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Human Claims to Freedom and God's Judgment

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All forms of communication assume a doctrine of man, a knowledge of a man's qualities or conditions—about his past and what he may yet be able to do. The ancient insights, that man is the measure of things and that his character is his fate, so that man is of never-ending interest to himself, are so deeply imbedded in our modern tradition that few seem to question them. Rather than investigate the validity of those claims and their implications, modern writers seem to be content to repeat ancient views of man with fashionable modifications suitable to the particular topics of interest to students of the social sciences.

Christian theology is Christian communication. Ancient formulations tend to become so familiar that students may feel bored before the spiritual dynamics of those formulations have been thoroughly explored by them. This melancholy condition may be observed in the treatment scholars of various periods of the Christian church have given to the doctrine of man. The Augustinian interpretation of man, though it was meant originally to follow the model of St. Paul, achieved neither the apostle's depth of insight into the meaning of the fall of man nor the clarity of his distinction between the justification and the sanctification of the sinner by God. That achievement must be credited to the theologians of the Reformation.

That human claims to freedom and God's judgment remain perennial topics for the student of theology is not in dispute. Reflections on them usually begin during a student's initial studies of biblical doctrine. Since experienced Christian teachers are usually aware that students require an extensive doctrinal background to deal with such topics effectively, they are inclined to delay their examination until students are better prepared for it. But some theologians of the Christian church eventually do focus the attention of their students upon these topics. When they do so, they must lead their students to examine the issues raised by Luther and Erasmus in their debate regarding the nature and power (or capacity) of the human will with regard to a saving relationship with God—unless they arbitrarily excise this momentous dispute from the history of Christian doctrine. A brief essay on this topic, therefore, may help to stimulate the reader to inquire further

into that debate. We shall note some of its terms and a few aspects of its structure as well as some implications for Christian theology.

To understand Luther's debate with Erasmus more than four hundred and fifty years after the event requires of the reader an exact perception of the issues as Luther and Erasmus saw them in their day. It would be thoroughly erroneous for the modern reader to think of the issues in contemporary philosophical categories. Neither Luther nor Erasmus thought in the same terms as modern psychologists, sociologists, and others working in the "social sciences" today.

At stake for both Luther and Erasmus was the biblical interpretation of the nature of man in terms of his capacities in relation to God. Luther argued for the view that it is "essentially salutary and necessary for a Christian to find out whether the will does anything or nothing in matters pertaining to eternal salvation. . .this is the cardinal issue. . .the point on which everything in this controversy turns. For what we are doing is to inquire what free choice can do, what it has done to it, and what is its relation to the grace of God."[1]

Although Erasmus agreed in his *Diatribe* to base his arguments upon biblical sources in defending his position that man has the power of free choice, he also insisted that the traditions of the church, formulated by the recognized teachers of the church, were authoritative interpreters of biblical doctrine:

> And, in fact, so far am I from delighting in "assertions" that I would readily take refuge in the opinion of the skeptics, wherever this is allowed by the inviolable authority of the Holy Scriptures and by the decrees of the Church, to which I everywhere submit my personal feelings, whether I grasp what it prescribes or not. . .I admit that many different views. . .have been handed down from the ancients about which I have, as yet, no fixed conviction, except that I think there to be a certain power of free choice.[2]

Luther was clearly aware of the gravity of the issue Erasmus had raised, as he wrote at the end of his reply:

> . . .unlike all the rest, you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies. . .You, and you alone, have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot.[3]

The original audience read Luther's *Bondage of the Will* in Latin, the theological language of the Christian West and, according to the structure of the work, as a point by point reply to Erasmus' *Diatribe*. Such a format served the expectations of the educated general public, who were both spectators and partisans of the event.

Luther's theological assertions in this book, written in 1525, were not new. He had made similar theological statements against human claims to freedom in his Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, in his *Assertio Omnium Articulorum* of 1521, and in his lectures on St. Paul's Letter to the Romans in 1515-1516. In his lectures on Romans, long before he raised the issue publicly in specific theses, Luther had followed the understanding of St. Augustine regarding the question of "free choice" in a manner one might see as conventional:

> The power of free decision in so far as it is not under the sway of grace has no ability whatever to realize righteousness, but it is necessarily in sins. Hence, Blessed Augustine is right, when, in his book against Julian (*Contra Julianum*, II, 8, 23), he calls it "the enslaved, rather than free, will." But when it has received grace, the power of decision really becomes free, at all events in respect to salvation. To be sure, it is always free according to its nature, but only with respect to that which is in its power and is inferior to it, but not with respect to that which is superior to it, since it is held captive in sins and then cannot choose the good according to God.[4]

Luther's rejection of human claims to freedom emerged in various forms of discourse in his writings addressed to the Christian laity of his time. His tract *The Freedom of the Christian* offers this paradoxical formulation:

> A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.[5]

Then he presents his biblical or Christian teaching of the meaning of human freedom and sweeps away the claims to human freedom raised by the Renaissance in Italy, by the Christian humanists of northern Europe, and by the medieval church in its semi-pelagian teachings that man is able to make a limited claim to freedom because he must do "what is in him" (*quod in se est*) toward his salvation. Luther's point of departure was not man's freedom but his rebellion against God—man's sin and God's grace, demonstrated by His creative, redemptive, and sustaining work in the world.

Human claims to freedom begin as ethical assertions—as they must, if freedom is also a quality of autonomous man who asserts his moral integrity. Erasmus, the leading humanist of Luther's time, who strongly opposed the moral decay of the church and even more vigorously denounced the obfuscations of the schoolmen of his time, proved himself a most dangerous enemy of the gospel asserted by Martin Luther. The term "humanist" is appropriate here to one who not only devoted himself to the study of the "humanities" but also attributed autonomous powers to human nature.

Erasmus, to be sure, had no intention of exposing himself to possible "martyrdom" by opposing the official doctrine of the church. Moreover, he shared the logical position of humanism: freedom entails responsibility. Man cannot be held accountable for his actions, Erasmus argued, unless he is also free from any controls which inhibit or prevent his ability to make free decisions. He accepted the logic of those who argued from the command "thou shalt" to the fiction "therefore you can."

The humanist position shares with determinism an understanding about necessity. No one can accept responsibility for having been born. No one has had a choice in the matter. But humanists will subsequently argue for their view of the powers of the human being by claiming that the ability to make choices is inherent in a human being. The consistent determinist, whatever else he may be, will deny that man has genuine choices. Luther's doctrine of God had no room for the deterministic position as it has been known since the skeptic Carneades (d. 129 B.C.) argued thus: if God is good, He cannot be all-powerful; if He is omnipotent, He must be evil. If men act by necessity, they have no freedom; therefore God can

neither punish nor reward them. But since men are punished and rewarded, it follows either that God is not good or that He is not omnipotent. Crass determinism was shrugged off by Luther, mindful of Psalm 2:4-5. Philosophical notions of determinism did not change his biblical understanding that God is God unconditionally (Psalm 68:20).

It is necessary also to specify that Luther rejected humanist claims regarding human freedom which denied the redemptive monergism of God. As a cultural orientation, humanism acquired many different interpretations, some apparently contradictory. Understood as the "study of man," it would include all human knowledge and action. Interpreted as a program for learning designed to lead to the acquisition of forms and standards for life, humanism may be understood as a recollection and reinterpretation of the cultural achievements of the past.

Renaissance humanism, which began in Italy after the termination of the crusades, may be understood as an intellectual movement promoting the revival of the learning of classical antiquity for the purpose of providing literary and artistic forms and standards to be imitated and perhaps transcended by renaissance man.[6] If it were to be argued that humanism, understood according to the criteria of classical antiquity, did not exist during the Middle Ages, the validity of the argument would depend on the meaning assigned to "humanism." If, for example, the notion of humanism is associated with the preservation of classical literature and learning, modern scholars seem to agree that some study of the heritage of the classical past was always maintained in the West. Paul Joachimsen argues the thesis that the new city states of Italy from 1250 to 1350 led in the development of a type of "new *humanities* understood as a sense of life and a desire for learning."[7]

German humanism was an Italian import. When the territorial princes began to favor it because the humanists of the mid-fifteenth century gave much attention to the education of the princes, the new orientation also began to be represented, and tended to become influential, in the faculties of the newly founded universities. The "new learning" stimulated almost everywhere the study of the ancient languages, sciences, and literature, as well as offering some new directions to the Maximilian Age (1493-1519).

Far from being a man of action, Erasmus of Rotterdam had a dream of reorganizing the Western world into a *respublica christiana* which would also be a community of learning, led by a hierarchy who would "educate for Christ" and through the available sacramental means provide the dynamics for the social and ethical elements of a reformed culture. According to his vision, Christian antiquity from Origen to Jerome, known as "tradition," provided the contextual perspective for the understanding of the teachings of Christ. Beyond the centuries of these ancient church fathers was the circle of ancient pagan learning, regarded as sufficient for the needs of living in this world, which Erasmus understood to be revolving about Christ, the true center of history. A judgment on this phantasy must point to the superficiality of its picture of the history of Christian theology.

Nevertheless, Erasmus' publications exhibiting his "new Christian philosophy" were widely received and applauded. Undoubtedly, his writings appealed to people dissatisfied with the cultural temper of their times who thought Erasmus might prove helpful in realizing their particular programs. For example, Erasmus satisfied the mystical inclinations of some with his easy vision of the "art of piety." Those who had aesthetic needs were helped by his criticism of manners and literature. To these points must be added the paramount interest of the age in intensifying criticism of the medieval church, its structure and administration, and particularly its monastic orders, which were increasingly seen by people as making little or no contribution to the commonweal commensurate with the high cost of maintaining them. The low moral and cultural quality of the clergy and the superstitions of the laity, as Erasmus skillfully limned them in his writings, stimulated the laughter and scorn of both humanists and "those who mourned for Zion."

To criticize a culture for failing to live up to its proclaimed ideals is easy enough. The available literature regarding conditions in Europe before the Reformation attests to that failure. Similarly, recent publications, without adequate recognition of its positive elements, have severely criticized the Reformation for its deficiencies.[8] Actual changes in a culture are revolutionary in a true sense because genuine cultural change is always a change in the self-understanding of a

people. The Reformation brought such change about for Protestant Europe. One of the consequences of the Reformation was the recognition and rejection of the pagan ideology of humanism. Erasmus cannot be given credit for even a share of this achievement despite the vigorous defense of Erasmus' merits offered by E. Gordon Rupp.[9] After all, it is a recorded fact that Erasmus carefully and consistently distanced himself from Luther's reformatory activities.

The Reformation effected revolutionary changes in northwest Europe in the course of a century. There is no historical parallel to the tremendous intellectual and spiritual upheaval brought about by the sixteenth-century Reformation in Germany, Scandinavia, and Great Britain. A point which needs to be stressed is that Luther did not initially seek the reform of the church structure, but rather the renewal of faith by preaching and teaching the pure gospel.

Part of the cultural program of Erasmus was the humanizing of religion—that is, fitting the Christian faith into a general program for the improvement of mankind—not essentially different from the aims of some eighteenth-century leaders of the Enlightenment. The chosen means were a process of moral training and the assimilation of the literary and philosophical treasures bequeathed by antiquity. The Scriptures would be given a reinterpretation suitable for humanistic purposes through the use of hermeneutical devices dependent on rules of speech learned from classical literature.

Luther, trained as an Augustinian theologian, had become a *Doctor in Biblia.* During his early monastic years he had struggled with the meaning of sin and guilt and had experienced searing confrontations with the reality of an angry God who was also, as the fathers of the church had taught Luther, the *Deus tremendus et absconditus.* This early spiritual frustration and, indeed, agony grew from Luther's inability to account for himself to the Creator who had willed his existence, but who as his judge would necessarily damn Luther the sinner. The issue was the Creator's demand "thou shalt" and the sinner's reply "I cannot." Stated theologically, the issue was man's sin and God's justice and righteousness in the teaching of the medieval church.

It would be erroneous to suppose that Luther remained unaware of the wide chasm between himself and contemporary

religious humanists with regard to the nature of man. He had consistently rejected humanist assumptions of the perfectibility of the human mind and spirit and, therefore, the autonomous dignity of man.[10] Luther was clearly aware, as some humanists were not, that his faith and hope had dimensions and goals entirely different from theirs. Since the Reformer published so much, Erasmus was finally induced to write against him. It is astonishing that the humanists waited so long before making a doctrinal attack upon Luther. The explanations of this delay cited by some historians are not commensurate with the implications of the problems posed for humanism by Luther's understanding of the Christian faith as law and gospel, which he regarded as virtually identical with the doctrine of the justification of the sinner before God by grace, through faith, on account of the person and work of Christ.

It must be recognized, at the same time, that Luther had hoped that his whole-hearted endorsement of classical scholarship and the cultivation of Greek and Latin would incline leading humanists to support his work of biblical and theological scholarship.[11] An examination of the correspondence of Luther shows that his expectations of Erasmus' interest in evangelical reform were quite minimal.[12] A few months after Luther's attempt (presumably at the instigation of others) to persuade Erasmus to support the evangelical cause, the great humanist wrote a letter stating that he did not see Luther as a defender of the new learning, but understood him to be a disciple and defender of scholasticism.[13]

Human claims to freedom, so emphatically denied in Luther's *Assertio Omnium Articulorum M. Luther per Bullam Leonis X Novissimam Damnatorum*, specifically in Article 36, were the issue raised by Erasmus in his essay "On the Freedom of the Will."[14] He refers to the debate at Leipzig in 1519 between Eck and Carlstadt, in which Luther participated, as well as to Thesis 13 of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation in 1518.[15] In his *Assertio Omnium Articulorum* of 1521 Luther repeated with emphasis the same doctrine regarding the "bondage of the will." Erasmus also quotes these words from Luther's Latin version of the *Assertio*:

> I was wrong in saying that free choice before grace is a reality only in name. I should have said simply, "free

> choice is in reality a fiction, or a name without reality." For no one has it in his own power to think a good thought or a bad thought, but everything (as Wycliff's article condemned at Constance rightly teaches) happens by absolute necessity.[16]

In his comments on Article 36 Luther also mentions St. Augustine's phrase "a will in bondage" and summarizes its meaning thus:

> . . .it has been said repeatedly that godly and holy men who live out of the resources of God's powerful grace struggle against their own flesh with great pains and peril, and the flesh fights against grace with all its strength. It is a profound and blind error to teach that the will is by nature free and can, without grace, turn to the spirit, seek grace and desire it. Actually, the will tries to escape from grace and rages against it when it is present.[17]

Augustine's teaching regarding the human will in bondage will be misunderstood if the picture of "bondage" he uses is given an inexact context. The concept of liberty at issue here must be taken in the sense of the Pauline affirmation: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is the same freedom Paul recommends to the Galatians: "For freedom Christ has made us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

Paul and Augustine understood this teaching to be intimately joined to the biblical doctrine of God, the Holy Trinity. In His creation of man God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). So Luther also understood this divine action as the act of conferring on newly created man finite aspects of the divine freedom, so that man's moral character was a created reflection of the moral nature of the Holy Trinity. But man was not created to be a puppet. Man could reject his Maker, and he did just that in the act of defiance or disobedience to the will of God which constituted man's fall from that state of freedom for which he had been created by God.

To continue in freedom man needed only to continue his life in the liberty of the Spirit of God by whose breath man had become a living being. In this sense, man's subsequent

decision to "be like God" (Genesis 3:8) was not a decision for freedom. According to the terms of his creation (Genesis 1:26), man already possessed a replicated measure of divine freedom. But he discarded it in favor of "autonomy."

Here the error of those sympathetic to the humanist interpretation of the Christian doctrine of man becomes painfully evident: man's free choice was indeed made while man enjoyed life in his spiritual freedom as God's creation. Man made that decision in the expectation that the serpent's promise, "You shall be like God," also included freedom from accountability to God. Humanist theologians failed to grasp the massive ambiguity, indeed error, inherent in the very concept of the promise to be like God by means of knowing good and evil.

Forgotten were the realities of created freedom: man already was like God, having been made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Besides, no rebellious action against God the Creator can eliminate the obligation of accountability. It must remain in force as long as God is God. A lie about God does not change that truth, a point made explicit by the account (Genesis 3:8).

Accountability to God and created freedom must also be considered in the context of this freedom. When God breathed His life into man, He gave man the freedom of His own Spirit, the source and dynamic of true liberty. This context makes it plain that the freedom of God's Spirit transcends accountability. In the liberty of the Spirit man is beyond and outside of God's judgment of sin and evil.

Such factors are part of the context of the divine judgment initially announced to man (Genesis 2:17). We observe the instant execution of this judgment when the spiritual liberty of man was supplanted by fear (Genesis 3:8). The Spirit of God was no longer the controlling breath of life for man and, without the Spirit of the Lord, there can be no liberty—no free choice.

The meaning of man's fall cannot be grasped without the prior confession of the authority of the biblical self-revelation of God in the variety of actions exhibited in the Bible. Essentially two themes emerge: God's judgment and God's mercy or grace. Both are unconditionally valid according to the monergism of God, who is always "all in all" because

"there is none beside God." When man rejected the freedom for which he had been made, his continuance on earth was made possible only on account of God's forbearance, mercy, and unmerited favor, by virtue of which God also clothed man (Genesis 3:21).

