



"Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD: MARTIN LUTHER — A MAN OF THE WORD 2
C. M. Gullerud

LUTHER — THE SEELSORGER 4
A. Schulz

LUTHER — THE TRANSLATOR 22
C. Kuehne

PERSON TO PERSON — THE SHEPHERD'S CONCERN
FOR HIS SHEEP 31
P. F. Nolting

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FOREWORD

MARTIN LUTHER — A MAN OF THE WORD

Luther walked in the Scriptures as his infallible teacher and mentor. Indeed, he walked with the Scriptures as his intimate and constant companion through life. He had the highest respect for the Holy Bible, believing as he did that it would never lead him astray but would unerringly lead him to the celestial goal which he ever kept before the eyes of his faith. As a confessing sinner, he never lost sight of the truth that Scripture pointed him to the hope of his salvation — Jesus, the all-sufficient Savior. Indeed, Scripture was his life's traveling companion. This it is that makes his writings so valuable and so precious. All the way from the Small Catechism to his *magnum opus*, "The Bondage of the Will," Luther stressed the *sola Scriptura* with its *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. Here he found the organic and formal foundation of the Christian faith which he so faithfully taught and proclaimed in the classroom, from the pulpit, and in the written word.

How great a store Luther set by the Holy Scriptures is well stated in his advice to theologians: "Thou shalt meditate, that is, not only in thy heart, but also outwardly; the language (*muendliche Rede*) and the letters of the word (*buchstabischen Worte*) written in the Book thou shalt always carefully examine (*treiben und reiben*), read and read again, and give most diligent attention to the thought and the sense which the Holy Spirit has put into the words. Beware lest thou soon weary of it and think that it is sufficient when thou hast read or heard or said it once or twice and that thou hast then already fathomed its depths; for in such a way thou wilt never become a real theologian, but wilt rather be like the early fruit that falls from the tree when it is but half ripe. From the 119th Psalm thou canst learn how David boasts that he will always, by day and by night, read, meditate, speak, and hear nothing but the Word of God and His Commandments. For God will not give unto thee His Holy Spirit except through His written word (*durch das aeusserliche Wort*). Keep this in mind; God has not in

vain commanded externally (*aeusserlich*) to write, preach, read, hear, sing, speak, etc." (St. L. XIV. 435). Again Luther says: "Truly, thou canst not read the Bible too much; and what thou readest thou canst not understand too well; and what thou well understandest thou canst not too well teach; and what thou well teachest thou canst not too well live. *Experto crede Ruperto* (Believe him who has experienced it). It is the devil, it is the world, it is our own flesh, which rage and fume against us. Therefore, dear sirs and brethren, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent! Surely it is not for us to loaf and snore and sleep in these evil days. Use the gift entrusted to you, and reveal the mystery of Christ." (Quoted in *Pastoral Theology*, by John H. C. Fritz, 2nd ed., p. 6.)

It is because of these facts and not because of any wish to canonize him (which he would not have wanted) that we observe, with gratitude to God, the 500th anniversary of the Reformer's birth. As a contribution to the celebration, the *Journal of Theology* will bring to its readers a number of articles setting forth our reasons for remembering Dr. Martin Luther as a precious gift of God to the Church. In addition to those appearing in this issue, you may look forward to the following articles to come during this anniversary year:

- Luther — The Father.
- Luther — The Preacher.
- Luther — The Hymn-writer.
- Luther — The Reformer.
- Luther — The Educator.

C. M. Gullerud

LUTHER - THE SEELSORGER

November 10, 1483. On that day a child was born in Eisleben, Saxony, Germany. His parents gave him the name Martin Luther. His name will no doubt be either loved or hated as long as the name of Jesus Christ Himself is loved or hated, for their message was the same. Now it is 500 years later - 1983. How can we possibly celebrate such a momentous anniversary? One hundred years ago, in 1883, the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth was observed by undertaking the collecting of all his writings in what is known as the Weimar Edition. Even now, a hundred years later, this Weimar Edition is still not complete. This was indeed a most appropriate anniversary undertaking.

But how shall we observe Luther's 500th birthday anniversary? Now, in 1983, there is a movement to have Luther's birthday nationally commemorated by a U. S. postage stamp, with the usual resultant debate that accompanies the issuing of any stamp of a religious nature. Shall our anniversary observance consist in purchasing a goodly supply of Luther postage stamps, and boldly placing them on the front of our letters? We much prefer the suggestion of our editor, that a series of articles in the *Journal of Theology* be devoted to this anniversary.

Over 30 years ago in the Seminary, Dr. Norman Madson exhorted us to read something in Luther every day. So, with all good resolve, some of us bought what we could afford of Luther's writings. A complete set of the St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works could still be purchased for \$75. But many were hesitant about buying this set because they were not that much at home in the German language. Several editions came out in English: the Lenker Edition, the 6-volume Philadelphia (Holman) Edition, and more recently, the American Edition in 56 volumes, among others. Those volumes of Luther surely look good on our shelves! They seem to add an air of stability to one's library. To have some sturdy volumes of Luther standing on the shelf almost seems like a certificate of one's orthodoxy! But merely having these volumes of Luther's writings brings no such guarantee. Without a

doubt, the best way we can commemorate Luther's 500th birthday anniversary is by actually doing more reading in his writings. This is not to say, of course, as has sometimes been charged, that we put them on an equal level with Scripture. Nor do we recommend reading in Luther to the detriment of reading in the Bible. The Bible alone is the inspired Word of God. Luther's writings are the product of a sinner who was much concerned about the eternal salvation of his soul, and who found what he needed in the Bible.

In that way you and I are in the same shoes as Luther. We, too, have souls to be saved. We, too, are sinners, very much in need of a Savior. We, too, find that Savior revealed to us in the Bible. How strengthening it is to hear from the mouth and pen of a fellow-sinner, Luther, of how much the Gospel means to him. As pastors, we find it humanly impossible to keep on producing sermons and articles and study topics without some good spiritual food coming back in to feed our hearts and souls. We are called to be Seelsorgers, to care for the souls of men. Instead of turning to the Reformed for their oft-times questionable and unscriptural material, we can receive infinitely better spiritual help and inspiration from Luther's writings. We would be foolish indeed to neglect this great resource that is available in the work of our ministry. To that end, let us at this time give thought to Luther as Seelsorger.

ONE'S OWN SOUL Caring for the souls of men! If we are going to care properly for the souls of others, it is so very necessary to care properly for our own souls. The apostle Paul writes: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). This work of the ministry is, therefore, not to be taken lightly. One dare not be satisfied with going though the outward motions, while closing one's eyes to the very real spiritual pitfalls along the way. To take proper spiritual care of others, I must first take proper spiritual care of myself. It can be no other way.

Now, what is involved in taking proper spiritual

care of oneself? Since pastors do not really have someone whom they can call their pastor, they must necessarily try to take care of this themselves. Oh, yes, we can always sit down to talk with some neighboring fellow-pastor or with our conference Visitor, but this cannot always be so easily worked out. For the most part, we are left to the privacy of our study to seek guidance in the Word of God, as well as help and strength from Him in prayer. It was with good reason that Paul said to the elders of Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (Acts 20:28).

But what is really necessary in taking good spiritual care of ourselves? Here is where Luther shows us the way. Luther had a soul to be saved, and he was a long while in searching for the right way to care for it. Luther was a desperate soul, plunged into the bitterness of spiritual conflict. In his earlier days, we find Luther as a haggard, emaciated monk, feverishly groping for the forgiveness of his sins and the pledge of a merciful God. We must step into the monastery cell at Erfurt, see him prostrate on the ground with streams of blood from self-inflicted torture running down his back. We must follow him through the routine of his monastic vows, as he frantically practices penances, fastings, flagellation, and the mortification of his body. We see how his "Hail, Mary's" and prayers to the saints left him cold and uncomfortable, and how the fraudulent miracles and the trumped-up relics of a superstitious day plunged him into the agony of greater doubt. We visualize him as he crawls up the sacred steps of St. Peter's in Rome, repeating a *Pater Noster* at each step, and wondering, when he reaches the top, whether the assurance of forgiveness and indulgence which this laboring act is supposed to impart is really true. We hear Luther say in the Preface to his exposition of Psalm 117:

When I made my pilgrimage to Rome, I was such a fanatical saint that I dashed through all the churches and crypts, believing all the stinking forgeries of those places. I ran through about a dozen Masses in Rome and was almost prostrated by the thought that my mother and father were still alive,

because I should gladly have redeemed them from purgatory with my Masses and other excellent works and prayers. There is a saying in Rome: "Blessed is the mother whose son reads a Mass on Saturday in St. John's!" How I should have liked to make my mother blessed! But it was too crowded, and I could not get in; so I ate a smoked herring instead. (St. L. Ed. V:1135.)

