

# **Causes of the Protestant Reformation and the Concept of Freedom viewed by the Great Reformers: Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. An Orthodox Vision**

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## **Abstract:**

The goal of this study is to objectively investigate the real causes of the Protestant Reformation's breakout in the West, and to discover the importance of freedom in the great reformers thinking, such as Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. What are the consequences of this theological and social desideratum in their revolting and organizing action and to what extent the theological thinking and the entire Western culture are tributary to the thinking of these „new road openers”? The present text also tries to outline an exercise of freedom and to analyse this concept in the context of the Protestant Reformation, its causes and its effects. How and in what ways was possible for the great reformers of the sixteenth century to appear? What are the premises of their thoughts and orientations, and what are the specific characteristics of their respective theology? What are the implications and what role has the notion of freedom played in their work and, above all, in their respective activity?

## **Keywords:**

Protestant Reformation, Protestant Church, freedom, faith.

## **Introduction**

Considering the 500 years anniversary of the Reformation's breakout in the West of Europe, the intent of this study is to put us in the position of an exercise of freedom in the context of the Reformation, of its causes and its consequences.

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How and in what ways could the great reformers of the sixteenth century appear: Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli? What are the premises of their thinking and positions? How and in what way did their theological thinking take its impulse? What are the consequences and what role has the notion of freedom played in their work and activity? On one hand, Orthodoxy may at any time refer to the Brâncoveni Saints and their martyrdom as an edifying event, while on the other, referring to Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, or Ulrich Zwingli on a matter of faith, is of course a valid approach, but obsolete.

In the Orthodox spirit, we try to orientate ourselves towards the past, we try to identify the depths of a system of thinking, living and faith, in relation to the issue of freedom. In the spirit of the language culture that the West propagates as a latest discovery of our age, we can say that the three reformers have been promoters of ideas that have transformed the culture and social life of future generations into a world where religion has become a personal option and the term *Protestant* has gradually acquired an anachronistic meaning in the context of diversity of opinions, viewpoints and orientation.

### **The Context of the Western World before Reformation**

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Reformation is in a „nascent state”<sup>1</sup> (*status nascens*), that the above point of view paradoxically does not disengage from. In an exercise of contemporary cultural arithmetic, we will be able to deduce a transitive relationship in a nihilistic exercise of Western culture, which disengages from its medieval connotations through the Renaissance, in order to give place to the Reformation, which „is a resumption of nihilism, even if the old medieval asceticism is substituted in the Puritan society by intermundane asceticism.”<sup>2</sup> The Reformation also disengages from the Counter-Reformation, for the latter to find its dissolution through the Protestant capitalism<sup>3</sup>, defeated during the eighteenth century by Romanticism - whose nihilist design wanted to revive the medieval age, ending in an apotheosis in Nietzsche’s discourse and thus reconfirming its valences, assuming as a rule of cultural morphology „the perpetual denial of values, for this alone could lead to their reversal in order to establish

<sup>1</sup> I.P. Culianu, referring to Fr. Alberoni, defines *the nascent phase (status nascens)*, being represented by a ”moment of discontinuity, either institutionally, or under the aspect of the everyday life... In order to create a nascent phase something has to corrode the former phase.” Gianpaolo Romanato, Mario Lombardo, Ioan Petru Culianu, *Religie și putere*, Ed. Nemira, Bucharest, 1996, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> G. Romanato, M. Lombardo, I. P. Culianu, *Religie și putere*, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, Penguin Books, New York, 2002.

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higher values”<sup>4</sup>, in this case to create *man as the measure of all things* (Protagoras of Abdera, 490-420 BC)<sup>5</sup>, for which modernity and diversity of opinions are the cause and the effect.

The Middle Ages, viewed from the outside of the above mentioned paradigm, in the Orthodox spirit, was not a dark period of history, compared to which the Renaissance and, later on, the Humanism, the Reformation, would receive a salutary aura. The Middle Ages saved, by the power of the example, Christianity (from that moment on the latter being free of consciousness and feeling) from the migratory roller. It has imposed to barbarians from everywhere, whose strength, as demonstrated in history, was highly superior, destructive and disconcerting, the Christian order<sup>6</sup> by providential means.

Moreover, it was explained to the Western Christian world, capable for the first time in history of being perceived as such, by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), how man’s rehabilitation in front of God had occurred: thus, if the world of the Old Testament failed to manage the problem of the *offense* brought by the original sin, sanctioned by the banishment from Paradise, unable to compensate by its imperfect nature in relation to God, the world remains in a perpetual state of indebtedness, incapable of reconciliation by the fact that in the absence of something to belong to – man never had anything that does not belong to God – he cannot provide a *counter act* to restore his honour. Therefore only God is the One who can make this happen, and man the only one that must start the initiative of making things straight again. In other words, „man has to give satisfaction, but the latter could be offered rightly only by someone who is at the same time God and

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<sup>4</sup> I.P. Culianu sees the last link of the nihilist in life as “a pure commercial accident, useful or not to the extent that it manages more or less to develop trade. Man is either a trader, one who knows how to use his life, or a negotiable entity, that is, something that will serve the purposes of Commerce anyway, but one the idol can live without. One’s passion for something is only useful to the extent it is well-targeted, that is, it brings good commercial results. Faith, to the extent it can be exploited. Hope, because it is subordinated to faith. Death, because it increases it... Any complaint must be suppressed because it is not worthy of a trader. Any regret must be silenced because it is not profitable. Any criticism must be reasonable and follow a predictable purpose, so the money silences it.” G. Romanato, M. Lombardo, I. P. Culianu, *Religie și putere*, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics. Contemporary Issues and Options*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolae Iorga considers the supremacy of the medieval world in its power to impose itself as a cultural model for the migratory era, through the fact “it had only one legal master: the emperor who ... had his own judge who, despite his worst weaknesses and defeats, has to be invoked in the final rounds, the representative on earth of the only “king who rules”, Christ. That is why the Middle Ages were able to present the most agitated adventures without falling into chaos, in that chaos where, on the contrary, we live.” Nicolae Iorga, *Generalități cu privire la studiile istorice*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 1999, p. 170.

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man. (...) The Son was the One who, for our sake and for our salvation, decided to embody as a descendant of Adam and Eve and to spontaneously offer his death to the Father, a death he was not submitted to, the due satisfaction for the offense from his keen fellows.”<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, the medieval man took an explicable attitude, rather in ecstasy than exuberant, rather contemplative for the miracle of the After Life, than willing to reason, centered around the monasteries, dedicated to saving biblical texts, to copying the manuscripts, to study and to the explanations that would spread and propagate the miracle of the renewed creation and the motive of God’s will.

Medieval perspectives become more complicated as soon as Christianity became an instrument of power maneuvered as such alternatively by the *Church* and the *Palace*, manipulating the masses through a liturgy in Latin, which the Church’s representatives did not understand in some cases. Priests were either subjected to the feudal noble, or devoted to the episcopal struggle for wealth and influence, sometimes far from the precepts of religion in which they hardly recognized them selves.