To appreciate the multiple dimensions of Luther's doctrine of man, the fallen creature of God, it is helpful to study such writings as his exposition of Psalm 90 (1534-1535) and his lectures on Genesis (1535-1545).[18] But the essence of his position is clearly set forth in his catechisms, the Smalcald Articles, and *The Bondage of the Will.* The latter work could have been given the subtitle "Man Before God According to the Scriptures." Perhaps it was for this reason that Werner Elert, citing the studies of Luther's understanding of God produced by Theodosius Harnack, C. Strange, Erich Seeberg, and others, makes the point that Luther appropriated the orthodox teaching of the Christian church by basing his interpretation of man upon "the unconditional validity" of the biblical teaching of God:

> Law and Gospel, which are appealed to as authoritative, have unconditional validity as the divine Word. But if they have validity even when man knows nothing about them, God is in any case independent of our consciousness. And if one investigates further, one finds as the beginning of everything from there on the knowledge that the consciousness of man as consciousness of himself is in original opposition to God whether one knows about this or not. No man is without sin. Nor is there any neutral ground between sin and righteousness. And there is no sin that would not be enmity against God.[19]

It is understandable that reading Erasmus and Luther on the topic of man (especially with regard to his powers and possibilities) will arouse in natural man immediate and deep feelings of assent to Erasmus' thesis and a prompt negative reaction to Luther's biblical teaching. Such a reader is likely to say, "Yes. Man must have a free will even after his fall; he must possess the power to choose between good and evil, or he cannot be held accountable. He must be able to make a decision for God. The alternative is to regard man as a non-accountable puppet, devoid of moral significance. Therefore, since God's justice and righteousness demand that we think of man as

being able to give an accounting, man must in fact be able to do so. If that were not so, God would appear to be unjust in His judgments.'"

For this kind of thinking, Erasmus' thesis that man possesses "a certain power of free choice" in spiritual matters exerts a powerful attraction. Such thinking makes a favorable response to the claims of freedom posited in the semi-pelagian image of man or in the sophistic theological-philosophical formulations of "Christian humanists." Like Erasmus' argument, the ultimate outcome must be a defense of work-righteousness as well as a claim to human autonomy in some marginal aspect of the relation between man and his God. It is also the essential position of all Christian rationalism, ancient or modern, whose representatives begin their work with the criticism or rejection of God's revelation regarding man, imposing their own "critical responsibility" between the word of God and man to whom this word is addressed. These actions are indebted to the ancient device exhibited in Genesis 3: "Yea, hath God said. . .?"

Modern man, like the intellectual establishment of ancient Athens, continues to assert his freedom to know meaning or truth beyond the capacity of his apperceptive equipment, insisting at the same time on his own terms for knowing. This demand must remain unmet in this aeon and produces great illustrations of fallen man because he wants what he is incapable of having. The ancient temptation of Genesis 3 continues in the lives of men, just as the humanist attitude regarding man's capacity continues to be reflected in Aristotle's description of the pursuit of knowledge by the philosophers of the fourth century B.C.:

> [men] philosophized in order to escape from ignorance; evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. And this is confirmed by the facts; for it was when almost all the necessities of life and the things that make for comfort and recreation had been secured, that such knowledge began to be sought. Evidently then we do not seek it for the sake of any advantage; but as the man is free, we say, who exists for his own sake and not for another's, so we pursue this as the only free science, for it alone exists for its own sake.[20]

Even if some limitations are attributed to man's nature, it is argued, he must be free in some manner of speaking in order to think of freedom, to pursue it, and to claim it—potentially on any level of his capacity to perceive it. After all, as Aristotle suggests, the pursuit of knowledge by man has the objective of demonstrating his capacity to share in a small way the divine attribute of freedom.

The point is not whether Erasmus the humanist endorsed the position of Aristotle on the latter's terms. In any case, however, Erasmus did claim a certain autonomous power in man of free choice in spiritual matters. This autonomy is precisely what Luther denied in his writings, including a shattering statement found in the Smalcald Articles (Part III:I:3): "This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures."

Luther's assertions of divine monergism in all points of the relationship between God and man shape his teaching regarding human claims to freedom and God's judgment. To understand Luther's sentence, "'. . .whoever does not 'grasp' God never 'grasps' any part of His creation,'" we need to see it in connection with his damning statement regarding unbelief in any form: "Anathema be the Christian who is not certain and does not grasp what is prescribed for him."[21] It is on this account that Luther writes against Erasmus as follows:

> . . .it is essentially salutary and necessary for a Christian to find out whether the will does anything or nothing in matters pertaining to eternal salvation. Indeed, as you should know, this is the cardinal issue between us, the point on which everything in this controversy turns. For what we are doing is to inquire what free choice can do, what it has done to it, and what is its relation to the grace of God. If we do not know these things, we shall know nothing at all of things Christian, and shall be worse than any heathen. Let anyone who does not feel this confess that he is no Christian, while anyone who disparages or scorns it should know that he is the greatest enemy of Christians. For if I am ignorant of what, how far, and how much I can and may do in relation to God, it will be equally uncertain and unknown to me, what, how far, and how much God can and may do in me, although it is God

> who works everything in everyone (1 Corinthians 12:6). But when the works and power of God are unknown, I do not know God Himself, and when God is unknown, I cannot worship, praise, thank, and serve God, since I do not know how much I ought to attribute to myself and how much to God. It therefore behooves us to be very certain about the distinction between God's power and our own, God's work and our own, if we want to live a godly life.[22]

The quotations cited assume Christian convictions regarding the biblical doctrine of God. Basic to Luther's interpretation is St. Paul's declaration that God works everything in everyone (1 Corinthians 12:6; similarly James 1:18). This divine monergism is further underlined by Luther's interpretation of passages speaking of the potter and the clay: Isaiah 45:9; Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 9:20-24. He shows that those passages likewise affirm that "God works everything in everyone."[23] "It is not for us to ask why He does so, but to stand in awe of God who both can do and wills to do such things."[24]

Such comprehensive affirmations regarding the being and work of God determine every aspect of Luther's theology. God alone can reveal Himself to man because He has made man for Himself; man has no ladder to ascend to God. God alone can preserve man ; the alternative is futility for man. God alone can redeem man from sin; no one else has the power to do so. God alone can convert man to Himself and in Jesus Christ keep man in the true faith:

> As long as I. . .cannot pour faith into people's hearts, I neither am able nor ought to force or compel anyone to believe; for God alone does this, coming to dwell beforehand in the heart. That is why we should leave the Word free and not add our work to it: we possess the *jus verbi*, but not the *jus executionis*. We have to preach the Word, but the consequences should be left to God alone in His pleasure.[25]

The freedom man had been given in his creation was lost in his fall, but restored "in Christ." To claim freedom apart from Christ, or without Christ, is to deny that Christ is unconditionally necessary.[26] Thus, Luther comes to a radically different understanding of freedom: "This Christian freedom, liberty, and power must be understood in a purely spiritual sense. . .spiritual freedom exists where the conscience remains free."[27]

Man's creatureliness, therefore, is not man's bondage. To argue thus is to reject man's exalted status as a creature made in the image and likeness of God. This image was the basis of man's created freedom which he had lost in the fall. Here Luther is aware of a possible confusion in the minds of his readers. Clearly no one intends to deny that man has a measure of freedom on earth:

> What we are asking is whether he has free choice in relation to God, so that God obeys man and does what man wills, or rather whether God has free choice in relation to man, so that man wills and does what God wills and is not able to do anything but what God wills and does.[28]

Luther's affirmation of divine monergism ("God works everything in everyone," 1 Corinthians 12:6), when applied to the function of the will of man, confronts the theologian with the temptation of making inferences not taught by God's revelation of His mercy toward man on account of the person and work of Jesus Christ. When God's monergism is affirmed, such inferences can produce a theological version of philosophical determinism. This development was probably on Luther's mind when he wrote against such a solution of the problem. The revelation of God concerning His being limits our understanding as well as the possibilities of our inquiries regarding Him. The secrets of God's majesty have not been revealed, and mankind must therefore be content to "occupy itself instead with the God incarnate." Clearly, it is Luther's argument, no legitimacy can be attributed to theological or philosophical inferences which have no explicit support in Scripture:

> We say, as we have said before, that the secret will of the Divine Majesty is not a matter for debate, and the human temerity which with continual perversity is always neglecting necessary things in its eagerness to probe this one must be called off and restrained from busying itself with the investigations of these secrets of God's majesty, which is impossible to penetrate because He dwells in light inaccessible, as Paul testifies (1 Timothy 6:16). Let it occupy itself instead with God incarnate, or as Paul puts it, with Jesus crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, though in a hidden manner

> (Colossians 2:3); for through Him it is furnished abundantly with what it ought to know. It is God incarnate, moreover, who is speaking here: "I would. . .you would not"—God incarnate, I say, who has been sent into the world for the very purpose of willing, speaking, doing, suffering, and offering to all men everything necessary for salvation. Yet He offends very many, who being either abandoned or hardened by that secret will of the divine majesty do not receive Him as He wills, speaks, does, suffers, and offers, as John says: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not comprehend it" (John 1:5); and again: "He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not" (John 1:11). It is likewise the part of this incarnate God to weep, wail, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly, when the will of the Divine Majesty purposely abandons and reprobates some to perish. And it is not for us to ask why He does so, but to stand in awe of God who both can do and wills to do such things.[29]

Assertions of divine monergism, Luther knew, may lead to the question of how God's omnipotence can be said to work evil in men, such as hardening, giving men up to their lusts (Romans 1:24), and similar disasters:

> We ought, of course, to be content with the words of God and believe quite simply what they say, since the works of God are entirely beyond description. Yet in order to humor reason, which is to say human stupidity, I am willing to be. . .stupid and see whether with a bit of babbling we can in any way move her.[30]

This quotation is worth considering because Luther here reveals his dual attitude toward human understanding. His willingness to do "'a bit of babbling'" about the topic, despite his conviction that "'the works of God are entirely beyond our description,'" may be understood as an indulgent concession to the craving of "'reason'" to know as well as to its pretensions. His "'bit of babbling'" here is to be understood as a form of apologetics, not as an interpretation of definitive revelation on the topic.

First, Luther offers the biblical teaching regarding the power of God "'who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will'" (Ephesians 1:11). But Satan and man, having

rebelled against God, remain in the created world as hostile and perverse creatures of God, "no less subject to divine omnipotence and activity than all other creatures and works of God."[31] God works through His creatures as they are until the time of judgment. When they are perverse and hostile to Him, evil consequences will happen even though God is good:

> It is the fault, therefore, of the instruments, which God does not allow to be idle, that evil things are done, with God Himself setting them in motion. . .Hence it comes about that the ungodly man cannot but continually err and sin, because he is caught up in the movement of divine power and not allowed to be idle, but wills, desires, and acts according to the kind of person he himself is. . .The omnipotence of God makes it impossible for the ungodly to evade the motion and action of God, for he is necessarily subject to it and obeys it. But this corruption or aversion from God makes it impossible for him to be moved and carried along with good effect. God cannot lay aside His omnipotence on account of man's aversion, and ungodly man cannot alter his aversion. It thus comes about that man perpetually and necessarily sins and errs until he is put right by the Spirit of God.[32]

"Next, however, follows the business of hardening." When a man, imitating Satan, seeks his own desires (careless of God or hostile to Him and the things which belong to God, but intent upon enjoying his possessions, wisdom, power, and glory) and discovers someone interfering with his purposes, he will rage against such an adversary:

> This is the well-known fury of the world against the Gospel of God. For by means of the Gospel that Stronger One comes who is to overcome the peaceful keeper of the court, and He condemns those desires for glory, wealth, wisdom, and righteousness of one's own, and everything which he trusts. This provocation of the ungodly, when God says or does to them the opposite of what they wish, is itself their hardening or worsening. For not only are they in themselves averse through the very corruption of their nature, but they become all the more averse and are made much worse when their aversion is resisted or thwarted. . .

> Let no one suppose, therefore, when God is said to harden or to work evil in us (for to harden is to make evil), that He does so by creating evil in us from scratch. . .That is the way people seem to imagine that man in himself is good, or at least not evil, and that he suffers an evil work at God's hands, when they hear it said by us that God works in us good things and bad, and that we are subject by sheer passive necessity to God's working; for they do not sufficiently consider how unrestingly active God is in all His creatures, allowing none of them to take a holiday. But anyone who wishes to have any understanding of such matters should think as follows. God works evil in us, i.e., by means of us, not through any fault of His, but owing to our faultiness, since we are by nature evil and He is good; but as He carries us along by His own activity in accordance with the nature of His omnipotence, good as He is Himself He cannot help but do evil with an evil instrument, though He makes good use of the evil in accordance with His wisdom for His own glory and our salvation.[33]

Luther's explanation of divine monergism does not answer questions such as "why God does not cease from the very motion of omnipotence by which the will of the ungodly is moved to go on being evil and becoming worse," why He permitted Adam to fall, and "why He creates us all infected with the same sin."[34] Instead, Luther points to the nature of God: "He is God, and for His will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things."[35] This divine monergism is also summed up in this sentence: "For God to will and to foreknow are the same thing."[36]

The relationship between divine monergism and freedom is expressed by St. Paul in this way: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:12). Moreover, we need to understand that divine freedom and divine power are facets of the nature of God; their purpose and character is rooted in divine love (Psalm 62:11, 12). What God foreknows, He will surely do; yet we must confess that His knowledge and will are always congruent with His nature. When the psalmist prays, "Thy power and

Thy righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens" (Psalm 71:18, 19), the Christian understanding of God immediately finds clarification in the incarnate God, Jesus Christ. In Him "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In this statement the term "love" is no mere abstraction; God is love according to the nature of His being—in His knowledge, His will, His works, and His communications of both judgment and mercy.

The "omnipotence and the foreknowledge of God," says Luther, "completely abolish the dogma of free choice."[37] No injustice is done to man by that fact, he argues. "God owes us nothing, has received nothing from us, and has promised us nothing but what suits His will and pleasure."[38] Thus, even Christians "are not led by free choice but by the Spirit of God, according to Romans 8:14."[39]

Obviously, the study of Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* involves much more than a few hours of reading. *The Bondage of the Will* represents a critical study of classical literature, the ancient and medieval church fathers, and the *via moderna.* Above all else, this work exhibits Luther's marvelously comprehensive and profound understanding of Scripture—an understanding of Scripture such as the Christian church has not seen since the time of the apostles. The Reformer offers us a lifetime of studying a topic which is no less inexhaustible than the study of God and of the Christian *ordo salutis.*

ENDNOTES

1. *Luther's Works: American Edition* (henceforth *LW*), edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1955 ff.), 33, p. 35.
2. *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, edited and translated by E. Gordon Rupp and Philip Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 37.
3. *LW*, 33, p. 294.
4. *Luther's Lectures on Romans*, translated and edited by Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 252.
5. *LW*, 31, pp. 344-345.

6. For interpretations of classical humanism see the following: Moses Hadas, *Humanism: The Greek Ideal and Its Survival* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960). Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, translated by Gilbert Highet, 3 volumes, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945). Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, two volumes (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958). Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Moral Thought of Renaissance Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). The relationship between Renaissance humanism and the ancient world is well drawn by R.R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries: From the Carolingian Age to the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964).

7. Paul Joachimsen, "Humanism and the Development of the German Mind," in *Pre-Reformation Germany*, edited by Gerald Strauss (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 170.

8. Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning. Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), offers a long catalogue of the failures of the cultural program of the Reformation. The interpretation of Strauss has, however, been emphatically rejected as a socialist ideological distortion of the consequences of the Reformation. See Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Die Wirkungen der Reformation* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987). A broad perspective is offered by Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550. An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). A less demanding approach is used by John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

9. *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 1 ff.

10. Ludwig Enders, *Luthers Briefwechsel*, I, no. 28, has his letter of October 19, 1516, addressed to Spalatin. See also Luther's letters to Lang, October 5, 1516 (*WA, Briefwechsel*, I: 61) and October 26, 1516 (*WA, Briefwechsel*, I: 73). One may compare Luther's letter to Spalatin of October 5, 1516 (*WA, Briefwechsel*, I: 63-64) with the one written two years earlier (*WA, Briefwechsel*, I: 23).

11. Luther's letter to Erasmus of January 6, 1519 (*WA, Briefwechsel*, I: 470, no. 911). His attempt to imitate the deferential and flowery style used by humanists in their correspondence may raise questions of Melanchthon's influence upon Luther at this time.

12. *Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), XVIII, col. 1582, offers a German translation of this letter to Erasmus. In columns 1668-1669 references are given to other correspondence of Luther regarding Erasmus. An appendix begins with column 1969. Originally published in 1534, Luther's answer to Nicholaus Amsdorf in Magdeburg regarding Erasmus undoubtedly represents Luther's judgment of Erasmus' work in retrospect. Erasmus' dishonesty, as Luther perceived it, was most offensive to him (paragraph 24):

> So great a rhetorician and theologian [as Erasmus] ought not only to know, but to act according to, the teaching of Fabius: "An ambiguous word should be avoided as a reef." Where it happens now and then inadvertently, it may be pardoned; but where it is sought for designedly and purposely, it deserves no pardon, but justly merits the abhorrence of everyone.