To understand Luther's genuine concern for his own soul, we must see him shudder at the very mention of the name of Christ. His principal charge against Rome continued to be that she had presented him with a terrifying caricature of Christ. In 1537 he said in a sermon on Matthew 18:11:

In the papacy I feared Christ more than I feared the devil. I did not think otherwise than that Christ was sitting in heaven as an angry judge, sitting on a rainbow. I could not call upon Him, nay, could not even bear to hear His name mentioned. I had to take refuge with our dear Lady, creep under her cloak, and call upon my apostle, St. Thomas. And then I thought: I will confess, say Mass, and satisfy God with my good works. The wretched pope so completely tore and removed our dear Savior Jesus Christ from our eyes and covered his friendly and lovely color with a hue so abominably black that we feared Him more than we feared the wretched devil. (St. L. Ed. VII:913.)

Luther, the Seelsorger, was first of all concerned about his own soul. What a wonderful new age of grace dawned upon the whole world when the great illumination came to him, that Spirit-filled understanding of the "righteousness of God" and the substitutionary self-sacrifice of Christ. This was born in Luther's quivering soul when he was paging through Paul's letter to the Romans. Then the black veil was torn from his eyes, and with an enlightened vision he learned for the first time in his thirty years that we are justified, not by an accumulation of good works, not by a lifetime of penance and regret, not by a monk's vow nor a priest's holy order, not by the super-abundant virtues and accomplishments

of mouldering saints, not by the pronouncements of ecclesiastical councils, not even by the dispensations of the Pope at Rome! No, thank God, not by any of these things, but by faith in the atoning, all-satisfying blood of Jesus Christ. That overpowering experience which brought Luther to the cross and into the very arms of the Savior, that new, wondrous realization of salvation sealed for him in the blood of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ — that, and that alone, made Luther the great and God-blessed Reformer of the Church of God. That was the real beginning of the Reformation, and the unfolding of a career which, like no other since the very days of Christ and His apostles, was dedicated to the proclamation of the full and free Gospel, the exaltation of the glory-crowned cross of Christ, and the magnification of Jesus as the only, but all-sufficient, Savior of sinful mankind in its overwhelming totality through all lands, and through all ages.

This blessing of free grace, of a merciful Christ, of a glorified cross, together with the restoration of all the priceless gifts of New Testament Christianity, the open Bible with its infallible directions for time and for eternity, the positive pledge of our salvation, the Sacraments as instituted by Christ Himself, the priesthood of all believers — these and all other doctrines of eternal Truth that had been denied, disfigured, or corrupted by a soulless creed, were now restored by Luther. Surely the Lord richly blessed this man who was so concerned about the salvation of his soul. When we, in a similar way, have a like concern for the salvation of our own souls, then we will be in a better position to take care of the souls of others.

THE SOULS OF OTHERS Luther's concern for the souls of others became evident already in connection with his Ninety-Five Theses protesting against the sale of indulgences. These Theses were not written by a chronic trouble-maker, but by a genuine Seelsorger. This can be seen from a letter which Luther wrote to Pope Leo X about six months after he had published the Theses. We shall quote a few statements from this letter:

In recent times the jubilee year of papal indulgen-

ces began to be preached among us, and this made such headway that the preachers of the same, thinking that, because of the awe which your name inspires, everything was permitted them, dared to teach publicly most godless and heretical things, to the very grave scandal and mockery of the ecclesiastical powers, as if the decretals regarding the misconduct of indulgence-preachers did not concern them. ... This business was very profitable to them, and the people were sucked dry by false hopes ... but the indulgence peddlers themselves lived on the fat and sweetness of the land. Their one means of quieting offending people was the terror of your name, the threat of death on the stake, and the disgrace of being branded a heretic. ... It might be better not to call this quietly offending people, but much rather stirring up schisms and endless revolt by sheer tyranny. ... I privately admonished some of the great men of the churches. By some of them I was well received, while to others I appeared ridiculous, and to still others something else; for the terror of your name and the threat of censure by the Church kept the upper hand. At length, when I could do nothing else, I considered it best to at least make a rather mild resistance to them, by calling their teachings into question and inviting them to a debate. So I issued propositions, asking only the learned, if any chose, to discuss them with me, as must be plain even to my opponents from the Preface to these Theses. Behold, this is the conflagration, concerning which they complain that the whole world is being set on fire. (St. L. Ed. XV:401-404.)

Luther's publication of the Ninety-Five Theses was the act of a conscientious Seelsorger. Being a priest, Luther had to hear confession. Through the confessional he learned how the common people viewed the indulgences. They actually believed that by buying indulgences they were freed from all the guilt and punishment of their sins. Absolution had become a plain business transaction. You pay your money, and you take your goods. Luther wrote to his archbishop the very same day on which he published his Theses. In his letter to Albert, Archbishop of Mainz and Primate of Germany, he says:

Papal indulgences are being hawked about under your illustrious name for the building of St. Peter's in Rome. In regard to these, I do not so much admonish and accuse the great clamor of the indulgence preachers, which I have not heard, as I am troubled at the false understanding which the people conceive from them, and which they extol far and wide among the common people. I am especially saddened and sickened by this, that these unfortunate people let themselves be persuaded to believe that if they buy letters of indulgence, that they can be certain and sure of their salvation. Likewise, that souls leap out of purgatory the very moment that they drop their money into the chest. Finally, that this indulgence is so powerful that no sin can be so great (yes, as they blasphemously assert, if such a thing were possible, that one should have violated the blessed Mother of God), they could be remitted and forgiven. Likewise, that by these indulgences a person is freed from all pain and guilt. (St. L. Ed. XV:390-393.)

Luther had ample reason to dread the demoralizing effect of the indulgence-vendors' activity upon the common people. In the sermons of John Tetzel, the church in which he happened to be doing business was raised to equal dignity with St. Peter's at Rome. Instead of confessing to an ordinary priest, he told the people that they now had the rare privilege of confessing to an Apostolic Vicar, who was especially assigned to this work. With consummate skill, he worked on the tender feelings of parents, of mothers who were mourning the loss of children, or of children who had lost their parents. He impersonated the departed in their agonies in purgatory. He made the people hear the pitiful moaning of the victims in the purgatorial fires, and transmitted their heart-rending appeals for speedy help to the living. And he clinched the argument by playing on the people's covetousness: for the fourth part of a gulden they could transfer a suffering soul safely to the home of the eternal paradise! Had they ever had a greater bargain offered to them? Never would they have this indispensable means of salvation brought within easier reach. Now was the time, now or never! He declared that the red cross of the indulgence-

vendors, with the papal arms, raised in a church, possessed the same virtue as the cross of Christ. If Peter were present in person, he would not possess greater authority, nor could he dispense grace more effectually, than he. Yes, Tetzl would not trade his glory as an indulgence-seller with Peter's glory, for he had saved more souls by selling the indulgences than Peter by preaching. Every time a coin clinked in his money chest, a liberated soul was soaring to heaven.

Catholic writers declare that the people were told that they must repent in order to obtain forgiveness. But this repenting meant buying a letter of pardon from the pope. That is the reason why Luther worded the first two of his Ninety-Five Theses as he did:

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying: *Poenitentiam agite!* meant that the entire life of His believers on earth should be a continual and unceasing repentance.

And these words cannot be understood as referring to the Sacrament of Penance, that is, of confession and satisfaction, as practised by the priestly office. (St. L. Ed. XVIII:102ff.)

The Latin phrase "*poenitentiam agere*" has a double meaning. It may mean "repent," or it may mean "do penance." The Lord Jesus used the phrase in the first sense, but the indulgence-sellers used it in the second sense. Since the people had been raised in the belief that the Church had the authority from God to impose church fines on them for their trespasses, by which they were to remove the temporal punishment of their sins, this was called "doing penance." They were actually led to believe that they were obeying a command of Christ in buying a letter of indulgence. And not only did the people believe that they were purchasing release from temporal punishment, but also from the guilt of sin and all its effects. The common man from the fields and the streets did not make the fine distinction of the hair-splitting theologians. His bargain meant to him that hell was closed and heaven was open to him. Luther, as a true Seelsorger, was much concerned that the Scriptural doctrine of repentance be lost, thereby endangering also the salvation of

countless souls. Thus his concern for souls, his own and those of others, was that which led to the work of the Reformation.

1983 What kind of Seelsorge is needed in this year of 1983? Around us we see increasing numbers of unemployed standing in lines for jobs, pacing the city streets, and eating the bread of public charity. We read of people living on the streets and under bridges. At the same time, we survey a land blessed with such overabundance that, while millions go hungry, there is still an overwhelming surplus of many food commodities. For years we have been listening to the plans and hopes of economists and financial experts. But in spite of all the oratory and the predictions, any far-sighted American recognizes that our country has difficult days ahead. Where, in all this confusion, is there a voice that will ring out with authoritative power?

