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Practicing what he preached : how Martin Luther lived out his "universal priesthood of all believers"

David C. Mayes

PRACTICING WHAT HE PREACHED:
HOW MARTIN LUTHER LIVED OUT HIS
"UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS"

by

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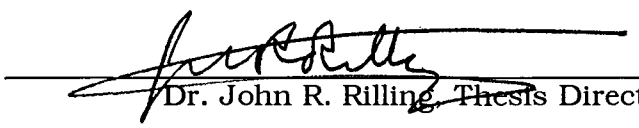
I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.



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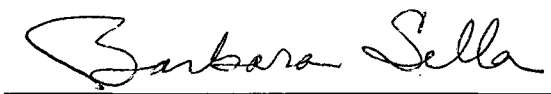

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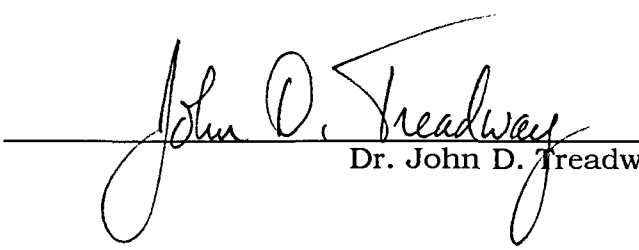

Dr. John D. Treadway

THESIS ABSTRACT

THESIS TITLE:	Practicing What He Preached: How Martin Luther Lived Out His "Universal Priesthood of All Believers"
AUTHOR:	David Christopher Mayes
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When Martin Luther entered the monastery in 1505 as an Augustinian monk, he left the corrupted, inherently less-spiritual "world" for the religiously-oriented, celibate life in a cloister—the highest, most holy road one could take as a Christian. After a number of years he discovered that he was no more certain about his salvation or God's acceptance of him than the day he had become a monk. The only way to please God came through faith, which a farmer or housewife could have as equally as a monk or a nun. Therefore, he left the monastery to return to the world and championed the cause of the married "commoners," whom, he declared, were no less holy or pleasing to God than the thousands of monks, nuns, and priests who filled Europe's churches and cloisters. Luther accomplished this through his writings, his preachings, and especially his lifestyle as he married a former nun, Katherina von Bora, raised children, and managed a home.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

Bainton, *Here I Stand*	Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. New York: Mentor, 1977.
Harrington, *Reordering*	Harrington, Joel. *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
LD	Luther, Martin. *Luther Deutsch: Die Werke Luthers in Auswahl.* 11 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991.
LW	Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works.* 55 vols. eds. Helmut T. Lehmann, Jaroslav Pelikan. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.
Oberman, *Luther*	Oberman, Heiko Augustinus. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil.* New York: Image Books, 1992.
SML	*Sermons of Martin Luther*, 8 vols. ed. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983.
TT	Luther, Martin. *Three Treatises.* (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, The Freedom of a Christian*). trans. Charles M. Jacobs, A. T. W. Steinhäuser, W. A. Lambert, revised by James Atkinson, Frederick C. Ahrens, Abdel Ross Wentz, Harold J. Grimm. Muhlenberg, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1970.

FOREWORD

In the summer of 1530, Martin Luther spent several months in the city of Coburg, about a five days journey from his hometown of Wittenberg. When he could be found in such locales, he was usually directly or indirectly involved in some kind of religious council that decided on theological issues, and this occasion was no exception.

In early June of that year Luther learned of his father's death, and along with the general discontent of being away from his family, the reports of strained relations during the council's meetings, and the approaching hotter weather, Luther took the liberty to divert his attention to more pleasant things. At some point on the day of June 19, his thoughts turned to his four-year-old son John (also called Hänschen or Hans), and so Luther sat down to write him a letter:

> Grace and peace in Christ! My beloved son, I am pleased to learn that you are doing well in your studies, and that you are praying diligently. Continue to do so, my son, [and] when I return home I shall bring you a nice present from the fair.
>
> I know of a pretty, beautiful, [and] cheerful garden where there are many children wearing little golden coats. [They] pick up fine apples, pears, cherries, [and] yellow and blue plums under the trees; they sing, jump, and are merry. They also have nice ponies with golden reins and silver saddles. I asked the owner of the garden whose children they were. He replied: "These are the children who like to pray, study, and be good." Then I said: "Dear sir, I also have a son, whose name is Hänschen Luther. Might he not also [be permitted] to enter the garden, so that he too could eat such fine apples and pears, and ride on these pretty ponies, and play with these children?"
>
> Then the man answered: "If he too likes to pray, study and be good, he too may enter the garden. . . . And he showed me there a lovely lawn in the garden, all prepared for dancing, where many gold whistles and drums and fine silver crossbows were hanging. But it was still so early [in the morning] that the children had not yet eaten; therefore I couldn't wait for the dancing. So I said to the man: "Dear sir, I shall hurry away and write about all this to my dear son Hänschen so that he will certainly study hard, pray diligently, and be good in order that he too may get into this garden."[1]

This "garden" was, of course, an allegory of heaven, and as for the "present from the fair," Luther may well have remembered to buy it. But if he

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[1] *LW* 49, 323-34.

failed to, or if he forgot to during any of the times he traveled, he would write back to his wife, Katherina, and remind her to have something ready to give the children just in case.

And this is a side of Martin Luther that a contemporary of his could observe for some twenty years. He lived a total of sixty-three years: twenty-two as a youth and student, twenty as a monk and highly public figure, and twenty-one as a husband and father. Oddly enough, it is this final third that authors so commonly neglect. Roland Bainton, one of this century's greatest scholars on Luther and the Reformation, claimed that

> [t]he last sixteen years of Luther's life, from the Augsburg Confession in 1530 to his death in 1546, are commonly treated more cursorily by biographers than the earlier period, if indeed they are not omitted altogether. There is a measure of justification for this comparative neglect because the last quarter of Luther's life was neither determinative for his ideas nor crucial for his achievements.[2]

Granted, Bainton's general objective in his book was something other than discussing in-depth the details of Luther's marriage and family. But if we determine the man's "achievements" to be defined by his publications and participation in Church council's, then our parameters are rather narrow when it comes to the value of a person. We lose so much of our understanding of Luther if our interest in him drops off sometime around 1525-1530. Does it seem possible Luther would agree with Bainton that, in essence, his writings and public appearances were of more importance to him than raising his sons or comforting his family after the loss of two daughters?

The span of this paper covers most of Luther's life and addresses a fairly wide range of topics. The theme is to trace Luther's transforming concept of the so-called sinful "world" as well as that of the holy life inside the walls of the Church; and to watch him subsequently declare and live out his

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[2] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 292.

message "The Universal Priesthood of All Believers" as he expressed it in so many ways for so many years. The culmination and completion of this life's work occurred from the day of his marriage to that of his death.

This paper is by no means meant to be revolutionary, but to refresh our memory—to look at Luther from a perspective seldom considered.

The best way to accomplish this is to examine the available evidence, especially primary sources. The published writings of Martin Luther are staggering in sheer quantity; therefore, due to time constraints and the sake of efficiency, I have selected only those that pertained directly to this thesis. Unfortunately, this means that some potentially helpful sources were left unused. Also, for the basis of their study accomplished authorities on Luther use the German publication of Luther's writings, commonly referred to as the *Weimar Ausgabe*. My own proficiency in German is limited, so I naturally gravitated to the English translation—*Luther's Works*. As to the German sources of Luther's writings that I did use, I opted for my personal copy of *Luther Deutsch*, an eleven-volume set that includes many of Luther's most important publications. All of the translations are my own.

As to the secondary sources, there, too, can one find more material than one has time to read. Again, I tried to find only those that related to the subject matter.

A special thanks goes to my thesis director, Dr. John Rilling. The thorough training in Reformation history and guidance during the research and writing of this thesis that I received from him were irreplaceable towards the completion of this project. To Dr. Barbara Sella I also extend my gratitude for her especially keen analysis of the draft of this paper. The several conversations we had on this topic over the course of the year allowed me to consider

thoughtfully many aspects which I had previously overlooked. And to Dr. John Treadway I am, as always, very grateful for his commitment to the betterment of my education. Among the many things I could say, my capability of handling and translating the German texts would not have been possible without his continual urging that I acquire proficiency in foreign languages.

For their careful reading of the text and many helpful corrections and suggestions I am indebted to Chris Deroco and my brother, Rick Mayes. Their contributions substantially improved the thesis in ways too numerous to mention.

David Mayes

Richmond, Virginia
May 1994

INTRODUCTION

In her historical novel about the life of Martin Luther, Elizabeth Rundle Charles described an event in the Great Reformer's life that would have occurred around the year 1498:

> At Magdeburg, also, Martin saw the picture of which he has often told us. "A great ship was painted, meant to signify the church, wherein there was no layman, not even a king or prince. There were none but the pope with his cardinals and bishops in the prow, with the Holy Ghost hovering over them, the priests and monks with their oars at the side; and thus they were sailing on heavenward. The laymen were swimming along in the water around the ship. Some of them were drowning. Some were drawing themselves up to the ship by means of ropes, which the monks, moved with pity, and making over their own good works, did cast out to them to keep them from drowning and to enable them to cleave to the vessel and to go with the others to heaven. There was no pope, nor cardinal, nor bishop, nor priest, nor monk in the water, but laymen only."[1]

There is no historical account of this picture, nor did Luther ever mention having seen it. But the description could hardly portray a more accurate image as to what he believed about the clergy and laymen; that is, when he entered the monastery. Luther took the monastic vows with the hope of at least being one of the oarsmen of this ship. Many others had done likewise, striving to achieve a more holy existence.

But by 1517, if not earlier, Luther believed that an unscriptural, hierarchical system existed within Christianity. He defined this system in a very simple manner: because of their position and lifestyle, the monks, nuns, priests, and all other ranking members of the Church inherently assumed a higher degree of spirituality than did the laymen.

For the remainder of his twenty-nine years Luther repeatedly wrote and preached against this destructive force that not only ruined the religion of the laity, but also of the clergy. Virtually no individual, Luther believed, lived

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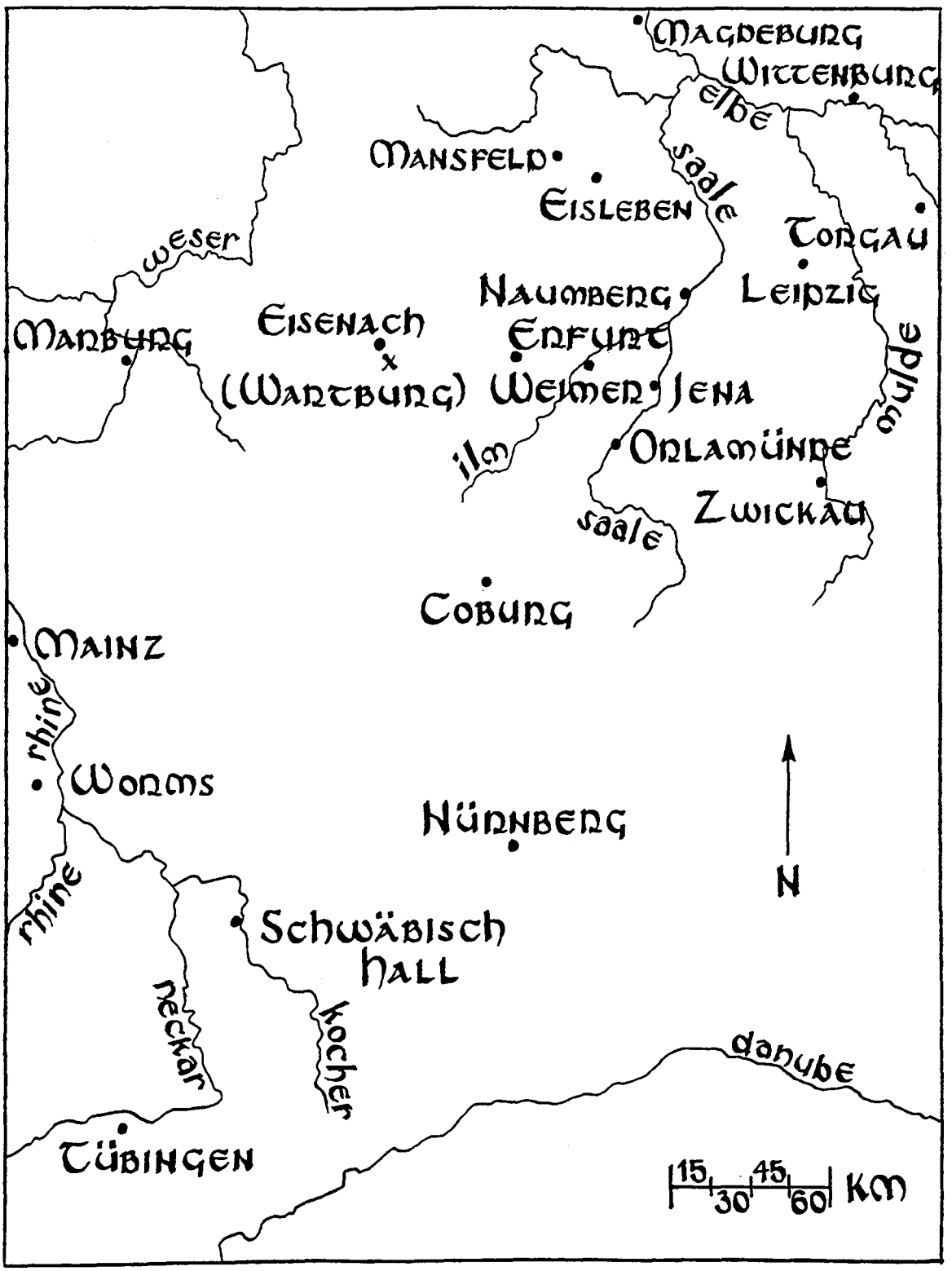
[1] Elizabeth Rundle Charles, *Luther: By Those Who Knew Him* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 27.

unaffected by it, if for no other reason than that the Church's power of influence extended inside every home of Europe.

His ultimate message was that if one wanted to compare Christianity to a ship, then one must know that all Christians—whether monk or farmer, nun or housewife—were granted a place on board, and no one place was better than another. Moreover, a ride aboard this ship of grace came only by way of faith. Good works in and of themselves played no part in acquiring passage on the ship or securing stay aboard it.

As Luther was to discover, calling for the destruction of the hierarchical system was one thing; leading the people by way of example was something entirely different. It would require a commitment that he could not possibly conceive of when he was a law student. The young Martin Luther had no idea of the life that lay just ahead of him.

The Land of Luther



PART I

LIFE OUTSIDE THE WALLS

It was fear for his salvation that had driven [Luther]. He wanted to achieve eternal life and was filled with "fear and trembling." He was not converted from Saul to Paul but from the world to the monastery.[2]

- Heiko Oberman

Martin Luther's decision to enter a monastery in Erfurt is profoundly important. It is essential for our understanding of Luther in both his younger and older years as well as our understanding of the Church, the life of communities, and the relation between the two. Furthermore, it is fundamental if we are to comprehend the mindset of a typical, sixteenth-century European, because although Luther will always be remembered as an extraordinary person, his background and upbringing were not exceptional for the times. Luther's decision and what we can learn from it goes far beyond the immediate implications it had for his life. In this decision we find a reflection of what people believed in sixteenth-century Europe—about themselves, about the Church, and about God.

Luther came to the point of his spiritual crossroads in the summer of 1505. Up to this time he had been rather successful as a student, acquiring his Masters at the University of Erfurt in February 1505 and showing every indication that he would fulfill his father's high expectations for him. Luther was gifted in music, sociable and friendly to the people around him, and motivated to develop his many talents. He was not particularly religious and had not been raised with the primary intention of becoming a deeply spiritual man. Instead, his father, Hans Luther, expected him to become a prominent

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[2] Oberman, *Luther*, 127.

lawyer and marry into a respectable, wealthy family. Martin had adopted these goals as his own.

The events that confronted Luther in the summer of 1505 have been well-discussed by other writers. He had recently happened upon a Latin copy of the Bible, which he immediately poured over with an intense interest. A friend of his had been murdered, and the ever-recurring yet wholly unpredictable plague had swept through the region, bringing death to many. Most dramatic of all, he was trapped in the famous storm on his return to Erfurt, where the lightening danced all around him until, in total desperation and helplessness, he cried out to St. Anne, "Help me! I will become a monk."

At the heart of his response to these events lies the historian's treasure because Luther is a window through which we can see his world. The obvious questions must be asked: Why, at the moment when death was at his door, did he pledge himself to monasticism? Why monasticism? What led him to think that God demanded life-long service in the Church? Why did he not simply promise to live a better life? Why did he not cry out "Help me! I will give you my soul!"? And why was his cry directed to St. Anne? If the Church's presence was felt at all levels of society and played a major role in what the "commoners" believed, then what teachings and message was the Church sending out? What, in short, was Luther's motivation?

Many authors have postulated their theories on this matter, the first being Luther himself. His answers are, in fact, somewhat ambiguous since he never really addressed the issue at length, but there are scattered references he made on the subject. Some of the more often quoted regard his childhood experiences:

> My parents kept me under very strict discipline, even to the point of making me timid. For [stealing] 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.[3]

On a different occasion he said, "My father once whipped me so that I ran away and felt ugly toward him until he was at pains to win me back."[4]

Erik Erikson offered a possible solution to the question in his book *Young Man Luther*, and based some of his conclusions on these statements made by Luther. As part of his psychological analysis he described how Luther held to the conviction "that it was God who made him go into the monastery," but then Erikson proceeded to argue that entering a monastery was the beginning of Luther's effort to gratify his ego and find his identity.[5] Also, Erikson concluded, Luther's suffering at the hands his parents resulted in a strong desire for independence from his father, if only to be supplanted by obedience to God. The ultimate answer, then, according to Erikson, inevitably lies somewhere outside of any spiritual strivings and can be found principally in psychotic pressures.

Roland Bainton took umbrage with Erikson's arguments, saying that "[i]f this was the motivation one wonders why the emancipation did not occasion relief instead of the most intense suffering. . . . Can one say . . . that Luther was struggling simply for the satisfaction of his ego by taking a course which bade fair to end in speedy martyrdom?"[6] Bainton also discounted any claims

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[3] *LW* 54, 235.

[4] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 17.

[5] Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958), 67ff.

[6] Roland H. Bainton, *Studies on the Reformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 88-89.

that Luther was driven to the monk's cowl by too severe discipline at home, stating that such arguments are misleading.[7]

Rather, Luther's motivation was no different from the countless others who went behind the walls of Europe's monasteries. "The opinion was popular," wrote Bainton, "that if the monk should sin thereafter, he was peculiarly privileged because in his case repentance would bring restoration to the state of innocence. Monasticism was the way par excellence to heaven. Luther knew . . . this. Any lad with eyes in his head understood what monasticism was all about."[8] It is interesting, Bainton continued, that "[t]he man who was later to revolt against monasticism became a monk for exactly the same reason as thousands of others, namely, in order to save his soul."[9] Certainly, one might claim that Luther pledged himself to monasticism because of selfish reasons. Lay hold of salvation? Find peace for the soul? What individual did not want such things? Yet to blame Luther for entering monasticism for the wrong or selfish reasons seems to overlook a glaring reality of his day.

Already fixated in Luther's mind on the day of the lightening storm, in words that had been spoken in the Church and reverberated throughout the community, was the belief that those in the cloisters could be more certain about their soul's safety than any other member of society. The message, then, that Luther had long since heard went something like this: those who wished to commit their lives entirely to God must exit their secular lives and enter the strict life of a religiously-devoted clergyman.

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[7] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 17.

[8] Ibid., 24.

[9] Ibid., 25.

For Luther this meant leaving his career in law and joining one of the monastic orders. His subsequent decision to do so was perfectly natural, for, as Professor Heiko Oberman described, "Luther's vows corresponded with the religious climate of the time and did fit in the ideals he had been reared with at home, school, and church."[10] True, the decision always remained in Luther's power. He had to weigh every factor and take responsibility for the path he would ultimately choose. Luther, however, was responding to this spiritual "climate" and would have just as surely isolated himself in some distant mountainous cave or remained in the "world" if he believed that this manner of living would please God the most and assure him of salvation.

The ideal, however, was monasticism. Therefore, Luther had only one option. "How many do you think would have said the vow," Luther wrote, reflecting on his monastic experience,

> had they known that they would acquire neither righteousness nor salvation through this vow? Therefore almost all [of them] have this enslaved conscience in one way or another; even more, they vow for this very reason, in the hope that by so doing they will be pleasing to God and become righteous and be saved. . . . I took the vow not for the sake of my belly but for the sake of my salvation.[11]

"Luther had gone the way of Europe's highest and most subtle religion of conscience," wrote Oberman, "the way of the 'religious,' as monks were called."[12]

There is a second reason for Luther's decision to become a monk. His "yes" to the Augustinians at the same time meant a "no" to the world outside the walls, the world to which he belonged. At one point in his book Oberman momentarily disregarded the idea of the monastery as being a "sanctuary of

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[10] Oberman, *Luther*, 93.

[11] *LW* 48, 300. *LW* 54, 338.

[12] Oberman, *Luther*, 129.

strict morals to protect [Luther] from the immorality of the world outside."[13] Oberman did this to emphasize what he believes to be the more important issue—Luther's longing for the grace of a "merciful God." This assessment is correct in so much as Luther would not rest until he knew he was eternally pardoned.

Nevertheless, the importance of Luther's opinion of the "world," and how the Church had defined the "world" in such a negative connotation should never be de-emphasized. The main reason why Luther and many other monks and nuns were inside the monastic walls resulted from the belief that salvation, purity, and holiness were all unattainable if one remained outside the monastic walls. One's religion in the world could never measure up to that of one living inside the walls. The spirituality of the saints and life in the world had become mutually exclusive.

Therefore, "[t]he meaning of Luther's entry into the monastery," wrote Bainton,

> is simply this, that the great revolt against the medieval Church arose from a desperate attempt to follow the way by her prescribed. . . . From beginning to end the only secure course was to lay hold of every help the Church had to offer: sacraments, pilgrimages, indulgences, the intercession of the saints. . . . [W]hat better could he do than take the cowl?[14]

LIFE INSIDE THE WALLS

. . . the people sought to be good by means of their own works, and thereby deliver themselves from sin. But it did no good, we only became more and more discouraged by sin and death, so that there were no more discouraged people to be found on earth than just the priests, the monks, the nuns, and those who go about with their good works.[15]

-Luther

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[13] Ibid., 127.

[14] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 22-23.

[15] *SML*, vol. 5 & 6, 337.

This is the sickness unto death which Luther uncovered: we cling to our achievements and cannot shake the need to prove ourselves before God and man, in life and in death.[16]

- Heiko Oberman

This was the fault of monasticism—trying to be saints without being in the world.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1943

Once Martin Luther reached the other side of the walls he discovered that monasticism had levels within itself. Therefore, he again set his sights on perfectionism, because, as Oberman wrote, according to the "conviction held throughout the Middle Ages . . . only by striving for perfection could one even hope to exist before God."[17]

Luther's time as a monk was a torturous nightmare. He never relented from his agonizing pursuit of holiness, never failed to do any of the required tasks, and, therefore, never achieved the peaceful rest for his soul. Such things as the regular confessionals did not provide the anticipated release of spiritual burdens, but a magnification of the hidden desperation—the assurance of God's forgiveness forever stood beyond his reach. Oberman stated that

> [Luther's] experiences are rooted in a fundamental form of spiritual temptation: is my penitence in the confessional great enough to permit me to receive absolution, forgiveness of sins? Confessional scruples were such a widespread problem in the Middle Ages that a number of handbooks and guides dealing with scrupulosity and giving instructions on how to deal with the affliction appeared on the market.[18]

Luther was certainly not the exception to this rule, rather the supreme example of it. After having done penance the same uncertainties and anxieties remained anchored in his heart just as they did before he began.