See also paragraphs 4-8 as well as the rest of Luther's letter to Amsdorf, dated February 1534, particularly paragraphs 37 and following.

13. Percy S. Allen, ed., *Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Oxford University Press, 1906), III, p. 544, no. 948, a letter from Erasmus to Moselanus, dated April 22, 1519, which leaves no doubt about Erasmus' judgment of Luther's work despite the cautious approval with which he treated Luther in his letter addressed a few months later to Albert of Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz. Allen, *ibid.*, IV, pp. 99 ff., no. 1033.

14. *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, translated and edited by E. Gordon Rupp and Philip Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 35. The careful student may wish to compare this translation of Erasmus' essay with the edition of the original text published by Johannes von Walter (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1910). A German translation of Erasmus' *Diatribe* by Otto Schumacher (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956) is noteworthy not only for the high quality of its interpretation of Erasmus' Latin, but also for the abundant explanatory footnotes.

15. *WA*, 1: 354; *LW*, 31, p. 40.

16. This translation comes from Rupp and Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 64. Luther himself favored his own German version of the *Assertio*, published a few months after the Latin version under the title *Grund und Ursach aller Artikel*, according to his letter to Spalatin of January 16, 1521 (Enders, III, 73). The German version of Article 36 reads somewhat differently, omitting a

reference to "necessity": "Since the fall of Adam, or after actual sin, free will exists only in name and, when it does what it can, it commits sin." *LW*, 32, p. 92.

17. *LW*, 32, p. 93. The reference to St. Augustine's *Contra Julianum*, II, 8, 23, is found in Migne, 44, 689: "You call the will free, but in fact it is an enslaved will." Augustine's expression, *servum arbitrium*—"a will in bondage" or "a will enslaved"—became the title of Luther's essay against Erasmus. Thereby Erasmus was forced to confront nor merely Luther, but also the greatest theologian of the ancient Western Church. It is remarkable that Luther voiced this primary conviction in 1516 in his exposition of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

> So then the first objection, which is also the least weighty one, is this: Man has been given free will and thus he can earn merits or demerits. We answer. . .as follows: The power of free decision in so far as it is not under the sway of grace has no ability whatever to realize righteousness, but it is necessarily in sins. Hence, Blessed Augustine is right, when, in his book against Julian, he calls it "the enslaved, rather than free will." But when it has received grace, the power of decision really becomes free, according to its nature, but only with respect to that which is in its power and is inferior, since it is held captive in sins and then cannot choose the good according to God.

Luther's Lectures on Romans, translated and edited by Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 252.

18. *LW*, 13, pp. 75-141; volumes 1-8 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956-1966).

19. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 17-18.

20. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 982 b.

21. *LW*, 33, p. 23; *WA*, 18: 605. Here we should add that Erasmus' choice of the Latin term *assequi* (literally, "to follow," used by Cicero in the sense of "to arrive at, comprehend, understand") gave Luther an opportunity to stress the mandatory force of the Scriptures for the believer: "What Christian would so throw the injunctions of Scripture and the church to the winds as to say, 'whether I grasp it or not'?"

22. *LW*, 33, p. 35; *WA*, 18: 614.

23. *LW*, 33, pp. 203-205; *WA*, 18: 727-730.

24. *LW*, 33, p. 146; *WA*, 18: 690.
25. *WA*, 39, I: 521-522.
26. *LW*, 33, p. 282; *WA*, 18: 780.
27. *WA*, I: 252, 8-12.
28. *LW*, 33, p. 285; *WA*, 18: 782.
29. *LW*, 33, pp. 145-146; *WA*, 18: 689-690.
30. *LW*, 33, p. 175; *WA*, 18: 709.
31. *LW*, 33, p. 176; *WA*, 18: 709.
32. *LW*, 33, pp. 176-177; *WA*, 18: 709-710.
33. *LW*, 33, pp. 177-178; *WA*, 18: 710-711.
34. *LW*, 33, pp. 180-181; *WA*, 18: 712.
35. *LW*, 33, p. 181; *WA*, 18: 712.
36. *LW*, 33, p. 186; *WA*, 18: 716.
37. *LW*, 33, p. 189; *WA*, 18: 718.
38. *LW*, 33, p. 188; *WA*, 18: 717.
39. *LW*, 33, p. 160; *WA*, 18: 699.

Martin Luther on Preaching:
Promises and Problems of the Sermon as a Source of Reformation History and as an Instrument of the Reformation

Patrick Ferry

The effort to disseminate the tenets of the Reformation to the common folk was no small task. Transmitting ideas so that they could be understood by the predominantly illiterate people of sixteenth-century Germany was only part of the problem. From the perspective of those who sought to implement reform measures within the church the goal was not achieved until the people embraced the ideas of reform and confessed them as their own. Reformers utilized various means to propagate their message in reaching for that goal.

The spread of new ideas throughout Germany has often been attributed to the impact of printing. However, while the literate elite may have been influential, they comprised only a small minority of the population in the first half of the sixteenth century. Printing, therefore, must be placed into the broader context of this mainly oral culture, and the diffusion of Reformation ideas must be understood to be the result of other forms of communication as well.[1] One of the more obvious ways in which those who were proponents of the Reformation sought to address the masses was through preaching. Few were able to read but almost all were able to hear. The sermon, therefore, lent itself very naturally to the reformers' cause. For this reason the sermon should lend itself naturally to the Reformation historian's cause as well. This essay will demonstrate the high esteem Martin Luther had for preaching and the very positive expectations he had for the sermon as an instrument of reform. At the same time, Luther discovered that people did not always put into practice what he preached, and this lack of receptivity disappointed him. The following analysis of Luther's own views on preaching and his assessment of its impact will reveal that as a means for reforming religious ideas the sermon promised much but delivered much less. Luther's own enthusiasm was tempered by the absence of popular enthusiasm for Reformation sermons. By way of introduction to this topic, however, it would be useful to assess more carefully just how much promise Reformation sermons in general, and Luther's sermons in particular, have to offer as a source for the Reformation historian. Enthusiasm need not necessarily be tempered, but neither should it be reckless.

Sermons probably tell us more about those who preach than they do about those who hear. The ideas a preacher would like to convey to the people in his message may be poles apart from those which are actually received. This difference, of course, imposes a limitation on using the sermon as a historical source, just as the sermon had limitations as a vehicle of new ideas during the Reformation in Germany. In other words, preaching was largely a one-sided means of communication, and it should not be assumed that listeners always agreed with and accepted the sermon's content.[2] It would be an error to presuppose a passive and receptive audience that regularly received the message as convincing and authoritative.[3] The historian should, therefore, also approach the sermon with respect and sensitivity for those who heard it, particularly inasmuch as Reformation preachers themselves did not likely expect their listeners to agree readily with everything they said. Finally, perhaps an even more fundamental problem with the sermon as a historiographic source is that of accessibility to the oral event. The ephemeral nature of the sermon makes it impossible to reproduce preaching. This would seem to prevent any definitive historical investigation of preaching since even printed transcripts of sermonic messages cannot contain the all-important chemistry of their original circumstances.[4]

Each of these limitations also applies to intensive studies of the sermons of Martin Luther, and there are other difficulties as well. Along with the more general problems relating to the original situation in which Luther preached are those relating to the transmission of written texts. Luther did not preach from a full manuscript prepared in advance but rather made use of an outline called a *Konzept*. Few *Konzepte* are still extant. Those that have come down to us are more or less summaries of what Luther intended to say rather than well organized and neatly arranged outlines.[5] Therefore, apart from these summaries, of the 2,300 some sermons of Luther that survive (roughly one-third of the total number that he preached), it is possible that not one of them was used by him in the pulpit while he was delivering his message. The versions of Luther's sermons that are available are the result of other efforts, and they exist in various forms. Among the extant sermons are some texts that Luther himself edited for

publication. Some are his church postils (*Kirchenpostille*), which were collections of sermons intended for reading in the church service by men who could not or were not willing to prepare their own sermons. Another group of sermons consists of notes written during Luther's actual preaching by various scribes. Some of these notes were later reworked into texts for publication while others exist as they were originally taken down.[6]

Thus, the effort to determine how Luther's own preaching might have been an instrument of reform among the people requires the exercise of considerable caution. In trying to determine on the basis of Luther's own notes what he preached to the people, his own *Konzepte* might seem like a good place to start. The fact that Luther took seriously his preparation for preaching is indicated by the fact that he was often troubled in his sleep by dreams that he had to preach with no *Konzept* along in the pulpit.[7] However, as indicated, his outlines provide only a summary of his preaching, and not many exist. Furthermore, though Luther may have been bothered by bad dreams, when he awoke and stood up to preach, his outline did not necessarily constrain him. Luther once stated, "Our Lord God wishes Himself to be the preacher, for preachers often go astray in their notes. . . It has often happened to me that my best outline became undone."[8]

Other sermons that Luther himself edited for publication, such as the church postils, do not necessarily give an indication of what he actually preached. Depending upon the extent to which other preachers borrowed from the postils for use in their own pulpits, they may offer some insight into what was being heard in other churches in Germany. But, if the quest is a closer look at what Luther himself was proclaiming to the congregation at St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, where he preached most of his sermons, then it is necessary to rely on his redactors. Among the men who assiduously took notes while Martin Luther preached were Caspar Cruciger, Stephen Roth, Veit Dietrich, Andrew Poach, John Aurifaber, George Rörer, and Anthony Lauterbach. They were probably aided in their endeavor by the fact that Luther was considered a slow speaker.[9] Nevertheless, often when several of them were present at the same sermon, their notes differed significantly from one another.[10] In Luther's

perspective this interpretative function of the scribes was not all bad. He once remarked, "I think Cruciger has made the sermon better than I preached it."[11]

This extended caveat is intended to suggest not that sermons cannot be used profitably as a historiographic source, but that they should be used discriminatingly. Indeed, if the eminent Reformation historian, Harold Grimm, is correct, then sermons are essential sources of historical information. Grimm writes:

> The Protestant Reformation would not have been possible without the sermon. Regardless of how the reformers gained their new theological insights, they used the sermon to bring their doctrines directly to their followers in the vernacular and to apply those doctrines to the immediate and practical religious needs of the people. Since the pulpit was one of the most important means of communicating information in the sixteenth century, the role of the sermon in making the Reformation a mass movement can scarcely be overestimated.[12]

Full credit must be given to the fact that the sermon brought the ideas of the Reformation to the ears of the masses. The extent to which preaching also reached their hearts and transformed their thinking, according to Luther's perceptions, will concern us momentarily. For the moment it should be noted that there is evidence to suggest that the pulpit was not merely a means of communicating information, as Grimm points out, but also that efforts to introduce religious reform were often the direct result of local revivals of preaching. In other cases communities developed interest in the new reform ideas first and would then work to secure a preacher who would proclaim God's word to them.[13] Lay people would pay out of their own pockets to support a good preacher in an effort to improve local religious life, and lay-endowed preacherships (*Prädikaturen*) often became key bases of operation for Protestant preachers to promote the Reformation.[14] Preacherships were established in large measure because of local dissatisfaction with the irregularity and low quality of the preaching of the local secular clergy and the unpopularity of preaching mendicants. Reform-minded preachers were asked to take up the slack by preaching a hundred to a hundred and fifty sermons a year. There was frequently friction between preachers and priests, or preachers and monks, and the people

would generally rush to the support of their most popular preachers.[15] The ejection of an acceptable preacher by unsympathetic magistrates could even result in rebellion.[16]

Though later in the Reformation popular zeal for preachers of the gospel seems to have waned, early in the Reformation their role was considered essential. Martin Luther consistently treated the office of preaching as indispensable to the cause of reform, and he believed that without it the ideas of the Reformation could not have reached the ears or attention of the people. For this reason Luther highly esteemed the place of preaching in the Reformation. At the same time, Luther very much opposed preachers ascending to the pulpit without proper authorization. He was most certainly an advocate of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but Luther made a distinction in connection with the office of preaching. To him all Christians were priests, but only those men were to preach who had been called by God, through the mediation of the congregation, to fill the pastoral office.

Luther was critical of those who publicly addressed the people without a regular call and yet claimed authorization for doing so on the basis of being led to speak by the Holy Spirit. Radical reformers like Andreas Carlstadt and Thomas Müntzer were often the targets of such criticisms. Referring to the Peasants War of 1525, Luther wrote, "If Müntzer and Carlstadt and their comrades had not been allowed to sneak and creep into other men's houses and parishes where they had neither call nor command to go, this whole calamity would not have happened."[17] Concerning those he called "sneaks" and "false preachers," Luther warned the people, "no one should let them in or listen to them, even if they were to preach the pure Gospel, nay even if they were angels from heaven and all Gabriels at that!"[18] To preachers who insisted that they were sincere and boasted that they were led by the Holy Spirit, Luther urged the people to say, "Go preach to the geese. You are a devil. Don't molest and confuse me with your spirit. Christ does not want me to listen to you."[19]

Luther's insistence upon the integrity of the preaching office might be interpreted as an effort to exercise control over what was being preached in German pulpits. Anabaptists considered the Lutheran retention of the rite of ordination and

insistence upon the call an abandonment of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and a means of suppressing opposing points of view.[20] However, Luther seemed less concerned about controlling everything that was being preached and taught than about upholding the significance of the preacher's call. He wrote:

> It is not lawful for me to forsake my assigned station as a preacher, to go to another city where I have no call and to preach there. . . I have no right to do this even if I hear that false doctrine is being taught and that souls are being seduced and condemned which I could rescue from error and condemnation by my sound doctrine. But I should commit the matter to God, who in His own time will find the opportunity to call ministers lawfully and to give the Word.[21]

Retrospectively, the pronounced clerical stamp of the Lutheran Reformation can be seen to have been a contributing factor to the more conservative nature of its reform measures in comparison with those of the more radical reformers. The emphasis upon the need of the rite of ordination and of a proper call for preachers was not something Luther wished to eliminate in reforming the church. Others might have assumed that this traditional framework inhibited the work of the Holy Spirit, but Luther believed that the office of preaching was an essential means through which the Holy Spirit would reach people with the gospel. He maintained: "the preacher's mouth and the words that I hear are not his; they are the words and the message of the Holy Spirit [through which] He works within me and thus He makes me holy."[22]

In his writings and in his preaching Martin Luther expressed considerable optimism that through the instrumentality of the preaching office reform of beliefs could be brought about and that people would be drawn to Christ. "Here we also see the power of this preaching of the Gospel," Luther wrote. "Beyond all the might and the power of the world and of all creatures, Christ proves His ability to draw the hearts of men to Himself through the Word alone. . ."[23] In a sermon preached on November 25, 1531, Luther acknowledged that from all outward appearances preaching seemed rather insignificant. However, he argued that, in fact, all else was insignificant in comparison to the preaching of God's word. He proclaimed:

"In the eyes of reason the preaching of the divine Word is unimpressive next to kings and princes. But what are princes or emperor, yes, the entire world, heaven, earth, and all creatures compared with the Word? They are dirt."[24]

Luther firmly believed that the preached word was nothing less than the *viva vox Dei*, and, thus, he had little time for those he called "wearisome, obnoxious spirits" who had little sense for spiritual matters. They asked, "What more than a fleeting breath are the words of a preacher?" Luther's only reply to them was that, "if they had ever experienced the power and effect of Baptism, of the Sacrament, or of the oral Word, they would indeed keep their mouths shut."[25] Luther emphasized the centrality of the oral word in the life and the work of the church. He said, "The church is not a pen-house but a mouth-house."[26] Again he said, "The Gospel should not be written but screamed."[27] It is generally agreed that Luther made very productive use of the medium of print to communicate his message, but it was his opinion that people were reached most effectively through the medium of the human voice. In a sermon on July 21, 1532, Luther preached against the idea that people could read the Word of God at home with as much profit as having to listen to a preacher. "Even if they do read it," Luther insisted, "it is not as fruitful or powerful as it is through a public preacher whom God has ordained to say and preach this."[28] Commenting on Malachi 2:7, "the lips of a priest guard knowledge," Luther further claimed:

> The Word is the channel through which the Holy Spirit is given. This is a passage against those who hold the spoken Word in contempt. The lips are the public reservoirs of the church. In them alone is kept the Word of God. You see, unless the Word is preached publicly, it slips away. The more it is preached, the more firmly it is retained. Reading it is not as profitable as hearing it, for the live voice teaches, exhorts, defends, and resists the spirit of error. Satan does not care a hoot for the written Word of God, but he flees at the speaking of the Word.[29]

Much of Luther's optimism about the power of preaching was based upon his view that the preacher's words were really God's own words. Though to the observer and listener what was beheld was only a man, and what was heard was only a man's voice, the picture was not complete unless it was

understood that God Himself was preaching there.[30] Preaching as the power of God, therefore, implied that through the proclamation of God's word much could be accomplished. As an example of this power, Luther, in his commentary of 1526, holds up the prophet Jonah. Jonah is described as an object of comfort for all who administer the word, inasmuch as he, through a single sermon, brought about the conversion of the city of Nineveh, the mightiest kingdom of his day. This conversion, Luther argued, was as great a miracle as Jonah's rescue from the belly of a fish, if not an even greater miracle, "for just as the whale had to spew Jonah forth in obedience to the words of God, so Jonah by the Word of God also tore the city of Nineveh from the belly and jaws of the devil, that is, from sin and death."[31] This thought, no doubt, would have been an inspiration to preachers of the Reformation facing Ninevehs all their own.