There is one such voice! We do not hesitate to say that it is the voice of Luther repeating the whole counsel of God to this generation! Behind Luther is the Word of God, crying from the housetops to tell us that in this visitation, an ungrateful nation is paying the penalty of its accumulated guilt. Because of individual and collective dishonesty and impurity, covetousness and greed, idolatry and blasphemy, America is being summoned before the divine tribunal to pay the punishment of this shocking rejection of God and His Gospel and the trampling of virtue. Rising up on the ramparts of the American nation, the spirit of Luther tells us that we need more than party platforms, economic panaceas, and political promises. Government programs may exert a temporary influence, but they cannot touch the root of the problem: the tainted morality and the corruption of a self-indulgent nation. As long as so many millions continue to cheat and lie, to covet and steal, to persecute and oppress, to follow the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; as long as the present epidemic of crime spreads through the land, the flood of immorality inundates our homes, the clouds of dishonesty hang low over our land, there can be no hope of permanent uplift and improvement. Luther today would cry out, as he did in his own day, that the United States needs more than a war on poverty,

or any such social program which touches only the outside of man. He would remind us that God says: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Luther would thus point the way to national repentance and humiliation, crying out: "America, this is the way, the path of repentance, contrition, and trust in God. Walk ye in it!"

The voice of Luther must likewise speak to the Church. There are inescapable signs of laxity and lukewarmness, of indifference and spiritual carelessness which haunt our Church today. Family altars are frequently neglected, and the blessings of Holy Communion often disregarded. There are voices that give evidence of satiety and encroaching worldliness. As we stand at one crossroad after another, we peer bewildered and disconsolate into the future, and plead for a guiding voice, an illuminating light, and a pledge of greater spiritual power.

Some think that the only way to restore happier days to the Church is to modernize. That would mean that we must develop the efficiency of the Church by modern technology. Computers are the answer! Or maybe we should add more pomp and ceremony to our church services and rituals. Maybe we should socialize our work and put more emphasis on recreational attractions, while at the same time dropping some of the unpopular restrictions and limitations on church membership, even though these may be endorsed by Scripture. The spirit of Luther rises up to this day, and assures us that the hope of the Church does not lie in any compromise with the so-called twentieth-century way of thinking. Our hope lies rather in the path of triumphant faith. Only by a personal, exultant faith in the meritorious suffering and death of Jesus Christ, only by an acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired oracles of God, only then can there be any individual hope or happiness or any virile, dynamic accomplishment in the Church. The very first and finest thing that our Church needs for its growth and development is our personal, pulsating, vitalizing faith, the confidence that clings to every sacred promise of God with inseparable tenacity, that believes with unbounded confidence every one of the blessed assurances of divine inspiration. Not until we have gripped

the cross with tighter grasp, not until the last Lutheran has shouted out into a defiant world: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39); not until we have a fuller measure of Luther's faith, can we successfully meet the high responsibilities of this present hour in our Seelsorge, the caring of souls.

CHRISTIAN LIFE At the same time, this spirit of Luther, which is still re-echoing after five centuries, is an appeal for a Christian life. This, too, is a part of the proper caring for souls. Who is there that does not thrill at those familiar words in Luther's Preface to Romans:

Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has done them and is always engaged in doing them. ... It is impossible to separate works from faith, just as it is impossible for heat and light to be separated from fire. (St. L. Ed. XIV:99f.)

There is no stronger demonstration of this truth than that of Luther's life, where faith was followed by consecration. It is surely true that Luther had his faults. If he were present today, he would be the last to insist that we minimize the inconsistencies of his life. But although jaundiced hatred has mercilessly focused the spotlight of hostile investigation upon his every act and word, it has discovered nothing to show that Luther did not earnestly desire to live his Christianity. Today, too, the road to the Church's power is not built by human intelligence, social prestige, wealthy membership, or political influence, but by the consecrated lives of men and women who let their light shine before men, that they might glorify their Father which is in heaven. Give us a Church of doers of the Word and not hearers only, a membership that scorns the deception of a double standard, with one set of ethics for Church and

and Sunday, and the other for the world during the rest of the week. Give us young people that refuse to worship at two altars: one dedicated to Christ, and the other to the Belial of lust. Give us Christians whose lives are Christ-marked, Lutherans whose conduct bears the indelible imprint of Luther's pious and God-fearing life. When we thus follow this highway of a godly life, whether we realize it or not, we will be blazing the trail to a nobler and a finer Church.

PRAYER Luther the Seelsorger! When we, in our Church of the Lutheran Confession, plead for an ever-greater missionary zeal, we speak in the very spirit of Martin Luther. His entire life, every breath that he breathed, every page that he wrote, every sermon that he preached, was directed to the exaltation of Christ and the saving of souls. Today he stands before us to assume the leadership in this missions-to-the-front movement. He would shake us out of the lethargy and indifference into which we so easily slip. As we follow Luther's guidance as Seelsorger, we see that he points us, first, to the pathway of prayer. History knows of no mortal who could pray with such insistence and the confidence with which Luther pushed through to the throne of grace. While our modern homes are often so crowded by the demands of our complicated mode of living that the family prayer is forgotten and individual intercession minimized, Luther, with the multitude of tremendous issues crowding upon him, was never too preoccupied to lead in family prayers. While he did a dozen men's work and filled each day brim-full of achievements, he always had the time and the love to meet his God in the communion of prayer and to wrestle for hours with his Creator. How poor and scanty our prayer-life seems when gauged by this standard! If every one of our homes were a praying home, and if every Lutheran Christian could pray with the fervor and freedom and the faith of our spiritual father, problems and perplexities that often seem insurmountable would be completely solved.

DEEDS But Luther asks not only for the words of prayer, but also for the acts of conviction. He would remind us that we cannot escape the missionary duties that God has laid upon our very conscience as mem-

bers of the universal priesthood of all believers. The fervor of Luther's missionary zeal startles us. The number of souls that were brought to Christ by his glorification of the Gospel will be revealed only in eternity. However, even here in time, we are thrilled by the realization that there must have been legions. What would the results have been if every Lutheran Christian since the great Reformer's day had been instrumental, under God, in bringing only one of his fellowmen into the Church? Instead, there are more non-Christians on the face of the earth than there were on that first Good Friday when the Savior of mankind was nailed to the cross. What a challenge, then, for us to remind ourselves of the rich and precious value of a single human soul, and of the inestimable service that God would permit us to render in helping to bring that soul to Christ. We dare not forget the number of hungry, unhappy souls around us that live on, day after day and year after year, without knowing that the Bread of Life has come down from heaven to still the heart-hunger of a dying world. Oh, how we need to follow Luther in his care of souls!

GIVING Need we add that, along with our prayers and time laid at the altar of Christ, we must meet the acid test by offering the financial support which is needed to carry on the work that is before us? Here again Luther, as Seelsorger, set the pace. Anyone who knows what Luther gave, contributing so much above his means that by the third year of his married life he had to sell an assortment of his wedding gifts in order to pay for debts incurred, directly or indirectly, in the support and spread of the restored Gospel, need not be told that the great Reformer has set a high standard. As Luther counted all but dross for the knowledge of the excellency of Jesus Christ, so those who bear his name must be ready to give back to God a portion of the blessings which His lavish grace has poured out upon them. If people are not moved by the spectacle of Christ's supreme self-giving (and apparently there are many nominal Christians who are not), of what good are the repeated protestations of pure creeds and sacraments, or what avail is the boast of orthodoxy, if it is so dead and empty that it refuses to raise the pittance required to tell others of their Savior?

As we move onward into this anniversary year, let us ask ourselves in all sincerity whether the blessings we have enjoyed will be vouchsafed to us in the future, if we are unwilling to give as we have received. Those who think so lightly of the precious blood of Jesus Christ and the salvation of their fellowmen, that they can spend far more for the selfish, disappointing purposes than the little that they heedlessly give for the Church, are ungrateful, unworthy children of the Reformation.