### **The Causes of the Reformation**

Reform occurs in such a context of a great extent and complexity, breaking out through the personal action of several individuals<sup>8</sup>. The prerequisites of the Reformation are not merely simple debates on religious themes. Its causes go beyond the field of faith, and the means are also of great importance for the current study.

By turn, the framework where the protest is propagating itself is, broadly, the following: at a *political* level, the process of centralization opposes the Holy Roman Empire, whose trace and fame embrace the field of shadows, a France with accentuated government powers, under Louis XI (1423-1483), a Spain that Ferdinand (1452-1516) and Isabella (1451-1504) consecrated as a local power (whose hegemony includes Sicily, Naples, Sardinia and Navarra) and last but not least, a non-existent Germany, divided among princes, because „each feudal unit had its estates, its court without appeal, its territorial army, its own system of finance, a large measure of control over its clergy, its own foreign policy”<sup>9</sup>, where the Church had vast territories through the episcopates, the Pope taking full advantage of the special situation of the German provinces. Kings like Frederick III (1440-1493) or

<sup>7</sup> John Bossy, *Creștinismul în Occident 1400 - 1700*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion und Kultur. Europa 1500 – 1800*, Vandenhoeck& Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2000, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> George V. Jourdan, *The Movement Towards Catholic Reform in the Early sixteenth Century*, BiblioBazaar, Charleston, South Carolina, 2009, p. 134.

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Maximilian (1493-1519) fail to manage the affairs of the Holy Empire, losing the power, first to nobility and kings, and then in wars for the conquest of Constantinople and in the efforts to impose on the stage of history as legendary characters, their only surviving title being given by the scribes employed by the court in order to exaggeratedly magnify his fame, „The German Hercules”.

*Socially*, mortality is high. Famine and epidemics alternate with periods of „economic progress” at frequent intervals, with life expectancy at around 40, people in their seventies being considered rare examples of survivors. Society is divided into townspeople and peasants, and at the country side witchcraft and occult practices replace incomprehensible liturgical language. The Church took in charge, in this context, the guidance of all believers (including the monarch) whose head, the Pope, is the only leader and mediator on the path of salvation, as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) postulates in *De Regimine Principum (De regno)*: „The administration of this kingdom, therefore, is entrusted not to earthly kings, but to priests, so that spiritual and earthly things may be kept distinct; and in particular to the Supreme Priest, the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff, to whom all the kings of the Christian people should be subject, as if to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself”<sup>10</sup>.

However, the move suffers from the *misunderstanding* of the message by the monarchy<sup>11</sup>, which will lead to the foundation of the Anglican Church, as the papacy itself was unable to find the needed coherence of its mission. For a long time, Western Christianity is abandoned to disputes and schism, the peak being reached by the Council declaring Pope Benedict XIII Antipope (1394-1423) from Avignon and Gregory XII (1406-1415) from Rome as heretics, then by the choice of another pope, in the person of Alexander the Great Antipope (1409-1410). But the two did not give up the pontifical seat, therefore, immediately after Pope Alexander’s death, John XXIII Antipope (1410-1415) was elected in Pisa, the West facing a tri-cephalic papacy at that time.

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum (De regno)*, in Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Henry VIII, King of England (1509–1547), failing to obtain from Rome the dissolution of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, breaks the ties with the papacy. In 1534, the British Parliament, by virtue of the Act of Supremacy, declares: ”Albeit the King’s Majesty justly and rightfully is and oweth to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their Convocations, yet nevertheless for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and for increase of virtue in Christ’s religion within this realm of England, and to repress and extirp all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses heretofore used in the same; be it enacted by authority of this present Parliament, that the King our Sovereign Lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England, called *Anglicana Ecclesia*...”. Geralk Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 1994, p. 113-114.

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From the *economic* point of view, in the West, the heavy burden of taxes of all kinds weighed on the peasantry from the sixteenth century, the tithe due to the Church being only one of the most burdensome taxes. On the other hand, princes coveted church properties, princes and peasants both enjoying every opportunity to get rid of the influence of Rome, thus obtaining a better life and opposing to „the Italians”, whom „the Germans” considered as corrupted, indulging in luxury and perversions of all kinds.

In this general context, the Reformation was not only a religious movement, but also a political, social and economic pretext, for if it was said that „the essence of Protestantism consisted of an assertion of the right of the individual as such to think things out for himself and to reach conclusions without deference to any kind of authority, we can as well say that, „a Protestant is a person who abides faithfully by the reason or unreason that is in him, in defiance of thrones, principalities and powers that be. A Protestant is a person who claims a right to speak of things as he sees them, and in particular to work out his religion for himself and worship in his own way. Consequently, it is asserted, Protestantism was essentially a claim to freedom for the individual, a claim that no man should be coerced into saying he believes what he does not believe ... If the essence of Protestantism is a claim to liberty for the individual to reach his own conclusions about religion in his own way and express the freely without interference, who in the sixteen century was a Protestant? Certainly Calvin was not a Protestant, nor Beza, nor Knox nor Whitgift”<sup>12</sup>.

In other words, people became Protestants for the most various reasons. „The desire to annex Church property and jurisdiction made very stout Protestants. A man bent on realizing some conception of national sovereignty might well become a Protestant, even though he has no religious convictions whatever.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Martin Luther**

In this context, Martin Luther (1483-1546) puts his *95 Theses* on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, on the eve of the Feast of All Saints<sup>14</sup>, also sending the document to the Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg, to

<sup>12</sup> John William Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteen Century*, Routledge, London, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteen Century*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> The date is premeditated and perspicuously chosen by the monk Martin Luther, a professor at the newly established Wittenberg University, because “the 95 Theses appeared only a few hours before the only day of the year [The Feast of All Saints – 1<sup>st</sup> of November – o.n.] when the Elector Prince of Saxony was offering indulgences to those visiting his famous relics collection. Keith Randall, *Luther și Reformaîn Germania 1517 – 1555*, Ed. ALL, București, 2002, p. 29.

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the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg<sup>15</sup>, one of the greatest promoters and supporters of the method of raising funds for the Catholic Church through the sale of indulgences. The *95 Theses* are a manifesto – a summary of the reform of Catholic doctrine and practice, which speaks directly against indulgences, an abusive and excessive practice of the Catholic Church, and against other doctrinal and practical exaggerations. Among other things, Luther writes:

„The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.” (Thesis 5)

„The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.” (Thesis 6)

„Therefore the pope, when he uses the words „plenary remission of all penalties,” does not actually mean „all penalties,” but only those imposed by himself.” (Thesis 20)<sup>16</sup>

The message was mainly addressed to the clergy, the practitioner of indulgences. The indulgences sold by the local bishop are openly concurred by those of Johann Tetzel (1460-1519), a Dominican monk who, on the outskirts of Wittenberg, was selling the salvation of the slaves, „by selling the most” «powerful» indulgences ever available. Not only did they ensure forgiveness for all the sins of the buyer, but they could even guarantee the purge of the soul of a friend or a relative who had already died<sup>17</sup>.

