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## MARTIN LUTHER, REFORMATION THEOLOGIAN AND EDUCATOR

Michael Sydow

How many turning points in history can there be? It's the stuff *what ifs* are made of. What if Alexander the Great had not died at thirty-three? What if Brutus had not been able to stab Julius Caesar? What if Hitler had responded earlier to the Normandy invasion rather than wait for one at Calais? What if JFK or Martin Luther King, Jr., or Bobby Kennedy had not been assassinated? The questions—all eventually idle—as time marches inexorably in its singular, linear direction, give speculation a little respectability.

Are there events which transcend turning points and become massive watersheds whose effects become world-wide? What was it about the year 500 B.C. that gave birth to an intellectual explosion which ushered in the Classical Age of Greece (Schmidt, cf. Bibliography for notes.)? It featured three giants of philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. During this time Pericles guided Athens to political greatness, and Phidias translated his genius into the *Athena Parthenos* (Mittler 87). It was also the age of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) in India and Kung Fu Tsu (Confucius) in China (Schmidt).

The year 1450 is another of those watershed years. Three years into this half century the city of Constantinople fell to the Muslims. Ahead of the invading armies came the well-preserved

manuscripts and books of the Western and Eastern worlds. The result was a flurry of classical humanism in which the study of mankind centered around the literary masterpieces of the past. In 1455 Johannes Gutenberg published the *Biblia Sacra* (Holy Bible) using movable type, a method invented and discarded by the Chinese nearly a half millennium earlier (Comptons, "Gutenberg"). Movable type would be the mid-wife of the Protestant Reformation as publishers eagerly sought material to print and offered it at low cost to a public more and more able to read.

The Turks in Europe attracted the attention of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, during the time right after Luther posted the 95 Theses, October 31, 1517. It fell to him to stop the advancing hordes. Again, who knows what impelling force led Friedrich the Wise, elector of Saxony, to consider protection of one of his citizens a more important moral and spiritual priority than handing him over to imperial authorities for execution? The fall of Constantinople was the first in a series of trickle-down events which

resulted in the protection of Martin Luther from the weight of papal and imperial power which might have otherwise crushed him as if he were some annoying insect.

This monograph is a study of the life and educational impact of Martin Luther. Unlike John Wycliff, whose teachings were officially suppressed, and John Huss, who lost his life at the stake, Martin Luther survived the massive opposition of pope and prelate (Qualben 193).

This will be a three part study.

1. **Historical Context.** The Protestant Reformation was a significant historical event which resulted from the exegetical and polemic efforts of Martin Luther and others. This historical movement provides the backdrop against which his views on education were announced.

2. **Biographical Background.** Martin Luther began life as a miner's son who was interested in studying law. His own internal spiritual nightmare and a lightning bolt which struck far too close led him to a cloister, the study of the Bible, the priesthood, and a professorship at the rather young University of Wittenberg, Germany.

3. **Educational Impact.** Although the Reformation was primarily a spiritual/ecclesiastical event, the success of its ideas would depend upon the enthusiasm of its followers for whom the new doctrine needed to become a *raison d'etre*. Not only would the new faith serve the individual spiritual needs of its adherents; its continuation would depend on a loyal cadre which was qualified and willing to defend it against myriad attacks through the years, decades and centuries. The vehicle to develop this commitment and army was education.

## I. THE NOT-SO-DARK DARK AGES

The period of history known as the Dark Ages was not as devoid of progress as the term might suggest. In the penumbra of the great Roman Empire there was still the less spectacular but no less persistent spread of Christianity throughout Europe. It was during this era that the focus of intellectual endeavor was the cathedral schools. These were learning centers of which the primary goal was training members of the clergy. Later came the monastic schools where the monks were involved in systematic study and reading for at least two hours a day and then spent considerable hours in the writing room copying materials to satisfy their literary curriculum. The Bible was also on their curriculum (Kretzmann 41f).

Of extraordinary importance in educational history was the rise of the universities. These were essentially free societies and associations of teachers and students in a number of cities throughout Europe. Bologna had a school which featured law. Universities grew in Oxford and Cambridge in England and in Vienna, Prague, Heidelberg, and Cologne on the mainland. The University of Paris grew into one of the most prestigious with degrees in theology, law, medicine, and the arts (Kretzmann, 44). Students could earn a baccalaureate which qualified them to teach (Schmidt).

A hundred years into the second millennium architects discovered the practicality and beauty of the flying buttress. Gothic cathedrals with the airy lightness and clerestory windows available from these buttresses, vaulted arches, and extraordinary statuary began to dot the landscape of northern Europe (Mittler 160ff). Constructing these buildings in the 20th century presented a significant

engineering challenge.

The reality of intellectual darkness, however, reared its discriminatory head against the so-called “common people.” “No general effort was made to reach and elevate the common people by education” (Kretzmann 49). Women were also excluded from serious educational concern.

It was also during these years that the power of the Roman pontiff reached its zenith. Coincidental to his rising power was the increasing abuse. Various popes sought to eliminate opposition by executing opponents—popularly known as heretics. Even secular rulers bowed before papal authority, as did Henry IV before Gregory VII at Canossa, Italy (Comptons, “Henry IV”).

However, in the early 1300s a Frenchman serving as Pope Clement V transferred the seat of papal power to Avignon near the boundary of France. This period became known as the Babylonian Captivity of the Church. Popes served in Avignon the same number of years (70) the Israelites were exiled in Babylon. Things were in turmoil. For a while there were two popes—Urban VI and Clement VII. And then a third one (Alexander V). The Great Schism had begun. It took the Council of Constance (1414-1418) to end the schism by deposing all three and electing Martin V. A semblance of unity returned in the administrative function of the church (Montgomery 21; Qualben 190).

### **Renaissance**

The Renaissance—a rebirth of learning and education—began in the early 1400s in Italy and diffused toward the north over the next century. Michelangelo, Donatello, DaVinci, and Raphael carried the Renaissance banner in art. The fall of Constantinople in the middle of the 15th century created a revival of learning in the West as students fleeing before the Muslims brought their manuscripts and expertise ahead of them to European schools and universities.

But abuses continued and grew. The church started using the sacrament of penance and the threat of excommunication to manipulate simple lay people and make them dependent on professional clergy to receive the beneficence of the church. The creation of indulgences as a means to offer a money payment instead of performing a church penance penalty brought considerable wealth to the church—or, in some cases, to the clergy. An official interdict against a city or province withdrew official sanction for celebration of the mass and performing the other sacraments (Qualben 199f).

Painter in his *Luther on Education* offers the following co-operative causes for the Reformation:

1. A reaction, brought about by the increased intelligence of the people, against ecclesiastical oppression.
2. The corrupt condition of the Church in doctrine and practice.
3. The external character imposed upon Christianity by the Papacy.
4. The pretensions of the Popes to temporal power in the presence of a growing national spirit.
5. Back of these causes, the providence of God, which arranged the “fulness of time,” and raised up the proper agent (31; also Tjernagel similarly 22f).

The deteriorating ability of the church to serve the people was not the only contributing factor to the Protestant Reformation. Renaissance thinking was spreading throughout the empire and created a climate of personal freedom and independent thinking. “By the sixteenth century, European nationalism had proved to be one of the most potent political and ideological forces in modern Western history. . . . The rise of nationalism and national states weakened loyalty and commitment to transnational figures and institutions such as the pope and the Roman Catholic church” (Gutek 89). No longer were folks content to accept the *dicta* of the church at face value. They wanted to know more. They wanted to know why. And now the use of movable type contributed to a knowledge explosion by giving people a reason to overcome their illiteracy and intellectual dependency. Books were available and were relatively inexpensive. Publishers and printers sought eagerly for material to keep their presses pressing. The Reformation fed that voluminous literary appetite.

The rising middle class of craftsmen and merchants spelled the end of medieval feudal society and its agrarian relationships. The resultant economic redistributions melded together with the literary/intellectual and the theological imperatives to change the cultural climate. Coin of the realm replaced the old barter system in daily business transactions. The artisans, bankers, and tradesmen

gravitated increasingly toward the cities. They became a political force in themselves as citizens who demanded their rights and insisted on the education of their children. In Germany this led to the establishment of the burgher or city schools, which championed the ideas of the Renaissance (Qualben 197).

### Reformation

Germany was ripe for reformation and transformation. Onto the theological and intellectual stage walked Martin Luther. For three decades Luther was a loyal, though inquisitive, servant of the church. A search for spiritual peace brought him to the monastery. His studies led him to advanced academic degrees. He became a priest in 1507. The elector invited him to teach at the recently established University of Wittenberg.

All of this achievement did not calm the turmoil in his soul. He could not gain spiritual peace from the sacraments of the church. The supererogatory merits of the saints did not seem to help. Self-flagellation and long seasons of fasting did not assuage his conscience but did injure his body so that he suffered physically from their effects until the day he died. The church offered forgiveness in the confessional, but it was contingent on conditions which Luther could not attain or found unacceptable. How could he, an abject miserable sinner, stand before a holy, angry God, who punished iniquity with legal precision and impartiality?

It was through a study of the Biblical book, Epistle to the Romans, that light finally showed through all the theological shadows. Romans 1:17 speaks about the “righteousness” (“justice” —Latin *iustitia*; but Greek δικαιοσύνη—which emphasizes the condition of legal innocence) “of God.” What was that? God’s personal righteousness? A righteousness to or for God from the penitent? Or a righteousness from God for sinners? Luther later wrote:

I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the justice of God.” because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. . . . Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. . . . If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God . . . (Bainton 65).

“Justification by faith alone” became the rallying cry of the Reformation. John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and other reformers embraced its implications. Much of the early 16th century ecclesiastical debate involved correction of abuses. There were many candidates: indulgences, simony, profligacy, and administrative corruption. However, the crux of the Reformation controversy was the doctrinal difference between the Roman Catholic church and the reformers regarding the concept of justification.

Both sides believed that eternal souls were at stake and the outcome of the theological difference could put human souls at spiritual risk. The Catholic Church addressed the issues raised in the Reformation through a series of councils and events known as the Counter Reformation. The Protestant reformers meanwhile had to struggle to gain tolerance and some degree of respectability. One of their principle avenues to assure the outcome they desired was the establishment of schools so that each generation could study and learn its own theology. Schools were essential to the success of the Reformation. The spiritual and educational goal was a growth in personal, saving faith through the study of the Scriptures, the use of the Bible as a guide for life and behavior, and a willingness to defend the faith against its enemies. Church leaders hoped that followers made faith the sole center of their life and reason for existence.

### II. CAREER OF THE REFORMER . . .

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. His father Hans was of peasant stock, a miner by trade. He and his wife Margaret had moved to Eisleben from Moehra. Martin’s parents truly loved their son and encouraged him to live a pure and sincere life. Parental discipline was at times severe. On one occasion Luther’s mother whipped him until the blood came

over one ‘insignificant nut’ (Just 27).

When Luther was five he went to school in near-by Mansfeld. There he learned the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. He also received instruction in reading, writing, and the principles of Latin grammar. Discipline at the Mansfeld school surpassed what he received at home. The schoolmaster treated the students like prisoners. In one afternoon Martin received fifteen whippings (Just 28).

