



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

I Timothy 4:15

Journal of Theology

Church of the Lutheran Confession

VOLUME 23

SEPTEMBER 1983

NUMBER 3

ISSN 0361-1906

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The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is published at Immanuel Lutheran College, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Subscriptions: \$5.00 per year, \$9.00 for two years, payable in advance. Issues are dated: March, June, September, and December.

Editor	Prof. C. M. Gullerud
Managing Editor	Prof. John Lau
Circulation Manager	Mr. Benno Sydow
	2750 Oxford Street North
	Roseville, Minnesota 55113
Staff Contributors	P. Fleischer, J. Pfeiffer,
	P. F. Nolting, C. Kuehne,
	L. D. Redlin.

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LUTHER - THE TRANSLATOR

(Concluded)

Inasmuch as the translation of the Bible was so close to Luther's heart and occupied so much of his time, he expressed himself frequently and frankly on the subject of translators and translating. In this section his thoughts are arranged under several topics.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED OF TRANSLATORS

In his "Open Letter on Translating" Luther writes: "The art of translating is not for everyone, as the senseless venerables imagine. It calls for a truly pious, faithful, diligent, awe-inspired, Christian, learned, experienced, trained heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian nor factious spirit is able to translate faithfully, as is shown in the prophets translated into German at Worms, in which great diligence was shown and which well-nigh follows my German translation; but there were Jews employed, who have not shown any great respect for Christ. Otherwise there was skill and zeal enough shown."²⁸

On another occasion Luther said: "Because someone has the gift of languages and understands them, that does not enable him to turn one into the other and to translate well. Translating is a special grace and gift of God."²⁹

TRANSLATING NOT AN EASY TASK

In a letter to Nicholas Amsdorf, written from the Wartburg on January 13, 1522, Luther stated: "In the meantime, I will translate the Bible, although 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."³⁰

In the middle of March, 1522, when he had completed the first draft of the German New Testament, Luther wrote: "I have undertaken to translate the Bible into German. I had to do it; otherwise I would have died with the mistaken idea that I was learned. All who think themselves learned ought to do work of this kind."³¹

Eight years later Luther stated in his "Open Letter on Translating": "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. ... Why should I speak much or long about translating? If I were to list the reasons and thoughts lying behind all the words in my translation, I'd have to keep writing on it for a year. What translating is in the way of skill, toil, and work, I've well found out."³²

One excerpt from Luther's *Daybook*: "To translate the Bible is a great task. Even though we have taken great pains in this work, yet there will be people who will want to do it better. They'll harass me over one little word, which words I could throw out by the hundreds when they translate. I'll give fifty gulden to the person who can give a fitting translation of the 72nd and 73rd Psalms — that is, if he doesn't make use of our translation."³³

LITERAL VS. FREE TRANSLATION Luther followed these general rules: "It isn't the sense which must serve and follow the words, but the words which must serve and follow the sense."³⁴ "It is not possible for one to express his native tongue exactly in a different language, and the art of translating is that a person is not too literal nor too free, but choose the word that fits that particular language. ... To translate correctly is to fit to one's own language what is said in another language."³⁵

One famous application of these rules was the use of the word "allein" (only, alone) in the German translation of Romans 3:28. Since Luther's defense of this translation is interesting and informative, several sections of it are quoted below. This defense is found in the "Open Letter on Translating" addressed to Link. Luther begins thus: "Grace and peace in Christ. Honorable, prudent, beloved gentleman and friend! I have received your letter with the two questions or inquiries, in which you request information of me. First, why I translated the words of St. Paul in the third chapter of Romans: *Arbitramur, hominem justificari ex fide absque operibus legis*, in this

way: 'Wir halten, dass der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werk, allein durch den Glauben.' [Therefore we conclude that a person is justified without the works of the law, through faith alone.] Along with this you point out how the papists make themselves obnoxious beyond measure because the word *sola*, 'allein,' is not in the text of Paul, and such an addition to God's Word is not to be tolerated from me, etc." Luther's answer to this question covers more than six pages in the St. Louis Walch edition. Some of the more significant statements appear below.

"To the first question (if you so desire) you may answer your papists thus, so far as I'm concerned: First, if I, Dr. Luther, had seen that all the papists taken together were so skilled that they could translate one chapter into correct and good German, then I certainly would have found the humility to beseech their help and assistance in translating the New Testament into German. But since I knew, and still clearly see, that not one of them knows rightly how one should translate or speak German, I've spared myself and them such trouble. A person certainly notices, however, that they are learning how to speak and write German from my translation and my German, and are therefore stealing my language, of which they knew little before, nevertheless do not thank me for it, but much rather use it against me. But I don't begrudge it them, for it makes me feel good that I have taught not only my thankless pupils, but also my enemies how to speak.

"Secondly, you may say that I have translated the New Testament to the best of my ability and according to my conscience; that I have compelled no one to read it, but have left it a matter of choice; and that I have done it only as a service to those who could not do it better. Nobody is forbidden to make a better translation. If someone doesn't want to read it, he can let it lie. I entreat and extol no one concerning it. It is my testament and my translation, and it shall be and remain mine. If I've perchance made a mistake in it — of which, however, I am not aware, and I certainly would not intentionally translate even one letter incorrectly — I won't on that account tolerate the papists as judges, for their

ears are still too long for that, and their hee-haw is too weak to judge my translation. ...

"Here in the third chapter of Romans, I knew quite well that the word *solum* is not in the Latin and Greek text. The papists would not have had to teach me that. It's true, these four letters *sola* are not in it, which letters the stupid donkeys stare at like a cow stares at a new gate. They don't see, however, that it nevertheless has the meaning of the text in it, and if a person wants to translate it into clear and powerful German, it belongs there. For it was German that I wanted to speak, not Latin or Greek, since I had undertaken to speak German in translation. Now this is the nature of our German language: If a statement concerns two things, one of which is admitted and the other denied, then one uses the word *solum*, 'allein,' alongside the word 'nicht' [not] or 'kein' [no]. As when one says: 'Der Bauer bringt allein Korn, und kein Geld.' [The farmer is bringing grain alone, and no money.] Likewise: 'Ich hab wahrlich jetzt nicht Geld, sondern allein Korn. Ich hab allein gegessen, und noch nicht getrunken. Hast du allein geschrieben, und nicht ueberlesen?' [To be sure I don't have money now, but only grain. I have only eaten, and not yet drunk. Have you only written, and not read?] And countless instances of the same in everyday usage.

"In all these statements, even though the Latin and Greek languages don't do it, yet the German language does, and it is its nature that it adds the word 'allein,' in order that the word 'nicht' or 'kein' may be all the more full and clear. For although I can also say: 'Der Bauer bringt Korn und kein Geld,' yet the word 'kein Geld' does not sound so complete and clear as it does when I say: 'Der Bauer bringt allein Korn und kein Geld,' and here the word 'allein' helps the word 'kein' so much, that it becomes a complete, clear, German statement. For a person must not consult the letters [Buchstaben] in the Latin language as to how he should speak German, as these donkeys do, but for this he must consult the mothers at home, the children on the street, the common man at the market, and must watch their mouths to see how they speak, and then translate, for in this way they will understand it and notice that a person is speaking German with them.

"As when Christ says: *Ex abundantia cordis os loquitur*. Supposing I should follow the donkeys, who will lay the letters before me and will translate thus: '*Aus dem Ueberflusz des Herzens redet der Mund*.' Tell me, is that German? What German person would understand such talk? What kind of a thing is '*Ueberflusz des Herzens*'? No German can say that, for he would then say that it must be the case that one has too large a heart or too much of a heart, although even that is not correct yet. For '*Ueberflusz des Herzens*' is no German. ... No, the mother at home and the common man speak thus: '*Woz das Herz voll ist, desz geht der Mund uher*.' [If a person's heart is full, his mouth will overflow.] That's good German, the kind which I've worked for, but unfortunately have not always reached or hit upon. For the Latin letters make it difficult beyond measure to speak good German." Luther then gives other examples to show that a person must depart from the "letters" of the foreign languages, and seek out how the German man talks. One must translate into understandable German. But he adds:

"On the other hand, I haven't translated too freely, but with my assistants have been most careful to translate literally and not depart so freely from a word when it carries a certain emphasis with it. As in John 6:27 where Christ says: '*Diesen hat Gott, der Vater, erwählt*.' [This one has God the Father sealed.] Here it certainly would have been better German to say: '*Diesen hat Gott, der Vater, gezeichnet* [marked]' or '*Diesen meint* [has in mind] *Gott, der Vater*.' But here I wanted rather to break with the German language than to depart from the word."

