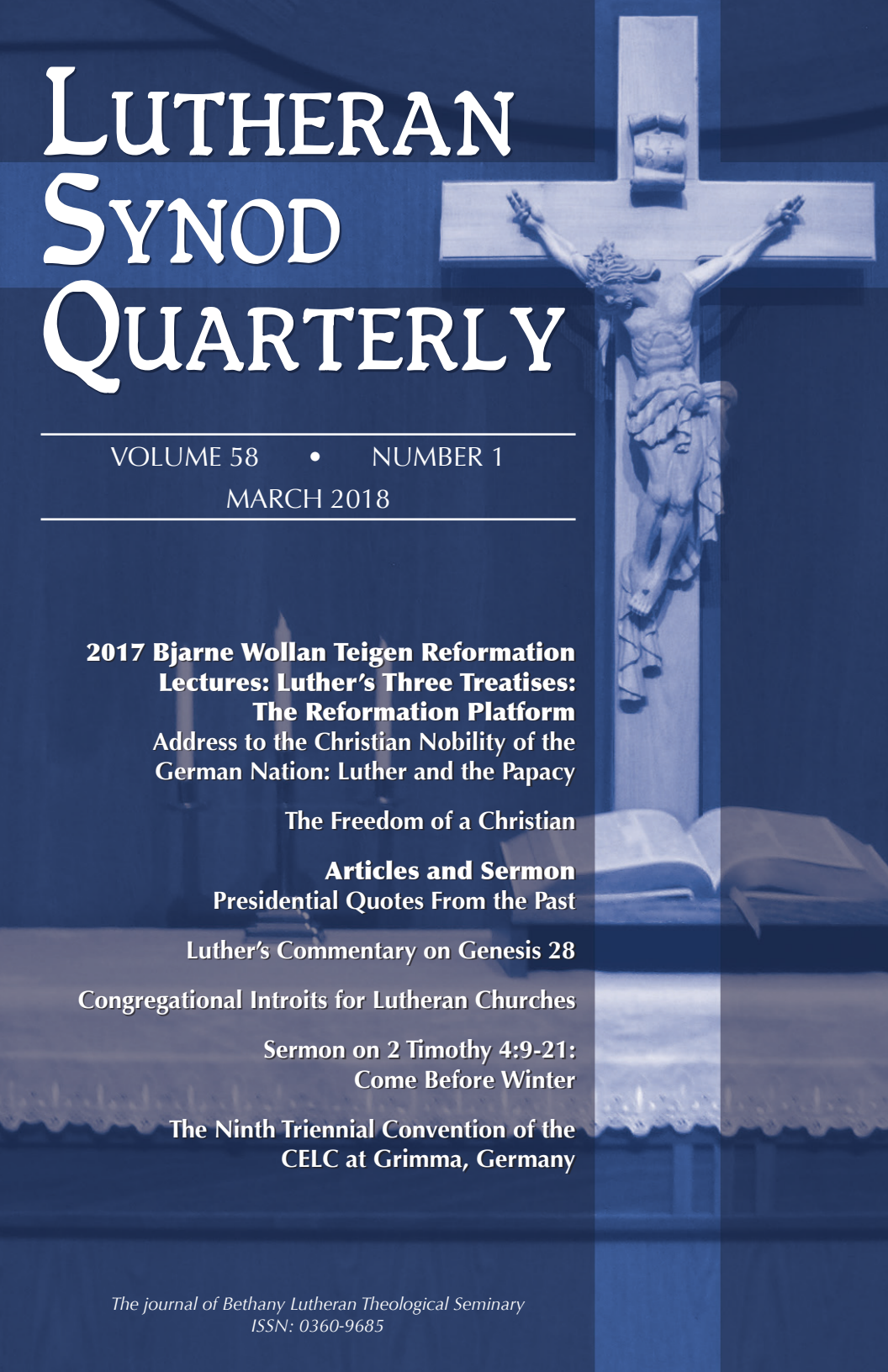


# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



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VOLUME 58 • NUMBER 1  
MARCH 2018

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**2017 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation  
Lectures: Luther's Three Treatises:  
The Reformation Platform**  
Address to the Christian Nobility of the  
German Nation: Luther and the Papacy

The Freedom of a Christian

**Articles and Sermon**  
Presidential Quotes From the Past

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*The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary*

# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling  
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# Foreword

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**I**N THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY* WE ARE PLEASED to share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, delivered October 26–27, 2017, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the fiftieth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the framework of fellowship.

