

THE ERRORS OF ERIK ERIKSON
A Critique of
Young Man Luther
"Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," in *The Challenge of Youth*
Childhood and Society
Identity and the Life Cycle
The Life Cycle Completed
by Erik Erikson

Building on the fraudulent foundation established by atheist Sigmund Freud, psychoanalyst Erik Erikson has proposed a series of eight "life cycles," each with an accompanying "life crisis," to explain both human behavior and man's religious tendencies. Erikson's extensive application of his theories to the life of Martin Luther reveals his contempt for the living God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. This paper will consider Erikson's view of man, sin, redemption, and religion, along with an analysis of his eight "life cycles." Finally, we will critique his attempted psychoanalysis of Martin Luther.

Erikson's Doctrine of Man

Every major psychological theory includes a doctrine of man, a particular view of the essence of human nature. Man is created in the image of God to live in relationship to Him. God's Word reveals what man needs to know about himself. Modern psychologies intrude on biblical territory when attempting to define man *apart from* his sovereign Creator. With God out of the picture, rampant error is inevitable.

Erikson mutilates the nature of man, God, and salvation all on one page when he speculates about the existence of three "dim nostalgias" or "images." First is the "wish for a hallucinatory sense of unity with a maternal matrix," second "the paternal voice of guiding conscience, which puts an end to the simple paradise of childhood and provides a sanction for energetic action" (264ML). At this second stage: "At all cost, the Godhead must be forced to indicate that He Himself mercifully planned crime and punishment in order to assure salvation" (264ML). Third, "the glass shows the pure self itself, the unborn core of creation the--as it were, preparental--center where God is pure nothing," as in Eastern religions (264ML). These quotes help us to see at the outset that Erikson rejects the biblical view of man's origins and of the God who created the heavens and earth.

Man's original state. The biblical view of man's creation, including his fall into sin, is viewed by Erikson as a "saga" that can be explained in psychological terms, rather than an actual account of history. In place of man's separation from God, Erikson substitutes the inevitable separation of the infant from his mother:

"This point in the individual's early history can be the origin of an evil dividedness, where anger against the gnawing teeth, and anger against the withdrawing mother, and anger with one's impotent anger all lead to a forceful experience of sadistic and masochistic confusion leaving the general impression that once upon a time one destroyed one's unity with a maternal matrix. This earliest catastrophe in the individual's relation to himself and to the world is probably the ontogenetic contribution to the biblical saga of paradise, where the first people on earth forfeited forever the right to pluck without effort what had been put at their disposal; they bit into the forbidden apple, and made God angry. We must understand that the profundity as well as the universality of this subject makes it seem the more important that the early unity should be a deep and satisfactory one and that a baby should be exposed to the unavoidable 'evil' in human nature gently and reassuringly, and without avoidable aggravation." (79C&S)

The child's original state is described as "naive self-love" rather than sin. This original state of "innocence" is later compromised when the child experiences disapproval from others. His successful imitation of such others may lead to an increase in his self-esteem:

"Surrounded by such mighty disapproval, the child's original state of naive self-love is said to be compromised. He looks for models by which to measure himself, and seeks happiness in trying to resemble them. Where he succeeds he achieves *self-esteem*, a not too convincing facsimile of his original narcissism and sense of omnipotence." (19ILC)

Erikson buys Freud's concept of the "superego" as "the internalization of all the restrictions to which the ego must bow," forced upon the child by parents and other authorities (19ILC). Erikson speaks of "the superego's function as a vehicle of tradition, and this especially in regard to its resistance to change and liberation" (93LCC).

"From a developmental point of view...what we detect in the superego as remnants of childhood years is, as Freud suggests, not only the reflection of living ideologies, but also of old ones that have become moralisms." (93LCC)

Thus we see how Erikson denies man's sinful nature and his responsibility before God. Man is perceived to be a *victim* of the external forces of disapproval and authority.

Evolution. Erikson's theories, like those of his predecessor Freud, deny the existence and seriousness of sin. At the same time, his evolutionary foundations degrade humanity. As the image of God, man was originally granted a position of honor within the scheme of God's created works. Psychological theories, grounded in evolution, deny *both* sin *and* man's honored position in relation to the rest of creation.

Erikson notes a "fall" of man in distinctly Freudian terms:

"Freud's work had begun in the century of Darwin's search for the evolutionary origin of the species; and the new humanist ethos demanded that mankind, once so proud of the consciousness and the moral stature of its assumed civilized maturity, would have to accept the discovery of its primary roots in its animal ancestry, in its own primeval prehistory, and in the infantile stages of ontogeny." (17LCC)

In Erikson's view, man "falls," not due to his transgression of God's commandments, but rather due to the discovery of his "animal ancestry" and bondage to the "infantile stages" of his life. Individual development is supposedly parallel to the "evolutionary gains" of mankind in general, and is forever marked by such "infantile" experience:

"The stage-by-stage acquisition during individual childhood of each of man's evolutionary gains leaves the mark of infantile experience on his proudest achievements" (2YFD).

Erikson buys into Freud's definitions of the id, the ego, and the superego. Evolution is one of the main foundations of this scheme:

"The id is the deposition in us of the whole of evolutionary history. The id is everything that is left in our organization of the responses of the amoebae and of the impulses of the ape...." (192C&S)

The "superego" is "a kind of automatic governor which limits the expression of the id by opposing to it the demands of conscience" (193C&S). The "ego" is claimed to balance the "id" and "superego" using various "defense mechanisms" (193C&S).

Evolution denies the biblical account of creation, wherein man is created in the image of God. This is a faulty foundation on which to rest a comprehensive view of human nature.

Psychic determinism. Erikson clearly buys into the Freudian view that man is largely determined by his unconscious:

"Moralistic man and rationalizing man continues to identify himself with abstractions of himself, but refuses to see how he became what he really is and how, as an emotional and political being, he undoes with infantile compulsions and impulses what his thought has invented and what his hands have built. All of this has its psychological basis--namely, the individual's unconscious determination never to meet his childhood anxiety face to face again, and his superstitious apprehension lest a glance at the infantile origins of his thoughts and schemes may destroy his single-minded stamina. He therefore prefers enlightenment away from himself; which is why the best minds have often been least aware of themselves." (404C&S)

Vast, arrogant claims are made for the theories of modern psychology:

"We have, in the last few decades, learned more about the development and growth of the individual and about his motivations (especially unconscious motivations) than in the whole of human history before us (excepting, of course, the implicit wisdom expressed in the Bible or Shakespeare)." (105ILC)

While Erikson gives passing acknowledgment here to the Bible, he places it on a par with human words (Shakespeare) and *presumes* by his statement that modern psychological theory has something valuable to *add* to Scripture. Nowhere does God's Word ever hint that man's responsibility is minimized due to "unconscious motivations." We might well inquire as to whether the psychoanalysts themselves are not driven by "unconscious" (more accurately, *ungodly*) motivations in the formulation of their own theories! Romans 1 informs us that the unregenerate man *holds down the truth in unrighteousness*. Such suppression of God's truth is an ethical, responsible act. The desire to escape the

judgment of God is certainly motivation to develop elaborate explanatory theories of human origins and behavior, theories that cut God out of the picture.

Erikson destroys hope in his Freudian view of man's enslaved "ego":

"Thus, our proud ego, which Freud called a 'frontier creature,' 'owes service to three masters and is consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego' (S. Freud 1923)." (18-19LCC)

Similar determinism emerges when Erikson proposes predetermined inner laws for the development of human personality:

"In the sequence of his most personal experiences the healthy child, given a reasonable amount of guidance, can be trusted to obey **inner laws of development**, laws which create a *succession of potentialities for significant interaction* with those who tend him." (54ILC, emphasis added)

"Personality can be said to develop according to steps **predetermined** in the human organism's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius, beginning with the dim image of a mother and ending with mankind." (54ILC, emphasis added)

One wonders how Erikson can hold to such universal, absolute laws that determine and govern human behavior, when his writings deny the existence of the Lawgiver!

Sexual development. Erikson describes "pregenitality," a concept that is "pervasive" in psychoanalytic literature:

"The child's erotic experiences are called pregenital because sexuality reaches genital primacy only in puberty." (29LCC)

It is theorized that there are three stages in a child's sexual development: oral, anal, and phallic (29LCC). In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson proposes to provide "a review of Freud's theories concerning the infantile organism as a powerhouse of sexual and aggressive energies" (48C&S).

Erikson assumes the truth of Freud's Oedipus complex, that "to possess one's mother and to replace one's father is a universal wish, universally tabooed" (87C&S).

"The 'oedipal' wishes (so simply and so trustingly expressed in the boy's assurance that he will marry his mother and make her proud of him and in the girl's that she will marry her father and take much better care of him) lead to vague fantasies bordering on murder and rape. The consequence is a deep sense of guilt--a strange sense, for it forever seems to imply that the individual has committed a crime which, after all, was not only not committed, but would have been biologically quite impossible." (90C&S)

It is rather strange that someone who denies original sin would attribute fantasies of homicide and incest to small children! It is also odd that he recognizes that *guilt* would attach to such actions, because he denies the only possible foundation for defining guilt, namely God and His Word. Without God, there is no standard for universal moral absolutes. This perverted sexual scheme is one of the major cornerstones of Freudian theory, and Erikson builds heavily on what Freud established. Meanwhile, sexual *sin* is nowhere to be found.

Social groups. Erikson places considerable emphasis on man as a social being. He states that:

"There is no individual anxiety which does not reflect a latent concern common to the immediate and extended group."
(36C&S)

Elsewhere, he considers the possibility that Freudian defense mechanisms can occur on a wide scale:

"Can defense mechanisms...be shared and thus assume an ecological value in the lives of interrelated persons and in communal life?" (83LCC)

Apparently so, according to Erikson. He proposes the existence of "grand ritual defenses of communities" (83LCC).

Erikson wants to look at what society grants to the child, rather than what it denies him (19ILC). Society "seduces him to its particular life style" (19ILC). Even *religion*, according to Erikson, is something society creates and gives to the individual:

"In...reinforcing the values by which the ego exists societies create the only condition under which human growth is possible.... A religion...may organize the nuclear conflict of sense of trust versus sense of evil, collectively

cultivating trust in the form of faith and exploiting the sense of evil in the form of sin." (277C&S)

Thus religion is explained away as an invention of human society.

Identity. The concept of "identity" (or "finding yourself") pervades today's psychological literature. Even Christian writings assume it to be a legitimate preoccupation. (Don Matzat's book, *Christ Esteem*, has many good points yet assumes that the focus on "identity" is valid for Christians.)

Erikson defines "ego identity" as something that "provides the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly" (42C&S). Elsewhere he describes it as a "self-esteem" that "grows to be a conviction that the ego is learning effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that it is developing into a defined ego within a social reality" (22ILC). In yet another place he says that it is "certain comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his preadult experience in order to be ready for the tasks of adulthood" (108ILC). The "ego" is described as "a concept denoting man's capacity to unify his experience and his action in an adaptive manner" (16C&S).

According to Erikson, society plays a major role in the development of identity, limiting the available choices:

"A child has quite a number of opportunities to identify himself, more or less experimentally, with real or fictitious people of either sex, with habits, traits, occupations, and ideas. Certain crises force him to make radical selections. However, the historical era in which he lives offers only a limited number of socially meaningful models for workable combinations of identification fragments." (25ILC)

If one does speak of identity, the Bible identifies believers as those who belong to Jesus Christ, God's people. Any other basis for "identity" falls to the ground by comparison (Philippians 3). However, *Scripture does not call us to focus on our own identity.*

Unity of mankind. Some of Erikson's sentiments about the ultimate unity of mankind are distressingly reminiscent of today's New Age propaganda. Erikson cites approvingly a 1930 statement by Freud that:

"...civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples, and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind." (95LCC)

Erikson presumes that various peoples are in the process of forming "the identity of one mankind" (26), that will "make transparent the superstitions of their traditional moralities" (26), such that a "universal ethics growing out of a universal technological civilization" will be formed (27YFD).

"The utopia of our own era predicts that man will be one species in one world, with a universal identity to replace the illusory superidentities which have divided him, and with an international ethics replacing all moral systems of superstition, repression, and suppression." (9YFD)

Such a "utopia" is a distortion and counterfeit of the eternal state promised to us when Christ returns and ushers in the eternal state.