Towards the end of the letter, Luther states: "I am not the only one, nor the first, who says here: '*Allein der Glaube machet gerecht*.' [Faith alone justifies.] Ambrose, Augustine, and many others before me have said it. And if anyone should read and understand St. Paul, he must certainly speak that way, and cannot speak differently. His [Paul's] words are too strong and permit no works, no works' at all. If there are no works, then faith must be alone."³⁶

Preceding his summary of the Psalms, completed in

November, 1532, Luther makes the following remarks concerning his translation: "Since some good, pious hearts, both in our time and even more after we are gone, who are well acquainted with languages but have had no practice in translating, may be offended and annoyed at the fact that we have departed from the letters so freely in many places and at times have followed another sense than that which the rabbis and grammarians of the Jews teach, we want to list here reasons for this and clarify this matter with several examples, in order that they may see that we proceeded to translate in this way, not out of ignorance of the languages, but knowingly and purposely.

"If we have departed at times from the grammarians and rabbis, no one should be surprised, for we have held to this rule: Where the words permit it and it gives a better understanding, there we haven't been compelled by the grammar formulated by the rabbis to accept a poorer or different understanding. For all schoolmasters teach that it isn't the sense which must serve and follow the words, but the words which must serve and follow the sense."

One example which Luther gives to illustrate this principle concerns his translation of Psalm 68:15. He says: "In the sixteenth [fifteenth in KJV] verse, accordingly, we could have followed the rabbis and translated thus: '*Der Berg Gottes ist ein Berg Basan,*' or '*ein fetter Berg*' (as we have previously translated it), but it is certainly better and more clear to say: '*ein fruchtbarer Berg,*' that is, in Christendom, which is God's mountain, that is, the Christians perform great works and wonders. For God's Word does not go forth empty, and a good tree brings forth good fruits. For in German we also call a good, fruitful land '*ein fett Land*' and '*eine Schmalzgrube,*' not that it is smeared with '*Schmalz*' [grease] or dripping with '*Fett*' [fat]. ...

"On the other hand, at times we translated very literally, even though we could have expressed it more clearly in a different way. We did this because of a certain emphasis that these words conveyed, as here in the nineteenth [eighteenth] verse: '*Du bist in die Netze gefahren, und hast das Gefangnis gefangen.*' Here it would

certainly have been good German to say: 'Du hast die gefangenen erlöst' [You have freed the captives], but this is too weak and does not give the fine, rich meaning which is in the Hebrew when it says: 'You have taken captivity captive.' These words imply not only that Christ has released the captives, but that He has also led away and taken captive captivity, that it never again can or shall take us captive, which amounts to an eternal redemption."

Luther realized that there would be those who would criticize his principles of translation. He answers them thus: "Without a doubt they will practice their cunning also in this, that we have extolled the rule of translating the words very literally in one place and giving only the sense in another. First of all they will act smart and wrangle about how we did not apply this rule correctly at the correct time, although they previously knew nothing at all about such a rule. But that's their type. When they hear something, they're right away more proficient at it than anyone else.

"I wish, when they would be so highly learned and would like to show their skill, that they would take the one very common word לָקַח and give me a good German translation of it. Fifty gulden I'll give to the person who translates that word into proper and correct German throughout Scripture. Let all the critics and wiseacres put all their skill together. They'll find out then that translating is a much different skill and work than to find fault with and to criticize another person's translation. If anyone doesn't like our translation, he can leave it alone. We serve our own people with it, and those who like it."³⁷

In the preface to the book of Job, printed in 1524, Luther states: "The language of this book is, perhaps, more masterly and splendid than any other book in all of Scripture. If therefore a person would translate it everywhere literally (as the Jews and foolish translators would have done), and not for the most part according to the sense, no one would be able to understand it — as, for example, when he says: 'the thirsty will drink up his goods,' meaning 'robbers shall take them from him'; or

'the children of pride have not gone therein,' that is 'the young lions that stalk proudly'; and many similar cases. Likewise by 'light' he means 'good fortune,' by 'darkness,' 'misfortune,' etc. ... We have worked diligently to produce a language clear and understandable to everyone, with unfalsified sense and understanding. We have nothing against it if someone can do a better job of it."³⁸

CHOICE OF VOCABULARY IN TRANSLATION

In addition to the many statements on this subject in the above quotations, the following excerpt from the *Daybook* is to the point: "One must speak then like people in the market speak. Therefore the textbooks, the philosophical and sententious, are hard to translate, while the historical are easy to translate. If I were to translate Moses now, I would certainly want to make him German, because I would want to take from him his Hebrew expressions, and indeed in such a way that no one would say, 'Moses is Hebrew.'"³⁹

MISCELLANEOUS RULES

The following excerpts are from Luther's *Table Talk*: "'When we translated the Bible into German,' Dr. Martin Luther said, 'I gave these rules to those who helped me: First, Holy Scripture speaks about divine works and matters; secondly, whenever a passage and meaning agrees with the New Testament, one accepts it; thirdly, that one pay attention to the grammar.' ... In translating I always held to this rule, not to violate the rules of grammar. Whoever rightly understands this realizes that the letters, not the intellect, give the correct sense."⁴⁰

MOTIVE FOR TRANSLATING

In the letter to Amsdorf referred to above, Luther states: "I hope that we will give our Germany a better translation than the Latin people have. It is a large and a worthy task, at which we all might work, since it is a public task and should be dedicated to the general welfare."⁴¹

The following beautiful passage from the "Open Letter on Translating" forms a fitting close to this discussion of Luther as a translator: "I can testify with a good conscience that I have exerted the utmost faithful-

ness and diligence in this [translating], and have never had any base motives. For I haven't taken a single penny for it, nor have I sought or earned any thereby. So I did not have my own honor in mind — God, my Lord, knows that — but I did it as a service to the dear Christians and to the honor of One who dwells above, who blesses me so richly every hour, that if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, yet I would not have deserved to live one hour or to have a healthy eye. All that I am and have is due to His grace and mercy, yea His precious blood and bitter sweat. Therefore, if God will, all of it should serve to His honor, with joy and from the heart."⁴²

C. Kuehne

NOTES

28. St. Louis Walch, XIX:978. Beyond any question, this "Open Letter" is Luther's most important discussion of the art of translation. As mentioned above, this writer has chosen to produce his own translations from Luther's German. Those who wish to read the entire letter in an English translation can consult the American Edition of Luther's Works, 35:181-202.
29. In Plass, p. 333.
30. St. Louis Walch, XV:2559.
31. St. Louis Walch, XV:1672.
32. St. Louis Walch, XIX:973, 977.
33. St. Louis Walch, XXII:1920.
34. St. Louis Walch, IV:130.
35. St. Louis Walch, XXII:1920.
36. St. Louis Walch, XIX:968-981.
37. St. Louis Walch, IV:125-137.
38. St. Louis Walch, XIV:19.
39. St. Louis Walch, XXII:1920.
40. St. Louis Walch, XXII:1545.
41. St. Louis Walch, XV:2559.
42. St. Louis Walch, XIX:977f.

LUTHER - THE EDUCATOR*

Education is a dominant issue in America today. The sad state of American public education has been and continues to be the focus of attention for Presidential commissions, congressional public meetings, and local school boards. For that reason alone it is proper that, as we commemorate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, we include a consideration of his views and work as an educator.

Luther's work as an educator can so easily be overlooked in a consideration of his life, for as is the habit of man, we tend to dwell on the heroic events in his life instead of the everyday work of his life. We view him somewhat in awe as God's courageous reformer standing before Emperor Charles V, risking life and limb for the truth, or as God's chosen preacher striding into the pulpit of the Castle Church in Wittenberg to calm the troubled populace during his stay in the Wartburg. We must remember, however, that Luther was in a position to reform the church by the grace of God, because he was an educator. He sat in the chair of Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg for a period of thirty-four years. He had sworn to uphold the truths of the Scriptures, and this he was determined to do. It was Luther as an educator who nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in 1517 with the hope that a scholarly debate would ensue. It was Luther as an educator who translated the Bible into German with the hope that such a translation would touch not only the lives of his students, but also those of the common people in Germany. It was Luther as an educator who helped lay the foundation for a new church through instruction of thousands of students over the years in Germany's first "Lutheran" university. Yes, Luther was an educator, and the purpose of this essay will be to explore some of his views on education. To explore them all would be impossible,

* The author of this article is Paul D. Nolting, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, White River, SD, and of Peace Lutheran Church, Mission, SD.

for the depth of Luther's views are as deep as Luther himself!