PSALM 51 Now we would like to give our cherished readers a little flavor of what it is like to read in Luther. Each one of us will have to decide for himself how or what he chooses to read in Luther. But let us read in Luther! This writer has found that Luther speaks better German than English. I get the most out of Luther by having German and English versions side by side. May the following selected comments of Luther in his exposition of Psalm 51 (St. L. Ed. V:472-619) serve to whet your appetite to read even more:

Preface: A knowledge of this Psalm is necessary and useful in many ways. It contains instruction about the chief parts of our religion, about repentance, sin, grace, and justification, as well as about the worship we ought to render to God. ... Where is there a man who could speak about repentance and the forgiveness of sins the way the Holy Spirit speaks in this Psalm? ... How can anyone give consolation if he does not understand what grace is? ... I have also urged the Church very often to be grateful for this great gift of the Word and pure doctrine, that with the darkness driven away He has lighted the clear lamp of the Word. ... All men, be they ever so illumined by the Holy Spirit, still remain pupils of the Word. They remain under and near the Word, and they experience that they can hardly draw out a drop from the vast ocean of the Holy Spirit. ... It is great wisdom to know that we are nothing but sin, so that we do not think of sin as lightly as do the pope's theologians. ... The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology

outside this subject, is error and poison. All Scripture points to this, that God commends His kindness to us and in His Son restores to righteousness and life the nature that has fallen into sin and condemnation. The issue here is not this physical life — what we should eat, what work we should undertake, how we should rule our family, how we should till the soil. The issue here is the future and eternal life.

Verse 1: From my own example I have sometimes learned that prayer is the most difficult of almost all works, I who teach and command others! Therefore I do not profess to be a master of this work, but rather confess that in great danger I have often repeated the words very coldly, "Have mercy on me, O God," because I was offended by my unworthiness. ... God wants you to pray and to be heard because of His mercy, not because of your worthiness. ... I am more than fit for prayer, because I am an exceedingly great sinner. ... Our only salvation is if we flee to the mercy of God and seek blessing and forgiveness from God, asking Him not to look at our sins and transgressions, but to close His eyes and to deal with us according to His steadfast love and abundant mercy. ... We know that those have been made holy who have become conscious sinners instead of unconscious sinners. ... He wants this to be a teaching for the whole world.

Verse 2: It takes the hardest kind of work to keep this faith fixed and sure and permanent in the heart. ... He permits sects and heresies to arise so that the Church might be exercised to keep the Word and faith and to clean out these remnants of sin.

Verse 4: Human nature is more seriously infected and corrupted by sin than I could ever have suspected. ... This is the constant battle with the proud and self-righteous, who do not want to be known as sinners and cannot stand it if anyone condemns their Pharisaic righteousness. ... Whoever does not believe the Word will not confess that God alone is righteous nor that he is only a sinner. ... If God promises

life, it follows that we are under death. If He promises forgiveness of sins, it follows that sins dominate and possess us. ... Do not let your mind be downcast because of the large crowd of contradictors. ... Satan wants us to forget this statement, that only God is righteous and holy, and on the sly he wants to snatch us from the feeling of sin to satisfactions and trust in our works.

Verse 5: Before she gave him birth, his mother was nourishing a sinner with her blood in the womb. ... I can testify from my own example that I did not yet know this teaching (original sin) when I had been a doctor of theology for many years. ... This is the most difficult teaching of this Psalm, yes, of all Scripture or theology; without it, it is impossible to understand Scripture correctly, as the dreams of modern theologians prove.

Verse 6: People are attracted by ascetic life and unusual customs much more readily than by sound teaching and the Word. ... The more a godly man feels his weakness, the more earnest he is in prayer.

Verse 7: All the sacrifices have been fulfilled by the one sacrifice of Christ. In the Lord's Supper we keep not a sacrifice, but a memorial of the sacrifice made by Christ. What Christ sacrificed, then we do not sacrifice again, according to His Word, but distribute to the faithful. ... Human nature is such that it cannot be without the worship of God; and if it does not have the Word, it invents services, as the examples of both the heathen and the pope show. ... Regeneration is stronger than the first birth, because it is not from man but from God and His promise, which our faith grasps.

Verse 8: This Psalm is a sort of general rule how sinners become righteous. ... When you become sad or feel divine wrath, do not look for any other medicine or accept any other solace than the Word. ... God is good, righteous, and merciful even when He strikes. Whoever does not believe this departs from

the unity of the faith that God is one, and he imagines another god for himself, who is inconstant, sometimes good and sometimes bad. But it is an outstanding gift of the Holy Spirit to believe that when God sends evil, He is still gracious and merciful.

Verse 9: The doctrine of justification is the kind of thing that can never be learned completely.

Verse 12: By the grace of God I have also experienced this great gift, that by my teaching and writing I have freely confessed Jesus Christ, my Lord and Liberator, against the will of emperor, pope, princes, kings, and almost the whole world, even amid a thousand dangers to life with which my wrathful enemies and Satan himself were threatening me. ... The office of teaching in the Church requires such a mind that despises all dangers. In general, all the devout should prepare themselves so that they are not afraid of becoming martyrs, that is, confessors or witnesses of God. Christ does not want to hide in the world, but He wants to be preached, so that the Gospel shines in the world like a torch on a high mountain or on a watchtower.

Verse 13: It is impossible for the Word of God to be preached without fruit. Although not all are converted, still there are some who are changed from sinners to believers and are saved. The outcome of the ministry is not with the will of men, but with the will of God.

Verse 14: I too was among the pope's monsters. If anyone had taught then what now, by the grace of God, I teach and believe, I think I would have torn him up with my teeth.

Verse 15: How will you praise God unless you have first accused and condemned the whole world with all its righteousness? Whoever does this draws not only hate but also open danger.

Verse 16: Everything pleases God because the person

pleases God, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the sacrifice of Christ and the mercy which faith grasps.

Verse 17: This passage is worthy of being written in golden letters. ... I have learned how difficult it is in this battle to say: "Lord, help me!"

So far Luther. But why not read Luther's entire exposition of this Psalm for yourself? It will be a most spiritually-rewarding experience. Then go on to read more and more. When a person is in trouble and distress, then we do well to read Luther's beautiful exposition of Psalm 118 (St. L. Ed. V:1174-1251), known as the "*Schoene Confitemini*." Once each year we do well to read what many consider to be his greatest work, his treatise "On the Liberty of a Christian Man" (St. L. Ed. XIX:987-1011). Here are Alpine heights and measureless depths. Here is the supreme example of that tranquillity of a Christian's mind which cannot be touched by the greatest impending disaster.

Luther was a true Seelsorger, not only for himself, but for others. Let us learn from him. Luther's words, now written and spoken almost five centuries ago, still guide and direct us, so that we may go on in Christian courage and conviction. Gloom and pessimism were never more dangerous and destructive than in the times in which we live and work. The challenge of the hour calls for men and women who know that their hopes and the hopes of their Church lie in the acceptance and perpetuation of the Scriptural principles and ideals of Martin Luther. May we, being edified by his holy faith and courage, raise our hands to the cross of Christ in the oath of allegiance, and pledge: This is the way we will go, with God's help. Let us read Luther!

A. Schulz

LUTHER — THE TRANSLATOR

"The most famous of Luther's books was itself a translation. It was the German Bible. ... The praises of Doctor Luther's German Bible have been sung for over four centuries. It is an enduring monument to both Luther's great faith and his great scholarship."¹ "The translation of the Bible is a noble monument of literature; a vast enterprise, which seemed to require more than the life of man, but which Luther accomplished in a few years. — The poetic soul finds in this translation evidences of genius and expressions as natural, as beautiful, and melodious as in the original language. Luther's translation sometimes renders the primitive phrases with touching simplicity, invests itself with sublimity and magnificence and receives all the modifications which he wishes to impart to it. It is simple in the recital of the patriarch, glowing in the predictions of the Prophets, and colloquial in the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Paul."² "The excellence of Luther's translation of the Bible from the point of view of the text is unquestionable."³ "The German Bible is Luther's noblest achievement ..."⁴ "... a great, magnificent, wonderful work of divine grace."⁵ "... the noblest gift he has bequeathed to his countrymen."⁶

Such is the praise that Lutheran, Protestant, and Catholic have heaped upon Luther's translation of the Bible. Since this translation occupies such an important place in the Reformer's lifework, much has been written about it. In an article of this scope, therefore, it is possible to present only the more important facts on Luther as a translator. This topic has been divided into three parts: 1) Pre-Lutheran Translations of the Bible, 2) Luther's Translation of the Bible, and 3) Luther on Translating.