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16 Oberman, *Luther*, 324.

17 Ibid., 137.

18 Ibid., 177.

Why? What is that haunted him? Every biographer of Luther has mentioned the turbulent life he led in the Augustinian monastery and none more so than Luther himself. What was his ultimate objective?

As noted earlier, Oberman suggested that it was to "find the merciful God."

> Luther did not seek the monastery as a place of meditation and study to exercise a faith he had once lacked. Nor was he looking for a sanctuary of strict morals to protect him from the immorality of the world outside. He was driven by his desire to find the merciful God. And that was precisely what the order demanded of the candidate for admission, as the liturgical formula makes clear. Searching for the merciful God was a crucial part of the monastic life.[19]

But a closer examination at the terms reveals that Oberman's analysis is unconvincing. By Luther's time, the idea of "searching for a merciful God" and, at the same time, choosing to live as a monk would have been a contradiction. Oberman, as Luther himself confessed, described a monk's life as a search, one which required perseverance to the end, one that is characterized by activity, praying to saints and to Mary, and "directing all his strength to the ultimate goal."[20] Yet the word "merciful" therefore becomes grossly misleading because "mercy" connotes unmerited favor.

Oberman's conclusion presupposes a couple of things. First, that Luther understood his need for mercy, meaning that he had seen both his sinful heart as well as his inability to rid himself of the sin. Second, that Luther believed God to be capable of showing mercy. But Luther did not know either of these. Instead, God was the omnipotent, exacting, holy and righteous Christ seated on the throne of this world's court of judgment.[21]

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[19] Ibid., 127.

[20] Ibid., 128.

[21] See Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 22, 44.

The Augustinian "liturgical formula," as Oberman described it, may have *defined* a monk's goal as finding the merciful God, but Luther never once understood God in this manner nor believed that he would find the merciful God at the end of his road as a monk. And as to dealing with his sin, Luther obviously believed that he could personally rectify his fallen nature because, for him, monasticism was a means by which to attain salvation. The "search for the merciful God" simply does not fit; neither is it what Luther had in mind.

Instead, he exerted all of his strength towards one purpose: to appease God of his wrathful judgment. He never intended to be granted God's mercy because he did not know God to be merciful, meaning Luther never understood God to be a compassionate Father. Nor did Luther ever aim to have faith. A merciful God and a soul-saving faith were things that Luther discovered only after years and years of toil. Before then they did not exist in his mind as an option or reality.

Early on, Luther fled in horror at even the mere thought of having to stand before God without an intercessor. He wanted to be pardoned eternally, but to do so without having to confront God, or be confronted, directly. In his later years Luther said that at some point in the Church's history God had ceased to be known as gracious and merciful. The need for intercessors between man and Christ thereafter arose, and the Church filled this gap with the Virgin Mary and the saints. "We were taught," he wrote in a 1531 letter,

> to rely on our own works and the holiness of the monks, and to consider this only comfort of ours, our Savior, not as a comforter but as a severe judge and tyrant, so that we had to flee from him to Mary and the saints, and not expect of him any grace or comfort. . . . [T]hey told us to look to the saints in heaven who should be the mediators between Christ and us; and they taught us to pray to the dear mother of Christ and reminded us of the breasts which she had given to her son so that she might ask him to go easy with his wrath toward us, and make sure of his grace. . . . But now we know . . . that Jesus Christ is our mediator, our throne of grace, and our bishop before God in heaven, who daily intercedes for us and reconciles all who believe in him alone, and who call upon him; that he is not a judge, nor cruel, [nor] accuses and threatens us, but

> rather the man who reconciles us [with God] . . . that we should not fear him, but approach him with all assurance and call him dear Savior, sweet Comforter, faithful bishop of our souls.[22]

Luther's confession offers an explanation for some of the events in his life. It was to St. Anne that he cried in the lightening storm because he imagined her as being more compassionate than God. The lightening nearly struck him dead, of course, because God was venting his anger against him. No less telling was Luther's first mass, which took place in July 1507. His father traveled to Erfurt for the service and celebration, wondering what had become of his wayward son and also still resentful about Martin's choice of career. Martin was anxious about his father's presence.

But that concern cannot be compared to what he subsequently encountered. He was already a nervous wreck before the start of the service, and as the time for the Eucharist drew nearer, Martin began to noticeably and increasingly shake from fear. It is a miracle that he even pulled himself together long enough to bring the mass to its completion.

Why? Because "This is my body" became far more than a standard religious exercise and dwarfed the celebration of the first mass that it was intended to be. The most daunting figure Luther faced on that day was not his father, Hans, but God; for this time Luther was without the intercession of another priest and, more importantly, Mary and the saints. He did not tremble so much for fear of dropping the Eucharist elements during the service; he was horrified, and stuttered terribly, because he was holding the Holy in his own hands. There could be no retreat nor could he expect some saint to come down from heaven to deliver him from the situation. Martin Luther was

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22 *LW* 50, 20. Erickson, *Young Man Luther*, 71-72.

terrorized that day because he was an unjust man standing before a just God. His recollection of the experience is worth noting:

> [W]hen I stood there during the mass and began the canon, I was so frightened that I would have fled if I hadn't been admonished by the prior. For when I read the words, "Thee, therefore, most merciful Father," and thought I had to speak to God without a Mediator, I felt like fleeing from the world like Judas. Who can bear the majesty of God without Christ as Mediator?[23]

After this experience, Luther knew that his standing with God had to be anywhere but where it was at present. He therefore thrust himself on an exhausting course of the strictest asceticism, hoping at least to appease God of His terrible judgment. And what a course he took! His efforts are legendary. Among the more notable was a penitent climb of the Santa Scala steps in Rome; the hours upon hours he spent in the confessional at a time; the agonizing discussions he had with Staupitz and others concerning God, sin, and human nature; the experience in the cloister tower upon reading Romans 1:17. Luther even developed a healthy sense of self-worth in the midst of his unparalleled pursuit after God. Remembering his days as a monk he said,

> When . . . I had prayed and said my mass I was very presumptuous. I didn't see the scoundrel behind it all because I didn't put my trust in God but in my own righteousness, and I didn't thank God for the sacrament but expected him to thank me and be glad that I had sacrificed his Son to him. We [monks] had a saying when we went to mass, "I'll go and get the Virgin a child."[24]

But Luther's pride did not last very long.

He later wrote that every single monk in the monasteries of Europe believed that their salvation hinged on whether or not they could keep the rules of their order.[25] Of no one was this more true than him. "I had no other thought," he remembered "but how I might keep my Rule. I . . . kept my order so strictly that I could say that if ever a monk could get to heaven through

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[23] *LW* 54, 234.

[24] Ibid., 182.

[25] *LW* 44, 321.

monastic discipline, I should have entered in. All my companions in the monastery, who knew me, would bear me out in this."[26]

For several years Luther did not wish to settle his soul with God directly, but continued to go the way of saints' intercessions. And he sang, along with his fellow monks, the first and last songs of every day to Mary, because this is what the Augustinian rule required. But with the passage of time Luther became dissatisfied with anyone's or anything's mediation on his behalf. Although he still clung to such things as his cowl, the rules of his order, and the disciplined, celibate life, they all began to lose their luster. He thought less and less about how he appeared before Mary and the saints and concerned himself more and more with how he appeared before God.

Although his interest in Mary and the intercessors faded, his zeal continually intensified. Luther yearned for God Almighty. In hindsight, it would not be overstating it to say that with each step Luther took in this pursuit, the more unstable became the foundation of monasticism. The condition of his life during this time, however, was not enviable. In the years 1510 (when he visited Rome, and was sorely disillusioned), 1511, 1512, and 1513, his doubts and fears magnified along with his zeal, creating a spiritually congested heart. "I was very pious in the monastery, yet I was sad because I thought God was not gracious to me."[27] His superiors and confessors searched desperately for a remedy, even a temporary one, for they themselves were a bit overwhelmed at the difficulty Luther had become.

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[26] Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1953), 103.

[27] *LW* 54, 95.

At the end of his road all he had to show for his years of laboring was a bitter heart: "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!"[28]

And he hated the Apostle Paul, too. In Paul's Epistle to the Romans Luther could not read through the first chapter. Verse seventeen haunted him day and night,[29] when he rose and when he tried to sleep, and particularly during his so-called "Tower Experience" in the Augustinian cloister.

> That expression "righteousness of God" was like a thunderbolt in my heart. . . . I hated Paul with all my heart when I read that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. . . . Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. . . . I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.[30]

Luther's monastic experience ended in complete failure, but this was the best thing that had ever happened to him. The paradox is this: that by going the wrong direction from the moment he embraced the cowl with, unknown to him, the wrong motive, he simultaneously set his course to finish at the very place he needed to be. He would not come to find God as merciful when he himself was the most presentable, most heavenly minded, but only when he had come to his own end.

At the very moment when he reached this point, Luther realized he was not at the lowest stage of his spiritual pilgrimage, but the highest. "God creates out of nothing," he said later. "Therefore, until a man is nothing, God

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[28] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 44.

[29] "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Romans 1:16-17. The King James Version. *The Holy Bible.* (Republic of Korea: World Bible Publishers, Inc.), 125.

[30] *LW*, 54, 308-309. Hans Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 2.

can make nothing out of him." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the noted twentieth-century German theologian and martyr, wrote that "[j]ust as the whole world of monasticism was crashing about him in ruins, [Luther] saw God in Christ stretching forth his hand to save. He grasped that hand in faith, believing that 'after all, nothing we can do is of any avail, however good a life we live.'"[31]

"Monasticism had transformed the humble work of discipleship into the meritorious activity of the saints," Bonhoeffer continued, "and the self-renunciation of discipleship into the flagrant spiritual self-assertion of the "'religious.'"[32] After the first "trial" year of monastic life, Luther was prayed over by the prior, who asked of God that this new fellow monk, at the Last Judgment, might be "glad that he fulfilled his monastic vows completely." As Oberman pointed out, monks like Luther lost sight of grace as a "gift" given in this process of fulfilling the vows, and determined it instead to be one's own "duty."[33] Hence, the all-out campaign for good works began. But "[o]nly with the Reformational breakthrough did the monk begin to discover the Devil's surprising interest in 'good' works."[34]

And this is the message Luther began to speak to his listeners. By 1513 he had been persuaded by Staupitz to assume the Chair of Theology, which meant that he had to lecture students on the Scriptures. The members of his audience must have quickly realized that the nature of these lectures would not be what they had expected—not only because of the spirit in which they were given, but also due to the topics that were addressed.

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31 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1959), 51.

32 Ibid., 50-51.

33 Oberman, *Luther*, 128.

34 Ibid., 129.

Among the first was the sale of indulgences. Luther wasted no time in speaking his mind about the destruction of faith caused by these mass produced, money-making sources, and it is no accident that the second book of the Bible he lectured on was Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The very book that had both driven him to insanity as well as freed from him the same would be the one used to wake up God's people.

Then came news of Tetzel, a Dominican monk who had mastered the art of selling these indulgences. "You priest, you nobleman, you merchant, you woman, you virgin, you married woman, you youth, you old man,"[35] he would bellow from German pulpits, and then they would line up like sheep for the slaughter, purses opened wide, hearts laid bare.

The final result of these shams was Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. On the same day he posted them he also wrote a letter to Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz, explaining his chief concern:

> I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation. They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution into the chest. Further, they assume that the grace obtained through these indulgences is so completely effective that there is no sin of such magnitude that it cannot be forgiven—even if (as they say) someone should rape the Mother of God, were this possible. Finally they also believe that man is freed from every penalty and guilt by these indulgences. O great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death.[36]

Luther, a shepherd of souls, had no intention of silently watching wolves come in to scatter and devour his sheep. Moreover, Luther knew himself to be a fellow sheep, who had likewise fallen for the trappings of false religion, and so he could not bear to witness the people, once again, being duped into placing

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[35] Ibid., 188.

[36] *LW* 48, 46.

their faith in whatever the Church said was the "good work" of the month. This was his message to Albrecht and to the citizens of Wittenberg.

Essentially, the heart of Luther's religion became a call for every individual to confront God and for God to confront that individual. Should one fear the power of God's eternal judgment? Absolutely. This was to be expected. But Luther concluded that only when one had confidently stood in faith before God's throne, alone, to humbly ask for mercy, could one receive it.

LUTHER'S REFLECTIONS ON MONASTICISM

For certain works are wrought by the Spirit in a few men, but they must not be made an example or a mode of life for all. Moreover, I greatly fear that these votive modes of life of the religious orders belong to those things which the Apostle foretold: "They will be teaching lies in hypocrisy, forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving" [I Tim 4:2-3]. Let no one retort by pointing to SS. Bernard, Francis, Dominic, and others, who founded or fostered monastic orders. Terrible and marvelous is God in his counsels toward the sons of men. He could keep Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael holy at the court of the King of Babylon; why could he not sanctify those men also in their perilous mode of living or guide them by the special operation of his Spirit, yet without desiring it to be an example to others? Besides, it is certain that none of them was saved through his vows and his "religious" life; they were saved through faith alone.[37]

-Luther

May God bless thee, my dear Pope! May God bless you, my dear bishops, monks and priests, I shall never need your medicine again, your work and merit, your commandments and traditions, you have martyred me too long with these things. I have found one who gives me all things freely, that I in time past had to buy from you with piles of money. He gives it to me without work or merit, whereas I before had to risk my body, strength, health and life for it. Good night and farewell! I will never come to you again.[38]

-Luther

In the final analysis, Luther focused his attention on two basic questions: What was monasticism doing for the monks? And what message did it send to the laity, or, said another way, how did the they respond to monasticism? Luther entered the monastic world hoping to walk on the

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37 *TT*, 201.

38 *SML*, vol. 5 & 6, 339.

highest spiritual road possible, one that would eventually lead to God's acceptance of him. He found this, but not because he was a monk.[39] He concluded that it was available to anyone and everyone, regardless of whether they were a nun or a housewife. In fact, said Luther, the latter might indeed have an easier time obtaining this soul-saving "faith" than could the former.

In the end, he rejected monasticism as a cruel hoax, a man-made institution neither divinely inspired nor established. The walls of a monastery, he believed, did not serve as an entrance into a more spiritual world where one might lay hold of that ever evasive peace for the soul. The walls were a prison, a place of destruction, which ruined not only the souls of those inside the walls but also those outside.

In an effort to please God and be holy amidst what they felt was a wretched, filthy, unchangeable world, the monks withdrew themselves and sought to be saints apart from the world. "The misunderstanding on the part of medieval monasticism," wrote Bonhoeffer, "does not lie in its recognition of the fact that the call of Jesus Christ involves man in a struggle against the world but in its attempt to find a place which is not the world and at which this call can, therefore, be answered more fitly."[40]

Luther blamed this development on the Church, which, he believed, allowed the most important truth it had originally possessed to fade away: "Ah, if the article on justification hadn't fallen, the brotherhoods, pilgrimages,

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[39] Luther dedicated his book concerning monastic vows (1521) to his father, and in the preface he wrote, "But to come back to you, my Father; would you still take me out of the monastery? But that you would not boast of it, the Lord has anticipated you, and taken me out himself. What difference does it make whether I retain or lay aside the cowl and tonsure? Do they make the monk? . . . My conscience has been freed, . . . [t]herefore I am still a monk and yet not a monk." *LW* 48, 334-35.

[40] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955), 256.

masses, invocation of saints, etc., would have found no place in the church."[41] Instead, justification by faith was lost and the people of the church groped for something on which to stand. This something became primarily and predominantly the way of the saints, which, by Luther's time, equaled a life of solitude and strict asceticism. But this, said Luther, was tragic because "God placed his church in the midst of the world, among countless external activities and callings, not in order that Christians should become monks but so that they may live in fellowship and that our works and the exercises of our faith may become known among men."[42]

This, then, is why Professor Oberman argued that Luther's repudiation of monasticism carried such crucial ramifications with it. "It was typically medieval," wrote Oberman,

> that Luther had to abandon the world. The end of the Middle Ages drew near when he would not let the world go to the Devil, instead sounding the battle cry for its preservation and improvement. The world, which had previously been the wide gate and the broad way to Hell, and partner to a pact with the Devil, now disclosed itself in the Reformation view to be the world God had ordained and preserved, an environment in which plants, animals, and man could flourish. Whereas good works had once been done for God's sake, to comply with His high righteousness, they were now redirected to earth for the sake of man. . . . Luther's new morality was not ascetic or unworldly. It was directed toward the world—not to transform it into a monastery but to let it remain the world and become what it was, God's good creation.[43]

Bonhoeffer articulated a similar scenario:

> Luther had to leave the cloister and go back to the world, not because the world in itself was good and holy, but because even the cloister was only a part of the world. Luther's return from the cloister to the world was the worst blow the world had suffered since the days of early Christianity. The renunciation he made when he became a monk was child's play compared with that which he had to make when he returned to the world. Now came the frontal assault. The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world.[44]

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41 *LW* 54, 340.

42 Ibid., 307.

43 Oberman, *Luther*, 179, 78.

44 Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 51. See also Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 255-57.

Luther, therefore, condemned monasticism with its "attenuation of the inexorable"[45] and so, commented Oberman, the result was a need to re-think the "totality of life."[46] Luther had figuratively placed his hands on the minds of European Christians, on the glasses through which they saw the world and themselves, and forever changed their perspective. His attack on monasticism and vows affected both those within and without the cloisters because the Church was the only institution that touched the lives of every European. No longer did the laymen have to walk by the monastery's walls and feel as if they were second-rate Christians. For centuries, the walls daily sent the message to passers-by that the world outside was corrupt and all those in it were tainted by this corruption. In 1521 Luther wrote,

> [Those in monasteries] divide the Christian life into a state of perfection and a state of imperfection. To the common people, they ascribe a life of imperfection; to themselves, a life of perfection. And they measure this difference not by Spirit, faith, and love, which are certainly markedly predominant among ordinary people. They measure it by the show and appearance of outward works and by their vows.[47]

The world inside the walls was characterized by a pledge to live like one of the great saints of the Church, to fill one's day with all manner of religious exercise, and to purge one's sinful inclinations in prescribed ways. "Both [Paul and Augustine] were always understood to say that the Church distributes Christ's righteousness like the talents that can be increased by hard work and good investment," said Luther. "Christ's justice does not make a man righteous before God; it puts him in the position to become righteous."[48] All the while,

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[45] Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 176.

[46] Oberman, *Luther*, 154.

[47] *LW* 44, 262-63.

[48] Ibid., 152.

those outside the walls could only boast of their worldly occupations—as a blacksmith, a peasant farmer, a housewife, or a government official.

Unfortunately, the commoners could not easily disregard the Church's definitions of first- and second-rate spirituality and then continue living peacefully on their own. The people, during Luther's time and in the many centuries leading up to it, looked to the Church for spiritual direction.[49] Many were undoubtedly disturbed and disheartened at what they saw. After entering the Church they found that within it was a smaller, elitist group of men and women who were following the Church's idea of an even more committed, yet seemingly impossible life.

The response of the laity was three-fold: disgust at being on the low end of the Church's spiritual hierarchy; throwing their arms up and saying "Why even try?"; or frantically grasping for the dream only to discover that they could neither measure up to the monks' spirituality nor confidently rest in God's peace and salvation. There was also a fourth response, one which Luther readily acknowledged—that out of a love for God people would commit themselves to life-long service in the cloister. And yet Luther believed their decision for such was unnecessary and actually contrary to what God wanted for them.

That is why Luther saw monasticism destroying both those within *and* without the walls. Those inside could never find the true, soul-saving faith so long as they tried to emulate a saint or adhere to a pre-set pattern, and those outside were essentially told that their world was damned and their lifestyle not

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49 "Whoever fulfilled the 'evangelical counsels' belonged to the religious elite and could pray and intercede for the common Church Christian, giving him spiritual support to at least keep the commandments. It was therefore in the vital interest of all Christians that the elite, under whose protection the simple believer lived, really meet the standards set by Christ. Consequently, the reformation of the monasteries concerned the whole of society." Oberman, *Luther*, 51.

nearly as likely to gain God's favor.[50] The latter is why Luther originally left the world and the former why he eventually disrobed himself of his monk's cowl and returned to the world. The result was like a rock being thrown into a pond as the initial impact occurred within the Church, where Luther laid hold of his faith and began to proclaim it. The ripple effect could then be seen in the communities as the commoners responded to the new ideas.

Like so many aspects of the Roman Catholic Church which Luther attacked, he declared monasticism to be unscriptural. Often in his writings he pointed out the abuses of monasticism, such as the gross sexual sins, laziness, gluttony; but this is not the heart of his argument, nor would it have been enough for him to have left his cowl behind.

Luther traced the system of monasticism back to its roots to determine where the movement deviated from its original course. In the end, he concluded that it was never fundamentally correct. If Luther had lived when each and every monastic order was established, he would have surely denounced each of them as harshly as he did during the 1520s. The whole issue for him boiled down, predictably, to faith.

In general, Luther applauded the saints. Often he spoke highly of Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairveaux, Peter Lombard, and many others. Luther admired them, but only so long as it concerned their faith. Naturally, he had his criticisms about various aspects of their lifestyles, but he was also known for saying,

> I know perfectly well that Bernard and many men like him were upheld by God. . . . If there were men of Bernard's caliber in the monasteries they could be

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50 "Let [the monasteries] cry out to the people in words to this effect, 'Understand this: it is far better to be a Christian than a monk.' Then you will see how many will enter the monastery, or, what is more the point, how many will remain inside. Yet they still teach that monks are far better and much holier than the ordinary believers. . . . they actually hold that their own monastic institution is greater and more significant, and that the simple Christian life is the lesser and is to be held in disdain." *LW* 44, 322-23.

> tolerated, because they would in part be observing the institution of Paul in all seriousness. . . . [W]e can see the divine work in Bernard and men like him. Bernard, lest he leave his monks in this state of puerile and narrow love, wrenched them away and thrust them into the midst of all the real concerns of life.[51]

The main reason, then, why Luther detested monasticism is best summed up in a sentence he wrote in 1522: "And so, while in former times the monks were celibates and lived in poverty and obedience of their own free will, their successors eventually turned their voluntary and evangelical example into a compulsory vow."[52] It is this idea of "their own free will" that Luther was so quick to point out. Their faith, said Luther, referring to the saints of the Church and the founders of monastic orders, was real. He did not necessarily agree with their decision to withdraw from the world or to submit themselves to any kind of rule or vow. Nevertheless, he believed they were honest in their pursuit of God.

What he disliked was how these saints' successors "eventually turned their voluntary and evangelical example into a compulsory vow." One case Luther referred to was that of St. Anthony, who

> knew absolutely nothing about monastic vows and ceremonial of this kind, but willingly chose to live as a hermit, and of his own will chose to live unmarried, after the pattern of the gospel. Pursuing human wisdom, his successors have made this way of life into a vow, into a matter of obligation and compulsion. This way of life is but a specious copy and a mistaken observance of the rule of Anthony, which is the rule of Christ.[53]

One cannot fawn over the glorious life and faith of a saint and, in that desperate effort to capture the magic, as if to say "this is how we become like St. Anthony," attempt to model every aspect of that saint. Yes, noted Luther, the Apostle Paul did write to the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I

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[51] Ibid., 325, 334.

[52] Ibid., 316.