There are those who may question the merit of reviewing the thoughts of an educator born five hundred years ago. Have not the times and issues changed, and would not his views be terribly out-dated? It is the opinion of this writer that as we consider Luther's views on education we will find them surprisingly current and applicable in our day. While Luther had nothing to say about computers or modern mathematics, his common-sense approach to education makes his educational theory quite up-to-date! In addition, for those of us involved in Christian education, Luther's emphasis upon education not only for time but also for eternity will be most encouraging. One might say that we will find Luther to be an educator for all time — with an eye always on eternity!

THE SITUATION OF EDUCATION IN LUTHER'S DAY

The situation of education in Luther's day was, to say the least, deplorable. The

schools in existence prior to the Reformation were controlled by the Catholic Church and were staffed routinely by members of the monastic orders.¹ Some schools were organized and controlled by the various trade organizations. However, these very frequently obtained their teachers through the monastic orders as well and so were under the influence of the Catholic Church. This fact profoundly affected both the curriculum and the purpose of education. F. V. Painter comments, "According to the Catholic view, the principal end of education is, not to develop the native powers in the direction of an ideal manhood, but to make faithful and obedient members of the Church or subjects of the Pope."²

Luther recognized the danger of such a situation. He frequently criticized the existing schools and pointed out their drastic need of reform:

Indeed, what have men been learning till now in the universities and monasteries except to become asses, blockheads, and numbskulls? (LW 45:351)

The universities, too, need a good, thorough reforma-

tion. I must say that, no matter whom it annoys. Everything the papacy has instituted and ordered serves only to increase sin and error. ... What are they but places where loose living is practiced, where little is taught of the Holy Scriptures and Christian faith, and where only the blind, heathen Aristotle rules far more than Christ. ... I believe that there is no work more worthy of pope or emperor than a thorough reform of the universities. And on the other hand, nothing could be more devilish or disastrous than unreformed universities. (LW 44: 200,202)

Luther was so adamant in his desire for reform and believed the danger to students was so great that he claimed no education at all was better than the education offered in such schools:

It is perfectly true that if universities and monasteries were to continue as they have been in the past, and there were no other place available where youth could study and live, then I could wish that no boy would ever study at all, but just remain dumb. For it is my earnest purpose, prayer, and desire that these asses' stalls and devil's training centers should either sink into the abyss or be converted into Christian schools. (LW 45:352)

The latter solution proposed by Luther might appear to be the logical answer to the situation, but implementing such a solution was not easy in Luther's day. While the Catholic schools and their teachers were supported by generous benefices and endowments, the new Lutheran schools were not. The need for financial support for schools in Luther's day was critical. However, while increasing numbers of Luther's countrymen were being loosed from the captivity of the Catholic Church by the gospel, very few of these individuals felt inclined to loosen their purse strings in support of new schools which would protect that gospel. Luther frequently chided his fellow-Germans:

Now that he (citizen) is, by the grace of God, rid of such pillage and compulsory giving, he ought henceforth, out of gratitude to God and for his glo-

ry, to contribute a part of that amount toward schools for the training of the poor children. (LW 45:351)

If the Scriptures and learning disappear what will remain in the German lands but a disorderly and wild crowd of Tartars or Turks, indeed, a pigsty and mob of wild beasts?! ... And it will serve them right, because they are not willing to support and keep the honest, upright, virtuous school masters and teachers offered them by God to raise their children in the fear of God ... they will get in their place incompetent substitutes, ignorant louts such as they have had before, who at great cost and expense will teach the children nothing but how to be utter asses. ... This will be the reward of the great and shameful ingratitude into which the devil is so craftily leading them. (LW 46:217-218)

A man ought to be willing to crawl on his hands and knees to the ends of the earth to be able to invest his money so gloriously well. ... Shame, shame, and shame again upon our blind and despicable ingratitude that we should fail to see what extraordinary service we could render to God ... with just a little application of effort and our own money and property. (LW 46:228)

Luther was not content simply to rebuke those at fault. He took the cause of education to the authorities. In a private letter to Elector John in 1526, Luther made this appeal:

We must have schools and pastors and preachers. If the older people do not want them, they may go to the devil; but if the young people are neglected and are not trained, it is the fault of the rulers, and the land will be filled with wild, loose-living people. Thus not only God's command but our own necessity compels us to find some way out of the difficulty.³

In addition to these reasons, there were also sweeping changes in trade and commerce going on at that time which aggravated education still further. Columbus had

only recently discovered a whole new world. Silver had been discovered in the Harz Mountains of Saxony in the previous century, bringing prosperity and with it greater opportunities for both trade and commerce. If a child were not destined to enter one of the learned professions — law, medicine, or theology — it was considered a waste of time for that child to attend school. The child could gain practical experience on the job. A common expression of the times, "*Gelährte sind verkehrte*,"⁴ reveals the sentiment of all too many people in Luther's day.

THE VALUE LUTHER
PLACED ON EDUCATION

In sharp contrast to popular opinion, Luther always maintained the value of education and held in esteem those who were educators. He commented in his Table Talks:

In a city as much depends on a schoolmaster as on a minister. We can get along without burgomasters, princes, and noblemen, but we can't do without schools, for they must rule the world! (LW 54:404)

In addition, in his sermon on keeping children in school in 1530 he commented:

I will simply say briefly that a diligent and upright schoolmaster or teacher, or anyone who faithfully trains and teaches boys, can never be adequately rewarded or repaid with any amount of money. ... If I could leave the preaching office and my other duties, or had to do so, there is no other office I would rather have than that of schoolmaster or teacher of boys. (LW 46:252)

When people would argue that sending poor children to school was impractical and unnecessary, Luther had a ready answer:

You can serve your Lord, or your city better by training children than by building him castles and cities and gathering the treasures of the whole world; for what good does all that do if there are no learned, wise, and godly people? (LW 46:210)

It is obvious from the statement above that Luther considered education to be essential not only for the welfare of individual souls but also for the state. Such was in fact the case:

Now if (as we have assumed) there were no souls, and there were no need at all of schools and languages for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the establishment everywhere of the very best schools for both boys and girls, namely, that in order to maintain its temporal estate outwardly the world must have good and capable men and women. ... Therefore, it is a matter of properly educating and training our boys and girls. (LW 45:368)

Frequently it was argued that since the Bible was now translated into the German language, there was no further need for the study of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. Luther retorted with sarcasm:

Alas! I am only too well aware that we Germans must always be and remain brutes and stupid beasts, as the neighboring nations call us, epithets which we richly deserve. But I wonder why we never ask, "What is the use of silks, wine, and spices, and other foreign wares, when we ourselves have in Germany wine, grain, wool, flax, wood, and stone not only in quantities sufficient for our needs, but also of the best and choicest quality for our glory and ornament?" (LW 45:357-358)

Such should be sufficient to convince anyone of Luther's high regard for education.