This year there were three presenters. The first presenter was Prof. Em. Erling Teigen of Bethany Lutheran College (BLC) in Mankato, Minnesota. Prof. Em. Teigen has served BLC since 1977. He received his AA from Bethany Lutheran College (1960), BA from the University of Minnesota (1962), BD (MDiv) from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (1966), and MA in philosophy from the University of Minnesota (1978). He served Evangelical Lutheran Synod parishes in East Grand Forks and Apple Valley, Minnesota. Since joining the BLC religion faculty, he has taught courses in philosophy, dogmatics, American Lutheran history, Luther, and the Book of Concord. He has served on the Doctrine Committee of the ELS as well as numerous other boards. He was editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel* from 1975–82, and a founding editor of *Logia* for which he remains an editorial advisor and contributing editor. He has presented papers

at various pastoral conferences, Lutheran free conferences, and has published articles in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, the proceedings of the *Pieper Lectures* and the *Congress on the Lutheran Confessions*, as well as *Logia*. Prof. Teigen presently serves as the BLC Archivist and editor of *Oak Leaves*. He has been a member of the Reformation Lectures Committee since 1978, and has served as a moderator and reactor for the lectures several times. In 2004, he presented a lecture on J. A. Ottesen of the Norwegian Synod for this lecture series which received an award from the Concordia Historical Society. In 2000, his translation of *Letters from Leipzig*, Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker's letters to his family while studying in Leipzig from 1907–10, was published by BLC. He and his wife Linda live in Mankato.

The second presenter was Dr. Erik Herrmann, associate professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, and director of the Center for Reformation Research. He received his PhD from the same institution in 2005 in Renaissance and Reformation Studies. Before being called to the faculty, he was an assistant pastor at Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Lindenwood Park neighborhood of St. Louis, Missouri. His areas of interest and research include the history of biblical interpretation, with a particular focus on Martin Luther and the Reformation period; the history of medieval and Reformation/early modern Europe; twentieth-century interpretations of Martin Luther and his theology; and the history of American Lutheranism. His most recent publications are in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, and *The Annotated Luther*. He is married to Aliesha (née Ave-Lallemant). They are blessed with five children: Augustine, Constansa, Mathias, Tobias, and Elspeth.

The third presenter was the Rev. James Langebartels of St. John's Lutheran Church, Rib Lake, Wisconsin, and Zion Lutheran Church, Ogema, Wisconsin. Pastor Langebartels was baptized and confirmed at Trinity Lutheran Church in Crete, Illinois. He attended Northwestern College (1977) in Watertown, Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (MDiv, 1981) in Mequon, Wisconsin. He also received an STM in exegetical theology (2008) from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, at the same service in which his son Matt received his MDiv. He and his wife, Shirley (née Marten), were married at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Tomah, Wisconsin, in 1978. Their marriage has been blessed with four children, all of whom attended Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan, and Martin Luther College in New

Ulm, Minnesota; two also graduated from WLS. John (Julie) owns Cornerstone Roofing in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin; Peter (Ann) teaches at St. Markus Lutheran School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Matt (Hannah) serves as a WELS pastor in Tucson, Arizona, and Rebekah (Neil) Birkholz supports her husband in Beijing, China. Jim and Shirley have also been blessed with eleven grandchildren. Pastor Langebartels served as a parish pastor from 1981 to 2015 at churches in Morenci, Hopkins, and Imlay City, Michigan. During his time there, he served for sixteen years on the Michigan District Constitution Committee. He translated numerous articles from the *Quartalschrift* for the anthology volumes of *The Wauwatosa Theology* (volumes 1–3, NPH, 1997); the first volume of *The Complete Timotheus Verinus* (NPH, 1998); the third volume (and portions of the first two volumes) of Adolf Hoenecke's *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics* (NPH, 2003, 2009); Heinrich Schmid's *The History of Pietism* (NPH, 2007); and Luther's *Church Postils I–V* (LW 75–79, CPH, 2013–16). He served as assistant editor of Luther's *Sermons III–IV* (LW 56–57, 2016–17) and the four volumes of *The Apology to the Book of Concord* by Martin Chemnitz, Nicolas Selnecker, and Timothy Kirchner (first volume, CPH, 2018). He is currently translating Georg Mentz's biography of Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous. Pastor Langebartels retired from full-time parish work in 2015 and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to be closer to some of his grandchildren and to put more time into translating. He now serves as the part-time pastor of St. John Lutheran Church, Rib Lake, and Zion Lutheran Church, Ogema, Wisconsin. His wife Shirley works as a librarian in South Milwaukee and Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

This year the theme of the Reformation Lectures was “Luther’s Three Treatises: The Reformation Platform.” The first lecture, given by Prof. Em. Teigen, was entitled, “Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.” In this treatise, Luther demolishes the three walls of the Roman papacy: 1. temporal power has no jurisdiction over the church, 2. only the pope can interpret Scripture, and 3. no one can summon a church council except the pope. The second lecture, presented by Dr. Herrmann, was entitled, “Martin Luther’s Babylonian Captivity in Context.” In this treatise, Luther discusses the three captivities of the medieval church: 1. Communion in one kind, 2. transubstantiation, and 3. the sacrifice of the mass. He rejects the seven Roman sacraments and speaks of two: Baptism and the Bread (LW 36:124). The third lecture, given by Rev. Langebartels, was entitled, “The Freedom of a Christian.” Here Luther points out that the Christian man is a perfect lord of all,



subject to none, and at the same time, the Christian is a perfect dutiful servant of all, subject to all (LW 31:344). In addition, he illustrates the joyful exchange (*der fröhliche Wechsel*, LW 31:352).

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In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are continuing a series of quotations entitled “Presidential Quotes From the Past.” The series includes a number of relevant, Christ-centered quotes from the former presidents of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) as we look forward to the one-hundredth anniversary of the synod in 1918. This series is being produced by the Rev. John Moldstad, the president of the ELS.