[53] Ibid., 253.

also am of Christ."[54] But this imitation Paul spoke of is that of true, personal faith in God. Bernard's faith worked for Bernard because his faith came from within. His successors, in that effort to raise themselves to the same level of faith, could never lay hold of Bernard's spirituality so long as they sought it by vows, endlessly repeated prayers, and celibacy.

> Worship among Christians is not the spectacle of monks. They chasten their body with fasts, wakings, and songs, bear cowls and chasten themselves with rods. By no means did God offer such worship nor demand it of us. But if his word is handled diligently and purely, then their souls will be instructed so that they know what and how a man shall believe.[55]

The followers could, therefore, have an equally unique and special life of faith, as did Bernard, but it would not come from trying to bottle up the glory in and around the saint.

For Luther monasticism was a generational problem. The first generation of the saints' successors had good intentions and tremendous inspiration since they had lived or were still living with the saint. Some of these followers had a genuine faith, said Luther, but for too many it became a situation whereby they believed they could attain to the same level of spirituality of their saint if they fulfilled the rule and modeled the example set before them. This, of course, would not be enough unless their own faith was genuine, and so their decision to found an order was unrighteous because it was a "specious copy," a "mistaken observance," and "a matter of obligation and compulsion." Furthermore, "it has no divine authority " because it "has no testimony from

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[54] I Corinthians 11:1. Note that the Greek word for "followers" is *mimetes*, which means "imitators."

[55] "Der Gottesdienst bei Christen ist nicht jenes Gespenst der Mönche. Sie kasteien ihren Körper mit Fasten, Wachen und Singen, tragen Kutten und geißeln sich mit Ruten. Einen solchen Gottesdienst hat Gott keineswegs geboten, noch fordert er ihn von uns. Sondern wenn sein Wort fleißig und rein getrieben wird, dann werden die Seelen gefördert, daß sie wissen, was und wie man glauben soll." *LD* 9, 159.

Scripture. In fact, it is actually prohibited and condemned along with all other traditions of men."[56]

By the second and third generations this problem only festered into a great tragedy. "Their successors," wrote Luther, "have rushed in and taken over their outward practices, but have abandoned the spirit and faith of the early founders." For

> [w]e learn from these testimonies that in the lives of God's saints it is not the outward appearance of the works, but faith that has to be heeded. . . . Yet these modern successors of the saints regard these external things as the works of God. . . . It is impossible, therefore, for these outdated imitators of the saints not to go disastrously wrong when they copy even the best works of the father rather than the faith and Spirit of the fathers, not to mention when they pick up the errors and sins of the fathers. . . . You cannot make doctrines of God from the doctrines of men through the example of a holy man. The doctrine of God teaches faith; these men under vows boast that they teach something more than faith.[57]

For Luther, even though it was built on the wrong foundations, monasticism at least started out as a movement with honorable intentions—to take spirituality seriously. What it became was something the Church should have rejected. "A vow is Christian and godly only when it is not destructive of faith. Faith remains unhurt only when a vow is regarded as a matter of free choice and not as necessary to attain righteousness and salvation."[58] Obviously, what Luther as a monk saw in himself and those around him was anything but constructive. This is why he did not hesitate to call for the system's abolishment.

Monasticism was also an issue of identification. By following a rule, calling themselves by such names as "Franciscan," "Dominican," or "Benedictine," and thereby trying to achieve the saints' spirituality, the monks and friars had "cast aside the name of God" in order to "establish their own." They

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[56] *LW* 44, 317.

[57] Ibid., 268-69, 289.

[58] Ibid., 296.

had found their identity more with Francis than with whom Francis would have wanted them to—Christ. This, then, crushed the opportunity for God to do a unique, personal work in an individual. Instead people of both sexes relegated themselves to a uniform, isolated lifestyle. For Luther there could be no freedom for the individual or their conscience in this situation; only bondage. Consequently, he found monasticism to be a mirage. Thirsty for God's eternal pardon, Luther fled towards what he believed to be an ocean of spiritual water; only to find that when he arrived there, it was a vast desert and had actually made his predicament worse.

The second part of this identification problem for Luther was that, in their effort to ascend to the spiritual elite and take on the name of a monastic order, the laity had to become something they were not. A housewife had to become a nun; a nobleman's son had to choose voluntary poverty. To be sure, some orders provided room for those already married, so that they did not have to separate from their spouses to join. These laymen were of the third order, while the monks and nuns and priests occupied the first and second. Luther believed this was tantamount to setting up what is today known as a "glass ceiling."

Therefore, he proposed an alternative response to monasticism. To those individuals who wished to love God and dedicate themselves to him, Luther wanted to say, "You don't have to go to a cloister or anywhere else to prove to God that you desire him. You can decide to do so right were you are, whether you're making dinner or harvesting crops. All God wants is the dedication of your heart."

LUTHER'S REFLECTIONS ON CELIBACY

A society that admires nothing less than a saint can be demoralizing for the ordinary sinner.[59]

-Peter Brown

. . . we fill the world with priests, monks, and nuns, and imprison them all in lifelong vows. You will find those who argue and decree that a work done in fulfillment of a vow ranks higher than one done without a vow, and in heaven is to be rewarded above others with I know not what great rewards. Blind and godless Pharisees, who measure righteousness and holiness by the greatness, number, or other quality of the works! But God measures them by faith alone, and with him there is no difference among works, except insofar as there is difference in faith. With such bombast wicked men by their inventions puff up human opinion and human works in order to lure on the unthinking masses who are almost always led by the glitter of works to make shipwreck of their faith, to forget their baptism and to injure their Christian liberty.[60]

-Luther

Luther opposed the Church's claims that there was no spiritual hierarchy, especially when it concerned monasticism. Whether or not the letter of the law and the spoken word had communicated such, it was the *mentality* of the people in both the Church and the community that declared the monks and nuns to be more spiritual than the commoners. The Church hierarchy could repeatedly tell its audience that they themselves were no better or pleasing to God, but so long as all these things existed, who would believe it? The enemy for Luther was two-fold: the various vows and ceremonies of the Church and the mentality of the age. These were underlying all the problems that Luther addressed because they had been firmly established in the people's minds.

In light of this, there was, in Luther's opinion, perhaps nothing more disastrous to Christianity than the exaltation of celibacy. The origins of it are debatable, but certainly by Augustine's time a distinguishable attitude towards celibacy and marriage can be deciphered. Although Luther drew much of his

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59 Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 249.

60 *TT*, 199.

inspiration and theology from Augustine, he had clearly parted ways with him on this issue.

In the first centuries of the church, Christians wrestled over the issue of sexuality.[61] Jean Leclercq stated that the Church "always asserted the goodness of marriage," but then devalued its own position by continued assaults on the purity of intercourse.[62] "Certain ideas," Leclercq wrote,

> commonly admitted at that time, contributed also to [Augustine's] reticence about marriage. Among other theories, not only was original sin transmitted in procreation, but that virginity is a higher state than marriage. . . . It was felt that marriage was good, *but* not entirely so. And it was the *but* which played such an important part. . . . In brief, marital love bore the mark of a certain guilt, which though it was the object of indulgence (*venia*) and "excused" by the good of marriage, inevitably influenced the mentality of the time.[63]

Augustine, despite his general support of the state of marriage, did not differ from many of his contemporaries. Essentially, as Ozment noted, he believed that no pleasure is righteous, but is rather idolatry.[64] Leclercq echoed the same argument, stating that Augustine expressed uncertainty about intercourse's purity, as did his contemporary St. Jerome.[65] Ambrose was even more outspoken, and wrote that "Marriage is good . . . but virginity is better. . . . Through a woman distress entered the world; through a virgin salvation came upon it. . . . Those who do not marry and men who do not take to wife are accounted as the angels of God in heaven."[66] Cyprian also wrote often on the excellence of celibacy, and advised men to flee from women lest they be

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61 Thomas Fischer Miller, *Mirror for Marriage: Lutheran View of Marriage and the Family, 1520-1600* (Charlottesville: Ph.D. dissertation for University of Virginia, 1981), 77.

62 Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View* (The Seabury Press, 1982), 12.

63 Ibid., 13, emphasis Leclercq's.

64 Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 10. See also Harrington, *Reordering*, 51.

65 As Luther noted in his 1525 book *The Bondage of the Will*, one of Jerome's more memorable statements was, "Virginity populates heaven, marriage earth." trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 119.

66 St. Ambrose, *Letters*, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1954), 226, 171.

caught in a sinful trap.[67] With such authorities in the Church rejecting sexual intercourse, it is no surprise that monasticism gained strength in numbers and spiritual superiority, while marriage gradually fell into further disrepute.

Marriage during the later medieval years, Ozment claimed, had thus evolved into its own religious order, one that was "oriented to the world" and had its "own moral rules and spiritual discipline."[68] Much of the same rhetoric persisted and had become cemented into Church dogma. Ozment noted an early thirteenth-century Augustinian canonist, named Huguccio, who continued to uphold Augustine's opinion that sexual intercourse is sinful since pleasure always accompanied it.[69] Two centuries later, Jean Gerson, a leading theologian, explained to his world that virginity has "many advantages, both in this life and in the life to come," in contrast to the "endless 'solicitudes and cares of marriage' they had witnessed in their parents' lives. . . . For there is no service in the world more pleasing to God, no way of life more loved by him, than total virginity of body and mind."[70]

Professor Joel Harrington, in his book *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany*, agreed with these statements.

> The celibate ideal . . . not only degraded marriage as a second-class institution in doctrine, but also consistently undermined it in practice as well by putting spiritual leaders in unnatural, unbearable, and thus hypocritical situations. Despite the repeated efforts of many fifteenth and sixteenth century bishops to remedy the apparently high incidence of clerical concubinage and adultery, enforcement of clerical celibacy remained undeniably sporadic at best. . . . Whether the problem lay in doctrine, law, or enforcement, sixteenth-century

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[67] *LW* 54, 357. Also, in his *The Dress of Virgins* Cyprian wrote, "Now our discourse is directed to virgins, for whom our solicitude is even the greater inasmuch as their glory is the more exalted. They are the flower of the tree that is the Church, the beauty and adornment of spiritual grace, the image of God reflecting the holiness of the Lord, the more illustrious part of Christ's flock." St. Cyprian, *Treatises*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, trans. Angela Elizabeth Keenan (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1958), 33.

[68] Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 12.

[69] Ibid., 10.

[70] Ibid.

> critics could agree on one thing: The church's authority over marriage was in jeopardy.[71]

Harrington, however, countered the claim that the Roman Catholic Church made no attempts to deal with the divisive issue. He successfully argued that the Church, beginning in the twelfth century, began to praise the state of marriage, that it might be elevated in the eyes of the Church and community.[72] The two leaders of this campaign were Gratian and Peter Lombard. Therefore, "[l]ong before the Reformation," Harrington wrote,

> the ambivalent heritage of the early Church's marriage teachings experienced a much more significant transformation. During the scholarly renaissance of the twelfth century, Canon lawyers and theologians attempted to systematize marriage doctrine in theory and in practice. The result was a legal definition of marriage as sacramental, indissoluble, and consensual, to be exclusively adjudicated by ecclesiastical courts.[73]

Although Luther and the rest of the reformers did accomplish a great deal for marriage, concluded Harrington, the difference was not dramatic. The stage had already been substantially set, with changes having been instituted in the previous four hundred years. Consequently, marriage, in the sixteenth century, experienced a measurable improvement, but not the colossal revolution which some historians portray.

Nevertheless, what Harrington also confessed was that while changes in marriage had slowly evolved up until Luther's time, the superior status of celibacy remained steadfast in the mentality of every age and showed no signs of diminishing. Marriage, therefore, while often being exalted higher and higher in the eyes of the people, would never achieve equal standing. "In doctrine," wrote Harrington, "marriage was also exalted as a *sacramentum*, but

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[71] Harrington, *Reordering*, 33-34, 38.

[72] See also Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, 22-23.

[73] Ibid., 49.

'not as highly' as the superior state of celibacy."[74] Thomas Robisheaux confirmed this and added that while Gratian and Lombard "considered marriage to be acceptable," it still remained "less than desirable," serving more to "[curb] man's carnal lust."[75]

In the sixteenth century, the first real formidable attacks against celibacy as a superior lifestyle came from the pen of Erasmus. His accusations would be similar to some of Luther's in that he ridiculed this ideal as being completely unreasonable and self-destructive. Vows of celibacy show every ignorance about the understanding of human nature; they were "blind superstition."[76] No less important in Erasmus's refutations were the unscriptural nature of these vows. Nowhere did Jesus say that he demanded them, so why did the Church?[77]

Luther echoed these words:

> "But virginity and celibacy is a counsel," [they say]. . . . But our unchaste celibates will not interpret the word "counsel" as having any other meaning than to invite, exhort, call, or persuade to celibacy, and at the same time to dissuade, discourage, renounce, and refrain from marriage. This they also do in all their sermons and writings. But now let us come to the heart of the matter. If celibacy is an evangelical counsel, what is the sense of your making a vow that goes beyond the gospel and makes a rigid commandment out of a counsel? . . . . In all truth chastity has a godlessness of its own, just like the other parts of the vows. Its godlessness exists in that it boasts of a faith over and above the common general faith. And this is a direct disservice to Christ.[78]

Luther restated this last point again by writing that "[i]f a virgin makes herself superior to others or even equal to others before God because of her virginity, she is a virgin of Satan."[79] While these statements flew right in the face of

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[74] Harrington, *Reordering*, 48-49.

[75] Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Reformation* Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 98.

[76] Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 7.

[77] Harrington, *Reordering*, 61.

[78] *LW* 44, 261-62, 373-74.

[79] Ibid., 307. In his commentary on I Corinthians 7 Luther reiterated his point: "From this it is clear how grievously in error are those who glorify nuns, claiming that their state is more glorious and better in the sight of God than matrimony. .

medieval spirituality and put Luther in the center of controversy, they also, admittedly, effectively communicated his point. Besides, nothing could be more true to his character than his brutal candor in every conversation, whether it was about government or the Roman Church. With no other topic was Luther more candid than that of celibacy, marriage, and a human's sexual desire.

This is not to say that Luther disapproved of chastity entirely. He believed in it as strongly as he did in marriage, but both had to be the calling of, and gift given by, God. One should never rely on celibacy to gain salvation, to follow "the way prescribed," or, worst of all, because one was involuntarily committed to it.[80] Ideally, a virgin's attitude should be to say,

> 'Although I could marry, I am content to remain unmarried not because it is commanded, not because it is advised, not because it is greater and more sacrificial than all other virtues, but because this seems to me to be the right way to live, just as marriage or farming may seem right to somebody else.' . . . . [T]his is what it means to be a virgin in Christian simplicity, for she glories not in her virginity, but in Christ. Every one of us ought to serve God freely with the gift he has, but we must all glory in what is common to us all.[81]

In one of Luther's more memorable statements he declared that while there will be true Christian celibates, they will be "rare; not one in a thousand

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. . They contrive fictitious crowns for them and all kinds of virtues and honors, and thus they produce vainglorious, unchristian, and even ungodly people who rely more on their station and work than on faith in Christ and on God's grace, despising marriage as something much inferior—even before God—to their own status and calling themselves "brides of Christ." They are rather the brides of the devil, because they do not use chastity as it should be used." *LW* 28, 16-17.

[80] Luther dealt seriously with the issue of celibacy and its vows during his stay at the Wartburg, May 1521-March 1522. Many letters were exchanged between himself and Philip Melanchthon. "Whoever has taken his vow with a spirit which is contrary to evangelical liberty has to be released from it and his vow condemned; he who has taken his vow with the intention of seeking salvation or righteousness through it belongs in this category.... Since, however, almost the whole crowd of those who say their vows do it with this intention it is obvious that their vows are godless, sacrilegious, and contrary to the gospel; therefore their vows have to be completely nullified and come under the anathema. . . . If you have said your vow . . . in a free and evangelical attitude and have made yourself a slave voluntarily, then it is right that you keep your vow and fulfil it. Yet I would not want to affirm that an evangelical heart ever would dare or has dared to do this, except by self-deception." *LW* 48, 299, 302. Also, noted Leclercq, because it was the practice for many families to commit one of their children to a cloister, "a certain number of men and women found themselves condemned to involuntary celibacy." *Monks on Marriage*, 12.

[81] *LW* 44, 307. "[Paul] did not take that elevated view of chastity that we have had until now and still have, but wanted to see all men bound in marriage. And being full of the Holy Spirit, he certainly knew human nature and capacities far better than all the bishops who followed him, who have rejected and perverted the divine order so that St. Paul's words are no longer bind, 'each man should have his own wife,' but rather they preach: 'Some may have wives, some should not have wives,' thus making 'some' out of 'each.'" *LW* 28, 12-13.

can do it: it is one of God's special miracles." He later changed this ratio to one in one-hundred thousand.[82] "Nature will express itself," Luther wrote, and this expression is to multiply and fill the earth, but this is to be done through marriage, as God had commissioned.[83] Therefore, "God uses lust to impel man to marriage."[84]

Oberman elaborated on this point of sexual desire and how Luther broke from the past:

> The Fall had debased the conjugal act as much as it had man's highest intellectual achievements. Yet through marriage the egocentric lust for possession could be turned toward a partner. The combination of sexuality and egotism was not novel; it could have been discovered in medieval morality texts. Astonishing, however, is the way Luther spurned everything the Middle Ages held sacred. . . . The surprising element—one still highly offensive in the sixteenth century—was the assertion that sexual drives were a divine force or even God's vital presence.[85]

Luther would have agreed with Oberman's assessment. In the tremendous wake of medieval celibacy and denigration of marriage and intercourse, it was "highly offensive" in his day to think that God *wanted* his people to be sexual. But, Luther countered, this is the only way God intended life to be—anything else is a man-made deception. If, as Augustine believed, man could not engage in sex without the sinful pleasure of it, and if, as Luther believed, only one in one-hundred thousand could successfully be chaste and that only because God provided the grace for it, then the Church had positioned humanity in a no-win situation. "Luther wanted to liberate the Christian faith from this distortion,"

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[82] Ibid., 28. Luther also wrote that "where the grace to be free to marry or not marry is not present, there marriage is commanded, yes, even more than commanded." Ibid., 16.

[83] Ibid., 27.

[84] Kevin Miller, ed. "Colorful Sayings of Colorful Luther," *Christian History* 34 (1992): 27.

[85] Oberman, *Luther*, 273.

wrote Oberman. "He could not accept the oppression of people down to their most intimate moments and warned of its devastating effects on society."[86]

Gerald Strauss, in his book *Luther's House of Learning*, took a somewhat different stance on this matter. Initially, he provided excerpts from Luther's writings to show how the Reformer regarded marriage "as great a sign of God's favor as chastity" and that "the married state is . . . good, that is to say it is without sin and is pleasing to God." But later Strauss asserted that Luther "equivoca[ted]" over whether marriage is inferior to celibacy and this because Luther remained uncertain about the sanctity of intercourse, especially in light of the seemingly obvious advantages of being a virgin.[87]

Strauss's conclusions on this issue, however, are untenable. Even a cursory reading of Luther's words on marriage reveals how he understood the pains of marriage life, but never considered it to be inferior. Had Luther done so he would have betrayed the very goal for which he labored so hard. Strauss further misrepresented Luther when he stated that Luther's views were very similar to Aquinas and the Scholastics in that both approved of marriage as a social good and for "ordinary" and "common folk."[88]

Yet it is wrong to say that Luther sanctioned marriage just for the sake of the laity. Surely, he did want this; but he also aimed to tear down the entire monastic framework which held in "bondage" the poor souls striving for the

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[86] Ibid., 272. Luther also did not tolerate what he believed to be an anti-procreation stance of the "guilty" priests, monks, and nuns, who neither remain pure nor follow God's command to replenish the earth: "So daß Pfaffen, Mönche und Nonnen schuldig sind, ihr Gelübde zu lassen, wo sie finden, daß Gottes Schöpfung, sich zu samen und zu mehren in ihnen kräftig und tüchtig ist, und sie keine Macht haben, durch irgendeine Gewalt, Gesetz, Gebot, Gelübde solche Schöpfung Gottes an sich selbst zu hindern. Hindern sie es aber, so sei du gewiß, daß sie nicht rein bleiben und sich mit stummen Sünden oder Hurerei besudeln müssen." *LD* 7, 286.

[87] Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 113, 115.

[88] "Luther's views on sex and marriage," commented Strauss, "arose from the same speculations and differed in no important respect from those of Thomas Aquinas. Scholastic authors approved of marriage as a social good and, for ordinary men and women, a haven from lust." Ibid., 110.

impossible. For Luther it would not have been enough to have repaired the estate of marriage and left the rest unfinished. This is what Gratian, Lombard, and Aquinas had done and Luther obviously felt it to be insufficient in solving the problem.

Also, this idea of "ordinary folk" is precisely what Luther tried to drive from the Church mentality. According to Luther, there should no longer be these publicized distinctions between the "married and unmarried" because "all are one in Christ."[89] Such messages had long since given way to the idea of there being "ordinary" (married commoner) and "extraordinary" (monks, nuns, and priests). Luther raged against this prevailing mentality, one that Aquinas and the scholastics left untouched. The latter upheld celibacy and then tried to elevate marriage in the eyes of the people.

Luther recognized that this was a faulty solution. A man's sexual desire did not decrease simply because he lived in a cold, spartan, monastic cell and surrounded himself with religious activities. The saints, he argued, came to this painful realization after all their efforts.[90] This mentality was the one thing holding back the Church from where it was to where it needed to be. The state of marriage could never assume its correct place in the people's eyes so long as monasticism and celibacy existed.[91] For, he said,

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[89] *LW* 44, 308.

[90] During a conversation about the "tyranny" and "burden" of celibacy, Luther commented that "[w]hen he was quite old, Augustine still complained about nocturnal pollutions. When he was goaded by desire Jerome beat his breast with stones but was unable to drive the girl out of his heart. Francis made snowballs and Benedict lay down on thorns. Bernard macerated his harassed body until it stank horribly. I believe that virgins also have temptations and enticements, but if there are fluxes and pollutions the gift of celibacy is no longer there; then the remedy of marriage which God has given should be taken hold of. People who occupied stations at least as high as ours lived in the estate of marriage. Peter had a mother-in-law, and therefore had a wife too. So James, the brother of the Lord, and all the apostles were married, except John. Paul counted himself among the unmarried and widowers, but it appears that he was married in his youth according to the custom of the Jews." *LW* 54, 270-71.

[91] "If the institution of marriage had stood firm, monasticism wouldn't have amounted to anything. Thus Satan obscured the glorious ordinance of God (namely, marriage) with the glittering phantom of the monks." Ibid., 328. Lee Palmer Wandel noted that Zwingli, about the same time that Luther fired his anger against monasticism, began to do the same: "By 1522, Zwingli was preaching against pilgrimages, the penitential system and indulgences, processions, clerical vows, especially of celibacy, the cults of Mary and the saints, and calling for a return to a simple practice of Christianity."

> [w]hat would the nuns and monks do if they heard that in the sight of God they are not a bit better than married people and mud-stained farmers? Will they not murmur against the householder that they are being treated the same as those who worked for but one hour while they alone have borne the burden and heat of the day? Show me, I beg you, a nun or a monk who is content with the penny common to us all. They say, "Why then have I persevered? Why have I not married? Why have I denied myself everything?" Do you see the thoughts of their hearts against the householder? . . . . They would have all preferred to have married, had it not meant that they would be regarded as inferior in the sight of God, or so they thought.[92]

This is what led Luther also to say, "It is my belief that if anyone is unable to keep his vow of chastity and takes a wife, confident of God's mercy, as he grows in this faith he will discover a merciful and understanding Father. . . . In no sense does God attribute sin to the conjugal rights of married people, which is due solely to his mercy."[93]

It is no surprise, then, that in the 1520s a substantial number of monks and nuns left their cloisters and returned to the world. Some went home; some learned a trade and began working; others married. Luther was the primary cause for much of this exodus. He rarely withheld his opinions on monasticism, especially with his 1521 publication, *Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*. This work, along with his other writings, became a guide for all those who had already left their cloister or were considering it.[94] "Living in a monastery is really a lazy, secure, and good life," he wrote.