THE PURPOSES LUTHER CITED FOR EDUCATION

The purpose of education for Luther was twofold. Education was intended to prepare the individual in order that he might use his potential in service both to his God and his fellow men. Luther accordingly stressed both the spiritual and secular sides of education. Unlike the Catholic educators of his day, who claimed that in order to please God one had to serve the church, Luther maintained that all callings in life were

the creation of God and pleasing to Him:

All estates and works of God are to be praised as highly as they can be, and none despised in favor of another. ... These ideas ought to be impressed particularly by the preachers on the people from their youth up, by schoolmasters on their boys, and by parents on their children, so that they may learn well what estates and offices are God's, ordained by God, so that once they know this they will not despise or ridicule or speak evil of any one of them but hold them all in high regard and honor. That will both please God and serve the cause of peace and unity, for God is a great lord and has many kinds of servants. (LW 46:246)

In his appeal "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany" in 1524 Luther outlined three specific spiritual purposes for maintaining Christian schools. His first was the need for fighting against the devil as our most subtle enemy:

If he (Satan) can hold them (children), and they grow up under him and remain his, who can take anything from him? He then maintains undisputed possession of the world. For if he is to be dealt a blow that really hurts, it must be done through young people who have come to maturity in the knowledge of God, and who spread His word and teach it to others. (LW 45:350)

Luther's second purpose was that we should not accept the grace of God in vain and neglect the time of salvation God has given us. Luther recognized the need for educating the masses in Christian doctrine and often-times waxed eloquent in his appeals:

O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's grace and word is like a passing shower or rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's

gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year. (LW 45:352)

Luther's third purpose was simply to comply with the specific injunctions of God to educate children. Luther accused all parents who failed to provide instruction for their children of sinning, and pointed out upon many occasions that the chief purpose of parental lives is the care of the young:

There is not a dumb animal which fails to care for its young and teach them what they need to know. ... What would it profit us to possess and perform everything else and be like pure saints, if we meanwhile neglected our chief purpose in life, namely, the care of the young? (LW 45:353)

While Luther consistently emphasized the need of education for the purpose of spiritual growth, he was also very much aware of the need of education for the secular world, as has been already mentioned. We therefore find Luther frequently referring to the temporal authorities in life, and the need of education to sustain them:

A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens. ... Since a city should and must have educated people, and since there is a universal dearth of them and complaint that they are nowhere to be found, we dare not wait until they grow up of themselves; neither can we carve them out of stone nor hew them out of wood. Nor will God perform miracles as long as men can solve their problems by means of the other gifts he has already granted them. Therefore, we must do our part and spare no labor or expense to produce and train such people ourselves.

(LW 45:356)

It is certain, then, that temporal authority is a creation and ordinance of God, and that for us men in this life it is a necessary office and estate which we can no more dispense with than we can dispense with life itself; since without such an office this life cannot continue. (LW 46:238)

Luther realized that without education man cannot properly exercise his reason and must then simply resort to force. This, Luther felt, would lead to utter chaos:

All experience proves this and in all the histories we find that force without reason or wisdom, has never once accomplished anything. (LW 46:238).

Thus we find Luther emphasizing the education of the whole man for service wherever the Lord might call him. Education was intended to prepare man both for time and eternity.

THE PRINCIPLES LUTHER ESPOUSED FOR EDUCATION

Out of necessity we will review only a few of the principles of education put forth

by Luther. We find them surprisingly modern. We would point out, first of all, that Luther believed that education should begin at an early age:

Is it not only right that every Christian man know the entire gospel by the age of nine or ten? Does he not derive his name and his life from the gospel? A spinner or a seamstress teaches her daughter her craft in her early years. (LW 44:206)

Luther, in a rather humorous way, reveals his reason why he stresses education at an early age in his "Sermon on Keeping Children in School" in 1530:

It is hard to make old dogs obedient and old rascals pious; yet that is the work at which the preacher must labor, and often in vain. Young saplings are more easily bent and trained, even though some may break in the process. (LW 46:253)

While Luther was not alone in advocating school at an early age, he was one of the few who recognized the need for training children on their own level. Luther would have been delighted with today's approach to kindergarten or such programs as Sesame Street:

Now since the young must always be hopping and skipping, or at least doing something that they enjoy, and since one cannot very well forbid this — nor would it be wise to forbid them everything — why then should we not set up such schools for them and introduce them to such studies? By the grace of God it is now possible for children to study with pleasure and in play languages, or other arts, or history. (LW 45:269)

Luther realized that educators had to descend to the level of their pupils if anything of substance was to be accomplished. This principle Luther applied not only to the classroom, but also to the worship service. In introducing the German Mass of 1526, Luther commented that in the worship service the basic truths of Christianity ought to be taught to children. He summarized the truths under two headings, or as it were, two "pouches" — faith and love. As the children memorized passages, Luther urged parents to have the children put those passages into the two "pouches" just as they would pennies. Some no doubt scoffed at such child's play. To such Luther addressed these words:

Let no one think himself too wise for such child's play. Christ, to train men, had to become man himself. If we wish to train children, we must become children with them. (LW 53:67)

Luther also realized that the key to retention of material on the part of students was simplicity of presentation and repetition. No doubt, one of the reasons Luther's Small Catechism has received such widespread use is its simplicity of expressing the essential truths of Christian doctrine. As for repetition, Luther recognized its importance even for himself:

As for myself, let me say that I am a doctor and a

preacher. I am as learned and experienced as any of those who are so presumptuous and confident. Yet I do as a child that is learning the Catechism. I read and repeat in the morning and whenever I have time, the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, etc. I daily read and study the Catechism, and still I am not able to master it as thoroughly as I wish. I must remain a child and a pupil of the Catechism, and this I do very willingly.⁵

Luther maintained that all children, boys and girls, ought to receive an education. In our day we take such a principle for granted; however, such was not the case in Luther's day. At that time most girls were excluded from education, their education being the household duties necessary for maintaining a home. Luther advocated formal training for girls:

And would to God that every town had a girls' school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel for an hour every day either in German or in Latin. (LW 44:206)

Luther understood that children differ and must be treated as individuals. He recognized that the talents and abilities of children vary. For extremely gifted children Luther urged a university training:

Moreover, even if the universities were diligent in Holy Scripture, we need not send everybody there as we do now, where their only concern is numbers and where everybody wants a doctor's degree. We should send only the most highly qualified students who have been well trained in the lower schools. (LW 44:206)

For children with lesser abilities, Luther maintained that each child should receive an education in accordance with his ability:

Other boys as well ought to study, even those of lesser ability. They ought at least to read, write, and understand Latin, for we need not only highly

learned doctors and masters of Holy Scripture, but also ordinary pastors ... for a good building we need not only hewn facings, but also backing stone. (LW 46:231)

For children destined to spend their lives in business or trade Luther suggested what today would be considered a work-studies or industrial arts program:

My idea is to have the boys attend such a school for one or two hours during the day, and spend the remainder of the time working at home, learning a trade, or doing whatever is expected of them. In this way, study and work will go hand-in-hand while the boys are young and able to do both. (LW 45:370)

It is interesting that long before there were any mandatory school attendance laws we find Luther advocating just such a thing. His logic is both interesting and sound:

I hold that it is the duty of the temporal authority to compel its subjects to keep their children in school, especially the promising ones we mentioned above. For it is truly the duty of the government to maintain the offices and estates that have been mentioned, so that there will always be preachers, jurists, pastors, writers, physicians, and schoolmasters, and the like, for we cannot do without them. If government can compel such of its subjects as are fit to military service to carry the pike and musket, man the ramparts, and do other kinds of work in time of war, how much more can it and should it compel its subjects to keep their children in school. (LW 46:256)

In Luther's day, as in our own, discipline within schools was a problem. However, the problem was somewhat reversed. In Luther's day discipline was frequently too severe, while in our day it is often-times too lax. It is well-known that Luther grew up in both home and school under rigorous discipline. Over the years Luther developed the "rod in one hand, with an apple in the other" approach to discipline. Such an approach is sound for

both teachers and parents in our day:

One shouldn't whip children too hard. My father once whipped me so severely that I ran away from him, and he was worried that he might not win me back again. I wouldn't like to strike my little Hans very much, lest he should become shy and hate me. I know nothing that would give me greater sorrow. God acts like this for he says, "I'll chastise you, my children, but through another — through Satan or the world — but if you cry out and run to me, I'll rescue you and raise you up again." For God doesn't want us to hate him. (LW 54:157)

One ought to observe reasonableness. If only cherries, apples, and the like are involved, such childish pranks ought not to be punished so severely; but if money, clothing, or coffers have been seized it is time to punish. My parents kept me under very strict discipline, even to the point of making me timid. For the sake of a mere nut my mother beat me until the blood flowed. By such strict discipline they finally forced me into the monastery; though they meant it heartily well, I was only made timid by it. They weren't able to keep a right balance between temperament and punishment. One must punish in such a way that the rod is accompanied by the apple. It's a bad thing if children and pupils lose their spirit on account of their parents and teachers. There have been bungling schoolmasters who spoiled many excellent talents by their rudeness. ... Whatever the method that's used, it ought to pay attention to the difference in aptitudes and teach in such a way that all children are treated with equal love.) (LW 54:235)

