Preface

THIS STUDY of Martin Luther as a young man was planned as a chapter in a book on emotional crises in late adolescence and early adulthood. But Luther proved too bulky a man to be merely a chapter. His young manhood is one of the most radical on record: whatever he became part of, whatever became part of him, was eventually destroyed or rejuvenated. The clinical chapter became a historical book. But since clinical work is integral to its orientation, I will, in this preface, enlarge briefly on my colleagues and my patients, and our common foci of preoccupation.

During the last five years a grant from the Field Foundation has enabled me to concentrate on the study of emotional disturbances of people in their late teens and early twenties. The clinical work with acutely disturbed young people was done mainly at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and at intervals at the Western Psychiatric Institute in the School of Medicine of the University of Pittsburgh. Austen Riggs is a small, open (*i.e.*, with no closed facilities), research-minded private hospital in a small residential town in New England. The Western Psychiatric Institute is a skyscraper with closed floors, on one of the fastest-growing medical campuses in the world, in the center of the capital of steel. In Pittsburgh, under the generous direction of Dr. Henry W. Brosin and of Dr. Frederik Weniger, I was able to test my hypotheses on patients who came from backgrounds altogether different from those of the patients at Austen Riggs Center, where, thanks to Dr.

Robert P. Knight's vision, selective smallness permits a joint and systematic awareness of the therapeutic factors in all the areas of a patient's life. Within the safe outlines of the diagnostic facilities and the therapeutic practices of both hospitals I could study the afflictions of young patients as variations on one theme, namely, a life crisis, aggravated in patients, yet in some form normal for all youth. I could identify those acute life tasks that would bring young people to a state of tension in which some would become patients; I could study their initial symptoms and the emergence of a psychiatric syndrome. I could explore possible similarities in their childhood experiences and discover what kinds of parents and what kinds of backgrounds would be apt to prejudice development in such a way that the life crisis of adolescence might prove insurmountable without special help or exceeding good fate, in the form of the opportunity to deploy special gifts under favorable conditions. Joan Erikson's work in transforming at Riggs what once was occupational therapy into a meaningful "activities program" helped me to understand the curative as well as the creative role of work which, as we shall see, is so prominent in young Luther's life, and in his views about work—and "works."

Each new clinical experience supports and is supported by developments in theory. This book will more or less explicitly take account of recent thinking about the ego's adaptive as well as its defensive functions. Sigmund Freud's monumental work is the rock on which such exploration and advancement must be based. Anna Freud, with her book on the ego, opened a whole new theoretical area for study,[1] and August Aichhorn opened a therapeutic frontier in work with young people.[2] What I have learned from them, from the writings of Heinz Hartmann,[3] and in recent years from joint work with David Rapaport,[4] I have tried to expand in line with new observations, first in a preliminary paper,[5] and now in this book; a clinical monograph is to follow. Here I will say only that any comparison made between young man Luther and our patients, is, for their sake as well as his, not restricted to psychiatric diagnosis and the analysis of pathological dynamics, but is oriented toward those moments when young patients, like young beings anywhere, prove resourceful and insightful beyond all professional and personal expectation. We will concentrate on the powers of recovery inherent in the young ego.

I must also acknowledge another kind of professional experience

which helped focus my thoughts on a controversial figure in the history of ideas. In 1956, I gave the Yale Centenary address in honor of Sigmund Freud[6] and also spoke on the hundredth anniversary of his birthday at the University of Frankfurt.[7] I spoke of dimensions of lonely discovery, as exemplified in Freud the beginner, the first, and for a decade the only, psychoanalyst. I compared Freud with Darwin, and noted that neither man had come upon his most decisive contribution as part of an intended professional design; both lived through an extended intellectual "moratorium"; and, in both, neurotic suffering accompanied the breakthrough of their creativity. The address on Freud, of course, bridged the clinical study of disturbances in youth which I was observing and treating with the method created by him, and conflicts of early adulthood which men like him fight through to the creativity of their manhood. Moreover, it seemed to me that Luther's specific creativity represented a late medieval precursor of some aspects of Freud's determined struggle with the father complex; even as Luther's emancipation from medieval dogma was one of the indispensable precursors both of modern philosophy and of psychology.

Whatever references are made in this book to analogies in Luther's and Freud's lives are not derived from any impression of a personal likeness between these two men; far from it. But both men illustrate certain regularities in the growth of a certain kind of genius. They had, at any rate, one characteristic in common: a grim willingness to do the dirty work of their respective ages: for each kept human conscience in focus in an era of material and scientific expansion. Luther referred to his early work as "*im Schlamm arbeiten*," "to work in the mud," and complained that he had worked all alone for ten years; while Freud, also a lone worker for a decade, referred to his work as labor *in der Tiefe*, calling forth the plight of a miner in deep shafts and wishing the soft-hearted *eine gute Auffahrt*, "a good ascent."

I have attempted in this preface to give a brief rationale for writing this book; I doubt, though, that the impetus for writing anything but a textbook can ever be rationalized. My choice of subject forces me to deal with problems of faith and problems of Germany, two enigmas which I could have avoided by writing about some other young great man. But it seems that I did not wish to avoid them.

When speaking about Freud to the students at Frankfurt and at Heidelberg, I remembered an event in my own early years, a memory which had been utterly covered by the rubble of the cities and by the bleached bones of men of my kind in Europe. In my youth, as a wandering artist I stayed one night with a friend in a small village by the Upper Rhine. His father was a Protestant pastor; and in the morning, as the family sat down to breakfast, the old man said the Lord's Prayer in Luther's German. Never having "knowingly" heard it, I had the experience, as seldom before or after, of a wholeness captured in a few simple words, of poetry fusing the esthetic and the moral: those who have once suddenly "heard" the Gettysburg Address will know what I mean.

On occasion we should acknowledge emotional debts other than traumatic ones. Perhaps, then, this study is a tribute to a spring morning in that corner of Europe from which Schweitzer came; and an attempt to grasp something essential in that reformation which stands at the beginning of our era, something which we have neither completely lived down nor successfully outlived. Such is the material of psychoanalysis.

This book was made possible by a grant from the Foundation's Fund for Research in Psychiatry which freed me for a year of all clinical and academic responsibilities.

The manuscript was read and criticized at various stages by David Rapaport, and also by Scott Buchanan, John Headley, Robert P. Knight, Margaret Mead, Gardner and Lois Murphy, Reinhold Niebuhr, and David and Evelyn Riesman. Both for the suggestions which I accepted and for those which I had to overrule, my heartfelt thanks.

Larry Hartmus read some of the medieval Latin with me in Ajijic. Edith Abrahamsen of Copenhagen checked my translation of Kierkegaard's Danish.

Dorothy F. Hoehn ably assembled the pieces in a final typescript.

My wife, Joan Erikson, lived with me through the reading and the writing and sealed the experience by editing the manuscript.

ERIK HOMBURGER ERIKSON

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Young Man Luther

CHAPTER

I

Case and Event

THE LITERATURE on Luther, and by Luther, is stupendous in volume. Yet it adds up to very few reliable data on his childhood and youth. His role in history, and above all his personality, remain ambiguous on a grandiose scale. Luther has been both vilified and sanctified, and both by sincere and proven scholars, who have spent a good portion, if not all, of their lifetimes reconstructing him from the raw data—only to create, whenever they tried to encompass him with a formula, a superhuman or a suprahuman robot, a man who could never have breathed or moved or least of all spoken as Luther spoke. In writing this book, did I intend to do better?

Soeren Kierkegaard—the one man who could judge Luther with the compassionate objectivity of a kindred *homo religiosus*—once made a remark which sums up the problem which I felt I could approach with the means at my disposal. He wrote in his diary: "Luther. . . . is a patient of exceeding import for Christendom" (*en for Christenheden yderst vigtig Patient*).[1] In quoting this statement out of context, I do not mean to imply that Kierkegaard intended to call Luther a patient in the sense of a clinical "case"; rather, he saw in him a religious attitude (patienthood) exemplified in an archetypal and immensely influential way. In taking this statement as a kind of motto for this book, we do not narrow our perspective to the clinical; we expand our clinical perspective to include a life style of patienthood as a sense of imposed suffering, of an intense need for cure, and (as Kierkegaard adds) a "passion for expressing and describing one's suffering."

Kierkegaard's point was that Luther overdid this subjective, this "patient," side of life, and in his old age failed to reach "a doctor's commanding view" (*Laegen's Overskuelse*). The last question we must leave open for the present.

"A patient" . . . . I expected to have access to this wider meaning of patienthood from my work with gifted but acutely disturbed young people. I did not wish merely to reduce young Luther to his diagnosis (which, within limits, could be done rather convincingly); I wished to delineate in his life (as I had done in the lives of young contemporaries) one of those life crises which make conscious or unconscious, diagnosed or unofficial, patients out of people until they find a cure—and this often means a cause.