> In the monasteries they sit idle and brood day and night over their evil thoughts; and then they think that a woolen cloth or shirt will make them chaste. . . . I have seen and tried it for myself, to a degree that almost no one else has. But just let them engage in productive and creative work as the people outside have to do, and they will find that the situation is quite different.[95]

Lee Palmer Wandel, *Always Among Us: Images of the Poor in Zwingli's Zurich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32-33.

92 *LW* 44, 305.

93 Ibid., 376.

94 Ibid., 247.

95 *LW* 46, 149.

Only because Luther had traveled the road with them could he speak to a "whole generation" of monks and nuns.[96] The widespread longing to be free from vows and monastic life is attested by the large number of those who left.[97] They, too, returned to the world, a place that had formerly been condemned.

Professor Harrington countered this notion of "the world," marriage, and Oberman's stance on the issue.

> Heiko Oberman has suggested in his biography of Luther that this Protestant alteration marked the dramatic transformation of an ascetic and otherworldly Christianity into a religion of this world and its demands. Certainly the decline of religious celibacy among Protestants deserves such commemoration, but its replacement by a new or different Protestant marital idea appears to have been a much more gradual and subtler process.[98]

But Harrington's final analysis seems to overlook the grip that the medieval, spiritual mentality had on Christian Europe. The "world" would forever remain accursed so long as this mentality existed. The Church and the commoners would never be reconciled because the former would look at the world and consider it tainted and imperfect, while the latter would look at the Church and its cloisters and either strive be like them or quickly feel the frustration of the "glass ceiling." Luther thus pointed the Church back into the world and led the way by example. In other words, the difference between Francis and Luther is that Luther went back to his father, and then started his own family. This alone represented a marked distinction between medieval Christianity and Protestantism.

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96 Oberman, *Luther*, 129.

97 "The devaluation of clerical celibacy was accompanied by a concomitant rise in the significance of marriage. Marriage was uniquely and markedly Protestant, and was important for them to discuss.... This Protestant outpouring began with Martin Luther, whose interest in marriage and the family has been well documented and discussed." Miller, *Mirror for Marriage*, 7,8.

98 Harrington, *Reordering*, 61.

The changes in the status of marriage that occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are worth noting; the Reformation's destruction of the medieval mentality, however, can hardly be overestimated in its importance.

Here, then, is the point: that because Luther defined spirituality in terms of faith, it thereby nullified any importance attached to monastic gowns, repeated prayers, and vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. Everyone was now on the same level. God-pleasing spirituality could be as easily attained working in a wheat field or preparing supper for a family as it could by saying prayers and singing chants.[99] Indeed, Luther believed that spirituality was more easily acquired in the world than in a monastery because as a monk or nun one's identity consisted of rituals, garb, and the hope that one's works accounted for something.[100] Whereas in the world, as a Christian, one's identity was in Christ, and only by faith can one live in the world, and only by living in the world can one live by faith.

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[99] "'Killing the flesh' must first be accomplished through the Spirit in faith. Then a man becomes the enemy of his flesh and its lusts. Then come work, suffering, trouble, worry, and interrupted sleep; but he eats and drinks with confidence. That is the way that married people can do it, who never have any peace from their children or servants, and are never without work day or night. It is among such people that you will find those who believe and have their flesh. But the man who sits all alone in the corner of the monastery serves no one and is of no use at all. . . . To serve God is to serve one's neighbor as Christ and the apostles did—they did not isolate and hide themselves forever in monasteries." *LW* 46, 150-51.

[100] "Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest," said Luther, "because the monk or priest lacks faith. Since, therefore, vows nowadays seem to tend only to the glorification of works and to pride, it is to be feared that there is nowhere less of faith and of the church than among the priests, monks, and bishops. These men are in truth heathen or hypocrites. They imagine themselves to be the church, or the heart of the church, the 'spiritual' estate and the leaders of the church, when they are everything but that. . . . while the few poor 'people of the earth' who are left behind, such as the married folk, appear vile in their eyes." *TT*, 203. See also *LW* 28, 18-20. Luther's return from the cloister to the world was the worst blow the world had suffered since the days of early Christianity. The renunciation he made when he became a monk was child's play compared with that which he had to make when he returned to the world. Now came the frontal assault. The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world." Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 51.

PART II

"BOLDLY FOLLOW ME!"

Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things.[101]

-Luther

Long before Luther sat down to write the Ninety-Five Theses he was already finding fault with the condition of religion. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of Luther's conversion, it seems to have occurred at some point during the years 1513-1515, while he, at the request of his superior, Johannes von Staupitz, was lecturing students on the Psalms and Romans. From this time we begin to see a different Martin Luther, nothing at all like the fearful law student caught in a terrible lightening storm or the trembling monk at his first mass. His tone was different; his attitude had changed. He sounded more and more like the Luther of later years. "Now I should like to know," he wrote to a fellow monk and friend in April 1516,

> whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ. For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible. . . . Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners. . . . For why is it necessary for him to die if we can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions?[102]

The backbone of Luther's theology formulated during this time and it rested entirely on the Scriptures. Anything not of the Bible is mere opinion, he would frequently say.[103] The Church at-large immediately saw the implication and ultimatum: by placing the Bible above everything and everyone Luther

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[101] Miller, *Christian History*, 28.

[102] *LW* 48, 12-13.

[103] *TT*, 145.

made all individuals, including the highest ranking members of the Church, subject to a greater authority.[104]

Luther may have kept quieter longer if not for the indulgences. As discussed previously, watching Tetzel travel around so close to Wittenberg and witnessing herds of parishioners casting their coins into the coffer became too much for Luther. The Ninety-Five Theses, which soon followed, were written not so much from an immediate "personal vendetta" because "[t]hree years earlier, in the autumn of 1514, Luther had already denounced indulgences in the university lecture hall, terming them proof of the nadir Christendom had reached."[105]

This is what ultimately drew Luther to the battle. He saw that the people did not have a God-fashioned conscience on which to stand and were thus quite helpless. Predictably, they fell victim to the scheme of indulgences, which, an enraged Luther declared, "rob men of their money and their faith in God."[106]

Therefore, beginning with the Theses, Luther fashioned his published writings with the intent of bringing "Christian liberty" to what he saw as an enslaved Church.

> . . . I greatly fear that few or no colleges, monasteries, altars, and offices of the church are really Christian in our day—nor the special fasts and prayers on certain saint's days. I fear, I say, that in all these we seek only our profit, thinking that through them our sins are purged away and that we find salvation in them. In this way Christian liberty perishes altogether.[107]

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[104] Bonhoeffer wrote similarly on this idea: "It was the Reformation that broke asunder the unity of the faith. That was not because Luther willed it so. He was indeed wholly concerned for the true unity of the Church. But the word of the Bible forced him to the conclusion that the unity of the Church can lie only in Jesus Christ as He lives in His word and sacrament, and not in any political power. In this way he shattered the whole structure of the Church, which was founded upon the Roman tradition. Only a Pope who submitted unreservedly to the word of the Bible could be the shepherd of a united Christendom. But the Pope, bound as he was by tradition, was incapable of this submission, and that is why the unity of Christendom was destroyed." *Ethics*, 94.

[105] Oberman, *Luther*, 189, 191.

[106] *TT*, 124.

[107] Ibid., 308.

Naturally, the matter was made worse by the "blind pastors" who "stir up and urge on their people in these practices by praising such works, puffing them up with their indulgences, and never teaching faith."[108] The congregations are thus withheld from the true religion, declared Luther, and since they do not understand even the most rudimentary tenets of Christ's gospel but know only of "merits, rewards, and the things that are ours," Christ has become "a taskmaster far harsher than Moses."[109]

Luther also desired Christian liberty to be extended to those in the cloisters, who needed it no less than the parishioners and arguably more so. Part I showed his conviction that monasticism was wrong in its essence and the vow of celibacy unrealistic and unscriptural. Aside from these stood the problem of parents committing their new-borns and young children to the monastic life. "[I]t is simply foolish and stupid for parents to dedicate their children, before birth or in infancy to the 'religious life or to perpetual chastity,'" Luther wrote.

> It seems to be a kind of mockery of God for them to vow things which are not at all in their power. . . . [T]hey [also] deceive many young children who are ignorant both of their age and of what they are vowing. They do not observe the age of puberty in receiving such children; but the children, after making their profession, are held captive and consumed by a troubled conscience as though they had afterward given their consent.[110]

And other problems contributed to the growth of the cloisters as well.

> [T]oday everybody is attracted to the priesthood or the monastic life, and among them, I am sorry to say, there is not one in a hundred who has any other reason than that he seeks a living and doubts that he will ever be able to support himself and a family. Therefore, they live wildly enough beforehand, and wish, as they say, to get it out of their system, but experience shows that it is only more deeply embedded in them. I find the proverb true, "Despair makes most monks and priests." That is what happens and that is how it is, as we see.[111]

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 305.

[110] Ibid., 205.

[111] *TT*, 109.

In other words, the theme was spiritual bondage. Virtually nobody was free according to Luther, and in the eight years between the Ninety-Five Theses and his marriage the one main occupation he had was the liberation of the Church. His Theses, three Treatises of late 1520 (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, The Freedom of a Christian*), participation in the 1519 Leipzig Debate, 1521 work *The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows*, famous stance before Emperor Charles V at the 1521 Diet of Worms—these were all done not necessarily for his own interests, but that of others.

And while they dealt seriously with theological matters, he was not reforming theology for the sake of theology alone. What satisfaction would that give to a man like Luther? He viewed the re-establishment of correct theology in the Church as only a means to an end. By the insertion of individual faith and God's mercy back into Church dogma and didactics, the result would be congregations wholly content with their identity in Christ and a cessation of their ignorant compliance with the peddling scams of those like Tetzel.

It is noteworthy that in order to accomplish his goal Luther was unorthodox, iconoclastic, and practical in his methods. And his methods were very diverse. He did not limit himself to often-complicated theological argumentation nor was he himself limited to such. Clearly, one cannot be whimsical if attempting to reorient Church theology, but characteristically he carried unhindered his brazen personality into what he wrote just as did into what he spoke. He appealed to emotions, to common sense, to historical evidence, to brutal candor, to anything he believed would be effective. From his writings flowed the testimony of experience. The day his Theses became public the Church sensed that a formidable threat had arisen.

The reason why is because he spoke effectively and with authority, challenging even those matters taken most for granted. "The pope decrees," wrote Luther in *The Babylonian Captivity*, "that a marriage is dissolved if one party enters a monastery without the consent of the other, provided that the marriage has not yet been consummated. Now I ask you, what devil puts such monstrous things into the pope's mind? God commands men to keep faith and not break their word to one another."[112] Luther then followed this with his solution: "Marriage itself, being a divine institution, is incomparably superior to any laws, so that marriage should not be annulled for the sake of the law, rather the laws should be broken for the sake of marriage."[113]

And just what are saints, asked Luther. "In your own parish you find baptism, the sacrament, preaching, and your neighbor, and these things are greater than all the saints in heaven, for all of them were made saints by God's work and sacrament."[114] With these kinds of statements Luther repeatedly hammered away at the injustices he saw. "[W]ho will dare to say that [Christ's blood] was not poured out for the laity?" he argued. "'This is my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Here you see very clearly that the blood is given to all those for whose sins it was poured out."[115]

And what is the Church? It is "the people of God," as opposed to the ranking ministers.[116] "It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and

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[112] Ibid., 204.

[113] Ibid., 228.

[114] Ibid., 77.

[115] Ibid., 136-37.

[116] Ibid., 137.

farmers are called the temporal estate," Luther wrote. "Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them. . . . [W]e all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike."[117]

As has been mentioned by many authors before, what Luther called for was a "Universal Priesthood of All Believers," and it was in total contrast to what the commoners had been hearing. Aside from all the doctrinal explanations, the heart of this "Universal Priesthood" can best be seen in a passage from *The Babylonian Captivity*:

> Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it—unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.[118]

A year later Luther returned to this idea. "For who among the religious would allow himself to be put in the same class as a married man, a farmer, or a workman in the sight of God?" he asked. "Do not the religious in fact take their vows for the express purpose of appearing to serve God with a more devoted obedience than anybody else? Why do they despise as they do all other ways of living and esteem this one only?"[119]

Neither did he approve of the titles within the Church. As a continuation of his "Universal Priesthood" doctrine he declared, "You will ask, 'if all who are in the church are priests, how do these whom we now call priests differ from laymen?' I answer: Injustice is done those words 'priest,' 'cleric,' 'spiritual,'

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[117] Ibid., 12.

[118] Ibid., 202-203.

[119] *LW* 44, 304. Similarly, Luther also wrote, "Such an attitude holds vows in contempt and regards them as no better than working on a farm or any other kind of manual work—and what monk ever takes a vow without regarding the work of the vow as a work of supererogation and perfection which has no like or equal? This is the doctrine these people brazenly teach." Ibid., 295.

'ecclesiastic,' when they are transferred from all Christians to those few who are now by a mischievous usage called 'ecclesiastics.'"[120] Furthermore, instead of allowing for a priest or bishop to head a congregation and be held in a higher spiritual regard, Luther submitted that the leader of a given congregation should be one "chosen from among us," who would be regarded as an equal. It was to be a decision made by the people, so that the minister may be empowered to preach and be the spiritual shepherd.[121] Such a position, of course, should no one "dare to take upon himself . . . without the authority and consent of the community."[122] Then, to elaborate on this idea, Luther drew an analogy:

> Suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married or not, and charge him to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests.[123]

This he wrote in August 1520. A year later, while at the Wartburg, Luther heard news about Wittenberg and how it was faring without him. In a letter to Spalatin, Luther suggested that Philipp Melanchthon preach to the citizens after the evening meal.[124] Doing so, he believed, would be a way to "introduce freedom" and return to the simple habits of the early Christians. "What difference does it make that he is not called by those [bishops]? . . .

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120 *TT*, 291-92.

121 Ibid., 244-45, 248.

122 Ibid., 15.

123 Ibid., 13.

124 Melanchthon, a layman, was an instructor of the Greek language at the local university. His first name is often spelled as either "Philip" or "Philipp."

because what the people need above all things is the Word of God. . . . [B]ut he must be urged and called by the congregation."[125]

There is, then, no hierarchy between Christians, Luther concluded. The only difference lies in the office held, which is not to say that one office is better than another, but that God obviously will not call everyone to the same task. And yet Luther knew that such a statement was far easier to proclaim than to receive. Even he had trouble reconciling himself with it. As he confessed, "Next to faith, this is the highest art: to be content in the calling in which God has placed you. I have not learned it yet."[126]

THE LANGUAGE OF THE COMMON MAN

When I preach I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, of whom I have above forty in my congregation; I have all my eyes on the servant maids and on the children. And if the learned men are not well pleased with what they hear, well, the door is open.[127]

-Luther

A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it.[128]

-Luther

Oberman noted that as soon as Erasmus' Greek New Testament appeared in mid-1516, Luther scoured the book to find all discrepancies between the Latin and Greek texts.[129] He found a considerable number that were of substantial importance.

Luther had a special love relationship with the Scriptures. "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me," he said, "it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it

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125 *LW* 48, 308-309. Note: Melanchthon had already been giving communion to the congregation. Ibid., 281.

126 Miller, *Christian History* 34, 28.

127 Ibid., 27.

128 Ibid.

129 Oberman, *Luther*, 168ff.

lays hold of me."[130] The very first time he picked the book up he randomly opened it to the Old Testament story of Hannah and Samuel and read the tale voraciously. It was the Bible that drove Luther the monk into deeper and deeper despair because passages like Romans 1:17 towered over him. Paradoxically, it was the Bible that also freed him from his spiritual chains and lighted the path to salvation.

And it was on the Bible that he held his ground and staked his life when he stood before Charles V and all of Europe, shocking them into hysterics by defiantly declaring that he would indeed believe the instruction God gave him through the Scriptures over the thousand years of Church teachings. The image alone of these two men opposing each other is incredibly powerful, and that is why Bainton chose the title for his biography, *Here I Stand*, from the 1521 confrontation.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the moment Luther had enough time on his hands, namely, during his eleven month seclusion at the Wartburg, he dedicated himself solely to the translation of the Bible into German. And not just any German. A few vernacular translations in the past century had been done but failed to make headway since they were an arduous read.[131] Luther had one, very specific purpose in mind. "We must not, like these [papists], ask the Latin letters how we are to speak German," he said,

> one must ask the mother at home, the children in the street, the man at the market, and listen to how they speak, and translate accordingly. That way they will understand and notice that one is speaking German to them. . . . Now that [the Bible] is translated and complete, anyone can read and criticize it, and one now runs his eyes over three or four pages and does not stumble once. But he is not aware of the humps and lumps out of the way so that one could slide over

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130 Miller, *Christian History* 34, 27.

131 "There had been translations before him of the Scripture in to German, reaching back to the earliest transcription of the Gothic tongue by Ulfilas. There were even portions of the Bible translated not from the Latin Vulgate, but from the Hebrew and the Greek. But none had the majesty of diction, the sweep of vocabulary, the native earthiness, and the religious profundity of Luther." Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 255.

> it so finely. It is good ploughing when the field is cleaned up; but rooting out the woods and the stumps and getting the field ready,-that is work that nobody wants.[132]

But once the work was completed, everybody wanted the finished project. "[I]t was the thorough comprehension of the linguistic usage of the Scriptures," wrote Oberman, "[t]hat is the secret of the originality and power of the Luther Bible."[133]

Along with an excellent command of colloquial German, Luther combined a meticulous, painstaking attitude, so that the translation of every single word and sentence received a total commitment. One can well imagine him at two o'clock in the morning scampering from his bed to the desk, quickly lighting the lamp, and grabbing his pen because he finally figured out how to translate a troublesome verse that he had been working on all day. At times it would take him four days to translate three lines of text, and this despite the help of Melanchthon and fellow colleagues.[134] "It's not enough to know the grammar [of a biblical passage]," he recalled years later. "One must observe the sense, for a knowledge of the matters treated brings with it an understanding of the words."[135]

The task was monumental, but the reward well worth his labors. Luther wanted a Bible in every hand; to hear Scriptures roll off the tongues of men and women who had faithfully studied it; to see the written words produce a burgeoning faith inside every heart. Granted, Luther's success depended upon the active interests of parishioners; but all those who had desired to read the

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132 Oberman, *Luther*, 169. E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, eds., *Martin Luther* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 88.

133 Oberman, *Luther*, 169.

134 Rupp and Drewery, *Martin Luther*, 88.

135 *LW* 54, 375.

Bible now had much easier access to it.[136] "The translation played a major role in shaping the modern German language," Oberman stated, "yet it became a genuine folk Bible, carrying the cause of the Reformation into every house, because Luther made use of the living, colloquial German in his translation. He had truly listened to the common people—the language of the common man was not too lowly to be the language of God."[137]

While his published New Testament became available by 1522, the entire Bible was not completed until 1534. In the meantime, congregations eager for the new, controversial teachings of Luther awaited him every week. Very quickly he "realized that one of the major shortcomings in the church of his time was the comparative lack of a thorough knowledge of Scripture on the part of both clergy and laity."[138] Therefore, beginning in 1519 (if, in fact, not sooner), Luther made it a daily priority to instruct men, women, and children on the fundamentals of Christianity. He approached it more as a project to raze and rebuild than making some token repairs here and there.[139]

Thus, he began with teachings on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and when the time came for their publication, Luther refused their being printed in Latin and chose German instead.[140] This was not customary. But by doing so the commoners had the chance to read it or have

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136 "I shall remain here in seclusion till Easter," wrote Luther to a friend in December 1521, "and write postils, and translate the New Testament into German, which so many people are anxious to have." Rupp and Brewery, *Martin Luther*, 74.

137 Oberman, *Luther*, 305.

138 *LW* 48, 151.

139 In a March 1519 letter to Spalatin Luther wrote, "I do not know whether the pope is the Antichrist himself or whether he is his apostle, so miserably is Christ (that is, the truth) corrupted and crucified by the pope in the decretals. I am extremely distressed that under the semblance of laws and the Christian name, the people of Christ should be so deluded. . . . Daily greater and greater help and support by virtue of the authority of Holy Scripture wells up in me." Ibid., 114.

140 Ibid., 113.

it read to them if they were illiterate; a Latin text would have confined the readership to, essentially, the especially well-educated and scholars. Consequently, the years immediately following his Ninety-Five Theses were as determinative as any others toward Luther's achievements. Oberman described this perfectly, using as his setting the Leipzig Debate of July 1519:

> Never Eck's match as a debater, Luther was soon maneuvered into the position of the accused. For one-and-a-half days Eck took every opportunity to defame his opponent. . . . Luther's repeated protests went unheeded. On the afternoon of July 5 Luther could no longer contain himself. Violating all the rules of disputation, he interrupted Eck twice. The next morning at seven, he could bear no more of Eck's barbs and spontaneously changed over to the German language to demonstrate to non-theologians that his rights had been infringed. In subsequent years laymen would preside over the Reformation disputations from the start: the search for truth was too important to leave to academic theologians. . . . The Reformer . . . abandoned the defensive and launched a counterattack—in a language everyone could understand: German, the national tongue.[141]

Luther did not stop here. As surely as the spoken word required a transformation, so, too, did the sung word: the centuries of Latin worship and song. Luther decided, to come to an end. "Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people [in the] vernacular . . . so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music." He wrote these words in a letter to George Spalatin near the end of 1523, inviting the latter "to work with us on this project [of writing hymns]." Instructing Spalatin on how the songs should be constructed, Luther added, "I would like you to avoid any new words or the language used at court. In order to be understood by the people, only the simplest and the most common words should be used for singing; at the same time, however, they should be pure and apt; and further, the sense should be clear."[142]

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[141] Oberman, *Luther*, 299-300.

[142] *LW* 49, 68-69.

In sum, Luther revised three areas of worship: the priest's chants, the choir's songs, and the congregation's hymns.[143] The last of these witnessed the greatest alterations, so much so that Luther "may be considered the father of congregational song. This was the point at which his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers received its most concrete realization. . . . All the people sang."[144] Himself an accomplished lute player and gifted singer, Luther eagerly inspired many of the reforms in music, the value of which he ranked second only to God's Word and theology.

Hand in hand with the simplification of music came the call for the simplification of all messages from the pulpit. "Cursed by every preacher who aims at lofty topics in the church, looking for his own glory and selfishly desiring to please one individual or another," he remarked. "When I preach here I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people," or, as he stated earlier in his life, "One should preach about things that are suited to a given place and given persons. . . . [T]ake pains to be simple and direct; don't consider those who claim to be learned but be a preacher to unschooled youth and sucklings."[145]

Luther's thorough knowledge of the Scriptures also taught him many things other than theology and translation. For example, how should a minister speak to a crowd? The answer, as always, lay somewhere between Genesis and Revelation. He consciously observed Jesus through the eyes of the gospels' writers and adopted Christ's approach. As if man could find a better method than God!

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143 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 266.

144 Ibid., 269-70.

145 *LW* 54, 235-36.