Luther was an extremely successful and popular teacher. Part of the reason for this was his understanding of human nature and his desire to build the confidence of his students through praise:

Some masters rate the proud youngsters to make them feel what they are, but I always praise the arguments of the boys, no matter how crude they are, for Mel-

anchthon's strict manner of overturning the poor fellows so quickly displeases me. Every one must rise by degrees, for no one can attain to excellency suddenly.⁶

THE SUBJECTS LUTHER
SUGGESTED FOR EDUCATION

Luther was first and foremost a child of God. When it came to the subject matter of education his first thoughts turned to the Scriptures:

Above all, in schools of whatever description, the chief and most common lesson should be the Scripture. ... Where the Holy Scriptures do not rule, I advise no one to send his child. Everything must perish where God's Word is not studied unceasingly.⁷

While Luther gave spiritual matters a high priority, we ought not to think that he downgraded other studies:

See to it in the first place that your children are instructed in spiritual things. Give them first to God, and then let them learn their secular duties.⁸

"As to classical culture in general, Luther held that it was good, too, for a theologian (and we can therefore infer, for others as well); that a man so trained was more efficient than a man without this training. 'One knife cuts better than another; therefore, a man who knows the languages, and has some attainments in the liberal arts, can speak and teach better and more distinctly.'"⁹

The standard fare for students in the lower schools in Luther's day was the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the quadrivium (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). Luther did not object to these subjects. In fact, he speaks quite glowingly of some of them, especially that of music:

We can mention only one point which experience confirms, namely, that next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. (LW 53:323)

THE MEANS LUTHER SUGGESTED FOR EDUCATION

The primary

means of education for Luther were, of course, good Christian schools and competent Christian teachers. This is evident as we have seen in the quotations already cited. At this point we will simply add one more — an appeal to German's councilmen:

My dear sirs, if we have to spend such large sums every year on guns, roads, bridges, dams, and countless similar items to insure the temporal peace and prosperity of a city, why should not much more be devoted to the poor neglected youth — at least enough to engage one or two competent men to teach school.
(LW 45:350)

In addition to these, however, we find Luther pursuing a variety of means of education. Principle among them is the use of the native language of German. The primary language used within schools up to Luther's day and even beyond was Latin. Luther, however, stressed the need for German, and promoted its use along with that of the classical languages. His major achievement in this area, of course, was the German Bible. Luther wanted people to understand God's Word and the teachings it proclaims. It was for this reason that he introduced German into the worship service. In 1523 he commented concerning a newly translated Order of Baptism:

I have come to the conclusion that it would not only be profitable, but also is necessary to administer this sacrament in the German language. And I have, therefore, begun to do in the German what was heretofore done in Latin, namely, to baptize in German, in order that the sponsors and others present may be stirred to greater faith and more earnest devotion, and that the priests who administer the baptism should show greater concern for the good of the hearers. (LW 53:101)

Perhaps Luther's greatest success in alternate methods of education came in the field of hymnology. The truths of the Bible were impressed upon the ears, lips, and hearts of countless Lutherans through the singing of hymns. "The first hymnal prepared under Luther's own auspices is the *Geistliche Gesangbuechlein*, edited by his

friend and musical advisor Johann Walter and published in Wittenberg in the late summer of the same year, 1524. It was intended for the choir, to familiarize them to the congregations. Luther's hymns were meant not to create a mood, but to convey a message. They were a confession of faith, not of personal feelings. That is why, in the manner of folk songs, they present their subject vividly and dramatically, but without the benefit of ornate language and other poetic refinements. They were written not to be read but to be sung by a whole congregation."¹⁰

It may seem somewhat surprising, but Luther also advocated public libraries as a primary means of educating the German populace:

No effort or expense should be spared to provide good libraries or book repositories, especially in the larger cities which can well afford it. For if the gospel and all the arts are to be preserved, they must be set down and held fast in books and writing. ... This is essential not only that those who are to be our spiritual and temporal leaders may have books to read and study, but also that the good books may be preserved and not lost, together with the arts and languages which we now have by the grace of God. (LW 45:373)

Luther, who was a practical man, also took the liberty to spell out for the German councilmen which books ought to be included in these public libraries. He was not in favor of indiscriminate book purchases. He suggested, first of all, Bibles and books dealing with the languages; then books written by the best poets and orators without regard to their religious persuasion; and finally he indicated a need for books on law and medicine, history and other arts.

CONCLUSION Education, as was mentioned in our introduction, is a topic of great concern today. It is our hope that the preceding essay will have served not only to introduce some of Luther's thoughts on education, but also to demonstrate the merit of considering Luther's views as we search for solutions to the problems of education today. We believe that Luther has much

to say to the educators of our day, both secular and Christian. He expresses himself very candidly, as has been demonstrated. His comments reveal a practical wisdom which can only be acquired through years of teaching experience in the classroom. We feel that they reveal a wisdom we need! While classrooms and classroom equipment have changed over the centuries, students and the ultimate goals of education have not. For this reason we hope that many of our readers will be stimulated to further study in Luther. It is necessary for educators in our day to recognize as did Luther the need for educating the whole man, both body and soul, for time and eternity. Luther was an educator! Let us sit at his feet, for he was an educator for all time — with an eye on eternity.

Paul D. Nolting

NOTES

1. For a more complete treatment of the various schools of the day see *Luther on Education* by F. V. N. Painter, pages 76ff.
2. Painter, p. 72.
3. Plass, Ewald, *This is Luther*, p. 306.
4. "The learned are daft!"
5. Luther, Martin, *Large Catechism*, p. 2.
6. Plass, p. 303.
7. Kohn, W., "Luther's Influence on Popular Education," *Four Hundred Years*, p. 215.
8. Kohn, p. 215.
9. Sihler, E. G., "Luther and the Classics," *Four Hundred Years*, p. 261.
10. Introduction to Hymns, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 197.



LUTHER - THE PREACHER

In the Preface of Dr. Elmer Kiessling's little book titled *The Early Sermons of Luther and their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon*, the author quoted an earlier statement that "There is no exhaustive treatise, even in German, on Luther's preaching ... a systematic research of this vast material is still a desideratum." When Kiessling got into his own research, he declared, he, too, considered a full-scale monograph on Luther as preacher to be too monumental a task to pursue, in view of the fact that the material available (over two thousand sermons) was too extensive.

John W. Doberstein, writing in his introduction to Volume 51 of the American Edition of Luther's Works, declares: "No full-scale monograph on Luther the preacher has yet been written in any language, though there are a number of important studies, both homiletical and hermeneutical, which have prepared the ground for such a monograph." Among the sources which he then cites is included the above-mentioned book by Kiessling. Doberstein continues: "The reason for this lack seems to be the formidable task of studying and analyzing Luther's sermons of which more than two thousand are to be found in the Weimar edition (though it, too, does not contain all of the sermons of which transcripts are available). As Emanuel Hirsch has said, 'Every Luther scholar knows that this requires years of labor.' Luther's preaching activity was tremendous by any standards since it was carried out in addition to his proper vocation of lecturing to students and his astonishing literary output."

Our purpose in this present article is to add to the words of celebration, commemoration and thanksgiving which have thus far been written in this year of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth. From the foregoing it is apparent that our comments on Luther as preacher will need to be more historical and concise than homiletical and extensive. It will be our purpose to praise the Lord for His gift to mankind of His servant Martin Luther, who in addition to his work as *Seelsorger*, translator, reformer, a man concerned with home and family, edu-

cator and hymn writer, was also a gifted and remarkable preacher — all by the grace of God!

It is the judgment of noted historians that Martin Luther was without question one of the greatest preachers who ever lived. E. G. Schwiebert, in his monumental *Luther and His Times*, states: "Although Luther had been reluctant to enter the ministry, he proved to be a naturally gifted preacher. Without exaggeration he may be called one of the greatest preachers of all time."

The well-known reluctance of Luther to become a doctor of theology and preacher was displayed by the young monk under a pear tree on the grounds of the Augustinian cloister at Wittenberg, in a conversation with John Staupitz. Staupitz was Luther's superior in the order, and, although Luther listed fifteen reasons why he should not become a preacher to his fellow monks, Staupitz insisted. Luther then complained: "Herr Staupitz, you are killing me. I won't be able to endure it for three months." To this Staupitz gave the somewhat wry answer: "In God's name, then. Our Lord has a far-flung empire and can use gifted people in heaven also."