As seen above, the social context is discontinuous, marked by the vague of plague – „the Black Death”, between 1347-1353, which killed almost half of Europe’s population, denouncing for many the Apocalypse: creating development differences between urban guilds and rural areas. Lists of sins are made, for which man would have deserved his fate, his condition. Existence is evanescent enough so the perspective of after life is a short term one, that is, in a near future for every adult (as I was saying, the life expectancy was somewhere around 40 years). Of all the corners of his soul and life, man is lurked by all kinds of sins. The remedy was only one: indulgences.

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<sup>15</sup> Prince Albrecht von Brandenburg was part of the Hohenzollern German royal family, a family from which, more than three centuries later, in 1866, was elected the first prince of Romania (who was later King, in 1881), Carol I of Hohenzollern - Sigmaringen (1839-1914), the founder of the Royal Dynasty of Romania (1866-1947) and founder of Modern Romania. Princess MARGARETA of Romania, Prince RADU of Romania, *Coroana Română la 140 de ani*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2008, p. 8–32.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, *Die 95 Thesen vom Jahre 1517*, 3. Auflage, Hermann Verlag, 1915, p. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> K. Randell, *Luther și Reforma în Germania*, p. 31.

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One of the determining reasons for the outbreak of Martin Luther's revolt and reformation is the urgent and exaggerated desire of the Church of Rome to collect impressive funds of money through the indulgences, funds needed to rebuild the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome<sup>18</sup> whose foundation stone was placed on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1506<sup>19</sup>. Luther wrote in his *Theses*: „Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.”<sup>20</sup>

Born in Eisleben, a small Saxon town, in 1483, Martin Luther grew up in a severe family environment, whose correspondent would be a patriarchal society of a harsh authoritarianism<sup>21</sup>. Young Luther puts on his monk's cloth, and thanks to St. Anne because he was saved by a lightning strike. The miracle is taking place, and young Luther, who studies law, shifts to a branch associated with the ridicule by the law professors – monasticism<sup>22</sup>. He chose the Augustinian Order in Erfurt, and was a dutiful novice, until April 1507, when he takes his final oath. A good monk, strictly respecting the oath, Martin Luther is appreciated for his leadership spirit and erudite inclinations, the outstanding feature of his monastery period being the attempt to do everything to please God.

Was Luther more a reformer against ecclesiastical abuse or more a seeker for an honest way to God? Literature oscillates. It is certain that the publication of the *95 Theses* against the practice of indulgences is not only a beginning of reforma-

<sup>18</sup> „This temple is an image of the infinite, there are no limits to the feelings you inspire, to the evoked ideas, to the huge number of years that you bring to your memory of either the past or the future,” said Madame de Stoel, in 1807. Neil Parkyn, *Şaptezeci de minuni arhitecturale ale lumii*, Ed. Aquila, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> The rebuilding of the Basilica was initiated by Pope Julius II (1503-1513), who „decided to demolish the most venerable monument of Christendom - the church built by Emperor Constantine the Great more than 1,000 years ago, sheltering the tomb of St. Peter - and to build a new one.” After the death of Pope Julius II in 1513, the construction pace, reaching the number of as much as 2000 people working at the same time, slowed down a lot. „One of the problems was the money. Pope Julius II's successor, Pope Leo X, was getting money from the sale of indulgences, which prompted Luther's Wittenberg protest. Thus the Basilica of St. Peter became one of the causes of the Reformation.” N. Parkyn, *Şaptezeci de minuni arhitecturale ale lumii*, p. 48.

<sup>20</sup> M. Luther, *Die 95 Thesen vom Jahre 1517*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Jörg Erb, *Martin Luther*, Johannis Lahr Verlag, Lahr-Dinglingen, 1993, p. 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> „Monasticism was, ideally speaking, a heroic vocation. The monk gave up everything to seek his own salvation and God's grace on the world. But Erasmus, himself a monk for a few years in his youth, scorned monks as lax, lazy and immoral, and he was only one of many writers who in Luther's time made monks the target of endless jokes”. Richart Marius, *Martin Luther. The Christian Between God and Death*, Harvard University Press, London, 1999, p. 46.



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tion, but also the tribulations of a faithful soul who, in the context of the century, weighed the truth and the possibility of salvation with the greatest interest, as his fellows did. In this context, the path that Luther finds, beginning with the publication of the *Theses*, is circumscribed by new rules: salvation only by faith and only by Jesus Christ, the universal priesthood, the exclusive work of divine grace and the supreme authority of Holy Scripture<sup>23</sup>. Thus, much of the Catholic doctrine is undermined, man is no longer conditioned by his meritorious deeds in obtaining salvation, being, according to the new Lutheran orientation, incapable of approaching God through good deeds: the latter are void of content. Only God can uplift man, and the Bible is the sole source of Revelation at the expense of Tradition<sup>24</sup>. In such a context, the papal superiority is disavowed, as is the sanctifying grace of the broken priesthood, for there is no need for mediators between the believer, incapable of rethinking himself other than in a fallen state of sin and incapable of repent, and God. The cult of the Virgin Mary and the saints, as well as the monastic oath, are emptied and cancelled.

„Luther asserted broadly that no coercive power whatever belonged properly to clergy, bishops or Pope, that clergy were subjects of secular magistrate like other people and that the whole body of canon law was without validity. Of the two sets of magistrates civil and ecclesiastical, theoretically governing a united Christendom, the latter was in the view of the early Reformers, simply abolished”<sup>25</sup>.

The Reformation itself, albeit paradoxically, is a form of protest of revolted consciousnesses against medieval order in the Humanist-Renaissance context of the sixteenth century. As we have tried to show earlier, through Luther it creates only „chains”. Luther’s theology gravitates around the immanence of sin. The struggle and the attempt of the Christian to oppose himself to sin are only corrupt means of making sin last.

„The chasm between God’s holiness and human abjection is so wide that by shaking with his ridiculously short arms the ridiculous ladders of good deeds, man seems to be grotesque, until his mistake and blasphemy are forgotten. Only God is able to suppress the abyss, approaching man, enveloping him with an effective love, with a love that, by penetrating man, regenerates him, raises him to the Creator”<sup>26</sup>.

Luther would point out that love is the measure of justice between God and man, but according to Luther’s theory, love, as a means of regulating divine jus-

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<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Schwarz, *Luther*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2004, p. 37-40.

<sup>24</sup> Bernhard Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift. Martin Luther: Die wiederentdeckten Grundlagen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1990, p. 40 f.

<sup>25</sup> J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteen Century*, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Lucien Febvre, *Martin Luther – un destin*, Ed. Corint, București, 2001, p. 45.