Man as judge. Having rejected the true God, Erikson exalts man in His place:

"Man creates his environment and both lives in it and judges his own modes of living." (3YFD)

This is strangely inconsistent in view the psychic determinism that permeates Erikson's writings! Yet without God, man assumes the throne by default.

Man, not God, is viewed as the source of moral standards and virtues:

"It is not our purpose...to dwell on the easy perversion and corruptibility of man's morality, but to determine what those core virtues are which--at this age of psycho-social evolution--need our concerted attention and ethical support; for antimoralists as well as moralists easily overlook the bases in human nature for a strong ethics." (2-3YFD)

Erikson defines "basic virtues" as "certain qualities which begin to animate man pervasively during successive stages of his life, hope being the first and the most basic" (3YFD). The text is absent as to the origin of such "virtues." *Erikson must borrow from the Christian worldview!* Otherwise, he would have no basis on which to assert one "virtue" over any other.

Erikson's borrowing from Christianity is more than a little obvious when he acknowledges the values of faith, hope, and love (charity), values we find in 1 Corinthians 13. He speaks freely about them, assuming their validity:

"Such proven traditional values, while referring to the highest spiritual aspirations, must, in fact, have harbored from their dim beginnings some relation to the developmental rudiments of human strength." (58LCC)

Erikson's theories begin and end with man, not God. He steals the biblical qualities of faith, hope, and love, denying the God who defines them in His Word.

Erikson's "Life Cycles" and "Life Crises"

Erikson neatly explains away a multitude of sin by proposing eight stages of human life, each with its own peculiar "crisis" resulting in "the emergence of a basic strength or ego quality" (80 LCC). Before looking at each stage in depth, here is a brief overview (57-58 LCC):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Basic trust vs. mistrust | HOPE |
| 2. Autonomy vs. shame/doubt | WILL |
| 3. Initiative vs. guilt | PURPOSE |
| 4. Industry vs. inferiority | COMPETENCE |
| 5. Identity vs. identity confusion | FIDELITY |
| 6. Intimacy vs. isolation | LOVE |
| 7. Generativity vs. stagnation | CARE |
| 8. Integrity vs. despair/disgust | WISDOM |

Again, Erikson has the audacity to correlate his system with the biblical trio of faith, hope and love:

"...if developmental considerations lead us to speak of *hope*, *fidelity*, and *care* as the human strengths or ego qualities emerging from such strategic stages as infancy, adolescence, and adulthood, it should not surprise us...that they correspond to such major credal values as *hope*, *faith*, and *charity*." (58LCC)

Erikson *borrow*s unashamedly from a system of truth he cannot understand, because he lacks the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Exalted claims are made for Erikson's system. He explains Freud's view that:

"All these tormented people, then, whether addicted, depressed, or inhibited, have somehow failed to integrate one or another of the infantile stages, and they defend themselves against these infantile patterns--stubbornly, wastefully, unsuccessfully." (61C&S)

We will see later how even our Protestant Reformation is "explained" in terms of a "psychosocial crisis" in Martin Luther's life.

Erikson begins with the seemingly simple observation that all human beings start life as children and are borne by mothers (17ILC). From this he creates an involved system in which development must supposedly proceed in systematic fashion, according to his outline:

"Each item of the healthy personality to be discussed is *systematically related to all others*, and...they all depend on the *proper development in the proper sequence of each item*...each item exists in some form before '*its*' decisive and critical time normally arrives." (54ILC, emphasis in original)

For example, Erikson considers "basic trust" to be an earlier form of both autonomy and initiative, "autonomy" to be a later form of basic trust but an earlier form of "initiative," and so forth (55ILC). Each phase is claimed to reach a "crisis" toward the end of the stage (56ILC): "All of them exist in the beginning in some form" (56ILC).

#1 - Basic Truth vs. Mistrust. The concept of trust here includes the confidence "that one may trust oneself and the capacity of one's own organs to cope with urges, and that one is able to consider oneself trustworthy enough so that the providers will not need to be on guard lest they be nipped" (248C&S). Trust is strictly a *human* accomplishment for Erikson:

"The infant's first social achievement...is his willingness to let the mother out of sight without undue anxiety or rage, because she has become an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability." (247C&S)

Erikson defines "basic trust" as:

"...an attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life...reasonable trustfulness as far as others are concerned and a simple sense of trustworthiness as far as oneself is concerned." (57ILC)

Erikson uses the phrase "sense of" as something that "pervades surface and depth, consciousness and the unconscious" (58ILC). Explaining further, he says:

"There are ways of conscious *experience*, accessible to introspection (where it develops); ways of *behaving*, observable by others; and unconscious *inner states* determinable by test and analysis." (58ILC)

There is a penetrating depth claimed here that is available solely to God, through His Word and Spirit (Hebrews 4:12).

Failure at this stage is used to explain later life problems. "In adults the impairment of basic trust is expressed in a basic mistrust," shown by various degrees of withdrawal (58ILC). Erikson regards this "basic trust" as "the cornerstone of a healthy personality" (58ILC). Psychotherapy is held out as holding the key when a person's trust is impaired. Erikson says that, in such therapy:

"...we must try to reach them again in specific ways in order to convince them that they can trust the world and that they can trust themselves" (58ILC).

Trust in *self* and trust in *the world* are elevated as the goals to be sought in this area. But that is diametrically opposed to Scripture! Bible verses about trust are legion; Erikson is trespassing on biblical territory. A good summary of biblical truth is found in Jeremiah 17:5-8, where the prophet contrasts trust in the flesh (in *self* and *the world*) with trust in the Lord. Erikson's teachings are the antithesis of Scripture.

#2 - Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt. This stage is said to be characterized by "sudden violent wish to have a choice, to appropriate demandingly, and to eliminate stubbornly" (252C&S). It is "a battle for autonomy" (70ILC) that Erikson relates to early bowel training:

"The anal zone lends itself more than any other to the expression of stubborn insistence on conflicting impulses because, for one thing, it is the model zone for two

contradictory modes which must become alternating, namely, *retention* and *elimination*." (69-70ILC)

Basic trust in self and the world, which we have seen to be unbiblical, is the foundation for this second achievement:

"To develop autonomy, a firmly developed and a convincingly continued stage of early trust is necessary. The infant must come to feel that basic faith in himself and in the world...will not be jeopardized by this sudden violent wish to have a choice, to appropriate demandingly, and to eliminate stubbornly." (71ILC)

Human sin has now been elevated to a virtue, at least in this system!

Erikson believes that autonomy must be developed before a person is able to sacrifice his autonomy for the sake of others:

"There is a time for the stubborn ascendancy of autonomy and there is a time for the partial sacrifice of secure autonomy, but obviously the time for a meaningful sacrifice is *after* one has acquired and reinforced a core of autonomy and has also acquired more insight." (75ILC)

Autonomy is related to the self-esteem values of modern psychology, which we hear so often echoed in the church:

"Just as the sense of trust is a reflection of the parents' sturdy and realistic faith, so is the sense of autonomy a reflection of the parents' dignity as individuals." (75ILC)

Erikson lacks knowledge of the truth about man's creation in the image of God, and also about man's fatal fall into sin. Man is created to glorify God, not to achieve "autonomy" and/or "dignity" apart from Him.

Failure at this point is claimed to result in a turning against the *self*:

"...if denied the gradual and well-guided experience of the autonomy of free choice...the child will turn against himself all his urge to discriminate and to manipulate." (252C&S)

Man's fundamental problem, however, is not that he turns against himself but that he has rebelled against his Creator. This difference is monumental.

Shame is a key element of the discussion about this stage.

"Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at--in a word, self-conscious." (71ILC)

According to Erikson, excessive shame leads to deceit--to what we would call *sin*:

"Too much shaming does not result in a sense of propriety but in a secret determination to try to get away with things when unseen, if, indeed, it does not result in deliberate *shamelessness*." (71ILC)

Once again, Erikson is a trespasser on biblical ground. Genesis 3 speaks truthfully to the problem of man's sin and shame. Jesus Christ speaks to the solution, as He is our "robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10), covering our sin and shame. Erikson reveals only his unbelief and error concerning *biblical* topics, not insights that we could profitably add to the Scripture.

Finally, Erikson relates this stage to the "principle of law and order," as he related the earlier trust stage to religion as its institutional expression (254C&S). But what he writes about human development is a clear example of the "counsel of the wicked," avoided by the person who delights in the *law* of the Lord (Psalm 1).

#3 - Initiative vs. Guilt. Erikson describes "initiative" as a "new responsibility," characterized by a "new hope" (255C&S).

"Initiative adds to autonomy the quality of undertaking, planning and 'attacking' a task for the sake of being active and on the move." (255C&S)

This is supposedly the stage where the child finds out "what kind of a person he is going to be" (78ILC). At this time:

"...he must emerge with a sense of *unbroken initiative* as a basis for a high and yet realistic sense of ambition and independence" (78ILC).

Erikson proposes an "intrusive mode" at this stage, intruding into other people's bodies and space, aggressive talking, curiosity (80ILC). He sees this curiosity as extending to an "overconcern with sexual matters" (80ILC), and assumes the truth of Freud's oedipal complex. In addition, he proposes the existence of a

"potential powerhouse of destructive drives which can be aroused and temporarily buried at this stage, only to contribute later to the inner arsenal of a destructiveness so ready to be used when opportunity provokes it" (83). However, he asserts that such developments may be "harnessed to constructive and peaceful initiative if only we learn to understand the conflicts and anxieties of childhood" (83ILC).

Guilt, a thoroughly *biblical* concept, is viewed as the greatest *danger* to be faced during this third stage of life:

"The danger of this stage is a sense of guilt over the goals contemplated and the acts initiated in one's exuberant enjoyment of new locomotor and mental power." (255C&S)

Conscience is supposedly developed at this time. However, Erikson warns that:

"...if this great achievement is overburdened by all too eager adults, it can be bad for the spirit and for morality itself." (84ILC)

A related concern is the observation of parental sins. Erikson teaches that if a child observes a parent attempting to get away with "the very transgressions which the child can no longer tolerate in himself...the child comes to feel that the whole matter is not one of universal goodness but of arbitrary power" (84ILC).

All of the values and concerns of this "stage" are *biblical concerns*. Conscience is created by God (Romans 2:14-15) and the ultimate moral standards are His law. Erikson speaks of morality but rejects both God and His law. Thus he has no standard by which to judge what is moral or immoral. Guilt is defined by the transgression of God's law, not by human feelings. Rejecting Christ, Erikson can offer no solution to true guilt. He views it as a *feeling* that should be avoided.

The value that emerges at this stage is *purpose*. Without God, however, purpose is elusive and we are left with random chance. But with a saving knowledge of God, we know that He works all things according to the counsel of *His* will, to accomplish *His* good purposes (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 8:28-29). Erikson knows nothing of *God's* purposes.

#4 - Industry vs. Inferiority. Building on the concept of purpose, this is the stage where "the child now wants to be shown

how to get busy with something and how to be busy with others" (87ILC). Erikson believes that children are eventually dissatisfied without a "sense of being useful...of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly." This is his "sense of industry" (91ILC). He describes two extremes in grade school education, the first "emphasizing self-restraint and a strict sense of duty," the other "an extension of the natural tendency in childhood to find out by playing" (88ILC). He sees values in both approaches. Overall, there is to be a certain settling down from the high hopes of earlier stages:

"The child must forget past hopes and wishes, while his exuberant imagination is tamed and harnessed to the **laws of impersonal things**--even the three R's." (258C&S, emphasis added)

Note here the assumption that there are "laws of impersonal things." Erikson rejects the law of God, our *personal* Creator and Lawgiver. Only a *person* can formulate laws. "Impersonal law" is a contradiction in terms. God created the world and designed the laws by which it operates. The so-called "laws of nature" could not exist without Him.