As the young Luther (28 years old at the time) was well aware, it was one thing to be a monk and priest and quite another thing to be a preacher before a congregation. Although it was held in high honor to celebrate the Mass, nevertheless it required less training and men were admitted to these ritual functions of the priesthood at an earlier age than they might be admitted to the calling of a preacher. A certain Jerome Dungersheim stated in his *Manual of Homiletics*, published in 1514, that a clergyman ought to have received a good education and ought to be at least thirty years of age before being permitted to preach.

When Luther, therefore, was persuaded by Staupitz to accept the calling of preacher, he was well aware that much would be expected of him as he entered this most difficult and responsible calling. With the aid and help of God, Luther was able to fulfill the calling, not only with the many sermons that he himself preached, but also with his composition of the church postils, which have

been of great benefit to many who have followed Luther in this calling. Luther's influence as a preacher is well expressed by Schwiebert:

His mastery of the Bible, his originality and depth of thought, his dramatic yet simple form of expression, all enabled him to hold a congregation in the hollow of his hand. Throughout his lifetime people journeyed for miles to hear him preach. He seems to have possessed the unusual ability to express the most profound truths in an original and yet very simple manner so that even the man in the street grasped their meaning. His physical features, intellect, memory, voice, easy manner, and sincerity all contributed to the effectiveness of his preaching. At Wittenberg he might preach as many as three or four times a day, and each time the audiences crowded into the *Stadtkirche* to hear his powerful exposition of the Word of God. After Worms his reputation spread to all Germany, and clergymen everywhere were anxious to preach like Luther.

Of course, it was not that way in the beginning, as would be the case with anyone. Luther, as a novice preacher, no doubt had much to learn about the art of preaching. As in our own seminaries, budding theologians in Luther's day had much to learn. Their method of learning was also similar in many ways to our own: namely, to study and learn from preachers and sermons considered to be the best examples available.

There were, of course, the sermons of the apostles, as they are set down in sacred Scripture. But in Germany itself, according to Kiessling, "there were probably not more than half a dozen preachers whose names have come down to us, and every one of these leaned heavily upon the Greek and Latin fathers, not only for his sermonic material but for his sermons as well." Nevertheless, there had been a great deal of preaching, particularly of the missionary sermon, in the course of the spreading of the Gospel throughout Europe, which continued until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when it could be said that all Germany had become "Christianized." The so-called missionary sermon had as its aim to bring to the

hearer the essential message of salvation, unfortunately in many cases bringing the power of the church as the means of that salvation. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, there was also the development of sermons which had a somewhat wider purpose; for example, there were sermons which expounded upon the Bible stories with the purpose of increasing the hearers' knowledge of the contents of the Bible. There were also, especially during the period of the Crusades, sermons which attempted to rouse the hearers to an increased awareness of morality and Christian obligation. As Kiessling puts it, very succinctly, both the first and second crusades might be called "responses to preaching." The time of the crusades brought forth many traveling preachers who strove to arouse interest in the cities and villages of Germany in driving the infidel out of the Holy Land, and there was deep interest in the sermons presented by these individuals.

Preaching within the church of Rome received additional stimulus because of the development of the Albigensian and Waldensian movements during the twelfth century. Although their work was unauthorized and forbidden by the church, these sects had a number of lay-preachers who were very successful as far as having large numbers of hearers is concerned. As a result, the Catholic preaching orders trained talented individuals from the Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian ranks to prepare and deliver sermons. These individuals received special licenses from Rome to preach and were entitled to remarkable freedom in preaching when and where they pleased. The chief characteristic of these licensed preachers, as time went on, was the influence on them of scholasticism and mysticism. Scholasticism provided to sermonizing the form and outline (dividing into theme and parts, etc.) which it still has among us today, to a great extent at least. Mysticism provided a greater emotional approach and impact, necessary when the scholastic approach made sermons too formal and organized.

As the church of Rome entered the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, historical developments brought about further changes in preaching. Many of the elements of discontent resulting in the sixteenth century Reformation

were, of course, present and recognized long before the Reformation. Voices of criticism became so loud and powerful that the mendicant preachers of the various orders were not able to overcome them, try as they might. Throughout much of Christendom the preaching of Wycliffe and Huss demonstrated the discontent with the church of Rome that was present nearly everywhere. In Germany, moreover, discontent was to be found expressed in the sermons of such preachers as John of Wesel and Geiler of Kaisersberg.

Yet another aspect of the pre-Lutheran sermon ought to be discussed, though briefly. The type of Humanism which was spreading throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the northern part of Europe was of benefit to the methodology of preaching. "The Humanists aimed to eliminate formalism, excessive ornamentation, and the cramming together of disjointed and unedifying facts from the sermons of the time." Erasmus joined the ranks of those who fostered and supported these Humanistic ideals.

And so, as young Luther entered his career as a preacher, he had a rather lengthy and involved history of preaching to consider, as he began to develop his own ideas of good homiletics. After all, preaching and sermons were becoming so common that one Protestant scholar has stated that there never was a time in Germany when there was more preaching in the church than shortly before the Reformation! Many sermons were available in printed form and so could be thoroughly studied. For example, a study was made of preaching in Westphalia between 1378 and 1517 indicating the following: sermon collections of seventy known preachers; an equal number of anonymous collections; at least one hundred manuscript volumes of sermons; 10,000 different printed sermons; to say nothing of the manuscripts which came down from previous centuries and collections from neighboring provinces!

The rise of the preacher in the mendicant orders has been previously mentioned. It might be added that nearly all the extant sermons of the pre-Reformation era were the work of these mendicant friars. They were the professional preachers of their day, and some of them became

quite famous. Some of the best known, such as Geiler, were given the special assignment of "cathedral preacher" and were released from any other priestly duties. However, many of the sermons of the itinerant preachers are also extant. These individuals preached penance, heard confessions, and received money for their efforts. The practice became quite lucrative and therefore desirable. Simony was practiced, and, as Chaucer put it in his *Canterbury Tales*, these individuals "purchased their hunting grounds" from Rome.

It is of interest to know something about the typical sermons of Luther's time. First of all, what were the physical circumstances? During the fifteenth century the pulpit began to be placed in the nave of the church, whereas previously the preacher addressed the congregation from a lectern, called an *ambo*, placed behind the chancel rail. Attempts had been made to improve the acoustics, especially in cavernous cathedrals, usually by elevating the *ambo*, but these proved to be unsuccessful, simply because the speaker was so far removed from his audience. Eventually the lecterns were simply moved farther and farther out into the nave, and were at length made an integral part of the church design, being permanent fixtures, carved and beautifully ornamented, mounted on the side wall of the nave.

Much of the public preaching, of course, during the late Middle Ages was still done out-of-doors, probably in the market place, or the public square in front of the church or cathedral. The itinerant preacher would simply erect a portable pulpit, paying careful attention to the direction of the wind, ring bells to get the people's attention, and begin to preach. Both outdoors and indoors the people would usually sit down during the preaching, although chairs or benches were not generally furnished. In the chapels of the monasteries, where Luther began his preaching, it was customary that the preacher also would speak while sitting down.

Fifteenth century sermons usually lasted one hour. Dungersheim (previously cited) mentioned the *solita hora*. Of course, on occasion sermons might be shorter, but then also longer. It appears that the typical Good Friday ser-

mon, for example, went on for most of the day, beginning early in the morning and frequently lasting as long as nine hours, with some intermissions during which the people might come and go. The time of the preaching service would also vary. The usual time would be "either before, during, or after the chief mass of the day," which would ordinarily be at nine o'clock in the morning. Cloister preaching services, as Luther was first called to conduct, however, would usually take place early in the morning. When there were specially assigned preachers, such as Geiler, his preaching services were held in the afternoon. Quite frequently, when there would be cloister services as well as services in a local parish, or where there would be two or more parishes in a community, the service times would be arranged so that the people could attend all the services. There were, of course, many festival and feast days in the church year, so that there were many services held during the week days as well.

Thus, once Luther began to preach, his duties as preacher became ever more demanding. From 1522 to his death in 1546 he preached an average of seventy sermons a year. This average does not include many periods in his ministry for which transcripts of his sermons are missing. As Doberstein states, "The following samplings of the number of sermons preached in a year give a truer picture: 1522, 138; 1524, 100; 1528, 190; 1531, 180; ... 1538, 100." In speaking of his preaching during 1517, Luther himself declared: "Often I preached four sermons on one day. During a whole Lenten season I preached two sermons and lectured once each day in the early days when I was preaching on the Ten Commandments."