Luther's emphasis upon the principle *praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*, did not imply that the content of the sermon was not important or even of secondary significance.[32] To a preacher who could not proclaim God's grace, but who instead raised doubts in people's minds, Luther suggested that it was reasonable to say, "If I am to hear no other comfort from you than this, that I can never know how I stand with God, then be the devil's confessor, and be a preacher in the abyss of hell."[33] It was Luther's contention that foolish preachers actually did more to hinder the gospel than overt enemies of the gospel.[34] Especially early in his career, Luther deplored what he considered to be the woeful state of preaching in his day, and he held it responsible not only for an absence of understanding among the laity, but also for the many souls that were perishing.[35] In a sermon preached at Erfurt on his famous journey to Worms in 1521, Luther lamented, "The reason why the world is so utterly perverted and in error is that for a long time there have been no genuine preachers. There are perhaps three thousand priests, among whom one cannot find four good ones—God have mercy on us in this crying shame!"[36]

Early in the Reformation Luther maintained that the low state of preaching was largely responsible for what he perceived to be the decline of the church. He further insisted, however, that ignorance of the Scriptures was responsible for the low state of preaching. He was enraged at what was being

passed off as preaching and realized that the oral word of God had to rely upon the written word of God. For that reason he translated the Bible into German and devoted much of his career as a theologian to the exposition of the Scriptures.[37] In his exposition of Psalm 68 Luther wrote, "Where God does not provide the message, a sermon is useless. . . For wherever God does not suggest the words, there is no sermon at all, or it is a vain and pernicious sermon."[38] As a minister of the word, a preacher was to be sure not only that he had a divine office but also that his doctrine was correct. "If I were not so sure of this that in my heart I could build upon it and depend upon it," Luther commented, "it would be much better for me to keep my mouth shut."[39] A preacher with this certainty, on the other hand, could with firm confidence declare at the conclusion of his sermon, "Haec dixit Dominus," following the example of the apostles and prophets.[40]

Luther was deeply concerned about preaching that hindered the gospel. Above all, he opposed what he considered to be misleading sermons which pointed people to their own merits before God rather than to the saving works of Christ. In his pastoral concern for people Luther also had some things to say about sermons that, although redemptive and cruciform in character, were unable to be easily understood. In order for the Reformation to succeed at the popular level it was necessary to preach to the people in such a manner that the gospel message could be grasped. The sermon as an instrument of reform had to be preached with hearers in mind.

In the well-known collection of many of Luther's after-dinner remarks known as the "Table Talk" (*Tischreden*), the reformer commented occasionally on this matter. Luther once said to his companions, "In my preaching I take pains to treat a verse of Scripture, to stick to it, and so to instruct the people that they can say, 'That's what the sermon was about.'"[41] When describing the model preacher, however, Luther was much more apt to point to the example of Christ than to his own sermons. For example, he states, "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."[42]

The example of the preaching of Jesus was not wasted on Luther; he treated his texts with his hearers' interests at

heart.[43] He preached on the nativity from the point of view of Mary and on the Epiphany lesson of the twelve-year old Jesus in the temple from the viewpoint of the anxious parents, because in his congregation there were young women who knew what it meant to give birth in a cold house and there were parents who felt guilt over the neglect of their children.[44] What Luther said about his efforts at translating, no doubt, also applied to his preaching: "We must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly."[45] These remarks of Luther summarize his insistence that preaching be understood:

> Cursed be every preacher who aims at lofty topics in the church, looking for his own glory and selfishly desiring to please one individual or another. When I preach here I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people. I don't look at the doctors and masters, of whom scarcely forty are present, but at the hundred or the thousand young people and children. It's to them that I preach, to them that I devote myself, for they too need to understand. If the others don't want to listen, they can leave. . .we preach in public for the sake of plain people. Christ could have taught in a profound way, but He wished to deliver His message with the utmost simplicity in order that common people might understand. Good God, there are sixteen-year-old girls, women, and farmers in the church, and they don't understand lofty matters.[46]

Preachers who had the ability to bring the gospel to the people in an understandable manner were much needed, and Luther was earnest in encouraging men to prepare for this office. In fact, Luther even urged parents of young boys to prompt their sons along in this direction. In 1530 he published a message entitled "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School." The emphasis was upon the value of educating children, something often treated with derision in the sixteenth century, but within the sermon Luther once again expressed his high regard and optimism for the preaching office. Addressing parents of young boys, Luther wrote:

> If you were sure that your son would accomplish even one of these works in a single human being, that he would make one blind man to see or one dead man to rise, snatch

> one soul from the devil or rescue one person from hell, or whatever else it might be, ought you not leap with utmost joy that with your money you are privileged to accomplish something so great in the sight of God?. . . Now just look at what your son does—not just one of these works but many, indeed, all of them.[47]

Whether or not reform of the church would be achieved on any large scale, Luther believed that individuals would be changed through the ministrations of the incumbent of the office of preaching. Of course, the preacher would need to be prepared to proclaim the promises of the gospel, and in such a manner that they might be readily understood, but in theory popular, evangelical reform waited only upon preachers with popular, evangelical sermons. This assertion might create the impression that in Luther's estimation good gospel preaching would enable the reformers to implement their full program with very little obstruction. Such, however, was not the case, and more needs to be added before a clearer picture comes into view. The theoretical possibilities must be seen in the light of practical accomplishments.

In his book, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young to the German Reformation*, Gerald Strauss has sparked considerable discussion among Reformation scholars by asserting that the reformers' efforts to indoctrinate through catechesis were mainly ineffectual. Some of the evidence that he cites to support this conclusion includes many of Luther's own rather negative assessments of the progress of reform.[48] Luther made similarly negative observations about popular reactions to preachers and about the low impact which their preaching seemed to have. The gospel was not producing the fruit for which he had hoped. At one point Luther observed: "Many a man listens to sermons for three or four years and does not retain enough to give a single answer concerning his faith."[49] He complained that people left church no wiser than when they came in because all they did once they were inside was sleep and snore.[50] They might sometimes prick up their ears to hear clever stories, but "the common people sleep and cough when the article of justification is preached."[51]

In a sermon preached in 1532 on John 7:37, "if anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink," Luther reflected upon a change of attitude which he perceived among the people. Whereas only

twelve or fifteen years before that time the people were thirsty for the gospel of Christ and joyfully thanked God that they now had water to drink, by this time they were sated and had already had their fill.[52] This change was something Luther lamented to the end of his days. As a matter of fact, in Luther's final sermon, preached at Eisleben only a few days before his death, he echoed much the same theme:

> In times past we would have run to the end of the world if we had known a place where we could hear God speak. . . "Oh," people say, "what is that? After all, there is preaching every day, often many times every day, so that we soon grow weary of it. What do we get out of it?"[53]

Weariness of hearing preaching was accompanied by declining support of preachers—not only moral support, but also financial support. Luther considered it nothing less than contempt for the gospel that people would amass everything for themselves in their extreme greed while allowing their ministers to die of starvation.[54] In his commentary on Isaiah Luther compared the predicament of preachers with that of the prophets who had to endure the ridicule of contemptuous people. He wrote:

> All the country folk and the common people laugh at and deride the preachers by not giving them food and clothing, and people say they even mock those whom they ought to provide for, as we see today. They say, "we do not need a pastor," and the prophets and godly appear stupid to them. They point their fingers at them and disparage them. But one day it will rain mud.[55]

Asserting that it would one day "rain mud" was Luther's way of warning that ingratitude toward the gospel and its messengers would result in certain retribution. He often insisted that the gospel would be taken away from them if the German people continued to resist it so shamefully. One day, he predicted, there would be no more faithful preachers to be found. More than once he threatened to quit preaching himself, though he was not at all sure that the people would even mind. He wrote, "Thus, people today also say of me, Dr. Martin Luther: 'If he does not care to preach, let him stop. We have his books. Just begone! Go to the devil!'"[56] Often he would have been more than happy to oblige saying, "I would rather be stretched on a wheel or carry stones than preach one

sermon."[57] There was one point when he did quit briefly. Following his sermon of January 1, 1530, Luther announced his resolve to preach no longer to the St. Mary's congregation in Wittenberg because the people despised the gospel. He said, "I would rather preach to mad dogs, for my preaching shows no effect among you, and it only makes me weary."[58] His expressed intention was to confine himself to his classroom lectures and leave the preaching responsibility to Bugenhagen, the pastor of St. Mary's Church. However, within a few weeks Luther was back in the pulpit.

Luther always returned to the pulpit because he believed it was his office. If it were not for God's own order and institution, Luther insisted, "I would not want to preach another sermon to the end of my days."[59] As mentioned above, Luther did continue to preach to the end of his days. But the optimism he held about what could be done through preaching was always restrained by the reality of what was or, indeed, was not actually being accomplished. Theoretically he believed that the sermon could be a vital and useful instrument of reform, but in practice its impact often seemed minimal at best. He reconciled himself to the fact that no preacher would be able to remove or change all that was wrong with the church.[60] Nevertheless, he still held out hope and encouraged fellow preachers to believe that they were not preaching in a void even though "barely two listened to their sermons."[61] He compared their predicament to a fire that could not be controlled or extinguished and said that their task was to try to rescue a few. Luther would not quit and he urged others not to give up either:

> For one should not quit simply because so few are changed for the better in hearing the preaching of the gospel. But do what Christ did: He rescued the elect and left the rest behind. This is what the apostles did also. It will not be better for you.[62]

Neither, it seems, was it any better for Luther. The sermon, for all of its promise and all of its promises, was reaching only the few rather than the many. Luther seemed to derive consolation from the fact that it reached any at all.

ENDNOTES

1. For a more complete analysis of means that were used to spread ideas in the oral culture of the Reformation period see Robert Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas," *History of European Ideas*, 5 (1984), pp. 237-256. Along with preaching Scribner assesses the role of discussion groups, kinship connections, ballads and hymns, and other forms of oral communication in transmitting ideas.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
4. Richard Lischer, "Luther and Contemporary Preaching: Narrative and Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 36 (1983), p. 487.
5. Elmer C. Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Martin Luther and Their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1935), p. 55.
6. For a concise description of the various problems involving the transmission of texts of Luther's sermons see Lowell C. Green, "Justification in Luther's Preaching on Luke 18:9-14," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 43 (1973), pp. 732-734.
7. *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jarislav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955 ff.), volume 54, p. 214. Citations from this translation will henceforth be indicated by *LW* together with volume and page number.
8. *LW*, 54, p. 213.
9. Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983) p. 52.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
11. Green, p. 734.
12. Harold J. Grimm, "The Human Element in Luther's Sermons," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 49 (1958), p. 50.
13. Scribner, p. 238. Scribner also provides more background on this matter, including a social, economic, and educational background sketch of the Reformation preacher in his article "Practice and Principle in the German Town: Preachers and People," in *Reformation Principle and Practice*, ed. Peter N. Brooks (London, 1980), pp. 95-117.

14. Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 39.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.
16. Scribner, "Oral Culture," p. 238.
17. *LW*, 13, p. 64.
18. *LW*, 13, p. 65.
19. *LW*, 23, p. 175.
20. Scribner, p. 100.
21. *LW*, 26, p. 18.
22. *LW*, 24, p. 170.
23. *LW*, 13, p. 291.
24. *LW*, 23, pp. 388-389.
25. *LW*, 24, p. 109.
26. *LW*, Companion Volume, p. 63.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 64, n. 66.
29. *LW*, 18, p. 401.
30. *LW*, 22, p. 526.
31. *LW*, 19, p. 37.
32. See Heiko A. Oberman, "Preaching and the Reformation," *Theology Today*, 18 (1962), pp. 27ff. Oberman argues that, while preachers of the Reformation held to an essentially *ex opere operato* view of the preached word (that, when preached by properly ordained ministers, it was *ipso facto* effective), it was presupposed that the content of the sermon would be consistent with the Scriptures.
33. *LW*, 24, p. 218.
34. *LW*, 15, p. 66.
35. *LW*, 44, pp. 55-58.
36. *LW*, 52, pp. 63-64.
37. *LW*, Companion Volume, pp. 68-69.
38. *LW*, 13, p. 12.
39. *LW*, 12, p. 186.
40. *LW*, 41, p. 216.

41. *LW*, 54, p. 160.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
43. For a good account of Luther's ability to make biblical preaching contemporary see Lischer, pp. 487-504.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 491.
45. *LW*, 35, p. 189.
46. *LW*, 35, p. 235; p. 383.
47. *LW*, 46, p. 225.
48. Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young to the German Reformation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). See also Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past and Present*, 67 (1975), pp. 30-63. For a reply to the Strauss thesis see James Kittleson, "Successes and Failures in the German Reformation: The Report from Strasbourg," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 73 (1982), pp. 153-174.
49. *LW*, 53, p. 67.
50. *LW*, 51, p. 45.
51. Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 3 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 1115.
52. *LW*, 23, p. 269.
53. *LW*, 51, p. 390.
54. *LW*, 17, p. 343. For more on the economic position of pastors during this time see Susan Korant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside* (1979), pp. 38-52.
55. *LW*, 17, p. 291.
56. *LW*, 23, p. 264.
57. *LW*, 51, p. 222.
58. *LW*, 17, pp. 128-129, n.6.
59. *LW*, 22, p. 372.
60. *LW*, 7, p. 364.
61. *LW*, 16, p. 204.
62. *LW*, 15, p. 124.

Bernard of Clairvaux as Luther's Source:

Reading Bernard with Luther's "Spectacles"

Franz Posset

The nine hundredth birthday of Bernard of Clairvaux, celebrated in 1990, is a good occasion to call to mind this French medieval master's achievement and his impact on the German Reformer Martin Luther. Bernard deserves to be re-introduced to Christian spirituality today, because he is one of the greatest spiritual authors of the church universal. His greatness was recognized and valued by Luther. The Reformer's numerous references to Bernard testify to his high esteem for Bernard as a great witness to the evangelical truth, and they show simultaneously Luther's close familiarity with this last of the church fathers and the greatest representative of monastic theology.

The celebration of Bernard's nine hundredth birthday gives us the occasion to point out Bernard's general importance not only for the Roman Catholic Church, but also for the churches of the Reformation. Besides, there is another specifically theological reason for celebrating Bernard's birthday. It is his ecumenical significance for genuine Christian theology as such. A close scrutiny of Bernard's writings and of Luther's works reveals a striking congeniality of these two giants in the history of Christendom, an affinity to such a degree that previous generations of Lutheran scholars could view Bernard as the forerunner of Protestantism. This ecumenical perspective needs to be pointed out again today, although not necessarily in the same manner. Historically speaking, it would be more accurate to think of Luther's Bernardine outlook in terms of a *filiation bernardienne*.[1] Thus, by going back to the original Luther and to the original Bernard, a common theological ground can be established, or further secured, for the future of theology—and with an ecumenical accent at that.

It remains remarkable that in previous centuries people made more of the congeniality between Luther and Bernard than is generally done today. For instance, the oldest Protestant ecclesiastical history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*, reserved a special place of honor for the Cistercian abbot of Clairvaux. And Luther's old foe, Erasmus of Rotterdam, also went on record with the observation that the Reformer's teaching went back to Bernard (and Augustine).[2] Keeping

these hints in mind, Luther may be our guide not only to the thought-world of Bernard, but also to a future ecumenical theology grounded in pre-scholastic theology. The purpose of this study is to uncover some of Bernard's thoughts which served as a source of Luther's spirituality and theology and to learn from Bernard what Luther learned for his teaching and preaching in the Reformation. In order to regain access to Bernard as a teacher not only of Martin Luther but of all Christians today, I want to invite the reader to focus with me—using Luther's "eye-glasses"—on those texts from the large body of Bernard's writings which Luther employed in his preaching and teaching.

We must be selective because Luther's references to Bernard amount to more than five hundred, not counting allusions made in his table-talk and in his correspondence. Before going into greater detail on the congeniality of Bernard and Luther, it is fitting to review at least briefly the life and works of Bernard. We can intersperse with these biographical data some observations on Luther's use or neglect of certain Bernardine writings.

I. *Bernard and Luther*

We focus on the preaching, theologizing, and praying Bernard because this focus corresponds to Luther's view of the great pre-scholastic teacher of the church. Luther spoke often and most admiringly of him: "I love Bernard as the one who among all writers preached Christ most charmingly [*auff das aller lieblichste*]. I follow him wherever he preached Christ, and I pray to Christ in the faith in which he prayed to Christ."[3] "Bernard is golden when he teaches and preaches."[4] "Bernard with his preaching excels all other doctors including even Augustine."[5] To Luther it was a joy to listen to Bernard's "fine preaching."[6] Apparently, Luther the preacher was most interested in Bernard the preacher, that is, the preacher of the crib and the cross of Christ, but not of the crusade. The German Cicero looked up to Bernard as the greatest medieval rhetor. This observation is mirrored in Luther's numerous references to Bernard's rhetorically exquisite "sermons."