When Luther was fourteen he left his parental home to attend school in Magdeburg. But he lasted there only one year. Students had to beg for their food; folks would reward him with bread if he would sing for them. After a short stay at home Luther went to school in Eisenach. Here again he had to sing for his supper. A pious matron named Ursula Cotta, the wife of the burgermeister, took him into her home and saw to his physical needs while he attended Latin school (Just 30; Moody 12).

From there it was on to the University at Erfurt. The year was 1501. Hans wanted his son to study law. Martin would never finish that major. It was while he was at Erfurt that he discovered a book in the library called *Biblia Sacra*. He thought he knew all about the Holy Bible since it was read regularly in the Mass. But he took down the book anyway. It happened to open to the section of 1 Samuel which recorded the birth of Samuel and his mother Hannah’s song of praise at his birth after many barren years (Moody 18; Krauth 10).

It was also at Erfurt where Luther came into contact with the *Via Moderna*, a new humanistic learning concept used for theological studies. Luther earned his Bachelor’s degree in that first year at the university. Four years later he earned his Master of Arts degree (Tjernagel 27).

Two events shortly thereafter changed the course of his life. One of his acquaintances was found murdered in his bed. The incident revived the turmoil of his soul and how a person can possibly have a right standing before God. A person who was murdered certainly didn’t have time to prepare his soul through repentance. During the summer of 1505 on a trip back to school in Erfurt from Eisleben another incident rocked his soul. He was caught in a severe thunderstorm. One bolt of lightning struck dangerously close to Luther. He fell to the ground and shouted, ‘Help me, dear St. Anne, I will become a monk’ (Schroeder 18). A couple weeks later he distributed a few of his earthly belongings, said farewell to his friends, and entered the Black Cloister in Erfurt—in July of 1505.

Luther’s studies did not end when he entered the cloister. He was ordained a priest in 1507. At the insistence of his father superior he went on a pilgrimage to Rome. That venture did not cure his soul or calm his conscience. It did reveal the materialism and profligacy which characterized the papacy at that time. His superiors encouraged him to finish his studies for his doctorate. Friedrich the Wise of Saxony agreed to pay Luther’s expenses on the condition that Martin would accept a life-long appointment as a lecturer on the Bible at the University of Wittenberg. His formal education was completed in 1508 when he received his Doctor of Theology degree. Wittenberg would be his home for the remaining 34 years of his life (Tjernagel 27f).

In 1515 Luther began his lectures on the Epistle to the Romans. From his preparations for these lectures he came to the realization that justification was *sola fide*—by faith alone. His lectures at the university began to reflect his commitment to this principle.

### **Indulgences**

However, it was not a debate about the doctrine of justification which originally occupied the attention of prelates and people. Pope Leo X had issued a plenary indulgence to help pay for completion of St. Peter’s basilica in Rome. A Dominican friar named John Tetzel was authorized to sell indulgences in Germany. However, Friedrich the Wise did not allow him to sell them in Saxony. But many of the Wittenbergers traveled across the border to buy their indulgences from him. In his sales pitch Tetzel promised:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,  
The soul from purgatory springs. (Bainton 78)

Luther’s parishioners came away with the idea that they were not just trading earthly penance penalties when their money came to rest in Tetzel’s chest; they believed that they had actually

purchased the forgiveness of sins (Bainton 79).

On the eve of All Saints Day, October 31, 1517, Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenburg. These 95 statements were to have been the subject of a serious academic debate regarding the abuses of indulgences. They were indeed debated, but never in the serene and relatively safe environs of academia. The 95 Theses were interpreted by official Rome as a direct salvo on the teachings of the church and of the pope himself. The pope sent Cajetan to silence the German monk. He was unsuccessful. Finally Luther was excommunicated in the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, signed by the pope in June of 1520 (Bainton 147).

It fell to Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire to end the spread of this new teaching by capturing Luther, trying him, and putting him to death. This would not be as easy as it seems. The German electors were sovereign in their own states. And the elector of Saxony considered it his God-given duty to protect the professor he had wooed to Wittenberg from Erfurt. Charles V finally succeeded in bringing Luther to trial before an imperial diet (Kuske). In April of 1521 Luther came to the city of Worms. He came there under a safe-conduct to answer the charges the church brought against him. Luther came well-prepared to defend his teachings at Worms. However, he was never given the opportunity. The papal legate asked only two questions. The first was an inquiry whether a collection of his writings were actually his. He acknowledged that they were. The second question asked him to recant what was written in them. He asked for time to consider his answer. On the next day, April 18th, Luther answered. In the first part of his response Luther mused whether he should recant regarding the teachings which were part of church doctrine. The imperial spokesman then demanded a clear answer. Luther's confession (frequently in a condensed version) has become famous in Protestant Christianity:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by patent, clear, and cogent reasons and arguments (for I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone, since it is evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), and because the passages adduced and quoted by me have convinced and bound my conscience in God's Word, therefore I cannot and will not recant, since it is neither safe nor advisable to do anything against conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise! God help me! Amen. (Just 60; also Bainton 185; Sydow 20; *et al*)

From 1521 until his death in 1546 Luther spent his time teaching his classes at the university, writing, translating the Scriptures, composing hymns, mediating disputes, defending the new doctrine at various councils, and composing hymns to enhance a worship which had not previously featured congregational singing. Along the way he married Katharine von Bora, a former nun. Their union produced six children, one of whom died in her youth (Tilly 56).

### **The Reformation Legacy**

The Reformation was primarily a spiritual/theological movement. But it indeed had its political, social, and cultural ramifications. The face of Europe changed as a result of this new teaching.

A scant nine years after Luther was born, Christopher Columbus embarked on his voyage to find the western route to India. The world was considerably bigger than he thought. Columbus was not the first European to reach the New World, but his discovery was the one which was publicized throughout the Old World. The effects of the Reformation would also be felt in North America as well.

Luther had to deal with the political fall-out of the Reformation doctrine. In 1525 many of the peasants rose in arms against the constituted authorities. Although sympathetic with the peasants' plight, he reminded his followers that his reformation was religious in nature and not secular. He later chastised the peasants for disobedience to God's representatives in government. He also urged the governing authorities to do what they existed to do, namely, keep the peace (Dannenfeldt 52f). Lutheranism lost its popular edge as a result of the Peasant War. Many sought more militant sects. German Lutheran leaders became aware that a new religion would create unrest and instability.

From the many issues which were debated and discussed between 1521 and 1546 there were three overriding issues which were fundamental to the Reformation (Sydow 21).

1. **The teaching of justification by faith alone.** In the reformers' view this was the teaching on which the church stood or fell (Pieper 512—*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Every other doctrine of Christianity centered around this one.

2. **The teaching of the priesthood of all believers.** Before the Reformation the members of a congregation or parish were clergy-dependent. Through seven sacraments, six of which dealt directly with lay people, Catholic clergy sustained a day-to-day influence and control over the members of their congregations. According to Catholic doctrine the grace people needed to live correctly ("righteously") before God came through the administrations of the sacraments. Using a passage in 1 Peter (2:9) as his source, Luther noted that all believers are called priests before God. Each one could talk directly with God and receive His gifts. People could read the Bible for themselves and learn directly from its words without the official interpretation of the church. This concept of individual human freedom was an idea that would later be refined and restated in the principles used to justify the American Revolution and to build the Constitution of the United States of America (Remensnyder 88).

3. **The translation of the Bible into German.** Before the Reformation—before the use of movable type—there were few Bibles. Many of them were kept in places where the people could not reach them. Most of them were in Latin, a language which the common folk did not understand. Already in 1521 Luther started translating the New Testament into German. (He was exiled at the time at the Wartburg Castle and had time for the task.) Now his beloved Germans could hear God speak to them directly rather than rely on church leaders for explanations of what the Bible said. The combination of personal freedom and a Bible in the vernacular contributed to Luther's ideas on education. An informed laity would have to know how to read to benefit from having a personal Bible. In 1529 Luther published a Large and a Small Catechism, summaries of Lutheran doctrine in handbook form. Students would need to know how to read to benefit from their catechism lessons (Sydow 20f). Along the way Luther standardized the German language for the German people. It wasn't until 1871 that Germany was unified from the multitude of small independent provinces and kingdoms (Comptons, "Germany"). Yet, since the Reformation, people in these independent states had a common language.

### III. LUTHER AS EDUCATOR

In her book, *A History of Education*, Luella Cole is critical of Martin Luther's position in history as an educator. She does acknowledge Luther as a magnificent speaker and a dynamic, restless person with "flaming courage" (Cole, 221).

Luther was in the main a destructive influence, not perhaps by intention but because the destructive work had to be done before anything new could be built, and Luther did not live far beyond this initial period. Melanchthon's [Luther's friend and colleague] work was largely constructive, partly because of his temperament and partly because he lived longer. Both men had courage. Luther's was the heroism of daring and defiance; Melanchthon's was the heroism of endurance and patient suffering (Cole 225).

Gerald Gutek takes a more complimentary view of Luther's contributions as an educator. It is Luther's ideas which were foundational for the establishment of schools in the German states. Luther did not live long enough to see its fruition. It fell to men like Melanchthon and John Calvin to implement Luther's seminal ideas for schools and actually establish them. Gutek comments:

Luther believed that if the reformed creed was to be established after the initial impetus of the Reformation had passed, it needed to be institutionalized in the instruction provided by schools. The young needed to attend school to learn to read so that they could read the Bible. They also needed religious instruction so they could defend their faith against sectarian rivals. In "A Letter to the Mayors and Alderman of All Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools," Luther urged these officials to establish schools for religious, political, and economic reasons. Such schools would enable people to read the Bible in their vernacular language and educate citizens who would know and respect the laws of the civil state. Schools would instill the habits of industriousness and productivity that would promote the economic prosperity of the state

(Gutek 90f).

Luther viewed the establishment of schools as the inevitable consequence of his reformatory work. He believed the insights he gained were so critically important that they had to be passed down to succeeding generations. Education in the Middle Ages was prejudicially selective and offered its benefits to privileged males only. These assumptions were challenged by Luther and other reformers.

### **The Purpose and Goal of Education**

For Luther the purpose and goal of education was twofold. It naturally involved his interest in the spiritual realm. But Luther also recognized the benefit of schools for the civil state. "See to it," he wrote, "that you first of all have your children instructed in spiritual things, giving them first to God and afterwards to secular duties. . . . They should be taught to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and constantly to remember how He has suffered for us, what He has done, and what He has promised" (Painter 120).

On a visitation of Saxon congregations in the 1520s Luther was dismayed by what he discovered. He wrote in his "Preface to the Small Catechism":

The deplorable, miserable conditions which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach . . . (Bente 533).

In his sermon on the "Duty of Sending Children to School" Luther emphasized the dual goal and purpose of education:

If you have a child capable of learning, you are not free to bring it up as you please, or to deal with according to your caprice, but you must consider that you are under obligation to God to promote both spiritual and secular government, and to serve Him thereby. God needs pastors, preachers, school teachers in his spiritual kingdom . . . Thus, also, in secular government, you can serve your sovereign or country better by training children than by building castles and cities, and collecting treasures from the whole earth. For what good can these do, without learned, wise, and pious people (Painter 132).