Luther’s commentary on Genesis offers many valuable insights into the theology of Martin Luther. In the essay “Luther’s Commentary on Genesis 28,” this important chapter of Genesis is studied in detail. The heart of the chapter is Jacob’s ladder to which Jesus points in the New Testament when he says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Jesus is the ladder that bridges the chasm between God and the sinner. This essay was written by the Rev. Christian Eisenbeis, pastor of First Trinity Lutheran Church in Marinette, Wisconsin.

The introits of the liturgy in the ancient church were usually chanted or sung by a choir. In the places where the introits are used in modern hymnals the supporting musical resources often are not available. In the essay “Congregational Introits for Lutheran Churches,” the Rev. Daniel Hartwig provides such a musical resource for the introits. The Rev. Hartwig is pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Okauchee, Wisconsin.

This *Quarterly* provides a fine example of an ordination sermon. This sermon was preached at the ordination of Aaron Ferkenstad by his father, the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, the secretary of our synod. The theme of this sermon, based on 2 Timothy 4:9–21, is “Come Before Winter.”

Also included in this *Quarterly* is a summary of the ninth triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference in Grimma, Germany.

– GRS

# Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation: Luther and the Papacy

Erling T. Teigen  
Professor Emeritus, Bethany Lutheran College  
Mankato, Minnesota

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## I. Three Treatises?

THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION SCHOLAR JAMES McKinnon in 1928 referred to these three essays as “The Reformation Manifestos of 1520.” Heiko Obermann, on the other hand, calls them Luther’s “political manifesto”; Martin Brecht characterizes them as a “Reformatory Program”; Julius Köstlin quotes Luther’s friend John Lang as calling them “*A war trumpet*,” all of which leaves it open as to whether they are political or theological documents.<sup>1</sup> For at least a century and a half, these Luther writings have been treated as manifestos or programmatic documents, or treatises for the Lutheran Reformation.

Whether or not it is reasonable to limit the discussion to just these three, *The Address to the Christian Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of the Christian*, is certainly debatable. One might wonder whether that much weight can be forced on just these three writings? Or are there others that might possibly be at least as germane as statements of Luther’s reforming principles—such as the

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<sup>1</sup> James MacKinnon, *Luther and the Reformation* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962, first published 1928), two vols., 1, 222f. Heiko Obermann, *Luther, Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 443. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to the Reformation 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 369. Julius Köstlin, *The Theology of Luther*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), I, 370.

“Ninety-five theses,” Luther’s “Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses,” the “Disputation on Scholastic Theology,” “The Heidelberg Theses,” as well as Luther’s “Eight Wittenberg Sermons” preached in March and April of 1522. There might be good reason to single out the particular documents written in 1520, the year of *Exsurge Domine*, but if that is the case, why do we omit Luther’s significant *Treatise on Good Works*?<sup>2</sup> That writing certainly stands at the core of Luther’s reformatory concerns, because it represents a radical departure from the medieval understanding of good works and a return to a biblical understanding of the nature of good works, especially as found in the letters of St. Paul.

How it has come about that these three treatises have been associated together is unclear. No discussion in Luther’s own century is known connecting them. None of the earliest printings of the three together in the nineteenth century have included a reason for the association. Julius Köstlin in 1883 refers to “The Three Principle Reformatory Publications.”<sup>3</sup> And while there may have been other references like that to these three writings as a unit, the first time, so far as I can find, they were published under one cover was in 1874 by Ludwig Lemme, which came out in a second edition in 1884. A review in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* in 1876, supposes that Lemme’s is the first collection of these treatises.<sup>4</sup>

Whether or not it is accurate to say that these treatises present a platform for the Lutheran Reformation may become clear (or not) in the course of these lectures. It is fair to ask, however, whether Luther’s 1520 *Treatise on Good Works* (LW 44, 17–144) ought to have been included in these programmatic treatises of 1520,<sup>5</sup> and Luther’s treatise in response to Augustine Alveld of Leipzig, could well replace the treatise we are

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 55 vols+; general editors, Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, vol. 44, 17ff. In this paper, all references will be cited in the text with (LW vol., page). The complete works of Luther are published in the Weimar edition of Luther’s Works (*D. Martin Luthers Werke*. 120 vols. Weimar, 1883–2009). In this essay, they are abbreviated WA vol., page or column #.

<sup>3</sup> Julius Köstlin, *The Theology of Luther*, trans. Charles Hay, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), vol. 1, 369.

<sup>4</sup> The first English appearance that I have been able to locate is *Martin Luther, First Principles of the Reformation or The 95 Theses and the Three Primary Works of Dr. Martin Luther* published in England in 1883, translated by C. A. Buchheim and edited by Henry Wace. The little volume, *Three Treatises*, with which American Lutherans have become familiar, was first published in 1943 by Fortress Press using Charles Jacob’s translation and revised in the American edition of *Luther’s Works*.