Luther, the theologian of grace and of faith, accepted Bernard as his spiritual master and as one of the greatest witnesses to the gospel. Bernard's thoughts had a remarkable influence upon Luther's early lectures on the Psalms and on

the Pauline Letters—delivered during the decisive years of his "Reformational turn." This fact led Carl Stange, a scholar of both Bernard and Luther, to the observation—on the occasion of a Lutheran academy's commemoration of the eight hundredth anniversary of Bernard's death in 1953—that Luther found the "decisive impulse for his further [Reformation] development" in reading Bernard.[7]

There is a theological continuity from the apostolic tradition via Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, and Bernard to Luther. In this regard the Reformer declared once at the table that as an adolescent he "took to heart Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, Bernard, etc." These fathers did not read Aristotle, Luther observed, and, as a young man, indeed, he had been left with the belief that these church fathers were no theologians at all—since they had not read Aristotle—or perhaps they were theologians "of a different kind."[8] Luther was so impressed with the Cistercian father that he did not shy away from calling him the "Divine Bernard" (*Divus Bernardus),* in contemporary humanistic fashion.[9] Luther especially esteemed an assertion of "grace alone" which he had found in Bernard's sermon on the Annunciation of our Lord and, similarly, a story which he must have encountered in *The Golden Legend* wherein the aging abbot is reported to have said that a monk's life, work, and achievements meant nothing for eternal salvation.[10]

Early in his career, during his first lectures on the Psalms, Luther stated that Bernard "meditates beautifully" on man's justification by God's non-imputation of his sins.[11] Thus, there is great probability that Bernard was one of the decisive causes of Luther's Reformation breakthrough—a probability which has up to now scarcely been acknowledged. In a writing of 1539, indeed, Luther specifically states: "that sinners shall be stirred to repentance through the preaching or the contemplation of the passion of Christ, so that they might see the enormity of God's wrath over sin and learn that there is no other remedy for this than the death of God's Son—this doctrine is not mine but Bernard's...."[12]

Not only the preaching and teaching Bernard made a great impression on Luther, but also the praying Bernard.[13] Apparently Luther and Bernard shared common thoughts on prayer. The spiritual master Bernard—when praying and thus

moving "in faith"—was "a beautiful teacher" who "ascribes everything to Christ."[14] Luther considered what Bernard had said on prayer the most beautiful thinking thereon that he had ever heard or read, and he posed this rhetorical question: "What could be more Christian"?[15] "Therefore, Bernard was a fine man who had Christian thoughts."[16] Thus, also in regard to a life of prayer, Bernard was Luther's mentor. The German Reformer approvingly observed that Bernard painstakingly admonished his people to prayer, making "excellent" statements in this regard.[17]

Bernard's experience of the "sweetness of the faith" enjoyed the admiration of both the young Luther and the aging Luther.[18] In Luther's eyes Bernard was such a great master because "he knew Christ as his Savior and felt [Him] in his heart" and so "did not err in the spirit."[19] Luther appreciated Bernard so highly that he reserved the honorific title of "father" for him alone, and he recommended the diligent study of his works: "He is the only one worthy of the name 'Father Bernard' and of being studied diligently."[20]

Who was this man whom Luther revered so highly? It is impossible, of course, to present an exhaustive biography of his life and works here. But some basic statements about Bernard are in order. In a letter to a Carthusian prior Bernard once called himself the monster of his age, the "chimaera" of the twelfth century. Thus, his life reminded himself and others of the fantastic fire-breathing monster with a lion's head and a serpent's tail and a goat's body: "May my monstrous life, my bitter conscience, move you to pity. I am a sort of modern chimaera, neither cleric nor layman. I have kept the habit of a monk, but I have long ago abandoned the life."[21]

To some contemporaries he may have appeared a chimaera indeed. But the impression he made upon others, and centuries later upon Luther, was quite different. To the Reformer he was the last of the church fathers, a superb biblical theologian, and an even greater preacher than Augustine. Luther's Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine was naturally particularly fond of Augustine, so that it is somewhat surprising that Luther ranked the preaching of Bernard even higher than Augustine's.

In Bernard's time a new theology influenced by the ancient pagan philosophy of Aristotle arose in the form of what today

is called Scholasticism. It was fostered and inspired by Peter Abelard, Bernard's foe. This medieval theological development was utterly despised by Luther as the business of "sow theologians" who were rooting in the dirt. This "development" he considered a theological *de*formation which needed to be subjected to a *re*formation which would return to the pre-scholastic church fathers and ultimately to the Sacred Scriptures.

As to biography itself, there is very little historical information about Bernard's early years. Somewhere between the years 1111 and 1113, at the age of twenty-one, he entered the strict Benedictine monastery at Citeaux. Only a few years later he was sent to found a new cloister at Clairvaux, where he became the abbot. He led the monastery there until his death—hence his name "Bernard of Clairvaux."[22]

Some time before 1124 he wrote his first spiritual masterpiece, *The Steps of Humility and Pride.* Probably in the following year, 1125, he composed the *Letter on Love.* This "letter" was placed at the end of another tractate which he wrote shortly afterward, *On Loving God.* These early works did not leave any traceable impact on Luther's works, even though they were quite influential elsewhere throughout subsequent ages. During his convalescence from an illness Bernard wrote a series of sermons entitled *In Praise of the Virgin Mother* which are also known, from the initial line in Latin, as *Missus est Angelus.* In these so-called "Marian" sermons the christocentric concentration is never lost. The Bernardine focus on Christ incarnate led Luther to exclaim in his late lectures on Genesis: "Bernard really loved Christ's incarnation!"[23]

Beginning with the year 1128, Bernard became involved in church politics and in the affairs of the Knights Templar. This order was established at Jerusalem by a cousin of Bernard, at whose request he wrote the *Book in Praise of the New Militia* between 1128 and 1136. Neither this work nor the one immediately preceding it, *On the Conduct and Duties of Bishops* (1127-1128), had any noticeable impact on Luther.

In the 1130's Bernard treated the question of *Grace and Free Choice.* In his introduction he states: "We trust the reader may be pleased to find that we have never strayed far from the Apostle's meaning," that is, the intention of St. Paul. This

treatise may, indeed, be considered Bernard's commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans, to which he referred eighteen times explicitly and twenty-five times implicitly.[24] Bernard was particularly concerned with Romans 5-8. His *leitmotif* was the question which he posed at the beginning: "What part do you play...if it is all God's work?" More precisely he asked: "What part, then, does free choice [*liberum arbitrium*] play?" He gave the answer with one verb in the passive form: *salvatur*. That is to say, free choice itself is in need of redemption. Thus, his answer was that free choice plays no active part whatsoever: "Take away free choice and there is nothing to be saved. Take away grace and there is no means of saving.... God is the author of salvation; 'free choice' is merely capable of receiving it. None but God can give it; nothing but free choice can receive it." He continued: "For to consent is to be saved." "Where you have consent, there also is the will [*voluntas*]. But where the will is, there is freedom. And this is what I understand by the term 'free choice.'" Bernard made it perfectly clear that "salvation is from the Lord (Psalm 3:9), not from free choice." He stated that "whereas the whole is done *in* free choice, so is the whole done of *grace*," and, referring to Romans 9:16, he asserted: "it is not a question of man's willing or doing but of God's grace."[25] Bernard argued that he who justifies himself ignores the justice-righteousness of God, and he is one who takes his own merits from elsewhere than grace.[26]

At times, passages in *Grace and Free Choice* sound like Luther. But they are thoughts which Bernard developed on the basis of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Strangely, however, Luther did not pay much attention to this Bernardine "commentary" on the Letter to the Romans. No direct quote from this work can be located in Luther's works. The question arises whether Luther had access to it and, if so, whether he ever studied it.

In 1135 a Carthusian friend invited Bernard to undertake a commentary *On the Song of Songs*. Thus, the "sermons" contained in this work were not delivered as homilies to the monks, but were Bernard's biblical reflections written in the literary form of *sermones*, to be read by or to other monks. The most famous sermon in this series is number 43, known from its initial word as *Fasciculus Myrrhae*, in which Bernard's affective christocentrism comes to its culmination. Sermons 61

and 62 are meditations on the wounds of Christ, a devotional practice which was continued in the following centuries. Also Luther was advised by his superior, John von Staupitz, that he ought to meditate on the wounds of Christ in order to overcome the theological doubts raised by his concentration on predestination.[27] Luther obeyed.

These eighty-six "sermons" are actually a sequence of tractates—at times more concerned with personal (and more or less mystical) experiences than with the biblical text—and they are interwoven with excursions into dogmatic theology and church history. In any case, Bernard's biblical meditations are always connected to the personal experience of man's existence before God in the "world"—inside or outside the cloister walls; and thus they are "existential" interpretations of the Bible. Luther made ample use of these Benardine "existential" meditations. Luther's quotations from and allusions to these sermons on the Canticle are so numerous that they cannot be treated here in a comprehensive way. They deserve a study of their own.

Bernard's labors on the Song of Songs lasted many years. He had to interrupt them more than once. During a sojourn at Paris in 1140, he gave a public talk to student clerics, urging them to quit their life of vice. Shortly afterwards, he edited his talk in the form of a tract under the title *On the Conversion of Clerics*. It was a call to enter the monastic life. More than twenty people from his original audience followed him back to his monastery at Clairvaux. This work seems, however, to play no role in Luther's works.

In the same year, 1140, Bernard participated in the Synod of Sens where Peter Abelard's teachings were to be discussed. Instead they were referred to Rome. From this historical context emerged Bernard's famous "letter" to Pope Innocent II, *Against the Errors of Abelard*, which is counted as number 190 in a collection of more than five hundred letters. It too, however, left no trace in Luther's works.

Three years later, around 1143-1144, two Benedictines at Chartres, who had difficulties with their superior, requested from Bernard a clarification of the Rule of St. Benedict. Bernard's response was a treatise entitled *On Precept and Dispensation*. There he set forth his view of the relationship between the power of the abbot and the free conscience of the

subordinate monk. Luther knew this work and commented on it, praising Bernard in doing so.[28]

In 1145 a former monk of Clairvaux become Pope Eugenius III. In 1146 Bernard was summoned by pope and king to drum up support for a French crusade to the Holy Land. This duty kept him on the road for one and a half years—until the spring of 1148. When this "armed pilgrimage," as one may describe the original idea of a "crusade," resulted in failure, Bernard came under criticism which adversely affected his Cistercian monasteries. During that time, Bernard must have had the reform-minded Archbishop of Armagh (Ireland) as his guest at Clairvaux; he died there in 1148. Bernard gathered information about the prelate's life and homeland and so produced the *Life of St. Malachy*. This work appears to have been unknown to Luther.

Besides commenting and meditating on the Song of Songs in his last years, Bernard was occupied with the reformation of the church on all levels, including the monarchical head. Therefore, in 1152-1153 he wrote five volumes on the papal office entitled *On Consideration*, in response to the request of the first Cistercian pope, Eugenius III. This work includes criticisms of the contemporary papal administration and outlines the pastoral duties of a pope. This work became a means of examining the consciences of popes and other rulers in the Middle Ages.[29] In the following paragraphs, I shall highlight only those sections which Luther quoted or to which he at least alluded.

The pope is told to engage in the "consideration" of things unknown to him, including his own self. Bernard saw the danger of ending up with a hardened heart, as the pharaoh did in Exodus 7:13, a theme which Luther would pick up.[30] Book Two deals with the "three-fold consideration of the self." If one does not know oneself, one is like a building without a foundation. In this context the pope was reminded that the Apostle Peter's successor was not to receive silver and gold. The saintly abbot inculcated this thought: "You are the one shepherd not only of all the sheep, but of all the shepherds," referring to John 10:16. In Book Three the admonitions continue. Christ is the head of the church, her Lord; the pope is only His steward. Christ claims the possession of the earth for Himself by right of creation, by merit of redemption, and

by gift from the Father. The pope should leave possession and rule to Him.

Book Four considers the pope's immediate milieu, which Bernard described in powerful metaphors. The pope had to provide the example of a pastor. Again, the simple model of St. Peter is evoked. He had never gone in procession adorned with either jewels or silks, covered with gold, carried on a white horse, attended by a knight, or surrounded by clamoring servants; and "he believed it was enough to be able to fulfill the Lord's command" of John 21:15. And quite bluntly and provocatively Bernard added: "In this [finery], you are the successor not of Peter, but of Constantine." He could not have said it more clearly, but he added yet: "To preach the gospel is to feed. Do the work of an evangelist and you have fulfilled the work of the pastor." In the epilogue to Book Four Bernard wanted the pope to see the Holy Roman Church, of which he was the head, as the mother of the churches, not the mistress (*domina*). He told the pope that he was not the lord of bishops, but one of them, and the brother of those who love God and the companion of those who fear Him. He was to be a friend of the bridegroom (Christ) and an attendant of the bride (the church). He was to be the shepherd of the people. Indeed, Bernard's *De Consideratione* contains the most critical, yet loyal, and the "most virulent attack ever written" on the Vatican.[31] Luther referred to Bernard's "advice to a pope" at least ten times, and he demanded that "all popes should know it by heart." It is known that a copy of *De Consideratione* (as published by Anton Sorg at Augsburg) was available in the library of Luther's friary at Erfurt—besides copies of Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs and his *Sermones de Tempore et de Sanctis*.[32]

Toward the end of his life Bernard carefully edited and revised his most important writings, word by word, so as to leave a definite inheritance behind. He selected 225 letters for an official collection intended for publication. Other writings contain his life-long teaching, as occasioned by the liturgical calendar, cast in the literary form of "sermons." They were based mostly on the pericopes of the various feasts in the ecclesiastical calendar. The aging Bernard himself edited a vast collection of his sermons and thus created a handbook of the liturgical year, including sermons on the high feasts of the Lord, the feasts of the Mother of God, and the feasts of other

saints. Luther made use of these collections, especially of the first sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation. In regard to the collection of letters, there is some evidence that Luther had access to it or that somehow he had knowledge of some of its contents, such as letters 91, 201, and 385. But perhaps the adage-like utterances which are found in these letters were handed down separately through the ages and in this way became known to Luther as Bernardine proverbs.

Bernard died on August 20, 1153. Approximately twenty years later, in 1174, he was elevated to canonical sainthood. A hundred years later his impact upon Christian piety grew even more when, not only the story of his life, but also quotations from his works were woven into *The Golden Legend* by Jacob of Voragine, who repeatedly interspersed readings alloted to the high feasts of the liturgical year with references to St. Bernard (and St. Augustine, of course). The reading in *The Golden Legend* for March 25, that is, the Feast of the Annunciation, was immediately followed by the reading of "The Passion of the Lord." Both are permeated by Bernardine thoughts. Thus, Bernard's spirituality became an integral part of Jacob de Voragine's lectionary of the lives of the saints. By the late Middle Ages this *Legenda Aurea* was translated into various languages and widely broadcasted in printed form.[33] Luther was familiar with *The Golden Legend* and loved to refer especially to its story of Bernard.

The works of St. Bernard were often created in response to given circumstances. Yet they provide us with lasting insights from the spirituality of the great master of Western Christianity. Bernard, from among all the doctors of the church, was declared by Luther to be worthy of diligent study and worthy of being addressed as a father in the faith: *Pater Bernhardus.*[34]

II. *Luther and Bernard's Sermons*

A. *General Considerations*

In reading the vast Bernardine opus with Luther's selective spectacles, one encounters many ideas which caught Luther's eye. Early on, Luther learned from Bernard that in religious matters "not to progress is to regress."[35] In the present study we shall limit ourselves to Bernard's Advent sermons and take notice of those passages which most likely inspired Luther in his own preaching and teaching.

One must note at the outset that the "mysticism" of the Middle Ages did not have a lasting impact on Luther, although he was touched by it for several years, especially by what is called "German mysticism."[36] Of course, Bernard's mysticism deserves fuller attention than can be given here; and whether or not and, if so, to what degree it rubbed off on Luther is a matter of debate. Reinhard Schwarz considered Luther one of the "great mystics" in the history of Christianity.[37] Certainly, however, the Bernardine statements which Luther remembered reading are not "mystical" ones. The Reformer was interested in Bernard as a biblical theologian and a preacher of the gospel, not as a "mystic" in the sense in which the term is usually understood today. Bernard's most mystical passages had no traceable impact on Luther. The Reformer alerted his audience primarily to Bernard's christocentric piety, that is, to meditation on the wounds of Christ, to his incarnational christology, and to his theology of grace alone and faith alone.