Luther understood very well that the welfare of the state depended on the "intelligence and virtue of its citizens" (Painter 135). "But the highest welfare, safety, and power of a city consists in able, learned, wise, upright, cultivated citizens, who can secure, preserve, and utilize every treasure and advantage" (Painter 136).

Luther believed that education should be universal and that girls should also receive an education. He also urged the states and provinces to pay for this education since it was in their best interests to do so (Kretzmann 60f).

### **What Should Make up the Curriculum?**

Because one of the purposes and goals of education according to Luther was spiritual, the curriculum should first of all feature religious instruction. For that Luther recommended a thorough understanding of the material in the Catechism, his little handbook on Christian doctrine.

But before a student could be proficient in his study of the Catechism he would need to know how to read. In this Luther followed the principle of instruction fundamental to the giants of education. Even those who championed their object lessons first—Rousseau and Froebel—acknowledged that eventually students would have to learn how to read, even though reading may not have had as high a place as nature study in their estimation.

Scattered through Luther's writings is mention of those features of the curriculum he considered important. He believed firmly in instruction in ancient languages, the emphasis to be on Latin, Greek, and Hebrew for the interpretation of religion. As students became proficient in these languages they should progress to the excellence of speech studied in grammar. Luther also approved of the ancient courses in rhetoric and dialectic (Painter 157-159). He noted, "A prominent place should be given to



chronicles and histories, in whatever languages they may be obtained; for they are wonderfully useful in understanding and regulating the course of the world, and in disclosing the marvelous works of God” (Painter, 160). Luther also believed in the study of nature and encouraged work in the sciences. And he placed extraordinary emphasis on music and singing. He also encouraged gymnastic exercise which he regarded as “salutary for the body and the soul” (Painter 166).

Luther did not have time or a long enough life to actually implement his own curriculum other than providing one of its featured textbooks and persuading his followers to be vitally concerned about establishing schools. His trusted companion, Melanchthon, actually devised the specifics of the curriculum both of them envisioned (Cole 238ff):

*The First Group.* Children learning to read. Alphabet, creed, the Lord’s Prayer, Donatus and Cato (two Latin reading books), and, of course, music.

*The Second Group.* Grammar. Aesop’s Fables. Works of Mosellanus and Erasmus. Music for an hour a day. Syntax. Etymology. Prosody. Composition.

*The Third Group.* Again, music for one hour. The works of Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero. Grammar. Syntax. Prosody. Composition.

The next step would be instruction at a university where study would specialize in theology, law, teaching, or medicine (Cole 241).

#### **What practices and methods were used to address the curriculum?**

Luther also was concerned about the way students were taught. He despised the oft-times harsh and mechanical methods which were commonplace in his day. In the “Preface to the Small Catechism” he outlined his methodology for teaching the catechism itself: 1) The teacher should not make changes in the wording or the text. 2) The teacher should use simplicity and repetition. 3) After the students became familiar with the text, the teacher should teach them to understand the meaning of the words. 4) Teachers should allow ample time for the learning to take place (Bente 533-537). 5) Luther understood the necessity of starting with the concrete before going to the abstract; the simple before the complex. 6) He also recognized that courses of study needed to reflect the ability of the students. He believed in graded schools. 7) He also understood the value of the Socratic method of awakening minds and transmitting truth (Painter 152-154).

As a father, Luther loved to prattle with his children. He knew that relating to his children and students at their level—becoming one of them—would promote spiritual and intellectual growth and maturity (Bainton 302).

#### **What was the role of the school in the larger society?**

As a result of the Reformation view of education, especially Melanchthon’s general plan for education, three types of schools developed. The first level schools of the 17th century emphasized instruction in the vernacular. They developed into the German *Volksschule*, so named because they were attended more by the children of common folk. The wealthy generally home-schooled their children or had them tutored. The Latin school, corresponding to our high school, developed into the German *Gymnasium*. And finally there was the university for the specialized instruction required for professionals.

The diffusion of the Reformation principles was dependent on the schools. Each generation needed to learn its doctrine anew in order for Christianity to be a viable resource for their life and behavior as well as for staunch defense of the faith when it was under attack.

#### **SOME PARTING THOUGHTS**

Although the Reformation was primarily a theological and ecclesiastical movement, it left an indelible imprint on education as well. Painter concludes the first part of his book with a recognition of Luther’s contributions to educational advancement:

1. In his writings, as in the principles of Protestantism, he laid the foundation of an educational system, which begins with the popular school and ends with the university.
2. He set up as the noble ideal of education *a Christian man*, fitted through instruction and

- discipline to discharge the duties of every relation of life.
3. He exhibited the necessity of schools both for the church and the state, and emphasized the dignity and worth of the teacher's vocation.
  4. With resistless energy he impressed upon parents, ministers, and civil officers their obligation to educate the young.
  5. He brought about a re-organization of schools introducing graded instruction, an improved course of study and rational methods.
  6. In his appreciation of nature and of child-life, he laid the foundation for educational science.
  7. He made great improvement in method; he sought to adapt instruction to the capacity of children, to make learning pleasant, to awaken the mind through skillful questioning, to study things as well as words, and to temper discipline with love.
  8. With a wise understanding of the relation of virtue and intelligence to the general good, he advocated compulsory education on the part of the state (167f; quoted by Kretzman 61).

The superlatives in Painter's book, *Luther on Education*, indicate a celebratory examination of the educational impact of Martin Luther during his lifetime and beyond. Perhaps some of Painter's points are debatable. This much we can confidently assert. Martin Luther had an extraordinary impact on the history of his people. The Reformation which he helped to spawn was a watershed event in the history of the world. Part of the success of the Reformation lay in the reformers' insistence on establishment of schools to bring its insights, principles, and ideas to succeeding generations.

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## Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox<sup>1</sup> Revisited

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

### Introduction

After an evening of freezing rain and a light dusting of snow, a man drove rather fast down a country road. Needless to say, it was very slippery. Going around a curve, his car started to slip to the left. His natural reaction was to jerk the steering wheel hard to the right. But he turned the car so far to the right that he ended up in the ditch and had to call a tow-truck.

On a warm summer' s evening two children were playing in their backyard. They both wanted to play with the same toy, and so the two started fighting over it. One pulled in one direction, and the other pulled in the other direction. Back and forth the pulling and the arguing went, until one of the children let go of the toy. The other child went flying backward and ended up on the ground.

"For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Maybe you remember that statement from your school days. Whether it be a law of science, or a man driving down an icy road, or two children fighting over a toy, we see that it is very easy to fall into extremes and to overreact to situations. The same can hold true in matters of religion and theology.

Our synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), is rapidly approaching its fortieth anniversary. During the early years of our church body several of our founders recognized the temptations our members would be susceptible to. In reaction to the doctrinal errors that were evident in our former affiliations, there was the danger of reacting so intensely that we would be tempted to fall into the opposite extremes.

The introduction to our 1999-2000 *CLC Directory* states concerning the beginning of our synod: **"A number of pastors and congregations could not in good conscience remain in fellowships in which there was doctrinal indifference and liberalism (defined in the church as modernism, disobedience to the Word, and plain unbelief)."** In our own lifetimes we have seen the disastrous results of this liberalism. Formerly Christian churches today deny basic Biblical teachings. Creation is rejected as an unscientific myth. The virgin birth, miracles, and resurrection of our Lord are all dismissed as the mere wishful thinking of the apostles. And even life after death is doubted. Jesus no

longer is considered the Son of God and Savior of the world, who washed our sins away with His blood, but He is viewed simply as one moral teacher among the many this world has seen.

The outright *unbelief* in visible Christianity today is a sad commentary on the Holy Spirit's words through Paul, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (Gal. 5:9).<sup>2</sup>

When we consider what has occurred in the world of religion during the Twentieth Century, we can understand why Christ commanded us to "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*" (Matt. 7:15), and why the inspired apostle Paul exhorts us, "*Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them*" (Rom. 16:17). As one of our pastors recently said in a conference paper, these separation passages make up the "immune system" of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

But the introductory remarks in our CLC Directory also recognize "**that many temptations and snares confront the way of orthodoxy—legalism, arrogance, formalism, exclusivism—to name a few.**" These are some of the matters we would like to focus our attention on in this article. In so doing, we will listen to the past voices of some of our church body's fathers and others. By the grace of God they wisely recognized the importance of having the spirit of king Josiah, of whom it was said: "*And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left*" (2 Kings 22:2).

During his opening address for the theological seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin, Professor and President Edmund Reim stated in 1954: "We must realize that when we defend the cause of conservatism, when we resist the trend toward liberalism, we are in constant danger of a reaction in the opposite direction, of falling into a state of rigorism and legalism that is just as wrong as the errors we oppose. Let us not close our minds against this possibility. For such a false attitude can exist only at the expense of the true spirit of the Gospel. Let us have eyes for the dangers that lie in the one extreme as well as the other."

The fact that Prof. Reim felt so strongly about this balance is evident from an article in our *Journal of Theology* shortly after the formation of the CLC. He wrote there:

If some have resisted [the devil] when he was seeking to move us to the left, in the direction of indifferentism and incipient unionism, will he not then seek to swerve just those into the opposite direction?

To ignore this danger would be the very blindness against which the Apostle so urgently warns us. Satan is defeated when men stand on the simple truth of God's Word. But he gains precious ground, not only when men weaken in their adherence to this Word, but also when in an excess of zeal they go beyond it, when they seek to fortify it by well-meant but misguided additions of their own. That is how the Scribes and the Pharisees became what they were in the days of the public ministry of our Lord. Let us clearly understand that one particular danger facing us lies in the direction of developing a superorthodoxy, an arrogant attitude of pride and self-esteem that someone in Germany has with rare discernment described as "Lehrgerechtigkeit." I am not suggesting that this would be anyone's conscious and deliberate attitude. But that Satan will be trying to move us in that direction, of that there can be no doubt. And since he did not hesitate to use God's Word in tempting our Lord Jesus, he will certainly come to us also with his deceitful "It is written." ... Having some rather strong convictions, and aiming at some rather definite objectives, let us be sure, very sure, that we are really drawing these conclusions out of Scripture, rather than reading them into it. The Devil is an expert on the psychology of controversy!<sup>5</sup>

In order to help us maintain the proper Scriptural balance so that, in the words of 2 Kings 22:2, we turn "*not aside to the right hand or to the left*," let us consider in greater detail the temptations that especially confront the orthodox.

The introduction to the CLC Directory mentions four temptations that especially confront the orthodox. We will comment on two of them and add another one, "lovelessness." Here, then, are the three we would especially like to focus on: legalism, arrogance and lovelessness.