<sup>5</sup> David Lau, *Journal of Theology, Church of the Luther Confession*, “1521–1971: In Commemoration of Luther’s Stand at Worms,” suggests that the *Treatise on Good Works* was “thought by many to be superior to the three major works of the summer of [1520].”

considering here, for various reasons. In an article on “Luther’s Treatises and Essays,” Mark Tranvik, Professor of Religion at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, groups analyses of five treatises produced in 1520, the three of this year’s lectures as well as the *Treatise on Good Works* and *On the Papacy in Rome* (against Alveld).<sup>6</sup>

## II. Address to the Christian Nobility

### *The Adel deutscher Nation (Nobility of the German Nation)*

The title masks the subject matter of this treatise. The real subject is the Roman Papacy. One who is familiar with Luther’s Smalcald Articles of 1537<sup>7</sup> is fully aware of Luther’s firm position on the papacy, that it is, in fact, the Antichrist spoken of in the New Testament, especially 2 Thessalonians 2 and 1 John 2 and 4. One might have a difficult time, however, reconciling Luther’s explicit conviction of the identity of the papacy as Antichrist with his expression in a letter to Spalatin, March 18, 1519:

And, confidentially, I do not know whether the pope is the Antichrist himself or whether he is his apostle, so miserably is Christ (that is, the truth) corrupted and crucified by the pope in the decretals. I am extremely distressed that under the semblance of laws and the Christian name, the people of Christ should be so deluded.<sup>8</sup>

That was Luther’s thinking at the time of the Leipzig debate. However, a year later, when he penned his *Address to the Christian Nobility*, he had arrived at a not-yet-complete but growing clarity on the nature of the

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Tranvick, “Luther’s Treatises and Essays,” in the online *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, <http://religion.oxfordre.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 308–09.

<sup>8</sup> LW 48, 114n16: “The prince of Christ’s enemies; see II Thessalonians 2; I John 2:18; 4:8; II John, vs. 7. In addition the Antichrist and his kingdom is symbolized at various points in the book of Revelation; see Rev. 9:13; 11:7 (the Beast); chapter 12; 13:11; 17:8. For Luther, who considered himself to be living in the “latter” days (see 104n7), the idea of the Antichrist was a common one. At least since the days of John Huss, but probably even earlier, people concerned with the reform of the church had identified the papacy with the kingdom of the Antichrist. For more details, see H. Preuss, *Die Vorstellungen vom Antichrist im späten Mittelalter, bei Luther und in der konfessionellen Polemik* (Leipzig: C. J. Hinrichsche Buchhandlung, 1906).

papacy. Early on, Luther speaks of the papacy as Antichrist conditionally, but later expressions become absolute.

Beginning with the title, we are pointed toward a couple of issues that must be grasped in order to engage with the treatise itself. The standard translation of “Christlichen Adel” is “Christian nobility,” which, however, turns out to be somewhat misleading when measured against the text of the treatise itself. Aside from its use as an adjective to characterize a lofty purpose and ethic, “nobility” otherwise suggests to the English reader a wealth-encrusted, hereditary-ruling-aristocracy, but that is not quite Luther’s point. James MacKinnon makes the term more precise for the twentieth-century, English-speaking reader:

The term “nobility” or *Adel* refers to the princes and the higher nobility as well as the lower [nobility]. As a matter of fact it is directed to the ruling classes of the empire—to the *Obrigkeith* [authority or government], consisting of Emperor, princes, nobles, knights, and the imperial cities—in a word, the estates of the empire represented in the imperial Diet.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the treatise is addressed not only to the aristocrats and imperial rulers, but also to the laity in general, from the emperor on down at least to the lowliest of the landed gentry. Luther introduces in this treatise the biblical doctrine of the universal priesthood and asserts that since the ecclesiastical estate will not reform itself, the real spiritual estate—which is the Christians—will have to do it. Luther’s point is not that the political realm must do the reforming, but rather, the true Christians, whatever their station in life, must take up the task, because the ecclesiastical realm will not or cannot do it. In that sense, Luther is already cognizant of what will later be formulated as the doctrine of the two kingdoms, which is not the same as the later principle of separation of church and state.

Secondly, Luther addresses “the German Nation,” which is the Holy Roman Empire. On the one hand, a political agenda might be noted—that Luther’s argument, on one level, is that ecclesiastical Rome is bleeding Germany of its capital, not only through the sale of indulgences, but in the many ways enumerated in parts two and three of the *Address*. On the other hand, the expression points to the abortive reform of the Council of Constance (1414–18). A provision which failed in practice and was thwarted by the popes elected by the conciliarists, was that the pope was to be elected not by the college of cardinals, but by the

<sup>9</sup> MacKinnon, 2:226. Also see 226n19.

representatives of the designated five nations (Germany, France, Italy, and England to which Spain was later added).<sup>10</sup> Implicit in that provision was that the various states in which the Roman church dominated, each had their own particular interests and needs. That the Roman church came to be thought of in terms of national churches facilitated Henry VIII's establishment of the Church of England outside of the Roman church and under his own authority. By directing that "the German nation" would have a voice in the reformation of the church, Luther tips his hat in sympathy with the aims of the failed Conciliar movement. However, at the mention of the Council of Constance Luther can't forget that it was at the Council of Constance that Jan Huss and Jerome of Prague were condemned and put to death, along with the posthumous excommunication and cremation of John Wycliffe. (Luther was sympathetic with the cause of Huss, but hardly one with him theologically; even so, John Eck made Luther's affirmative statements about Huss to be an important element in the Leipzig Debate of 1519.)