The great danger, at this particular stage, is that a child may develop a sense of "inadequacy and inferiority" (91 ILC, 260 C&S). For example:

"When a child begins to feel that it is the color of his skin, the background of his parents, or the cost of his clothes rather than his wish and his will to learn which will decide his social worth, lasting harm may ensue for the *sense of identity*." (93ILC)

Erikson wishes to promote here a sense of *competence*. That is the value that is supposed to emerge at the close of this stage. Such competence is the antithesis of "inadequacy and inferiority." We are reminded here of the much acclaimed self-esteem movement, with all of its emphasis on self-worth, self-esteem, and feelings of being adequate. The apostle Paul, however, would have none of this. Despite his prominent role in the development of the early church, he proclaimed that our competence, as Christians, is solely from God and never ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). Paul did not claim to speak from human strength or wisdom, but was determined to preach only the crucified Christ (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), so that the faith of those who heard him might be grounded in the power of God, not man. Paul counted the worldly values of his former life to be loss, compared to the surpassing greatness of

knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). Certainly, believers are called to be industrious in all of their efforts, serving the Lord heartily (Colossians 3:23-24). However, the "industry" and "competence" of this psychological view has only a superficial resemblance to anything biblical. Its *focus* (self rather than God) is radically different.

#5 - Identity vs. Role Confusion or Identity Diffusion. This is a critical stage, as we will see when we examine Erikson's analysis of Martin Luther. It is the point at which childhood comes to an end:

"In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, adolescents have to refight many of the battles of earlier years, even though to do so they must artificially appoint perfectly well-meaning people to play the roles of adversaries; and they are ever ready to install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity." (261C&S)

Identity is currently a key "buzz word" in psychological circles, even within the church. (See Discernment's critique of Don Matzat's book, *Christ Esteem*. While that book contains many good points and attempts to refute modern psychology, the author is nevertheless determined to find an "identity" for the believer.) Erikson centers in on the development of individual identity, and accompanying self-esteem, as major goals of human development:

"The integration now taking place in the form of the ego identity is more than the sum of the childhood identifications. It is the inner capital accrued from all those experiences of each successive stage, when meaningful identification led to a successful alignment of the individual's *basic drives* with his *endowment* and his *opportunities*." (94ILC)

"Self-esteem, confirmed at the end of each major crisis, grows to be a conviction that one is learning effective steps toward a tangible future, that one is developing a defined personality within a social reality which one understands." (95ILC)

Erikson explains the crucial importance he attaches to identity when he states that:

"...if a child feels that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permit him to develop and to integrate the next step in his ego

identity, he will resist with the astonishing strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives. Indeed, in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of ego identity." (95ILC)

Such words leave the impression that man is nothing more than a highly developed animal living in a sophisticated "jungle," rather than the image of God living in the world He created.

"Identity diffusion" is described as the danger at this stage, the sense of being unable to "take hold of some kind of life" (97ILC). Erikson believes this dilemma, if based on "a strong previous doubt of one's ethnic and sexual identity," may lead to "delinquent and outright psychotic incidents" (97ILC). He explains the intolerance of adolescent cliques as "the necessary *defense against a sense of identity confusion*, which is unavoidable" at this point in life (97ILC). Thus a variety of human "sin" is "explained" in terms of his theories (see following section).

Erikson further describes the results that are supposed to occur if the young person fails to develop and integrate his identity:

"Psychologically speaking, a gradually accruing ego identity is the only safeguard against the *anarchy of drives* as well as the *autocracy of conscience*, that is, the cruel overconscientiousness which is the inner residue in the adult of his past inequality in regard to his parent. Any loss of a sense of identity exposes the individual to his own childhood conflicts." (99ILC, emphasis in original)

There are clear moral overtones to this quote, as well as to this "explanation" of adolescent mentality:

"The adolescent mind is...a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult."
(262-263C&S)

In speaking of morality, Erikson yet again trespasses on biblical territory. We are reminded that psychology is not a "science" that can be cut from theology. God, our Creator, defines morality. It is His law that we are commanded to keep, and that law is the same throughout all time and for persons of all ages.

The value to be cultivated at this stage is *fidelity*. Erikson believes that "fidelity" is a capacity of youth that is not acquired through effort, but rather "part of the human equipment evolved with socio-genetic evolution" (1YFD). We cannot help but think about God's everlasting faithfulness, *His* fidelity, as contrasted with our own lack of faithfulness. He is absolutely faithful to keep His covenant, in spite of man's disobedience and sin. Psalm 136 reinforces, in verse by verse repetition, that His lovingkindness (the Hebrew word *chesed* encompasses His faithfulness and His love) endures forever. In the New Testament, we see that He remains faithful, and cannot deny Himself, even though we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13).

#6 - Intimacy vs. Isolation or Self-Absorption. Here is the first of three stages in *adult* life. Erikson believes that "real intimacy," either with the opposite sex or with anyone else, is possible "only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established" (101ILC). He explains that:

"The young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others. He is ready for intimacy...." (263C&S)

Here is how Erikson describes the failure to achieve intimacy:

"The counterpart of intimacy is *distantiation*: the readiness to repudiate, to isolate, and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own." (101ILC)

"The avoidance of such experiences [close affiliations] because of a fear of ego loss may lead to a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption." (264C&S)

Biblically, the problem here is a *fear of man*, which Scripture contrasts with trust in the Lord (Proverbs 29:25), and living to please self rather than to please God (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Again--and we can hardly overstate this--Erikson intrudes on biblical territory. He addresses areas of human life that *Scripture already speaks to, with complete sufficiency* (2 Peter 1:3-4). The value emerging here is *love*, but as believers we know that God is love (1 John 4:7-8, 16). Apart from Him, love cannot even be defined (1 John 3:16). The classic text on love was written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit hundreds of years before Erikson came on the scene (1 Corinthians 13).

#7 - Generativity vs. Stagnation. In the next to last stage of life, Erikson proposes "a widening commitment to *take care of* the persons, the products, and the ideas one has learned to *care for*" (67LCC). He calls this "generativity," which he claims "encompasses the evolutionary development which has made man the teaching and instituting as well as the learning animal" (266C&S). "Generativity...is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (267C&S).

Failure at this stage is claimed to result in an excessive preoccupation with self and regression:

"Individuals who do not develop generativity often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own one and only child." (103ILC)

"When such enrichment fails altogether, regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment...where conditions favor it, early invalidism, physical or psychological, becomes the vehicle of self-concern." (267C&S)

Erikson "explains" this behavior (actually sin) in terms of early childhood factors:

"The reasons are often to be found in early childhood impressions; in faulty identifications with parents; in excessive self-love based on a too strenuously self-made personality; and finally...in the lack of some faith, some 'belief in the species.'" (103ILC)

Note here the comment about *faith*--not in *God* but in *man* ("the species"). "Excessive self-love" and failure to care for others is more serious than Erikson realizes. It is *sin*. Again we find that Erikson has placed his feet on biblical ground.

Care is the quality to emerge through this stage, yet Erikson is ignorant of God's loving *care* for His people (1 Peter 5:7).

Furthermore, Erikson's concept of "generativity" implies that *man*, rather than *God*, is *creator*.

#8 - Ego Integrity vs. Despair and Disgust. Erikson sees identity as a continuing development that culminates at this last stage of life:

"While the end of adolescence...is the stage of an overt identity *crisis*, identity *formation* neither begins nor ends with adolescence: it is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society. Its roots go back all the way to the first self-recognition: in the baby's earliest exchange of smiles there is something of a *self-realization coupled with a mutual recognition*." (122ILC)

This "self-realization" depends on successful completion of the immediately preceding stage:

"Only in him who in some way has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being, the originator of others or the generator of products and ideas--only in him may gradually ripen the fruit of these seven stages. I know of no better word for it than ego integrity." (268C&S)

He describes the idea further in terms of love:

"It is a post-narcissistic love of the human ego--not of the self--as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for." (268C&S)

As noted earlier, Erikson cannot fathom the meaning of love, because he rejects God, the author of love. Compare his comments to the glorious hope we Christians have in Romans 8:35-39! Erikson can go no further than the "love of the human ego," an empty goal indeed.

Failure at this stage leads to fear of death:

"The lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by fear of death: the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life." (268-269C&S)

If this "one and only life cycle" is all that there is, hope is destroyed. Contrast this view with the wonderful knowledge we have as believers of our eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-9; Romans 8:18). Erikson cannot escape the fear of death with his theories. Only Christ holds the solution to that common fear (Hebrews 2:15). We know that our earthly years are not "the ultimate of life," but that is exactly what gives us hope and casts out the fear of death (Philippians 1:21-24; 1 John 4:18).

Erikson summarizes for us his correlation of the eight stages with various human institutions, connecting this final stage with philosophy:

"Just as there is a basic affinity of the problem of basic trust to the institution of religion, the problem of autonomy is reflected in basic political and legal organization and that of initiative in the economic order. Similarly, industry is related to technology; identity to social stratification; intimacy to relationship patterns; generativity to education, art, and science; and integrity, finally, to philosophy." (279C&S)

Erikson's views, however, are one of the "vain philosophies" we are warned to avoid (Colossians 2:8). He lacks the Spirit and thus fails to understand spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 2:14).

"Wisdom," emerging supposedly from Erikson's final stage, is described by him as "a kind of 'informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself'" (61 LCC). Its counterpart is "disdain," which Erikson defines as "a reaction to feeling (and seeing others) in an increasing state of being finished, confused, helpless" (61LCC). *Wisdom* is a biblical value that Erikson has borrowed and redefined according to his own understanding, which is darkened and futile (Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:17). Biblically, wisdom begins with the *fear of the Lord* (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13). Having rejected the Lord, Erikson's so-called "wisdom" is pure foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-21).

Erikson sees a "ritualistic danger" of "dogmatism" at this last stage, "a compulsive pseudointegrity that, where linked to undue power, can become coercive orthodoxy" (64LCC). Such psychological "explanations" neatly do away with absolute truth, such as God reveals in His Word. It is thus that psychologists often stand in judgment of those who would contend for the true gospel, the faith delivered once and for all to the saints (Jude 3). Unfortunately, even "Christian psychologists" demonstrate an increasing contempt for concern with sound doctrine.

Erikson's View of Sin

Lacking the absolute moral standards of a personal God, Erikson's skewed view of sin is grounded in his theories of childhood development. Guilt is a concept he would prefer to wipe away (he has no solution!) because of its "damage" to young children:

"No, blame does not help. As long as there is a sense of blame, there are also irrational attempts at restitution for the damage done--and such guilty restitution often results only in more damage." (33-34C&S)

Perhaps Erikson would like to exclude the very idea of "good" and "evil," although he must recognize that such concepts do exist. He claims that it is during the infant's time of increasing separation from his mother that "'good' and 'evil' enter the baby's world, unless his basic trust in himself and others has already been shaken in the first stage by unduly provoked or prolonged paroxysms of rage and exhaustion" (78C&S). In other words, "good" and "evil" enter the baby's life even earlier than would be normal if trust in *himself* has been shaken. What a contrast to our trust in the *Lord*!

Similarly, Erikson evidently believes that guilt and evil are somehow created by the training a child receives early in his life:

"The great human question is to what extent early child training must or must not exploit man's early helplessness and moral sensitivity to the degree that a deep sense of evil and of guilt become unavoidable; for such a sense in the end can only result in clandestine commitment to evil in the name of higher values.... The trouble comes, first, from the mortal fear that instinctual forces would run wild if they were not dominated by a negative conscience; and second, from trying to formulate man's optimum as negative morality, to be reinforced by rigid institutions." (263ML)

That is a flat denial of original sin.