PRE-LUTHERAN GERMAN TRANSLATIONS

The Bible had been translated into German many times before Luther undertook his translation. The oldest extant German translation dates back to the eighth century. This translation, of which only portions of the Gospel of St. Matthew survive, is remarkably good, much

better than most subsequent attempts. The translator appears to have been a linguist of some ability. Besides this early work, we have little or nothing of note until the fourteenth century. During the second quarter of this century, no fewer than four German translations of the entire Bible were made. The work of the fifteenth century consisted largely of copying existing translations. Schwiebert states that there were fourteen high German versions dating from 1462 to Luther's day.⁷ With the invention of printing, the German Bible came into much wider circulation. By 1534, when Luther's complete translation appeared, more than a dozen versions in high German and four in low German had been printed.⁸

Was there, then, need for a new translation? There was, for all the pre-Lutheran translations were inadequate in one or more ways. Except for certain portions of the Bible which had been translated from the Greek and Hebrew, all these translations were based on the Latin Vulgate of Jerome.⁹ In addition to those errors which the Vulgate itself contained, a large number of new errors were added by the German translators, who were not always too proficient in Latin.¹⁰ Furthermore, the language of many of these translations was so clumsy and difficult that it was often unintelligible to the people. Fuerbringer illustrates this with the following examples¹¹, the first from the ninetieth Psalm (vv. 13-15) and the second from the third chapter of Hebrews (vv. 14-16):

Pre-Lutheran Bible

*O HErr, bis wann bist du
bekehret und bist vergeb-
lich über deine Knechte?
Wir seien früh erfüllt
mit deiner Erbarmung. Wir
freuten uns und sind er-
freut in allen unsern Tag-
en. Wir sind erfreut um
die Tage, in denen du uns
hast gedemütigt, in den
Jahren, in denen wir sahen
die üblen Dinge.*

Luther's Translation

*HErr, kehre dich doch wie-
der zu uns und sei deinen
Knechten gnädig! Fülle uns
frühe mit deiner Gnade, so
wollen wir rühmen und fröh-
lich sein unser Leben lang.
Erfreue uns nun wieder,
nachdem du uns so lange
plagest, nachdem wir so
lange Unglück leiden!*

Wenn wir seind teilhaftig Christo. Jedoch ob wir be= haben den Anfang seiner Substanz. Verstehe bis an das Ende. Als lang, bis es wird gesagt. Ob wir heut hören sein Stimme. Nit wollt erherten euer Herzen. Als in der Bitterkeit. Wenn etlich hÿrten und erbitter= ten. Aber doch nit all. Die da ausgingen von Egipt durch Moysen.

Denn wir sind Christi teil= haftig worden, so wir anders das angefangene Wesen bis ans Ende festbehalten; solange gesagt wird: Heute, so ihr seine Stimme hören werdet, so verstocket eure Herzen nicht, wie in der Verbitterung ge= schah. Denn etliche, da sie hÿreten, richteten eine Ver= bitterung an, aber nicht alle, die von Ägypten aus= gingen durch Mosen.

Dr Wilhelm Walther says of the pre-Lutheran translators: "Even those who attempted to speak good German, with few exceptions, had no idea as to what was required of a good translation. They were satisfied if they were readily understood. That the German Bible must also be a work of art, that the different moods of the originals were to be reproduced ... was a knowledge of which we find only very slight traces in a very few of the translators. Most of them were fearfully prosaic, all on one note, and insufferably tedious."¹² In Luther's words: "The need of the Bible in German is so great that no one can imagine it. No one realizes the insight which it (Luther speaks of his German translation) has offered to our world today. What we once tried to accomplish through continual lecturing and great industry and still could not attain, this text now offers clearly by itself; for none of us realized in what darkness we were living because of the former translations."¹³

LUTHER'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

Luther was well qualified for the work of translating. He was, first, a capable linguist, knowing German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. His ability in German is obvious and unquestioned. "The German language was like clay in his hands, like a violin played by a virtuoso. The sighs and sobs of some of the Psalms; the high hallelujahs of others: hymns to the God of salvation; the majestic cadences of Isaiah; the lamenting notes of Jeremiah; the profound depth beneath the simple diction of John; the tremendous power of the tense, stor-

my, telescopic style of Paul — Luther's translation has all of these in German."¹⁴ Erasmus Alber stated: "Our Lord also illumined the German language through Doctor Martin, so that, as long as the world has stood, no human has written or spoken the German language as well as he." The German poet Klopstock said of Luther: "No one who knows the nature of a language dares to appear in the presence of Luther without reverence. Among no people has one man done so much to help create their language." Many other eminent Germans, including Goethe, Grimm, Wagner, and Treitschke, have testified to Luther's mastery of the German language.¹⁵ The variety of German which Luther chose as a basis for his translation was the court language of electoral Saxony, enriched from a number of dialects with which he had become acquainted in his travels.¹⁶

Luther was well acquainted with the Latin language also. Latin was the language of the classroom, and Luther spoke it with ease. Before 1514 Luther knew little Greek and Hebrew, but under the guidance of Lang, Melancthon, and others at the university he made steady progress in these languages, particularly in Greek. By 1519, according to Mosellanus, he had learned enough Greek and Hebrew to form a judgment of the translations.¹⁷ But not only was Luther a good linguist. He was coming to a clear apprehension of Scriptural truth, a requisite qualification for any translator of Scripture.

It is impossible to determine just when Luther realized that he should translate the Bible into German. Schwiebert states that he was hardly ready for this task before his stay at the Wartburg.¹⁸ Previous to this time, Luther had been engaged in some translations at Wittenberg. He had begun in 1517 with the seven penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 147), followed by a translation of the Lord's Prayer and the 110th Psalm in 1518, and the 37th, 68th, and 118th Psalms and the Magnificat in 1521. But Luther's first extended effort at translating came at the Wartburg. It seems that during his visit to Wittenberg in December, 1521, his friends urged him to begin a new translation of the Bible, for within a few days after his return to the Wartburg he was at work on the New Testament. The second edition of the

Greek Testament of Erasmus (1519) furnished the text. In a letter to Nicholaus Amsdorf on January 13, 1522, Luther admits the difficulty of this undertaking: "I have taken upon myself a load that surpasses my powers. I see now what translating is, and why no one who has attempted a translation up to now will attach his name to it."¹⁹ Difficult though the task was, Luther completed the first draft of the German New Testament in the incredibly short time of eleven weeks, from mid-December, 1521, to mid-March, 1522. Dr. Reu thinks: "It still remains an achievement that Luther could not have accomplished without the special assistance of the Holy Ghost."²⁰

Upon his return to Wittenberg in March, Luther devoted himself to a thorough revision of the translation. In this work he had the assistance of Melancthon and other colleagues of his. In this revision Luther paid meticulous attention to details in an effort to achieve an accurate rendition. In order to name the precious stones in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, he borrowed, through Spalatin's intervention, the court jewels of the elector of Saxony. Letters were addressed to Spalatin, Mutian, and Sturtz, seeking information as to the value of certain New Testament coins in German money. As soon as the revision was complete, the copy went to the printer, Melchior Lotther, and by September 21, 1522, the first edition, known as the "*Septembertestament*," was off the press. The book, *Das Neue Testament Deutzsch*, sold in such huge numbers that a new printing was necessary in December. And so it went. Until the printing of the entire Bible in 1534 Luther brought out many new editions of the New Testament, each edition incorporating more revisions and improvements in the text. It is estimated that over 200,000 New Testaments were disseminated among the German people by 1534.²¹

While the first edition of the New Testament was still in the press, Luther began the translation of the Old Testament. In this task he was assisted by Hebrew scholars at the university and elsewhere, for Luther did not consider himself proficient enough in Hebrew, nor did he have enough time, to attempt a translation alone. In the introduction to the five books of Moses, printed in 1523, Luther stated his problem: "I acknowledge open-

ly that I undertook too great a problem especially in attempting to translate the Old Testament, for the Hebrew language is in such a neglected state that even the Jews know little about it, and the glossaries and the commentaries are not to be trusted. . . . Even though all of us should co-operate, there would be sufficient work for all in the reconstruction of the Bible and bringing it once more to the light. Some might assist with their ability to reason; others through their mastery of languages. Nor did I labor alone in this undertaking, but I utilized the services of others where it might assist me in mastering a problem."²² Among these advisers were Aurogallus, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Creuziger, Ziegler, Foerster, and Roerer. For a time a weekly "*collegium*" was held, beginning a few hours before supper, in which the various texts and translations were compared. When the meaning of a passage was once settled, it became the work of Luther to find an idiomatic rendering that would be intelligible to even the plainest people. Again we see Luther's desire to produce an accurate translation. We read that he made several trips to a butcher to observe the slaughter of sheep and learn the exact German word for each part of the animal. Often the translation progressed slowly, days being spent on only a few lines. In his "Open Letter on Translating," written to Wenceslaus Link on September 8, 1530, Luther says: "In translating, I put forth much effort that I might use good, clear German. And it often happened that we searched and consulted two, three, or four weeks for a single word, nevertheless at times did not find it."²³ Even though Luther had help in translating the Old Testament, it was nevertheless his translation, for the ultimate force of the translation depended upon his decision.