I have called the major crisis of adolescence the *identity crisis;* it occurs in that period of the life cycle when each youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood; he must detect some meaningful resemblance between what he has come to see in himself and what his sharpened awareness tells him others judge and expect him to be. This sounds dangerously like common sense; like all health, however, it is a matter of course only to those who possess it, and appears as a most complex achievement to those who have tasted its absence. Only in ill health does one realize the intricacy of the body; and only in a crisis, individual or historical, does it become obvious what a sensitive combination of interrelated factors the human personality is—a combination of capacities created in the distant past and of opportunities divined in the present; a combination of totally unconscious preconditions developed in individual growth and of social conditions created and recreated in the precarious interplay of generations. In some young people, in some classes, at some periods in history, this crisis will be minimal; in other people, classes, and periods, the crisis will be clearly marked off as a critical period, a kind of "second birth," apt to be aggravated either by widespread neuroticisms or by pervasive ideological unrest. Some young individuals will succumb to this crisis in all manner of neurotic, psychotic, or delinquent behavior; others will resolve it through participation in ideological movements passionately concerned with religion or politics, nature or art. Still others, although suffering and deviating dangerously through what appears to be a prolonged adolescence, eventually come to contribute an original bit to an emerging style of life: the very danger which they have sensed has forced them to mobilize capacities to see and say, to dream and plan, to design and construct, in new ways.

Luther, so it seems, at one time was a rather endangered young man, beset with a syndrome of conflicts whose outline we have learned to recognize, and whose components to analyse. He found a spiritual solution, not without the well-timed help of a therapeutically clever superior in the Augustinian order. His solution roughly bridged a political and psychological vacuum which history had created in a significant portion of Western Christendom. Such coincidence, if further coinciding with the deployment of highly specific personal gifts, makes for historical "greatness." We will follow Luther through the crisis of his youth, and the unfolding of his gifts, to the first manifestation of his originality as a thinker, namely, to the emergence of a new theology, apparently not immediately perceived as a radical innovation either by him or his listeners, in his first Lectures on the Psalms (1513). What happened to him after he had acquired a historical identity is more than another chapter; for even half of the man is too much for one book. The difference between the young and the old Luther is so marked, and the second, the sturdy orator, so exclusive a Luther-image to most readers, that I will speak of "Martin" when I report on Luther's early years, which according to common usage in the Luther literature include his twenties; and of "Luther" where and when he has become the leader of Lutherans, seduced by history into looking back on his past as upon a mythological autobiography.

Kierkegaard's remark has a second part: ". . . of very great import for Christendom." This calls for an investigation of how the individual "case" became an important, an historic "event," and for formulations concerning the spiritual and political identity crisis of Northern Christendom in Luther's time. True, I could have avoided those methodological uncertainties and impurities which will undoubtedly occur by sticking to my accustomed job of writing a case history, and leaving the historical event to those who, in turn, would consider the case a mere accessory to the event. But we clinicians have learned in recent years that we cannot lift a case

history out of history, even as we suspect that historians, when they try to separate the logic of the historic event from that of the life histories which intersect in it, leave a number of vital historical problems unattended. So we may have to risk that bit of impurity which is inherent in the hyphen of the psycho-historical as well as of all other hyphenated approaches. They are the compost heap of today's interdisciplinary efforts, which may help to fertilize new fields, and to produce future flowers of new methodological clarity.

Human nature can best be studied in the state of conflict; and human conflict comes to the detailed attention of interested recorders mainly under special circumstances. One such circumstance is the clinical encounter, in which the suffering, for the sake of securing help, have no other choice than to become case histories; and another special circumstance is history, where extraordinary beings, by their own self-centered maneuvers and through the prodding of the charismatic hunger of mankind, become (auto)biographies. Clinical as well as historical scholars have much to learn by going back and forth between these two kinds of recorded history. Luther, always instructive, forces on the workers in both fields a special awareness. He indulged himself as he grew older in florid self-revelations of a kind which can make a clinical biographer feel that he is dealing with a client. If the clinician should indulge himself in this feeling, however, he will soon find out that the imaginary client has been dealing with him: for Luther is one of those autobiographers with a histrionic flair who can make enthusiastic use even of their neurotic suffering, matching selected memories with the clues given to them by their avid public to create their own official identities.

2

I intend to take my subtitle seriously. This "Study in Psychoanalysis and History" will re-evaluate a segment of history (here the youth of a great reformer) by using psychoanalysis as a historical tool; but it will also, here and there, throw light on psychoanalysis as a tool of history. At this point I must digress for a few pages from the subject of my main title in order to attend to the methodological subtitle.

Psychoanalysis, like all systems, has its own inner history of development. As a method of observation it takes history; as a system of ideas it makes history.

I indicated in the preface that whenever a psychoanalyst shifts the focus of his interest to a new class of patients—be they of the same age, of similar background, or the victims of the same clinical syndrome—he is forced not only to modify his therapeutic technique, but also to explain the theoretical rationale of his modification. Thus, from a gradual refinement of therapeutic technique, the perfection of a theory of the mind is expected to result. This is the historical idea psychoanalysis lives by.

The treatment of young patients who are neither children, adolescents, nor adults is characterized by a specific exaggeration of trends met with in all therapies. Young patients (as well as extraordinary young people) make rather total demands on themselves and on their environment. They insist on daily confirming themselves and on being confirmed either in their meaningful future or in their senseless past; in some absolute virtue or in a radical state of vice; in the growth of their uniqueness or in abysmal self-loss. Young people in severe trouble are not fit for the couch: they want to face you, and they want you to face them, not as a facsimile of a parent, or wearing the mask of a professional helper, but as the kind of over-all individual a young person can live by or will despair of. When suddenly confronted with such a conflicted young person the psychoanalyst may learn for the first time what facing a face, rather than facing a problem, really means—and I daresay, Dr. Staupitz, Martin's spiritual mentor, would know what I have in mind.

In the treatment of young people, furthermore, it is impossible to ignore what they are busy doing or not doing in their work life or in their unofficial avocations. Probably the most neglected problem in psychoanalysis is the problem of work, in theory as well as in practice: as if the dialectic of the history of ideas had ordered a system of psychological thought which would as resolutely ignore the way in which the individual and his group make a living as Marxism ignores introspective psychology and makes a man's economic position the fulcrum of his acts and thoughts. Decades of case histories have omitted the work histories of the patients or have treated their occupation as a seemingly irrelevant area of life in which data could be disguised with the greatest impunity. Yet, thera-

peutic experiments with the work life of hospitalized young patients indicate that patients in a climate of self-help, of planful work, and of communal association can display an adaptive resourcefulness which seemed absent only because our theories and beliefs decreed that it be absent.

This is part of the wider problem, now being discussed in a large part of the psychiatric and sociological literature, of how much psychiatry has tended to make patienthood a self-defining, self-limiting role prison, within which the development of the patient's stunted capacities is as clearly prevented, by the mere absence of systematic stimulation and opportunity, as if it were professly forbidden.

Such discoveries make it obvious that clinical methods are subject to a refinement of technique and a clarification of theory only to a point; beyond this point they are subject to ideological influences. The emergence in different countries and cities of intensely divergent schools of clinical thought corroborates the idea that an evolving clinical science of the mind is colored and often darkened by ideological trends even as it inadvertently influences the intellectual and literary climate, if and when and where history makes use of it. Maybe, then, a clinical science of the human mind will eventually demand a special historical self-awareness on the part of the clinical worker and scholar. As the historian Collingwood put it: "History is the life of mind itself which is not mind except so far as it both lives in the historical process and knows itself as so living." [2]

Of all the habits of thought which the historically self-conscious psychoanalyst is apt to detect in his work, one is most important for our book. In its determination to be sparing with teleological assumption, psychoanalysis has gone to the opposite extreme and developed a kind of *originology*—a term which I hope is sufficiently awkward to make a point without suggesting itself for general use. I mean by it a habit of thinking which reduces every human situation to an analogy with an earlier one, and most of all to that earliest, simplest, and most infantile precursor which is assumed to be its "origin."

Psychoanalysis has tended to subordinate the later stages of life to those of childhood. It has lifted to the rank of a cosmology the undeniable fact that man's adulthood contains a persistent childishness: that vistas of the future always reflect the mirages of a missed past, that apparent progression can harbor partial regressions, and

firm accomplishment, hidden childish fulfillment. In exclusively studying what is repetition and regression and perseveration in human life, we have learned more about the infantile in the adult than was ever before known. We have thus prepared an ethical reorientation in human life which centers on the preservation of those early energies which man, in the very service of his higher values, is apt to suppress, exploit, or waste. In each treatment, and in all our applications, this reorientation governs our conscious intentions. To formulate them on an historically valid scale, however, it is necessary to realize that the psychopathologist, called upon to treat in theory and practice the passions, anxieties, and rages of the race, will always have to make some kind of convincing philosophy out of a state of partial knowledge; while neurotic patients and panicky people in general are so starved for beliefs that they will fanatically spread among the unbelievers what are often as yet quite shaky convictions.

Because we did not include this fact in our awareness, we were shocked at being called pansexualists when our interest (that is, the affects of curiosity and confirmation) was selectively aroused by the minutest references to sexual symbolism. We were distressed when we saw ourselves caricatured in patients who, in social life, spread a compulsive attitude of mutual mental denuding under the guise of being alert to the defensive tricks of the ego. And we were dismayed when we saw our purpose of enlightenment perverted into a widespread fatalism, according to which man is nothing but a multiplication of his parents' faults and an accumulation of his own earlier selves. We must grudgingly admit that even as we were trying to devise, with scientific determinism, a therapy for the few, we were led to promote an ethical disease among the many.