> When Christ preached he proceeded quickly to a parable and spoke about sheep, shepherds, wolves, vineyards, fig trees, seeds, fields, plowing. The poor lay people were able to comprehend these things. . . . Good God, there are sixteen-year old girls, women, old men, and farmers in church, and they don't understand lofty matters! If one can present fitting and familiar comparisons . . . the people will understand and remember. Accordingly he's the best preacher who can teach in a plain, childlike, popular, and simple way. . . . Some day I'll have to write a book against artful preachers.[146]

He also questioned the effectiveness of the numerous and enormous cathedrals located all over Europe. No one doubted their grandeur, but were they reasonable? "These are extraordinary buildings, but they aren't suitable for listening to sermons. Good, modest churches with low arches are the best for preachers and for listeners, for the ultimate object of these buildings is not the bellowing and bawling of choristers but the Word of God and its proclamation."[147] It should come as no surprise that he would say such. Protestantism, beginning with Luther, shifted the emphasis of the religious service from singing and ceremony to the sermon because "[f]or the 'evangelicals,' for Luther and Zwingli, Carlstadt and Bucer, words were the primary source and medium for reform."[148] Now, the message of the local preacher became not only the focal point of the service, but also of the entire week.

There were other reasons for the emphasis on the sermon. As previously noted, Luther wanted to educate his audience; but he also desired for them to have a God-seared conscience. Luther spoke an inordinate amount about his own conscience, and when he stood before Charles V, staring at the ultimatum of recant or face the fatal consequences, he braced himself and then

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146 Ibid., 160, 383-84.

147 Ibid., 272.

148 Wandel, *Always Among Us*, 36.

based his entire standing on what God had taught him.[149] This alone held him from crumbling under the overwhelming severity of the moment. "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other," Luther was quoted as saying at the climatic moment of his trial, "—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."[150]

"[The papists] think that building up the church consists of the introduction of some sort of new ceremonies," he said later in life. "They don't realize that building up the church means to lead consciences from doubt and murmuring to faith, to knowledge, and to certainty."[151] Similarly, Luther, in 1522, wrote against the monastic vows with the hope of providing concrete understanding and assurance to the many monks and nuns leaving the cloisters, that they would know what they were doing and why. For "[w]hoever has [God's] pure and unadulterated [Word] can stand and win in the battle against all the gates of hell. Whoever, though, is not certain about his teaching and faith and continues to dispute it—he is lost."[152] Would those departing their life in the cloister be strong enough to stand against the certain attacks of their enemies?

Luther had his doubts. The memory of the Diet of Worms and standing before the Emperor was still fresh in his mind. "I have learned that some of

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149 "There is no greater thing that we can believe than that which God speaks to us. If we would believe it, we would already be blessed." Es gibt kein großer Ding, als daß wir glauben können, daß Gott mit uns redet. Wenn wir das glaubten, so wären wir schon selig. *LD* 9, 32.

150 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 144.

151 *LW* 54, 195-96.

152 "Wer das rein hat und unverfälscht, der kann bestehen und siegen im Kampf wider alle Pforten der Hölle, wer aber seiner Lehre und Glaubens nicht gewiß ist und will noch darüber disputieren, der ist verloren." *LD* 9, 33.

our people have disposed of the cowl," Luther wrote while at the Wartburg. "I have been afraid that perhaps they might have done this with a conscience not sufficiently strong. This fear has wrested out of me this little book, so that . . . they might receive support among pious and good people and be encouraged to have more confidence in themselves."[153] In the "little book" he targeted his words towards the very anxieties he anticipated the former monks and nuns as having:

> Show me one single person who would presume to assert that his vow was pleasing and acceptable to God. Indeed, [the papists] teach that it is presumption to claim this, for they want us to be fearful and uncertain. But God has commanded us to put our whole trust in his mercy, and with utter certainty and without any doubt to have faith that both we ourselves and all our works are pleasing to him, not because of our worthiness or merit but because of his goodness. This is the conscience of a sound faith which holds firmly and unshakably to the promise and command of God. On the other hand, the kind of faith that [doubts] that both it and its works are pleasing to God, devastates the conscience and sins against it.[154]

Yet, if "words were the primary source and medium for reform," then the printed word would have to be of secondary importance to the far more inexpensive, efficient, even effective spoken word. Luther would have probably traded one hundred well-written theological books for one hundred capable preachers, if only because *everybody* could understand the spoken word—that is, when it was in the vernacular tongue and delivered so that the uneducated could grasp the subject matter. "It is a great thing to set a true preacher in motion, and unless our Lord God himself gets him going, nothing will come of it," Luther commented. "It requires a mighty spirit to serve people in body and soul and yet suffer extreme peril and the basest ingratitude for so

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153 *LW* 48, 337-38.

154 *LW* 44, 277. For more about Luther's thoughts on the conscience, see Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 108-110.

serving. . . . [F]or who will suffer ingratitude and give up money and health to study, only to expose himself to the gravest danger?"[155]

A few days later he continued on this train of thought, borrowing more imagery from his biblical knowledge of Christ.[156]

> A preacher is like a carpenter. His tool is the Word of God. Because the materials on which he works vary, he ought not always pursue the same course when he preaches. For the sake of the variety of his auditors he should sometimes console, sometimes frighten, sometimes scold, sometimes soothe.[157]

Luther wanted pastors not to be silent in the community but active, on guard "against . . . wicked wiles," to treat their sermons as a gift from God and to use them for the benefit of all. If societal problems developed in a locale and yet the minister retreated into passivity, then their "own silence and snoring" was to blame.[158] And woe to those preachers who took advantage of their position to embarrass or harshly attack the listeners, especially those who did not believe in God. Christ did not commission preachers for this purpose.

Luther knew from his days in the Wittenberg pulpits and lecterns that transforming the minds of people did not come easy. What a preacher desired to see and what a preacher actually saw in the lives of his parishioners were usually two different things. As Luther often said, a minister's job had a healthy dose of headaches and heartaches, and they began in the pulpit. Therefore, he simplified the matter. As to the preparation of a message, he gave three words of advice:

> First, you will have prepared your sermon as diligently as you know how, and it will slip through your fingers like water; second, you may abandon your outline and God will give you grace. You will preach your very best. The audience will be pleased, but you won't. And thirdly, when you have been unable in

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155 *LW* 54, 31.

156 He also spoke this out of his own experiences. In 1526, a year after his marriage, Luther learned woodworking in case of financial needs.

157 Ibid.

158 *LW* 46, 218.

> advance to pull anything together, you will preach acceptably both to your hearers and to yourself. So pray to God and leave all the rest to him.[159]

For those preachers who requested more definite guidelines, Luther offered further suggestions:

> It is not necessary for a preacher to express all his thoughts in one sermon. A preacher should have three principles: first, to make a good beginning, and not spend time with many words before coming to the point; secondly, to say that which belongs to the subject in chief, and avoid strange and foreign thoughts; thirdly, to stop at the proper time.[160]

Similarly, it benefits a preacher to speak clearly and slowly, "for then he can more wisely and precisely deliver his sermon."[161] All of these were to be practical applications towards the one chief goal: not to confound the audience with complex theology and certainly not to impress them with erudition, but to deliver God's truth to the people.

The churches of Europe contained spectacular depictions of Christ—some done in paint, some in glass, others in stone. In essence, Luther asked ministers to draw their congregation's attention to the pictures; not for the purpose of getting the people to strive, to strain, to reach with all their might in the hope of gaining Christ's favor, but to remind the people that God had already come to them by way of his son Jesus. Such a message may seem so basic as to hardly require mentioning, yet it was the very message congregations had waited their lifetimes to hear:

> Protestant preachers may initially have attracted audiences because they spoke to pious laymen who, like themselves, were not only aware of the failings of church and clergy, but also thoroughly persuaded that they had been doctrinally hoodwinked and religiously exploited by what was, in the end, unnecessary and untrue.[162]

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159 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 273-74.

160 Miller, *Christian History* 34, 27.

161 "Fein langsam reden ist einem Prediger am passendsten; denn er kann so desto überlegter und genauer seine Predigten vorbringen." *LD* 9, 146.

162 Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 46. "The principal lesson of theology," Luther said, "is that Christ can be known. . . . Christ is friendlier than we are. . . . When Satan leads me to the law I am damned, but if I can take hold of the promise I am free." *LW* 54, 143.

THE EDUCATION OF YOUTH, THE BANE OF "KNOW-NOTHING"

My advice is that people should not dispute about unknown things, but simply remain in God's Word, particularly in the catechism. For in them you have the truest way in all of religion.[163]

-Luther

I wish that no one would be selected as a preacher unless he had stayed in school before then. Today, all of the young people want to be a preacher immediately and so they flee from their schoolwork. [But it is in school that] they learn . . . how one shall purely handle and explain the words of the Holy Scriptures.[164]

-Luther

But how to find educated and equipped ministers! Luther discovered this to be quite difficult, especially as the 1520s progressed. Just as it happened with other areas of life, Luther's proclamation of the "Universal Priesthood of All Believers" backfired, to a degree, when it came to the education of children.[165] The people latched onto the proclamation, abused it beyond its intended purpose, and determined for themselves that spirituality existed independently of education. Therefore, their children did not need schooling. Luther summarily threw his arms up in disbelief, wondering how the people could have ever come up with such an insane notion, particularly since they claimed they were taking his "Universal Priesthood" to its logical conclusion.

As always, he voiced his opinions from the pulpit and took to his pen and paper in order to respond to this anti-educational, "know-nothing" attitude.

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163 "Mein Rat ist, daß man nicht über verborgene Dinge disputiere, sondern einfältig in Gottes Wort bleibe, vornehmlich im Katechismus. Denn darin habt ihr den richtigsten Weg der ganzen Religion." *LD* 9, 100.

164 "Ich wollte, daß keiner zum Prediger gewählt würde, er hätte denn zuvor Schule gehalten. Jetzt wollen die jungen Leute alle sofort Prediger werden und fliehen die Schularbeit. . . . Sie lehren . . . wie man die Sprüche der heiligen Schrift fein handeln und auslegen soll." Ibid., 194.

165 Writing a letter to his parents on Reformation Day (October 31) 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer included a profound analysis that deserves further examination: "One wonders why Luther's action had to be followed by consequences that were the exact opposite of what he intended, and that darkened the last years of his life, so that he sometimes doubted the value of his life's work. He wanted a real unity of the church and the West—that is, of the Christian peoples, and the consequence was the disintegration of the church and of Europe; he wanted the 'freedom of the Christian man,' and the consequence was indifference and licentiousness; he wanted the establishment of a genuine secular social order free from clerical privilege, and the result was insurrection, the Peasant's War, and soon afterwards the gradual dissolution of all real cohesion and order in society." *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1953), 123.

"The universities at Erfurt, Leipzig, and elsewhere, as well as boys schools here and there, are so deserted that it is distressing to behold," Luther wrote in his 1530 manuscript *A Sermon on Keeping Children in School.* "[L]ittle Wittenberg now does better than any of them."[166]

How deserted? In the five years up to 1530 alone the University of Leipzig experienced a sharp decline in numbers, from 175 to 93 students. In those same years the University of Wittenberg fell 25 percent to 173.[167] The University of Erfurt, a German institutional pride and joy, experienced similar setbacks.[168] "Formerly," Luther continued,

> when people served the devil and put the blood of Christ to shame, all the purses stood wide open. There was no limit to men's giving to churches, schools, and all sort of abominations. Children could be driven, pushed, and forced into monasteries, churches, foundations, and schools at unspeakable cost—all of which was a total loss. But now when men are able to establish real schools and real churches, . . . [n]obody can give anything.[169]

As abrasively as any other of Luther's tirades, he lashed out against the prevailing, popular spokesmen who rejected the value of education. Not a trace of ambiguity on Luther's part can be found in his *A Sermon*:

> That wretch of a Satan is now attacking us on all sides with force and guile. Among his wiles . . . if not the greatest of all is this—he deludes and deceives the common people so that they are not willing to keep their children in school or expose them to instruction. He puts into their minds the dastardly notion that because monkery, nunning, and priestscraft no longer hold out the hope they once did, there is therefore no more need for study and for learned men, that instead we need to give thought only to how to make a living and get rich. This seems to me to be a real masterpiece of the devil's art.[170]
>
> . . . how much more should you rejoice if you have raised a son for this office of preaching in which you are sure that he serves God so gloriously, helps men so generously, and smites the devil in such knightly fashion? . . . You ought also to know the harm that you are doing if you take the opposite course . . . and do not train him for it but look only to the belly and to temporal livelihood, then . . . see what a pious hypocrite and unproductive weed you are. . . . [Y]ou are

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166 *LW* 46, 234.

167 Ibid. See also Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 5-6.

168 The editors of *Luther's Works* vol. 46 stated that "[w]hen Luther entered Erfurt as a student in 1501 the enrolment was about two thousand, but by 1529 the enrolment had dropped to twenty." 234.

169 Ibid., 256.

170 Ibid., 217.

> making a place for the devil and advancing his kingdom so that he brings more souls into sin, death, and hell every day and keeps them there, and wins victories everywhere.[171]

Luther wanted people to be educated for a host of reasons. Only by learned men can a lawful government be established; without it, a man's body, wife, children, house, fields, and animals all lie unprotected in a lawless society. Once the law is set up, only by its trained scholars can it be maintained. "I would take the work of a faithful, pious jurist and clerk," Luther said, "over the holiness of all the priests, monks, and nuns, even the very best."[172] This path of argumentation led him to further statements about other occupations: "I should also mention how many educated men are needed in the fields of medicine and the other liberal arts. Where are the . . . physicians to come from, if grammar and other rhetorical arts are not taught? For such teaching is the spring from which they all must flow."[173]

Above all of these, Luther cried most desperately for the potentially lost generation of schoolmasters and preachers. As to the former, they can "never be adequately rewarded or repaid with any amount of money."[174] "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."[175] These things Luther said against the mounting tide of those who held schools and schoolmasters in lower and lower regard.

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171 Ibid., 229. In the preface to *Oeconomia Christiana*, a book written by his friend Justus Menius in 1529, Luther foretold his audience to expect such violent words from him: "I shall say nothing of the temporal gain and eternal reward that accrue to you [married people] before God and the world, how in this way your child will be even better fed than by raising him in the shameful, despicable, hoggish way you had intended. But I shall deal with this matter more fully another time in a separate book, God willing, in which I shall really go after the shameful, despicable, damnable parents who are no parents at all but despicable hogs and venomous beasts, devouring their own young." Ibid., 211.

172 Ibid., 241.

173 Ibid., 252.

174 Ibid., 252-53.

175 *LW* 54, 403-404.

Luther viciously defended those who played a role in the training of children. "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. . . . [F]or I know that next to that of preaching, this is the best, greatest, and most useful office there is. Indeed, I scarcely know which of the two is the better."[176]

In truth, he did know which was better, or at least knew the one he valued most. "In the eyes of God" a shepherd of God's flock was "a king and prince in the kingdom of Christ," "an angel of God."[177] Any parent withholding their child from such a calling paradoxically despised what God needed most. "There is no dearer treasure, no nobler thing on earth or in this life than a good and faithful pastor and preacher," he openly declared.[178] And that is why Luther shuttered at the sight of students abandoning schools and their education. Who would succeed the retiring generation of preachers if so few were trained and even fewer considered the job of a minister to be honorable?

"Therefore go ahead and have your son study," Luther wrote. Then he brilliantly, even strategically, elaborated by stating, "[E]ven if he has to beg bread for a time, you are nonetheless giving to our Lord God a fine bit of wood out of which he can carve you a lord. That is the way it will always be: *your* son and *my* son, that is, the children of the common people."[179] Such a statement constituted about the most powerful persuasion Luther could make. Indeed, Luther's three sons went on to become respected, learned men of their

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176 *LW* 46, 253.

177 Ibid., 223.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid., 251, emphasis mine.

communities: Hans became a lawyer and later worked in the chancellery of Weimar; Martin followed in his father's footsteps and studied theology; and Paul became a physician.[180]

Originally, Luther submitted a rather unrealistic solution for the problem of educating youth. He wanted instruction of the Christian tenets to be done in the home, favoring "voluntary effort, parental direction, and community enterprise."[181] But soon thereafter he recognized the futility of such a proposal. The idea of self-initiative appealed to Luther, because he believed that each person should individually develop his or her faith in God as opposed to following a pre-set pattern aimed at spiritual growth.

Yet, could he expect parents themselves to fully handle the education of their child? No, particularly when so many other things required attention. Thus, he eventually acceded to reality and around 1525, when the student population at the universities noticeably began to plummet, switched his support of "educational authority from private to public jurisdiction, from voluntary to compulsory participation, and from associative to institutional organization."[182]

"Compulsory participation" would not be easily achieved since "parental prerogative" usually overruled reformers' demands that children be in school.[183] Nevertheless, the church and government united their efforts to agree on the purposes behind education—to reform the spiritual and civic lifestyle of the population and to solidify Christian truth so that dissension and heresy might

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180 Ibid.

181 Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 4.

182 Ibid., 7.

183 Ibid., 23. Luther was not alone in his conviction of widespread education. Many other key reformers championed the cause as well, especially Melanchthon, who, more so than Luther, loathed the sight of so many "know-nothing" attitudes towards education.

not successfully usher in its ruination.[184] The ultimate objective though, at least for the reformers, "was to prepare people to give willing service to God, each in accordance with his native gifts."[185]

To this end, Luther, a year before he wrote *A Sermon*, published two of his more famous writings—the Larger Catechism and the Smaller Catechism. "Few of his works received more of his care than these unpretentious compendiums of basic religious knowledge," wrote Strauss, "and none was closer to his heart."[186] The usefulness of the catechisms was manifold—to instruct pastors on the foundations of Christianity; strengthen the faith of those who already believed and inform those who did not; and provide simple material for the children. Later, pictures were added for the sake of the illiterate.[187] "The catechism is the perfect teacher," Luther said. "I wish that men would daily preach it and simply read from the book."[188]

Luther desired to see the catechisms first and foremost in the home.[189] With literacy and correct indoctrination Luther envisioned an optimistic future for Christianity. Think of the opportunities, he said. Though some young men may not need their education vocationally, they can still use it with biblical instruction at home and even "[stand] as a ready reserve in case [they] should be needed as a pastor or in some other service of the word."[190]

> A man who has truly learned the Ten Commandments, Luther announced, holds the key to the whole Scripture, and "such a man is entitled in all matters and

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184 Ibid., 22.

185 Ibid., 38.

186 Ibid., 159.

187 Ibid., 162-63.

188 "Der Katechismus ist die vollkommenste Lehre. . . . Ich wollte, daß man ihn täglich predigte und einfach aus dem Buch läse." *LD* 9, 157.

189 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 264.

190 *LW* 46, 231.

> cases to advise, help, console, decide, and judge things spiritual and temporal. And he may be a judge over all doctrines, estates, ideas, laws, and everything else that exists in the world." The priesthood of all believers could scarcely be asserted more boldly.[191]

Moreover, with the Bible in the vernacular and catechisms widely available, Luther and the reformers ardently supported the education of girls as well.[192] "Even women and children," Luther wrote, excitedly, as if to inform those who were not catching on, "can now learn from German books and sermons more about God and Christ . . . than all the universities, foundations, monasteries, the whole papacy, and all the world used to know."[193] In short, the reformers were "[n]ot content with the limited goals of formal instruction. They broadened their aims to include the population at large: city dwellers, small-town folk, villagers. . . . [A]nd here the Lutheran Reformation in Germany is of particular significance because it tried to do it first."[194]

And though Luther wanted education to be universal, he also insisted that it not be, as Strauss defined it, "rigid" or too "formal" but instead a "humane fellowship between the child and an adult."[195] Disciplining children too severely will only cause them to lose hope, be resentful, and probably quit. Praise and punishment had to be sensitively balanced. If done so, blessings and benefits will flow, for "[t]he youth is the church's nursery and fountainhead," Luther said in the winter of 1542-1543. "God has preserved the church through schools."[196]

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191 Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 161.

192 Merry Wiesner, *Women's Response to the Reformation in "The German People and the Reformation,"* ed. by R. Po-Chia Hsia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 156.

193 *LW* 46, 232.

194 Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 2.

195 Ibid., 37.

196 *LW* 54, 452.

PART III

A NEW BEGINNING

You can't be without a wife and remain without sin. After all, marriage is an ordinance and creation of God. Therefore it is not Satan's idea when a man desires to marry an honorable girl, for Satan hates this kind of life. So make the venture in the name of the Lord and on the strength of his blessing and institution![197]

-Luther, 1532

When one looks back upon it, marriage isn't so bad as when one looks forward to it.[198]

-Luther

"God knows, I never thought of going so far as I did," said Luther in 1532 as he reminisced on his forty-eight years of life. "If anybody had said to me when I was at the Diet of Worms [1521], 'In a few years you'll have a wife and your own household,' I wouldn't have believed it."[199] This seems quite true in light of some of his letters written before June 1525. Startled at the mass number of former nuns and monks hastily getting married, he wrote to Spalatin on August 15, 1521, "Good Lord! Will our people at Wittenberg give wives even to the monks? They will not push a wife on me!"[200]

Three years later, with what appears to have been an unchanged conviction, Spalatin read in another letter from Luther that "the way I feel now, and have felt thus far, I will not marry. It is not that I do not feel my flesh or sex, since I am neither wood nor stone, but my mind is far removed from marriage, since I daily expect death."[201] It is interesting that Luther would have written in this vein because in 1519 he told his congregation that a man should pray to God for a wife.[202] Who knows? Perhaps Luther was not

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197 *LW* 54, 31.

198 Kevin Miller, ed., "A Monk Marries," *Christian History* 39 (1993): 24.

199 *LW* 54, 160.

200 *LW* 48, 290.

201 *LW* 49, 93.

202 *LW* 44, 8.

admitting to the fact that he was praying for a wife the whole time! Or, more likely, God stood in Luther's stead and did the praying for him.

Either way, Luther obviously was not aware of the surprise that immediately awaited him. Even as late as April 1525 he demonstrated his ignorance. It was to Spalatin, again, that he communicated his feelings in one of Luther's more free-spirited letters:

> Incidentally, regarding what you are writing about my marrying [let me say the following]: I do not want you to wonder that a famous lover like me does not marry. It is rather strange that I, who so often write about matrimony and get mixed up with women, have not yet turned into a woman, to say nothing of not having married one. Yet if you want me to set an example, look, here you have the most powerful one, for I have had three wives simultaneously, and loved them so much that I have lost two who are taking other husbands; the third I can hardly keep with my left arm, and she, too, will probably soon be snatched away from me. . . . Watch out that I . . . do not overtake you too eager suitors—just as God usually does those things which are least expected.[203]

His jesting about having been "mixed up with women" and had "three wives simultaneously" was a reference to the numerous nuns who, after exiting their cloisters, fled to Luther and pleaded that he might find them husbands. This "third [that] I can hardly keep with my left arm" happened to be Katherina von Bora, a strong-willed woman of twenty-six who was the last in a group of twelve nuns that Luther, for two years, had been trying to marry off.[204]

Only several weeks after this letter he proposed to Katie.[205] Just before his engagement Luther visited his parents' home in Mansfeld, about seventy

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[203] *LW* 49, 104-105.

[204] Katherina von Bora was born in January 1499. She was placed in a nunnery at Nimschen at age ten, and took her vows six years later. By the early 1520s, Luther's ideas found their way into this nunnery to those inside, including Katherina. In 1523, a layman named Leonard Koppe orchestrated the escape of Katherina and eleven nuns. He regularly drove a wagon load of smoked herring barrels to the nunnery, and so he successfully smuggled out the nuns either in the empty barrels or made the nuns appear as the barrels in his covered wagon. They were taken to Wittenberg, where Katherina stayed in the grand house of Lucas Cranach for the two years before she married Luther. Martin tried several times to marry her to suitors in the town. When these efforts failed, she let him know through a friend that she would consider Luther himself for marriage. Roland H. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 23-26.