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tice, does not forgive sins, but does not impute them. In this context, man does not have to fight sin; he must not try to oppose it, because he would not succeed anyway, the fight being always followed by defeat. Therapy does not mean to do or not to do something, but to take refuge in God<sup>27</sup>.

In June 1520, the Papal Bubble *Exsurge Domine* definitively condemns Luther's teachings, urgently demanding the destruction of his writings and giving him a term of 60 days for obedience. The answer comes immediately, in August 1520, when Luther published a *Manifesto to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation)*, which speculates Germans need to break free from the exploitation regime imposed by the papacy<sup>28</sup>. Luther's fate is helped a lot by technical progress, without which probably he would have ended like John Wycliffe (1320-1384) declared heretical, or Jan Hus (1369-1415), who was burned at the stake. With the help of the print, 4,000 copies arrived in just 6 days in the hands of the concerned „nation". The Imperial Diet of Worms, organized by Emperor Carol V in 1521, is tantalizing: Luther is excommunicated, refusing to obey. He finds shelter at Wartburg, by the Saxon Elector, where he translates the Bible into the German language spoken at the time<sup>29</sup>. Later, the Bible was printed in hundreds of thousands of copies, even during Luther's life, being considered a true masterpiece of German culture.

### **The Notion of Freedom in Martin Luther's Thinking**

The notion of freedom plays a fundamental role in the thinking of the German theologian, a fact that led him to speak so firmly about the intentions and practices of the Catholic clergy. In order to decipher the issue of freedom, we have chosen one of the most important writings of his early years, *On the Freedom of the Christian (Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen)*, that was published in November 1520, in the context of trying to rehabilitate his condition in relation to Pope Leo X<sup>30</sup>. Martin Luther states that „a Christian is a perfectly free master over all things, subjected to no one. A Christian is a slave to all things and subjected to all."<sup>31</sup> The apparent contradiction is inspired by the words of St. Paul: „Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (1 Corinthians 9:19) and „therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because

<sup>27</sup> R. Schwarz, *Luther*, pp. 105-112.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, Philipp Reclam Stuttgart, 2004, p. 100 f.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Lilje, *Luther*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1982, p. 78 f.

<sup>30</sup> R. Schwarz, *Luther*, p. 108 f.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, Philipp Reclam Stuttgart, 2004, p. 125.

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of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.”(Romans 13: 5). This is substantiated by the duality of the human being, divided into spiritual and material. The affirmations address one another to the bodily nature (the old man) and to the soul (to the new man), thus justifying the contradiction. Yet neither the body nor the soul can manage their state of freedom either by condition, by circumstances or by exercise. Being rich, having your body covered or practicing meditation are vain means of deliverance. The only source of freedom is the Word of God: „The soul does not have anything else to love, Luther says, in heaven and on earth, for whom to be a free and godly Christian, except for the Holy Gospel, the Word of God, preached by Christ, as He himself declares: «I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die (John 11:25)» or «I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6)» and «man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mathew 4:4)». Therefore we must be aware that the soul may lack anything but the Word of God, and without the Word of God, nothing else can help it”.<sup>32</sup>

In Martin Luther’s thinking, the road to freedom is a concentric one, through the Word (Holy Scripture), faith and Christ, the circle closes, leaving man alone in the face of his impotence, that is, incapable of liberation and forced to return to the only saving springs. The same idea will be met later, with other Protestant theologians, for example Karl Barth<sup>33</sup>. The path had already been shown to him: the Holy Scripture, understood as the „Command or Law of God” (Gebotoder Gesetz Gottes) and „The Oath or Promise of God” (Verheissungoder Zusage Gottes) reveals to the Christian the inability to oppose sin, the whole Old Testament commandments chain being nothing but the example of the ineffectiveness of the repeated struggle against sin, intended to make the believer recognize his defeats, limitation, condition, in a word, the inability to rise, in order to, by faith, reach Christ.

„God’s promises give us what His commandments ask from us, and fulfill what the former order, for everything belongs to God, both the commandment and its fulfillment, He alone defines and accomplishes them. Therefore, promises are the Word of God in the New Testament and belong to the New Testament.”<sup>34</sup>

In the view of the German theologian, the proposed paradox in order to offer freedom to man is built in the light of the appropriation of the whole struggle for salvation done by Christ Himself, Who has undertaken all that was divinely necessary (the Holy Fathers would say divinely and humanly) for liberation, therefore nothing has been left for man to do.

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<sup>32</sup> M. Luther, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, p. 126-127.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik, IV, 3*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1986, p. 761 f.

<sup>34</sup> M. Luther, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, p. 130.

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„Christians are freed from the law and freed from the tyranny of perfection, from the fear of never being good enough. Christians know that God’s commands humble mortals because none can obey them. The commandments destroy pride – which in good Augustinian fashion Luther interprets as the quality that makes us put ourselves in the center of the universe and usurp the place of God. Only the humiliation do we perceive that we are not divine, and only then can we truly let God be God, to acknowledge that God rules all. Only when we recognize this essential truth can God give us the grace that saves us. Freedom consists in the faith that we have already been released from the bondage of sin and that we need not suffer anguish to win something we already possess”<sup>35</sup>.

At this point appears a fundamental question, which at the same time has a moral and dogmatic aspect. What should man do? The Catholic Church, through its representative, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), „the greatest and most respectable opponent of the great reformer,”<sup>36</sup> speculated the immobility of man and the ineffectiveness of man’s good deeds<sup>37</sup>, placing on Luther the attitude of those who proclaimed firmly their faith in God, and led their lives to the farthest limits of morality. Luther answers, in return, by arguing that the Christ’s presence is contagious to every soul bearing Christ: good deed is not a means to attain salvation, but a result of coming closer to Christ:

„Therefore, the two maxims are true: good and godly deeds will never make man be godly, but a godly man will do good deeds. Evil acts never make man evil, but a bad man does evil deeds. Thus, in all cases, the person must be good and godly before doing good deeds, and good deeds follow and are the result of a good and godly person. As Christ says, „A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Matthew 7:18)<sup>38</sup>

The Erfurt monk<sup>39</sup> claims that whoever assumes his existence this way, that is, in a continuous proximity to Christ, must abandon all the practices of mediation. From the moment when Christ is and must be in the heart of each, the priesthood becomes the general credentials of the believers, for no one should stand between man and God.

In a work dedicated to the notion of freedom in the great reformer’s thinking, Christina Busch said the following, referring to his work *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*:

<sup>35</sup> R. Marius, *Martin Luther. The Christian Between God and Death*, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> B. Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift. Martin Luther*, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Vom freien Willen*, Übers. von Otto Schumacher, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1988, p. 24 f.

<sup>38</sup> M. Luther, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, p. 141–142.

<sup>39</sup> J. Erb, *Martin Luther*, p. 12.