### *Occasion of the Address*

Luther seldom, if ever, plucked an issue out of thin air, pursuing it as an academic whim. Rather, Luther is reactive, responding to a specific incident or a writing. While the sermons and exegetical works are not reactive in themselves, in them he reacts to contemporary events. And so it is with Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (*An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*.)

Luther's frame of mind in writing *Address to the Christian Nobility* becomes apparent from a quick survey of the events surrounding its publication:

- 1517    October 31—Ninety Five theses.
- 1518    Luther appears before Cajetan.
- 1519    Death of Maximillian and election of his grandson,  
          Charles V as Holy Roman Emperor.

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<sup>10</sup> The "Western Schism" followed the Avignon papacy (1309–1376). After 1378, an Avignon pope reigned in opposition to the Roman pope and by 1414, three rivals reigned simultaneously. The council was called by the antipope John XXIII to resolve the problem. The council resolved that voting was to be carried out according to nations, four distinct assemblies of the following national groups: Italian, French, German, and English. When representatives from Spain arrived a fifth nation was given a vote. Most of the reforms of the council were later subverted by popes who were elected as supporters of conciliarism but changed their view once in office.

- Explanation of Thesis XIII* (re: the papacy)—published before Leipzig Debate.<sup>11</sup>
- July—Disputation with Eck at Leipzig; Luther openly rejects papal supremacy.
- 1520 June 15—*Exsurge Domine*, papal ultimatum threatening excommunication.
- June—*Treatise on Good Works*.
- June—*On the Papacy in Rome, Against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig*.
- August—*Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.
- August—*Exsurge Domine* officially published in Saxony.
- October—Babylonian Captivity of the Church.
- November—Freedom of the Christian.
- 1521 January 3—*Decet Romanum Pontificem*: formal decree excommunicating Luther.
- April 17–18—Diet of Worms followed by ten months at Wartburg.
- May 26—*Edict of Worms* places Luther under an Imperial ban.

Some older Luther scholars held that the occasion for the *Address to the Christian Nobility* arose from Luther's contact with Ulrich von Hutten, a renaissance humanist, who had been critical of the papacy, and upon being condemned in Rome, sided with Luther. Luther initially took to von Hutten, especially because of Hutten's re-publication of Lorenzo Valla's book *Donation* [gift] of *Constantine* (*Schrift gegen die konstantinische Schenkung* [ca. 1440]), in which Valla demonstrated that the purported letter of Constantine to Pope Sylvester giving the western portion of the Empire to the Pope was in fact a forgery (a finding that most in the Roman church have long since accepted).<sup>12</sup> The supposition was that this re-publication gave Luther the impulse to write. Most

<sup>11</sup> After receiving Eck's second edition of the theses for debate, Luther recast them to reflect his position, and then wrote an explanation of Thesis XIII. Written and published before the debate took place, the explanation seems to be Luther's debating notes, or his working out of his argument. Written in Latin, the explanation has not been translated, but appears in the Weimar edition of Luther's Works: WA 2, 153ff. The difference between Luther's form of the thesis is simply that it is the reverse of Eck's original wording.

<sup>12</sup> See *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Donation of Constantine," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05118a.htm>.

others, as noted by MacKinnon,<sup>13</sup> reject that theory and instead show that the genesis for the *Address* rather comes from the publication of Sylvester Prierias' and Augustine Alveld's attacks on Luther. To these, we can add the influence of John Eck in his response to the Ninety-five Theses and in the Leipzig debate.

### *Antecedents*

*The Address to the Christian Nobility* did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, several events or ideas precede it. These antecedents are not necessarily causes of Luther's writing, but in various ways, they illuminate his thinking. We will summarize them before we take up a closer examination of the content of the *Address*.

In 1517, it appeared that the point of controversy between Luther and the Roman Catholic hierarchy was the sale of indulgences. However, that course was altered by Luther's confrontation with John Eck. Scott Hendrix comments that the shift from indulgences to papal authority "was not made the main issue by Luther but by his opponents,"<sup>14</sup> with John Eck bearing at least part of the blame for that. It may not be accurate, however, to describe it as a "shift." Even if it was not consciously realized by Luther and those around him, John Eck, Sylvester Prierias, Thomas Cajetan, and others in the Roman church were correct in holding that Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*<sup>15</sup> was an attack on the Pope, even if Luther did not realize it.<sup>16</sup> Prierias and Cajetan can well be considered the more brilliant lights associated with the Roman Curia.

Luther's battle with the papacy has been surrounded by a certain amount of misunderstanding. A popular assumption has been that realization of the corruption and heresy of the Roman Curia was the leading issue for Luther. Even the best-known Luther movies leave the impression that Luther was motivated by what he saw on his trip

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<sup>13</sup> MacKinnon, 222f.: "Despite the oft-repeated assertion which ascribes the genesis of this famous appeal to Hutten and his fellows, it is evident that in the first instance at least, it had nothing to do with the offer of alliance and protection made by Hutten."

<sup>14</sup> Hendrix, 79.

<sup>15</sup> The propositions of the Ninety-five Theses Eck and others aimed at were Theses 5, 22, and others that spoke negatively about papal powers (LW 31, 26).