According to R. Cruel, writing in 1879 in his *Geschichte d. deutschen Predigt*, there were six types or classes of sermons in medieval times. These types were typical also in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Kiessling describes them as follows:

The first is the ancient homily in which a longer text was expounded verse by verse. It was dethroned by the scholastic method of outlining but not altogether displaced, for it survives even to this day. Cruel divided the scholastic method into

two major forms, which he called the textual and the thematic, depending on whether the outline was based directly on the text (like branches rising immediately from the roots) or on a theme deduced from the text (like branches rising from a trunk, which in its turn communicates with the roots). But each of these two he once more divided into two kinds. Thereby he arrived at the next four types of the medieval sermon.

The textual sermon might deal with a Scriptural passage or only with a short verse. Thus one can speak of a textual pericope and a textual verse sermon.

Far more numerous are the thematic sermons, subdivided into the doctrinal and the figurative (or emblematic) varieties. The first is nothing more than the well-known sermon with theme and parts, still perhaps the most widely used of all forms. In the emblematic outline the theme and its parts are replaced by an image and certain of its features. ... Like the pictures on the walls and in the windows of churches this picture sermon undoubtedly was well fitted to convey spiritual truths to the childlike mind of the medieval man.

The last chief type that Cruel presents might be called the unorganized, conglomerate type. Sur-gant included it among his five fundamental forms and said it was the one most widely used.

Medieval preachers liked colorful styles in sermon outlining. An outstanding example of this can be found in the so-called "number sermons." Names such as Jesus and Mary would be used as theme, according to numerical analyses of the names. For example, the name of Mary has three syllables (Maria) representing the Trinity. The five letters in the name represent the five virtues. If you multiply these two numbers you get fifteen, which is the number of the Psalms of Degree, etc. In addition, it was commonly understood that a fourfold sense lay behind every Scripture text. With this in mind, even the shortest text could be forced into very fascinating out-

lines!

Until 1521 Luther was very much under the influence of scholasticism and the homiletics in vogue during his day. The sermons which he delivered during the first ten years of his preaching demonstrate his attempts to make them adhere to the outline typical of the thematic style of sermon. He usually began with a statement of his theme, followed by a Scripture passage or a quotation from some church father. Luther customarily followed the pericopes in strict fashion; consequently his "proof passage" generally followed the Gospel selection for the particular Sunday. Next came a carefully worded proposition or statement called a *suppositio*, and this proposition, in turn, was carefully supported according to the rules of scholastic disputation. Many authorities were cited, and the entire sermon showed evidence of careful organization and outlining, with divisions and subdivisions all in their proper place. However, Luther's early sermons presented this difference: logic was preferred over the usual long-winded verbosity distinguishing many sermons of his day. He also cited the Scriptures as his authority in preference to the church fathers, usually limiting his use of authorities to brief references or the use of a hymn. In general, Luther's sermons demonstrate a simplicity of form and outline that is very refreshing. Doberstein adds: "The outline of these sermons is apparent; they do not require a chart to follow them, as is the case with many scholastic sermons."

Ewald Plass, writing in his *This is Luther*, gives some insight into the medieval character of Luther's early sermons. He writes that "They quite lacked the evangelical fire for which he subsequently became quite famous. Moreover, they were not free from that fanciful allegorizing which the Reformer so severely condemned in later years. Thus he once preached on the story of Solomon's reception of his mother in the throne room. In the deference the king showed Bathsheba upon that occasion by bowing to her and seating her at his right hand, the monk Luther told his auditors to see a type and prophecy of the honor and reverence Jesus was to accord His mother. These early sermons also contain much philosophizing and speculating about doctrinal and moral matters, quite in

the spirit of the monastic preachers of the day."

It is believed that a manuscript purportedly discovered in the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, declared to be in the Reformer's own handwriting, is a copy of Luther's first sermon, delivered either in 1510 or 1512, the dates of Luther's two visits to Erfurt. The text is Matt. 7:12. The introduction is very brief and is, evidently, quite typical of the medieval sermon and particularly typical of Luther: "This sermon will have three parts. First I shall say something which is noteworthy by way of introduction; secondly, I shall draw a useful conclusion for our own instruction; and thirdly, I shall answer some questions with regard to what has been said." He then proceeds, without deviation, to follow his outline in a very organized fashion and in great detail. There is throughout the sermon an extensive use of numbering his parts and subdivisions in order (Firstly, Secondly, Thirdly, etc.). He also follows a definite order and pattern in adducing his Scriptural and patristic proof passages.

Evidently, this first sermon was written down by the Reformer himself, if the evidence of the autograph manuscript is to be believed. However, most of Luther's sermons were not written down by the author himself. Many of the sermons which have been preserved were taken down by those who heard them and later published, although few were published during Luther's lifetime. Although somewhat rare, some of the editions of sermons that were published while Luther was still alive received the benefit of being edited by him. This, however, cannot be said of most of them. Many of the sermons that were published were questionable as to the reliability of the words used. Luther himself felt obliged to admonish printers to print his sermons only "if they have been prepared by my hand or previously printed here in Wittenberg at my behest." Well-known among the sermons prepared by Luther himself for print are those preached on the Ten Commandments in 1516 and 1517, as well as those preached on the Lord's Prayer in 1517.

Luther's first sermons delivered regularly to a lay audience began in 1514, and from then on to the very end

of his life he was an immensely popular preacher. We today can read his sermons with great enjoyment and edification, preserved for us as they are in three different classifications: first, those which were preserved in the original manuscript; secondly, those that appeared in contemporary printed editions; and thirdly, those that were never prepared for preaching, but were originally prepared for publication. We are also grateful for the *Kirchenpostille*, the church postils, which were prepared by the Reformer as preaching aids at a time when, as he observed, many preachers in the Reformation movement were poorly prepared for the task of proclaiming the Gospel and needed all the help they could get.

Quite a lot is known about Luther's sermon preparation and delivery, especially from 1521 on. Prior to that, judging from the available manuscripts, he may well have written his sermons out in advance, although it is also likely that he may have written them down after delivering them, at the request of friends and associates. Kiessling states: "... medieval preachers when they wanted to save the sermons that they had preached in the vernacular were wont to translate them into Latin afterward. ... We may therefore conclude that what we have of Luther's earliest preaching represents the sermons written in his study on Monday mornings, not the ones preached in the pulpit on Sundays."

In Luther's later sermons it seems evident that he did not work out his complete sermon before he delivered it. Rather, he worked out a *Konzept*, in Latin for the most part. A *Konzept* was a sort of outline of what he intended to say in his sermon; perhaps "summary" might be a better term to use to describe it. Some of them seem to be "mere listings of catch-words." Luther said of his sermon preparation: "In my sermons I try to take one theme or statement and stick to it and show the people so plainly that they can say: This was the sermon." When he was instructing his students, he advised them to work out well-prepared and well-structured outlines, but he himself did not work out his details in advance. He explained this by claiming that otherwise his sermons would be too long. And it is certainly true that Luther made no claim to brevity in his sermons! Luther always felt

that the best preparation in his sermons was the knowledge of the Word and will of God he had from his reading and studying. God will provide the *Konzept*. Luther once described how his own prepared *Konzepte* would "vanish into thin air" when he got into the pulpit and how he "involuntarily became the mouthpiece of a message he had not originally planned to utter." Kiessling points out that "A comparison of the extant sermon meditations with the delivered sermons for which they furnished the preparations shows that most of the time Luther on the pulpit departed from the lines of thought he had set for himself in his study."

Much is also known concerning external aspects of Luther's preaching. His physical appearance on the pulpit was always simplicity itself. In the early years, of course, being a monk, he naturally wore the cap and gown of a monk. It is reported that he continued doing this until 1524, at which time he began to wear a gown similar to the scholar's gown of the time, reaching down to just below the knee.

When Luther announced the text of his sermons, he did not recite it by heart, not because he was not able to memorize it or was afraid he might forget, but because of the example of Christ Himself. In Luke 4 it is written that Jesus read from the Scriptures.