The existence and the multiplicity of defensive regressive mechanisms in adolescence were systematically demonstrated in Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*.[3] Her book defines inner defense in the widest sense; but it does not foreclose the psychoanalysis of adolescent development. When she states: "The abstract intellectual discussions and speculations in which young people delight are not genuine attempts at solving the tasks set by reality. Their mental activity is rather an indication of a tense alertness for the instinctual processes and the translation into abstract thought of that which they perceive," [4] she presents the defensive half of the

story of adolescent rumination, the other half being its adaptive function,[5] and its function in the history of changing ideas. In this book we will add to this formulation the historical concomitance which teaches us how, in the period between puberty and adulthood, the resources of tradition fuse with new inner resources to create something potentially new: a new person; and with this new person a new generation, and with that, a new era. The question of what happens to persons, generations, and eras because guiding ideologies are of postadolescent origin, will be discussed in conclusion, although it transcends the frame of this study, which is dedicated rather to the proposition that what we have learned as pathologists must become part of an ecology of the mind before we can take full responsibility for the ideological implications of our knowledge.

We cannot even begin to encompass the human life cycle without learning to account for the fact that a human being under observation has grown stage by stage into a social world; this world, always for worse *and* for better, has step by step prepared for him an outer reality made up of human traditions and institutions which utilize and thus nourish his developing capacities, attract and modulate his drives, respond to and delimit his fears and phantasies, and assign to him a position in life appropriate to his psychosocial powers. We cannot even begin to encompass a human being without indicating for each of the stages of his life cycle the framework of social influences and of traditional institutions which determine his perspectives on his more infantile past and on his more adult future. In this sense, we can learn from patients only to the extent that we realize (and the patient realizes) that what is said and done in treatment is based on a formal contract between healer and patient and must be carefully transposed before being applied to the general human condition. This is the reason why the fragments of case histories or psychoanalytic interpretations which flutter around in increasing numbers in our newspapers and magazines seem lost like bats in the daytime.[6]

On the other hand, we cannot leave history entirely to nonclinical observers and to professional historians who often all too nobly immerse themselves into the very disguises, rationalizations, and idealizations of the historical process from which it should be their business to separate themselves. Only when the relation of historical forces to the basic functions and stages of the mind has been jointly charted

and understood can we begin a psychoanalytic critique of society as such without falling back into mystical or moralistic philosophizing.

Freud warned against the possible misuse of his work as an ideology, a "*Weltanschauung;*"[7] but as we shall see in Luther's life and work, a man who inspires new ideas has little power to restrict them to the area of his original intentions. And Freud himself did not refrain from interpreting other total approaches to man's condition, such as religion, as consequences of man's inability to shake off the bonds of his prolonged childhood, and thus comparable to collective neuroses.[8] The psychological and historical study of the religious crisis of a young great man renews the opportunity to review this assertion in the light of ego-psychology and of theories of psychosocial development.

3

As to the dichotomy of psychoanalysis and religion, I will not approach it like a man with a chip on each shoulder. Psychology endeavors to establish what is demonstrably true in human behavior, including such behavior as expresses what to human beings seems true and feels true. I will interpret in psychological terms whatever phenomena clinical experience and psychoanalytic thought have made me recognize are dependent on man's demonstrable psychic structure. This is my job, as a clinician and as a teacher—a job which (as I have pointed out) includes the awareness that psychoanalysis for historical reasons often occupies a position on the borderline of what is demonstrably true and of what demonstrably *feels* true. The fact that each new vital focus of psychoanalytic research inadvertently leads to a new implied value system obliges us to ask ourselves whether or not we mean what we seem to be saying. It obligates us, as well as our critics, to differentiate psychoanalysism from psychoanalysis, and to realize that ours is not only a profession recognized among professions, but also a system of thought subject to fashionable manipulation by molders of public opinion. Our very success suggests that our partisanship be judicial.

Religion, on the other hand, elaborates on what feels profoundly true even though it is not demonstrable: it translates into significant words, images, and codes the exceeding darkness which surrounds man's existence, and the light which pervades it beyond all desert

or comprehension. This being a historical book, however, religion will occupy our attention primarily as a source of ideologies for those who seek identities. In depicting the identity struggle of a *young* great man I am not as concerned with the validity of the dogmas which laid claim to him, or of the philosophies which influenced his systematic thought, as I am with the spiritual and intellectual milieu which the isms of his time—and these isms *had* to be religious—offered to his passionate search.

My focus, then, is on the "ideological." In modern history, this word has assumed a specifically political connotation, referring to totalitarian systems of thought which distort historical truth by methods ranging from fanatic self-deception to shrewd falsification and cold propaganda. Karl Mannheim has analyzed this word and the processes for which it stands from the sociological point of view.[9] In this book, *ideology* will mean an unconscious tendency underlying religious and scientific as well as political thought: the tendency at a given time to make facts amenable to ideas, and ideas to facts, in order to create a world image convincing enough to support the collective and the individual sense of identity. Far from being arbitrary or consciously manageable (although it is as exploitable as all of man's unconscious strivings), the total perspective created by ideological simplification reveals its strength by the dominance it exerts on the seeming logic of historical events, and by its influence on the identity formation of individuals (and thus on their "ego-strength"). In this sense, this is a book on identity and ideology.

In some periods of his history, and in some phases of his life cycle, man needs (until we invent something better) a new ideological orientation as surely and as sorely as he must have air and food. I will not be ashamed then, even as I analyze what is analyzable, to display sympathy and empathy with a young man who (by no means lovable all of the time) faced the problems of human *existence* in the most forward terms of his era. I will use the word *existential* in this simplest connotation, mindful that no school of thought has any monopoly on it.

CHAPTER

II

The Fit in the Choir

THREE OF young Luther's contemporaries (none of them a later follower of his) report that sometime during his early or middle twenties, he suddenly fell to the ground in the choir of the monastery at Erfurt, "raved" like one possessed, and roared with the voice of a bull: "*Ich bin's nit! Ich bin's nit!*" [1] or "*Non sum! Non sum!*" [2] The German version is best translated with "It isn't me!" the Latin one with "I am *not!*"

It would be interesting to know whether at this moment Martin roared in Latin or in German; but the reporters agree only on the occasion which upset him so deeply: the reading of Christ's *ejecto a surdo et muto daemonio*—Christ's cure of a man possessed by a *dumb spirit*.[3] This can only refer to Mark 9:17: "And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit." The chroniclers considered that young Luther was possessed by demons—the religious and psychiatric borderline case of the middle ages—and that he showed himself possessed even as he tried most loudly to deny it. "I am *not*," would then be the childlike protestation of somebody who has been called a name or has been characterized with loathsome adjectives: here, dumb, mute, possessed.

We will discuss this alleged event first as to its place in Luther's life history, and then, as to its status in Luther's biography.

The monk Martinus entered the Black Monastery of the Augustinians in Erfurt when he was twenty-one years old. Following a

vow made in an attack of acute panic during a severe thunderstorm, he had abruptly and without his father's permission left the University of Erfurt, where had had just received with high honors the degree of a master of arts. Behind the monk lay years of strict schooling supported only with great sacrifice by his ambitious father, who wanted him to study the law, a profession which at that time was becoming the springboard into administration and politics. Before him lay long years of the most intense inner conflicts and frequently morbid religious scruples; these eventually led to his abandonment of monasticism and to his assumption of spiritual leadership in a widespread revolt against the medieval papacy. The fit in the choir, then, belongs to a period when his career, as planned by his father, was dead; when his monastic condition, after a "godly" beginning, had become problematic to him; and when his future was as yet in an embryonic darkness. This future could have been divined by him only in the strictest (and vaguest) term of the word, namely, as a sense of a spiritual mission of some kind.

It is difficult to visualize this young man, later to become so great and triumphant, in the years when he took that chance on perdition which was the very test and condition of his later greatness. Therefore, I shall list a few dates, which may be of help to the reader.