<sup>16</sup> See LW 31, 318 for Luther's counter thesis for the Leipzig Debate: "13. The very callous decrees of the Roman pontiffs which have appeared in the last four hundred years prove that the Roman church is superior to all others. Against them stand the history of eleven hundred years, the test of divine Scripture, and the decree of the Council of Nicaea, the most sacred of all councils."



to Rome and to his general treatment by church officialdom. In fact, Luther's attitude toward the papacy grew gradually, and went through several levels of animosity before its full expression in the Schmalkald Articles of 1537 and his final treatise on the papacy in 1544.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Luther moves from the naïveté of the true believer to a deeply troubled grasp of the depth of Curial corruption. The writings on the papacy extend over a period of twenty-five years:

- 1519 *Leipzig Debate (Thesis XIII) & Luther's Letter to Spalatin*, LW 31
- 1520 *(late) Why the books of the Pope and his disciples were burned*
- 1520 *(June) On the Papacy in Rome*  
Luther's response to Alveld's second writing in defense of the Papacy, LW 39
- 1520 *August, Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, LW 44
- 1521 *Debate with Jerome Emser, four writings*, LW 39
- 1522 *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope....Falsely so-called*, LW 39
- 1537 *Smalcald Articles, Part II*
- 1539 *On the Councils and the Church*, LW 41
- 1545 *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*, LW 41

### *The Conciliar Movement and the Council of Constance*

The first antecedent that we will consider is the fifteenth-century reform movement in the Roman church usually referred to as "conciliarism," the idea that the ecclesiastical authority of the Pope is subordinate to the councils of the church. One cannot really grasp the substance of Luther's writings on the papacy without an understanding of the Avignon papacy, the Western Schism, and the councils of Pisa, Constance, and Basel. Luther stands closer to the end than to the beginning of a protracted battle in the western (Roman) church over the precise nature of papal supremacy in the Roman church, which did not formally end until 1870 with the decree of papal infallibility. Surprisingly, the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, even as the Roman church was emerging from the Lutheran and conciliar controversies, did not directly or officially deal with the question of papal authority, whether or not the Pope was the infallible, supreme authority for the church. That had to wait until 1870 when the doctrine of

<sup>17</sup> Hendrix, 146.

papal infallibility was officially decreed by the First Vatican Council. Nevertheless, some of the modern critics of the liberalizing elements in the Roman Catholic Church read the Second Vatican Council 1962–65 as moving toward the conciliar position. It also appears that some of the more conservative minds in the Roman Catholic Church today tilt somewhat toward a conciliarist position, especially in the wake of some of the present pope's statements.

Luther's proposals in *Address to the Christian Nobility* for a reform of the Roman church were not at all new. The conciliar movement had its beginnings in the fourteenth century in the writings of William of Occam (1287–1347) and at the University of Paris, but developed traction following the "Western Schism," the period when two and three Popes ruled simultaneously. Luther was never a vocal advocate of the movement, which still had its hangers-on in the first decades of the sixteenth century, but some of his views on the papacy are more than superficially similar to those of the conciliarists. In his 1520 *Treatise on Good Works* Luther refers to the councils of Constance, Basel, and the Lateran (1512–1517): such councils are of no use, for Roman cunning has contrived a device so that before a council starts, kings and princes must take an oath to let the Romans remain just as they are... (LW 44, 91). And yet in 1539 Luther can write in *On Councils and the Church*, "I am a good conciliarist" (LW 41, 27) though it is not clear how he meant that statement to be taken.

This turbulent time began in 1304 with the election of Clement V, a French cardinal, to the papacy. Because of political and social unrest in Rome, Clement moved the papacy to Avignon, which in the late Middle Ages—though geographically French—was an autonomous city with ties to Italy; it did not become a part of France until the French Revolution.

Clement V was followed by six successive popes who ruled the Roman church from Avignon. In 1377, Gregory XI succeeded Urban V and transferred the papacy back to Rome. When Gregory died soon after returning to Rome, the cardinals were preparing to elect a successor, there was pressure from the Romans to install an Italian pope. Finding no suitable candidate in Rome, the best the cardinals could do was to elect a Neapolitan bishop who became Urban VI. The cardinals soon regretted their judgment since Urban turned out to be "whimsical, haughty, suspicious and sometimes choleric in his relations

with the cardinals who had elected him.”<sup>18</sup> The same cardinals moved their meetings out of Rome and in 1378, elected Robert of Geneva who took the name Clement VII. Soon after, he moved the papacy back to Avignon. However, Urban VI had not been deposed, so there were now two popes, Urban VI in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon, and the two proceeded to excommunicate each other. In order to attempt to end the schism a council was called to meet at Pisa in 1409.

The idea of resolving the problem by calling a council had surfaced earlier, but was held to be contrary to canon law. However, in 1409, some theologians justified it on the grounds that the church itself could act for its own welfare in spite of canon law. Luther takes a similar, though not the same, position in *Address to the Christian Nobility*.

When the Council of Pisa attempted to depose both the pope and the antipope, they exacerbated the situation by electing a third pope, Alexander V, who died within a year and was succeeded by Baldassare Cossa, Pope John XXIII, 1410–1415. (When Cardinal Roncalli was elected to the papacy in 1958, he took the name John XXIII, thereby settling the question about the legitimacy of the first John XXIII who had reigned as a third pope and was deposed by the Council of Constance in 1415.)