## Legalism

"Legalism" has been defined as "(a) seeking salvation through works rather than grace; (b) emphasis on the letter rather than the spirit of the law."<sup>6</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees were excellent examples of legalists. They tried to save themselves by their good works and they condemned Christ for healing on the Sabbath day, since work was forbidden on that day by the law of Moses. In our day we also label as "legalists" those who replace the gospel of Christ with something else as the center of their ministry. This writer spoke at length about this in a previous *Journal of Theology* article that was entitled, "The Centrality of the Gospel in Our Ministry." A "legalistic" pastor is one who tries to motivate his people with something other than the mercy of God in Christ—with something other than the gospel. A "legalist" will stand before Christ on the Last Day and expect to be allowed into heaven because he kept God's word pure. Such a person will be eternally disappointed, because such an opinion is no different than that of the Pharisees. Instead, entrance is gained into heaven solely on the basis of Christ's merits, as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:19,21, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. ... For He made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

In speaking of legalism, we read the following in the June 1961 issue of our CLC' *Journal of Theology*: "Have the requirements of orthodoxy in a parish sometimes been made so great that it has seemed almost useless to try to win others to it? Have not unnecessary inhibitions at times taken all heart and spirit out of people?"<sup>7</sup> Pastor John Schierenbeck also wrote in 1981: "...There is the danger that confessionalism becomes an end in itself. If we lose sight of the ecumenical nature of the Church and the power of the Gospel, confessionalism becomes empty Pharisaism...confessionalism dare never be divorced from the power and spirit of the Gospel. And the Gospel dare never be subordinated to confessionalism."<sup>8</sup>

## Arrogance

For whatever the reason, arrogance seems to walk hand in hand with legalism. We have all known people who convey an attitude of "I'm better than you are!," and we know how such an attitude on the part of others has made us feel. How tempting it is to stick out our own chests in sinful human pride because our little church body proclaims the word of God in its truth and purity! In speaking of other church bodies or in talking to members of other churches, how easy it is to communicate a sense of superiority!

... Legalism infiltrates among us in the form of bragging about orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup>

In theology as well as in life pride is a deadly sin. And confessional pride is a deadly virus.<sup>10</sup>

One must always be ready to confront an issue when a principle is involved especially when it is a Scriptural principle. But a road-block is set up if we pursue the issue in a strident and belligerent manner and with an air of domineering authority. This can often tend to close the ears of those who should be listening. Much more can be gained with an irenic and kindly approach which displays concern and compassion. "Speaking the truth in love."<sup>11</sup>

And in writing about the kind of attitude we should have during controversy and in defending the truths of Holy Scripture, let's not forget this:

Bars should not be let down, but they should be upheld with dignity. The world will hate us, but let us make sure that it is for Christ's sake. Let it not be for our failure to walk among men as did Abraham of old, as friends of God. Let them not call us self-satisfied, cold, aloof, supercilious, and worse. Can't we compel them to say, 'These men have done nothing amiss?' The sacred Proverb stands: 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him' (Prov. 16:7). Whence is the high correlation between being 'orthodox' and having insensitive personalities?<sup>12</sup>

## Lovelessness

Lovelessness is a natural result of arrogance. Lovelessness is a fruit of our sinful human nature. But ...

Where the Word of Christ lives and reigns in the hearts of believers, there will also be found spiritual life which manifests itself in the ways of Christian love. This greatest of all spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13:13), namely Christian love, is not simply an emotion or feeling, but is a spirit of heart that involves activity of words and actions. Consider the supreme example of this found in the heavenly Father when it is said of Him, ' For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'<sup>13</sup>

Lovelessness particularly manifests itself in the heat of doctrinal conflict:

... A stress on confessionalism without an ecumenical balance can become loveless in its treatment of other people. Too often confessionalism degenerates into proving that I' m right and you' re wrong. Especially in the heat of controversy, when confessional action is called for, love goes right out the window. Church bodies and individuals have proven that it is very difficult to be confessional and at the same time exhibit Christian love. some of the bitterest battles are fought among those who are closest in confessional position. Without Christian sobriety and fear, it is possible to be confessionally right and still be wrong.<sup>14</sup>

We also dare never forget:

A confessional position which is accompanied by hatred and lovelessness is counter productive to the Gospel and self-destructive. Our fellowship principles need to be put into action in the perspective of Christ' s command to love one another. To do less is in itself to deny Christ<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

So how do we fight against these temptations that especially confront the orthodox? How do we prevent ourselves from falling into either one of the ditches on both sides of the road? Paul' s inspired words in Ephesians chapter 6 apply to us as never before: "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*" (v. 11). We also dare never forget the central message of Paul' s proclamation, which should also be the focus of our ministry and proclamation: "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:1,2).

What makes this subject so difficult is that we are talking about a spirit, an attitude, about the very spirit of the Gospel. The proper balance between confessionalism and ecumenism is impossible for the flesh. The proper balance is entirely a work of the Holy Spirit and a Spirit-wrought fruit of faith. This sobriety is worked through the Gospel of the unconditional forgiveness of sins. This spirit comes to us through the Scriptures, the words of the living God. We rest secure in God' s promise that His Word will not return unto Him void, but that it will accomplish His purposes. The Holy Spirit, alone, will maintain the proper sobriety or balance in our lives.<sup>16</sup>

It is our earnest desire, by the grace of God, to be faithful to the Word, as well as to be found faithful in service as ready instruments of God' s ministering grace in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We recognize that many temptations and snares confront the way of orthodoxy—legalism, arrogance, formalism, exclusivism—to name a few. We plead with the Spirit of God to defend us against anything and everything that would destroy our witness to the manifold grace of God. We also beg that He empower us to be faithful stewards of His Word, proclaiming the Gospel with boldness to all people as we are given opportunity.<sup>17</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This title is taken from an article by Prof. Martin Galstad in the June 1961 issue of the CLC' s *Journal of Theology*.

<sup>2</sup> All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version.

<sup>3</sup> Pastor James Albrecht, "Encouraging the Positive Aspects of Church Fellowship," CLC General Pastoral Conference, Eau Claire, WI, June 22-24, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Reim in Opening Address, Theological Seminary, Thiensville, Sept. 14, 1954;

*Quartalschrift*, Oct., 1954, 235. Quoted by Martin Galstad, "Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox" *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1, Number 3, June, 1961, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Reim, "Things to Guard against in Our Approach toward Re-alignment," *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 2, Number 1, February, 1962, 3,4.

<sup>6</sup> *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, Erwin L Lueker, editor; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975, 465.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Galstad, "Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox," *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1, Number 3, June, 1961, 5.

<sup>8</sup> John Schierenbeck, "How to Be both Confessional and Ecumenical," 1981 CLC Southeastern Pastoral Conference paper, p. 6. The author uses the term "ecumenical" in its historic sense, and not in the sense of the modern-day ecumenical movement, where churches join together in worship, prayer and other church work without being agreed on the teachings of Holy Scripture (1 Cor. 1:10). Pastor Schierenbeck writes: "There is a unity of faith or oneness which joins all believers the world over in Christ Jesus. This ecumenical oneness is a mark of the Holy Christian Church. This unity is not an organizational unity, but a reality of Spirit created faith in Jesus" (p. 3).

<sup>9</sup> J.P. Koehler, "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 2, Milwaukee: Northwestern , 239. Originally published as "Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 11:4 (1914) and Vol. 12:1-3 (1915).

<sup>10</sup> Schierenbeck 8.

<sup>11</sup> Prof. C.M. Gullerud, "Keeping the Unity," an undated conference paper, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Galstad 6.

<sup>13</sup> Pastor Mark Gullerud, "The Exercise of Brotherly Fellowship in the Waning Days of the Church Militant," Essay presented at the 23rd Convention of the CLC, Eau Claire, WI, June 15-19, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Schierenbeck 7.

<sup>15</sup> Schierenbeck 7.

<sup>16</sup> Schierenbeck 8.

<sup>17</sup> 1999-2000 *CLC Directory* 2.

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## STUDIES IN LUTHER: LUTHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH AND WRITINGS ABOUT THE JEWS—PART II

Paul D. Nolting

[This series of articles began in the *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1999), 2-19.]

### Recapitulation of Part I

In 1522 Martin Luther wrote a treatise entitled, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. In this treatise Luther commented on the terrible treatment that Jews had received from Christians and recommended a different approach in an effort to lead some of them out of their misbelief and into evangelical Christianity. He advised:

Deal gently with them (the Jews) and instruct them from Scripture....If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealing with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty years later in December 1542, Luther wrote another treatise entitled, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. In this treatise Luther's thoughts regarding how the Jewish people should be treated were dramatically different. He advised:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn....Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed.... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them....Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb....Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews....Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping....Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow....But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc...then eject them forever from the country.<sup>2</sup>

These words of Luther have embarrassed many twentieth-century Lutherans. In the mind of twentieth-century man, they are frequently tied to the policies and travesties of Nazi Germany. Consequently, some Lutherans have apologized for several of Luther's last treatises, while others have claimed that such apologies are "oblique and ingenuous."<sup>3</sup> We will consider these thoughts more fully later in this paper. Our intent up to this point has been to consider the factors, which led Luther to such a dramatic change in his opinions concerning the Jews, and to trace the development of Luther's relationship with the Jewish people during the last twenty-five years of his life. Our hope remains that we will gain a better understanding of Luther and his times and grow thereby in the grace and knowledge of our Savior God.

The first essay presented a variety of suggestions to explain Luther's change in attitude. Some historians point to internal factors such as the possible onset of senility, the bitterness and anger of old age, an immense capacity for hatred, and his many bodily ailments as possible reasons. Some of these assertions simply do not accord with the facts, while the influence of others is difficult to prove. Other historians propose the external force of reformation politics and its demand for increased polemics on Luther's part as a contributing factor. Still others propose and, in this author's opinion properly so, theological and spiritual concerns—Luther's passionate love for the gospel and devotion to the truth, his concern over reports of Jewish proselytizing in Moravia, and his absolute conviction that the end of time was near. Unfortunately, Luther late in life appears also to have accepted at face value many false assertions and stereotypes of the Jewish people, which he had previously either dismissed or ignored, and which moved him to added vehemence.<sup>4</sup>

Before tracing Luther's actual relationship with the Jews, the first essay presented three factors to bear in mind in order to place Luther's words and actions into a proper context. It was noted that the ideals of religious freedom and separation of church and state were unknown in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the social make-up of medieval Western Europe was based on a series of corporations, the greatest of which was the Christian church. The Jews were excluded from the church, unless they were converted and baptized. Finally, from the time of the First Crusade in 1096, the Jews had been subjected to a never-ending series of persecutions, pogroms, and expulsions. Consequently, Luther lived in a society in general which was hostile towards the Jews, and in a community in particular which had expelled its Jews. He, therefore, had little personal contact with them.