Luther published the translation of the Old Testament in parts as they were finished, to gratify the public impatience more speedily and to enable the poor to procure the book. The Pentateuch appeared in the summer of 1523, under the title *Das Alte Testament deutsch*. The second part of the Old Testament, from Joshua to Esther, entitled *Das Ander teyl des alten testaments*, was published the following year. It was Luther's intention to include the didactic and prophetic books in the next part, but in Job he encountered real difficulty. In the "Open

Letter on Translating" referred to above, Luther states that at times he and his assistants were hardly able to complete three lines of Job in four days. In February, 1524, Luther wrote to Spalatin: "All is well with us. Only we have had hard work with the translation of Job because of the sublimity of its exceedingly grand style, so that he seems to be much more impatient with our translation than with the consolation of his friends; or he will certainly persist in sitting upon his ash heap, if it was not perhaps the desire of the author of this book that it should never be translated. This situation is delaying the printing of the third part of the Bible."²⁴ Because of the delay in translating Job, Luther published the third part without the prophets. This section appeared in September or October, 1524, under the title *Das Dritte teyl des allten Testaments*.

After the third printing, the time that Luther could spend on translating was sharply curtailed by the Peasants' War and the preparation of the new liturgy and hymnal. He completed the translation of the Psalms, which he had begun before Worms, and published them in 1524. During the following years, he was occupied with church visitations, doctrinal controversies, the preparation of catechisms, etc. Yet he was able to work intermittently on his translations. Habakkuk appeared in 1526, and Zechariah and Isaiah in 1528. Luther admitted the difficulty he encountered in translating the prophets. In a letter to Link in June, 1528, he stated: "We are now sweating over the translation of the Prophets into German. O God, what a great and hard toil it requires to compel the writers against their will to speak German! They do not want to give up their Hebrew and imitate the barbaric German. Just as though a nightingale should be compelled to imitate a cuckoo and give up her glorious melody, even though she hates a song in monotone."²⁵ In 1529 the Wisdom of Solomon appeared, followed by Daniel early in 1530. During his stay at the Coburg Luther continued his work on the prophets. By the end of June Jeremiah was completed, and Ezekiel appeared after Luther had returned to Wittenberg. In a letter to Spalatin in October, 1531, Luther stated that he was working two hours each day doing the final work on the prophets. In February, 1532, the complete prophets appeared under the title

Die Propheten alle Deudsch. Luther then began work on the Apocryphal books. Ecclesiasticus and Maccabees appeared in 1533, but the remainder were reserved for the complete Bible, which, after careful checking and revision, was published in 1534 by Hans Lufft in Wittenberg, under the title *Biblia / das ist / die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch.*

Luther's work on the Bible was not completed with the printing of the 1534 edition, for he was not yet satisfied with the translation. During the remainder of his life he continued to polish and perfect his work. In the summer of 1539 the sessions with his colleagues were resumed. Within the next year and a half, between sixty and seventy meetings were held. A "patient, conscientious, scientific methodology" is revealed in the extant notes of these sessions. "The word-for-word searching in an attempt at a literal translation of the Greek and Hebrew texts had been replaced by a spirit of freedom, an attempt to render the exact meaning of the original in the idiom of the 16th-century German." These notes "reveal that Luther was the master and leader of the group, not just the organizer of a commission of experts. ... Both in his command of the original languages and in an acquaintance with the German tongue he had no equal in the group. His colleagues recognized Luther's preparation for the task, for he had lived closely with the work of Bible translation for twenty years."²⁶

The work of this commission is reflected in the September Bible of 1541. After this edition no systematic revision of the Old Testament was undertaken. Luther was not, however, satisfied with the New Testament. Therefore he assembled the commission in 1544 for a final revision of the New Testament. The work of this group was incorporated in the edition of 1546. Even though this edition was not completed until after Luther's death in February, it followed Luther's notations faithfully, and can therefore be considered Luther's translation.²⁷

C. Kuehne

(TO BE CONTINUED)

NOTES

1. Ewald M. Plass, *This is Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1948), pp. 327, 337. When he wrote this biography, Plass was serving as professor at Concordia College, Milwaukee.
2. The French Catholic J. M. Vincent Audin, cited in Plass, p. 338.
3. The German Jesuit Hartman Grisar, cited in Plass, p. 338.
4. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), p. 326. Bainton was ordained a minister in the Congregational Church and has had associations with the Society of Friends.
5. *Unser Erbteil* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1917), p. 20. This citation is from the essay "Die deutsche Bibel" by L. Fuerbringer.
6. Julius Koestlin, *Life of Luther* (New York: Scribner, 1911), p. 265. Koestlin wrote his definitive biography of Luther's life and writings when he was professor at the University of Halle.
7. E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), p. 527.
8. The historical information in this paragraph comes largely from Plass, p. 328.
9. Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 147. Cf. also Bainton, p. 326f.
10. This is Fuerbringer's evaluation, *Unser Erbteil*, p. 19.
11. *Unser Erbteil*, p. 19f.
12. In Plass, p. 328.
13. In Schwiebert, p. 663.
14. Plass, p. 336.
15. In Schwiebert, p. 527f.
16. Bainton, p. 327. Grimm observes (p. 147): "By using the official German of the Saxon chancery, not his own colloquial Saxon dialect, he helped create a standard German for all Germany."
17. In Plass, p. 32.
18. Schwiebert, p. 528.
19. *Dr. Martin Luthers Saemmtliche Schriften*, edited by Joh. Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1880-1910), XV:2559. In subsequent notes this edition will be identified as the St. Louis Walch. All translations

therefrom are by this writer.

20. In Plass, p. 331.
21. In Schwiebert, p. 531.
22. In Schwiebert, p. 644.
23. St. Louis Walch, XIX:973.
24. In Schwiebert, p. 645.
25. In Schwiebert, p. 647.
26. Schwiebert, p. 655f.
27. The historical information in this section has been gleaned from a variety of sources, chiefly the detailed presentation in Schwiebert, pp. 527-531, 643-663.

PERSON TO PERSON -

THE SHEPHERD'S CONCERN FOR HIS SHEEP

(A Study of the Epistles to the Thessalonians)

Paul founded the congregation at Thessalonica in the year 50 A.D. on his second missionary journey. After having been asked by the magistrates to leave Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy made their way southwestward along the Via Egnatia through Amphipolis and Appollonia to the port city of Thessalonica. Paul immediately began "reasoning with them (the Jews) from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2) in the synagogue. That lasted only three weeks; as was his custom Paul turned to the Gentiles. The envy of the Jews had been aroused; they created disturbances and forced Paul and Silas to leave for the sake of their own safety. But before they left "a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4) were won for Christ. The period between the break with the synagogue and their being forced to leave town may have been months. During that time Paul had labored "night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you" (I,2:9). The preaching of the gospel, however, must have taken so much of his time that Paul was unable to earn enough to support himself entirely. Twice the Philippians had sent love gifts to sustain

him (Phil. 4:15-16). The exact length of Paul's stay in Thessalonica cannot be determined, but his success, his working to provide for himself, and his receiving two gifts from the Philippians indicate that it must have been longer than weeks, more likely months. That is, nonetheless, a short time to establish firmly a congregation consisting of converts from paganism and Jews who were persecuted by their blasphemous countrymen.

Paul was concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians. He had been forced to leave them and so was separated from them geographically, but not emotionally, for he had them in his heart (I,2:17). Satan had prevented his returning to them (I,2:19). Paul couldn't stand the separation any longer. He was in Athens; Timothy may have been with him or may have been left in Berea. Paul sent him back to Thessalonica "to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith" (I,3:2). What Paul couldn't do personally, he endeavored to do through Timothy and through a personal letter, the first epistle to the Thessalonians, which was shortly followed, after Timothy's personal report on conditions in Thessalonica, by his second epistle.

Paul's letters breathe personal, loving concern for the Thessalonians. Both letters bore the names of Paul, Silas, and Timothy as writers. Paul could not return to Thessalonica, much as he longed to. He wrote; Timothy carried the letter which was also from him, as well as from Silas. Paul addressed the Thessalonians as "beloved brethren" (I,1:4), thereafter 13 more times as "brethren" in the first epistle and 6 times in the second. For Paul "brother" was a precious term. It reflected a relationship created by the Spirit through the gospel. It was not lightly used, as so often in our day when "brother" so frequently covers up unfaithfulness to the gospel. The tenderness of the "brotherhood" relationship was heightened with the parent-child analogy: "We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children" (I,2:7). Again: "You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children" (I,2:11). There is no hint of an adversary relationship or of lording it over the flock; on the contrary that of shepherd and sheep as interrela-

ting members of a loving family.