In 1414, the Pisan Pope, John XXIII, with the endorsement of the Roman Pope, Gregory XII, called a council to be held at Constance (Konstanz), the city in Germany but on the Swiss border. That council secured the resignations of John XXIII and Gregory XII. The Avignon Pope, Benedict XIII, refused to step down and was excommunicated. On November 11, 1417, the council elected a Roman to be pope (Martin V) by the representatives of the five nations (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and England).

It is possible that had the Council of Constance lived up to expectations, Martin Luther would not have been in the position to write his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, nor would he have had quite as much to criticize since under the conciliar position, the pope did not have unfettered, supreme power over the Roman Church but was subservient to the councils.

However, Luther was mistaken when he said in Thesis XIII of his version of the Leipzig theses, that it was for the last four hundred years that papal supremacy had been claimed; in fact it had a longer history than that. The debate between Roman Catholic historians and others

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<sup>18</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, “Western Schism,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13539a.htm>.

has not achieved agreement on the history of papal supremacy. While Roman Catholic historians insist on beginning with St. Peter, others find it between the accession of Gregory I (d. 604) and Gregory VII (1085). Luther, in his reference to four hundred years, is probably thinking of the reign of Gregory VII. Hildebrand, a papal advisor, was elected pope in 1073 and became Gregory VII, usually billed as a reforming pope. Williston Walker cites Gregory's principles:

“[T]he Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal.”  
“[T]hat he alone can depose or reinstate bishops.” “That it may be permitted him to depose Emperors.”<sup>19</sup>

One of the aims of the Council of Constance had been moral and administrative reform. As a reformatory instrument, however, the council was a bitter disappointment, since the jealousies and rivalries of the several “nations” thwarted effective action.<sup>20</sup> The Council of Basel reversed that organization and substituted some committees for it. But from that time on, it seems that the papacy had to deal more and more with the church affairs in various countries as de facto national churches. England and Germany were two dissimilar cases of that reality.

Luther's title, *Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, echoes aspects of the Roman struggle over papal authority. Walker concludes:

Though the conciliar theory still lived and was to be powerful in the Reformation age, the fiasco in Basel had really ruined the hope of transforming the papacy into a constitutional monarchy or of effecting needed reform through conciliar action. The papacy emerged in the ensuing restoration era as a monarchy that again was absolutist in its claims, now armed with the first conciliar definition of papal primacy, namely, that of the union decree *Laetentur coeli* of 1439.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly completely reversing the reforms of Constance, the Council of Basel established the standing of the papacy as Luther faced it in 1519. The council decreed:

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<sup>19</sup> Williston Walker, ed. R. Norris, D. Lotz, and R. Handy, *A History of the Christian Church* [4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1985] (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons), 275f.

<sup>20</sup> Walker, 387f.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 390f.

We also stipulate that the Holy See and the Roman pontiff possesses primacy over the entire world and that this Roman pontiff is successor to the blessed Peter, prince of the apostles and true Vicar of Christ, that he is the head of the whole Church and the father and master of all Christians, and that he, through the blessed Peter, had been given full authority by Christ to keep watch over, rule, and govern the Church as contained in the acts of the ecumenical councils and the holy canons.<sup>22</sup>

The origin of “conciliarism” is usually credited to William of Ockham, who died thirty years before Luther’s birth. Ockham wrote during the period of the Avignon papacy and the reign of John XXII, accusing the pope of heresy. Ockham had argued that a pope could fall into heresy and that the Roman church was not identical to the Christian church. As the battle of the Western Schism heated up, Marsilius of Padua, then rector of the University of Paris, a layman and a physician, wrote *Defensor Pacis* (1324). Luther, like the supporters of conciliarism, cited the first council of Nicea in support of their positions. Even when William of Ockham and Marsilius wrote, the idea of conciliar authority in the church was not a novelty.

### *John Eck and the Leipzig Debate*

The shift from indulgences to papal authority as the focus of the Reformation movement took place in Luther’s relationship with John Eck, professor at the University in Ingolstadt. The fierce animosity between Luther and Eck had begun as an affinity since Eck saw in Luther a kindred spirit favoring some level of reform of the church. Any possibility of collaboration changed, however, after the publication of the Ninety-five Theses and Luther’s further elaboration on the theses.<sup>23</sup> Schwiebert documents Luther’s surprise at the attack from Eck:

A man of signal and talented learning and of learned talent, has recently written a book called *Obelisks* against my [Ninety-five] “Theses.” I mean John Eck, doctor of Theology, chancellor of the University of Ingolstadt, canon of Eichstaett, and now, at length, preacher at Augsburg, a man already famous and widely known by his books. What cuts me most is that we had recently

<sup>22</sup> Michiel Decaluwe, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson, *A Companion to the Council of Basel* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2016), 131.