During his early years Luther did not deal with the subject of the Jews at any great length. Early in his career he defended John Reuchlin, a Christian Jew, in an issue regarding academic freedom. His first treatise dealing specifically with the Jews was *That Jesus was Born a Jew*, written in 1523 to refute false accusations leveled against him by Catholic opponents. Luther dedicated this work to Bernard, a baptized Jew in Schweinitz. Bernard served occasionally as a messenger for Luther, and at one point, when Bernard was facing financial difficulties, both Luther and Melancthon



cared for his children. Throughout the 1520s and up until 1533 Luther appears to have maintained his hope that by right preaching and moderate treatment many Jews would be won to the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-1530s, however, Luther's attitude began to change. Several factors appear to have contributed to this change. Luther received reports of Jews becoming baptized simply to mock the Christian faith. Luther himself experienced such an incident in Wittenberg in 1532. Shortly after this, it was reported to Luther that three Jewish scholars whom he had befriended later blasphemed Christ. This, no doubt, led to Luther's refusal to help Josel of Rosheim, a spokesman for the German Jews, when he sought a recommendation from Luther to gain an audience with Duke John Frederick in 1537. In addition, Luther received letters from Count Wolfgang Schlick zu Falkenau in 1537 stating that Jews were making inroads through their proselytization of Christians in Moravia. Supposedly Christians were being convinced of the necessity of circumcision and Saturday worship.<sup>6</sup> In response Luther wrote *Against the Sabbatarians* in March 1538. This tract was a theological and apologetic argument against Judaism and in particular the rabbinic interpretation of the Bible. While it emphasized Christianity's heritage from Judaism, it reaffirmed that the Old Testament Scriptures could only be properly understood in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Luther maintained that the task of Christians was to lead the Jews out of their errors and into the truth.<sup>7</sup>

## **PART II: Continuation of "THE DEVELOPMENT OF LUTHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE DURING THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF HIS LIFE."**

The issue of the false rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament became a reoccurring theme in Luther's writings during his latter years, whenever the subject of the Jews arose. This was understandable, since from 1535 on Luther was lecturing and writing his commentary on Genesis. For Luther, it was none other than the Triune God who spoke in the creation story, and the promises of the Savior contained in Genesis found their fulfillment for Luther completely and only in Jesus Christ. Luther studied the Jewish exegetes in connection with this work and came to view them as "pernicious perverters of the Scriptures," who "deserve to be detested," because they rejected, and their followers steadfastly resisted any instruction in these very fundamental truths.<sup>8</sup>

Luther, for instance, found the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 in Christ. He wrote:

But if, as the words clearly indicate, this promise is to be extended to all nations, or families of the earth, who else, shall we say, has dispensed this blessing among all nations except the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ?..In these few simple words the Holy Spirit has thus encompassed the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. The holy patriarchs and prophets explained this more fully later on in their sermons, namely, that through the Son of God the entire world would be made free, hell and death would be destroyed, the Law would be abrogated, sins would be forgiven, and eternal salvation and life would be given freely to those who believe in Him. This is the day of Christ about which He discourses in John (8:56), the day which Abraham did not see with his bodily eyes but did see in the spirit, and was glad. To the flesh these things were invisible, impossible, and for this reason incredible...This passage is profitable not only for instruction and encouragement but also for refuting the perfidious Jews. Because God promises Abraham the material blessing that his descendants will be a great nation, let them declare about themselves whether they are a blessed and great nation today!<sup>9</sup>

Later, when addressing the subject of Abraham's righteousness in Genesis 15:6, Luther dealt with the key teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone and wrote:

How, then, did he obtain righteousness? In this way: God speaks, and Abraham believes what God is saying. Moreover, the Holy Spirit comes as a trustworthy witness and declares that this very believing or this very faith is righteousness or is imputed by God Himself as righteousness and is regarded by Him as such. But because the words which the Lord is speaking relate

especially to Christ, the spiritual Seed, Paul unfolds this mystery and declares clearly that righteousness comes through faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). Let us, then, accept this statement and not allow ourselves to be dislodged from it by the ragings of Satan and the popes.

But how Satan hates this statement is proved not only by the fact that today he assails it in such a hostile manner and impudently blasphemes and condemns it; but here the rabbis of the Jews also reveal their folly and the wrath which they harbor against Christ.

They read this passage in the following manner: Abraham believed in God, and when he directed his thoughts to Him, he did so in righteousness. This means that Abraham believed the Lord and thought that God was just and would give him a seed because He was just, that is, because He would have regard for the merits and the saintliness of father Abraham.

Surely a thought worthy of the rabbis and enemies of Christ! For by it the entire sense is turned upside down, the promise and grace are excluded, and human righteousness is established—although Paul, on the basis of this very passage, most emphatically attacks this opinion as wrong and ungodly.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that Luther's theological controversies were above all a struggle over the proper interpretation of Scripture. Luther did not spend much time arguing about the meaning of words, nor was he interested in personal victory and prideful, professorial vindication. Rather, Luther was convinced that his interpretation of the Old Testament was the true and correct one, the adherence to which was then ultimately a matter of spiritual life or spiritual death.<sup>11</sup>

In 1539 Luther read a book written in 1530 by a Jew, Anthony Margaritha, which had a profound influence on his thinking. Margaritha had converted from Judaism to Christianity in 1522 and had afterward become a Lutheran. The book was entitled, *The Whole Jewish Faith, Together with a Thorough and Truthful Account of All the Regulations, Ceremonies, and Prayers, Both for Family and Public Worship, as Observed by the Jews throughout the Year, with Excellent and Well-founded Arguments Against Their Faith*. The materials provided in this book confirmed for Luther that the Jews in their blindness wanted nothing to do with faith and justification through faith. In this way, Luther felt, they were similar to the papists! Heydenreich, a dinner companion of Luther, recalled this observation by Luther:

When we were reading at the table about the various rites and ceremonies of the Jews in the little book by Anthony Margaritha, a baptized Jew, the doctor said, "All religions that depart from the true Christian religion are *ex opere operato*, that is, teach, 'This I will do, and that will please God.' But one must hold fast to the rule that every *opus operatum* is idolatrous. Whatever the papists taught was *opus operatum*, At all events, their rules and regulations remind me of the Jews, and actually very much was borrowed from the Jews."<sup>12</sup>

Yet, in 1540, Luther baptized a Jewish man, Michael from Posen. To be sure, Luther questioned him in order to discover his motives, yet in the end he baptized him and received him as a Christian brother. It is interesting to note that when Michael arrived in Wittenberg and Luther was informed of his request, Luther commented, "I love Jews, if they come to their senses, for the sake of Abraham, whom I love above all the Jews."<sup>13</sup> It should be added that, when asked what would be necessary for a Jew to be baptized, Luther drew up a series of five confessional questions to ask any Jewish person requesting baptism. If the Jewish convert responded with an appropriate Christian confession, Luther urged that he be baptized. Luther also suggested that any such individual be assured afterward, "You should not doubt from this time forward that your sins are forgiven you, and that you have been promised and are a child of God through Christ Jesus, the only Son of God, in whom you now believe. The grace of God be with you!"<sup>14</sup>

In 1541, Luther revised his *Preface* to the book of Ezekiel. In it he accused the rabbis of "tearing the Scripture apart and tormenting it with their commentaries, like filthy sows rooting up and overturning a pleasure garden." In a Bible revision that same year Luther added a gloss to Matthew 27:15, which concerned the choice between releasing Christ or Barabbas. Luther stated that the Jews

“would rather have worshipped the devil himself than let God’s Son go. This is also true today and always.” Yet in that same revision, the gloss inserted on Romans 15:8 states, “In sum, this epistle says that both, Jews and Christians, will be saved.” In connection with the revision of Romans 11 we find, “The Jews are not denied life, and the door of grace is not closed...The Jews are not to be abandoned entirely, this is his (Paul’s) earnest affirmation...(God says) go, preach, baptize; who knows what I will do with Jews, Gentiles. I do not share my will with you. Let God alone, we cannot fathom his decree.”<sup>15</sup>

Sometime during late 1541 or early 1542 Luther learned that the Jews had been expelled from Bohemia, an action Luther believed the Jews brought on themselves in view of their impenitence. At the same time he received a rabbinic writing (no longer extant) that attacked his *Against the Sabbatarians*. It was during the summer and fall of 1542 that Luther decided to write once more against the Jews, in view of the fact that the Jews were still being tolerated within some evangelical territories. He stated at the time:

I intend to write against the Jews once again because I hear that some of our lords are befriending them. I’ll advise them to chase all the Jews out of their land. What reason do they have to slander and insult the dear Virgin Mary as they do? They call her a stinkpot, a hag, a monstrosity. If I were a lord I’d take them by the throat or they’d have to show cause [why I shouldn’t]. They’re wretched people. I know of no stronger argument against them than to ask them why they’ve been in exile so long.<sup>16</sup>

Luther felt the time had come to expel the Jews, for it was apparent to him that the mild treatment he had advocated earlier, with the hope of bringing about the conversion of the Jews, had proven ineffective. In preparation for his writing, Luther reread Margaritha’s book. With the prayer, “Come therefore, dear Lord! Come and strike about thee with thy day of judgment, for no improvement is any longer to be expected,” Luther wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies* in December 1542.<sup>17</sup>

Luther began *On the Jews and Their Lies* by stating his purpose in writing:

I had made up my mind to write no more either about the Jews or against them. But since I learned that these miserable and accursed people do not cease to lure to themselves even us, that is, the Christians, I have published this little book, so that I might be found among those who opposed such poisonous activities of the Jews and who warned the Christians to be on their guard against them. I would not have believed that a Christian could be duped by the Jews into taking their exile and wretchedness upon himself. However, the devil is the god of the world, and wherever God’s word is absent he has an easy task, not only with the weak but also with the strong. May God help us. Amen.

Grace and peace in the Lord. Dear sir and good friend, I have received a treatise in which a Jew engages in dialog with a Christian. He dares to pervert the scriptural passages which we cite in testimony to our faith, concerning our Lord Christ and Mary his mother, and to interpret them quite differently. With this argument he thinks he can destroy the basis of our faith.

This is my reply to you and to him. It is not my purpose to quarrel with the Jews, nor to learn from them how they interpret or understand Scripture; I know all of that very well already. Much less do I purpose to convert the Jews, for that is impossible. Those two excellent men, Lira and Burgesses, together with others, truthfully described the Jews’ vile interpretation for us two hundred and one hundred years ago respectively. Indeed they refuted it thoroughly. However, this was no help at all to the Jews, and they have grown steadily worse...<sup>18</sup>

Now, in order to strengthen our faith, we want to deal with a few crass follies of the Jews in their belief and their exegesis of the Scriptures, since they so maliciously revile our faith. If this should move any Jew to reform and repent, so much the better. We are now not talking with the Jews but about the Jews and their dealings, so that our Germans, too, might be informed.<sup>19</sup>

*On the Jews and Their Lies* contains three parts. In the first part Luther dealt with and refuted certain advantages claimed by the Jews over Christians. In the second and main part of the work Luther dealt with the promised Messiah by considering four Old Testament prophetic passages. In the third part, which is the cause of much protest today, Luther dealt with Jewish ‘lies’ about Christ and the Virgin Mary, supposed Jewish threats towards Christians, and then outlined what he believed the civil authorities should do in connection with the Jews.