[205] Years later Luther stated, "It's always my advice that after an engagement is announced one should proceed as quickly as possible to the wedding. Postponement is dangerous on account of foul-mouthed people who are incited by Satan." *LW* 54, 191. Note also that Martin usually referred to Katherina as "Katie" or "Katy," the spelling of which varied according to the people who observed and kept notes about the Luther family.

miles to the southwest. The jesting must have lingered in his mind because he relayed the stories of the nuns on the hunt for husbands and how the town of Wittenberg had become one huge marriage chapel. He probably also mentioned the case of Katie.

Luther's parents did not share in the humor. They had become quite impatient with their son's continued bachelorhood and their eyes brightened at the news of so many wedding bells. Ironic it is that this forty-one year-old revolutionary, who stood up to the Pope, Emperor, and Christian Europe, broke under the rebuke of his parents, who wanted grandchildren. What Spalatin's and Luther's friends' reactions must have been when they received his letters in the following weeks! The first hints of his approaching marriage came in a letter dated May 4 to his friend, John Rühel: "If I can manage it, before I die I will still marry my Katie to spite the devil."[206] Then Spalatin heard the news: "Grace and peace in the Lord! The wedding banquet for me and my Catherine will be held this coming Tuesday. . . . I am inviting you, my Spalatin, so that I may see for myself that you really rejoice in my marriage. . . . I have made the angels laugh and the devils weep. . . . You must come to my wedding. Please do not miss it."[207]

Martin had three reasons for marrying: "to please his father," who desired the family name to be passed on to another generation; "to spite the pope and the Devil; and to seal his witness before martyrdom," or, as Bainton also said, that it might be a "testimony to his faith."[208] Luther confessed that he had carried the banner for marriage now for several years and it was time

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206 Ibid., 111.

207 Ibid., 115-16.

208 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 224-25.

that he owned up to it himself. Besides, "God himself appointed marriage. . . . The world says about marriage: a short joy and a long misery. But let them say what they will. What God created and desires must be, to them, a mockery."[209] Now, whenever he preached on the biblical texts about marriage, he could say, "This is right, I know it." For "one does not learn anything without practice."[210]

He did not marry Katie because of infatuation or some unbridled passion to be joined with her for life; but this is not to say that he did not desire her. He, in fact, stated at the time, "I would not exchange Katie for France or for Venice, because God has given her to me. . . . I cherish my wife."[211] Yet, there is a sense that, from the day of his wedding, his initial, subdued love for her noticeably intensified until his death.

For a while Melanchthon did not support Luther's decision for marriage since "the reintroduction of clerical marriage in the 1520s was not without negative consequences. Melanchthon, in particular, realized the dangerous polemical potential of Luther's 1525 marriage to Katharina von Bora, but was overruled (and subsequently uninvited to the wedding) by his mentor."[212] Moreover, Melanchthon, as well as others like Justas Jonas, a close friend of Luther's, felt that for Martin to have married Katie, a former nun, only made matters more volatile. Luther understood all of this well enough. He knew

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209 ". . . Gott die Ehe selbst eingesetzt. . . . Die Welt sagt von der Ehe: Eine kurze Freude und eine lange Unlust. Aber laß sie sagen, was sie will: was Gott schafft und haben will, das muß ihr Spott sein." *LD* 7, 196.

210 *LW* 54, 50-51.

211 Ibid., 225.

212 Harrington, *Reordering*, 82.

that his wedding represented another "radical break" with medieval Christianity and thus would be one more road that he would have to travel alone.[213]

But this was all part of his plan. The perceived threat of imminent martyrdom constituted the main reason why Luther delayed in having a wife and children. Yet, despite these fears, he alluded to marriage more and more up to the time of his engagement because he believed that it would "seal his witness." In short, the Reformation he earnestly labored for could not be completed, and the Church that he called to go back into the world would not mobilize, until he himself took this final and monumental step.

Bainton proposed that Luther's stance before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 was the moment when history entered modern times. Luther's radical stance, however, for a different theology along with all of his talk about reforms could never alone accomplish his intended goal. So much else would have been left undone because the people who wished to go the way of the Reformation were looking for an example and, in this case, a pioneer. They could follow only where they were led.

If Martin, after preaching for years on the glory of the family, did not lead them himself into marriage and children, how could they confidently step into the same? And how could Luther expect them to? This is why he said "[t]rue theology is practical, and its foundation is Christ, . . . [a]ccordingly speculative theology belongs to the devil in hell."[214] Practice what you preach, Luther often said. Hence, if not for Martin and Katie reciting wedding vows to each other, a break into "modern times" as well as the return to the "world" would have been an unfinished work.

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213 Oberman, *Luther*, 282.

214 *LW* 54, 22.

"Luther's marriage was the genuine and far more offensive form of iconoclasm," wrote Oberman. "It directed itself against the fiction of false saintliness in the hearts of the living and not against the depiction of dead saints. For him 'saintly' meant to be near his 'dear housewife.'"[215] It is true that some of the monks and nuns preceded Luther in finding spouses, but Luther knew it would be very difficult to instruct them on marriage if he did not have the experiences himself. And with various marital problems already arising in the Reformation, how else could he better handle them, or be able to handle them at all?

The truth is that this road was one that Luther did not tread alone. Many of the key reformers were married by 1525 and "brief reflections on the spiritual benefits of their own marriages gave them far more credibility with their parishioners than volumes of scriptural or theological expositions."[216] Protestant reformers possessed a powerful polemical tool in the person of the married minister," continued Harrington, "and they knew it. . . . Catholic reformers could match Lutheran and Calvinist recruitment, training, and disciplining of their respective clerics, but not the living spiritual authority that married ministers lent to the institution of marriage itself."[217]

When compared to many of the great contemporaries of his day, including Erasmus, the popes, bishops, and Catholic debaters like Eck and Aleander, the one thing Luther had above them all was the ability to closely relate with the vast majority of Europeans, be they rich or poor, and this due

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215 Oberman, *Luther*, 282.

216 Harrington, *Reordering*, 82.

217 Ibid., 83.

to his identification with their world.[218] It would be impossible, however, to do so as long as he remained a monk or even the bachelor Protestant preacher. "I . . . wanted to confirm what I have taught by practicing it," wrote Luther to Spalatin, "for I find so many timid people in spite of such great light from the gospel. God has willed and brought about this step."[219]

THE DOCTOR AND HIS WIFE

Luther looked admiringly at a painting of his wife and said, "I think I'll have a husband added to that painting, send it to Mantua, and inquire whether they prefer marriage [to celibacy]."[220]

-January 1537

The Devil cannot bear to see married people agree well with each other.[221]

-Luther

No one individual shaped Martin Luther more in his later years than did his wife. Although Luther now had to meet her needs and pay attention to all the cares that came with marriage, he had no intention of slowing down. But having Katie around with their six children certainly re-directed many of his energies as well as opened up previously untapped sources of learning and life. Luther embraced these as eagerly as he had all the theological dilemmas and reforms. He loved Katie. There is an unmistakable mutual affection between the two that can be witnessed in his letters and *Table Talk*.

"Man has strange thoughts the first year of marriage," recalled Martin. "When sitting at table he thinks, 'Before I was alone; now there are two.' Or in

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218 "It is, in fact, true that neither Erasmus nor Carlstadt would have enabled all Christians to achieve freedom. The 'enlightened' reforms of the one would have remained a privilege of the educated elite, and the reformation of the other would have been forced on all. If both of them had been successful in shunting Luther aside, Christendom would soon have been confronted with the alternative of 'education or Bible.' Luther's realization of these consequences could only reinforce his inclination to identify Christ . . . closely with his own interpretation of the Gospel." Oberman, *Luther*, 303.

219 *LW* 49, 117.

220 *LW* 54, 222. In that same year a Church council had been arranged to meet in Mantua.

221 Miller, *Christian History* 39, 24.

bed, when he wakes up, he sees a pair of pigtails lying beside him which he hadn't seen there before."[222] What began as two at table soon became three when their first son, John (called Hans), arrived fourteen months after their wedding.

Father, mother, and son lived comfortably in the very spacious former Augustinian monastery; but owing to Martin's relatively meager salary, refusal to receive any money for his published material, and rapidly growing family, the Luthers' found themselves approaching poverty. But Martin did not seem to mind. "God in his great goodness has blessed me with a healthy and vigorous son," he wrote to a friend. "Katie, my rib, sends her greetings. . . . She is well, by God's grace, compliant, and in every way is obedient and obliging to me . . . so that I would not want to exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus."[223]

Martin quickly realized that his first impression of Katie as being "haughty" was misguided. In reality, this so-called "haughtiness" turned out to be the greatest blessing to him because she was, quite honestly, a workhorse. He affectionately referred to her as the "morning star of Wittenberg" since she rose at five in the morning during the winter and at four during the summer.

After preparing herself for the day's work, there seemed to be no limit to the things she could do, not the least of which were tending farmlands and orchards they owned, driving wagons, brewing beer, slaughtering animals, raising their children plus managing any and all servants of the house, cooking meals, and reading the Bible.[224] In late 1535 Martin "promised her fifty gulden

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[222] Ibid., 191.

[223] *LW* 49, 154.

[224] Katie shied away from virtually nothing. Once, some large field mice crept onto their property and damaged some of the fruit trees. She subsequently caught and drowned them in some pools of water in the garden. *LW* 54, 337.

if she [read the Bible] before Easter. She is very serious and is now starting the Book of Deuteronomy."[225] Occasionally she asked him the meaning of a particular verse. Martin willingly explained passages of the Bible for people at religious settings or for guests at meal times, but nothing pleased him more than to do so for those in his family when they inquired, and they often did.

"Wives bring to their husbands, no matter how busy they may be, a multitude of trivial matters," said Luther. There were the mundane questions, formalities of making the house look presentable, and the like. Yet for all the "trivial matters" Martin claimed she pulled him into, one wonders if many of them were for his own good. He readily admitted that "[b]efore I was married the bed was not made for a whole year and became foul with sweat. But I worked so hard and was so weary I tumbled in without noticing it."[226] He may not have noticed, but Katie did. Six months after their marriage he was placing an order for a new mattress.

"Women deceive men" was another one of Martin's more colorful statements, referring to the Garden of Eden. Towards the end of one of Martin and Katie's more animated disagreements he surrendered and said, "You convince me of whatever you please. You have complete control. I concede to you the control of the household, provided my rights are reserved. . . . With tricks and cunning women deceive men, as I, too, have experienced."[227] Perhaps Luther was a little astonished that he had met his match. Marrying a man with a dominating personality and commanding presence required a special calling, and Katie rose to the occasion. While she lived out the model of

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225 *LW* 50, 109.

226 Quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 226.

227 "Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years," Martin once said. "Eve would say, 'You ate the apple,' and Adam would retort, 'You gave it to me.'" *LW* 54, 174-75.

a submissive, nurturing Protestant wife and mother, she nonetheless spoke her peace about what personal flaws her husband should take care to address. "Domestic wrath is our Lord God's plaything," concluded Luther, "there only a slap or a cuff applies. . . . If I can endure conflict with the devil, sin, and a bad conscience, then I can also put up with the irritations of Katy von Bora,"[228] and so "he freely accepted her criticism and wrath."[229]

At times he would return fire just for good measure. His words were not caustic in nature, rather poking fun so as to ruffle Katie a little.[230] Most importantly, however, Luther vehemently defended the female sex and blasted any degrading speech about women that so often bordered on misogyny. Attacking Albrecht, the archbishop of Mainz, who purportedly made several slanderous statements concerning woman's physical nature, Luther said, "[t]hat godless knave, forgetful of his mother and his sister, dares to blaspheme God's creature through whom he was himself born. . . . For Christ, our Savior, did not hold woman in contempt but entered the womb of a woman."[231] A few years later some local students were suspected of having published injurious pamphlets concerning virgins. The matter so upset Luther that he railed against them during a public meeting and kept grumbling about it for the rest of the day.

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228 Ibid., 34-35.

229 Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 55.

230 "Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon to [keep house and bear and raise children]." *LW* 54, 8. Some months later Luther told Katie, "The time will come when a man will take more than one wife." She responded, "Let the devil believe that!" "The reason, Katy, is that a woman can bear a child only once a year while her husband can beget many." Katie replied, "Paul said that each man should have his own wife." Martin then said, "Yes, 'his own wife' and not 'only one wife,' for the latter isn't what Paul wrote." "Before I put up with this," Katie rejoined, "I'd rather go back to the convent and leave you and all our children." Ibid., 153.

231 Ibid., 171, 223. Luther often praised women because of their God-given gift to procreate. "It was for this reason that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Adam called his wife by that admirable name Eve, which means mother. He didn't say 'wife' but 'mother,' and he added 'of all living.' Here you have the ornament that distinguishes woman, namely, that she is the fount of all living human beings." Ibid.

Martin remained mindful of the realities of marriage, especially the potential for divided loyalties. He once heard it said that men, six months after their wedding, will already prefer other women to their own wife. "And so it is," confirmed Luther. "We hate the things that are present and we love those that are absent. . . . There's more to [marriage] than a union of the flesh. There must be harmony with respect to patterns of life and ways of thinking. The bonds of matrimony alone won't do it."[232] The archenemy was, once again, the Devil. Insidious demonic onslaughts awaited all those who heeded the call of matrimony since it stood as one of God's chief institutions on earth. "[The Devil would] like to have whoredom and uncleanness," remarked Luther, "for if he does, he knows very well that people will no longer trouble themselves about God."[233]

There were other inescapable realities in marriage, too. One wintry afternoon Luther's little son Martin

> cried so that nobody could pacify him. The doctor and his wife sat there sadly for a whole hour. Afterward the doctor said, "These are the annoyances of marriage, and on their account everybody avoids marriage. We all fear the caprice of wives, the crying of children, bad neighbors. So we want to be free, not bound, in order that we may remain free lords and seek after whoredom."[234]

Luther knew very well that many fretted and declined marriage at the sight of its pains and travails.

> When that wise harlot, natural reason, looks at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Ah, should I rock the baby, wash diapers, make the bed, smell foul odors, watch through the night, wait upon the bawling youngster and heal its infected sores, then take care of the wife, support her by working, tending to this, tend to that, do this, do that, suffer this, suffer that, and put up with

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232 Ibid., 444.

233 Ibid., 422. Luther believed that sound scriptural teaching must accompany a minister who speaks about marriage. "For what is more dangerous than to incite such a big crowd of unmarried people to matrimony on the basis of . . . unreliable and uncertain Scripture passages, only to have them harassed afterward with continual anguish of conscience, worse than the cross they now have to carry." *LW* 48, 294.

234 *LW* 54, 179.

> whatever additional displeasure and trouble married life brings? Should I be so imprisoned?[235]

Yes, answered Luther. He gave a very simple reason as to why—"God desires it, and so we obey."[236] If this did not suffice then he would elaborate: "Man can't do without women. Even if it were possible for men to beget and bear children, they still couldn't do without women. . . . It seems to me that it is the pleasantest kind of life to have a moderate household, to live with an obedient wife, and to be content with little."[237]

At those times when he realized this life was, in fact, now his, he looked at his wife with of a heart of thankfulness and said, "Katie, you have married an honest man who loves you; you are an empress."[238]

A CITIZEN OF WITTENBERG

When we think of Martin Luther, we understandably think first of the monk and theologian who wanted to reform the church, a great man of God seemingly obsessed with sin and the Devil and lost in other-worldly pursuits. But the monk and the theologian who wrote the 95 Theses was also a husband and the father of six children.[239]

- Steven Ozment

In the Doctor's house lives a strangely mixed crowd of young people, students, young girls, widows, old ladies, and children, wherefore there are large disturbances in the house because of which many people pity Luther.[240]

-A contemporary

Martin Luther lived at the far east end of town. The Schloßkirche (Castle Church) on which he nailed the Ninety-Five Theses stood at the far west

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235 Miller, *Christian History* 39, 24.

236 Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 113.

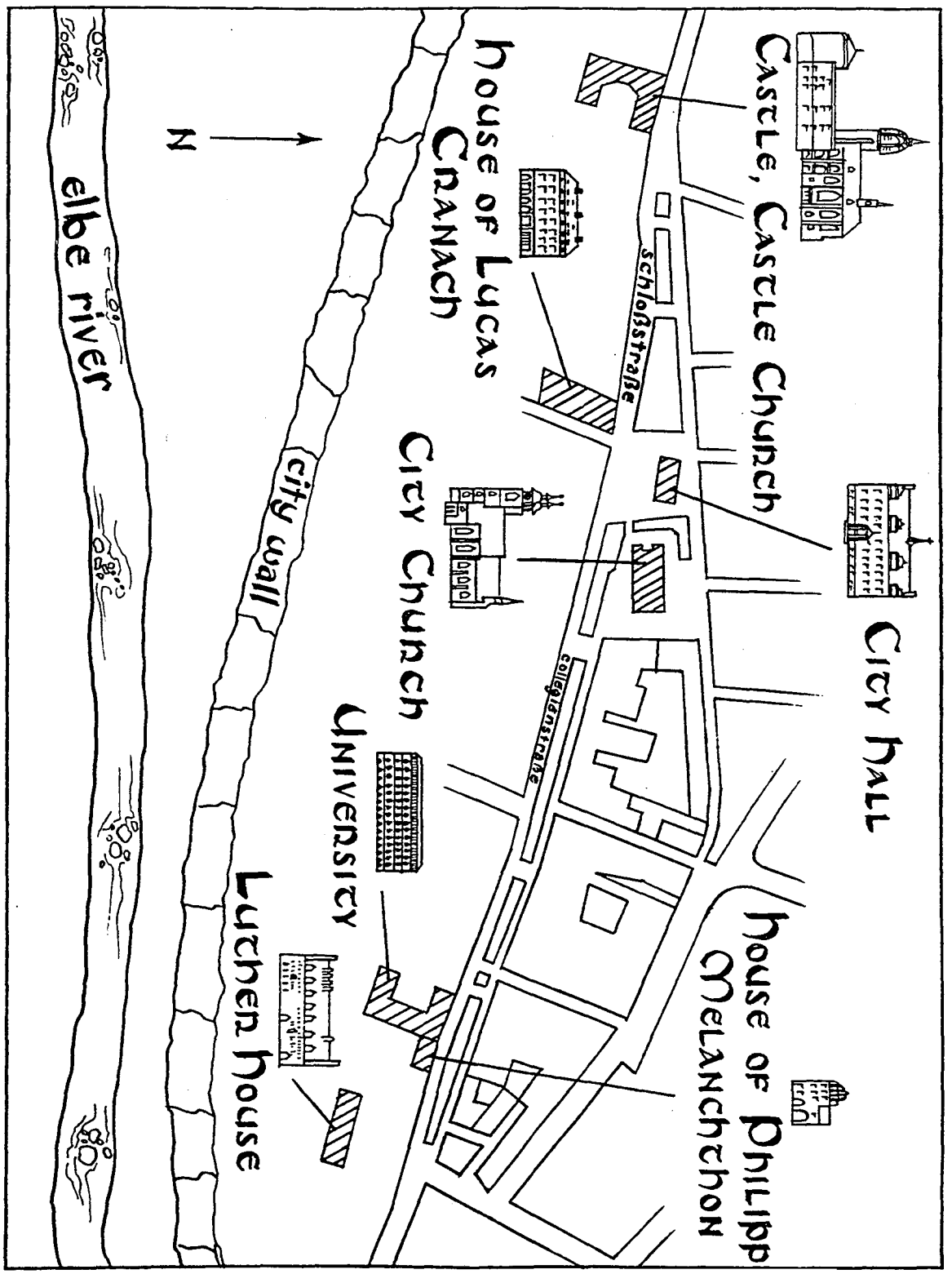
237 LW 54, 160, 218.

238 Oberman, *Luther*, 280.

239 Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), quoted in Miller, *Christian History* 39, 22.

240 Lutherstadt Wittenberg, "The Luther House" (Wittenberg: Fremdenverkehrsberband Wittenberg Information), 6.

Center of Wittenberg



end, about a ten minute walk from Luther's front door.[241] Between the two lay most of Wittenberg. The status of a town had been given it as far back as 1293, but its importance was quite new. In 1502 Elector Frederick the Wise established a university within the town and in the following years the population grew to about 2,500. Nothing truly set Wittenberg apart from other towns, which probably explains why it was overlooked by settlers for centuries. The Thuringian forest and hills were fifty miles to the south and all the land between the forest and the Baltic Sea to the north (about 200 miles distance) was flat. Wittenberg, therefore, was situated at the southern end of this German plain with the Elbe river, flowing along the southern side of the city, as one of its major sources of strength.

Exiting a northern doorway of the Castle Church, Luther would step onto Schloßstraße (Castle Street), a flat street that connected the Church with Luther's house. Martin would stroll eastward on his walk home and gaze upon buildings that could be found in almost every sixteenth-century German village. Not far from the Castle Church he would see the home of Lucas Cranach, whose paintings and woodcuts played a notable role in the course of the Reformation. Cranach was a leading member of the community, thrice elected mayor, owned one of the more impressive properties in Wittenberg, and, in his later years, was second in wealth only to the Chancellor of Frederick the Wise. Cranach's house, like the others along the city's streets, was several stories high and stood adjacent to his neighbors' houses. Indeed, most of the buildings in Wittenberg were attached to one another, providing for what on

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241 The actual place where Luther presented his Theses is not known for sure. Historians have postulated various sites, although tradition certainly has it as the Castle Church door.

both sides of the street looked like flat-faced walls of randomly changing colors, countless windows, and slightly varying styles of facades.

Just ahead of Cranach's house Luther would see, on the left, the white, three-storied Rathaus (Town Hall) with, on its front or south side, about twenty, dark-framed windows. Constructed during Luther's later years it was, when well maintained, one of the more attractive buildings in town. Lying between it and Schloßstraße was an open court where Luther could stop in to buy fruit and other goods at the market, which had been strategically positioned since the City Hall was the center of town. A few more steps to the east stood the other major church of Wittenberg—the Stadtkirche (City Church). Its twin towers rose to over two hundred feet and, along with the Castle Church's even higher tower, dominated the Wittenberg skyline when viewed from a distance. Luther's theses were nailed to the door of the Castle Church but for the better part of thirty years he fulminated most of his sermons from the pulpit of the City Church.

At the east end of the market Schloßstraße became Collegienstraße. Nearing his home Luther would see, on the right, a small, stone arch gateway which opened up to the University's two buildings—the Old (1503) and the New (1511). Philipp Melanchthon's house was next door to the school. A graduate of Tübingen University, Melanchthon was renowned for his Greek scholarship and, from the day of his arrival in August 1518, labored alongside Luther as a friend and co-worker.

Two doors further eastward lived Martin Luther. The former monastery which became his house was a considerable structure, eventually consisting of several attached buildings all of which were about three stories tall. Here Luther dwelled from 1511 until his death in 1546, receiving permission from

the Elector in 1525 to raise his family in the monastery and finally, in 1532, being given legal ownership of it.