Experts might miss a closer examination of Bernard's and Luther's Mariology. It certainly deserves further consideration, but it cannot be treated here. A note in this regard is, however, in order. Along with many others, Luther mistakenly believed that Bernard's traditional honorific title of *Doctor Mellifluus* originated in his sweet praise of the Virgin Mary, as the Reformer indicated in a lecture in 1527, where simultaneously he had rather critical words for any exaggerations in Marian piety:

> They who made Christ a judge sought His mother as *paracleta* as Bernard did, who is one of those elect who fell into error [at this point]. I hope that in the end they found better insights. The same is true for Anselm, who is called the Chancellor of the Virgin (*Cancellarius Virginis*). And Bernard is called the *Doctor Mellifluus* because of his preaching about the virgin.[38]

A corrective note is in order in regard to this designation of Bernard as *Doctor Mellifluus*. This honorific title—"Dr. Honeysweet"—is grounded not in Bernard's praise of Mary, but in his expertise in biblical theology. Tradition regarded him, above all, as an interpreter of the Sacred Scriptures, depicting him opening "the Book" and drawing the hidden meaning from the literal sense of the biblical text as Moses drew water from a rock or as one draws honey from the

honeycomb.[39] Thence comes his title of *Doctor Mellifluus*—and not from his sermons on Mary.

Luther kept his distance from any exaggerated Marian devotion by incessantly applying his theological principle of christocentrism. Therefore, down to his last sermon at Wittenberg in 1546, Luther deplored Bernard's treatment of the gospel of the Feast of the Annunciation and complained that he had written "most impious" things in sermons such as *Missus est Angelus*. Luther wanted to correct this distortion and demanded that on the Feast of the Annunciation one use one's rhetorical talents to proclaim the incarnate Christ, in order to tell the people that "we are made His brothers" (as Bernard, by the way, had said in a sermon on the Canticle). In his table talk Luther once spoke severely of *Missus est Angelus*: "Bernard spent his entire sermon on the praise of Mary and forgot about God's deeds." The real joy stemmed not from the creature, Mary, but from the fact that the Creator Himself came into the world to make Himself our salvation.[40] One should really call the Feast of the Annunciation the "Feast Day of the Incarnation of Christ."[41] Whether Luther was aware of it or not, his own suggestion corresponded partially to Bernard's occasional designation of this feast as the Feast of the "Annunciation of the Lord," as Bernard called it at the beginning of Sermons 2 and 3 on the Annunciation. In contrast, the Roman tradition was accustomed to speak of the *Annuntiatio Beatae Mariae Virginis*.

In any case, Luther was clearly an eager reader of Bernard of Clairvaux. Indeed, in his study of the history of the councils and the church Luther, in refuting certain critics who slighted his knowledge of the church fathers, declared with justification: "I have read more than they think."[42] Certainly he had read Bernard's Advent sermons. Luther's teaching and preaching profited from them. The thoughts in Bernard's Advent sermons found a welcome reception in Luther's thinking, starting with Luther's first course on the Psalms (*Dictata*).

B. *Specific Examples of Influence*

1. *The Happy Soul*

Luther explicitly indicated in his *Dictata* that, when speaking of a "happy soul," he meant the phrase in the sense in which it was used in Bernard's Advent sermons. Luther

appropriated Bernard as follows: "So Blessed Bernard in an Advent sermon expresses this idea with different words as follows: 'O happy soul which always judges itself before the eyes of God and accuses itself. Because if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged by God.'"[43] Luther was referring to a passage in Bernard's third Advent sermon, where the original wording is slightly different.[44]

2. *Divine Consolation*

In view of this explicit reference to Bernard's third Advent sermon, one may infer with some propriety that something else in that sermon influenced Luther's thinking. It is a passage in which Bernard addressed his brethren, saying that it was worth their while to celebrate the Advent of the Lord, to be delighted by so much divine consolation, to be excited by so much worthiness, and to be inflamed by so much love.[45] It may have been this passage which Luther had in mind (quite possibly in combination with other Bernardine *loci*) when he mentioned Bernard in another place in his *Dictata*. Luther's vagueness creates some difficulty in locating his reference in Bernard's *opera*. Luther declared that "Blessed Bernard said" that the divine consolation is so tender that no consolation from elsewhere is tolerated. Luther's Latin may best be understood with the help of his own German version: "But God's Word is so tender that it does not tolerate any addition; it wants to be all by itself or not at all."[46] Luther's German form of the citation is close to Johannes Tauler's, who also quoted it as a Bernardine saying—and in German: "Divine consolation is so tender that it does not admit in any way any consolation from anywhere else."[47]

Luther may have quoted a Bernardine dictum according to Tauler's citation of Bernard, since Tauler provided him with the German version of the same idea. In other words, a statement in Bernard's third Advent sermon may have been melded with the Bernardine line as handed down by Tauler. Admittedly, the specific wording of this line most likely has its origin in a Pseudo-Bernardine text. Then, too, it has some similarity to a sentence in a Bernardine Lenten sermon.[48] In effect, Luther blended Bernard's teaching with Tauler's teaching, here in the *Dictata* and elsewhere—for instance, in his Christmas sermon of 1520.[49]

3. *The Triple Advent*

The concept of the "triple advent of Christ" also had an impact on Luther's *Dictata*. Luther thought he had read of it in Bernard's sermons on the Canticle.[50] However, the Cistercian preacher developed the concept of the three comings of Christ in his Advent sermons, especially in the third Advent sermon. Bernard's concept includes the following elements: The first coming is the incarnation, which is the general advent to all men, *ad homines*. Then there is the *parousia*, usually called the "second coming," the advent on the day of judgment, which is Christ's coming against men, *contra homines*. The third advent is the spiritual birth in the soul—a "mystical" advent, *in homines*. Bernard numbered these three advents differently at times: what is known as the "second coming" is also called the "third advent," and the spiritual advent in the soul can become the "second advent" in his counting. Thus, between the incarnation in past time and the *parousia* at the end of time, the spiritual advent in the individual soul takes place as the second (though hidden) advent.[51]

St. Bernard also preached on the triple advent in his fifth advent sermon, where he repeated that the intermediate advent is the hidden one in which only His chosen ones see the Lord, in themselves, and so their souls are saved.[52] In his sixth sermon, he also focused on the heavenly guest's arrival, that is, Christ's spiritual advent in the soul: "You have a noble guest, O flesh, a very noble guest; and your salvation depends entirely on Him. Give honor to so great a guest."[53] The concept shows up also in his seventh sermon, a rather short one in which St. Bernard treated the topic of "triple utility" (*de triplice utilitate*). Here he discussed the usefulness of the triple advent for man—firstly, it serves to illuminate our blindness; secondly, to assist our infirmity; thirdly, to protect us and fight for us in our fragility. All these things occur in the believing soul where Christ resides by faith.[54]

Bernard's concept of Christ's triple advent served Luther as the immediate matrix of his interpretations of Psalm 101:2 ("when wilt Thou come to me?") and Psalm 102:2 ("non advertas faciem tuam a me" in the Vulgate; "turn not Thy face away from me"). In expounding Psalm 101:2, Luther declared that he understood the time of the Lord's coming to be any

given time, whether past, present, or future. Luther added that St. Bernard spoke *pulchre* (in a beautiful way) about the distinction between the several comings of Christ.[55]

The reference to St. Bernard in the course of the *Dictata* was triggered by Luther's knowledge of Bernard's concept of the spiritual encounter with Christ as one of the three advents of Christ. Luther, speaking in the words of Psalm 102:2, expressed the hope that Christ would not turn away His "face" from him. At this point he was definitely lecturing within the framework of St. Bernard's triple advent of Christ. However, Luther spoke of Christ's triple *face* rather than *advent*, because Psalm 102 speaks of the "face of the Lord." Luther adapted the wording, but retained the content of the Bernardine concept:

> Christ's face is triple: firstly, in His first advent when He was made incarnate who as Son of God is the face of the Father. . .; secondly, in the spiritual advent without which the first is good for nothing—and so one has to recognize His face through faith; thirdly, in the second and last advent when His face will be fully visible.[56]

Luther, then, did not refer to St. Bernard by name in interpreting Psalm 102:2. However, the concept of a triple encounter with Christ is so distinctly Bernardine that one must assume that Luther borrowed it from the abbot's Advent sermons. In his interpretation of Psalm 101:2, then, Luther explicitly referred to the Bernardine "distinction" between the three advents of Christ; in speaking on the ensuing psalm, he used the sequence of the three advents in the way in which St. Bernard had stated it. Later on, too, in these same lectures Luther spoke of St. Bernard again, as he dealt with Psalm 119:46.[57] Thus, it is safe to say that Bernard was Luther's spiritual companion during this entire series of early lectures on the Psalms.

4. *Adventus Christi Mysticus in Iudeos*

The idea of Christ's triple coming borrowed from Bernard's Advent sermons could very well have contributed to another thought in Luther's early exegesis, even though there is no specific indication that Luther was thinking of Bernard on that occasion. It is Luther's mention of "Christ's mysterious coming to the Jews" in the course of his lectures on the Letter to the Romans, specifically in expounding Romans 11:26.[58] Luther did not specify what he meant by *mysticus* in his

"adventus Christi mysticus in Iudeos," except that in his subsequent sentence he contrasted this "mystical advent" to the "corporal advent" of Christ. The latter was the first coming, the physical coming of Christ in the flesh, in fulfilment of the prophetic saying of Isaiah (59:20) quoted by Paul in Romans 11:26.[59] At this time in his life, however, Luther was willing to submit himself to the judgment of the church fathers, who, despite the clear significance of Isaiah 59:20, referred Romans 11:25 to a future end-time. To be sure, said Luther, no one could elicit this idea from Isaiah or Paul except for the guidance of the fathers. This guidance, however, led to the conclusion that "now. . .'blindness has come upon part in Israel,' but in that future day not a part but all of Israel will be saved. Now a part has been saved, but then all."[60] This is the "mystical advent of Christ" for the salvation of the Jews.

Luther's expression "in Iudeos" deserves closer attention. He said not "ad Iudeos," but "in Iudeos." I should like to propose that behind this wording lay St. Bernard's concept of "the triple advent of Christ," which, as we have seen, consisted in a coming *ad homines*, a coming *in homines*, and a coming *contra homines*. The third is the coming for the last judgment. The first is the coming into the flesh. Both of these comings are generally observable, Bernard says, while the coming *in homines* is "hidden." It is the "spiritual coming" of Christ which is experienced only by the elect, who see Him *within* themselves, because they are believers and Christ comes through faith to live in their hearts. This coming is hidden, he says, using the Latin word "occultus." In this perspective I should like to suggest that Luther's expression of "mystical advent" is to be understood as the hidden advent in the heart of the believer. Thus, Luther may be understood as saying that the "mysterious coming to the Jews" (*in Iudeos*) is a coming into the hearts of Jews when they become believers, as they are granted this grace through the mercy of God (Romans 11:26, 32). It seems to me that Bernard's concept of the triple advent of Christ contributed here to Luther's exposition. Certainly elsewhere in his lectures on Romans, namely, in expounding Romans 8:16, Luther made quite explicit use of Bernard's first sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation.[61]

5. *The Incarnation of the Son*

Bernard's first Advent sermon contains an attempt to answer the question of why specifically the Son became

incarnate and not the Father or the Spirit. Bernard's response to this question began to leave its traceable marks in Luther's works a decade or so after his lectures on Romans. Luther, in reading the Bernardine Advent sermons, would have encountered this paragraph:

> . . .But why from the Three Persons in whom we believe as the Highest Trinity is it the Son who comes, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit? This surely did not happen without reason. . ."But who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?" And, of course, it happened not without the highest consultation of the Trinity that it was the Son who came; and if we consider how our exile came about, we may be able to understand a little how fitting it was for the Son to be the one who most of all liberated us. Lucifer was hurled by God from heaven, because he tried to usurp for himself the similarity [*similitudo*] of the Most High, and such equality was considered robbery. It is proper only to the Son. The Father, therefore, jealous on the Son's behalf, seems by that act to say: "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." [And the Son said:] "I observed Satan fall from the sky like lightning." . . .[Lucifer] performed no act. All he did was thinking with pride (*superbia*); and in a moment, in the bat of an eyelid, he was cast down beyond recall. . . .[62]

This Bernardine reflection on the mystery of the incarnation appears for the first time in Luther's works in a sermon of 1526. Luther combined this Bernardine thought with a colorful comparison (also inherited from the patristic tradition) of God and a fisherman who uses a worm on his hook. God hides the divinity of the Son (the hook) within the humanity (the worm—an image taken from Psalm 22).[63] The Reformer likewise integrated Bernardine thinking on the incarnation into his Christmas sermons of 1533 and 1535, his exposition of John 1:14 in September of 1537, and finally his last exegetical project, the lectures on Genesis.

In fact, in his Christmas sermon of 1533 Luther referred to Bernard's thinking more directly than in 1526. Indeed, the stenographer of this sermon, Georg Rörer, wrote the name *Bernardus* in the margin of his notes, in order to explain Luther's reference to unnamed fathers who had given some

thought to the matter of which he was speaking.[64] Luther preached these words on Christmas in 1533:

> There were fathers who gave some thought to this matter, and they said that the devil, when living in heaven, saw that God would become man, and this caused his down-fall; [they said] that, because God assumed this nature, not the angelic one, therefore there was envy and haughtiness. . .[These fathers] wanted to indicate the great joy [which we should feel] and the overwhelming goodness [of God shown in this], that He assumed, not the angelic [nature], but Adam's. . .flesh and blood, which had been spoiled by the devil through sin and death and poison.[65]

Two years later, again on Christmas (December 25, 1535), Luther gave the afternoon sermon on the Christmas gospel, focusing on Luke 2:10-13. He followed in the tracks of tradition when, in a sort of allegory, he alluded to the burning bush: but for Christmas one would have to fear its brightness; but because of Christmas night one has no need to be afraid, because the angels have brought a joyful light. The allusion to the burning bush on Mount Sinai was a motif used by St. Bernard as he preached about Mary as the woman of Revelation 12.[66] Within this same sermon Luther made an explicit reference to the *Doctor Mellifluus* in speaking of the Son of God assuming, not an angelic nature, but our human nature: "Saint Bernard was a wonderful man (*mirabile vir*); he believed that the devil in paradise learned that God would become man. . . ." Luther continues, however, by saying of the good angels that "they do not mind at all and they are happy that God is not called an angelic God (*Engelischer Gott*) and that God becomes, not an angel, but a person."[67] Thus, Bernard's words on the Son of God becoming a man and not an angel (*Engel*) again entered the Reformer's mind (as they had two years earlier) when he stood in the pulpit on Christmas Day of 1535.

Conclusion

Bernard, as the greatest representative of monastic theology, influenced Luther, not only as a friar, but also as an ex-friar and even as the Reformer. In this article I could demonstrate such a conclusion only with respect to some of Luther's early works and some later sermons and with respect

to Bernard's Advent sermons. But Luther's repertory of Bernardine thoughts was much larger. The impact of Bernard on the elder Luther is to be demonstrated elsewhere.[68] However, at this point in the history of research, not all of Luther's allusions to Bernard have been retrieved by scholars. There are still a number of references which remain unidentified at this time.[69] Nevertheless, we may maintain that there is evidence of Luther's sympathetic use of Bernardine sources. Luther, during his entire career, enjoyed the spiritual company of Bernard in spite of the centuries that separated the two. The great German preacher of the Reformation drew various insights from the great French preacher of the Middle Ages, as the more than five hundred references to Bernard in the most complete edition of Luther's works indicate. Therefore, a recent study (on Bernard and Calvin) is wrong when it insinuates that Luther did not seem to make much use of Bernard's thinking.[70] The evidence presented here shows the contrary. The import of this evidence is magnified by noting that Luther totally neglected Peter Abelard, Bernard's scholastic foe. And, if one compares Luther's allusions to the representatives of the so-called "German Mysticism" (such as Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and the anonymous Frankfurter who wrote the *Theologia Germanica*), one comes upon some surprising facts: Luther never directly or indirectly quoted or mentioned Meister Eckhart by name; and, compared to Bernard, Luther referred relatively rarely to Tauler and to the Frankfurter whose work he had edited. Luther's often literal quotations from, direct references to, and indirect allusions to Bernard outnumber these others by the hundreds. During his entire life as friar, as ex-friar, and as "Church Father" of the Church in Germany, Luther was indebted to Bernard, the monastic theologian. This debt is not surprising, because monastic theology understood itself as rather removed from the theology of the Scholastics, whom Luther called "sow theologians." Thus, Bernard was to Luther truly a father in the faith, as the Reformer himself indicated by reverently speaking of the abbot as the only theologian really worthy of being called "father" and of being studied diligently: *Pater Bernhardus.*

ENDNOTES

1. See Pierre Chaunu, as quoted by Theo Bell, *Bernhardus Dixit. Bernardus van Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Werken* (Delft: Eburon, 1989), p. 345; August Neander, *Der heilige Bernhard und sein Zeitalter* (Hamburg-Gotha, 1813), second edition, 1848.
2. Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, translated by E. Graf (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 1, p. 190.
3. *WA*, 46:782, 21-24. (The abbreviation of *WA* means the Weimar *Ausgabe*, i.e., the critical edition of Luther's works.)
4. *WA*, TR, 1: no. 584; *WA*, TR, 5: no. 5439a.
5. *WA*, TR, 3: 295, 6-7 (no. 330).
6. See *WA*, 15:755, 7-9 (sermon of November 20, 1524).
7. Carl Stange, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*. Studien der Luther-Akademie, edited by Carl Stange on the order of the board of directors (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann), p. 5; See Erich Kleineidam, "Ursprung und Gegenstand der Theologie bei Bernhard von Clairvaux und Martin Luther," *Dienst der Vermittlung*, edited by Wilhelm Ernst et al. (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1977), pp. 221-247; Franz Posset, "*Bernardus Redivivus*: The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a Medieval Sermon in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," *Cistercian Studies*, 22 (1987), pp. 239-249; idem, *Luther's Catholic Christology According to His Johannine Lectures of 1527* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), pp. 116-128; idem, "Monastic Influence on Martin Luther," *Monastic Studies*, 18 (Montreal: The Benedictine Priory. 1988), pp. 136-163.
8. *WA*, TR, 3: 295, 3ff.; *WA*, 60:125, 40-44.
9. *WA*, 2: 15, 18.
10. See *WA*, 20:746, 15-19.
11. See *WA*, 3:175, 33-34; Bell, op. cit., pp. 42-71.
12. *WA*, 50:471, 1-5.
13. *WA*, 31, II:566, 30-31.
14. *WA*, 40, III:354, 3-5 (manuscript), 16-24 (printed version).
15. *WA*, 40, III: 25-26.
16. *WA*, 46:86, 34-39.
17. See *WA*, 43:33, 26-27.
18. See *WA*, 40, III:652, 20-23 (on Isaiah 9:5[1546]).