Erikson must explain away the fact that man was originally created good and consequently fell into sin. Man's original condition, in this psychological view, is a mere illusion for which every person yearns. Here is what he says about the earliest "stage" of the infant's life, one centering on basic trust:

"This stage seems to introduce into the psychic life a sense of division and a dim but universal nostalgia for a lost paradise." (62ILC)

Perhaps religion is to blame, according to Erikson, for introducing the notion of man's universal sinfulness. When

describing the supernatural in relation to the practices of Sioux Indians, Erikson says that:

"The paradise of orality and its loss during the rages of the biting stage...may be the ontogenetic origin of that deep sense of badness **which religion transforms into a conviction of primal sin on a universal scale.** Prayer and atonement, therefore, must renounce the all too avaricious desire for 'the world' and must demonstrate, in reduced posture and in the inflection of urgent appeal, a return to bodily smallness, to technical helplessness, and to voluntary suffering." (147C&S, emphasis added)

Erikson also lays blame on "frustrated wishes" in early life for the development of sin, guilt, and the religious solutions that emerge:

"It is hard for our rational minds to comprehend--unless we are schooled in the ways of irrationality--that frustrated wishes, and especially early, preverbal, and quite vague wishes, can leave a residue of **sin** which goes deeper than any **guilt** over deeds actually committed and remembered. In our world only the **magic sayings of Jesus** convey a conviction of these dark matters. We take His word for it, that a wish secretly harbored is as good--or rather, as bad--as a deed committed; and that whatever organ offends us with its persistent desires should be radically extirpated. It is, of course, not necessary that a whole tribe or congregation should follow such a precept to the letter. Rather, the culture must provide for a convention of **magic belief** and a **consistent system of ritual** which will permit a few exceptional individuals who feel their culture's particular brand of **inner damnation** especially deeply...to dramatize, for all to see, the fact that there is a **salvation.**" (149C&S, emphasis added)

Note carefully how religion, and Christianity in particular, is reduced to "magic"! Erikson denies and "explains" both the real problem (sin) and the only solution (Jesus Christ).

Throughout his proposed developmental system, Erikson continues to "explain" the sense of sin that man cannot escape. He proposes a "judicious" stage in early childhood development. Here, supposedly, is the

"...origin of that great human preoccupation with questions of free will and of self-determination, as well as of the **lawful definition of guilt and transgression**...institutions rooted in this phase of life are those that define by law the individual's freedom of action." (47LCC, emphasis added)

Morality, rather than being revelation from God, is reduced to an imaginative invention of childhood play:

"As for the element of ritualism rooted in the play age, I think it is a moralistic and inhibitive suppression of playful initiative in the absence of creatively ritualized ways of channeling guilt. *Moralism* is the word for it." (48LCC)

However, Erikson explains "infantile moralism" at this stage as differing from actual morality, and teaches that guilt experienced here is a "deep-seated conviction that the child as such...is essentially bad" (85ILC). He also buys into Freud's oedipal complex and attributes sexual fantasies and jealousies to young children, such that "a deep sense of *guilt*" results (82ILD), guilt for imaginary crimes that are "biologically quite impossible" (83ILC). In all of this, genuine guilt for transgression of God's law is ignored. Actually, it is more than ignored; man's inescapable knowledge of God is actively suppressed by complex psychological theories of human behavior (Romans 1:18).

Furthermore, Erikson blames the workings of the culture for producing "guilt feelings" and "atonements" that might not otherwise exist. He believes that "children are induced to accept historical or actual people as prototypes," but we haven't yet studied how this happens. He goes on to state that:

"...in our guilt-culture, individuals and groups, whenever they perceive that their socioeconomic status is in danger, unconsciously behave as if inner dangers (temptations) had really called forth the threatening disaster. As a consequence, not only individual regressions to **early guilt feelings and atonements** take place, but also a reactionary return to the content and to the form of historically earlier principles of behavior. The implicit moral code becomes more restricted, more magic, more exclusive, more intolerant, etc." (27ILC, emphasis added)

It seems that Erikson would like to eliminate man's sense of guilt, along with restrictive moral codes, but he cannot.

Conscience. Refusal to acknowledge the God of Scripture results in the view that conscience and morality are merely humanly contrived concepts:

"As an animal, man is nothing.... Man's 'inborn instincts' are drive fragments to be assembled, given meaning, and organized during a prolonged childhood by methods of child training and schooling which vary from culture to culture and are determined by tradition...man survives only where traditional child training provides him with a conscience which will guide him without crushing him and which is firm and flexible enough to fit the vicissitudes of his historical era." (95C&S)

Erikson cannot escape the necessity for a conscience, but fails to understand either its source or the absolute moral standards by which it must abide. Conscience seems almost a necessary evil in his system. He believes that a child is born with "fragmentary drives" that are completed by traditional training. The result of this training "forever ties the individual to the traditions and to the institutions of his childhood milieu, and exposes it to the--not always logical and just--autocracy of his inner governor, his conscience." (97C&S) He also correlates his view of conscience with the Freudian superego, a vehicle for morality created by man, rather than God:

"The superego is conceived as a more archaic and thoroughly internalized representative of the evolutionary principle of morality." (160ILC)

What Erikson fails to see is that man's conscience, presently even in the unbeliever (Romans 2:14-15) is flawed because of *sin*; thus we need regeneration and God's revelation. Erikson's view of conscience is one that exalts trust in *self* rather than God, as seen in his teachings about the childhood stage where conscience is supposedly developed:

"It is at this stage of initiative that the great governor of initiative, namely, *conscience*, becomes firmly established. Only as a dependent does man develop conscience, that dependence on himself which makes him, in turn, dependable; and only when thoroughly dependable with regard to a number of fundamental values can he become independent and teach and develop tradition." (84ILC)

As he continues, Erikson reveals his thoroughly unbiblical views concerning both God and guilt:

"He now hears, as it were, God's voice without seeing God. Moreover, he begins automatically to feel guilty even for mere thoughts and for deeds which nobody has watched."
(84ILC)

Erikson evidently assumes that "God's voice" is not a *reality*, but a creation of the human mind, and that "God's voice" condemns for sins that have not even been committed! Elsewhere, his words imply that "God's voice" is nothing more than the "superego" of man:

"Visual shame precedes auditory guilt, which is a sense of badness to be had all by oneself when nobody watches and when everything is quiet--except the voice of the superego."
(253C&S)

This "shame" is reminiscent of the very real shame experienced by Adam and Eve when they sinned. Denying God, Erikson explains shame in terms of a turning against *self*:

"Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one's face, or to sink, right then and there, into the ground. But this, I think, is essentially rage turned against the self."
(252C&S)

The very existence of moral consciousness in man is something that troubles Erikson:

"The fact that human conscience remains partially infantile throughout life is the core of human tragedy.... The suspiciousness and evasiveness which is thus mixed in with the all-or-nothing quality of the superego, this organ of moral tradition, makes moral (in the sense of moralistic) man a great potential danger to his own ego--and to that of his fellow men." (257C&S)

Note how the term "infantile" covers a multitude of sin. One must wonder what alternative Erikson can offer to the "moral man" who is presumed to be such a "great potential danger" to others. An immoral man?

Autonomy. In proceeding through Erikson's developmental stages, we encounter *autonomy* as a positive attribute to be cultivated. Much sin is explained away as a failure to properly develop autonomy:

"If outer control by too rigid or too early training insists on robbing the child of his attempt *gradually* to control his bowels and other functions willingly and by his free choice, he will again be faced with a double rebellion and a double defeat.... From a sense of *self-control without loss of self-esteem* comes a lasting sense of autonomy and pride; from a sense of muscular an anal impotence, of loss of self-control, and of parental overcontrol comes a lasting sense of doubt and shame." (70-71ILC)

Erikson further explains the undesirable results of a child's failure to become autonomous:

"Denied the gradual and well-guided experience of the autonomy of free choice, or weakened by an initial loss of trust, the sensitive child may turn against himself all his urge to discriminate and to manipulate. He will *overmanipulate himself*, he will develop a *precocious conscience*." (72ILC)

Erikson believes that his theory explains a child's attempt to "gain power over his parents," and that there are also "consequences...for adult character," specifically in the form of compulsive behaviors (73ILC). His counsel at this stage is to "be firm and tolerant with the child" so that he "will feel pride in being an autonomous person" and "grant autonomy to others" (73ILC).

From a biblical perspective, *autonomy* is a description of man's fundamental problem, not a quality to be desired. Parents are responsible for raising their children according to *God's* standards, in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Believers are to be discerning and not merely parrot the thinking of others, and certainly they are to assume responsible for their actions, but nowhere in Scripture is autonomy held up as a desirable standard.

Later youth and adulthood. Erikson claims that youth "must often test extremes before settling on a considered course," "extremes" that "may include not only rebellious but also deviant, delinquent, and self-destructive tendencies" (4YFD). He explains a young German boy's "neurotic rebellion against all authority" by claiming it to be "an unconscious one-boy-Hitler-youth rebellion" in which he identified with his father's aggressors. He had moved from Germany to American with his father while very young, having heard some of the slogans of Hitler youths. On entering military school, he changed radically. Erikson explains that "the boy was

now an unconscious Hitler youth wrapped up in an American prototype: the military schoolboy." (26ILC)

Much adult sin is similarly explained on the basis of childhood influences:

"In the analysis of adults the historical prototypes which determined infantile ego-identity crises appear in specific transferences and in specific resistances." (28ILC)

Erikson cites "Freud's far-reaching discovery that neurotic conflict is not very different in content from the conflicts which every child must live through in his childhood, and that every adult carries these conflicts with him in the recesses of his personality." (52ILC)

The issue of identity is a core concern in Erikson's system, one that is presented as an explanation for what the Bible would call sin. Erikson traces the life problems of various individuals ("preschizophrenias...severe character disorders...paranoid, depressive, psychopathic") to "inability of their egos to establish an identity...acute identity confusion" (132ILC). Other times, it is the choice of a "negative identity" that masks sin:

"The loss of a sense of identity often is expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the roles offered as proper and desirable by one's family or immediate community." (139ILC)

Erikson claims that "role repudiation" can take the form of "systematic defiance...a perverse preference for the...*negative identity*; that is, a combination of socially unacceptable and yet stubbornly affirmed identity elements." (73LCC)

"If the social setting fails to offer any viable alternatives, all this can lead to a sudden and sometimes 'borderline' regression to the conflicts of the earliest experiences of the sense of 'I,' almost as a desperate attempt at self-rebirth." (73-74LCC)

Erikson blames the "suppression, exclusion, and exploitation" imposed by society for the sin that he cannot ultimately deny:

"Therapeutic efforts as well as attempts at social reform verify the sad truth that in any system based on suppression, exclusion, and exploitation, the suppressed, excluded, and

exploited unconsciously believe in the evil image which they are made to represent by those who are dominant." (30ILC)

In this, and Erikson's other teachings, biblical truth about sin is suppressed. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23, 5:12-21). Sin is universal, and it is present from birth (Genesis 6:5, 8:21; Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 53:6). Erikson's complex series of life stages serves to mask the truth about sin as well as the glorious solution we have in Christ.

Erikson's Psychological God

Erikson's rare words about God demonstrate his lack of belief in the God of the Bible, or any other personal deity. Like his predecessor Freud, Erikson evidently views God as a fictional projection of one's earthly parents. In particular, his "god" is a projection of a person's early life relationship with mother:

"A charismatic or divine image, in the context of the ideological search of adolescence or the generative communality of adulthood, is not 'nothing but' a reminder of the first 'Other.'" (50LCC)

"...all identifications amounting to brotherhoods and sisterhoods depend on a joint identification with charismatic figures, from parents to founders to gods. Wherefore the God above the Sinai, when asked by Moses who he should tell the people had talked to him, introduced himself as 'I AM that I AM' and suggested that the people be told 'I AM has sent me unto you.' This existential meaning is, no doubt, central to the evolutionary step of monotheism and extends to associated patriarchal and monarchic phenomena. Here we are again reminded of the lifelong power of the first mutual recognition of the newborn and the *primal* (maternal) *other* and its eventual transfer to the *ultimate other* who will 'lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.'" (88LCC, emphasis in original)

Note how monotheism is, to Erikson, nothing more than an "evolutionary step."

In his psychoanalysis of Martin Luther, Erikson tells us more about his psychologized view of God. The human conscience and the "medieval God" are correlated as Erikson speculates about Luther's motives:

"...he incorporated his father's suspicious severity, his mother's fear of sorcery...later he rebelled: first against his father, to join the monastery; then against the Church, to found his own church--at which point, he succumbed to many of his father's original values. We can only surmise to what extent this outcome was prepared for in childhood by a cumulative rebelliousness and by an ever-so-clandestine hate (for our conscience, like the medieval God, knows everything and registers and counts everything)." (74ML)

Later, according to Erikson, God became less of a *person* to Luther. Note how Erikson's analysis mutilates the gospel and plunges into something similar to pantheism:

"God, instead of lurking on the periphery of space and time, became for Luther 'what works in us'...God, now less of a person, becomes more personal for the individual; and instead of constituting a threat to be faced at the end of all things, He becomes that which always begins--in us. His son is therefore always reborn." (213-214ML)

Even more nauseating is the way Erikson *reverses* the gospel and has Luther forgiving *God* and granting *Him* justification!