Most often Luther could be found in and around his house. The building, windows, inhabitants, and surroundings now formed a schoolroom from which Luther never ceased to learn or let a moment pass without expounding on the great lessons of life.[242] The sources of his education were endless. The cloister would eventually house the six Luther children (Hans, Elizabeth, Magdalena, Martin, Paul, and Margaretha), students, servants, four orphans related to Luther, and sometimes the sick. Luther the Great Reformer and Theologian had now also become the Great Parent, and he did not shirk his new responsibilities. "There is no power on earth that is nobler or greater than that of parents."[243]

On the night of January 28, 1533, the third son was born to Martin and Katie. "I've had him named Paul," Luther announced the following day, "because St. Paul furnished me with many a good passage and argument. . . . I intend to send my children away [when they're grown]. Any of them who wants to be a soldier I'll send to Hans Loeser. Dr. Jonas and Philip will have any of them who may want to study. And if one wants to toil I'll dispatch him to a peasant."[244] "Perhaps," wrote Luther to a friend, asking him to be present at the baptizing of Paul, "God the Lord may wish to raise [with this boy] a new enemy of the pope or the Turk."[245]

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242 "More often than is generally acknowledged, Martin Luther drew his verbal imagery from the visual images around him." Kristin Zapalac, *In His Image and Likeness: Political Iconography and Religious Change in Regensburg 1500-1600* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 80.

243 Quoted in Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 132.

244 *LW* 54, 184.

245 *LW* 50, 74.

The other children were, like Paul, raised under the careful guidance and concern of their parents. In mid-1532 seven-month old Martin was nursing while his father sat nearby. "The pope, the bishops, Duke George, Ferdinand, and all the demons hate this child," remarked Luther, "yet the little child isn't afraid of all of them put together. He [feeds with pleasure], is cheerful, is unconcerned about all his enemies, and lets them rage as long as they wish. Christ said truly, 'Unless you become like children.'"[246] Luther gathered encouragement after witnessing such incidents. "[I]f God hides himself in the storm clouds which brood over the brow of Sinai, then gather about the manger, look upon the infant Jesus as he leaps in the lap of his mother, and know that the hope of the world is here."[247]

In the winter of 1531, while watching his wife and three-week old child, Luther said,

> God must be much friendlier to me and speak to me in friendlier fashion than my Katy to little Martin. Neither Katy nor I could intentionally gouge out the eye or tear off the head of our child. Nor could God. God must have patience with us. . . . When I reflect on the magnitude of God's mercy and majesty, I am myself horrified at how far God has humbled himself.[248]

No doubt Luther sensed his opponents' mocking murmurs and snickerings as he faced the toils of parenthood. "When a father washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child," he retorted, "and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool . . . God with all his angels and creatures is smiling."[249]

Often, one or some of his children would be present when guests came to visit with Luther. Depending on the circumstance, a guest might catch Martin playing with his child while saying, "Oh, this is the best of God's

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246 Ibid., 159.

247 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 286.

248 *LW* 54, 127.

249 Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 8.

blessings,"[250] or "there is a remarkable innocence in children, and therefore Christ has set them before us as our teachers; they know no sin of envy, avarice, unbelief . . . and take an apple for a gold piece."[251] On a February evening in 1539, George Spalatin and a pastor came for dinner at the Luther house. Upon entering they found Luther in "some pleasant banter with his little son Martin,

> who wished to defend his doll with zeal and honor and to dress her and love her. Then [Luther] said, "Such was our disposition in paradise—simple, upright, without malice. There must have been real earnestness there, just as this boy speaks about God piously and with supreme trust and just as he is sure of God. Such natural playing is best in children, who are the dearest jesters. The affected play of old fools lacks such grace. Therefore little children are the finest mockingbirds and talk naturally and honestly. . . . Children live altogether in faith, without reason. It's as Ambrose said, 'There is lack of reason but not of faith.'"[252]

Other times the lesson was of a different nature. With the constant activity of so many living in the house, tempers were bound to flare up—if not those of Martin or Katie, who were constantly interrupted, then certainly those of the siblings. Luther would at times opt for passive observation in an effort to know God's thoughts. "On August 17 [1538] he listened to the quarreling and fighting among his children and afterward watched them as they were again reconciled. Then he said, 'Dear God, how pleased you must be with the life and play of such children! Yes, all their sins are nothing else than forgiveness of sins.'"[253]

Up the staircase and in the central section of the second floor was Luther's study (*Stube*). Aside from the dining room, it is likely that no other

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[250] *LW* 54, 142.

[251] Ibid., 120. Luther consistently referred to the simplicity of faith in children, and how they keep and follow God's word without fail. "Der Kinder Glauben und Leben ist am besten, denn sie haben nur das Wort, daran sie sich halten, und geben Gott fein einfältig die Ehre, daß er wahrhaftig sei, halten für gewiß, was er verheißt und zusagt." *LD* 9, 37.

[252] *LW* 54, 334.

[253] Ibid., 300.

area witnessed more activity. What should have been his place for contemplation and the organization of his writings and sermons usually turned into the stage for everyone's energies. In one corner of the room, away from the sunlight, stood a large heater while Luther's desk, quite simply a flat, square table surprisingly similar to the one on which he translated the Bible while at the Wartburg, was placed next to the windows.

Here he devoted much time towards his sermons, writings, and studies, primarily of the Bible. Luther regarded the latter so highly that he eschewed his own published works in light of it.

> As a young man I made myself familiar with the Bible; by reading it again and again I came to know my way about in it. Only then did I consult writers [of books about the Bible]. But finally I had to put them out of my sight and wrestle with the Bible itself. It's better to see with one's own eyes than with another's. On this account, because of the bad example, I would wish that all my books were buried . . . and the Holy Scriptures alone would be read. . . . Who wants to buy [my] stout tomes? And if they're bought, who'll read them? And if they're read, who'll be edified by them?[254]

Yet, while Luther was himself later repelled at the voluminous production that had flowed from his pen and confessed to have been wrong on some issues, he believed that his words concerning faith were true.[255]

Martin's children delighted in being near their father. The feeling was mutual, but inevitably they disturbed him while he worked. "When I'm writing or doing something else," commented Luther, "my Hans sings a little tune for me. If he becomes too noisy and I rebuke him a little for it, he continues to sing but does it more privately and with a certain awe and uneasiness. This is what God wishes: that we be always cheerful, but with reverence."[256] Disciplining in order to correct was always the rule, but "[o]ne shouldn't whip

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[254] Ibid., 361, 311. On another occasion Luther wrote, "He who adds to someone's knowledge also adds to his pain." *LW* 49, 147.

[255] *LW* 54, 197.

[256] Ibid., 21.

children too hard," concluded Luther. "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."[257] Therefore, the apple should always lie next to the rod.

Nevertheless, the failure of a child to confess a misdeed or, in other cases, justifying a wrongful act, would not be brooked. "It is enough to have sinned without trying to justify oneself! This isn't tolerated in a home. The father of a household doesn't allow it."[258] And if the children did not remind Luther of his own humanity in the face of God's divinity, then other things would. After washing his hands before dinner one night he discovered that the water had become quite dirty. "Well, I have forgotten that our skin and flesh are made of dirt. It is as the Scriptures says, 'You are dust and ashes.' How proud you are, O man!"[259] Usually, however, the children sufficed in making Luther mindful of the relation between God and man. Taking his six-month old son on his lap the child suddenly soiled himself as well as Luther. "How our Lord God has to put up with many a murmur and stink from us," he exclaimed, "worse than a mother must endure from her child!"[260]

Understandably, Martin and Katie availed themselves of the sparse opportunities they had to be alone. While the front doorway to their house opened towards the north and Collegienstraße, the south side faced the Elbe river, only a few minutes' walk across some grassy fields. A particularly favorite destination for a respite was the river bank with fishing rods in hand.

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257 Ibid., 157.

258 Ibid., 60-61.

259 Ibid., 267.

260 Ibid., 158-59.

In relaxing silence or pleasant conversation the two would sit for awhile, and their catch, usually that of pike, trout, blacktail, and others, would end up as the main course for dinner. And they enjoyed each other's company. During an autumn evening in 1533 Luther said to her, "Katy, you are more pleased over these few fish than many a nobleman when he fishes in several large ponds and catches thousands of fish. Alas, greed and ambition prevent us from enjoying things. Many a skinflint sits in the midst of the greatest luxuries and yet can't enjoy them with pleasure."[261]

Once they had caught their fill they then retraced their steps to "Liberty Hall," as Luther's house was often referred to, for a host of people called at all hours of the day—none being denied entrance; most offered a seat if they arrived at meal time. "One hardly knows whether to be grateful or not for that hospitality of Luther which allowed a motley club of inferior Boswells to frequent his table," noted Gordon Rupp. "And we know how they intruded into the most domestic privacies, . . . [b]ut they were all made welcome."[262] Included in this "motley club" were "exiled clergymen, escaped nuns, government officials, visitors from abroad, . . . colleagues of Luther in the university,"[263] as well as young students like John Mathesius, who, aside from scribbling down many of Luther's informal discussions, also managed to allow other eager students access to the table. He characterized meal times in this way:

> Although our doctor often took weighty and profound thoughts to table with him and sometimes maintained the silence of the monastery during the entire meal, . . . yet at appropriate times he spoke in a very jovial way. . . . When he wished to get us to talk he would throw out a question, "What's new?" . . . If the

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261 Ibid., 199.

262 Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 5-6.

263 *LW* 54, ix.

> conversation was animated, it was nevertheless conducted with decent propriety and courtesy, and others would contribute their share until the doctor started to talk. . . . Reputable persons often came to the table from the university and from foreign places, and then very nice talks and stories were heard.[264]

The great, daily lessons of life were by no means suspended while everyone ate. Despite the conversations, on which Luther and everyone else depended for information and learning, other sources proved of interest. The family dog Tölpel, which in English literally means "blockhead" or "clumsy oaf," taught Martin a thing or two. "When Luther's puppy happened to be at the table," noted Veit Dietrich, a friend and assistant, and "looked for a morsel from his master, and watched with open mouth and motionless eyes, [Luther] said, 'Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish, or hope.'"[265]

Justas Jonas frequently dropped by the Luther house as well. Settling down for dinner one evening Jonas said, "I have a branch with cherries on it hanging over my table in order that when I look at it I may learn the article about divine creation." "Why don't you learn it daily by looking at your children, the fruit of your body?" countered Luther. "They're there every day, and surely they amount to much more than all the fruit of the trees! There you may see the providence of God, who created them from nothing."[266]

And yet, like Jonas, Luther absolutely loved nature. To cool his too easily eruptable temper he often granted himself a furlough in his garden, the same place where he and Staupitz grappled over theological dilemmas. An

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[264] Ibid., ix-x.

[265] Ibid., 37-38.

[266] Ibid., 245.

hour or two would pass as he sat on the bench, usually alongside Katie who busied herself with some activity, and he indulged his imagination. Everything on which his eyes rested amazed him, but nothing more so than a rose.[267]

> A glorious work of art by God. . . . If a man had the capacity to make just one rose he would be given an empire! But the countless gifts of God are esteemed as nothing because they're always present. . . . If God were to withhold our necessities from us for a year, what a cry there would be throughout the world! But now that he lavishes them upon us we're all ungrateful, and there is no one who gives thanks."[268]

He also had a special affection for birds. To him the song of a nightingale was as Christ proclaiming the gospel, but too often the sweet music was drowned out by the croaking of frogs—"the clamor of the heretics."[269] While walking around his garden with a friend some birds scampered off when Luther, wishing to draw closer, came too close. "Dear little bird, don't fly away. I wish you nothing but good. If only you'd believe me! . . . . This is how we should believe God—that he wishes us well with his whole heart. He who has given his Son for me certainly doesn't want to kill us."[270]

But most of all, Luther wished to be in the garden with his children. Poetically, the same man who shook the Church by its hinges and stirred an enormous controversy in Europe could also be seen jumping into the fray of his children's playtime battles!

Unfortunately for Luther, his times of pleasure must have been short-lived. Countless duties were required of him. At some point around New Year's 1532 he said, "Four persons are dependent on me, and each of them

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267 "It is reported that Luther, during the hotly-contested theological wrestlings of the 1519 Leipzig Debates, held a flower in his hand and would often smell its fragrance." Oberman, *Luther*, 326.

268 *LW* 54, 355, 131. Luther made similar statements quite often: "Je größer Gottes Gaben und Wunder sind, um so weniger werden sie geachtet. Denn wo ist eine größere Gabe, als daß der Mensch sehen, hören und sprechen kann? Und doch dankt niemand Gott dafür oder erkennt diese Gabe an und achtet sie hoch." *LD* 9, 214.

269 *LW* 54, 351.

270 Ibid., 192.

demands my time for himself. Four times a week I preach in public, twice a week I lecture, and in addition I hear cases, write letters, and am working on a book for publication."[271] Despite these endless commitments Martin was generally happy. He despised the sorrow of solitude, to which he felt subjected during his years as a monk; and regarded loneliness and isolation as equally loathsome, especially since they were in direct conflict to the life God intended for people to live.[272] It is doubtful he would have traded the busy atmosphere in his home for that of quiet and seclusion because the life he now led was filled with vitality and the unpredictable. "I'd rather go to my swineherd John, or even to the pigs themselves, than remain alone."[273]

As an active citizen with a family to consider, Martin concerned himself with the affairs and conditions of the village. Much of the official business had to be addressed to the Electors of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, and later his brother, John. For example, the Augustinian monastery was not the only cloister in Wittenberg. Another local one belonged to the Franciscans, but by 1526 only a few, poverty-stricken friars remained. When they departed a year later, Luther requested of John that the cloister be set "aside for the service of God and of poor people. . . . Therefore . . . I humbly request Your Electoral Grace to appoint and give the monastery . . . to our Lord Jesus Christ as an asylum and home for his poor members . . . lest in time grasping hands should fall upon it and tear it down."[274]

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271 Ibid., 22-23.

272 Ibid., 140.

273 Ibid., 277.

274 *LW* 49, 170-71.

If the religious buildings were not in need of attending to then its ministers were. Not long before Luther's inquiry into the Franciscan monastery he informed the Elector John about the declining financial condition of regional church ministers. Many communities wished to have "evangelical preachers" but either did not have the money to support them or else were too stingy in their contributions. Luther, obviously, did not need to be persuaded about the importance of each village's having a reform-minded minister. Therefore, he wrote to John, "if the people want to have a pastor, it is Your Electoral Grace's duty to see to it that they also reward the laborer"—meaning, an annual tax.

Other times the business was even less glamorous. An incorrigible yokel named Hans Metzsch, who happened to work for the town's security, proved unresponsive to Luther's admonishments about his openly and offensively promiscuous lifestyle. Again, Luther brought the matter to the Elector's attention.

> Metsch is headstrong, and creates stout opposition toward himself. Therefore it is necessary for Your Electoral Grace to look into this situation. . . . For good people are patient, but too heavy a weight tears the bag, and a spark could easily start to glow among the impatient people who might get tired of Metzsch's stubbornness, cursing, and tyranny. Thank God this is a good, peaceful, and law-abiding town.[275]

In the same letter Luther mentioned the unrepaired city wall, a project whose delayed completion created a dangerous situation.

> . . . the city stands open day and night because [of a break in the wall] of more than one hundred paces, so that pigs and all kinds of animals run into [town]; it is possible to see, walk, and shoot without any obstacle from the fields, because the wall is torn down to the foundation and nothing new has been built, or even surveyed, to replace it. . . . My head is full of worry because there are many children of important and good people here, and times are very dangerous. God might allow something to happen which we would have to deplore belatedly and in vain.[276]

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[275] *LW* 50, 24-26.

[276] Ibid., 25.

The terrible plague also seeped its way past the city walls and into Wittenberg several times during Luther's life. Customarily, most inhabitants fled to the country in an effort to escape, including the university students who relocated their studies to Jena, about one-hundred thirty miles southwest. This happened in 1527, 1535, and again in 1539. Melanchthon went with them, but Luther stayed behind. The most desperate of these times for Martin was 1527, due not only to the harsh, unpredictable conditions and the people who, though healthy one day, were dead the next, but also because of a severe depression and doubt that seized Luther for most of the year. The letters he sent to distant friends at that time reveal as much.

> Please do not cease praying for and struggling along with me . . . so that Christ may not abandon me nor permit this to be a torment of the ungodly people but [rather a testing] of his children, and that my faith may not cease to the end. If only you all were here again. We have prayed to the Lord to avert the plague, and it does seem that we have been heard.[277]

In 1542, after he and his family had survived the waves of pestilence, Luther heard about the plague sweeping through Naumberg. Someone asked him if ministers should leave at such times. "By no means!" he replied. "Preachers must not be all too ready to flee in order not to make the people apprehensive. . . . [I]t would be a good thing not to burden all with this task [of visiting the sick] but to appoint one or two men and let them risk their lives. If the lot fell on me I would not be afraid."[278]

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[277] *LW* 49, 186.

[278] *LW* 54, 434.

SUFFERING AND SORROW

You believe, therefore you speak. You speak, therefore you must suffer. You suffer, therefore you will be comforted. For faith, confession, and the cross belong to each other and are what righteous Christians are entitled to.[279]

-Luther

My sufferings were a good teacher for me. They have made me humble and have chased away the search for fame and vanity.[280]

-Luther

Affliction is the best book in my library.[281]

-Luther

"If we judge Luther only by his 'official' face," says Oberman, "we shall never get to know the sensitive, sorely tried, frightened Luther, or the acrimonious one."[282] Or, to say it a bit more simply, Luther was a human being. The Great Reformer, Great Theologian, and publisher of countless books purchased throughout Europe suffered from life's tragedies that chased him down as surely as they did the people around him. There was no magical, spiritual shield by which he could deflect the trials as they came. On the contrary, he never searched for such a shield but faced head-on all that life offered, and he was a big target. Opening himself up to the cares of so many destined him for sizable burdens.

The griefs he experienced up until the Ninety-Five Theses were primarily his own, resulting from wrestlings with the Holy, the tenets of the Church, and his own nature. Later, they began to pour into his life from that of others. It is ironic that the monk who virtually never spoke or listened to a female while

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279 "Glaubst du, so redest du. Redest du, so mußt du leiden. Leidest du, so wirst du getröstet. Denn Glaube, Bekenntnis und Kreuz gehören zueinander und stehen einem rechten Christen zu." *LD* 9, 105.

280 "Meine Leiden waren für mich eine gute Lehre. Sie haben mich demütig gemacht, d. h. sie haben die Sucht nach Ruhm und Eitelkeit verscheucht." Ibid., 236.

281 Miller, *Christian History* 34, 27.

282 Oberman, *Luther*, 303.

in the cloister suddenly discovered himself repeatedly involved with the lives of women.[283]

Some of the time he managed to be of help to them, other times his efforts backfired, and usually the issue at hand was marriage. In November 1520, Melanchthon, at the suggestion of Luther, married the mayor's daughter, but seventeen years later Luther said, "I remember . . . when, after the wedding, [Melanchthon] was told that she wasn't a virgin but had a tainted body. Oh, how I suffered with Philip for a whole week. I resolved never again to be a matchmaker."[284]

This promise was short-lived. As noted earlier, during the 1520s the fleeing monks and nuns came to him looking for spouses.[285] He tried to accommodate them all, sometimes having to search several times before being able to locate a match. The whole ordeal no doubt struck him as bizarre, that so many would, in effect, trust him to find their life-long mate. The requests came at all hours of any and every day. On a particular evening in May 1532, Luther had retired to bed only to be reawakened by an urgent messenger. The latter was sent by a pastor's widow looking for a new husband. "Give [her a husband]?" exclaimed Luther. "She's over seven years of age! Let her find her own husband! I can't provide one for her. . . . What a bother! Am I to furnish husbands for these women? They must take me for a pimp!"[286]

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283 "[When I was a monk] I didn't even look at the women when they made their confession," he recalled in later years. "In Erfurt I heard the confession of no woman, in Wittenberg of only three women." *LW* 54, 15.

284 Ibid., 224-25. Luther held a very deep conviction about women preserving their virginity until marriage. "In his own time, Luther maintained, nothing including offspring, was more important than 'feminine honor' which should never be surrendered prior to a legitimate and lawful wedding." Miller, *Mirror for Marriage*, 82-83.

285 See also Oberman, *Luther*, 316-17.

286 *LW* 54, 155.

He would shake his head in disbelief, probably relay the unusual story to a friend, but then handle such cases seriously because God had now restored the institution of marriage to the Church and that meant the Devil lurked nearby, angry and revengeful. "He is hostile to us," noted Luther. "We don't know a hundredth part of what he knows."[287] If "family and economy, state and Church" served as the protecting forces of God's creation, then one could expect them to be the focal point of the enemy's fury.[288] Therefore, any kind of presumptuous or whimsical attitude on the part of God's warriors was inappropriate.

Likewise, because he regarded theology as a treasure, there was no place he felt the battle raging more than in the brooding heresies. After separating from the Wittenberg leadership, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt emerged as one of Luther's earliest heretical opponents; and because Karlstadt ministered in nearby Orlamünde, the theological threats to continued reform remained in the forefront of Luther's mind. Then came yet another sect, again in Luther's backyard, who "boast that they are being moved by pure spirits, without the testimony of Holy Scripture."[289]

Before long Luther had his eye on any number of wayward groups, one of the most threatening being that of Thomas Müntzer's free-spirited sect in Nürnberg. He and his people, like many other groups, did not turn to the Bible for instruction but to whatever God purportedly led them to do. Even John Agricola, Luther's close associate for many years, was suspected of unorthodox teachings. "The story goes that you are starting to affirm and fight

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287 Ibid., 105-106.

288 Oberman, *Luther*, 168.

289 *LW* 49, 82.

for a new doctrine," he wrote to Agricola in letter, "namely, that faith can exist without good works. [It is said that] you presented this idea and tried to sell it with great effort of rhetoric and ingenuity, and even by using Greek words. I . . . am writing . . . to admonish you in all seriousness to watch Satan and your own flesh."[290]

Once again, the point at which Luther grieved the most over these mounting adversities was in 1527. The plague had returned to Wittenberg, hordes of people and students left the town, Luther had already been in a deep despair of unbelief, and in November his son, John, succumbed to a serious illness that prohibited him from eating anything for two weeks. On top of all this came news of the heretical sects.

Luther felt abandoned. "I am enduring God's wrath because I have sinned against him," he wrote to Jonas. "Pope and emperor, sovereigns and bishops, and the whole world hate and attack me; and this is not enough, even my brothers torment me, so that my sins, death, and Satan with all his angels rage without ceasing. What could save and console me if Christ, too, should abandon me."[291] Such experiences became Luther's sounding board for subsequent sermons, because "[f]rom them Christians shall learn

> what Christ is for a man and to what, from Christ, a person shall hold fast; namely that he is our help . . . and can and will help [us] in the last and highest need. If all things fail, all friends forsake us, and the world cannot help, then there is still one who is our helper, Jesus Christ.[292]

Nevertheless, Luther longed for comfort from his colleagues, so his first reaction was to reach out and tangibly know who still stood by his side. Two

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290 Ibid., 212.

291 Ibid., 172.

292 "... aus dem sie lernen sollen, was Christus für ein Mann sei und was man von ihm halten solle, nämlich daß er ein solcher Helfer sei . . . und in der letzten und höchsten Not helfen will und kann. Wenn alle Dinge aufhören, alle Freunde uns verlassen und die ganze Welt nicht helfen kann, da ist noch ein Helfer da, Jesus Christus." *LD* 8, 417.

weeks after his letter to Jonas he wrote another, this time to Johannes Brenz, making it the first time Luther had corresponded with the great reformer of southern Germany who lived in Schwäbisch Hall. Brenz had always defended Luther's teachings and at no time did Luther appreciate it more than now.