Luther first dealt with the claims by the Jews that they alone were the children of Abraham and so God’s chosen people. He demonstrated that mere physical descent does not guarantee an unbroken relationship with God, and that, in fact, the Gentiles can claim an equal physical descent:

I could go back to the beginning of the world and trace our common ancestry from Adam and Eve, later from Shem, Enoch, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; for all of these are our ancestors just as well as the Jews’, and we share equally in the honor, nobility, and fame of descent from them as do the Jews. We are their flesh and blood just the same as Abraham and all his seed are. For we were in the loins of the same holy fathers in the same measure as they were, and there is no difference whatever with regard to birth or flesh and blood, as reason must tell us. Therefore the blind Jews are truly stupid fools, much more absurd than the Gentiles, to boast so before God of their physical birth, though they are by reason of it no better than the Gentiles, since we both partake of one birth, one flesh and blood, from very first, best, and holiest ancestors. Neither one can reproach or upbraid the other about some peculiarity without implicating himself at the same time....This I wanted to say for the strengthening of our faith; for the Jews will not give up their pride and boasting about their nobility and lineage. As was said above, their hearts are hardened. Our people, however, must be on their guard against them, lest they be misled by this impenitent and accursed people who give God the lie and haughtily despise all the world. For the Jews would like to entice us Christians to their faith, and they do this wherever they can. If God is to become gracious also to them, the Jews, they must first of all banish such blasphemous prayers and songs, that boast so arrogantly about their lineage, from their synagogues, from their hearts, and from their lips, for such prayers ever increase and sharpen God’s wrath toward them. However, they will not do this, nor will they humble themselves abjectly, except for a few individuals whom God draws unto himself particularly and delivers from their terrible ruin.<sup>20</sup>

Luther continued by addressing the issue of circumcision. He refuted the Jewish claim that circumcision was a guarantee of salvation. He went on to compare circumcision to baptism and to point out that where either is separated from faith it becomes a mere external deed. Luther wrote:

Circumcision was given and instituted to enfold and to preserve God’s word and his promise. This means that circumcision should not be useful or sufficient as a work in itself, but those who possess circumcision should be bound by this sign, covenant, or sacrament to obey and to believe God in his words, and to transmit all this to their descendants...<sup>21</sup>

As we said, God did not institute circumcision nor did he accept the Jews as his people in order that they might persecute, mock, and murder his word and his prophets, and thereby render a service to justice and to God. Rather, as Moses says in the words dealing with circumcision in Genesis 17, this was done in order that they might hear God and his word; that is, that they might let him be their God. Apart from this circumcision in itself would not help them, since it would then no longer be God’s circumcision, for it would be without God, contending against his word; it would have become merely a human work. For he had bound himself, or his word, to circumcision. Where these two part company, circumcision remains a hollow husk or empty shell devoid of nut or kernel.

The following is an analogous situation for us Christians: God gave us baptism, the sacrament of his body and blood, and the keys for the ultimate purpose or final cause that we should have his word in them and exercise our faith therein. That is, he intends to be our God through them,

and through them we are to be his people. However, what did we do? We proceeded to separate the word and faith from the sacrament (that is, from God and his ultimate purpose) and converted it into a mere *opus legis*, a work of the law, or as the papists call it, an *opus operatum*—merely a human work, which the priests offered to God and the laity performed as a work of obedience as often as they received it. What is left of the sacrament? Only the empty husk, the mere ceremony, *opus vanum*, divested of everything divine.<sup>22</sup>

Luther then turned to the Jew's greatest source of pride—the Mosaic Law. Luther pointed out that the Jews failed both to keep the law and to understand its greater purpose of revealing sin and so the sinner's need for a Savior from sin. He wrote:

Indeed, that is truly to understand God's law and its observance—when we know, recognize, yes, and feel that we have it, but do not keep it and cannot keep it; that in view of this, we are poor sinners and guilty before God; and that it is only out of pure grace and mercy that we receive forgiveness for such guilt and disobedience through the Man on whom God has laid this sin...<sup>23</sup>

Learn from this, dear Christians, what you are doing if you permit the blind Jews to mislead you. Then the saying will truly apply, "When a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit" [cf. Luke 6:39]. You cannot learn anything from them except how to misunderstand the divine commandments, and despite this, boast haughtily over against the Gentiles—who really are much better before God than they, since they do not have such pride of holiness and yet keep far more of the law than these arrogant saints and damned blasphemers and liars.

Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemently, just as the devils themselves do. And where you see or hear a Jew teaching, remember that you are hearing nothing but a venomous basilisk who poisons and kills people merely by fastening his eyes on them. God's wrath has consigned them to the presumption that their boasting, their conceit, their slander of God, their cursing of all people are a true and great service rendered to God—all of which is very fitting and becoming to such noble blood of the fathers and circumcised saints. This they believe despite the fact that they know they are steeped in manifest vices.<sup>24</sup>

In the final portion of this first part of the work, Luther focused on the boast that God had given them the Promised Land. As was frequently the case, Luther dismissed this claim as meaningless seeing that the Jews had been driven out of Palestine fifteen hundred years before.

In the second portion of the work, which is the longest of the three, Luther discussed the promised Messiah as proclaimed by four Old Testament messianic prophecies—Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 23:1-5; Haggai 2:6-9; and Daniel 9:24. In this section he renewed his debate with the Jewish rabbis and their interpretation of Old Testament Scripture.

With regard to Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah, Luther maintained that the promised Messiah, identified as "Shiloh" in the text, must be Christ in view of the fact that the scepter had departed from Judah after the time of Christ. If this were not the case, Luther concluded, then God must be guilty of lying, for the Jews had been dispossessed from their lands for fifteen hundred years. He wrote in summary:

I do not have the time at present to demonstrate what a rich fountainhead this verse is and how the prophets drew so much information from it concerning the fall of the Jews and the election of the Gentiles, about which the modern Jews and bastards know nothing at all. But we have clearly and forcefully seen from this verse that the Messiah had to come at the time of Herod. The alternative would be to say that God failed to keep his promise and, consequently,

lied. No one dare do that save the accused devil and his servants, the false bastards and strange Jews. They do this incessantly. In their eyes God must be a liar. They claim that they are right when they assert that the Messiah has not yet come, despite the fact that God declared in very plain words that the Messiah would come before the scepter had entirely departed from Judah. This scepter has been lost to Judah for almost fifteen hundred years now...<sup>25</sup>

We Christians, however, can greatly strengthen our faith with this statement of Jacob, assuring us that Christ is now present and that he has been present for almost fifteen hundred years—but not, as the devil jeers, as a beggar in Rome; rather, as a ruling Messiah. If this were not so, then God’s word and promise would be a lie. If the Jews would only let Holy Scripture be God’s word, they would also have to admit that there has been a Messiah since the time of Herod (no matter where), rather than awaiting another.<sup>26</sup>

Luther then moved on to the last words of David in 2 Samuel 23:1-5 asserting that the everlasting kingdom promised to David by God could only be found established in and by one person—Jesus Christ! God is a faithful God, Luther maintained, and does not lie. Therefore David’s house and government had to have endured from his time forward and forever, because God had promised it would! For Luther, any honest individual would have to admit that it had endured in the person and through the rule of Jesus Christ. Luther wrote:

Well and good, if God is truthful and almighty and spoke these words through David—which no Jew dares to deny—then David’s house and government (which are the same thing) must have endured since the time he spoke these words, and must still endure and will endure forever—that is, eternally. Otherwise, God would be a liar. In brief, either we must have David’s house or heir, who reigns from the time of David to the present and in eternity, or David died as a flagrant liar to his last day...<sup>27</sup>

Now such an eternal house of David is nowhere to be found unless we place the scepter before the Messiah and the Messiah after the scepter, and then join the two together: namely, by asserting that the Messiah appeared when the scepter departed and that David’s house was thus preserved forever. In that way God is found truthful and faithful in his word, covenant, and oath. For it is obvious that the scepter of Judah completely collapsed at the time of Herod, but much more so when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the scepter of Judah. Now if David’s house is eternal and God truthful, then the true King of Judah, the Messiah, must have come at this time. No barking, interpreting, or glossing will change this. The text is too authoritative and too clear. If the Jews refuse to admit it, we do not care.<sup>28</sup>

It is in connection with his discussion of Haggai 2:6-9 that Luther used some of his strongest language of the treatise and made some unfortunate generalizations. In the passage, God Himself speaks of the time when the Messiah, the “Desire of All Nations,” will come and fill the temple with a greater glory than that of Solomon’s temple. In connection with that, God also states that “the silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine” (Haggai 2:8). While Luther spoke eloquently of what the Savior would mean for the Gentiles, he strongly ridiculed the thought of Jewish commentators, who suggested that when the Messiah came, he would distribute the world’s silver and gold to the Jews themselves. Luther wrote:

In a little while the desire of the Jews shall come. For the Jews are the ones who desire gold and silver more avidly than any other nation on earth. In view of that, the text should more properly speak of the desire of the Jews than of the Gentiles. For although the Gentiles do desire gold and silver, nevertheless here are the Jews who desire and covet this desire of the Gentiles, who desire that it be brought to them so that they may devour it and leave nothing for the Gentiles. Why? Because they are the noble blood, the circumcised saints who have God’s commandments and do not keep them, but are stiff-necked, disobedient, prophet-murderers, arrogant, usurers, and filled with every vice, as the whole of Scripture and their present conduct bear out...<sup>29</sup>

Shame on you, here, there, or wherever you may be, you damned Jews, that you dare to apply this earnest, glorious, comforting word of God so despicably to your mortal, greedy belly, which is doomed to decay and that you are not ashamed to display your greed so openly. You are not worthy of looking at the outside of the Bible, much less of reading it. You should read only the bible that is found under the sow's tail, and eat and drink the letters that drop from there. That would be a bible for such prophets, who root about like sows and tear apart like pigs the words of the divine Majesty, which should be heard with all honor, awe, and joy...<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, dear Christian, be on your guard against the Jews, who, as you discover here, are consigned by the wrath of God to the devil, who has not only robbed them of a proper understanding of Scripture, but also of ordinary human reason, shame, and sense, and only works mischief with Holy Scripture through them. Therefore they cannot be trusted and believed in any other matter either, even though a truthful word may drop from their lips occasionally. For anyone who dares to juggle the awesome word of God so frivolously and shamefully as you see it done here, and as you also noted earlier with regard to the words of Jacob cannot have a good spirit dwelling in him. Therefore, wherever you see a genuine Jew, you may with a good conscience cross yourself and bluntly say: "There goes a devil incarnate"...<sup>31</sup>

Thus the verse reads: "Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land (these are the islands of the sea) and the chemdath of all Gentiles shall come"—that is, the Messiah, the Desire of all Gentiles ....In brief, it is the Messiah, who would be the object of displeasure, disgust, and abomination for the unbelieving and hardened Jews, as Isaiah 53 prophesies. The Gentiles, on the other hand, would bid him welcome as their heart's joy, delight, and every wish and desire. For he brings them deliverance from sin, death, devil, hell, and every evil, eternally. This is, indeed, the Gentiles' desire, their heart's delight, joy, and comfort.<sup>32</sup>

Luther concluded this second part of the treatise by dealing with the final of the four prophetic passages, Daniel 9:24. He pointed out that the "seventy weeks," about which Daniel spoke, fit into the Old Testament history of the time and found its completion and fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. Luther maintained that the Jews would "tear apart the text wherever they can, solely for the purpose of spoiling the words of Scripture for us Christians."<sup>33</sup> For Luther the text itself, the history of the inter-testamental period, and the evidence provided by the New Testament writers all led to the same inevitable conclusion that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah.