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„This book of Luther is a work about hope, although it does not express a diminution of suffering. Also, there is no way of liberating or improving life in this book. In the foreground, there is the accomplishment of Christian freedom, faith in God and in Jesus Christ, which frees man from his sins, as well as a Christian activity that leads to the salvation and righteousness of believers, and therefore to the salvation of their souls.”<sup>40</sup>

We note, therefore, that the concept of freedom occupies a central place in Martin Luther's thinking in the context of his protest over the exaggerated practices and scholastic teaching of the Catholic Church in his time. However, the idea of freedom expressed by the great reformer differs from the idea of freedom in Catholic theology and, moreover, from the patristic thought of the East.

In a particular way, the fundamental structure of human freedom is drafted by Martin Luther around the „Master-slave” report as far as the relationship between God and man is concerned, and loses sight of the beauty of the „Father-child” relationship, as understood in the thinking of the Holy Fathers and in the whole spirituality of the Orthodox Church. This „Master-slave” relationship will be transmitted and found easily in other reformers' thinking in the sixteenth century, as well as in that of many other modern and contemporary Protestant theologians.

### **Jean Calvin**

The Reformation goes on, and another of its representative is Jean Calvin (1509-1564). He was born in France, at Noyon, in 1509, in a very fervent family, his mother being a fervent Catholic Christian, and his father being even the financial administrator and secretary of the Bishop of Noyon. Young Calvin receives a solid Catholic education at home, and is helped by his father to become the chaplain of the Noyon Cathedral, when he was only 12 years old, and later, of a nearby parish in Marteville. He began his university studies in theology in Paris, but after a while, he gave up and at the request of his father he became a law student in Orléans. Gradually, he is touched by the spirit of Renaissance and Humanism, being easily attracted to the Protestant ideas of the Reformation<sup>41</sup>. At that time, France was watching with great caution the magnitude of the Reformation, triggering the persecution of its followers. The situation of the Protestants was initially regarded with restraint by King Francis I (1494-1547), who, although opposed to heresy, failed to find a clear definition of it, „because heresy was ill-defined, and humanist

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<sup>40</sup> Christina Busch, *Freiheit bei Martin Luther und Huldrych Zwingli im Vergleich*, Grin Verlag, Norderstedt, 2008, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Reiner Rohloff, *Johannes Calvin*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, Göttingen, 2011, p. 11-16.

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critics of the Church could have been caught up in a general wave of persecution and unjustly punished.”<sup>42</sup>

The date of 18 October 1534 would mark the drastic change of policy, „Placards Day”, which meant the publication in the major French cities of extremist manifestos of the protest against Catholic practices, date that brings the unleashing of the persecution against the heretics. This is the context in which Jean Calvin leaves France and escapes to Basel, a sort of oasis for the persecuted of the Reformation, where he publishes his first work, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, in 1536<sup>43</sup>.

In August 1536, Calvin arrives in Geneva. At that time, Geneva represented an interesting political construction at the confluence of the Powers of the Swiss Confederation, France and the Duchy of Savoy. Organized as a republic in the true sense of the word, enjoying a solid constitution capable of permanently reducing the potential of the families participating in political life, Geneva opposes in the first half of the sixteenth century the interests of two political factions, who either saw the future of the republic, either twinned to the Protestant cause of the French refugees or against them, given that they had begun to suffocate the life of the city through an increased numbers of immigrants. Among the political leaders who supported the ideas of the Reformation was the preacher Guillaume Farel (1489-1565), the fervent critic of Catholicism. As an experienced politician, he asks Calvin for formal support (not doubled by an institutional position), for him to stay in Geneva, and to help him in supporting and implementing the Reform<sup>44</sup>. In Geneva, „the old practices, such as the worship of the saints, the fasting and the celebration of the Liturgy, had been abandoned, but nothing had taken their place. Farel and his followers had done their best to raise the religious conscience of the population. But the results were modest. Many of the citizens were not willing to give up old practices for good, for fear that their fate would be forever cursed. Others understood these changes as less boring duties, which allowed them to have more money and more time for entertainment. Few understood what Reform really meant.”<sup>45</sup>

Serious measures were required, transposed briefly in education and discipline. As the exercise of discipline was not difficult to follow – Geneva had lean institutional levers, the teaching remained. Calvin and Farel failed, confronted

<sup>42</sup> Martyn Rady, *Franța 1494 – 1610. Renaștere, Religie și Refacere*, Ed. ALL, București, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Veit-Jakobus Dieterich, *Die Reformatoren*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2002, p. 88-89.

<sup>44</sup> Willem Van'tSpijker, *Calvin. A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, Trans. by Lyle D. Bierma, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, USA, 2009, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Keith Randell, *Jean Calvin și Reforma târzie*, Ed. ALL, București, 1996, p. 12. The quote seems relevant to appreciating the true value and success of Calvin's reforms.

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with the hard-to-start springs of a population not very willing to take on new constraints after having barely caught the taste of freedom. Politics repelled quickly, acting against both. In 1538, Calvin and Farel were excommunicated<sup>46</sup>.

Follows the Strasbourg period when, together with Martin Bucer, Calvin continues his studies, at the same time he teaches, writes and attends meetings with Catholic representatives in the hope of finding a way of union. Unsuccessfully this time, Calvin maintains his faith in the unity of the Church, deepens the writings of the Latin Fathers of the Church of the first centuries, and reweighs the viability of the principles set forth in his work, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, whose republication, in 1539, receives numerous additions<sup>47</sup>.

He gets back to Geneva in 1541. There, the pro-Bern movement had fallen into disgrace, and the only „French” capable of reorganizing the society, an already famous professor and doctrinaire, was Calvin. The condition imposed on the Council is to immediately implement the measures proposed by Calvin for the organization of the Church, which happens in December 1541 when the *Church Orders*<sup>48</sup> are applied. Follows a difficult period, marked by the oscillations of power between libertines and Calvinists, with Jean Calvin being most of the time in the middle, attacked from one side and the other, until in 1555, when the dissolution of the „liberal” faction takes place. What follows is the transformation of Geneva, according to John Knox (1514-1572), a leader of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland, in „the most perfect school of Christ that has ever existed on earth since the Apostles.”<sup>49</sup> Calvin’s advice was listened to and implemented in the smallest detail, „from the requirements for special qualities the main dentist of the city must have, to the need to build a protection on the balconies for children safety. For those coming from outside the city, the most obvious signs of Calvin’s influence could be found in everyday behaviour. People were very soberly dressed, with no unnecessary ornaments. They spoke politely and seemed to be concerned about each other’s problems. No public performances took place, and singing was performed only in churches where the whole population was gathering, several times a week, to pray to God and listen to the religious service.”<sup>50</sup>

In the field of theology, Calvin is not a bearer of ideas. The general lines of his theological thought have arisen as a result of the persecution. Theology puts a great emphasis on ethics, based on Christian freedom, and on the coherence be-

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<sup>46</sup> Van’tSpijker, *Calvin. A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, p. 42-49.