EVENTS OF MARTIN'S YOUTH

Born in 1483, Martin Luther	1483
entered the University of Erfurt at seventeen;	1501
received his master's degree at twenty-one, and entered the monastery, having vowed to do so during a thunderstorm.	1505
Became a priest and celebrated his first Mass at the age of twenty-three; then fell into severe doubts and scruples which may have caused the "fit in the choir."	1507 +
Became a doctor of theology at the age of twenty-eight; gave his first lectures on the Psalms at the University of Wittenberg, where he experienced the "revelation in the tower."	1512 +
At thirty-two, almost a decade after the episode in the choir, he nailed his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg.	1517

The story of the fit in the choir has been denied as often as it has been repeated; but its fascination even for those who would do away with it seems to be great. A German professor of theology, Otto Scheel, one of the most thorough editors of the early sources on Luther's life, flatly disavows the story, tracing it to that early hateful biography of Luther written by Johannes Cochläus in 1549.[4] And yet, Scheel does not seem to be able to let go of the story. Even to him there is enough to it so that in the very act of belittling it he grants it a measure of religious grandeur: "Nicolaus Tolentinus, too," he writes "when he knelt at the altar and prayed, was set upon by the Prince of Darkness. But precisely in this visibly meaningful (*sinnfaellig*) struggle with the devil did Nicolaus prove himself as the chosen armour of the Lord. . . . Are we to count it to Luther's damnation if he, too, had to battle with the devil in a similarly meaningful way?"[5] He appeals to Catholic detractors: "Why not measure with the same yardstick?" And in a footnote he asks the age-old question: "Or was Paul's miraculous conversion also pathological?" Scheel, incidentally, in his famous collection of documents on Luther's development, where he dutifully reprints Cochläus' version, makes one of his very rare mistakes by suggesting that the biblical story in question is Mark 1:23, where a "man with an unclean spirit . . . *cried out*" and was *silenced* by Christ.[6] However, the *surdus* and *mutus daemonius* can hardly refer to this earlier passage in Mark.

Scheel is a Protestant professor of theology. For him the principal task is explaining as genuinely inspired by a divine agency those attacks of unconsciousness and fits of overwhelming anxiety, those delusional moments, and those states of brooding despair which occasionally beset young Luther and increasingly beset the aging man. To Scheel they are all *geistlich*, not *geistig*—spiritual, not mental. It is often troublesome to try to find one's way through the German literature on Luther, which refers to various mental states as "*Seelenleiden*" (suffering of the soul) and "*Geisteskrankheit*," (sickness of the spirit)—terms which always leave it open whether soul or psyche, spirit or mind, is afflicted. It is especially troublesome when medical men claim that the reformer's "suffering of the soul" was mainly *biologically* determined. But the *professor*—as we will call Scheel when we mean to quote him as the representative of a particular academic-theological school of Luther biography—the

professor insists, and in a most soberly circumstantial biography, that all of Luther's strange upsets came to him straight down from heaven: *Katastrophen von Gottes Gnaden.*

The most famous, and in many ways rightly infamous, detractor of Luther's character, the Dominican Heinrich Denifle, Sub-Archivar of the Holy See, saw it differently. For him such events as the fit in the choir have only an inner cause, which in no way means a decent conflict or even an honest affliction, but solely an abysmal depravity of character. To him, Luther is too much of a psychopath to be credited with honest mental or spiritual suffering. It is only the Bad One who speaks through Luther. It is, it must be, Denifle's primary ideological premise, that nothing, neither mere pathological fits, nor the later revelations which set Luther on the path to reformation, had anything whatsoever to do with divine interference. "Who," Denifle asks, in referring to the thunderstorm, "can prove, for himself, not to speak of others, that the alleged inspiration through the Holy Ghost really came from above . . . and that it was not the play of conscious or unconscious self-delusion?" [7] Lutheranism, he fears (and hopes to demonstrate) has tried to lift to the height of dogma the phantasies of a most fallible mind.

With his suspicion that Luther's whole career may have been inspired by the devil, Denifle puts his finger on the sorest spot in Luther's whole spiritual and psychological make-up. His days in the monastery were darkened by a suspicion, which Martin's father expressed loudly on the occasion of the young priest's first Mass, that the thunderstorm had really been the voice of a *Gespenst*, a ghost; thus Luther's vow was on the borderline of both pathology and demonology. Luther remained sensitive to this paternal suspicion, and continued to argue with himself and with his father long after his father had no other choice than to acknowledge his son as a spiritual leader and Europe's religious strong man. But in his twenties Martin was still a sorely troubled young man, not at all able to express either what inspired or what bothered him; his greatest worldly burden was certainly the fact that his father had only most reluctantly, and after much cursing, given his consent (which was legally dispensable, anyway) to the son's religious career.

With this in mind, let us return to Mark 9:17–24. It was a father who addressed Christ: "Master I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit. . . . and he asked his father, how long

is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. . . . Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. . . . And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Two cures, then, are suggested in the Bible passage: the cure of a son with a dumb spirit, after a father has been cured of a weak faith. The possibility of an "inner-psychological" kernel in Martin's reaction to this passage will thus deserve to be weighed carefully, although with scales other than those used by Father Denifle—to whom we will refer as the *priest*, whenever we quote him as a representative of a clerical-scholastic school in Luther biography.

But now to another school of experts. An extremely diligent student of Luther, the Danish psychiatrist, Dr. Paul J. Reiter, decides unequivocally that the fit in the choir is a matter of severest psychopathology. At most, he is willing to consider the event as a relatively benign hysterical episode; even so, he evaluates it as a symptom of a steady, pitiless, "endogenous" process which, in Luther's middle forties, was climaxed by a frank psychosis. *Endogenous* really means biological; Reiter feels that Luther's attacks cannot "with the best of will" be conceived of as links "in the chain of meaningful psychological development." [8] It would be futile, then, to try to find any "message," either from a divine or an inner source, in Luther's abnormalities other than indications of erratic upsets in his nervous system. Reiter considers the years in which we are most interested—when Luther was twenty-two to thirty—as part of one long *Krankheitsphase*, one drawn-out state of nervous disease, which extended to the thirty-sixth year; these years were followed by a period of "manic" productivity, and then by a severe breakdown in the forties. In fact, he feels that only a pitifully small number of Luther's years were really characterized by the reformer's famous "robust habitual state"—which means that Luther was like himself only very rarely, and most briefly. Reiter considers at least Luther's twenties as a period of neurotic, rather than of psychotic, tension, and he acknowledges the crisis of this one period as the only time in Luther's life when his ideological search remained meaningfully related to his psychological conflicts; when his creativity kept pace with his inner destructive processes; and when a certain "limited intellectual balance" was reached.

We will make the most of the license thus affirmed by the *psychiatrist*, as we shall call Reiter when we quote him as the representative of a medical-biological school in Luther-biography. This class of biographers ascribes Luther's personal and theological excesses to a sickness which, whether "seated" in brain, nervous system, or kidneys, marks Luther as a biologically inferior or diseased man. As to the event in the choir, Reiter makes a strange mistake. Luther, he says, could not have been conscious, for he called out with "utmost intentionality . . . 'That's me!'" (*Ich bin's*)[9]—meaning, the possessed one of the evangelium. Such a positive exclamation would do away with a good part of the meaning which we will ascribe to the event in the choir; however, three hundred pages earlier in the same book, Reiter, too, tells the story in the traditional way, making Martin call out: "That's *not* me." [10]

And how about a psychoanalyst? The professor and the psychiatrist frequently and most haughtily refer to a representative of the "modern Freudian school"—Professor Preserved Smith, then of Amherst College, who, beside writing a biography of Luther,[11] and editing his letters,[12] wrote, in 1915, a remarkable paper: "Luther's Early Development in The Light of Psychoanalysis." [13] I use the word "beside" deliberately, for this paper impresses one as being a foreign body in Smith's work on Luther; it is done, so to speak, with the left hand, while the right and official hand is unaware. "Luther," Smith claims, "is a thoroughly typical example of the neurotic quasi-hysterical sequence of an infantile sex-complex; so much so, indeed, that Sigismund [sic] Freud and his school could hardly have found a better example to illustrate the sounder part of their theory than him." [14] Smith musters the appropriate data to show (what I, too, will demonstrate in detail) that Luther's childhood was unhappy because of his father's excessive harshness, and that he was obsessively preoccupied with God as an avenger, with the Devil as a visible demon, and with obscene images and sayings. Smith unhesitatingly characterizes "the foundation-stones of early Protestantism . . . as an interpretation of Luther's own subjective life." Outstanding in Luther's morbid subjectivity is his preoccupation with "concupiscence" which Smith, contrary to all evidence, treats as if to Luther it had been a mere matter of sexual "lust." Smith in fact (while conceding that "it is to his great credit that there is good reason to believe he never sinned with women") attributes Luther's great preoccupation with concupiscence to his losing battle with masturbation.

It is instructive to see what an initial fascination and temporary indoctrination with "Freudian" notions can do to a scholar, in particular perhaps to one with a Puritan background: the notions remain in his thinking like a foreign body. In order to make the masturbation hypothesis plausible, Smith, obviously a thorough student of the German sources, flagrantly misinterprets a famous statement of Luther's. Luther reported repeatedly that at the height of his monastic scruples he had confessed to a trusted superior, "not about women, but about *die rechten Knotten*." [15] This phrase means "the real knots"; in the language of the peasant, it means the knotty part of the tree, the hardest to cut. This reference to real hindrances Smith suspects is a hint at masturbation, although the sound of the words does not suggest anything of the kind, and although at least on one occasion Luther specifies the knots as transgressions against *die erste Taffel* [16] that is, the first commandment concerning the love of God the Father. This would point to Luther's increasing and obsessive-blasphemous ambivalence toward God, partially a consequence (and here Smith is, of course, correct and is seconded by the psychiatrist) of a most pathological relationship to his father; which, in turn provides the proper context for Luther's sexual scruples. Professor Smith, incidentally, translates the reported outcry in the choir as "It is not I!"—words which I doubt even a New Englander would utter in a convulsive attack.