19. *WA*, 20:753, 22-23.

20. *WA*, 47:109, 18-23.

21. Bruno Scott James, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (London: Burns Oates, 1953), pp. 401-402 (no. 326).

22. See Jean Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 13-57.

23. *WA*, 43:581, 11-12.

24. See Bernard McGinn, "Introduction" to *On Grace and Free Choice* (Cistercian Fathers Series, 19, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 5, n. 13.

25. *Opera*, III: 165-200, (*Opera* is the abbreviation used from here on for the critical edition of Bernard's works, *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, edited by Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais, and C.H. Talbot (Rome: 1957-).

26. "Qui seipsum iustificat, Dei iustitiam ignorat. . . Qui est qui seipsum justificat? Qui merita sibi aliunde praesumit quam a gratia." *Opera*, III: 201, 1-3. See also 203, 14-19.

27. See *WA*, TR, 2:112, 9-11 (no. 1490); *WA*, TR, 5:293, 28-30 (no. 5658a); *WA, Briefwechsel*, 9:627, 23-25 (February 23, 1542).

28. See *WA*, 8:331, 13-15; 634, 1-5.

29. See the appendices in the translation of *De Consideratione* in the Cistercian Fathers Series (37), *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*, translated by John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), p. 188. See also Karl Bihlmeyer and Hermann Tuchle, *Church History*, translated by Victor E. Mills and Francis J. Miller (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1963), volume 2: p. 170; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), volume 3: p. 300; cf. volume 4: p. 71.

30. *Opera*, III:396, 11-14.

31. See Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux, Selected Works*, p. 25.

32. See Jun Matsuura, "Restbestände aus der Bibliothek des Erfurter Augustinerklosters zu Luthers Zeit und bisher unbekannte eigenhändige Notizen Luthers," *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers von den Mitarbeitern der Weimarer Ausgabe* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1984), pp. 318, 324, 326.

33. *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, translated by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: 1941).

34. *WA*, 47: 109, 18-23.

35. *Opera*, IV: 340, 1; quoted in *WA*, 56:486, 7.

36. See Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).

37. See Reinhard Schwarz, "Martin Luther (1483-1546)," *Grosse Mystiker: Leben und Wirken*, edited by Gerhard Ruhbach and Josef Sudbrack (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1984), pp. 185-202.

38. *WA*, 20:837, 38.

39. See Leclercq, "Introduction" to *Bernard of Clairvaux, Selected Works*, p. 33.

40. See *WA*, TR, 1:45, 21-29 (no. 118); *WA*, TR, 1:218, 27-219, 12 (no. 494).

41. *WA*, 47:698, 2; 695, 2 (1531).

42. "Ich hab mehr gelesen, denn sie meinen." *WA*, 50:519, 27-28.

43. "Unde b. Bernardus sermone de adventu istum versum aliis verbis sic exprimit: 'O felix anima, que [=quae] in conspectu Dei seipsam semper iudicat et accusat. Si enim nos ipsos iudicaremus, non utique a Deo iudicaremur.'" *WA*, 4:198, 19-21.

44. "Diligit enim animam, quae in conspectu eius et sine intermissione considerat, et sine dissimulatione diiudicat semetipsam. Idque iudicium non nisi propter nos a nobis exigit, quia si nosetipsos iudicaverimus, non utique iudicabimur." *Opera*, IV:181, 4-7.

45. "Dignum est, fratres, ut tota devotione Domini celebretis adventum, delectati tanta consolatione, stupefacti tanta dignatione, inflammati tanta dilectione." *Opera*, IV:182, 3-5.

46. "Ita ut recte B. Bernardus dixerit, quod delicata est consolatio divina et non datur admittendibus alienam." *WA*, 4:331, 14-15. See Luther's German version in *WA*, 8:143, 34-36.

47. Tauler: "gottlicher trost sol sin also zart, das er in keine wise gestot do man andern trost enphohet." See Martin Treu, "Die Bedeutung der consolatio für Luthers Seelsorge bis 1525," *Lutherjahrbuch*, 53 (1986), p. 12.

48. See *Sermo* 9 (*Qui Habitat*), which contains a passage with the content under discussion here: "consolationes eius laetificabunt animam tuam, dummodo non ad alia convertaris." *Opera*, IV:440, 14-18. It could also be that Luther had the similar saying

in mind (attributed to Bernard by his disciple Gaufried) in the Pseudo-Bernardine *Declamationes de Colloquio Simonis cum Jesu* (55, 66). The latter has the following wording: "Per manna, quod habebat omnem suavitatem saporis, spiritualis consolatio designatur, quae iuxta verbum Bernardi delicata est nec datur admittendibus alienam," as quoted by the spiritual master of the Windesheim Congregation; cf. Heinrich Gleumes, "Gerhard Groot und die Windesheimer als Verehrer des hl. Bernhard von Clairvaux," *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik*, 10 (1935), p. 108, note 62. The last three words in the Pseudo-Bernardine text show up verbatim in Luther's Latin version in the *Dictata*, and they are close to the German text of Tauler as well as to the German text of Luther. Apparently the Pseudo-Bernardine text fits best as Luther's source.

49. See Theo Bell, "Sermon von der Geburt Christi. Bernard van Clairvaux en Johann Tauler in Luther's Kerstpreek van 1520," *Bijdragen*, 39 (1978), pp. 289-309.

50. "Et hanc distinctionem Bernardus in Canticis pulchre ponit." *WA*, 4:134, 6-7. The index in *WA* 63 mistakenly gives sermon 69, 2 on the Canticle as Luther's source. The indicated passage in sermon 69, 2 is so vague that it cannot qualify as the text which Luther had in mind, when he referred to Bernard's "distinction" as to the coming of the Lord. Luther was simply mistaken here. The text which matches best is found in Bernard's Advent sermons, to which Luther referred explicitly elsewhere, so that one is on the right track in assuming that Luther meant to refer, not to the sermons on the Canticle, but to those on Advent.

51. See *Opera*, IV:177, 17-187, 2 (sermon 3).

52. See Sermon 5, *Opera*, IV:188, 2-189, 2.

53. See Sermon 6, *Opera*, IV:192, 25-193, 1.

54. See Sermon 7, *Opera*, IV:196, 9-14.

55. See note 50 above.

56. "Quia facies Christi est triplex. . .Secundo in adventu spirituali, sine quo primus nihil prodest." *WA*, 4:147, 10-20.

57. See *WA*, 4:331, 14-15, as mentioned above.

58. *WA*, 56:438, 20-21.

59. *WA*, 56: 437-438; cf. *LW*, 25: 430.

60. Ibid.

61. See F. Posset, "*Bernardus Redivivus*: The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a Medieval Sermon in the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," especially pp. 242-244.

62. Sermon 1, *Opera*, IV:162, 13-163, 2.

63. *WA*, 20:334, 8-335, 2 (1526). On Christ as a "worm," see Kenneth Hagen, "The Testament of a Worm: Luther on Testament and Convenant," *Consensus*, 8:1 (1982), pp. 12-20.

64. *WA*, 37: 235, 10, with footnote 6 (1533).

65. *WA*, 37:235, 10-22 (1533).

66. See *Opera*, V: 262-274.

67. *WA*, 41:486, 13-28 (1535). See also *WA*, 46:625, 1-626, 30 (1537); and in the lectures on Genesis *WA*, 42: 4-5; *WA*, 43:319, 16-22; *WA*, 43:580, 42-582, 16.

68. As to Bernardine source material in Luther's works after 1535, see my forthcoming article "The Elder Luther on Bernard," *The American Benedictine Review*.

69. From the list of Luther's unidentified references to Bernard in the index of *WA*, 63: 97-98, the following references still remain obscure: *WA*, 48: 274. *WA*, 1: 49, 38; 50, 4; 473, 6. *WA*, 4: 681, 10; *WA*, 25: 428, 5. *WA*, 55, I: 110, 13. *WA*, 37: 383, 32; *WA*, 41: 749, 39. *WA*, 5: 399, 30. *WA*, 36: 205, 5 and 7. *WA*, 59: 290, 39; 510, 2387; 522, 2776; 538, 3273. *WA*, 49: 389, 32. *WA*, 60: 188, 26.

70. See W. Standford Reid, "The Reformer Saint and the Saintly Reformer. Calvin and the Legacy of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Christian History*, VIII (1989), p. 28.

Homiletical Studies

Epistle Series B

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 2, 1990

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

During Advent we anticipate our Lord's "coming," especially His coming again on the last day. The introit for Advent 1 sounds the theme for the entire Advent season: "See, your king comes to you!" Our Lord Himself reminds us in today's gospel that we do not know when our king will return; we must be watching constantly. But we Christians are not afraid of our Lord's return. St. Paul reminds believers in the text (the epistle) that God has made us ready for the last day by the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose incarnation and birth we shall celebrate soon in Christmastide. Luther's great Advent hymn, "Savior of the Nations, Come" (the hymn of the day), also suggests that it is our Lord's first advent which prepares us well for His second one.

If any congregation of people seemed unprepared to meet their king in His "apocalypse" (verse 7), it was the congregation in Corinth. Schism, strife, false doctrine, unionism, superstition, and abuse of God's gifts were rampant in this congregation. But the Apostle Paul reminds these Corinthian sinners (and us sinners today) in the introduction to his First Epistle to Corinth that no one prepares himself to meet his king; God prepares us by grace alone through His Son Jesus Christ. We note Paul's repetition of "Jesus Christ" in these few verses, emphasizing the fact that we are who we are through Jesus Christ alone. We note also all the passive verbs in this section (verse 4, *dotheisei*; verse 5, *eploutisthete*; verse 6, *ebebaiothe*; verse 9, *eklethete*) underscoring the passive receptivity by which the Corinthians enjoy God's gifts; the only active verbs in this section are used of Paul (verse 4, *eucharisto*) and of God (verse 8, *bebaiosei*). The Corinthian Christians (and Christians today) have nothing to do with their salvation. Only two verbal forms refer to the Corinthians, neither of them finite verbs—the first in verse 7, *hustereisthai*, an infinitive, and the second in the same verse, *apekdechomenous*, a participle. The Corinthians *do* nothing for their salvation; they are "lacking nothing" (because of what God has done for them and given them) and they are "waiting" (*apekdechomenous*, present participle).

Introduction: "See, your king comes to you!" This is the theme of this Advent season which we begin today. Jesus makes it clear in the gospel this morning that He is coming back and urges everyone to

watch and be ready. Many will not be ready when Jesus returns on the last day for judgement. Are you ready? St. Paul reminds us this morning that we believers are most certainly ready:

READY TO MEET OUR KING

I. We are ready, not because of our own careful preparations or efforts, but because and only because of what our gracious God has already done for us.
   A. Left to ourselves we only make a mess of our lives and bring down God's anger on ourselves.
      1. The members of the Corinthian congregation were like us in many ways. They bickered among themselves and were jealous of one another; they abused God's gifts; some lived in ways that shocked even the pagans living around them. Paul sadly wrote, "Some. . .have informed me that there are quarrels among you. . .Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly."
      2. Paul then warned them, "Some of you have become arrogant. . .Shall I come to you with a whip?" (4:18-21).

Transition: We also often live in a way which deserves only a "whipping" from a holy God. We must all agree with Isaiah when he cries out to the Lord, "We continue to sin against Thy ways. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean. . .and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (see the Old Testament lesson). How can we be ready to meet our king?

   B. God has made us ready to meet our king through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
      1. We note how many times St. Paul repeats our Lord's precious name in these few verses; he wants us not to forget that all we are and have as Christians comes through Jesus alone.
      2. Only Jesus can give us the gifts of God since only Jesus shares God's nature intimately (in verse 3 the one preposition "from" [*apo*] governs both "Father" and "Lord Jesus Christ").
      3. This Jesus, God's own eternal Son, came into our world and took unto Himself our own flesh; He became "incarnate" and was born of a virgin on that first Christmas so He could be our Savior as Luther has us sing: "Savior of the nations, come, show Thyself the virgin's son. . .Father's equal, Thou wilt win vict'ries for us over sin."

4. Our Lord Jesus, true man and true God, has earned for us all the gifts of God's grace and brought us peace with God forever (verse 3).

C. God has given us all the benefits of our Lord's victory.
   1. He "called" us also "into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ" (verse 9) through holy baptism, uniting us with our crucified and risen Lord Jesus.
   2. Through faith, and through faith alone, we enjoy all God's gifts and treasures.
      a. We note all the passive verbs Paul uses in these verses. We receive; He gives.
      b. And He gives generously: "You have been enriched in every way" (verse 5), especially in "speech and knowledge" (verse 5).

Transition: Because of our Lord's victory and the gifts of His grace and forgiveness He has given us in the gospel, we can anticipate the return of our king without fear, since we know He comes, not to condemn us, but to give us eternal life, as we sang in today's introit: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation."

II. But not only are we ready to meet our king because of what our gracious God has already done for us in Christ; we are ready because of what He promises to continue doing for us.
   A. He continues to provide everything we need.
      1. Apart from our Lord's first advent we lack everything before God (cf. Romans 3:23; we note Paul's use of the verb *hystereo* in the text).
      2. But for Jesus' sake St. Paul can happily write, "You do not lack [literally, "are not lacking," in view of the present tense infinitive] any gift of grace as you wait."
         a. The Corinthians enjoyed many "gifts of grace" (see especially chapters 12-14).
         b. While the so-called "charismatic gifts," such as tongues and healings, have ceased with the death of the Lord's apostles, we today still enjoy "gifts of grace," the greatest of which are faith and hope and love, as Paul makes clear in chapter 13.
      3. In the Lord's Supper Jesus assures us again and again that all His gifts are ours as He seals His grace and peace by giving us to eat and to drink His own true body and blood.
   B. He promises to keep us faithful to the end.
      1. If our continued faithfulness depended on our own wisdom or strength, we should surely lose our salvation, for we are weak in ourselves, even as St. Paul reminded

the Corinthians: "Do not deceive yourselves. . .the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (chapter 3).

2. We may not have it in ourselves to be faithful, but St. Paul writes emphatically, as the Greek text literally reads, "Faithful is God. . ." (the Greek word for "faithful" stands first in the sentence whereas the NIV puts it last).
3. God works in us through His word and sacrament to keep us strong to the end (verse 9, where Paul carefully writes "through whom," and not "by whom," suggesting that God works through means).
4. Through word and sacrament God keeps us firm in our confidence that we are "blameless" (verse 8), legally innocent of all sins and all crimes before Him.

Conclusion: Through faith in Christ, then, we do not need to fear our Lord's coming on the last day. Knowing that He has already come into our world as the Savior of the nations and has come into our own lives through His word and sacrament, we are more than ready to meet our king. For our God is a God "who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him."

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THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 9, 1990

2 Peter 3:8-14

This text overlaps (in three and a half of its seven verses) with the text concluding, only a fortnight before, Epistle Series A. This study will, therefore, assume the exegetical work already done in connection with the Last Sunday in the Church Year. A sermonic goal differing slightly from the goal suggested there can be found in the additional verses here (11,12,14) and in the new liturgical ambience (Advent). Advent is a penitential season in which we prepare, not only to celebrate well the first coming of the Lord and to receive Him rightly as He comes now in words and sacraments, but also to welcome Him when He comes again—in glory. The problem is that most people are unprepared for the inevitable return of Jesus Christ. The only means to the goal stated above remains the same as a fortnight previous, namely, the promise of God—the second coming is the necessary consequence of the first coming of the Lord Jesus.