<sup>47</sup> Van’tSpijker, *Calvin. A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, p. 51-58.

<sup>48</sup> Van’tSpijker, *Calvin. A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*, p. 68 f.

<sup>49</sup> K. Randell, *Jean Calvin și Reforma târzie*, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> K. Randell, *Jean Calvin și Reforma târzie*, p. 30–31.

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tween the message and the order of the Church, thus gaining survival traits in the second wave of the Reformation, which made it stand in the midst of the crisis of the next century<sup>51</sup>. The latter is marked by a good organization of the Reformation precepts. His religious doctrine is easily grasped, especially due to the numerous editions of the *Institutio Christianae Religionis*.

### **The Notion of Freedom in Jean Calvin's Thinking**

To state the thesis of freedom, we chose Chapter 19, *About Christian Freedom*, from *Institutio Christianae Religionis*. According to Calvin, freedom consists of three things. The first refers to the *deed* as a means of man's justifying before God, for the original sin. According to Calvin's thinking, the one who brings the deed as a measure of securing his justification, in the light of God's Law, does nothing but turn His entire Law against him, becoming accountable for, by means of deeds, complying entirely to it. This is far beyond man's ability, who therefore finds as single refuge „the mercy of God ... for the question is, how we may be right, but how, though unworthy and unrighteous, we may be considered as righteous»<sup>52</sup>. Justice in itself and the one in the nature of deeds (righteous ones) are only the privilege of Jesus Christ. The Law is given only as a study exercise, as a „memento” of duty, of a life that must be dedicated to aspiration to piety. From here, Christ, the Only Righteous One, will decide at the moment of the Last Judgment for every man. Unlike Luther, however, for Calvin the Law keeps its necessity, but in its specific manner, shown above.

Secondly, *a conscience released from under the yoke of the Law* will be subjected by its nature. That's the only way we can imagine how the consciences can obey the command of „love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deut. 6:5), which means „the soul must be divested of all the other teachings and feelings, the hard purified from all its desires, all its powers collected and united on this one object»<sup>53</sup>. However, the encounter of consciousness with the body undermines any liberating process. Unlike Luther, in Calvin's thinking, the relationship between the „old man” (the flesh one) and the „new man” (the spiritual one) acquires the tones of a song of mourning, of the soul incarcerated in the body. Under the auspices of the Law, such a soul can only do imperfect deeds. Even if their intentions are good, they are bad in terms of their imperfection. And then, it becomes clear that „for the law demand-

<sup>51</sup> R. Rohloff, *Johannes Calvin*, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans. by Henry Beveridge, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2009, p. 550.

<sup>53</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 551.



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ing perfect love, condemn all imperfection unless its rigor is mitigated.”<sup>54</sup> Freedom from the Law must subscribe to St. Paul’s words „For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). It must be circumscribed to the difference between the „Master-servant” and the „Master-son” relationships. If one can only appear at the moment when the chores are ready, that is, finished and well done, the second is received, in love, and with the unfinished or imperfect tasks accomplished. By delivering from the law, the deeds are not judged by man in the way a master judges the actions of his slave, but those of his son. In relation to the Father, however, the deeds of the son are irremediably imperfect, perverted; the son, i.e. man, cannot contribute to the process of salvation. God makes the choice, and the chosen ones are obedient, says the French reformer.

In his third aspect, Jean Calvin refers to freedom in front of God vis-à-vis *exterior things* without meaning in themselves<sup>55</sup>. Compared to these, man has the choice, and consciousness is indispensable in the struggle with despair and superstition. „I know and am entrusted to the Lord Jesus,” says Calvin, „that nothing is defiled by itself, but only to the one who thinks that there is something defiled: for that one, it is truly defiled, says the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 14: 14) adding „Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin”(Romans 14: 22-23). We are to use the gifts of God without any scruples of conscience, without any perturbation of mind, for the purpose for which he gave them: in this way our souls may both have peace with him, and recognize his freedom towards us.”<sup>56</sup>

Concluding, Jean Calvin believes that freedom is exclusively a matter of understanding the law and the power of God in human life. Freedom has, above all, a palliative role, acting as a bandage for the consciousness burdened by the load of justification, the inconsistency of human deeds and the immobility of the carnal envelope, and remains perplexed in front of God’s gifts, giving man the opportunity to use them for the divine glory. Only the free man, who obeys the Word of God and is justified and chosen from eternity through Jesus Christ, lives truly and with responsibility in God.

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<sup>54</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 551.

<sup>55</sup> This idea was later on borrowed by the theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who claims an accentuated nuance of independence in the exercise of human freedom over all the internal and external challenges of his existence. Rudolf Bultmann, „Der Gedanke der Freiheit nach antiken und christlichen Verständnis“, in *Glauben und Verstehen*, vol. 4, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1965, p. 42-51.

<sup>56</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 553.

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From an Orthodox point of view, this understanding of human freedom is different from that encountered in the patristic and philosophical thinking of Eastern theology.

### **Ulrich Zwingli**

Going forward, the last representative of the Reformation that we would like to present is Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). He was born in 1484, in Wildhaus, Switzerland, in a large middle class family, his father being involved in community leadership. Counseled by his uncle, who was a priest, to dedicate himself to the study of Latin, Zwingli promises at an early age. He studied at Basel since 1494, then in Bern, afterwards at the University of Vienna in 1498, under the guidance of Conrad Celtes (1459-1508), an important representative of Humanism. At the age of 22 he graduated the university and had a master degree in arts. He is then appointed in the canton of Glarus as priest. This period is an important opportunity to deepen the humanistic principles; he learns Greek during the same period<sup>57</sup>.

In 1515, he met Erasmus of Rotterdam, the moment representing a major point, the detachment of scholasticism and the reorientation towards a humanistic theology.

„The long term fruit was in a reformation theology that was both biblical and centered in Christ. There are many points of contact between Erasmus and Zwingli. There were common emphases – in particular a stress on God as Spirit and a Platonist view of man as a body and soul. There were common emphases – in particular the emphases on an inward rather than outward piety. There were similar concerns – in particular a delight in the literature and philosophy of Greece and Rome. But there were differences as well, notably but not only in their understanding of the sovereign grace of God and the freedom of the will”<sup>58</sup>.

Although many of his theological guidelines have been assimilated as „Lutherans”, Zwingli has repeatedly protested, claiming to be reformed first of all:

„I began to preach before I even heard Luther’s name, and I began to learn Greek ten years ago in order to learn the teachings of Christ from the original source. The Papists say, «You must be Lutheran; you preach just as Luther writes.» I answered them, «I preach, just as Paul writes, why do not you call me paulin?» ... I do not want to bear Luther’s name, because I have read a few of his teachings, and I have often deliberately refrained from reading his books. I do not want to enter a name other than that of my captain, Christ, whose soldier I am.”<sup>59</sup>

The meeting with Lutheran theology takes place in Zurich. It was a troubled period when the plague had ravaged the city (1519-1520), when Zwingli himself

<sup>57</sup> Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli. Leben und Werk*, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004, p. 29-35.