Although the professor, the priest, and the psychiatrist refer to Smith as "the psychoanalyst," I myself cannot characterize him in this way, since his brilliant but dated contribution appears to be an isolated exercise of a man who, to my knowledge, never systematically pursued psychoanalysis either in practice or in theory.

2

Why did I introduce my discussion of Luther with this particular event in the choir, whose interpretation is subject to so many large and small discrepancies?

As I tried to orient myself in regard to Luther's identity crisis by studying those works which promised to render the greatest number of facts and references for independent study, I heard him, ever again, roar in rage, and yet also in laughter: *Ich bin's nit!* For with

the same facts (here and there altered, as I have indicated, in details precisely relevant to psychological interpretation), the professor, the priest, the psychiatrist, and others as yet to be quoted each concocts his own Luther; this may well be the reason why they all agree on one point, namely, that dynamic psychology must be kept away from the data of Luther's life. Is it possible that they all agree so that each may take total and unashamed possession of him, of the great man's charisma?

Take the professor. As he sifts the sources minutely and masterfully establishes his own versions, a strange belligerence (to judge from Freud's experience not atypical of the German scientific scene of the early part of this century) leads him to challenge other experts as if to a duel. He constantly imputes to them not only the ignorance of high school boys, but also the motives of juveniles. This need not bother us; such duels spill only ink and swell only footnotes. But the emerging image of Luther, erected and defended in this manner, assumes, at decisive moments, some of the military qualities of the method; while otherwise it remains completely devoid of any psychological consistency. At the conclusion of the professor's first volume, only a soldierly image suffices to express his hopes for sad young Martin behind whom the gates of the monastery have just closed: "Out of the novice Luther," he writes, "the warrior shall be created, whom the enemy can touch neither with force nor with cunning, and whose soul, after completion of its war service, will be led to the throne of the judge by archangel Michael."[17] *Kriegsdienst* is the metallic German word for war service, and the professor makes the most of the biblical reference to God as El Zebaoth, the master of the armies of angels; he even makes God share the Kaiser's title *Kriegsherr*. Everything extraordinary, then, that happens to Luther is *befohlen*, ordered from above, without advance notice or explanation and completely without intention or motivation on Luther's part; consequently, all psychological speculation regarding motivation is strictly *verboten*. No wonder that Luther's "personality" seems to be put together from scraps of conventional images which do not add up to a workable human being. Luther's parents and Luther himself are pasted together; their ingredients are the characteristics of the ordinary small-town German: simple, hardworking, earnest, straightforward, dutiful folk (*bieder, tuechtig, gehorsam,* and *wacker*). The myth to be

created, of course, is that God selects just such folk to descend on in a sudden "catastrophic" decision.

Boehmer,[18] whom I would place in the same school, although equally well-informed, is milder and more insightful. Yet for him, too, Luther's father is a harsh, but entirely well-meaning, sturdy, and healthy type, until suddenly, without any warning whatsoever, he behaves "like a madman" when his son enters the monastery. Boehmer acts as if such a childish explosion were a German father's prerogative and above any psychologizing.

Scheel's book is a post-World War I heir of two trends in the Lutheran writing of history, initiated by two men and never surpassed by others: the universalistic-historical trend of the great von Ranke,[19] the "priestly historian," whose job it was to find in the conflicting forces of history "the holy hieroglyph of God"; the other, a theological-philosophical trend (sometimes fusing, sometimes sharply separating philosophy and religion) begun by the elder Harnack.[20] We will return to this last point of view when we come to the emergence of Luther's theology.

Denifle the Dominican priest, also an acknowledged scholar and authority on late medieval institutions of learning (he died a few days before he was to receive an honorary degree from the University of Cambridge), as well as a most powerful detective of Luther's often rather free quotations from and reinterpretations of theological doctrine, feels obliged to create a different image of Luther. To him he is an *Umsturzmensch*, the kind of man who wants to turn the world upside down without a plan of his own. To Denifle, Luther's protestant attitude introduced into history a dangerous kind of revolutionary spirit. Luther's special gifts, which the priest does not deny, are those of the demagogue and the false prophet—falseness not only as a matter of bad theology, but as a conscious falsification from base motives. All of this follows from the priest's quite natural thesis that war orders from above, such as the professor assumes to have been issued to Luther, could only be genuine if they showed the seal and the signature of divinity, namely, signs and miracles. When Luther prayed to God not to send his miracles, so that he would not become proud and be deflected from the Word by Satan's delusions, he only discarded grapes which were hanging as high as heaven itself: for the faintest possibility of any man outside the Church receiving such signs had been

excluded for all eternity by the verification of Jesus as God's sole messenger on earth.

Denifle is only the most extreme representative of a Catholic school of Luther biography, whose representatives try hard to divorce themselves from his method while sharing his basic assumption of a gigantic moral flaw in Luther's personality. The Jesuit Grisar [21] is cooler and more dissecting in his approach. Yet he too ascribes to Luther a tendency for "egomanic self-delusion," and suggests a connection between his self-centeredness and his medical history; thus Grisar puts himself midway between the approaches of the priest and of the psychiatrist.

Among all of Luther's biographers, inimical or friendly, Denifle seems to me to resemble Luther most, at least in his salt-and-pepper honesty, and his one-sided anger. "Tyrolean candor," a French biographer ascribes to him.[22] The Jesuit is most admirable in his scholarly criticism of Luther's theology; most lovable in his outraged response to Luther's vulgarity. Denifle does not think that a true man of God would ever say "I gorge myself (*fresse*) like a Bohemian and I get drunk (*sauff*) like a German. God be praised. Amen," [23] although he neglects the fact that Luther wrote this in one of his humorous letters to his wife at a time when she was worried about his lack of appetite. And he seriously suggests that the sow was Luther's model of salvation. I cannot refrain from translating here the quotation on which Denifle bases this opinion, which offers a contrast to Scheel's martial image and as such, is an example of a radically different and yet equally scholarly suggestion for the real core of Luther's personality.

In an otherwise hateful pamphlet written in his middle forties, Luther relaxes into that folksy manner which he occasionally also used in his sermons. What he wants to make clear is that there is a prereligious state of mind. "For a sow," he writes, "lies in the gutter or on the manure as if on the finest feather bed. She rests safely, snores tenderly, and sleeps sweetly, does not fear king nor master, death nor hell, devil or God's wrath, lives without worry, and does not even think where the clover (*Kleien*) may be. And if the Turkish Caesar arrived in all his might and anger, the sow would be much too proud to move a single whisker in his honor. . . . And if at last the butcher comes upon her, she thinks maybe a piece of wood is pinching her, or a stone. . . . The sow has not eaten from

the apple, which in paradise has taught us wretched humans the difference between good and bad." [24] No translation can do justice to the gentle persuasiveness of these lines. The priest, however, omits the argument in which they appear: Luther is trying to persuade his readers that the as yet expected Messiah of the Jews could not make a man's life a tenth as good as that of a sow, while the coming of Christ has done more, has put the whole matter of living on a higher plane. And yet one cannot escape the fact that in Luther's rich personality there was a soft spot for the sow so large that Denifle correctly considers it what I will call one of Luther's identity elements. Oftentimes when this element became dominant, Luther could be so vulgar that he became easy game for the priest and the psychiatrist, both of whom quote with relish: "Thou shalt not write a book unless you have listened to the fart of an old sow, to which you should open your mouth wide and say 'Thanks to you, pretty nightingale; do I hear a text which is for me?'" [25] But what writer, disgusted with himself, has not shared these sentiments —without finding the right wrong words?

The Danish psychiatrist, in turn, offers in his two impressive volumes as complete an account of Luther's "environment, character, and psychosis" as I have come across. His study ranges from the macrocosm of Luther's times to the microcosm of his home and home town, and includes a thorough discussion of his biological make-up and of his lifelong physical and emotional symptoms. But the psychiatrist lacks a theory comprehensive enough for his chosen range. Psychoanalysis he rejects as too dogmatic, borrowing from Preserved Smith what fragments he can use without committing himself to the theory implied. He states his approach candidly: it is that of a psychiatrist who has been consulted on a severe case of manifest psychosis (diagnosis: manic-depressive, à la Kraepelin) and who proceeds to record the presenting condition (Luther's acute psychosis in his forties) and to reconstruct the past history, including the twenties. He shows much insight in his asides; but in his role of bedside psychiatrist, he grimly sticks to his central view by asserting that a certain trait or act of Luther's is "absolutely typical for a state of severe melancholia" and "is to be found in every psychiatric textbook." The older Luther undoubtedly approached textbook states, although I doubt very much that his personal meetings with the devil were ever true hallucinations, or that his dramatic

revelations concerning his mental suffering can be treated on the same level as communications from a patient.

