he, 'often attempt a work that deceives their expectations; for the terrible element, once let in, does not go where they would wish it, but rushes whithersoever it pleases, and causes great devastation. Be that as it may,' added he, 'let troubles be everywhere avoided! It is better to put up with ungodly princes, than to increase the evil by any change.'

"But the courageous portion of his contemporaries were prepared with an answer. History had sufficiently proved that a free display of the truth and a decided struggle against falsehood could alone ensure the victory.

"If they had compromised, with the stratagem of policy and the wiles of the papal court, truth would have been extinguished in its first glimmerings.

"Had not conciliatory measures been employed for ages? Had not council after council been involved to reform the Church? All had been unavailing. Why now pretend to repeat an experiment that had so often failed?...

"The leading principle of Erasmus was: 'Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself.' This principle is good, and Luther acted upon it. But when the enemies of the light endeavour to extinguish it, or to wrest the torch from the hand of him who bears it, must we (for the sake of peace) allow him to do so? Must we not resist the wicked?...

"He [Erasmus] had not the strength of faith which animated Luther. While the latter was ever prepared to lay down his life for the truth, Erasmus candidly observed, 'Let others aspire to martyrdom: as for me, I do not think myself worthy of such an honour. I fear that if any disturbance were to arise, I should imitate Peter in his fall.'" History of the Reformation, b. 1, ch. 8, pp. 43, 44.

Marcus Dods also describes Erasmus as one who shrank from conflict. Of Erasmus he says:

"Often displaying a quick resentment, and sometimes as abusive in his language as Calvin, he was never vindictive. He was almost too ready to be reconciled to those who had injured him; in this, as in all matters, shrinking from disagreeable personal collisions, and from everything which would perturb him." Erasmus, p. 14.

Luther, in contrast to Erasmus, had an unchangeable nature. Luther said:

"If you do not contend with your whole heart against the impious government of the pope, you cannot be saved. Whoever takes delight in the religion and worship of popery, will be eternally lost in the world to come. If you reject it, you must expect to incur every kind of danger, and even to lose your lives. But it is far better to be exposed to such perils in this world than to keep silence! So long as I live, I will denounce to my brethren the sore and the plague of Babylon, for fear that many who are with us should fall back like the rest into the bottomless pit!" Cited in History of the Reformation, b. 6, ch. 5, p. 208.

Erasmus' position was not an easy one. Erasmus said in a letter to Zwingle:

"I shall not be unfaithful to the cause of Christ, at least so far as the age will permit me." Ibid., b. 11, ch. 9, p. 414.

Erasmus was not without a struggle in trying to remain neutral. Many important people of Erasmus' day, put pressure on him to speak against Luther. D'Aubigne says:

"In proportion as he beheld Rome rising up against the friends of the Reformation, he prudently retreated. He was applied to from all quarters; the pope, the emperor, kings, princes, scholars, and even his most intimate friends, entreated him to write against the reformer. 'No work,' wrote the pope, 'can be more acceptable to God, and worthier of yourself and of your genius.'

"Erasmus long resisted these solicitations; he could not conceal from himself that the cause of the reformers was the cause of religion as well as of letters. Besides, Luther was an adversary with whom every one feared to try his strength, and Erasmus already imagined he felt the quick and vigorous blows of the Wittenberg champion....

"He [Erasmus] was fond of glory, and already men were accusing him of fearing Luther, and of being too weak to answer him; he was accustomed to the highest seat, and the little monk of Wittenberg had dethroned the mighty philosopher of Rotterdam." Ibid., pp. 414, 415.

In response to the appeals for him to write against Luther, Erasmus said:

"I have refused the bribes which men in power have offered me, that I should write against Luther; and I would rather lose what I have than write to please any one contrary to my own conviction. It is no vulgar crime to betray the Gospel of Christ for money. But I have declined to give my name to Luther's party, both for many other reasons, and also because there occur in his books some passages I do not understand, and some which I cannot approve of; and especially because I have become aware, that in his party there are men whose character and efforts are very far from being in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel." Cited in Erasmus, p. 53.

"He [Erasmus] would involve himself with no party; he would identify himself with no movement which he could not himself control, with no opinions which might demand from him unwelcome action To Melancthon he complains of Luther's violence, and asks how many of the princes and ecclesiastics against whom he has written, have been turned by his word to the pursuit of holiness. He believed that milder measures should first have been tried; physicians do not resort to severe measures till milder treatment

has failed. He refuses to listen to those who plead that such a course was useless, and bids them remember the Greek proverb, that it is better to let an evil alone than to apply unsuitable remedies." Ibid., pp. 14, 15, 53, 54.

Erasmus could not remain neutral forever. The point came when Erasmus decided to write against Luther. This came as a result of a communication from Luther, the man of strife, asking for peace. It was Erasmus the man of peace who began the strife.

LUTHER AND ERASMUS

In April 1524 Luther wrote to Erasmus:

"You have not yet received from the Lord the courage necessary to walk with us against the papists. We put up with your weakness. If learning flourishes: if by its means the treasures of Scripture are opened to all; this is a gift which God has bestowed on us through you. Our thanksgivings ascend to heaven! But do not forsake the task that has been imposed upon you, and pass over to our camp. No doubt your eloquence and genius might be very useful to us but since you are wanting in courage, remain where you are. But on the other hand, my dear Erasmus, refrain from scattering over us with such profusion that pungent salt which you know so well how to conceal under the flowers of rhetoric; for it is more dangerous to be slightly wounded by Erasmus than to be ground to powder by all the papists put together. Be satisfied to remain a spectator of our tragedy; and publish no books against me; and for my part, I will write none against you." History of the Reformation, b. 11, ch. 9, p. 414.