Luther began the third part of his treatise by restating Jewish "lies" about Christ and Mary. He pointed out that the Jews routinely defamed Christ by saying that He was able to perform miracles only because He was in league with the devil,<sup>34</sup> and that after He was exposed, He was executed. He reviewed how the Jews accused Jesus of being a "whore's son," for they claimed that Mary had "conceived him in adultery with a blacksmith."<sup>35</sup> In addition, it was claimed that Mary conceived Jesus during her menstrual period, which caused Jesus to be "mentally deficient from birth" and perhaps even "some sort of demon."<sup>36</sup> Luther passed on a report he had received that one malicious rabbi routinely changed Mary's name to "haria," or dung heap.<sup>37</sup> In response Luther used crude satire to explain what he viewed as wicked pride on the part of the Jews:

Do you ask what prompts them to write this, or what is the cause of it? You stupid, accursed Goy, why should you ask that? Does it not satisfy you to know that this is said by the noble, circumcised saints? Are you so slow to learn that such a holy people is exempt from all the decrees of God and cannot sin? They may lie, blaspheme, defame, and murder whom they will, even God himself and all his prophets. All of this must be accounted as nothing but a fine service rendered to God. Did I not tell you earlier that a Jew is such a noble, precious jewel that God and all the angels dance when he farts? And if he were to go on to do something coarser than that, they would nevertheless expect it to be regarded as a golden Talmud. Whatever issues

from such a holy man, from above or from below, must surely be considered by the accursed Goyim to be pure holiness.<sup>38</sup>

Luther continued at this point by speaking of the Jews' supposed beliefs and violent intentions over against the Gentile Christian population. Here Luther apparently combined thoughts from Margaritha's book, *The Whole Jewish Faith*, as it referred to Jewish rituals and unfounded, but not uncommon, rumors. He stated:

Further, they presume to instruct God and prescribe the manner in which he is to redeem them. For the Jews, these very learned saints, look upon God as a poor cobbler equipped with only a left last for making shoes. This is to say that he is to kill and exterminate all of us Goyim through their Messiah, so that they can lay their hands on the land, the goods, and the government of the whole world. And now a storm breaks over us with curses, defamation, and derision that cannot be expressed with words. They wish that sword and war, distress and every misfortune may overtake us accursed Goyim. They vent their curses on us openly every Saturday in their synagogues and daily in their homes. They teach, urge, and train their children from infancy to remain the bitter, virulent, and wrathful enemies of the Christians.

This gives you a clear picture of their conception of the fifth commandment and their observation of it. They have been blood-thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intentions, and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds. Thus they have been accused of poisoning water and wells, of kidnapping children, of piercing them through with an awl, of hacking them in pieces, and in that way secretly cooling their wrath with the blood of Christians, for all of which they have often been condemned to death by fire.<sup>39</sup>

In view of this gross wickedness, the actual blasphemies against Christ and Mary and the potential danger Luther perceived for the Christian population, Luther turned to a discussion of what should be done. He pointed out that the Jews themselves had been punished by God for over fourteen hundred years, and that other Christian kings and countries had banished them from their lands long before. Luther was convinced that it was now time for the Christian princes of Germany to respond with "sharp mercy," which would either impress the Jews with the errors of their beliefs and lead them to repentance, or remove any threat they might pose to the Christian population. Therefore, Luther proposed:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians...Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies....Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them...Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb...Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the country-side, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like...Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. The reason for such a measure is that, as said above, they have no other means of earning a livelihood than usury, and by it they have stolen and robbed from us all they possess. Such money should now be used in no other way than the following: Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted, he should be handed one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred florins, as personal circumstances may suggest. With this he could set himself up in some occupation for the support of his poor wife and children, and the maintenance of the old or feeble...Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a



spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam...But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc...then eject them forever from the country. For as we have heard, God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!<sup>40</sup>

Luther went on to admonish the Christian pastors and preachers of his day to take his warnings seriously and to share them with their parishioners. Luther maintained that they needed to be warned, lest they fall prey to Jewish errors and suffer God's judgment. Still, Luther pointed out that the parishioners themselves should do no harm to the Jews either verbally or physically, but that any action should be taken by the governmental authorities within each state:

And you, my dear gentlemen and friends who are pastors and preachers, I wish to remind very faithfully of your official duty, so that you too may warn your parishioners concerning their eternal harm, as you know how to do—namely, that they be on their guard against the Jews and avoid them so far as possible. They should not curse them or harm their persons, however. For the Jews have cursed and harmed themselves more than enough by cursing the Man Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son, which they unfortunately have been doing for over fourteen hundred years. Let the government deal with them in this respect, as I have suggested.<sup>41</sup>

Luther understood that everyone had a right to believe whatever he wanted and that no one could be forced to believe a particular confession. However, he was very concerned that the Christians of his day not become partners in the evil promoted by the Jews. He wrote:

We cannot help it that they do not share our belief. It is impossible to force anyone to believe. However, we must avoid confirming them in their wanton lying, slandering, cursing, and defaming. Nor dare we make ourselves partners in their devilish ranting and raving by shielding and protecting them, by giving them food, drink, and shelter, or by other neighborly acts, especially since they boast so proudly and especially when we do help and serve them that God has ordained them as lords and us as servants...<sup>42</sup>

Of course, we accord anyone the right not to believe *omissive et privatim* [by neglect and privately]; this we leave to everyone's conscience. But to parade such unbelief so freely in churches and before our very noses, eyes, and ears, to boast of it, to sing it, teach it, and defend it, to revile and curse the true faith, and in this way lure others to them and hinder our people—that is a far, far different story. And this is not changed by the fact that the Jews do not believe the New Testament, that they are unacquainted with it, and that they pay it no heed.<sup>43</sup>

Luther recognized that his proposals were serious ones, but he viewed them as unavoidable under the circumstances. Coexistence of the Christian and Jewish religions was, in Luther's opinion, impossible, and he gave no thought to mutual toleration, a concept foreign to the sixteenth century. The Jews had proven themselves to be obstinate, through their usury he viewed them a danger to the state, and by their proselytization of Christians they had become an active threat to the spirituality of the Christian populace. Consequently, he wrote:

In my opinion the problem must be resolved thus: If we wish to wash our hands of the Jews' blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country. Let them think of their fatherland; then they need no longer wail and lie before God against us that we are holding them captive, no need we then any longer complain that they are burdening us with their blasphemy and their usury. This is the most natural and the best course of action, which will safeguard the interest of both parties.<sup>45</sup>

It is interesting to note that, as Luther concluded this treatise, it is very apparent that for him

the issue between Jew and Christian was fundamentally a theological one. He framed the issues in terms of doctrinal truth versus doctrinal error. He recognized that both Jew and Gentile could stand side by side if agreed, and that God's grace extended to all, Jew or Gentile, when one's faith was placed in Jesus. His concluding paragraph, while soundly condemning Jewish unbelief, held out the possibility that individual Jews might be converted and be saved through Christ. Luther wrote:

Consequently, if I had power over them, I would assemble their scholars and their leaders and order them, on pain of losing their tongues down to the root, to convince us Christians within eight days of the truth of their assertions and to prove this blasphemous lie against us, to the effect that we worship more than the one true God. If they succeeded, we would all on the self-same day become Jews and be circumcised. If they failed, they should stand ready to receive the punishment they deserve for such shameful, malicious, pernicious, and venomous lies. For, thanks be to God, we are after all not such ducks, clods, or stones as these most intelligent rabbis, these senseless fools, think us, that we do not know that one God and many gods cannot truly be believed in simultaneously...<sup>46</sup>

The Christian church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, is such a new people and a new Jerusalem. This people knows that sin has been removed entirely by Jesus Christ, that all prophecy has been fulfilled, and eternal righteousness established. For he who believes in him is eternally righteous, and all his sins are forever made of no effect, they are atoned for and forgiven, as the New Testament, especially St. Peter and St. Paul, strongly emphasizes. We no longer hear it said: Whoever offers guilt-offerings or sin offerings or other offerings in Jerusalem becomes righteous or has atoned for his sin; but now we hear: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" [Mark 16:16], no matter where in the wide world he may be. He need not travel to Jerusalem; no, Jerusalem has to come to him...<sup>47</sup>

So long an essay, dear sir and good friend, you have elicited from me with your booklet in which a Jew demonstrates his skill in a debate with an absent Christian. He would not, thank God, do this in my presence! My essay, I hope, will furnish a Christian (who in any case has no desire to become a Jew) with enough material not only to defend himself against the blind, venomous Jews, but also to become the foe of the Jews' malice, lying, and cursing, and to understand not only that their belief is false but that they are surely possessed by all devils. May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfastly and immovably in the knowledge of him, which is eternal life. Amen.<sup>48</sup>

Reaction to *On the Jews and Their Lies* was mixed after its publication. Philip Melancthon forwarded it to Philip of Hesse with his recommendations, and Philip took some measures against the Jews. John Frederick, who had softened his 1536 edict against the Jews, now reinstated it. Protestants in southwest Germany, however, openly disapproved and Rosel of Rosheim obtained suppression of the treatise in Strasbourg.<sup>49</sup> The magistrates of Strasbourg further agreed to forbid a second printing of the treatise and, when reports arrived that the pastor of Hochfelden had attempted to incite his congregation against the Jews, urged their ministers "not to preach turmoil from the pulpit."<sup>50</sup> Luther appears to have been little concerned by the reception of his treatise, for in 1543 he took up his pen again to write two more treatises, both of which dealt with the Jews—*On the Tetragrammaton and the Genealogy of Christ* and *Treatise on the Last Words of David*.

(To be continued)

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works*, 45:229.

<sup>2</sup> LW, 47:268-272.

<sup>3</sup> Neelak S. Tjernagel, *Martin Luther and the Jewish People*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), 15.

<sup>4</sup> For further details cf. ‘Studies in Luther: Luther’s Relationship with and Writings about the Jews—Part 1,’ 3-8. Also found in the *Journal of Theology*, Volume 39, Number 1, 5-11.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532-1546*, Vol. III (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 336.

<sup>6</sup> For further details cf. ‘Studies in Luther: Luther’s Relationship with and Writings about the Jews—Part I,’ 9-11. Also found in the *Journal of Theology*, Volume 39, Number 1, 13-16.

<sup>7</sup> Brecht, III:339.

<sup>8</sup> LW, 1:352.

<sup>9</sup> LW, 2:260f.

<sup>10</sup> LW, 3:21.

<sup>11</sup> LW, 54:436f.

<sup>12</sup> Brecht, III:339.

<sup>13</sup> *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden 5*, (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883), no. 5354.

<sup>14</sup> Werke, no. 5843.

<sup>15</sup> Brecht, III:340.

<sup>16</sup> LW, 54:426.

<sup>17</sup> Brecht, 341.

<sup>18</sup> LW, 47:137f.

<sup>19</sup> LW, 47:140.

<sup>20</sup> LW, 47:148f.

<sup>21</sup> LW, 47:159.

<sup>22</sup> LW, 47:160f.

<sup>23</sup> LW, 47:171.

<sup>24</sup> LW, 47:172.

<sup>25</sup> LW, 47:184.

<sup>26</sup> LW, 47:192.

<sup>27</sup> LW, 47:193.

<sup>28</sup> LW, 47:199f.

<sup>29</sup> LW, 47:211.

<sup>30</sup> LW, 47:212. Footnote 92 on p. 212 points out that Luther’s crude image may have been suggested by the stone relief in the parish church of Wittenberg, which he described later in the treatise *Vom Schem Hamphoras*.

<sup>31</sup> LW, 47:213f.

<sup>32</sup> LW, 47:214.

<sup>33</sup> LW, 47:244.