Furthermore, when it comes to the younger Luther and the psychiatrist's assertion that his *tentationes tristitiae*—that sadness which is a traditional temptation of the *homo religiosus*—is among the "classical traits in the picture of most states of depression, especially the endogenous ones," [26] we must be decidedly more doubtful. For throughout, this psychiatric textbook version of Luther does not compare him with other examples of sincere religious preoccupation and corresponding genuine giftedness, but with some norm of *Ausgeglichenheit*—an inner balance, a simple enjoyment of life, and an ordinary decency and decided direction of effort such as normal people are said to display. Though the psychiatrist makes repeated allowances for Luther's genius, he nevertheless demands of him a state of inner repose which, as far as I know, men of creative intensity and of an increasing historical commitment cannot be expected to be able to maintain. At any rate, he points out that even in his last years Luther's "psychic balance was not complete," his inner state only "relatively harmonious." Using this yardstick of normality, the psychiatrist considers it strange that Luther could not accept his father's reasonable plans and go ahead and enjoy the study of law; that he could not be relaxed during his ordination as other young priests are; that he could not feel at home in as sensible and dignified a regime as that of an Augustinian monastery; and that he was not able, much later, to sit back and savor with equanimity the fruits of his rebellion. The professor, too, finds most of this surprising; but he assumes that God, for some divine reason, needled Luther out of such natural and sensible attitudes; the psychiatrist is sure that the needling was done from within, by endogenous mental disease.

I do not know about the kind of balance of mind, body, and soul that these men assume is normal; but if it does exist, I would expect it least of all in such a sensitive, passionate, and ambitious individual as young Luther. He, as many lesser ones like him, may have had good inner reasons to escape premature commitments. Some young people suffer under successes which, to them, are subjectively false, and they may even shy away as long as they possibly can from what later turns out to be their true role. The professor's and the psychiatrist's image of normality seems an utterly incongruous measure to

use on a future professional reformer. But then the psychiatrist (with the priest) not only disavows God's hand in the matter, he also disregards, in his long list of character types and somatotypes, the existence of a *homo religiosus* circumscribed and proved not necessarily by signs and miracles, but by the inner logic of his way of life, by the logic of his working gifts, and by the logic of his effect on society. To study and formulate this logic seems to me to constitute the task at hand, if one wishes to consider the total existence of a man like Luther.

I will conclude this review of a few of the most striking and best-informed attempts at presenting prejudiced versions of Luther's case with one more quotation and one more suggested Luther image. This image comes from sociology, a field certainly essential to any assessment of the kind to which our authors aspire. I could not, and would not, do without *The Social Basis of the German Reformation* although its author, R. Pascal, a social scientist and historical materialist, announces with the same flatness which we have encountered in the other biographers how well he could manage without me and my field. "The principle underlying [Luther's contradictions]," he states, "is not logical, it is not psychological. The consistency amid all these contradictions is the consistency of class-interest." [27]

This statement is, perhaps, the most Marxist formulation in the economic-political literature of Luther's personality and his influence on the subsequent codevelopment of protestantism and capitalism. (The most encompassing book with this economic-political point of view is by Ernst Troeltsch [28]; the most famous, at least in this country, those of Weber [29] and of Tawney.[30]) I am not smiling at it in superiority, any more than I am smiling at the statements of the dogmatic professor of theology, the Dominican scholar, or the "constitutional" psychiatrist. For each cites valid data, all of which, as we shall see, complement each other. It is necessary, however, to contemplate (if only as a warning to ourselves) the degree to which in the biography of a great man "objective study" and "historical accuracy" can be used to support almost any total image necessitated by the biographer's personality and professed calling; and to point out that biographers categorically opposed to systematic psychological interpretation permit themselves the most extensive psychologizing—which they can afford to believe is common sense only

because they disclaim a defined psychological viewpoint. Yet there is always an implicit psychology behind the explicit antipsychology.

One of the great detractors of Luther, Jacob Burckhardt, who taught Nietzsche to see in Luther a noisy German peasant who at the end waylaid the march of Renaissance man, noted: "Who are we, anyway, that we can ask of Luther . . . that [he] should have fulfilled *our* programs? . . . This concrete Luther, and no other, existed; he should be taken for what he was" (*Man nehme ihn wie er gewesen ist*).[31]

But how does one take a *great* man "for what he was"? The very adjective seems to imply that something about him is too big, too awe-ful, too shiny, to be encompassed. Those who nonetheless set out to describe the whole man seem to have only three choices. They can step so far back that the great man's contours appear complete, but hazy; or they can step closer and closer, gradually concentrating on a few aspects of the great man's life, seeing one part of it as big as the whole, or the whole as small as one part. If neither of these works, there is always polemics; one takes the great man in the sense of appropriating him and of excluding others who might dare to do the same. Thus a man's historical image often depends on which legend temporarily overcomes all others; however, all these ways of viewing a great man's life may be needed to capture the mood of the historical event.

3

The limitations of my knowledge and of the space at my disposal for this inquiry preclude any attempt to present a new Luther or to remodel an old one. I can only bring some newer psychological considerations to bear on the existing material pertaining to one period of Luther's life. As I indicated in Chapter I, the young monk interests me particularly as a young man in the process of becoming a great one.

It must have occurred to the reader that the story of the fit in the choir attracted me originally because I suspected that the words "I am *not!*" revealed the fit to be part of a most severe identity crisis—a crisis in which the young monk felt obliged to protest what he was *not* (possessed, sick, sinful) perhaps in order to break through to what he was or was to be. I will now state what remains of my suspicion, and what I intend to make of it.

Judging from an undisputed series of extreme mental states which attacked Luther throughout his life, leading to weeping, sweating, and fainting, the fit in the choir could well have happened; and it could have happened in the specific form reported, under the specific conditions of Martin's monastery years. If some of it is legend, so be it; the making of legend is as much part of the scholarly rewriting of history as it is part of the original facts used in the work of scholars. We are thus obliged to accept half-legend as half-history, provided only that a reported episode does not contradict other well-established facts; persists in having a ring of truth; and yields a meaning consistent with psychological theory.

Luther himself never mentioned this episode, although in his voluble later years he was extraordinarily free with references to physical and mental suffering. It seems that he always remembered most vividly those states in which he struggled through to an insight, but not those in which he was knocked out. Thus, in his old age, he remembers well having been seized at the age of thirty-five by terror, sweat, and the fear of fainting when he marched in the Corpus Christi procession behind his superior, Dr. Staupitz, who carried the holy of holies. (This Dr. Staupitz, as we will see, was the best father figure Luther ever encountered and acknowledged; he was a man who recognized a true *homo religiosus* in his subaltern and treated him with therapeutic wisdom.) But Staupitz did not let Luther get away with his assertion that it was Christ who had frightened him. He said, "*Non est Christus, quia Christus non terret, sed consolatur.*" (It couldn't have been Christ who terrified you, for Christ consoles.) [32] This was a therapeutic as well as a theological revelation to Luther, and he remembered it. However, for the fit in the choir, he may well have had an amnesia.

Assuming then that something like this episode happened, it could be considered as one of a series of seemingly senseless pathological explosions; as a meaningful symptom in a psychiatric case-history; or as one of a series of religiously relevant experiences. It certainly has, as even Scheel suggests, *some* marks of a "religious attack," such as St. Paul, St. Augustine, and many lesser aspirants to saintliness have had. However, the inventory of a total revelation always includes an overwhelming illumination and a sudden insight. The fit in the choir presents only the symptomatic, the more pathological and defensive, aspects of a total revelation: partial loss of conscious-

ness, loss of motor coordination, and automatic exclamations which the afflicted does not know he utters.

In a truly religious experience such automatic exclamations would sound as if they were dictated by divine inspiration; they would be positively illuminating and luminous, and be intensely remembered. In Luther's fit, his words obviously expressed an overwhelming inner need to deny an accusation. In a full religious attack the positive conscience of faith would reign and determine the words uttered; here negation and rebellion reign: "I am *not* what my father said I was and what my conscience, in bad moments, tends to confirm I am." The raving and roaring suggest a strong element of otherwise suppressed rage. And, indeed, this young man, who later became a voice heard around the world, lived under monastic conditions of silence and meditation; at this time he was submissively subdued, painfully sad, and compulsively self-inspective—too much so even for his stern superiors' religious taste. All in all, however, the paroxysm occurred in a holy spot and was suggested by a biblical story, which places the whole matter at least on the borderline between psychiatry and religion.

If we approach the episode from the psychiatric viewpoint, we can recognize in the described attack (and also in a variety of symptomatic scruples and anxieties to which Martin was subject at the time) an intrinsic ambivalence, an inner two-facedness, such as we find in all neurotic symptoms. The attack could be said to deny in its verbal part ("I am not") what Martin's father had said, namely, that his son was perhaps possessed rather than holy; but it also proves the father's point by its very occurrence in front of the same congregation who had previously heard the father express his anger and apprehension. The fit, then, is both unconscious obedience to the father and implied rebellion against the monastery; the words uttered both deny the father's assertion, and confirm the vow which Martin had made in that first known anxiety attack during a thunderstorm at the age of twenty-one, when he had exclaimed, "I want to be a monk."[23] We find the young monk, then, at the crossroads of obedience to his father—an obedience of extraordinary tenacity and deviousness—and to the monastic vows which at the time he was straining to obey almost to the point of absurdity.