This spiritual relationship is further revealed by the use of personal pronouns. The first person plural pronoun is used 47 times in the first epistle, 26 times in the second. The second person plural pronoun is used 85 times in the first epistle, 41 times in the second. Concern, comfort, exhortation, instruction, and admonition are given within the framework of a living, pulsating, loving interrelationship created by the Spirit in the Lord — you and we in the Lord!

MUTUAL PRAYER As so often Paul began his letter with thanksgiving to God, "making mention of you in our prayers" (I,1:3). "We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (I,2:13). "... night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith" (I,3:10). Thanksgiving keyed Paul's unceasing prayers — thanksgiving for the miracle of their conversion, which in his letter to the Corinthians Paul likened to the creation of light (II Cor. 4:6). Then petition — day and night asking for the opportunity to see them all again face to face. That petition was not granted; his letter had to serve as his face to face meeting with them. So Paul had prayed. He concluded his first letter with the plea: "Brethren, pray for us" (I,5:25).

The second letter also begins with a prayer of thanksgiving "because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other" (II,1:3). Timothy had brought back a favorable report; Paul responded with thanksgiving. Timothy also had brought the report that the lives of some did not fully reflect the gospel. So Paul committed this matter to the Lord in prayer: "Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power" (II,1:11). Paul prayed that spiritual weakness in the brethren might be overcome. Paul had been the instrument of the Lord to call them "from idols to serve the

living and true God" (I,1:9). From that moment they became his partners in the spreading of the gospel. He urged them to help him with their prayers: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you" (II,3:1). The shepherd prayed for his sheep; he urged the sheep to pray for him. Thus shepherd and sheep were knit together by prayer to the same God through the same Lord Jesus.

TEACHING DOCTRINE The Apostle Paul was the Spirit's chosen vessel to teach. His manner of teaching eternal truth is most enlightening. Paul never taught divine truth in a vacuum; his teaching was never theoretical as though doctrine were a philosophical system to be learned, filed in the memory, disputed, and recalled upon demand. On the contrary, Paul understood the Lord's revelation as either: "Look out, I'm coming in judgment," or: "Fear not, I'm coming to save!" So Paul always taught doctrine in an extremely personal and practical manner, according to the principle: Revelation of divine truth is for the benefit, not the bane, of man; man is to be blessed, not burdened, by the truth. The truth is not to shackle man but liberate him for conscious, willing obedience in the joy of salvation. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Man is to obey not by constraint as a slave threatened by his master's whip or by instinct as a beast of the field or bird in the air but in the conscious assurance that obedience brings blessing.

In the epistles to the Thessalonians Paul teaches the great truths of our Lord's Parousia (His second coming), together with the related doctrines of the resurrection of the believers, the Great Antichrist, and the final judgment, besides the great truths of election, inspiration, and redemption. There are no essays on these great truths. They are not taught in philosophical, dogmatic, systematized or catechetical manner. On the contrary, the great divine truths are taught in the intimacy of the "we-you" relationship that had been miraculously, tenderly, and lovingly forged by the Holy Spirit.

The most prominent truth in the epistles to the

Thessalonians is the second coming of our Lord. Paul's first mention of the Parousia comes in a "you-they-we" relationship: From YOU the Word of the Lord spread to Macedonia and Achaia; YOUR faith has gone out; WE don't have to say anything; THEY (your spiritual sons and daughters) "declare concerning US what manner of entry WE had to YOU, and how YOU turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers US from the wrath to come" (I,1:9-10). The Parousia is not specifically mentioned, only the believers' practical stance toward it — waiting for God's Son to come again. That truth is coupled with the resurrection and the practical effect for us — deliverance from the wrath to come. The gospel was revealed to save individuals, groups, peoples; it's a "people" message. So it was laid upon the hearts of the Thessalonians.

The second appearance of the Parousia in the epistle comes in an extremely tender and emotional passage. Paul had just written of having been taken away from the Thessalonians by circumstances of which they were perfectly well aware. He so wanted to visit them personally, but Satan hindered him — how Paul does not say. Why did the Apostle so earnestly and fervently want to visit them personally? "For what is OUR hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even YOU in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming (Parousia)?" (I,19). Paul's emotional life was fed with the vision of the Thessalonians in glory at the coming of the Lord. What warmth! What a glorious bond between teacher and student, shepherd and sheep!

The third mentioning of the Parousia appears at the conclusion of the first section of Paul's letter in which he had reviewed their history as a congregation. Paul so longed to see them again. He besought the Lord to make them abound in love. To what end? That "He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming (Parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (I,3:13). The coming of the Lord was not an abstraction; it was not an event that didn't concern them, or an event of local concern only. Quite the contrary! It will be the climactic day in the life

of each believer, the day when he stands before our God and Father. Paul wanted them all to stand "blameless in holiness." Thereafter follows the hortatory section of Paul's letter — designed to help them become "blameless" in the preparation for His coming.

The Thessalonians had a very practical question: "What about the brethren who die before the Lord comes again? Would they be at a disadvantage relative to those who were alive at His coming?" This Paul answered in the negative in I,4:13-17. The Lord shall bring the believers who had died with Him; the living believers will meet Him in the air. No believer shall have advantage or be at disadvantage. That moment, which signals the end of time, shall be the beginning of being always with the Lord.

The Parousia of the Lord is "the day of the Lord" (I,5:2). It was the day of the coming of the King (Acts 17:7). No one wants to be caught unprepared! Paul warned that THE DAY shall come as a thief; he did not want THE DAY to catch them by surprise as a thief. Paul's warning was practical; his concern and teaching is individual, personal.

The final mention of the Parousia of the Lord occurs in the closing intercession for the Thessalonians: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify YOU completely; and may YOUR whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming (Parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I,5:23). Again, the concern that each one be "blameless at the coming."

Thus the Parousia of the Lord is introduced six times in this brief epistle; once as an exhortation to wait for that coming, once in the Apostle's anticipation of joy in the Thessalonians at the coming, twice in his concern that the Thessalonians be found "blameless" at the coming, once concerning the lack of any advantage or disadvantage for the believing living or dead at the coming, and once in warning that the coming should not overtake anyone as a thief.

In the second epistle the Parousia is introduced

five times, twice in connection with our Lord's coming for judgment and three times in connection with the teaching that the historical development of the Great Antichrist shall precede the coming of the Lord, whose coming shall mean destruction for the Man of Sin.

In both instances the teaching is personal. The coming of the Lord shall bring YOU rest with US, punishment for those "who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II,1:7-10). The coming of the Lord had engendered excitement in the congregation. Some unstable members had spiritualized the coming "as though the day of Christ had come" (II,2:2). Paul counteracted this unwholesome and dangerous spiritualization by recapitulating his prophetic teaching concerning the rise, development, revelation, defeat and destruction of the Man of Sin. This passage, the *locus classicus* on the Great Antichrist, was included by the Apostle for the practical purpose of curbing any unstable, unwholesome enthusiasm that threatened the Thessalonians as they waited for the Parousia.

ADMONITIONS The warm, personal manner of Paul's dealing becomes highly visible especially in his dealing with problems in the congregation. Paul never exhibited any weakness whatever, indecision, or compromise with evil, whether it was a matter of doctrine or life. But his heart and hand were always extended to the weak or fallen to succor them.

The Thessalonian congregation was chiefly made up of converts from paganism, people who had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I,1:9). In that moment they were all made new creations (II Cor. 5:17); Christ became unto them sanctification (I Cor. 1:30). Conversion brings with it instant sanctification in Christ, but not instant perfection in life. The old habits were ingrained. The flesh seized upon the past and the general pagan ambience to undermine the spirit. Sexual purity was such a novelty among the pagans, and unscrupulous craftiness in business dealings so natural and normal, faithfulness to one's spouse and loving concern for the material welfare of the person with whom one was doing business so contrary to deeply rooted personal

patterns of behavior and general mores, that there were bound to be moral lapses in these fledgling converts from paganism. How did the Apostle deal with these problems?

The section (I,4:1-8) is fraternal and personal, encouraging and reinforcing, evangelically instructive with the way of sanctification placed in sharp contrast to the pagan way of life, concluding with the solemn apostolic appraisal that he who rejects this exhortation is not rejecting the counsel of man, but of God. Noticeably absent are any disciplinary sanctions. The brethren are addressed positively as people under the control of the Spirit, not as potential or actual slaves of immorality or greed. The exhortation is people, not issue, oriented. The aim was to wean the brethren from their error and so root out the leaven, not root out the leaven merely to produce a morally "clean" congregation. The former is evangelical, the latter legalistic; the latter seeks abstract purity, the former recuperation from the innate and environmental influences of sin. It is worth one's time to read the section again to appreciate the Spirit's own method in sanctifying those whom He has called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:9):

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. (I,4: 1-8)

The great doctrinal truth that permeates both epistles to the Thessalonians is the Parousia of our Lord.