"The study of Luther's earliest lectures shows that in his self-cure from deep obsessive struggles he came, almost innocently, to express principles basic to the mastery of existence by religious and introspective means.... At the same time Luther crowns his attempt to cure the wounds of this wrath by changing God's attributes: instead of being like an earthly father whose mood-swings are incomprehensible to his small son, God is given the attribute of...a wrath which is really compassion. With this concept, Luther was at last able to forgive God for being a Father, and grant Him justification." (221-222ML)

Elsewhere, man assumes the throne of God when Erikson describes the adult's coming to view himself as a "first cause," creating his own world even if only through resignation (112ML). However, "the child is not yet in possession of such a seemingly self-sustaining universe; and he often is not willing, before he is forced to, to suffer all the adult sacrifices." (113) Meanwhile, "the one most exposed to the problem of his existential identity is the late adolescent" (113ML).

Erikson's Psychologizing of Religion

Erikson attempts to reduce religion to a mere psychological phenomenon that he can "explain" according to his theories. His "explanations" are yet another example of how the unbeliever "holds down the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). Modern psychologists go a step beyond other atheists. They not only deny God but invent explanations for the fact that others continue to believe in Him.

As Erikson describes the religion of Martin Luther's day, in terms of demons, superstitions, and the Freudian unconscious, we can see his contempt for the true God:

"The belief in demons permitted a persistent externalization of one's own unconscious thoughts and preconscious impulses of avarice and malice, as well as thoughts which one suspected one's neighbor of having." (60ML)

"Corresponding to the population of demonic middlemen between man and the worldly underworld was an ever-increasing number of mediators between him and heaven: the angels and the saints, the heavenly aunts and uncles, more human, more accessible, and more understandable than the forbidding Trinity." (61ML)

The entire supernatural world is thus reduced to fictions created in the unconscious mind of man. Certainly there were serious doctrinal errors in this time period, but Erikson fails to comprehend them in terms of God's truth.

Psychology, religion, and truth. Erikson engages in some double-talk when he places the psychologist in the role of judging religious faith:

"It is not the psychologist's job to decide whether religion should or should not be confessed and practiced in particular words and rituals. Rather the psychological observer must ask whether or not in any area under observation religion and tradition are living psychological forces creating the kind of faith and conviction which permeates a parent's personality and thus reinforces the child's basic trust in the world's trustworthiness." (66ILC)

In psychoanalyzing Martin Luther, Erikson does not hesitate to note Freud's approach (rooted in atheism!) with approval:

"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. 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." (21ML)

To atheist Freud, religion could be "explained" as a "collective neurosis." Erikson has some words about *idolatry* that are similar, as he claims that:

"...the need for the numinous [a hallowed presence] under given conditions easily degenerates into *idolatry*, a visual form of addiction that, indeed, can become a most dangerous collective delusional system." (46LCC)

We've thus moved from religion as a "collective neurosis" to idolatry as a "collective delusional system." The difference between these two is fuzzy at best!

Here is how Erikson explains the *difference* between psychology and religion:

"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.... 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." (21ML)

Erikson presumes *truth* in psychology, but admits his lack of concern for truth, not only here, but also when examining Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation:

"In depicting the 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." (22ML, emphasis added)

In view of the Reformers' concern for biblical truth, to the point of martyrdom in some cases, Erikson's remarks are greatly offensive to anyone who loves the Lord and His Word. He goes on, however, to generalize about ideological changes throughout the history of man:

"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." (22ML)

When we consider Erikson's definition of "ideology," it is even more apparent that he lacks any concern for God's truth:

"In this book, *ideology* will mean an unconscious tendency...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." (22ML)

Now religion is reduced to a creation of man's unconscious! Nevertheless, Erikson places a small amount of value on "religion" or "ideology" as he has defined (or rather redefined) these terms:

"To envisage a future, the young adult may also need that something which Shaw called 'a religion' and 'a clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligible theory.' I indicated at the beginning that we would call this something-between-a-theory-and-a-religion an *ideology*, a term highly conducive to misunderstanding." (153ILC)

Such a "religion" has nothing to do with the worship of the true, living God!

Religion and Erikson's "life stages." Having defined "God" in terms of the infant-mother relationship, it is not surprising that, throughout his works, Erikson connects the earliest life stage with the development of religious faith:

"I suggested earlier that the mutual recognition between mother and infant may be a model of some of the most exalted encounters throughout life.... I submit that this first and dimmest affirmation of the described polarity of 'I' and 'Other' is basic to a human being's ritual and esthetic needs for a pervasive quality which we call the *numinous*: the aura of a hallowed presence. The numinous assures us, ever again, of *separateness transcended* and yet also of *distinctiveness*

confirmed, and thus of the very basis of a sense of 'I.' Religion and art are the institutions with the strongest traditional claim on the cultivation of numinosity, as can be discerned in the details of rituals by which the numinous is shared with a congregation of other 'I's'--all now sharing one all-embracing 'I Am (Jehovah)'." (45LCC)

Erikson assumes religion (and God!) to be a mere *projection* from infancy:

"I assume that it is the smiling face and the guiding voice of infantile parent images which religion projects onto the benevolent sky...peace comes from the inner space." (265-266ML).

Even the purpose of religion, seen through the grid of Freudian psychology, is described in terms of mother and child:

"One basic task of all religions is to affirm that first relationship [mother-child], for we have in us deep down a lifelong mistrustful remembrance of that truly meta-physical anxiety." (119ML)

Erikson makes blasphemous comments about the Lord's Supper when he offers his perverted psychological explanation, based again on early childhood:

"...when they heard it said: 'Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me,' they participated in magic formulations of the kind which can only be created by a merger of the imagery of the unconscious with the poetry of the people. Our unconscious preserves the images of our early, preverbal childhood." (141ML)

Some minimal value is attributed to religion, despite Erikson's rejection of actual truth. Claiming that "religions retrace our earliest inner experiences" and "keep alive the common symbols of integrity distilled by the generations," he asks: "But must we call it regression if man thus seeks again the earliest encounters of his trustful past in his efforts to reach a hoped-for and eternal future?" (264ML). The apostle Paul, however, taught that our faith is useless if not grounded in the historical *truth* of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

Organized religion receives a mixed response from Erikson:

"The parental faith which supports the trust emerging in the newborn, has throughout history sought its institutional safeguard (and, on occasion, found its greatest enemy) in organized religion." (250C&S)

Erikson's judgment here is based on the standards of psychology, not the standards of Scripture.

In describing the crises peculiar to young people, Erikson states that "youth...is sensitive to any suggestion that it may be hopelessly determined by what went before in life histories or in history" (14YFD). This characteristic of youth, Erikson claims, "accounts for the acceptance by youth of mythologies and ideologies predicting the course of the universe or the historical trend" (15YFD).

In looking at the next to last "stage" of human life, Erikson believes that inability to develop this stage may sometimes be traced to "the lack of some faith, some 'belief in the species,' which would make a child appear to be a welcome trust of the community" (267C&S). Again, we find Erikson acknowledging some small value to religious faith, but that value is based on the standards of modern psychology rather than God's eternal truth, and faith is in "the species"--man instead of God.

Religion and death. At the close of life, Erikson still views religious faith as a psychological mechanism, as myth rather than truth:

"...we must acknowledge in old age a retrospective mythologizing that can amount to a pseudointegration as a defense against lurking despair...yet throughout, we must allow for a human being's potential capacity, under favorable conditions, more or less actively to let the integrative experience of earlier stages come to fruition...for the gradual maturation of integrity." (65LCC)

To Erikson, religion is a way to "mythologize and ceremonialize" death, rather than revealing *truth* about life and death in relationship to God:

"...the stage of generativity, as long as a threatening sense of stagnation is kept at bay, is pervasively characterized by a supremely sanctioned disregard of death. Youth, in its own way, is more aware of death than adulthood is; although adults, busy as they are with 'maintaining the world,' participate in the grand rituals of religion, art, and

politics, all of which **mythologize and ceremonialize death**, giving it ritual meaning and thus an intensely social presence. Youth and old age, then, are the times that dream of rebirth, while adulthood is too busy taking care of actual births and is rewarded for it with a unique sense of boisterous and timeless historical reality--a sense which can seem somewhat unreal to the young and to the old, for it denies the shadow of nonbeing." (80LCC, emphasis added)

Religious pluralism. Erikson tends to lump together and "explain" all religions, without distinction. Setting himself up as authority over them all, he claims that viewing "hopefulness as the most childlike of all human qualities" is compatible with "a variety of faiths ('unless you turn and become like children...')" (62LCC). He points to the "developmental logic in such universal values as faith, hope, and charity," claiming that we are forced to "consider how emerging human strengths, step for step, are intrinsically beset not only with severe vulnerabilities that perpetually demand our healing insights, but also with basic evils which call for the redeeming values of universal belief systems or ideologies" (60-61LCC). Thus religion is seen as something created to meet a pressing human need for "redeeming values," rather than as the objective, eternal truth that God reveals in His Word.

Religions in general, Erikson claims, make ritualized use of a "sanctioned listener" to facilitate healing of past painful events:

"Systems designed to cure the soul or the mind make ritual use of this tendency [to describe a past painful event] by providing, at regular intervals, an ordained or otherwise sanctioned listener who gives his undivided attention, is sworn not to censure arbitrarily or to betray, and bestows absolution by explaining how the individual's problem makes sense in some larger context, be it sin, conflict, or disease." (223C&S)

Using this definition, *modern psychotherapy must be classified as a religion*. Indeed, confession of pain to a therapist often replaces biblical confession of sin to God.

Erikson further describes what he believes to be characteristic of *all* faiths:

"All religions have in common the periodical childlike surrender to a Provider or providers who dispense earthly

fortune as well as spiritual health; some demonstration of man's smallness by way of reduced posture and humble gesture; the admission in prayer and song of misdeeds, of misthoughts, and of evil intentions; fervent appeal for inner unification by divine guidance; and finally, the insight that individual trust must become a common faith...." (250C&S)

Almost identical sentiments are echoed in another writing, where religion is correlated with the "basic trust" of early life:

"It seems worth while to speculate on the fact that religion through the centuries has served to restore a sense of trust at regular intervals in the form of faith while giving tangible form to a sense of evil which it promises to ban. All religions have in common the periodical childlike surrender to a Provider or providers who dispense earthly fortune as well as spiritual health; the demonstration of one's smallness and dependence through the medium of reduced posture and humble gesture; the admission in prayer and song of misdeeds, of misthoughts, and of evil intentions; the admission of inner division and the consequent appeal for inner unification by divine guidance; the need for clearer self-delineation and self-restriction; and finally, the insight that individual trust must become a common faith, individual mistrust a commonly formulated evil, while the individual's need for restoration must become part of the ritual practice of many, and must become a sign of trustworthiness in the community. Whosoever says he has religion must derive a faith from it which is transmitted to infants in the form of basic trust; whosoever claims that he does not need religion must derive such basic faith from elsewhere." (67ILC)

Note here how religion is considered dispensable. It is "basic trust" that Erikson values, not faith in the living God.

Unable to escape man's original created condition, and his subsequent fall into sin, Erikson substitutes a psychological explanation of both. Here again, all religions are merged:

"But what destroyed in our infantile past, and what destroys in the depth of our adult present, that original unity which provides the imagery of our supreme hopes? All religions and most philosophers agree that it is *will*--the mere will to live, thoughtless and cruel self-will." (120ML)

In describing the errors of medieval Christianity, and thus the need for the Reformation, Erikson reduces the whole scenario to one of psychological dysfunction. His "explanation" is grounded in his assumption that all religions may be lumped together:

"Our problem centers around the contribution of religious dogma and practice to the sense of identity of an age. All religions assume that a Higher Identity inhabits the great unknown; men of different eras and areas give this Identity a particular appearance or configuration from which they borrow that part of their identity which we may call *existential*, since it is defined by the relation of each soul to its mere existence.... The particular Christian combination of a Higher Identity in the form of a Personal maker of an absolutist moral bent, and a father figure who became more human in heaven as he became more totalitarian on earth was, we suggest, gradually robbing medieval man of just that existential identity which religion owed him." (177ML)

Later in the same book, Erikson claims that the medieval church erred by "promoting the reality of hell too efficiently," thus creating a nightmare (265ML). Clearly hell is not something that Erikson considers a reality, but more of a dream:

"Religions try to use mechanisms analogous to dreamlife, reinforced at times by a collective genius of poetry and artistry, to offer ceremonial dreams of great recuperative value." (265ML)

Erikson is grossly mistaken on an eternally serious matter.