We may also view his position as being at the crossroads of mental disease and religious creativity and we could speculate that perhaps

Luther received in three (or more) distinct and fragmentary experiences those elements of a total revelation which other men are said to have acquired in one explosive event. Let me list the elements again: physical paroxysm; a degree of unconsciousness; an automatic verbal utterance; a command to change the over-all direction of effort and aspiration; and a spiritual revelation, a flash of enlightenment, decisive and pervasive as a rebirth. The thunderstorm had provided him with a change in the over-all direction of his life, a change toward the anonymous, the silent, and the obedient. In fits such as the one in the choir, he experienced the epileptoid paroxysm of ego-loss, the rage of denial of the identity which was to be discarded. And later in the experience in the tower, which we will discuss in Chapter V, he perceived the light of a new spiritual formula.

The fact that Luther experienced these clearly separate stages of religious revelation might make it possible to establish a psychological rationale for the conversion of other outstanding religionists, where tradition has come to insist on the transmission of a total event appealing to popular faith. Nothing, to my mind, makes Luther more a man of the future—the future which is our psychological present—than his utter integrity in reporting the steps which marked the emergence of his identity as a genuine *homo religiosus*. I emphasize this by no means only because it makes him a better case (although I admit it helps), but because it makes his total experience a historical event far beyond its immediate sectarian significance, namely, a decisive step in human awareness and responsibility. To indicate this step in its psychological coordinates is the burden of this book.

Martin's general mood just before he became a monk, a mood into which he was again sliding at the time of the fit in the choir, has been characterized by him and others as a state of *tristitia*, of excessive sadness. Before the thunderstorm, he had rapidly been freezing into a melancholy paralysis which made it impossible for him to continue his studies and to contemplate marriage as his father urged him to do. In the thunderstorm, he had felt immense anxiety. Anxiety comes from *angustus*, meaning to feel hemmed in and choked up; Martin's use of *circumvallatus*—all walled in—to describe his experience in the thunderstorm indicates he felt a sudden constriction of his whole life space, and could see only one way out: the aban-

donment of all of his previous life and the earthly future it implied for the sake of total dedication to a new life. This new life, however, was one which made an institution out of the very configuration of being walled in. Architecturally, ceremonially, and in its total world-mood, it symbolized life on this earth as a self-imposed and self-conscious prison with only one exit, and that one, to eternity. The acceptance of this new frame of life had made him, for a while, peaceful and "godly"; at the time of his fit, however, his sadness was deepening again.

As to this general veil of sadness which covered the conflicts revealed so explosively in the choir, one could say (and the psychiatrist has said it) that Martin was sad because he was a melancholic; and there is no doubt that in his depressed moods he displayed at times what we would call the clinical picture of a melancholia. But Luther was a man who tried to distinguish very clearly between what came from God as the crowning of a worthwhile conflict, and what came from defeat; the fact that he called defeat the devil only meant he was applying a diagnostic label which was handy. He once wrote to Melanchthon that he considered him the weaker one in public controversy, and himself the weaker in private struggles—"if I may thus call what goes on between me and Satan." [34] One could also say (and the professor has said it) that Martin's sadness was the traditional *tristitia*, the melancholy world mood of the *homo religiosus;* from this point of view, it is a "natural" mood, and could even be called the truest adaptation to the human condition. This view, too, we must accept to a point—the point where it becomes clear that Martin was not able in the long run to embrace the monastic life so natural to the traditional *tristitia;* that he mistrusted his sadness himself; and that he later abandoned this melancholic mood altogether for occasional violent mood swings between depression and elation, between self-accusation and the abuse of others. Sadness, then, was primarily the over-all symptom of his youth, and was a symptom couched in a traditional attitude provided by his time.

4

Youth can be the most exuberant, the most careless, the most self-sure, and the most unselfconsciously productive stage of life,

or so it seems if we look primarily at the "once-born." This is a term which William James adopted from Cardinal Newman; he uses it to describe all those who rather painlessly fit themselves and are fitted into the ideology of their age, finding no discrepancy between its formulation of past and future and the daily tasks set by the dominant technology.

James [35] differentiates the once-born from those "sick souls" and "divided selves" who search for a second birth, a "growth-crisis" that will "convert" them in their "habitual center of . . . personal energy." He approvingly quotes Starbuck to the effect that "conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon" and that "theology . . . brings those means to bear which will intensify the normal tendencies" and yet also shorten "the period by bringing the person to a definite crisis." James (himself apparently the victim in his youth of a severe psychiatric crisis) does not make a systematic point of the fact that in his chapters on the Sick Soul, the Divided Self, and Conversion, his illustrations of spontaneous changes in the "habitual center of personal energy" are almost exclusively people in their late teens and early twenties—an age which can be most painfully aware of the need for decisions, most driven to choose new devotions and to discard old ones, and most susceptible to the propaganda of ideological systems which promise a new world-perspective at the price of total and cruel repudiation of an old one.

We will call what young people in their teens and early twenties look for in religion and in other dogmatic systems an *ideology*. At the most it is a militant system with uniformed members and uniform goals; at the least it is a "way of life," or what the Germans call a *Weltanschauung*, a world-view which is consonant with existing theory, available knowledge, and common sense, and yet is significantly more: an utopian outlook, a cosmic mood, or a doctrinal logic, all shared as self-evident beyond any need for demonstration. What is to be relinquished as "old" may be the individual's previous life; this usually means the perspectives intrinsic to the life-style of the parents, who are thus discarded contrary to all traditional safeguards of filial devotion. The "old" may be a part of himself, which must henceforth be subdued by some rigorous self-denial in a private life-style or through membership in a militant or military organization; or, it may be the world-view of other castes and classes,

races and peoples: in this case, these people become not only expendable, but the appointed victims of the most righteous annihilation.

The need for devotion, then, is one aspect of the identity crisis which we, as psychologists, make responsible for all these tendencies and susceptibilities. The need for repudiation is another aspect. In their late teens and early twenties, even when there is no explicit ideological commitment or even interest, young people offer devotion to individual leaders and to teams, to strenuous activities, and to difficult techniques; at the same time they show a sharp and intolerant readiness to discard and disavow people (including, at times, themselves). This repudiation is often snobbish, fitful, perverted, or simply thoughtless.

These constructive and destructive aspects of youthful energy have been and are employed in making and remaking tradition in many diverse areas. Youth stands between the past and the future, both in individual life and in society; it also stands between alternate ways of life. As I pointed out in "The Problem of Ego-Identity," [28] ideologies offer to the members of this age-group overly simplified and yet determined answers to exactly those vague inner states and those urgent questions which arise in consequence of identity conflict. Ideologies serve to channel youth's forceful earnestness and sincere asceticism, as well as its search for excitement and its eager indignation, toward that social frontier where the struggle between conservatism and radicalism is most alive. On that frontier, fanatic ideologists do their busy work and psychopathic leaders their dirty work; but there, also, true leaders create significant solidarities.

In its search for that combination of freedom and discipline, of adventure and tradition, which suits its state, youth may exploit (and be exploited by) the most varied devotions. Subjecting itself to hardship and discipline, it may seek sanctioned opportunities for spatial dispersion, follow wandering apprenticeships, heed the call of frontiers, man the outposts of new nations, fight (almost anybody's) holy wars, or test the limits of locomotive machine-power. By the same token it is ready to provide the physical power and the vociferous noise of rebellions, riots, and lynchings, often knowing little and caring less for the real issues involved. On the other hand, it is most eager to adopt rules of physical restriction and of utter

intellectual concentration, be it in the study of ancient books, the contemplation of monkhood, or the striving for the new—for example, in the collective "sincerity" of modern thought reform. Even when it is led to destroy and to repudiate without any apparent cause, as in delinquent gangs, in colonies of perverts and addicts, or in the circles of petty snobs, it rarely does so without some obedience, some solidarity, some hanging on to elusive values.

Societies, knowing that young people can change rapidly even in their most intense devotions, are apt to give them a *moratorium*, a span of time after they have ceased being children, but before their deeds and works count toward a future identity. In Luther's time the monastery was, at least for some, one possible psychosocial moratorium, one possible way of postponing the decision as to what one is and is going to be. It may seem strange that as definite and, in fact, as eternal, a commitment as is expressed in the monastic vow could be considered a moratorium, a means of marking time. Yet in Luther's era, to be an ex-monk was not impossible; nor was there necessarily a stigma attached to leaving a monastic order, provided only that one left in a quiet and prescribed way—as for example, Erasmus did, who was nevertheless offered a cardinalate in his old age; or that one could make cardinals laugh about themselves, as the runaway monk Rabelais was able to do. I do not mean to suggest that those who chose the monastery, any more than those who choose other forms of moratoria in different historical coordinates (as Freud did, in committing himself to laboratory physiology, or St. Augustine to Manichaeism) *know* that they are marking time before they come to their crossroad, which they often do in the late twenties, belated just because they gave their all to the temporary subject of devotion. The crisis in such a young man's life may be reached exactly when he half-realizes that he is fatally overcommitted to what he is not.