What is the proper response of the believer to the certain coming again of the Lord? The Lord made that abundantly clear in His Olivet Discourse. The believer is to watch and be ready (Matt. 24:43-44), as in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). He is to be found faithfully attending to his duties and responsibilities, as in the example of the faithful and evil servant (Matt. 24:45-51), and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). Such a response Paul had taught by precept and example when he was in Thessalonica.

But a certain unwholesome enthusiasm had surfaced in the congregation as they waited for the Parousia of the Lord. Instead of waiting and working, some seemed inclined to wait in feverish excitement and anticipation to the neglect of their daily responsibilities. In addressing himself to this tendency the Apostle used the verb παραγγέλλω five times (I,4:11; II,3:4.6.10.12). The verb is customarily translated "command." It is stronger than παρακαλέω ("exhort") that Paul used in the previous section when dealing with sexual and business immorality.

Paul introduced the subject in a gentle and general manner: "... we urge (παρακαλέω) you, brethren, that you increase more and more (in love, that is); that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we command (παραγγέλλω) you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (I,4:10-12). In the closing series of exhortations in the first epistle Paul broaches the subject once again: "Now we exhort (παρακαλέω) you, brethren, warn (νουθετέω) those who are unruly (ἀτάκτος), comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (I,5:14).

The verb νουθετέω emphasizes verbal exhortation. Talk to these people; remind them of all the things I spoke of when instructing you as to how to conduct yourselves in view of the Lord's Parousia. That warning is directed toward the ἀτάκτος, the unruly. The thought is that of being out of step, as one soldier being out of step in a marching column. There are only three forms of this word used in the New Testament, the verbal, adjectival, and adverbial. All are used only by St. Paul,

only in his letters to the Thessalonians (I,5:14; II,3:6.7.11), and only in connection with the disorderly walking in excited anticipation of the Lord's Parousia.

Timothy's report, after he had delivered the first epistle, revealed that Paul's gentle words in his first letter had not curbed or cured the unwholesome enthusiastic waiting for the Parousia in idleness. After having taught that the Lord's Parousia will mean judgment upon all unbelievers and glorification for the saints (II,1:5-12), and after curbing the excitement generated by the any moment expectation of the Parousia (II,2:2-12), Paul turned his attention to what appears to have been the case of one person whose disorderly walking had become disruptive. The final chapter of his second epistle is a classic example of how a congregation of believers is to go about rescuing a brother who is walking disorderly in one way or another.

The section again begins with an appeal to the congregation as "brethren." We have previously noted the richness of this term and the frequency of its use in these epistles. When Paul was reaching out to correct some faltering in their sanctification, he regularly reminded them that he was writing to them as a brother to brethren. In the matter of the person or persons waiting for the Lord's return in a disorderly manner Paul reminded the congregation of the brotherhood by addressing them four times as brethren (I,4:10; 5:14; II,3:6.13).

The entire section begins with the appeal: "Brethren, pray for us" (II,3:1), even as the first epistle was brought to a close with the same appeal (I,5:25). This time, however, Paul amplified by giving direction to their prayers. Pray for the success of the gospel and for our protection, even as Paul is certain that the faithful Lord "will establish you and guard you from the evil one" (II,3:3). Paul continued on the positive note that the Thessalonians were doing and "will do the things we command you" (II,3:4). That is followed by the Apostle's prayerful wish that "the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (II,3:5).

All this was preparatory for his loving concern for any-

one walking disorderly. Once again addressing them as "brethren," Paul issued a command "that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (II,3:6). The command is generalized. This is what you are to do in each case when a brother walks "disorderly." Never is the warm, intimate, Spirit-created interrelationship of the brotherhood abandoned. There is no hint of an adversary relationship, no anticipation of a stubborn resistance, no spiritual threats. Paul was dealing firmly but gently with a brother, any brother who fell into the pattern of walking disorderly. To regain any such brother Paul appealed to the example he had set in their midst — how he had worked to support himself, laying down the general rule: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (II,3:10). The Thessalonians could feel the power of such an appeal. If their teacher who had brought them to the saving knowledge of Christ and His glorious return worked while waiting for the Lord and while teaching them concerning His Parousia, certainly they should fall in step and do likewise.

After thus easing into the situation with such a general command, Paul got down to cases. He knew whereof he spoke, for Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica and had given his report: "We hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (II,3:11). The virus of enthusiastic waiting for the Lord in idleness appears to have been spreading and was becoming disruptive. The situation called for more than just exhortation: "Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (II,3:12). A command it is, but not a command as from a superior to a subordinate, but as from one brother to another. It is a command not to violate the brotherhood by becoming a burden unto others, but to continue waiting and working so as to be able to serve the brethren. Paul did not appeal to his apostolic authority, but appealed unto them as a brother among brethren.

"Brethren, do not grow weary in doing good" (II, 3: 13). Any individual who left his own shop and began hanging around someone else's shop, distracting him and

so keeping him from his own work with pious babbling about the Lord's coming, would no longer be an asset to the community, but rather a liability. Even as Paul wrote the Ephesians, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph. 4:28), so he here urges any "Christ-watcher" to return to his job and work while waiting for the Lord so that he would be able to do good.

After this gradual build-up the Apostle deals with the individual who apparently was the most grave offender in this matter of being not "busy, but a busy-body" (II,3:11). Paul individualizes: "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II,3:14-15). One can imagine that after the brethren had urged the offender to get back to his work bench and quit this distracting meddling and pious chatter they simply refused to respond to his chatter, ignored him, and did not invite this free-loader to lunch. It is reasonable to believe that this policy was applied a *fortiore* to the congregational "agape." But all of this disciplining took place within the framework of the brotherhood. Paul addressed the congregation as "brethren." He commanded that they "withdraw from every brother" (II, 3:6), and that in ostracizing the offender they "do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II,3:15). Brothers are dealing with a fellow brother. "As a brother" is not to be understood in a rather weak adverbial manner, as in a fraternal manner. The comparative particle *ὡς* is used with the accusative: Count him not in the category of an enemy of the gospel, but in the category of a brother who is walking disorderly. For a parallel use of *ὡς* see I Tim. 5:1-2: "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity."

The treatment prescribed for helping the disorderly brother get back in step was ostracism, in social as well as other ways. The treatment was administered within the bounds of the brotherhood and so parallels Gal. 6:1,

which is also addressed to "brethren": "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." In the case in Thessalonica Paul prescribed a specific treatment for restoration; in Galatians he was concerned with both the person "overtaken" and the brother attempting the restoration — "lest you also be tempted." The Thessalonian case, as the Galatian case, does not parallel the termination of fellowship passages which are directed against the false prophet (Matt. 7:15), the causer of divisions and offenses (Rom. 16:17), the unbelievers, etc. (II Cor. 6:14-18), the heretic or divisive man (Titus 3:10), or the peddler of false doctrine (II John 10). The latter cases call for separation to protect the brother against error; the Thessalonian case calls for isolation of the sick brother for the purpose of hastening his recovery.

PASTORAL THEOLOGY Personalized "Seelsorge" was the earmark of Paul's extensive ministry. That he achieved not only when he was physically present in a particular congregation, but also through his letters.

We are in danger of losing this "person to person" touch in our modern ministry. Many factors contribute to this — personality traits of pastors, the migratory nature of the membership of many congregations, the tendency to substitute "mail outs" or mimeographed material for personal contact, the removal from contact with the pastor by the use of church secretaries in larger congregations, congregational busywork instead of being busy with personal spiritual edification, and so on and on. In the process the individual brother can be reduced to an impersonal unit, teaching theorized and so divorced from individual needs, sanctification reduced to conformity to church polity or convention resolutions, and the gospel changed from the announcement of God's amazing, loving concern for the sinner in Christ to a demand for assent to a confessional platform and a corresponding regimentation of life. Gradually the spirit is lost, and the deadening chill of law inhibits the spontaneous flow of loving obedience generated by a daily renewed faith in the ever new grace and mercy of our God in

Christ Jesus. The preaching of the crucified Christ as the heart and core of the church's message may be confessionally maintained, but in fact and in practice it has been forced into the background.

The cure lies in a conscious return to the methodology of the Apostle: an intimate "you-we" relationship in the gospel; mutual prayer of both thanksgiving and petition; genuine, unfeigned loving concern for the brethren; dealing with brethren as brethren, not as adversaries or things; teaching eternal truths in a practical person-to-person manner; pleading and drawing, not threatening; restoring, not condemning; leading brethren to reflect Christ in their lives, not merely demanding conformity to a prescribed behavior; and, above all, placing everything in its proper relationship to the crucified Christ, so that Christ becomes all in all.

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