<sup>34</sup> LW, 47:256.

<sup>35</sup> LW, 47:257.

<sup>36</sup> LW, 47:260.

<sup>37</sup> LW, 47:261.

<sup>38</sup> LW, 47:260f.

<sup>39</sup> LW, 47:264f.

<sup>40</sup> LW, 47:268-272.

<sup>41</sup> LW, 47:274.

<sup>42</sup> LW, 47:275.

<sup>43</sup> LW, 47:279.

<sup>44</sup> Brecht, 344.

<sup>45</sup> LW, 47:287f.

<sup>46</sup> LW, 47:289.

<sup>47</sup> LW, 47:304.

<sup>48</sup> LW, 47:306.

<sup>49</sup> H.G. Haile, *Luther an Experiment in Biography*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 291f.

<sup>50</sup> Mark C. Edwards Jr., *Luther’s Last Battles: Politics and Polemics 1531-1546*, (Ithaca, NY:

## **TITUS 3:10—AN EXEGETICAL BRIEF**

John Lau

Paul's brief letter to Titus, whom the apostle had left behind in Crete, contains many instructions regarding the conduct of the ministry Titus had in Crete. "I left you behind in Crete to make the improvements still needed and to appoint pastors in every town as I directed you ..." (Beck) – thus Paul begins, after a somewhat lengthy salutation. The qualifications of pastors are then presented, the last of which concluding with the advice that the pastor should cling to the word of God, so that by sound teaching he may encourage people and correct those who oppose him. This is the first suggestion in the epistle that there are in Crete many individuals, both men of Crete (1:12) and Jews (1:10), whose positions will stand in opposition, in various ways, to the teachings of God which Titus is faithfully to present. The ways of the Jews are destructive, for they are "ruining entire families" by their teachings. Paul agrees with the description of the Cretans (a quote?) as being "always liars, savage animals, slow bellies." He declares to Titus that these people must be sharply corrected, with the hope that they may be sound in their faith, rather than bent on listening to Jewish fables, etc., which can only subvert their confession.

In the second chapter special instructions are given, in turn, to classes of people under Titus' care: old men, old women, young men, slaves. To the old men Paul says, "Be sound ..."; to the old women, "Teach what is good ... use good judgment ... so that people don't slander God's word"; to the young men, "Don't let anything corrupt your teaching ... give a sound message that can't be condemned ..."; and to the slaves, "...so that in everything you show the beauty of the teaching of God ..." There are other admonitions, too, but these emphasize what is uppermost in the mind of Paul, namely, that purity of doctrine be maintained in their midst. The last part of chapter two indicates what it is all about – not doctrinal purity just for its own sake, but the message which true doctrine presents: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (2:11-14).

Chapter three, after a brief admonition regarding the proper attitude Christians are to have over against authorities and powers, brings us a beautiful distillation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Beginning with a reminder of our status as sinners by our very nature, living in wickedness and jealousy, hating and being hated by one another, Paul declares: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." It is these things, Paul continues, that he wants Titus to affirm before the people of Crete, so that their hearts and minds, occupied thoroughly with the gospel, may continually dwell on the riches of God's grace, and so that they themselves may show forth the fruits of the faith generated in them by the gospel. Thus they will be happy and contented, led by the Spirit to be busy in good works pleasing to God. This is the positive side of Paul's advice to Titus.

But because of the contentious types described in chapter one, previously mentioned, Paul also lists things which must be strenuously avoided. His list is short and must therefore serve as representative of a good many things over which humans are disposed to be contentious: ‘Foolish arguments, lists of ancestors, quarreling, and fighting about the law (μαχας νομικας). Νομικας, according to Arndt-Gingrich, probably refers to quarrels about the validity of the law. It would surely be a mistake to take verse ten, about which we are chiefly concerned in this study, as referring only to heresies involved in this short list of items. The emphasis is on anything and everything that may stand in opposition to Paul’s instruction: ‘But speak thou the things which become (πρεπει= is fitting or suitable for) sound doctrine.’”

In this setting now come verses ten and eleven: αιρετικον ανθρωπον μετα μιαν και δευτεραν νουθεσιαν παραιτου, ειδως οτι εξεστραπται ο τοιοντος και αμαρτανει, ων αυτοκατακριτος. “A man who chooses to be different (a heretical man), after one and a second warning (admonition), reject (avoid), knowing that such a one has been turned aside (perverted) and is sinning, being self-judged (self-condemned).” The two present imperative forms (verse nine: περιβστασο, and verse ten: παραιτου) are both in the singular. The admonitions are directed to Titus. The verb παραιτεομαι, according to Gingrich’s *Shorter Lexicon*, has the first meaning of ‘ask for, request, intercede for,’ and the second meaning of “decline, refuse, reject, avoid.” Some commentaries simply translate: “avoid,” or “have no fellowship with.” It is the same imperative found in 1 Tim. 4:7 (‘But refuse profane and old wives’ fables ..’) and 2 Tim. 2:23 (‘But foolish and unlearned questions avoid ..’), in the identical form. What is required here is to break off relations and to separate from the heretical man.

The term νουθεσια is translated by A-G as “admonition, instruction, warning.” It seems clear that what is suggested is that the word of God is brought to bear, pointing out the error of what the heretical man is claiming, and presenting the truth as stated in Scripture. There is no thought in the word itself of the strife and struggle described in verse nine as being the methodology of the heretics. If the man is to be corrected, the word of God must do it. Lenski quotes Trench: “Νουθεσια is the word of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, where these may be required” (Commentary on Titus 3:10). There is no implication in the term itself that would help one decide the relative brevity or length, the extensiveness or conciseness, of the admonition. It is obvious that a long-drawn-out type of dealing is not contemplated; that is shown by the two numerical adjectives modifying the admonition, “one” (cardinal) and “a second” (ordinal).

This leaves us with the expression αιρετικον ανθρωπον, the heretical man who is to be avoided after (μετα with accusative) one and a second admonition. The root of αιρετικος is the verb αιρετιζω, which has the meaning: “to choose, to choose for oneself.” Beck therefore translates: “A man who chooses to be different in his teaching.” The term αιρεσις (heresy) is indicated in A-G as having the original sense of “sect,” or “party,” or “school,” without any derogatory meaning attached. A-G points out that it is a “later sense” to give the term a meaning *in malam partem*. The context gives the direction to follow, and therefore we do better to consider the use of the words in the New Testament. On the basis of its root meaning (“choose”), the term αιρεσις simply denotes a self-chosen way. W. R. Gawrisch writes: “It is a way of thinking, an opinion, a teaching arrived at by conscious, deliberate choice. A heretic is one who chooses to follow his own rather than God’s thoughts. The very term implies that the truth, the doctrine of Scripture, has received a hearing and has been rejected” (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 [January 1966], 25). The German terms “*Ketzererei*” or “*ketzerisch*,” referring to one given to a ‘party spirit,’ a separate way, give us an insight. Therefore, we can arrive at this: When one chooses the false, anything contrary to the Scriptures, and holds to it in spite of having heard the truth, such a one is a heretic.

A man who is ἀρετικός, then, is one who holds to heretical, unscriptural views and/or opinions. He has made a choice, a bad choice, in his doctrinal stance, because he has chosen to take a stand apart from Scripture. He ought not to be confused with a weak brother, a Christian who has unwittingly fallen into some error. The weak brother accepts correction from the Holy Scriptures; even though he may not fully understand, he bows before the Scriptures and will not insist on defending or promulgating his error; rather, he will retract it and willingly receive instruction. A heretic, on the other hand, refuses correction and sticks to his error.

It is not necessary (or correct) to assume that errors must be soul-destroying in themselves to be termed heresies. We think of the heresies mentioned by Paul in verse nine. These few examples suffice to demonstrate that *any* teaching that forsakes Scripture or contradicts Scripture (whether or not it may be termed fundamental or nonfundamental) constitutes heresy and identifies the individual who presents and holds to such teachings as a heretical man. Gawrisch's terse comment is very well put: "He chooses for himself what the Church by choosing Scripture must repudiate and disown" (*WLQ*, 26). In his article, "*Gibt es heute noch Ketzer? ('Are there still Heretics Today?')*", Prof. Max Lehninger also states it well: "*Es kann nach allem Gesagten nicht zweifelhaft sein, dasz das Adjektiv ἀρετικός, Tit. 3:10, einen Menschen bezeichnen soll, der Anhaenger einer Haeresie ist und sie bekennt. Mag sie darin bestehen, dasz einer toerichte und irrelevante Dinge, deren Behandlung keinen wirklichen Nutzen schafft, zur Hauptsache macht, oder dasz er die groszen Heilswahrheiten, wie Rechtfertigung, Wiedergeburt und Heiligung, nicht recht lehrt*" ["After all has been said there can be no doubt that the adjective ἀρετικός, Titus 3:10, is to designate a man who is an adherent of and confesses a heresy. It makes no difference whether it consists in making foolish and irrelevant things in the consideration of which there is no real benefit the main thing, or whether it does not teach the truths of salvation such as justification, regeneration, and sanctification correctly" – translation by Gawrisch] (*Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 37, No. 2 [April 1940], 91).

Since heresy is in itself destructive, heretics must be excluded by the Church from its fellowship. This is to be done promptly ("after the first and second admonition reject"). What would be the good of delay? Rather, much harm might come from delay, since delay would only give the error time to spread. There is no reason to consider this act of separation any different from the action designated in Romans 16:17. What is required is a spiritual separation, a withdrawal from any practice of fellowship, and it is to be done without hesitation. Romans 16:17 deals with individuals who have been *identified* as *causing* divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of God. *How* the identification has been made is not spelled out, except that the present tense of "causing" indicates that one is not dealing with a casual error or a slip of the tongue, but with an on-going situation. The individual has the stance of promoting or supporting false doctrine. When that is known, such an individual is to be avoided spiritually without delay.

In Titus 3:10 the heretic can be distinguished from a weak brother by the fact that he does not accept correction from the word of God when it is brought to him. That is how one knows that he has chosen a way or position different from the teachings of Scripture. The passage does not indicate that once a man is known to be a heretic that *then* he is still to be given one or two admonitions before separating from him. Paul uses the term "heretic" in a proleptic sense; that is, the man is called a heretic now in view of what he will be proved to be. Gawrisch states it correctly: "The thought is not that after the errorist has been identified or marked as persistent, in other words, as a heretic, the Church still owes it to him to admonish him once or twice more before breaking off relations and separating from him; as soon as he has been recognized for what he is, namely, as one who steadfastly and determinedly holds to his false teaching, he is to be shunned *immediately*. The welfare of the entire Church requires this, just as one who has a dangerous contagious disease is immediately isolated or quarantined for the safety of others as soon as his condition is recognized" [Emphasis in the original] (*WLQ*, 30).

Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10 are very similar passages. Both ask of Christians that they be on their guard against all who present and/or support doctrines apart from, or contrary to, true Scriptural doctrines. When such offenders are detected (according to Romans 16:17 by taking note of the on-going nature of the divisions and offenses that are being caused, and according to Titus 3:10 by admonishing the suspected individuals to determine whether or not they have indeed chosen a different teaching or practice), there is to be no delay in bringing about a cessation of the practice of fellowship with those individuals.

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