As a witness to the predicament of over-commitment let me quote an old man who, looking back on his own youth, had to admit that no catastrophe or failure stopped him in his tracks, but rather the feeling that things were going meaninglessly well. Somehow events in his life were coming to a head, but he felt that he was being lived by them, rather than living them. A man in this predicament is apt

to choose the kind of lonely and stubborn moratorium which all but smothers its own creative potential. George Bernard Shaw describes his crisis clearly and unsparingly.[37]

"I made good in spite of myself, and found, to my dismay, that Business, instead of expelling me as the worthless imposter I was, was fastening upon me with no intention of letting me go. Behold me, therefore, in my twentieth year, with a business training, in an occupation which I detested as cordially as any sane person lets himself detest anything he cannot escape from. In March, 1876 I broke loose."

Breaking loose meant to leave family and friends, business and Ireland, and to avoid the danger of success without identity, of a success unequal to "the enormity of my unconscious ambition." He thus granted himself a prolongation of the interval between youth and adulthood. He writes: ". . . when I left my native city I left this phase behind me, and associated no more with men of my age until, after about eight years of solitude in this respect, I was drawn into the Socialist revival of the early eighties, among Englishmen *intensely serious* and *burning with indignation* at *very real* and *very fundamental evils* that affected *all the world*." (The words I have italicized in this statement are almost a list of the issues which dominate Martin's history.) In the meantime, Shaw apparently avoided opportunities, sensing that "Behind the conviction that they could lead to nothing that I wanted, lay the unspoken fear that they might lead to something I did not want." We have to grant some young people, then, the paradoxical fear of a negative success, a success which would commit them in a direction where, they feel, they will not "grow together."

Potentially creative men like Shaw build the personal fundament of their work during a self-decreed moratorium, during which they often starve themselves, socially, erotically, and, last but not least, nutritionally, in order to let the grosser weeds die out, and make way for the growth of their inner garden. Often, when the weeds are dead, so is the garden. At the decisive moment, however, some make contact with a nutriment specific for their gifts. For Shaw, of course, this gift was literature. As he dreamt of a number of professional choices, "of literature I had no dreams at all, any more than a duck has of swimming."

He did not dream of it, but he did it, and with a degree of ritualization close to what clinicians call an "obsessive compensation." This often balances a temporary lack of inner direction with an almost fanatic concentration on activities which maintain whatever work habits the individual may have preserved. "I bought supplies of white paper, demy size, by sixpence-worths at a time; folded it in quarto; and condemned myself to fill five pages of it a day, rain or shine, dull or inspired. I had so much of the schoolboy and the clerk still in me that if my five pages ended in the middle of a sentence I did not finish it until the next day. On the other hand, if I missed a day, I made up for it by doing a double task on the morrow. On this plan I produced five novels in five years. It was my professional apprenticeship. . . ." We may add that these five novels were not published for over fifty years, at which time Shaw, in a special introduction, tried to dissuade the potential buyer from reading them, while recommending to his attention their biographical importance. To such an extent was Shaw aware of their true function and meaning; although his early work habits were almost pathological in their compulsive addictiveness, they were autotherapeutic in their perseverance: "I have risen by sheer gravitation, too industrious by acquired habit to stop working (I work as my father drank)." There is a world of anguish, conflict, and victory in this small parenthesis; for to succeed, Shaw had to inwardly defeat an already outwardly defeated father some of whose peculiarities (for example, a strange sense of humor) contributed to the son's unique greatness, and yet also to that specific failure that is in each greatness. Shaw's autobiographical remarks do not leave any doubt about the true abyss which he, one of the shyest of religious men, faced in his youth before he had learned to cover his sensitivities by appearing on the stage of history as the great cynic ("in this I succeeded only too well"), while using the theatre to speak out of the mouth of the Maid of Orleans.

As was indicated in the preface, Freud and Darwin are among the great men who came upon their most decisive contribution only after a change of direction and not without neurotic involvement at the time of the breakthrough to their specific creativity. Darwin failed in medicine, and had, as if accidentally, embarked on a trip which, in fact, he almost missed because of what seem to have been psychosomatic symptoms. Once aboard the *Beagle*, however, he found not only boundless physical vigor, but also a keen eye for

unexplored details in nature, and a creative discernment leading straight to revolutionary insights: the law of natural selection began to haunt him. He was twenty-seven years old when he came home; he soon became an undiagnosed and lifelong invalid, able only after years of concentrated study to organize his data into a pattern which convincingly supported his ideas. Freud, too, was already thirty when, as if driven to do so by mere circumstance, he became a practicing neurologist and made psychiatry his laboratory. He had received his medical degree belatedly, having decided to become a medical scientist rather than a doctor at the age of seventeen. His moratorium, which gave him a basic schooling in method while it delayed the development of his specific gift and his revolutionary creativity, was spent in (then physicalistic) physiology. And when he at last did embark on his stupendous lifework, he was almost delayed further by neurotic suffering. However, a creative man has no choice. He may come across his supreme task almost accidentally. But once the issue is joined, his task proves to be at the same time intimately related to his most personal conflicts, to his superior selective perception, and to the stubbornness of his one-way will: he must court sickness, failure, or insanity, in order to test the alternative whether the established world will crush him, or whether he will disestablish a sector of this world's outworn fundaments and make a place for a new one.[38]

Darwin dealt with man's biological origins. His achievement, and his sin, was a theory that made man part of nature. To accomplish this, and only for this, he was able to put his neurosis aside. Freud, however, had to "appoint his own neurosis that angel who was to be wrestled with and not to be let go, until he would bless the observer." Freud's wrestling with the angel was his working through of his own father complex which at first had led him astray in his search for the origins of the neuroses in childhood. Once he understood his own relationship to his father, he could establish the existence of the universal father image in man, break through to the mother image as well, and finally arrive at the Oedipus complex, the formulation of which made him one of the most controversial figures in the history of ideas. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*,[39] Freud gave psychoanalysis its orientation as the study of unconscious motivation in the normal as well as the pathological, in society as well as the individual. At the same time he freed his own creativity by self-analysis and was able to combine strict observation with disciplined intuition and literary craftsmanship.

This general discussion of the qualities of that critical area between neurosis and creativity will introduce the state of mind which engulfed Martin at the time of the fit in the choir. Even the possibly legendary aspects of this fit reflect an unconscious understanding on the part of the legend-makers, here Martin's monastic brothers, as to what was going on inside him. In the next chapter we will analyze what little is known of Martin's childhood. Then we will trace the subsequent personality change which made it possible for the young man who in the choir was literally felled by the power of the need to negate to stand before his emperor and before the Pope's emissary at the Diet of Worms twelve years later and affirm human integrity in new terms: "My conscience is bound by God's words. Retract anything whatsoever I neither can nor will. For to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor honorable."[40]

God's words: he had, by then, become God's "spokesman," preacher, teacher, orator, and pamphleteer. This had become the working part of his identity. The eventual liberation of Luther's voice made him creative. The one matter on which professor and priest, psychiatrist and sociologist, agree is Luther's immense gift for language: his receptivity for the written word; his memory for the significant phrase; and his range of verbal expression (lyrical, biblical, satirical, and vulgar) which in English is paralleled only by Shakespeare.

The development of this gift is implicit in the dramatic outcry in the choir of Erfurt: for was it not a "dumb" spirit which beset the patient before Jesus? And was it not muteness, also, which the monk had to deny by thus roaring "like an ox"? The theme of the Voice and of the Word, then, is intertwined with the theme of Luther's identity and with his influence on the ideology of his time.

We will therefore concentrate on this process: how young Martin, at the end of a somber and harsh childhood, was precipitated into a severe identity crisis for which he sought delay and cure in the silence of the monastery; how being silent, he became "possessed"; how being possessed, he gradually learned to speak a new language, *his* language; how being able to speak, he not only talked himself out of the monastery, and much of his country out of the

Roman Church, but also formulated for himself and for all of mankind a new kind of ethical and psychological awareness: and how, at the end, this awareness, too, was marred by a return of the demons, whoever they may have been.

CHAPTER

III

Obedience—To Whom?

At its height, Luther's rebellion centered in the question of man's differential debt of obedience to God, to the Pope, and to Caesar—or rather, to the multitude of Caesars then emerging. At the beginning of his career another and, as it were, preparatory dichotomy preoccupied him: that between the obedience owed to his natural father, whose views were always brutally clear, and the obedience owed to the Father in heaven, from whom young Luther had received a dramatic but equivocal call.

The earlier dichotomy actually followed Luther far into the manhood of his theological struggles; as late as in his thirty-eighth year, having defied emperor and Pope, and having become the spokesman of God's word, Luther appealed to his natural father in a preface to the work in which he justifies the abandonment of his monastic vows (*De Votis Monasticis*): "Would you not rather have lost a hundred sons than miss this glory? . . . For who can doubt that I stand in the service of the Word?" [1] When he had found a new agency to disobey, namely, the Pope, he had to tell his father publicly that he had finally obeyed him; but we cannot overlook the ambivalent wish to be right at all costs, for he adds: "Would you still want to tear me out [of the monastery]? . . . In order to save you from a sense of vainglory, God outdistanced you and took me out himself. . . ." [2] Thus Luther stated to all the world (for his works were then best-sellers) not only that his father had opposed the monastic career, but also that the son had belatedly made this