<sup>58</sup> W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli – An introduction to His Thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> K. Randell, *Luther și Reforma în Germania*, p. 84-85.

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almost died. He goes through a period of profound awareness of the divine supremacy, at a time when Luther's dispute with the Papacy does nothing else but gives consistency and impulse to the divorce with the Catholic Church, symbolically embracing the giving up of the papal reward. In fact, Zwingli's view of the Church of Christ, of the believers, and especially of bishops, differed greatly from the ecclesiological meaning of Rome: „We also see - says Ulrich Zwingli - who is the Church, that is, what is in the baptismal font, namely, in the water of Baptism, cleansed by the Word and that remains in Christ, and has no stain or defilement; the Church is holy, so no one can reprove her. If you ask me where the Church is, I will answer all over the earth. Who is the Church? All believers. Is it a gathering? Where does it meet? Answer: in this world, she unites through the Spirit of God in a hope, and there she is to the one God. Who knows it? God. But bishops and councils are not the same Church? Answer: And they are simple members of the Church, like any other Christian, to the extent that they recognize Christ as the only Head. You say, but they are the representatives of the Church; I will answer: about this matter, Scripture does not say anything.”<sup>60</sup>

In 1520, the Council of the City proclaims the above preaching in accordance with the Holy Scripture, and then, in 1523, in the court room, the official representative of the Catholicism fails to impose himself in a wider context in which even the legitimacy of the battles of the papacy was brought into discussion, successful battles the Swiss Confederation had greatly contributed to, through the mercenaries of an already unanimously recognized bravery. In 1523, Zwingli prints the work *Comments and Motivations to the Closing Speech (Auslegen und Gründe der Schlussreden)*, an obvious treaty of theology in the Reformation spirit<sup>61</sup>.

In his reforming process, Zwingli will constantly confront opponents of Catholicism, on the one hand, but above all, with radical reformists. The spirit that governs the city of Zurich and the Confederation is one of debate, which is why the Council has been convoked repeatedly so that the conservative representatives, Zwingli and the radicals, display their views on the organization of the church life of the canton. In such a structure, the Reformation goes on with slow steps, but the ample speeches synthesize Zwingli's theological thinking, transforming it into specialized works. That's how the issues of celibacy of priests, church services, church iconography, or baptism are clarified at the city level. The Confederation is also in the position to choose the preponderance of Scripture over the old Catholic order. The Cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Zug, Lucerne and Unterwalden are opposed since 1524, calling for the withdrawal of the Confederate Canton of Zurich from

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<sup>60</sup> Martin Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof. Huldrych Zwinglis Amtsverständnis im Rahmen der Zürcher Reformation*, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1994, p. 81.

<sup>61</sup> U. Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli. Leben und Werk*, p. 68-72.

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the Confederation. The conflict is short, but the signed peace does not draw a theological conclusion. Dissensions do not quench, the five cantons concluding an alliance with King Ferdinand of Austria against the Zurich canton and its reformist approach. Zwingli asks the invasion of the cantons. On October 9, 1531, the 5 Cantons set off the war, cross the Zurich Canton and threaten the city. The battle is relatively short, Zurich fails to oppose with a very small army, to which Zwingli also takes part, and on October 11 he is injured and dies together with 25 other pastors<sup>62</sup>.

Zwingli's theology is subsumed to God the Father, prevailing in His role in the Trinitarian unity. Compared to the providence of the Heavenly Father, man is like a „clay pot in the potter's hand.” In the *Letter to Myconius*, on July 24, 1520, Zwingli said: „I beseech Christ for this one thing only, that he will allow me to endure all things curatively, and that he breaks me as a potter's vessel or make me strong, as it pleases him.”<sup>63</sup> Regarding divine sovereignty, man's intake and the value of his good deeds are virtually non-existent. In the *67 Articles* of the Zurich Dispute of January 29, 1523, Zwingli said: „Christ is on our side; from where it follows that our deeds are good as long as they belong to Christ; as long as they are ours, they are neither good nor true (Art. 22).”<sup>64</sup>

In Zwingli's thinking, only the power of God is liberating, any human approach in this sense is derisory, the results being more than humble, if not even harming to man who, by trying to fast, for example, that is to censor the freedom to eat meat products, does nothing but deny the Christian order and defies his neighbour through an ostentatious parade of powers that do not belong to him<sup>65</sup>.

The conception of the reformed theologian is unfortunately in contradiction with the spirituality of the Eastern Church, which understands the practice of fasting and asceticism as a manifestation of the sacrificial state of every believer, according to the model of the sacrifice of Christ the Lord for us, as He was often fasting (Mathew 4:2; Luke 4:2). St. Paul and the other apostles, in their turn, frequently fasted and encouraged the new Christians to do the same (2 Corinthians 11: 27, Acts 13: 2; 14:23; 1Corinthians 7:5). In his work, *Adoration in Spirit and Truth*, St. Cyril of Alexandria (375-444) affirms that there can be no entry before the Father except in a state of sacrifice<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126-135.

<sup>63</sup> W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli – An introduction to His Thought*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Ulrich Zwingli, *Die 67 Thesen zur Disputation in Zürich. 29. Januar 1523* in Wilhelm Oechslis, *Quellenbuch zur Schweizergeschichte. Für Haus und Schule*, 2. Auflage, Zürich, 1901, p. 403.

<sup>65</sup> U. Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli. Leben und Werk*, p. 51-55.

<sup>66</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Adoration in Spirit and in Truth*, PG 68, 620D-621A, in Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 1, *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 1998, p. 166.

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Through his writings and sermons, Zwingli opposed the Church's tradition-  
alfasting, which led to fierce disputes in the community of believers<sup>67</sup>. In one of  
his writings on fasting, Zwingli said of those who fast: «[They] had not so strong  
a belief in God, that they trusted alone in him and hoped alone in him, listened  
alone to his ordinances and will, but foolishly turned again to the devices of men,  
who, as though they desired to improve what had been neglected by God, said to  
themselves: "This day, this month, this time, wilt thou abstain from this or that,"  
and make thus ordinances, persuading themselves that he sins who does not keep  
them. This abstaining I do not wish to condemn, if it occurs freely, to put the flesh  
under control, and if no self-confidence or vainglory, but rather humility, results.  
See, that is branding and injuring one's own conscience capriciously, and is turn-  
ing toward true idolatry. In a word, if you will fast, do so; if you do not wish to  
eat meat, eat it not; but leave Christians a free choice in the matter...But when  
the practice of liberty offends your neighbour, you should not offend or vex him  
without cause; for when he perceives it, he will be offended no more, unless he  
is angry purposely....But you are to instruct him as a friend in the belief, how all  
things are proper and free for him to eat»<sup>68</sup>.