> I have certainly read it with joy, my Brenz, seeing that the grace of God lives in you through Christ, his son, because you serve and teach the Word of God in such a steadfast and faithful way in the midst of this wicked and perverse nation. Blessed be God . . . who permits me . . . to see that at least some brethren are the true and right seed of Israel. Otherwise there are nothing but furious and raging monsters everywhere.[293]

Several months later the townspeople of Lochau put in for a new pastor. The name Michael Stifel had been considered as a candidate, but Luther did not desire for this close friend and trusted ally to leave. In a letter to the Elector John, Luther wrote, "I would like to keep Mr. Michael Stifel in the territory, since he is devout and very capable in [handling] Scripture and preaching. . . . I would prefer to see devout and learned people remain here, since too many of them leave."[294]

Luther's grief resulted from any number of sources, some of which never left. None of them was more prevalent than his illnesses. As Bainton noted, Luther "suffered at one time or another from gout, insomnia, catarrh, hemorrhoids, constipation, stone, dizziness, and ringing in the ears like the bells of Halle, Leipzig, Erfurt, and Wittenberg."[295] The pain occasionally escalated to such severity that it denied Luther the ability to concentrate on his work and forced him to lie down. In January 1532 a violent and sudden sickness seized him. His friends, standing by his bed, feared the very worst. "I am not going to die now," he assured them. "I know this of a certainty. For

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293 *LW* 49, 178-79.

294 Ibid., 210-11.

295 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 228.

God will not strengthen the papistic superstition through my death so shortly after the death of Zwingli and Oecolampadius. . . . To be sure, Satan would gladly kill me if he could. Every moment he is pressing me, is treading on my heels."[296]

While this depression always lingered around Luther, he developed methods of fighting back.

> Having been taught by experience I can say how you ought to restore your spirit when you suffer from spiritual depression. When you are assailed by gloom, despair, or a troubled conscience you should eat, drink, and talk with others. If you can find help for yourself by thinking of a girl, do so. . . . Those who are troubled with melancholy . . . ought to be very careful not to be alone, for God created the fellowship of the church and commanded brotherliness.[297]

He gave the same advice to those who suffered similarly. A friend once arrived and admitted, "The devil is a master at taking hold of us where it hurts most." "Yes," replied Luther, "he doesn't learn this from us. He is quite agile. . . . The deeper one is in sadness and temptations [*Anfechtungen*], the more suitable a tool he is for Satan. For our temptations are those through which the Devil can find an entrance and work in us."[298] Luther's remedy? Find company and do not let the despondency fester by being alone.

This solution was in keeping with his general approach. "Luther gave three rules for dispelling despondency," Bainton wrote. "The first is faith in Christ; the second is to get downright angry; the third is the love of a woman. Music was especially commended."[299] Luther favored music because of its joyful and uplifting effects. He would tell his friends that "[m]usic doesn't

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296 *LW* 54, 23. Martin was not the only one to approach death's door. In 1540, his wife nearly died during an illness. The reality of possibly losing Katie grieved him. "Oh, Katie," he said at one point, "do not die and leave me." Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 236. Katie died in 1552, six years after Martin's death.

297 Ibid., 15-17.

298 Ibid., 275. "Je tiefer einer in Traurigkeit und Anfechtungen ist, ein um so geeigneteres Werkzeug ist für den Satan. Denn unsere Anfechtungen sind es, durch die der Teufel bei uns Eingang findet und in uns wirkt." *LD* 9, 246.

299 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 285.

sound right when there is laughter in connection with it, for music is intended to cheer the spirit. . . . If one sings diligently, the soul, which is located in the body, plays and derives special pleasure from it."[300]

But as Luther found out, the remedies of music and anger sometimes did not soothe the intense pains of life. For example, the death of loved ones remained beyond his power of control, and more than once he wrestled with the heartache of having to let go those closest to him. In early 1530 Martin received word that his father's health began to fail. "I am worried about you," wrote Martin, who's friends advised against his traveling to Mansfeld lest he be struck down by those who sought his life.[301]

> [Y]our age gives me anxious thoughts at this time—although regardless of this [worry], none of us is, or should be, sure of his life at any time. . . . It would be great joy for me, however, if it were possible for you and mother to be brought here to us; this my Katie, too, desires with tears. . . . 'All who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' The whole Psalter is full of such comforting promises, especially Psalm 91, which is particularly good to be read by all who are sick. . . . Therefore let your heart now be bold and confident in your illness, for we have there, in the life beyond, a true faithful helper at God's side, Jesus Christ, who for us has strangled death, together with sin, and now sits [in heaven] for us.[302]

It was at Coburg in June that Martin was informed of his father's death. A friend who witnessed Luther's reaction to the news reported that Martin grabbed his Psalter and ran into the next room, weeping loudly for the rest of the day. "Even though it does comfort me," he wrote to Melanchthon later on, "that [Reinecke] writes that [my father], strong in faith in Christ, has gently fallen asleep, yet the pity of heart and the memory of the most loving dealing[s] with him have shaken me in the innermost parts of my being."[303]

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300 *LW* 54, 420.

301 "He was the only reformer whose freedom of movement was seriously inhibited. The only places he could move about freely were Electoral Saxony, later Hesse—and after Duke George's death, Ducal Saxony. . . . Luther . . . the traveler was restricted." Oberman, *Luther*, 298.

302 *LW* 49, 268-271.

303 Ibid., 319.

Eleven months later Martin was again at his desk at home, this time writing a letter to his dying mother.

> I have received my brother James's letter concerning your illness. I trust that you have long since been abundantly instructed, without any help from me, that (God be praised) you have taken [God's] comforting Word into [your heart]. . . . [Y]ou also know the true center and foundation of your salvation from whom you are to seek comfort in this and all troubles, namely, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. He will not waver or fail us, nor allow us to sink or perish, for he is the Savior . . . of all poor sinners, and of all who are caught in tribulation and death.[304]

A short time later she died as well, and Martin grieved at the loss of both parents within about a year's time.

They, however, had lived long and full lives; their deaths were natural and expected. What crushed Martin and Katie far more were the lives of two of their daughters cut short by the incurable illnesses that so regularly struck down the young children of other families as well. Elizabeth, their second child, died in infancy. As part of a letter to a friend Luther wrote, "My baby daughter . . . has passed away. It is amazing what a sick, almost woman-like heart she has left to me, so much has grief for her overcome me. Never before would I have believed that a father's heart could have such tender feelings for his child. Do pray to the Lord for me."[305]

About a year later, Magdalena, whom the Luthers called "Lenchen," was born on May 4, 1529. Her arrival proved crucial because she became a source of comfort and optimism after the loss of Elizabeth.[306] While Martin was away at Coburg in mid-1530, Katie had a picture of Magdalena made and sent to her husband (it appears that Martin received it a few hours before he heard of his

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304 *LW* 50, 18-20.

305 *LW* 49, 203.

306 In 1539, while commenting on the simple faith of children, Luther said, "Oh, how good it is for children to die while they're young. To be sure, it would cause me great grief because part of my body and part of their mother's flesh and blood would die. Such natural feelings don't cease in godly parents, no matter how hardened and calloused they think they are, for feelings like these are a work of divine creation." *LW* 54, 335.

father's death). "At first I did not recognize the little strumpet," wrote Martin to his wife in return, "so dark she appeared to me to be. I think it would be good if you want [to stop nursing her], [but] gradually, so that at first you omit one feeding per day, then two feedings per day, until [the child] clearly stops [nursing by herself]."[307] There were no favorites among the Luther children, yet Martin and Katie always did seem to hold a special place in their heart for Magdalena.

So also did John, their first son. He and his sister grew up together as close friends and playmates in spite of their three year age difference. In the late summer of 1542, the Luthers sent John, at age sixteen, to a Latin school in Torgau, about twenty miles southeast of Wittenberg. "Keep an eye on his conduct and correct it," wrote Luther to Marcus Crodel, the school's headmaster, "for in the Lord I have great confidence in you."[308]

Only ten days later Luther sent Crodel another letter requesting that his son return home. "My daughter Magdalena is ill and almost in her last hour; in a short while she might depart to the true Father in heaven. . . . She herself longs so much to see her brother that I feel compelled to send a carriage [for him]. They loved each other so much; perhaps his arrival could bring her some relief. . . . Therefore . . . order [John] to fly back in this carriage."[309]

John made it home in time to see his alive though bed-ridden sister and his distraught parents coming unglued at the sight of their thirteen-year old daughter so rapidly deteriorating. Katie "wept loudly" while Martin, trying to remain strong in faith yet rent by the same grief, did what he could to comfort

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307 *LW* 49, 312-13.

308 *LW* 50, 230-32.

309 Ibid., 235.

her. "Think where she's going," he often said in Magdalena's last days. "Children don't argue. They believe what they're told. All things are simple for children. They die without anxiety, complaint, or fear of death. . . . I love her very much. But if it is thy will to take her, dear God, I shall be glad to know that she is with thee."[310]

Magdalena remained able to communicate a little while longer. "Dear Magdalene, my little daughter," asked Martin, "you would be glad to stay here with me, your father. Are you also glad to go to your Father in heaven?" "Yes, dear Father," she replied, "as God wills." "You dear little girl! . . . In the last thousand years God has given to no bishop such great gifts as he has given to me."[311]

"When his daughter was in the agony of death," remembered Caspar Heydenreich, a friend and witness to the unfolding events, "[Martin] fell on his knees before the bed and, weeping bitterly, prayed that God might will to save her. Thus she gave up the ghost in the arms of her father. Her mother was in the same room, but farther from the bed on account of her grief."[312]

From such occasions Luther experienced first-hand God's power and right not only to create life and grant times of joy, but also to take these away. Martin wrote about the death and resurrection of saints in simple poems, and they were at times recited at funeral services.

Im Frieden bin ich dahin gefahren,
Denn meine Augen gesehen haben
Deinen Heiland, Herr, von dir bereit
Zum Licht der ganzen Christenheit.

In meinem Elend war dies mein Trost,
Ich sprach: Er lebt, der mich erlöst,
Auf den ich in der Not vertraut,
Wird mich wieder mit meiner Haut

310 *LW* 54, 428-29, 430.

311 Ibid., 430.

312 Ibid., 431.

Indes ich ruh in dieser Gruft,
Bis auf meines Herren Wiederkunft.[313]

Umgeben, daß ich aus der Erd
Vom Tod wieder erwecket werd.
In meinem Fleisch werd ich Gott sehen.
Ist gewißlich wahr und wird geschehen.[314]

John attended Magdalena's funeral and then rode back to Torgau to continue his studies. He struggled, though, finding it difficult to focus on the work after all that had happened. Martin sympathized with him, but when, in December, John wished to leave school due to intense homesickness, his father knew that permitting it would not be the right thing to do. The rite of passage for John meant overcoming the loss of loved ones.

The same was true for Martin and Katie. After such traumatic experiences the two probably embraced their surviving children a little bit tighter, and, no doubt, extra doses of sobered thunder worked their way into Martin's sermons. He usually spoke of death as but a mere sleep from which a Christian will awake in Heaven.[315] During one Sunday service, Martin took as his text Matthew's account of Jesus bringing a young girl back to life. "Before you the girl is dead," he explained, "but before [God] she is not dead, but is sleeping. . . . To the whole world it is impossible to awaken one from the dead, but to the Lord Christ it is not only possible, but is of no difficulty. . . . To Christ it is much easier to wake one who is dead than it is for us to wake one from their sleep."[316]

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313 "In peace am I going there, for my eyes have seen your salvation, Lord, prepared by you as the light of all Christendom. Thus, I silently lay in this grave, until I come again to my God." *LD* 6, 174.

314 "In my misery was this my comfort, I cried: He lives, who has delivered me, on whom I trust in my need, he will again clothe me with my flesh, so that I will awaken from death out of the earth. That I in my flesh will see God is surely true and will be done." Ibid.

315 Even when Luther was not in the pulpit he would speak of the sweetest sleep—death. "Es gibt kein sanfteres noch lieblicheres Ding auf Erden als einen süßen Schlaf. Deshalb is für einen wirklichen Christen nichts süßer als der Tod. Er schälft, um fröhlich und mit Jubel aufzuerstehen." *LD* 9, 73.

316 "Vor euch is das Mägdlein tot, aber vor mir ist es nicht tot, sondern es schälft. . . . Der ganzen Welt ist es unmöglich, einen Toten aufzuerwecken, aber dem Herrn Christus ist es nicht allein nicht unmöglich, sondern es ist ihm auch keine Mühe. . . . Christus ist es viel leichter, einen Toten aufzuerwecken, als uns, einen Schlafenden aus dem Schalfe aufzuwecken." *LD* 8, 418-19.

"The hour of our death is uncertain," Luther once said. "It's remarkable that men should be so arrogant and secure when there are so many, indeed countless, evidences around us to suggest that we ought to be humble."[317] Losing two children, almost losing his wife, nearly dying himself on several occasions, sicknesses, troubles, worries, heresies—hardly a day passed without some reminder of life's unexpected trials. And yet, Luther remarked, "God says, 'I'll take care of everything by myself. I'll be the pastor, the rector, the man in the house, the wife who brings up the children. In short, I'll do everything alone. It is good, and it pleases me, that he has taken the rule over all things into his hands. For [we make mistakes], but God doesn't."[318]

317 *LW* 54, 10.

318 Ibid., 449. Even in our mistakes, said Luther, God still keeps us. "Gott erhält die Heiligen auch mitten im Irrtum." *LD* 9, 114.

CONCLUSION

What is so astonishing about Martin Luther's systematic destruction of Christianity's spiritual, hierarchical system is how far-reaching the effects were. Nearly every aspect of human life was dealt with: from personal salvation to theology, government to parenting, sexuality to marriage, vocation to the Church in its entirety. Nothing was left untouched and virtually everything was handled in a violent, honest, earthy, passionate, or direct manner, or any combination thereof.

But Luther did not do this as an outsider or a non-participating observer who had no vested interest in the outcome. He took his shots at the system, yet he also lived up to all the reforms he pushed through. The people listened to him because they could see Luther laboring to bring Christianity back to the point where Christ had established it—a simple faith in God, a direct relationship with Christ, contentment with the calling God gives each individual, and living righteously in the midst of the world.

Luther began as a member of the middle-class, became a monk, and then returned to his original life as a layman. It was a total identification with the commoners, a gradual stripping away of that which separated the clergy from the laity, a bridging of the gap. The highest road in Christianity was no longer something physical such as a cloister or a cowl or a title, but a spiritual transformation of a heart that wished to live by faith in whatever capacity God so desired.

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Melanchthon, Philip. *Melanchthon: Selected Writings.* trans. Charles Leander Hill. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1962.

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Woolf, Bertram Lee, trans. *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther.* 2 vols. London: Lutterworth Press, 1952.

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Bainton, Roland. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther.* New York: Mentor, 1977.

Bainton's biography, though first published almost fifty years ago, remains a standard work for all Luther students. The strength of his book lies in its ability to bring Luther's character to the forefront, so as to watch the events of the Reformation unfold as Luther would have seen, influenced, and reacted to them. It is unfortunate that Bainton did not write more on Luther's family life because his style was well-suited for this.

_____. *Studies in the Reformation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

The chapters of this book that I found insightful were those when Bainton, at select moments, directly deals with some of the disappointing aspects in Luther's life, such as the question of anti-Semitism and harsh words against other Christian sects. Bainton obviously wrestled with these dilemmas and wished to offer fair and honest conclusions.

_____. *Women in the Reformation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pulishing House, 1971.

Bainton's objective here is simple—to write brief life sketches of about fifteen to twenty women who play a role in the Reformation. The only one of relevance for this subject is the opening account of Katherina von Bora. Bainton offers little about her early years, perhaps because there is limited information available, but does write at length about the many activities she was involved in after her marriage to Luther.

Barraclough, Geoffrey. *The Medieval Papacy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973.

The bulk of *The Cost of Discipleship* involves Bonhoeffer's theology and a call for the revitalization of honest religion during the time when the Nazis gained strength in the 1930s. But in light of this he refers to Luther early and often, hoping to remind Germans of their heritage of faith that began with Luther. Bonhoeffer and Oberman, as well as others like Bainton, have very similar opinions about how Luther first saw the cloisters as the highest road of Christiantiy, but later rejected it for a life of faith in the world.

_____. *Ethics*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974.

Bonhoeffer again includes Luther in many of his topics, which range from "The Church and the World" to the role of the state, but they are less applicable to the theme found in this paper.

_____. *Letters and Papers From Prison*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972.

From April 1943 to April 1945 Bonhoeffer was incarcerated in several German prisons. During this time he wrote letters to friends and loved ones, many of which survived. Owing to Bonhoeffer's naturally theological and historical mind, he would occasionally reflect on issues that occupied his mind or comment on a book that he had read. It never occurred to him that these letters might one day be published, so his words are of a refreshing, informal, yet perceptive nature.

Bouwsma, William J. *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. 3 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Brecht's biography is quite large, totaling over 1,300 pages; but aside from the obvious extra amount of factual information his three volumes carries, Oberman's and Bainton's biographies are more preferable and have a clearer agenda in mind.

Bromiley, G. W. ed., *Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations*. Philadephia: The Westminster Press, 1953.

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

Augustine figures prominently in the formulation of Luther's theology, so this well-written biography can go a long way towards explaning what Luther believed. Brown also devotes portions of his book to the description of early monasticism, offering insight as to how some aspects of ascetic life within the Church developed.

Cameron, Euan. *The European Reformation.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Cameron's objective is to focus more on an overview of the Reformation as a whole, the grand causes and effects, and less on the details.

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church.* London: Penguin Books, 1967.

Good summaries of key figures like Ambrose, Cyprian, and Augustinian, as well as a helpful allusions celibacy and its origins in the early Church.

Charles, Elizabeth Rundle, ed. *Luther: By Those Who Knew Him.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1983.

Although this is a fictional chronicle about a family involved with Luther's life, Charles enables the reader to gain a better sense for the times in which Luther lived.

Ebeling, Gerhard, Gerhard Bott, and Bernd Moeller. *Martin Luther: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten.* Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1983.

Undoubtedly one of the best sources for a "Luther's life in pictures." The photographs of portraits, buildings, and Reformation artifacts helps one to visualize better those things that surrounded Martin Luther.

Erikson, Erik H. *Young Man Luther.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1958.

Erikson frequently deviates from the history of Luther into complex psychological analysis. Thus, his train of thought can be difficult to follow. All students should read it if only for its controversial drawing power; but this should be done only after the reader has a knowledge of Luther's life and readings.

Estes, James Martin. *Christian Magistrate and State Church: The Reforming Career of Johannes Brenz.* Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1982.

Goody, Jack. *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Harrington, Joel. *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Harrington's opening chapters were applicable to parts of this thesis, particularly those of celibacy in the medieval cloisters and the opinions held about marriage. Although I disagree with Harrington on some points, his handling of the subject matter is superb.

Hillerbrand, Hans. *The Protestant Reformation*. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

Hsia, R. Po-Chia. *The German People and the Reformation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Leclercq, Jean. *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1982.

The idea for this book came from a lecture series given in Oxford. Leclercq narrowed his research to twelfth-century French monastic life, but presents his conclusions in a clear manner so that the reader better understands the medieval status of marriage in a doctrinal sense.

Lortz, Joseph. *The Reformation in Germany*, 2 vols. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1968.

Lortz's work, first published in German in the years 1939 and 1940, is a bit outdated. His section on pre-Reformation lay piety was useful in that it presented one side of the case.

Lutherstadt Wittenberg. "The Luther House." Wittenberg: Fremdenverkehrsberband Wittenberg Information.

Miller, Kevin, ed. "Martin Luther: His Early Years." *Christian History* 34, 1992.

This magazine offers a compact summary of Luther's monastic and early public years. A summary of some of Luther's more interesting quotes was illuminating.

_____. "Martin Luther: His Later Years and Legacy." *Christian History* 39, 1993.

Miller picks up where he left off and brings Luther's life to a close. Much attention given to his marriage to Katherina and their family.

Miller, Thomas Fischer. "Mirror For Marriage: Lutheran Views of Marriage and the Family, 1520-1600." Ph. D. diss., University of Virginia, 1981.

Miller's dissertation is worthwhile as far as how the first generations of Protestants viewed marriage; but too often he bases his conclusions on too little evidence.

Oberman, Heiko Augustinus. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. New York: Image Books, 1992.

Oberman's biography is a bit unorthodox in its organization, but his expert command of the Reformation in general is seen at all points of the book. One of his main themes is the contrast between how the

Church and the world perceived each other, and how Luther responded accordingly.

_____. *The Dawn of the Reformation.* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1986.

_____. *The Impact of the Reformation.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

Osborne, John. *Luther.* New York: Signet, 1961.

Osborne's famous play about Luther focusses on the more noted moments in the Reformer's life. It is interesting to see how Osborne imagines some of the conversations between Luther and those like his father, Hans; but in his effort to make matters very dramatic, Osborne occasionally takes his artistic license too far, at least when viewed from the narrow parameters of historical accuracy.

Ozment, Steven E. *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.

Brilliant first chapter with excellent historiography on the question of lay piety in pre-Reformation Germany. Ozment carefully handles the opinions of previous authors and then offers his own at the end; namely, that although Germans were religiously-minded before Luther arrived, they had been led to adopt many false teachings.

_____. *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe.* Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983.

This later book of Ozment's is somewhat peculiar in that he makes many good points and communicates his message without any ambiguity, but surprisingly backs up his claims with shallow research and support. This is not to say that his conclusions are to dismissed out-of-hand, because subsequent authors have often echoed Ozment. Nevertheless, *When Fathers Ruled* should be read reservedly.

Robisheaux, Thomas. *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Robisheaux's book deals only with specific German lands, those of the Hohenlohe region, and not the places involving Luther's life. His work, however, can be very useful as a way of envisioning German life around this time and to see how religion, including Luther's influence, effected the lives of people.

Rupp, Gordon. *The Righteousness of God.* London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1953.

Any reader of this book must be impressed with Rupp's mastery of the English language, which enables him to describe aspects of Luther's life perhaps better than any other author.

Sider, Ronald J. ed., *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther: Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Texts of their verbal and written words, aimed against each other as the two steadily assumed different sides on theological issues.

Simon, Edith. *The Reformation*. New York: Time Incorporated, 1966.

Stephens, W. P. *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977.

Stone's book is quite large, and unless one has a definite topic and purpose in mind, it is easy to get overwhelmed with the mass of information. His chapters on"The Decline of Kinship, Clientage and Community" and "The Reinforcement of Patriarchy" are particularly intriguing. Many of Stone's conclusions, however, as well as his approach to family history have been revised or rejected by later writers.

Strauss, Gerald. *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Strauss has written here what is certainly a cornerstone in the study of how Luther and the early reformers developed and implemented their theories on the use of education. The book is obviously well-thought out and Strauss backs up his statements with conclusive evidence. In the end he submits several conclusions on the long-term effectiveness of Protestant reform of education, all of which are intriguing and controversial.

Wandel, Lee Palmer. *Always Among Us: Images of the Poor in Zwingli's Zurich*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

In this relatively short book, Wandel includes several discussions about Martin Luther and how the early Protestants as a whole addressed the question of the poor—not only as to how they should be cared for physically, but also how well their spiritual interests and status are taken into consideration within the churches.

Zapalac, Kristin Eldyss Sorensen. *"In His Image and Likeness:" Political Iconography and Religious Change in Regensburg, 1500-1600*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Focussing on sixteenth-century art inside several Regensburg buildings, as well as other paintings and artifacts, Zapalac argues that the Reformation transformed people's view of God and justice from that of the fearful "Last Judgment" variety to that of a more gracious, correcting father-figure. Luther figures prominently in her analyses and an interesting parallel can be drawn between his changing attitude towards God and that of some artists in German cities like Regensberg.