Erikson attempts to "explain" our Lord as a mere "legend" satisfying certain psychological desires common to *all* religions:

"The legend of Christ conveyed that total presence and absolute transcendence which is the rarest and most powerful force among men. A few simple words had once more penetrated the disguises and pretenses of this world, words which at one and the same time were part of the language of the child, the language of the unconscious, and the language of the uncorrupted core of all spiritual tradition." (178ML)

The unity of all religions is a prominent New Age theme.

Unity of mankind. Erikson presumes that various peoples are in the process of forming "the identity of one mankind" (26), that

will "make transparent the superstitions of their traditional moralities" (26), such that a "universal ethics growing out of a universal technological civilization" will be formed (27YFD). Like religious pluralism, this theme also corresponds neatly to the ambitions of the New Age movement.

Salvation, Redemption, Atonement

Erikson's perverted view of religion carries over into his remarks about salvation. He has no concept of the work of Christ, but holds to a psychologized view of such terms as "salvation" and "atonement." His use of such words should not be confused with biblical truth!

In a couple of Erikson's books, considerable space is devoted to a psychoanalysis of the religious practices of the Sioux Indians. Describing one of their rituals, he states that "obviously, self-esteem and inner security are restored by atonement" (23 ILC). Elsewhere, Erikson notes that one portion of the Sioux religious ritual involves having one's chest ripped open. This, he claims, is "only one variation of the countless ways in which, all over the world, a sense of evil is atoned for and the continued generosity of the universe assured, and this often after an appropriately riotous farewell to all flesh" (148C&S). We can see again how Erikson assumes the equality of all religions. In the same book, he explains his psychological version of "atonement" and its purpose:

"Primitive religions, the most primitive layer in all religions, and the religious layer in each individual, abound with efforts at atonement which try to make up for vague deeds against a maternal matrix and try to restore faith in the goodness of one's strivings and in the kindness of the powers of the universe." (251C&S)

A few pages later, Erikson offers his psychological "explanation" for the claim of any religion to possess *the only way* of salvation:

"As other ego values...become the nuclei of collective endeavors, older organizations may increasingly depend on a ruthless exploitation of infantile fears. A church may have to take refuge in a system of indoctrination intended to convince people of the inescapable reality of a particular kind of evil in order to be able to announce that it alone possesses the key for the only door to salvation." (278C&S)

It is as if some churches *invent* evil in order to provide salvation! As believers, we know that Jesus Christ is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14:6), regardless of Erikson's "explanation."

In his treatise on Martin Luther, Erikson again addresses the critical theological issue of atonement. In one place, he psychologizes both man's fall into sin and the concept of propitiation:

"Paradise was lost when man, not satisfied with an arrangement in which he could pluck from the trees all he needed for upkeep, wanted more, wanted to have and to know the forbidden, and bit into it.... He 'knew' at the price of losing innocence; he became autonomous at the price of shame and gained independent initiative at the price of guilt. Next to primary peace, then, secondary appeasement is a great infantile source of religious affect and imagery." (121ML)

Here "appeasement" is nothing more than "infantile religious imagery." In Scripture, the work of our Lord is the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, 4:10).

Erikson's appalling lack of understanding emerges at yet another point in his analysis of Luther, where he views the Lord's passion as mere "symbolism" and mutilates Luther's understanding of salvation:

"The main point to be made here is Luther's new emphasis on man in *inner* conflict and his **salvation through introspective perfection**. Luther's formulation of a God known to individual man only through the symbolism of the Son's Passion redefined the individual's existence in a direction later pursued in both Kierkegaard's existentialism and Freud's psychoanalysis--methods which lead the individual systematically to his own borders, including the border of his religious ecstasies." (214ML, emphasis added)

This could hardly be further from the biblical truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Luther's passion for the true gospel is anything but "introspective perfection," and his theology has nothing to do with either existentialism or psychoanalysis. Erikson sees the concept of redemption through the grid of his own psychological theories. The results are often bizarre.

The Psychologizing of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation

Erikson's probing analysis of Martin Luther's life is one that attempts to reduce the entire Protestant Reformation to an ash heap of Freudian ruins. There is no concern for *truth*, historical, biblical, or otherwise, but only for a forced, convoluted validation of Erikson's theories.

The book, *Young Man Luther*, is claimed to focus on the developmental process within Luther's life, as seen through the lens of Erikson's theories:

"...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." (47-48ML)

The implications of this claim are enormous. Erikson proposes a psychological explanation not only of Martin Luther's personal life, *but the entire Reformation!*

In his opening remarks, Erikson suggests a connection between Luther's courageous stand for the gospel...and modern Freudian psychology:

"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." (9ML)

However, there is a wide chasm between Luther, who was compelled to take a stand for God's truth, and Freud, who hated God and created theories to destroy the Christian faith.

Erikson informs us at the outset that he intends to analyze Luther's life in terms of an adolescent "identity crisis." He describes this crisis as the "major crisis of adolescence," where "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" (14ML). Applying the theory to Luther, Erikson says:

"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 analyze. He found a spiritual solution, not without the well-timed help of a therapeutically clever superior in the Augustinian order." (15ML)

Suddenly the clergy has taken on a therapeutic role. Actually, in modern times it is the psychotherapist who has stolen the duties of the clergy.

The Fit in the Choir Loft

Erikson's blatant lack of concern for *truth* is nowhere more apparent than in his account of the legendary "fit in the choir loft," an incident in Luther's life that is admittedly more fictional than factual. This event is reported by certain of Luther's contemporaries:

"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 Eufurt, 'raved' like one possessed, and roared with the voice of a bull...'It isn't me!'" (23ML)

This supposedly occurred during the reading of Christ's cure of a man possessed by a "dumb spirit," which Erikson claims can only refer to Mark 9:17 (23ML). He goes on to explain that:

"'I am not' would then be the childlike protestation of somebody who has been called a name or has been characterized with loathsome adjectives." (23ML)

In a chronology of Luther's life, Erikson places this "fit in the choir incident" at approximately 1507, after a period of severe doubts. This is about ten years prior to his nailing the 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door (24ML). *Erikson admits that the historicity of this event is in doubt*, having "been denied as often as it has been repeated" (25ML).

Erikson describes Luther as subject to "attacks of unconsciousness and fits of overwhelming anxiety...delusional moments...states of brooding despair," especially in his youth,

but even in later years also (25ML). He notes the analysis of Luther by several others. One of these is Dominican Heinrich Denifle, who considered Luther a psychopath and attributed events such as the "fit in the choir" to solely inner causes (26ML). Another, Danish psychiatrist Dr. Paul J. Reiter, "decides unequivocally that the fit in the choir is a matter of severest psychopathology" (27ML). Finally, a Freudian psychoanalyst, Preserved Smith, seeks to illustrate Freudian theory with Luther's life, claiming that:

"Luther's childhood was unhappy because of his father's excessive harshness...he was obsessively preoccupied with God as an avenger, with the Devil as a visible demon, and with obscene images and sayings." (28ML)

More likely, it is the images of Freudian analysis that should be described as *obscene*. Smith also "attributes Luther's great preoccupation with concupiscence to his losing battle with masturbation" (29ML).

Although Erikson repudiates these three psychologized approaches to Luther's life, he develops an approach grounded in his own psychological theories, seeing the choir loft incident as:

"...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." (36ML)

Like the three other analysts he cites, Erikson reads history through the grid of his own pet theories, disregarding both scriptural truth and historical accuracy.

Admitting that the incident may or may not have happened, and that Luther himself left no record of it, Erikson comments:

"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." (37ML)

Erikson is more concerned about being "consistent with psychological theory" than with truthful recording of facts. He

views the incident as one expressive of "suppressed rage," as Luther at this time was "submissively subdued, painfully sad, and compulsively self-inspective--too much so even for his stern superiors' religious taste" (38ML). He proposes certain "neurotic symptoms" in the incident, such as "intrinsic ambivalence" and "an inner two-facedness," and describes the fit as "both unconscious obedience to the father and implied rebellion against the monastery" (38ML).

Luther's position is described as one "at the crossroads of mental disease and religious creativity" (38ML). Specifically, this "mental disease" was one of sadness:

"Sadness...was primarily the over-all symptom of his youth, and was a symptom couched in a traditional attitude provided by his time." (40ML)

Erikson claims that Luther's youthful sadness was later exchanged for "occasional violent mood swings between depression and elation" (40ML).

Besides this emotional factor to explain the choir loft incident, Erikson zeroes in on his theory of the youthful need for ideology:

"We will recall that young people in their teens and early twenties look for in religion and in other dogmatic systems an *ideology*." (41 ML)

Erikson speaks of the young person discarding what is "old," often the lifestyle of parents (41ML). He proposes needs for both devotion and repudiation in the "identity crisis" of youth (42ML):

"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." (42ML)

Erikson believes that a youthful crisis may occur at a time "exactly when he half-realize[s] that he is fatally overcommitted to what he is not" (43ML).

Defending his disregard for *truth* in the choir loft incident, Erikson explains that:

"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." (47ML)

Erikson believes that by the time of Luther's famous statement at the Diet of Worms, being "God's spokesman...had become the working part of his identity" (47ML).

Throughout the account of this legendary choir loft event, Erikson displays his concern for what we might call "psychological truth," for what is supposedly occurring in the "unconscious," rather than for any accurate account of the facts. The incident fits his theories, so he uses it, true or not.

What a contrast we have in the Christian faith! Our faith is founded in the historical facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15). In His Word, God has authoritatively interpreted those facts, so that believers may know that their eternal inheritance is secure. Eyewitness accounts, in the gospels and epistles, undergird our faith with undeniable facts. The facts are critical! Erikson's theories about Martin Luther, and his related "explanation" for the Reformation, rest on flimsy accounts of events that may never have occurred.

Obedience and Rebellion

Erikson's analysis of Luther is largely focused on his theory of the adolescent "identity crisis." Perhaps it is not surprising that he also brings in the subject of adolescent rebellion.

Erikson claims that Luther's childhood environment thus developed in him "an obsessive mixture of obedience and rebelliousness" (123ML). He describes "Luther's rebellion" in terms of differing obligations to obey (God, the Pope, the civil authorities). First, however, a "preparatory dichotomy preoccupied him," that of obedience to his father versus obedience to God. Erikson describes Luther's childhood in gloomy terms, while *admitting that there are few historical facts about it*. He claims that:

"His parents were hard, thrifty, and superstitious, and beat their boy; and school was monotonous and cruel." (50ML)

Erikson believes that this environment drove Luther to "guilt and sadness" (50ML). In spite of the scarcity of facts, he forges ahead to analyze, defending his speculative approach:

"But a clinician's training permits, and in fact forces, him to recognize major trends even where the facts are not all available...he must be able to sift even questionable sources in such a way that a coherent predictive hypothesis emerges."
(50ML)

We might rephrase: When the facts fail, fantasize! Much psychological theory is indeed nothing more than the fantasies of unredeemed minds.

The concept of *negative* identity also enters the scene to help explain Luther's life. Erikson believes that "the second-generation ex-peasant Luther was highly ambivalent about his ancestry" (52ML). Luther, supposedly, "divorced himself from the German peasant whom he condemned for being vulgar, violent, and animal-like" (52ML). Erikson explains that Luther's father rejected the peasant life, such that, for Luther, "the image of a peasant may have become what we call a negative identity fragment" (52ML). This "negative identity fragment" contributed to his "disobedience."