For Ulrich Zwingli, serving the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ is fun-  
damental. The Church's servants must also show personal vocation.

„The mission of proclaiming the Gospel, which has a functional, personal,  
and sacramental-administrative aspect, is very much present in Zwingli's writings.  
Many things are asked by those who officiate, going even to the supreme sacrifice  
of imposing the Reformation; they have to convince and even fight for it.»<sup>69</sup>

### **The Notion of Freedom at Ulrich Zwingli**

As far as the concept of freedom is concerned, it has a priority position in  
the thinking of the Swiss reformer. „Zwingli's understanding of freedom offers a  
rich and diversified spectrum regarding Christian freedom and is a central point of  
his reformist program. From this point of view, freedom can be considered a key  
notion of its theology,»<sup>70</sup> says Christina Busch.

For Zwingli, human freedom is given by God through Jesus Christ, through  
Whom has been accomplished our deliverance from the slavery of sin, being in

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<sup>67</sup> “The public disputes over Zwingli's sermon have enflamed around the question of whether  
and to what extent the ordinances of ecclesiastical life must be kept, and, in particular, the prescrip-  
tions concerning fasting during the pre-Easter period.” U. Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli. Leben und  
Werk*, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli – An introduction to His Thought*, p. 56.

<sup>69</sup> M. Hauser, *Prophet und Bischof. Huldrych Zwinglis Amtsverständnis*, p. 121.

<sup>70</sup> C. Busch, *Freiheit bei Martin Luther und Huldrych Zwingli im Vergleich*, p. 14.

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full connection with God's choice of man from eternity and with the justification of this choice.

„According to his new reformed understanding of Christian freedom, the latter is derived from the sovereign and liberating freedom of God, His Word and His Spirit, through the liberating act of Christ, and thereby giving freedom to the conscience of Christians. Jesus Christ is understood as a guarantee of human freedom and freedom of conscience through a new trust, up to the political and social dimension of freedom, where the sovereign and unlimited liberating freedom of the Word of God has as its starting point and center of understanding freedom the understanding of providence, man's choice, and his spiritual activity. This conception emerged especially during his dispute with Luther.”<sup>71</sup>

Jesus Christ is the only mediator of man's liberty and his fulfillment. He gives man his freedom in the grace of the Holy Spirit. God is the source of freedom, Christ as God and Man is the Mediator, and man is the one who receives freedom according to the divine choice.

Often, human freedom has a meaning of independence and distance from all inner and outer desires and impulses.

„First of all, Christian freedom is, for Zwingli, the freedom given by God's biblical word (where, according to Zwingli, the liberating action of the Word of God is not obtained by something from inside, but by the preaching the Word of God) both freedom from all the commands and constraints made by men, and the freedom to decide by themselves.”<sup>72</sup>

Freedom is, for our author, the total trust in God, the One who raises man out of his misery. Christian freedom is total faith in God the Creator, who forgave people's sins following their mistakes, and spoke to them of righteousness. He is the one who works in us a new life, that is, the One who frees Christians from all the human laws that burden their conscience, and who let the light of the Holy Spirit shine in their hearts. Freedom of man is directly linked to the freedom of consciousness, being intimately connected with the pure heart and with a good and faithful human soul.

In the thinking of the Zurich theologian, human freedom is based only on Holy Scripture. The Word of God is the only one to legislate on the idea of freedom and embodying all its meanings. No other definition of human freedom can be formulated unless it is correlated with the words of Holy Scripture:

„Only the Holy Scripture, that is, the Word of God, is fundamental, says Zwingli, for Christian freedom and, thus, for the happiness of Christians. For

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

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Zwingli, Holy Scripture is the word of the Spirit, that is, the letters of the incarnated witness through the action of the Spirit in the prophets and apostles, and therefore, as well as the preaching of the interpreters of the Holy Spirit, has meaningful content. Appropriately, Zwingli makes a detailed reference to this when proposing to properly preach Holy Scripture and defend it from false teachings. There is only one true God, one Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore only one Holy Scripture, and one Gospel.”<sup>73</sup>

In some cases, Zwingli associates human freedom with the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, and consequently with the release of believers under the guardianship of the Church’s superior hierarchy, as well as with deliverance from darkness to light, that is, from the darkness created by men, to the light that comes through the obedience to the Word of God.

### Conclusion

This is, in very general terms, the context where the Reformation breakout took place in the West of Europe in the sixteenth century, in an area full of social and political turmoil. As we have seen, the notion of freedom has played a fundamental role in the thinking and especially in the work of each of the three great reformers, Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli.

Although the Reformation was initially subsumed to distinct territories, the movement spread afterwards, ultimately representing a turning point in Europe’s religious, cultural and social history, including vast territorial areas. Thus, Lutheranism will gradually expand beyond the German Empire, from Prussia to Scandinavia, even to Transylvania, and Calvinism will grow in France starting with 1559, when the families of Bourbon and Chatillon embrace, together with Henricof Navarra (1553-1610), the future King of France, the new faith. The persecution of the Huguenots and the Puritans ceases following the Edict of Nantes in 1598. It allowed the Huguenots - who accounted for about 10% of the population - to practice the cult, but at the same time limit the spread of Calvinism. Calvinism is the dominant denomination in Scotland, spreading to Germany, without enjoying the notoriety of the Lutheran denomination, but succeeding in transcending its borders, penetrating the noble environments of Poland and Hungary. As far as zwinglianism is concerned, it has been less influencing in comparison with the first two reforming currents, being limited to Zurich and other cities in Switzerland, as well as to several provinces in Germany.

The concept of freedom of the three main reformers is impregnated by theological protester ideas, and in many cases it is forced to follow *volens nolens* the

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

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course of Protestant teachings against Catholic practice and doctrine. The fundamental structure of freedom is particularly nuanced, following the paradigm of the „Master-Slave” relationship, referring to the relationship between God and man. The power of God and the Divine Law have a remarkable preponderance in the life of the Christian, imposing itself through authority and justice in his thoughts, attitudes and deeds. In the view of the three theologians, the notion of freedom is more a matter of understanding and assuming God’s command (*Gottes Gebot*) and the power of God (*Gottes Kraft*) in history. In the other part of the world, the mystical theology of the East Church put more emphasis on the „Father-Child” relationship when speaking about the connection between God and man.

The reformist ideas of the studied authors, both theological and those with social implication, have had a strong impact on the further development of Christian theology, culture and history. One thing is certain: the three reformers, Martin Luther, Jean Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, did not know the profound and mysterious teachings of the Orthodox Church of the East, full of theological and spiritual significance, based on Holy Scripture and developed and argued by the abyssal theology of the Holy Fathers. Otherwise, perhaps the Reformation would not have taken place, and the concept of freedom in the West would have had quite different nuances compared with those we find nowadays.