Luther evidently spoke very slowly and distinctly in the pulpit. The word used to describe his delivery is "*tardilocus*." This, of course, was of great help to those who were taking down his sermons from dictation, but at times it also meant that his sermons were quite long. Even though his delivery was slow, there is no doubt but that his words and expressions were impassioned with fervor. It is commented: "That he often worked himself and his hearers up to a high pitch of excitement ... cannot be doubted. At least once his words had such an incendiary effect on certain persons among the audience that the whole service was disrupted and he had to stop preaching because of a turmoil."

Probably the most famous advice that Luther had for preachers was the oft-quoted expression: "*Steig flugs*

auf, tu's Maul auf, hoer bald auf!" He was against long-windedness, obviously, insisting that one should keep within the customary limits of sermon length, namely one hour. "If the preacher had nothing to say he ought to preach only a half or a quarter of an hour rather than to talk without saying anything." The story is told that Luther once walked out in the middle of a sermon delivered by Bugenhagen, who was known for his interminable sermons.

Regarding the homiletical character of Luther's sermons, it has previously been noted that until 1521 he generally followed the thematic style as developed by the scholastics. After 1521, however, Luther developed a different homiletical style. John Gerhard is quoted as calling Luther's style "heroic disorder." One authority (Doberstein) describes it in this way: "He begins at once with the main point and when his text or his time are used up he simply stops. His preaching is expository, not thematic or topical; instead of a theme the basis is a text of considerable length and the aim of the sermon is to help his hearers thoroughly to understand this text." Luther no longer began with a *suppositio*; rather he simply announced his text, made a reference to the last sermon he preached, reminded his hearers of the theological importance of the text or its pastoral implications. "Then in practically all of his sermons the further development follows the text verse by verse or deals with its parts in a simple, direct flow of speech. The inner coherence that holds the sermon together is that everything he says serves to expound and proclaim the text, always keeping in mind the basic thought and thrust of the text." This type of sermon approximates the older form of preaching called the homily, but with a difference. As Doberstein puts it, "he does not bind himself to treat the text exhaustively word by word, but moves freely, keeping to the important points ... in every sermon one is made aware of a definite point of view and, despite their seeming artlessness, they are unified in thought and mood."

The organization of Luther's later sermons was extremely simple. A favorite device employed by the Reformer was simply to begin each new section with "First-

ly, secondly, etc." Kiessling cites the "homiletical virtuoso of Puritanism" who is supposed to have announced: "And now to be brief, I will say, eighteenthly ..."! Evidently Luther never got that involved, but did reach "twelfthly" on at least one occasion, although his divisions were very short.

Luther was known far and wide as a great pulpit orator. His colleagues spoke and wrote of the great effect that Luther's sermons had on his hearers. One such incident occurred early in 1517 when Luther went to preach in the chapel of Duke George of Saxony. Luther preached with great fervor and persuasiveness on the certainty of salvation in Christ. One of the ladies-in-waiting on the Duchess remarked afterwards that she could die in peace if only she might hear another sermon like that one. It appears that most of Luther's hearers had reactions more like hers than that attributed to Duke George, a loyal Catholic, who is said to have declared that he would be willing to pay a large amount of money not to have heard the sermon at all!

Plass states of Luther's preaching that "His masterful handling of the language, his pointed, incisive manner of expressing old truths, his clear, conclusive way of presenting new ones, made him the most celebrated preacher of the day. ... His dead earnestness was the first trait by which one was impressed. To this day his sermons make impressive reading. But how unforgettable and irresistible they must have been when delivered by the lively and magnetic evangelist Luther himself, all aglow with the fervor of faith, while his searching eyes seemed to penetrate to one's very heart, and his ringing, challenging, pleading voice called one's soul to life and salvation!"

We cannot but regard Martin Luther as a gift of God to the world also in this, that he was a gifted and powerful preacher. Trained in medieval systems of homiletics, he was an innovator in the system he devised for his own use but was also a practical instructor in homiletics, through his *Kirchenpostille*, for those who followed him. The power that was his in the pulpit stemmed from his own God-given and Spirit-moved conviction of salvation through

the merits of Christ Jesus alone. Having been granted faith in his Savior, Luther was driven by his calling from God to proclaim the message of free grace until very near the end of his life. He preached his last sermon in Eisleben on February 15, 1546, just three days before his death. The text was Matthew 11:25-30. Applying the last three verses of the text, the gracious invitation of the Savior, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Luther wrote these words: "Let misfortune, sin, death, and whatever the devil and the world loads upon you assail and assault you, if only you remain confident and undismayed, waiting upon the Lord in faith, you have already won, you have already escaped death and far surpassed the devil and the world. ... Lo, this means that the wise of this world are rejected, that we may learn not to think ourselves wise and to put away from our eyes all great personages, indeed, to shut our eyes altogether, and cling only to Christ's Word and come to him, as he so lovingly invites us to do, and say: Thou alone art my beloved Lord and Master, I am thy disciple. ... This and much more might be said concerning this Gospel, but I am too weak and we shall let it go at that."

John Lau

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LUTHER ON PREACHERS AND PREACHING

(GLEANINGS FROM WHAT LUTHER SAYS, BY EWALD PLASS)

PREACHERS OF THE WORD ARE NECESSARY. I myself know people who think that we do not need any preachers or pastors and that we must put up with the clerics because of ancient usage and custom. They hold that the salary and expense annually devoted to them might well be used in other and better ways. They speak as though preachers were (as the man said) a *necessarium malum* (a necessary evil). Especially the noblemen and some wiseacres say: After all, we have books from which we can read the message just as well as we hear it from the clerics in the church. The devil, who has taken possession of you, moves you to say this about your reading. If our Lord God had known that the ministry is unnecessary, He would certainly have been wise and prudent enough not to have Moses preach to you. Moreover, according to your godless, devilish, foolish thinking and speaking, there would have been no need for God to ordain the Levitical priesthood later on and always to send our prophets, as He Himself says He did (Matt. 23:34). He would no doubt also at this time bid preachers and pastors stay at home. Nor would He have deemed it necessary to command parents diligently to teach the Word and not to neglect it. God knows very well what we lack.

TEN VIRTUES A PREACHER SHOULD HAVE. To begin with, he must be apt to teach; (2) he should have a good head; (3) be eloquent; (4) should have a good voice; (5) a good memory; (6) should know how to stop; (7) should be industrious in his work; (8) should hazard life and limb in his work; (9) should let himself be plagued by everybody. Finally, he should patiently bear the fact that nothing is seen more easily and quickly in preachers than their faults. A preacher who has a hundred virtues obscures all with one fault. Dr. Jonas has all the virtues of a good preacher, but people cannot overlook the fact that the good man clears his throat so frequently.

THE PREACHER'S AND GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY. Let our respon-

sibility be merely to speak in accordance with the Word; let it be God's responsibility to grant the success and the increase. ... Therefore, putting aside the foolish confidence as though we had some ability to help the Word along in the hearer, let us rather engage in the prayer that without us He alone may perfect in the hearer what He speaks in the teacher. For it is He who speaks, and it is He who hears and works all in all people. We are His vessels and instruments, powerless either to receive or to give unless He Himself gives and receives.

GOD IS SPEAKING IN THE PREACHED WORD. Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? The minister? No indeed! You do not hear the minister. True, the voice is his; but my God is speaking the Word which he preaches or speaks. Therefore I should honor the Word of God that I may become a good pupil of the Word.

CHURCHES THAT ARE DENS OF DEATH. Where the Word of God is not taught, there is no life; there is death. For where human doctrine is taught instead of the Word of God ... you have a temple that is a veritable murderers' den. If we believed this, we would flee from a church where the Word is not preached as from a haunt of crime, because one preacher has as many as a few thousand hearers. These he infects; and he kills them all. What is the most horrible haunt of crime, where a hundred people are killed every year, in comparison with such a church? ... Therefore nothing is to be more carefully avoided than a false preacher.

RATHER PREACH "TOO MUCH GOSPEL." If you preach faith, people become lax, want to do no good, serve and help no one. But if you do not preach faith, hearts become frightened and dejected and establish one idolatrous practice after another. Do as you please; nothing seems to help. Yet faith in Christ should and must be preached, no matter what happens. I would much rather hear people say of me that I preach too sweetly and that my sermon hinders people in doing good works (although it does not do so) than not preach faith in Christ at all; for then there would be no help for timid, frightened consciences.



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