It was this letter that Erasmus received as the bitterest of insults and prompted his action in attacking Luther. In doing this Erasmus selected the doctrine of free will.

Erasmus' attack on Luther gained him the fame and applause he desired. D'Aubigne quotes Erasmus as saying:

"The Pope,' wrote he [Erasmus] with childish vanity to an intimate friend, at the period he declared himself the opponent of Luther, 'has sent me a diploma full of kindness and honourable testimonials. His secretary declares that this is an unprecedented honour and that the pope dictated every word himself.'" Cited in Ibid., b. 1, ch. 8, p. 43.

However, in the end Erasmus regretted the step he had taken. Again D'Aubigne quotes him as saying:

"Why was I not permitted to grow old in the garden of the Muses?' exclaimed he. 'Here am I, at sixty, driven into the arena, and holding the cestus and the net of the gladiator, instead of the lyre!- I am aware,' wrote he to the Bishop of Rochester, 'that in writing upon free will, I have gone beyond my sphere ... You congratulate me upon my triumphs! Ah! I know not that I triumph. The faction (i. e. the Reformation) is spreading daily. Was it then fated, that at my time of life I should be transformed from a friend of the Muses into a wretched gladiator!'" Cited in Ibid., b. 11, ch. 9, p. 415.

Marcus Dods expresses his view on Erasmus' neutral position. He says:

'But his [Erasmus] work was not the formation of doctrinal opinion or belief. His best friends must be rather ashamed of the weakness of this side of his mind....

"And the reader of Erasmus is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that this carelessness about doctrinal theology led him sometimes to utter opinions which at other times he disavowed....

"The question that results from the consideration of Erasmus' neutral attitude is this: Ought a man in every great conflict to take a side? To say that a man must in every such case take a side, implies that of two sides, one must be right and the other wrong, which is frequently not the case, the truth being almost equally distributed between them. But in the instance before us, it will be said, that one side was right, or so much nearer the right than the other, that it was a weakness not to take a side." Erasmus, pp. 63, 64, 65.

How sad Erasmus took this neutral attitude. How much greater would have been his end if he had made the cause of the reformers his own. However, the blame for the darkness of the Dark Ages can not be cast on Erasmus. As Marcus Dods says:

"They who drove Luther out of the church, and listened to no remonstrance from within it, are the parties responsible as well for the bloodshed, misery, and revolution which followed the Reformation, as for the ignorance and superstition which in Catholic countries have become identified with Christianity. Erasmus, as we have said, was mistaken, but his was the error of a man who thought too well of human nature. He expected inveterate abuses to be removed by those whose interest it was to maintain them. He expected that a community, which had grown to be a mighty political institution, would accept the position of the Apostolic Church, and at the voice of his persuasion, meekly return to her youthful and primitive ways ... He miscalculated the strength of his weapon, and omitted to consider that the masses of the people must have an outward movement to quicken and fix their inward convictions.... `Those whom temperament or culture has made the partisans of calm order, cannot attune progress to the stately and harmonious march which would best please them, and which they are perhaps right in thinking would lead with most security to the goal.'" Ibid. pp. 66, 67.

ERASMUS'S END:

What was the final outcome of Erasmus? D'Aubigne portrays it as thus:

"He was as the dying man who was asked by the devil, What do you believe? The poor man, fearful of being caught in some heresy, if he should make a confession of his faith, replied, What the Church believes. The devil demanded, And what does the Church believe?- What I believe.- Once more he was questioned, What do you believe?- and the expiring man answered once more, What the Church believes!

"Thus Duke George of Saxony, Luther's mortal enemy, having received an equivocal answer to a question he had put to Erasmus, said to him, `My dear Erasmus, wash me the fur without wetting it!' Secundus Curio, in one of his works, describes two heavens-the Papal and the Christian. He found Erasmus in neither, but discovered him revolving between both in never-ending orbits.

"Such was Erasmus. How different would he have been had he abandoned self, and sacrificed all for the truth! But... after having deserted the Reformation for Rome, when he saw that these two things could not go hand in hand; -he lost ground with all parties The fanatical partisans of the papacy felt all the hurt he had done them, and would not pardon him. Furious monks loaded him with abuse from the pulpits: they called him a second Lucian, -a fox that had laid waste the Lord's vineyard.

"A doctor of Constance had hung the portrait of Erasmus in his study, that he might be able at any moment to spit in his face.-But, on the other hand, Erasmus, deserting the standard of the Gospel, lost the affection and esteem of the noblest men of the age in which he lived, and was forced to renounce, there can be little doubt, those heavenly consolations which God sheds in the heart of those who act as good soldiers of Christ. This at least seems to be indicated by those bitter tears, those painful vigils, that broken sleep, that tasteless food, that loathing of the study of the Muses, (formerly his only consolation), those saddened features, that pale face, those sorrowful and downcast eyes, that hatred of existence which he calls `a cruel life,' and those longings after death, which he describes to his friends. Unhappy Erasmus!" History of the Reformation, b. 1, ch. 8, pp. 44, 45.

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