So did a large dose of "rationalization" about his early childhood. Based on the psychoanalytic theory that "all memories must pass through a number of screens" (54ML), Erikson insists that Luther is not a reliable reporter on his own early years (53ML). He explains that "everything before that [the ninety-five theses] then became memorable only insofar as it helped him to rationalize his disobediences" (54ML). But perhaps we should turn Erikson's theory on its head here. His own account of Luther's life is *memorable only insofar as it helps him to rationalize his own theories about life cycles and crises!*

Erikson also sees influences on Luther from the technological and political developments of his day, but insists that he had little awareness of them (55ML). Perhaps such external developments fail to neatly fit his theories...??

Luther's relationship with his father is pressed into service in order to squeeze his life into Erikson's mold. According to Erikson, Luther inherited from his father a violent temper which was "strangely dormant" during his youth, perhaps "beaten or scared out of him" by his father (57ML). He speculates that possibly Luther's father did not want him to become like his uncle, a drunken and violent man (57ML).

"He [Luther's father] showed the greatest temper in his attempts to drive temper out of his children. Here, I think,

is the origin of Martin's doubt that the father, when he punishes you, is really guided by love and justice rather than by arbitrariness and malice. This early doubt was projected on the Father in heaven with such violence that Martin's monastic teachers could not help noticing it." (58ML)

Luther's later courage in defending the gospel is reduced by these bizarre theories to nothing more than a magnified tantrum rooted in childhood fears:

"The fear of the father's anger, described as constant by some biographers, included the absolute injunction against any back-talk...only after an attempt to screw down the lid with the rules of monastic silence, did Martin become one of the biggest and most effective back-talkers in history" (66ML).

Erikson makes much of Luther's troubled relationship with his father, "to whom he could not get close and from whom he could not get away" (67ML). How, asks Erikson, "was he going to submit without being emasculated, or rebel without emasculating the father?" (67ML). Erikson sees here a struggle common to millions of boys, but says that "now and again...an individual is called upon...to lift his individual patienthood to the level of a universal one and to try to solve for all what he could not solve for himself alone" (67ML). Erikson insists that Luther's "fatherhate...took the form of a burning doubt of divine righteousness" (67ML). Think carefully about this. The whole Protestant Reformation, along with Luther's theology, is nothing more to Erikson than one man's "patienthood" imposed on masses of other people.

Erikson finds little historical notation about Luther's mother, except for one incident where she beat him for a small theft (72ML). This scarcity of facts, however, does not halt Erikson's psychoanalytic imagination from running wild. After all, he has Freud's oedipal complex from which to reconstruct history, true or not:

"...most certainly we would ascribe to Luther an Oedipus complex, and not a trivial one at that. We would not wish to see any boy--much less an imaginative and fearful one--face the struggles of his youth and manhood without having experienced as a child the love and the hate which are encompassed in this complex: love for the maternal person who awakens his senses and his sensuality with her ministrations,

and deep and angry rivalry with the male possessor of this maternal person." (73ML)

Thus we are right back to Luther and his father. Erikson moves right along to explain Luther's conscience in terms of this key relationship:

"Martin's reactions to his father's pressure are the beginnings of Luther's preoccupation with matters of individual conscience, a preoccupation which went far beyond the requirements of religion as then practiced and formulated." (73ML)

Unlike Erikson, Luther was terribly concerned with God's truth. He recognized, rightly, that the current practices of the Roman Catholic church could never make him right with God. He saw the corruption present in the selling of indulgences, as if one's soul could be bought and sold for mere money. He saw the sin in his own heart, and like Isaiah centuries before, he knew he could not stand before a holy God on his own merits. Rather than toss aside the facts, as Erikson does, Luther searched the Word of God. He found the glorious truth of the gospel--God's grace, through faith alone, in Christ alone. On that truth he courageously took his stand, risking death. Luther was not a sinless man (Romans 3:23). We are not suggesting that he had no struggles in his life. Indeed, he had fierce struggles. But these are not to be explained away through the demented theories of unredeemed men like Freud and Erikson, who build not on actual facts but on their own fantasies.

As for obedience and rebellion, Erikson lacks understanding of these concepts. Luther's obedience was directed toward God, and his rebellion toward the lies that had captivated the church of his day. That is far different than the adolescent crisis theories Erikson uses to explain Luther's life.

Identity Confusions and "Fanatic Leadership"

After discussing Luther's "obedience and rebellion" at some length, Erikson proceeds to discuss "the dimensions of identity diffusion" (99ML), thus relating his theories to events of the Reformation. He explains that:

"The story of the fit in the choir has prepared us for the pathological dimension in the spiritual struggle to come. We shall enlarge on this dimension in the direction of *desperate patienthood* and then in that of *fanatic leadership*; and

finally, discuss a theme which these two conditions have in common: *childhood lost*." (99ML)

Here is how Erikson goes on to describe Luther's particular "identity diffusion" problem:

"That extreme form of identity diffusion which leads to significant arrest and regression is characterized most of all by a mistrustful difficulty with mere living in time." (100ML)

"Martin was recruited into a system rigidly regimenting time; we will see what he did with this utopia." (101ML)

Having emphasized Luther's entrance into the monastic life in defiance of his father's wishes for him to enter law school, Erikson explains that:

"We will call all self-images, even those of a highly idealistic nature, which are diametrically opposed to the dominant values of an individual's upbringing, parts of a *negative identity*--meaning an identity which he has been warned *not* to become, which he can become only with a divided heart, but which he nevertheless finds himself compelled to become, protesting his wholeheartedness." (102ML)

Erikson describes Luther as one who would "cling to a make-believe order of compulsive scrupulosity and of obsessive rumination...mock order for the world of man, a caricature of logic and consistency" (104ML).

These psychological explanations for Luther's early life are bad enough, but Erikson doesn't stop here. He draws parallels between Luther and *Hitler* in terms of their rebellion and subsequent leadership:

"Hitler was a totalitarian leader. In his middle thirties Luther became the leader of a rebellion, too; and we will later point out trends in him which may have prepared his nation for the acceptance of a leader like Hitler." (109ML)

It goes without saying that this is revolting--comparing the leader of the Reformation to a mass murderer!

Continuing on his destructive path, Erikson tells us how he sees politics and theology, the spheres of leadership in which these two men operated:

"Politics is the most inclusive means of creating a world order in this world; theology is the most systematic attempt to deal with man's existential nothingness by establishing a metaphysical Allness." (109ML)

Erikson lumps Luther with Hitler when he speculates about motives he believes they hold in common:

"Ideological leaders, so it seems, are subject to excessive fears which they can master only by reshaping the thoughts of their contemporaries; while those contemporaries are always glad to have their thoughts shaped by those who so desperately care to do so." (110ML)

It is ludicrous to suggest that Luther's courageous stand for the gospel is at all similar to Hitler's mass executions!

Erikson goes on to "explain" the adolescent identity crisis that supposedly precipitated the Reformation:

"The introspective late adolescent, trying to free himself from parents who made and partially determined him, and trying also to face membership in wider institutions, which he has not as yet made his own, often has a hard time convincing himself that he has *chosen* his past and is the chooser of his future." (113ML)

Concerning this age group, Erikson further states that:

"Their defiant behavior clearly indicates an attempt to emulate that which gives other people the background of a group identity: a real family, nobility, a proud history--and religion." (115ML)

The Reformation is neatly explained away as one individual's "defiance" translated to the masses:

"No doubt when Martin learned to speak up, much that he had to say to the devil was fueled by a highly-compressed store of defiance consisting of what he had been unable to say to his father and to his teachers; in due time he said it all, with a vengeance, to the Pope." (122ML)

Erikson takes us back again to Luther's relationship with his father as he continues his perverted explanations:

"The father's prohibitory presence, and the anticipation of his punishment seem to have pervaded the family milieu, which thus became an ideal breeding ground for the most pervasive form of the Oedipus complex--the ambivalent interplay of rivalry with the father, admiration for him, and fear of him which puts such a heavy burden of guilt and inferiority on all spontaneous initiative and on all fantasy." (122-123ML)

The role of Luther's mother is also of concern to Erikson, who provides us psychological "explanations" for his rejection of Catholic dogma related to Mary:

"It was probably his father's challenging injunction against the little boy's bond with his mother which made it impossible for Martin to accept the intercession of the holy Mary." (123ML)

Nevertheless, Erikson proposes that, for psychological reasons, it was a long period of time before Luther could replace Mary with Christ:

"A long way stretched ahead of him before he was able to experience, through Christ rather than through Mary, the relevance of the theme of mother and child in addition to that of father and son. Then he could say that Christ was defined by two images: one of an infant lying in a manger...and one of a man sitting at his Father's right hand." (119ML)

Note again Erikson's lack of concern for *truth*. Christ is merely two "images," rather than God manifested in the flesh!

Luther the Monk

Luther's time in the monastery preceded his reformation activities and no doubt was significant in the shaping of his theology. Erikson, however, wants to explain it all in terms of psychology (his theories in particular) rather than theology.

According to Erikson, Luther was not typical of the monks of his day:

"The fact that Luther took upon himself the latent sadness of his age and the spiritual problems of its theology marks him as a member of an ideological, maybe even somewhat neurotic, minority. Among the Augustinians of his time, he was a

strange, a noteworthy, and sometimes a questionable, monk."
(128ML)

It is no surprise that Erikson returns again to the father-son theme that so often dominates his commentary on Luther. Here is how he explains Luther's monastic detour--as a symptom of his *rebellion*:

"Only if we remember that his father wanted him to be politically ambitious in a new, a secular sense, rather than spiritually good, can we understand that Martin was choosing a negative identity when he decided to become a monk; and he soon indulged in further contrariness by trying to be a better monk than the monks." (129ML)

Erikson attempts here to plunge the depths of Luther's heart and motives, something only God is able to do (Hebrews 4:12).

Indoctrination is yet another factor Erikson analyzes. In discussing what occurred in medieval monasteries, such as Luther attended, he says that:

"Indoctrination is charged with the task of separating the individual from the world long enough so that his former values become thoroughly disengaged from his intentions and aspirations; the process must create in him new convictions deep enough to replace much of what he has learned in childhood and practiced in his youth...it must endeavor to send the individual back into the world with his new convictions so strongly anchored in his unconscious that he almost hallucinates them as being the will of a godhead or the course of all history...." (134ML)

Erikson states that late adolescence is the best time period for the "indoctrination" he describes (134ML). He believes that the "psychological laws" underlying the monastic system include "the fiction that we chose to believe what in fact we had no choice but to believe, short of ostracism or insanity" (135ML).

Erikson cites "two decisive events" at Luther's first Mass. First was his own "anxiety attack during the Mass," and second his father's "loud anger during the following banquet" (138-139ML). Here is his account of that historic event:

"In front of him was the Eucharist's uncertain grace; behind him his father's potential wrath. His faith at that moment lacked the secure formulation of the nature of mediatorship

which later emerged in the lectures on the Psalms. He had no living concept of Christ; he was, in fact, mortally afraid of the whole riddle of mediatorship." (140ML)

How does Erikson know what was happening in Luther's heart at that time? He reconstructs, and he speculates on the basis of his own psychological theories. Not only does he not really have the facts, he doesn't believe that even Luther himself could accurately report his own life events:

"Luther may honestly have remembered as a detailed event in time and space what actually occurred only in his thoughts and emotions." (139ML)

Erikson calls this process "historification," claiming that it "came to full bloom when Luther had to accept his final identity as a historical personality" (139ML). This leaves us with no factual basis for historical events, but considering Erikson's general disregard for truth, we should not be surprised.

Erikson believes there is a *psychological* explanation for the changes in the Lord's Supper which occurred between the early Christian church and medieval times:

"What is driven out by young rebellion is always reinstated by the dogmatism of middle age. Dogma, given total power, reinstates what once was to be warded off, and brings back ancient barbaric ambiguities as cold and overdefined legalisms so unconvincing that, where once faith reigned, the law must take over and be enforced by spiritual and political terror." (140-141ML)

He also traces this sacrament back to the early life experience of mother and infant, which he claims remains throughout life:

"In primitive milieus it leads to superstitious ideas and acts of acquiring beneficial substances through the consumption of flesh and blood from significant bodies." (141ML)

After mutilating the Lord's Supper, Erikson attempts to delve into Luther's personal struggles. Luther's first Mass is claimed to precipitate some of those agonies:

"Martin was thrown back into the infantile struggle, not only over his obedience toward, but also over his identification with, his father.... *To be justified* became his stumbling

block as a believer, his obsession as a neurotic sufferer, and his preoccupation as a theologian." (145ML)

Thus the important biblical concept of *justification by faith* is reduced to a neurotic obsession!