As previously noted, 2 Peter 3 foretells a destruction of the universe *quoad formam* in connection with the parousia, but not a destruction *quoad substantiam*. Luther's confidence in the purification and glorification of heaven and earth rests squarely on Scripture, while Gerhard's idea of total annihilation (like all his deviations from Luther's line) fails to do justice to the biblical data. Annihilationism logically recalcitrates against the article of the resurrection, since, according to Scripture, the bodies which we possessed in this world—derived from this earth and returning to it (Genesis 3:19)—are to be ours again, albeit glorified, in the world to come. Holy Writ, in fact, asserts the permanence of this earth both explicitly (e.g., Psalm 104:5) and implicitly, as in those verses which promise its future possession to the faithful (e.g., Matthew 5:5).

The pariousia will, to be sure, bring a profound change in the universe (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12)—a change so profound as to produce a universe qualitatively new (e.g., 2 Peter 3:13, which uses forms of *kainos*, not *neos*). This change will certainly involve much destruction, but not cosmic disintegration. Our Lord Himself calls it "the regeneration" (*paliggenesia*, Matthew 19:28), while the Apostle Paul promises the deliverance of "the creation" in general from "corruption"—from the curse laid upon it by the fall of Adam (Romans 8:18-23; Genesis 3:17-18). Indeed, he implies a glorification of creation suitable to the habitation of the glorified faithful (cf. 2 Peter 3:13, "in which righteousness dwelleth"). As to the author of the verses under study, the Apostle Peter elsewhere joins the parousia to the "restoration of all things" (*apokatastasis*) predicted "from the beginning" (*ap' aiōnos*)—clearly the restoration of the universe to the perfection preceding the fall (Acts 3:21).

Also worth noting is the comparison which 2 Peter 3 makes between the effects of the Great Flood and those of the parousia (verses 6-7). The deluge produced, of course, tremendous destruction on a global scale—so much so that verse 6 can speak of "the world (*kosmos*) that then was" as having "perished." Yet although the deluge changed the form of things, the substance remained. The effect of prime importance was the predicted destruction of the prediluvian sinners hardened in impenitence, whom the waters of the flood swept away to eternal perdition (cf. 1 Peter 3:19-20). The same waters destroyed all the products of the sinful prediluvian civilization (except, of course, those carried on the ark). There was, of course, tremendous destruction of flora and fauna as well, but the first post-diluvian promise sets certain restrictions on future acts of God which presumably apply to the parousia as much as to any previous time: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake. . .; neither will I again smite any more everything living as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). The regeneration of creation will, of course, mean sweeping

changes in nature (e.g., returning troublesome plants and carnivorous animals to a state preceding the fall or raising them, like the faithful, to a state more glorious than Eden, Genesis 1:29-30; 3:17-18), but scarcely universal wrack and ruin.

Thus, the passage of the heavens in verse 10 clearly refers to form rather than substance, the present form contaminated by human sin giving way to the original perfection or a form yet more glorious. This truth is stated in more precise language by the Apostle Paul: "the *fashion* of this world (*to schēma tou kosmou toutou*) passeth away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). The addition of *roizēdon* ("with a great noise" [KJV] or "with a roar") emphasizes the suddenness, like the parousia itself, of the transition in nature associated therewith (cf. BAG, p. 744, "with great suddenness"). Both testaments speak of sudden eschatological noise—the voice of Messiah summoning all to divine judgement, joined by angelic choruses and celestial trumpets (Joel 3:16 EV; 4:16 MT; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The next clause (connected by means of *de* not *kai*) contrasts with the glorification of the heavens the perdition of the fallen angels: "demons, on the other hand, will be destroyed, being subjected to burning" (not "and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," as the KJV says). The ordinary biblical usage of *stoicheia* refers, not to elements in the modern chemical sense, but to the spirits whom pagans identified with certain material entities, worshipping them under these forms (Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8,20). The material entities used by the *stoicheia* to usurp divine honours were sometimes the four elementary substances of the ancient world (earth, water, air, fire) but more often the heavenly bodies (which is more in line with the preceding clause here).

The verb *luō* has a basic meaning of "loose," which leads negatively through breakage to destruction, but there is no need to exaggerate the idea with "melt" (KJV) or "dissolve" (Lenski). The Son of God assumed human flesh in the first place "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, using *luō*) and, indeed, "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14, using *katargeō*). The Lord will consummate the destruction of all the devils on judgement day by condemning them to burn forever in the fires of hell (cf. Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:2; Jude 6; Revelation 20:10). Satan suffers, not annihilation, but rather perpetual pain.

The final clause of verse 10 predicts that "earth and the works in it shall be found out." The last word has a number of textual variants, including the one underlying the final words of the verse in several English versions, "shall be burned up." The best reading, however, is clearly *heurethēsetai*, not only because of the manuscripts

containing it (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, etc.), but also because it alone explains the origin of the numerous variants. Actually the meaning is not so difficult to understand as commentators make it; one need only look to verse 14, where the same word occurs in the same tense and voice (the infinitive *heurethēnai*). The parousia will make manifest the works, as God sees them, of all the people of this earth—the good works of believers and the wicked works of unbelievers (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, the believers will be "found at peace" with God, "spotless and unblemished in His sight" (verse 14, where the KJV misunderstands *autō* as "of him" instead of "to Him," that is, "in His sight" by virtue of faith in Christ). The unbelievers, on the other hand, will be found at war with God, filthy and rotten in His sight.

This doom of unbelievers has already received attention in verse 7, which says literally that "the heavens and the earth which now exist. . .are being stored up for fire, being kept for a day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men." The second participial phrase evidently explains the first and so connects the eschatological fire particularly with the destruction of the wicked. There is no assertion here of a universal conflagration or, indeed, of any annihilation (even of the wicked in particular). Both testaments warn that on the last day the faithless will be condemned, like the demons, to everlasting hellfire (e.g., Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 25:41). This eternal perdition is clearly the "destruction" (*apōleia*) of which verse 7 speaks. At the same time, there are the comparison of the eschatological fire to the waters of the deluge and the assertion of verse 12 that "heavens" (although without the article), "being set afire, shall be destroyed." Evidently, then, fire will also serve as a divine tool in purging the universe of the results of human sin (cf. Isaiah 1:31).

The word *luō* recurs in verse 11: "all these things being destroyed thus," that is, in the ways specified by verses 7 and 10. The word then reappears in verse 12, where "heavens, being set afire, shall be destroyed" seems equivalent to "the heavens shall pass away" in verse 10. In other words, the reference is to a destruction *quoad formam* as described in the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The ensuing clause of verse 12 reiterates the eternal perdition of the fallen angels in more colourful language than the corresponding prediction of verse 10, using the present tense of *tēkō* to dramatic effect: "and demons, being subjected to burning, melt."

Previous studies have already dealt with the significance of "the day of the Lord" in verse 10, which corresponds to "the day of God" in verse 12, to "a day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men" in verse 7, and to "His coming" (*parousia*) in verse 4. Suffice it to add that 2 Peter 3 clearly identifies the second coming of Christ with the final judgement and the last day of history and so excludes the

premillenial theory. C.C. Ryrie, for example, defines the day of the Lord as an "extended period of time, beginning with the tribulation and including the events of the second coming of Christ and the millenial kingdom on earth" (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1809). The undersigned has demonstrated elsewhere the inadmissibility of interpreting the word *yōm* as an age (*CTQ*, 52:4 [October 1988], pp. 265-271). And "the day of the Lord" has already been identified as the *yōm-Yahweh* of the Old Testament; indeed, in verse 10 (at least in many manuscripts, including Papyrus 72 and Codex Vaticanus) *hēmera kuriou* appears in Hebraic mode without an article. Thus, the arguments against an "age-day" hypothesis refute the chiliasts as much as the evolutionary moderates. Verse 10, in particular, ties up the parousia with the last day in an inextricable knot of simultaneous action. The *New Scofield Reference Bible* attempts an explanation: "The expression 'in which' refers to the close of the Day of the Lord at the end of the millennium, when the destruction of the heavens and the earth ends the Day of the Lord" (p. 1341). Verse 10, however, clearly emphasizes the unpredictable suddenness with which the universal purgation itself will take place, rather than noting as a desultory aside something occurring exactly one thousand and seven years after the sudden beginning of the "tribulation." (The millennium, according to dispensational calculations, is to last exactly a thousand years and the tribulation exactly seven years preceding it.)

Introduction: When children play hide-and-seek, one counts to a previously agreed number and then shouts: "Here I come, ready or not." The Lord, on the other hand, has not told us when He will come again—only that He will come when *He* is ready and so *we* must be ready always. Some people will be prepared to see Him, but most people will be unprepared. The Lord has told us that He will come:

READY OR NOT

I. Most people will not be ready.
   A. Now they refuse the Lord of the cross (through unbelief).
      1. They are sinners living lives of impenitence.
      2. They refuse the fruits of His first coming.
      3. They deny His second coming.
   B. Then they will be terrified of the Lord in glory.
      1. They will see the end of the world they loved.
      2. They will see how rotten they are in His sight.
      3. They will receive eternal damnation.

II. Some people will be ready.
   A. Now they receive the Lord of the cross (through faith).
      1. They receive the fruits of His first coming.
      2. They are sinners living lives of repentance.
      3. They desire His second coming.

B. Then they will rejoice in the Lord in glory.
   1. They will see the end of the world they hated.
   2. They will see how pure they are in His sight.
   3. They will receive eternal perfection.

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 16, 1990

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

First Thessalonians 5 is a perfect epistle for Gaudete Sunday. It anticipates the joy of the birth of the Christchild with its opening phrase: "Rejoice always." The rose-colored paraments, rare in today's congregations, give a visible sign to the church that the rejoicing is soon to begin. The season of Advent is not as penitential as that of Lent, for it is as much a season of preparation as a season of repentance, reflecting the two themes of John the Baptist's preaching. As the premier figure in Advent, John's message is the message of Advent, as today's gospel announces. And so, as Reginald Fuller suggests, the joy of Gaudete is different than that of Laetare and Jubilate: "Advent joy is the joy of anticipation, mid-Lent joy that of an oasis in the wilderness, and the joy of Easter that of sorrow which has been turned to joy" (R.H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1971], p. 292).

Gaudete Sunday recognizes the tension of this Advent season between the now and the not yet. As we wait for the feast of Christmas, we wait as a church that knows three comings of the Lord: the nativity in Bethlehem, the presence of Christ in the gospel and the sacraments, and the *parousia*. In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul invites us to celebrate God's salvation in the midst of this anticipatory joy and tension with thanksgiving, prayer, and joy (T. Hall and J.L. Price, *Proclamation: Advent-Christmas: Series B* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], p. 17).

AN ADVENT INVITATION TO CELEBRATE

I. With thanksgiving that God has visited and redeemed His people (1 Thessalonians 5:18; 1:2; Luke 1:68).
   A. Repenting of every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22; 4:3-12).

B. Proclaiming salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us and delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1:9-10).
C. Living under the cross (1 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:4)

II. With petitionary prayer that God would keep on saving through His gracious presence among us now (1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1:2).
A. Remembering the faith, love, and hope of those who suffer under the cross (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3).
B. Imitating those who suffer under the cross (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:1-12; 3:1-5).
C. Petitioning God to visit us constantly with His saving presence (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

III. With joy in God's gracious promise to come again in glory (1 Thessalonians 5:16,23).
A. Knowing that we are prepared for His sudden appearance (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).
B. Confessing the resurrection of all flesh (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
C. Waiting in peace, sanctified wholly through His blood and our baptism (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Arthur Just, Jr.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 23, 1990

Romans 16:25-27

This conclusion to the Letter to the Romans is the longest of the doxologies which close Paul's letters. In it he repeats his wish that the Roman Christians be established in the faith, a theme with which he began this letter (1:11). Because the gospel Paul preached contained God's power to strengthen faith, Paul is moved to praise God. Furthermore, Paul ascribes eternal praise to God because He revealed this "mystery" of the gospel. The term "mystery" here refers to something which would have remained hidden from man unless God had revealed it (cf. 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51). Here it is the gospel, which man can only know through the preaching of Christ (verse 25) as witnessed in the prophetic Scriptures (verse 26; cf. 3:21-22).

Introduction: Waiting for anything which seems delayed can make us nervous, anxious, and frustrated. Whether it is waiting for a promised letter or package to arrive in the mail, waiting for a delayed

flight at the airport when a loved one is returning to us, or being put on "hold" on the telephone, we often lose the patience to wait. During the season of Advent we are reminded that we are waiting for Jesus as we look forward to His advent for our salvation. It could be easy for us to experience the same frustration over life's trials which we endure as we await Jesus. However, God has granted us a power which can remove our impatience as we look forward to Jesus' advent:

WE ARE ESTABLISHED IN THE GOSPEL

I. A mystery revealed to us by God.
   A. Through the preaching of Jesus Christ.
      1. Who alone gives us true knowledge of our heavenly Father.
      2. By whom we know the Father's love.
   B. Which shows us God's will.
      1. In the salvation won in Jesus' first advent.
      2. As the prophets of old foretold.

Transition: The gospel reveals to us a loving God whose good will was shown in sending His son to us. This Gospel establishes our faith firmly so that, as we await Jesus' second advent, we can triumph over the trials and tribulations of life by its power and patiently await our Lord.

II. Which God commanded to be preached.
   A. To all nations.
      1. So that the gospel's power might be brought to us.
      2. So that we might share in the privilege of bringing the gospel to others.
   B. For the obedience of faith.
      1. Faith trusts in God's promise.
      2. Faith moves us to do God's will.
         a. Because of the mercy shown in Christ.
         b. Guided by God's commandments.
   C. So that God might receive eternal glory.
      1. For His wisdom in establishing us in the gospel.
      2. Through the preaching of Christ.

Conclusion: We have been established in the gospel because God's command to preach this gospel to all nations brought the gospel to us. As we wait for Jesus' advent we are established in the gospel to do God's will, spread the word of Christ, and thereby glorify God.

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CHRISTMAS DAY

Titus 3:4-7

Titus was a Gentile convert accepted into Christianity without circumcision. The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus to give him personal authorization and guidance in meeting opposition and to give him instruction about faith and conduct. Titus was working mainly with new converts. The Apostle Paul reflected that he and other believers had no excuse for treating the heathen with haughtiness, since it was owing to no merit of their own that they had been saved by Christ.

These verses remind us what we once were. Remembering our own state when the love of God first appeared, we need to watch how we approach the unbeliever. Was it our own works which attracted God's love toward us? We are reminded that, being humble in the remembrance of our own sins and unworthiness, we should deal kindly and lovingly with unruly and sinful men and hope that God's grace would reach them as it has reached and has been impressed upon us.

Introduction: Are there lasting impressions of Christmas? Certainly there may be delightful reminiscences of Christmases past. These are usually experiences enhanced by memory that really do not supply us with the rich assurance that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is intended to give us. In the text Paul directs us to a lasting impression that not only enriches life now, but also assures us of a lasting blessed relationship with our God—to all eternity.

GOD'S LOVE MAKES LASTING IMPRESSIONS

I. His love is personal.
   A. The Word appeared, it became flesh, and dwelt among us. This marvelous mystery we celebrate each Christmas and do so again today (verse 4).
   B. His personal appearance fulfilled the promise of God's redeemer, the Messiah.
      1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling Micah 5:2.
      2. Mary, a virgin, was told by an angel that she would conceive a child, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose name was to be Jesus ("Savior"), fulfilling Isaiah 7:14.
      3. The heart of the gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins, fulfilling Isaiah 53:5.
      4. God raised Jesus from the dead, fulfilling Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 49:15.
      5. Jesus will appear again! "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go to heaven" (Acts 1:11).

C. His personal appearance had and still has broad, far-reaching effects.
   1. The loving kindness of the Savior is extended towards all humankind. It is *chrestotes* (verse 4).
   2. The loving kindness of the Savior is ineffably generous. It is free, boundless, and poured out on us through Jesus Christ (verse 6).

II. His love made us partakers in His plan of salvation (verse 7).
   A. Not by our own works of righteousness (verse 5).
      1. We are God's creation and owe everything to Him.
      2. We were corrupt and sinful.
         a. We are still tempted to overlook and forget God's love amidst busy engagements and the snares of everyday life.
         b. We still have the potential of setting ourselves apart from the unbelievers, forgetting that we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.
   B. But by His grace and mercy.
      1. A special work of His love and mercy occurs in baptism (verse 5).
         a. There is cleansing and removal of guilt from the soul.
         b. There is renewal; a new person is created to put forth good works and to exhibit a passion for souls, especially demonstrating love and mercy towards the unbeliever.
      2. The administrator of this redemptive love is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit initiates and applies the truth and work of the Son.
      3. The medium of this redemptive mercy is Jesus Christ. He finished the work of salvation on our behalf (verse 6).
      4. There are results of justification by His grace (verse 7).
         a. A present hope of eternal life.
         b. A future reality of being heirs to a heavenly home.
      5. The love of God makes a lasting impression. We will never lose Christ. We are forever His—now and unto all eternity.

Conclusion: The saving revelation of God focuses on the incarnation of Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this day. Remembering why He came, we rejoice with the angelic hosts and with all the people of God that, through Jesus Christ, salvation is certainly ours, a lasting impression for time and for eternity.

Norbert H. Mueller
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