Erikson describes Luther in his monastic years as suffering from "acute anxiety," having an obsessive fear of the devil, and subject to "strange fits of unconsciousness" (148ML). He presses on with his psychoanalysis:

"Today we would feel that such an attack might be the internal result of stored rage in a young man who is trying to hold on to his obedient, pious self-restraint, and has not yet found a legitimate outer object to attack or a legitimate weapon with which to hit out about him." (148ML)

The diagnosis of our courageous reformer, according to Erikson, might have subjected him to years of psychotherapy in today's world: "a borderline psychotic state in a young man with prolonged adolescence and reawakened infantile conflicts" (148ML). Monastic duties gave way to "a fanatic preoccupation with himself" (148ML).

Such psychological evaluations tend to destroy the credibility of Luther's theology. So does this explanation of how that theology developed:

"At the same time, a theological system of increasing self-assertiveness was founded on fragments of mood swings and of intuitive thoughts which later found their climax, as well as their conceptual unification, in the 'revelation in the tower.'" (149ML)

Of course, the monastery made its contribution:

"No course of training invented specifically to intensify neurotic strain in a young man like Martin could have been more effective than the monastic training of his day." (150ML)

Erikson describes Luther's meticulous methods of confession in the monastery, saying that "in doing this he was obviously both exceedingly compulsive and, at least unconsciously, rebellious" (156ML). He perceives Luther as increasingly alienated from his goal, "to feel justified in the eyes of God, and to feel there was a possibility of propitiating God" (156ML).

Classifying Luther as a "rebel," Erikson "explains" his inner struggle:

"At this point we must note a characteristic of young great rebels: their inner split between the temptation to surrender and the need to dominate." (156-157ML)

Erikson believes that Luther attempted to pursue mysticism, but unsuccessfully. Here is his psychological explanation for the failure:

"He could not *feel* his way to God. The fact is that this potentially so passionate man found he could not feel at all, which is the final predicament of the compulsive character.... All of which led to his final totalism, the establishment of God in the role of the dreaded and untrustworthy father. With this the circle closes and the repressed returns in full force; for here God's position corresponds closely to the one occupied by Martin's father at the time when Martin attempted to escape to theology by way of the thunderstorm." (164ML)

Theology here is an *escape route*! Erikson has a psychological explanation for *everything*. That even includes Luther's courageous defense of the true saving gospel:

"Luther was one of those addicts and servants of the Word who never know what they are thinking until they hear themselves say it, and who never know how strongly they believe what they say until somebody objects." (169ML)

Thus concludes our psychologized tour of the monastery. Next we will see more about how Erikson translates Luther's theology into the realm of modern psychology.

The Psychologizing of Luther's Theology

The Protestant Reformation was launched when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenberg. His protest was largely founded on his well-founded objections to the sale of indulgences. But Erikson offers us a psychological explanation for those indulgences, so vehemently opposed by Luther:

"Realism, just as it served to give supernatural reality to the 'dirt' on earth, also gave monetary substance to grace itself, establishing the vertical as a canal system for the mysterious substance of supreme ambivalence which both the

unconscious and mysticism alternately designate as gold and as dirt." (188ML)

The emergence of Luther's theology is credited to a "delayed identity crisis" at approximately age thirty:

"Rather dramatic evidence exists in Luther's notes on these lectures [Psalms] for the fact that while he was working on the Psalms Luther came to formulate those insights later ascribed to his revelation in the tower, the date of which scholars have tried in vain to establish with certainty.... My main interest is in the fact that at about the age of thirty--an important age for gifted people with a delayed identity crisis--the wholeness of Luther's theology first emerges from the fragments of his totalistic reevaluations." (201ML)

But it wasn't just theology that emerged:

"We have no right to overlook a fact which Luther was far from denying: that when he, who had once chosen silence in order to restrain his rebellious and destructive nature, finally learned to let himself go, he freed not only the greatest oratory of his time, but also the most towering temper and the greatest capacity for dirt-slinging wrath." (206ML)

Luther's words were forceful indeed. But Erikson has no right to overlook the *biblical truth* that Luther sought to defend at the risk of his life.

Erikson informs us that "in what follows [in this chapter], themes from Luther's first lectures are discussed side by side with psychoanalytic insights" (206ML). He states his intentions up front:

"I intend to demonstrate that Luther's redefinition of man's condition--while part and parcel of his theology--has striking configurational parallels with inner dynamic shifts like those which clinicians recognize in the recovery of individuals from psychic distress...Luther, in laying the foundation for a 'religiosity for the adult man,' displayed the attributes of his own hard-won adulthood; his renaissance of faith portrays a vigorous recovery of his own ego-initiative." (206ML)

Erikson doesn't stop with psychoanalyzing Luther. He *psychoanalyzes the entire message of the cross!*

"*Passion*: that total passivity in which man regains, through considered self-sacrifice and self-transcendence, his active position in the face of nothingness, and thus is saved. Could this be one of the psychological riddles in the wisdom of the 'foolishness of the cross?'" (209ML)

The Bible tells us that the cross is "foolishness" to those who are perishing, such as Erikson (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Note here how the whole edifice of Luther's theology is reduced to a series of psychological steps:

"The characteristics of Luther's theological advance can be compared to certain steps in psychological maturation which every man must take: the internalization of the father-son relationship; the concomitant crystallization of conscience; the safe establishment of an identity as a worker and a man; and the concomitant reaffirmation of basic trust." (213ML)

The launching of the Reformation is viewed by Erikson as a type of revenge precipitated by his childhood traumas:

"It is clear...that the negative conscience which had been aggravated so grievously by Martin's paternalistic upbringing had only waited (as such consciences always do) for an opportunity to do to others in some measure what had been done to him." (222ML)

The idea of revenge leads us right into Erikson's thesis that Luther's *faith* was intertwined with *wrath*. Erikson ties Luther's anger to the entire Protestant church that resulted from the Reformation, as well as to the church-state political arrangement of that time period:

"The younger Luther remained the personification of universal rebellion; but the older, the often 'frightened and angry' Luther--his reformation remained a provincial one. His theology had announced a Secret Church of all the truly faithful whom only God could know; his reformation led to the all-powerful church-state." (240ML)

Erikson claims that a "severe manic-depressive state" characterized Luther in middle age, where "Luther somehow felt in need of martyrdom" (243ML). He further explains that:

"In view of Luther's relation to his father, it makes sense that his deepest clinical despair emerged when he had become so much of what his father had wanted him to be: influential, economically secure, a kind of superlawyer, and the father of a son named Hans.... He was depressed and deprived of all self esteem." (243ML)

Erikson believes that Luther's earlier attempts at self-restraint erupted later in rebellion:

"Martin's tortured attempt to establish silence, self-restraint, and submission to the Church's authority and dogma had led to rebellious self-expression." (245ML)

Freud is credited with providing us an understanding and diagnosis of Luther's behavior:

"Luther often says outright things which in our era only Freud recognized are implicitly, symbolically, and unconsciously expressed in neurotic symptoms." (245ML)

Here is the grand finale to Erikson's analysis of Luther's wrath:

"We must conclude that Luther's use of repudiative and anal patterns was an attempt to find a safety-valve when unrelenting inner pressure threatened to make devotion unbearable and sublimity hateful--that is, when he was again about to repudiate God in supreme rebellion, and himself in malignant melancholy. The regressive aspects of this pressure, and the resulting obsessive and paranoid focus on single figures such as the Pope and the Devil, leave little doubt that a transference had taken place from a parent figure to universal personages, and that a central theme in this transference was anal defiance." (247ML)

In the epilogue, Erikson acknowledges that he has applied the "insights" of Freud to Luther's life (251-252ML).

Erikson believes Luther attempted to liberate the individual conscience from authoritarian dogma, but the effort backfired:

"Luther tried to free individual conscience from totalitarian dogma; he meant to give man credal wholeness, and alas, inadvertently helped to increase and to refine authoritarianism. Freud tried to free the individual's insight from authoritarian conscience; his wholeness is that

of the individual ego, but the question is whether collective man will create a world worth being whole for." (252-253ML)

Erikson fails to distinguish between the *authority* of God's Word, and the lines of authority divinely established, as contrasted with human *authoritarianism* that exalts human wisdom and discourages individual discernment. Freudian psychology is every bit as dogmatic as medieval theology!

Here is how Erikson compares the knowledge of God and self, as taught by Luther, with twentieth century psychoanalysis:

"Luther limited our knowledge of God to our individual experience of temptation and our identification in prayer with the passion of God's son. Freud made it clear that the structure of inner conflict, made conscious by psychoanalysis and recognized as universal for any and all, is all we can know of ourselves--yet it is a knowledge inescapable and indispensable." (253ML)

Thus we see that Erikson views Freudian "insight" as superior to Protestant theology. But the Bible reminds us that the human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, such that only God can know it fully, through His Spirit and His living Word (Jeremiah 17:9-10; Hebrews 4:12-13).

The "Life Cycles" and "Life Crises" of Martin Luther

Most of Erikson's treatise on Luther is devoted to his "identity crisis" and its effects. He also briefly describes the earliest life stages with their accompanying crises, maintaining that his series of "life crises"... "suggest a developmental root for the basic human values of faith, will, conscience, and reason--all necessary in rudimentary form for the identity which crowns childhood." (254ML)

Crisis #1 - Early Infancy. According to Erikson, this initial crisis "determines much of the individual's capacity for simple faith" (255ML). Luther's mother "must have provided him with a font of basic trust on which he was able to draw in his fight for a primary faith present before all will, conscience, and reason" (255ML).

Crisis #2 - Infancy. This stage supposedly develops the will, to determine whether a person is "dominated by a sense of autonomy, or by a sense of shame and doubt" (255ML). "Martin was driven early out of the trust stage...by a jealously ambitious

father" (255ML). Luther developed "violent doubts" and "lifelong shame" and "a deep nostalgia for a situation of infantile trust" (256ML).

Crisis #3 - Initiative vs. Guilt. Here is the Freudian "Oedipus complex" involving "a lasting unconscious association of sensual freedom with the body of the mother" and "of cruel prohibition with the interference of the dangerous father" (257ML). We have already seen how Erikson resorts to the oedipal complex to explain much of Luther's early life.

The "Integrity Crisis." Erikson believes that in a religious man such as Luther, the "integrity crisis" is chronic:

"This concentration in the cataclysm of the adolescent identity crisis of both first and last crises in the human life may well explain why religiously and artistically creative men often seem to be suffering from a barely compensated psychosis, and yet later prove superhumanly gifted in conveying a total meaning for man's life; while malignant disturbances in late adolescence often display precocious wisdom and usurped integrity. The chosen young man extends the problem of his identity to the borders of existence in the known universe." (261ML)

"He acts as if mankind were starting all over with his own beginning as an individual, conscious of his singularity as well as his humanity." (262ML)

By reducing Luther's life and theology to a series of psychological stages, Erikson effectively discounts the entire Reformation. However, this is just the sort of response we might expect from one who rejects the true God.

Conclusion

Erikson has looked at the "critical stages" in the lives of both Martin Luther and Mohandas Gandhi, claiming that both of these religious leaders "were able to translate their personal conflicts into methods of spiritual and political renewal in the lives of a large contingent of their contemporaries" (82LCC). But Erikson also describes such leaders as being *dangerous*:

"The danger of a reformer of the first order, however, lies in the nature of his influence on the masses.... In such hope great religionists are supported--one could say they are seduced--by the fact that all people, because of their common

undercurrent of existential anxiety, at cyclic intervals and during crises feel an intense need for a rejuvenation of trust which will give new meaning to their limited and perverted exercise of will, conscience, reason, and identity." (262ML)

Erikson gives the impression that hope is seductively created by reformers such as Luther. Happily, believers have the certain hope of their eternal inheritance, and thus need not be seduced by the empty theories of modern psychology. Luther was a man in need of salvation, not a sinless person. However, we are indebted to him for his search of the Scriptures and his faithful, courageous stand for the truth of God's Word. Erikson's theories are a hideous reconstruction of the Protestant Reformation and must be rejected by Christians.

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