<sup>23</sup> See LW 31, 79f. for Luther’s *Explanations of The Ninety-five Theses*.

formed a great friendship. Did I not already know the machinations of Satan, I should be astonished at the fury with which Eck has broken that sweet amity without warning and with no letter to bid me farewell.<sup>24</sup>

The rift between the two was exacerbated in the Leipzig debate. The debate was to be between Eck and Karlstadt, but after the debate had been set, Eck changed the program so that he could debate Luther. When Eck issued a second edition of the theses for debate, he had added one specifically for Luther.<sup>25</sup> Since Leipzig was in Ducal Saxony, ruled by George, who was firmly opposed to Luther, Luther could not enter Leipzig without formal permission from George. Therefore, Luther published *Resolutio Lutheriana*, arguments defending his own version of Thesis 13, in June, 1519, before the debate was even begun.<sup>26</sup> While *Resolutio Lutheriana*, written in Latin, appears in the Weimar edition of Luther's Works,<sup>27</sup> no English translation of it is available.<sup>28</sup> However, Köstlin has a lengthy running paraphrase of it, and Schwiebert<sup>29</sup> has a shorter summary. The *Resolutio Lutheriana* differs from Luther's argument in *Address* chiefly in its more extensive refutation of the authority of the papacy on the basis of the biblical texts,<sup>30</sup> Matthew 16 and 18 and John 21:15–17. He also presses more explicitly his argument that "rock" in Matthew 16 refers to the faith which the church confesses from Scripture, not Peter who confessed that faith. Luther is also more explicit in citing his research on the history of the papacy and its decrees.<sup>31</sup>

### Prierias

A second antecedent of the *Address* is Luther's print debate with Sylvester Prierias. Luther had been engaged with Prierias, a high official

<sup>24</sup> Schwiebert, 334, citing WA I, 278; translation in Smith, *Correspondence*, I, 76–77.

<sup>25</sup> LW 31, 305; see note 15 above.

<sup>26</sup> *Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione sua decimal tertia de potestate papae*, WA 2, 183ff. Written in Latin, it is not included in LW. There is, however, a German translation in the old Walch edition and in the newer (1885–1910) St. Louis edition of Luther's works. An English translation of *Resolutio* is scheduled to be included in the volumes now being added to the American edition of Luther's Works.

<sup>27</sup> WA 2, 183ff.

<sup>28</sup> Köstlin I, 292.

<sup>29</sup> Schwiebert, 389.

<sup>30</sup> WA 2, 180–240.

<sup>31</sup> See LW 31, 309–325 for Luther's summary of his part of the Leipzig debate especially on Thesis XIII and a July 20, 1519 letter to George Spalatin.

in the Roman Curia, regarding the Ninety-five Theses, in which the issue of papal supremacy had inevitably arisen. Upon receiving a copy of the Ninety-five Theses, Prierias wrote a refutation of Luther's view on indulgences, *Dialogus de potestate papae*, quoting Luther and then responding. Upon receiving a copy of Luther's *Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione sua decima tertia de potestate papae*, Prierias composed a detailed critique in two books, with a third entitled *Epitoma*, as a summary of his findings.<sup>32</sup>

Receipt of Prierias' *Epitoma*, according to Hendrix, marked "a new stage in his relationship to the papacy ... convincing him that everybody at Rome has gone raging mad like fools, sticks and stones, hell and the devil."<sup>33</sup>

Schwiebert remarks about Luther's *Resolutio*:

An analysis of this treatise reveals again Luther's amazing capacity to digest materials in a few months, which would have required years for the average scholar.<sup>34</sup>

### *Alveld*

In June of 1520, a monk at Leipzig, Augustine Alveld (or Alfeld and other variations) wrote a Latin defense of the primacy of the papacy. Luther was not impressed and did not find it worthy of response, though he did give that task over to a lowly teacher's assistant (*famulus*). Of Alveld's pamphlet, Luther writes, "I have never encountered a more foolish, a sillier or a blinder book than this one" (LW 39, 77). Apparently the faculty at Leipzig, in spite of favoring Luther's opponents, was not impressed either.<sup>35</sup> However when Alveld published a German treatise on the same topic, which would make it more accessible to the laity, Luther then dashed off a response in fewer than two weeks entitled *On the Papacy in Rome Against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig [Von dem Papsthum zu Rom wider den hochberümten Romanisten zu Leipzig]* (LW 39, 51–104).

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<sup>32</sup> I have not seen an English translation of *Epitoma*, but there is a Danish translation of Luther's edition of it with Prierias' Latin text in a parallel column.

<sup>33</sup> Hendrix, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Schwiebert, 390.

<sup>35</sup> WA 39, 51, Introduction to "On the Papacy at Rome." See also MacKinnon, 151 and other introductions.

Even though Luther hardly considered Alveld a worthy opponent, his argument in his response to Alveld is more to the point and more concise than his arguments in the Leipzig debate and the *Address to the Christian Nobility*. Luther appears to have gone off the deep end when he saw a plot, supposing that his more capable opponents, like Eck, Prierias, Cajetan, Emser, and some university theologians had hidden behind the less than competent Alveld. In his introduction to *On The Papacy*, Luther writes, “They put up somebody, thinking, ‘If he wins, we have all won, but if he loses, he alone is defeated.’” But he goes on, as though to apologize for his harsh language (LW 39, 56).

While Luther addresses Alveld directly and returns the invective, Luther couches his argument in simple talk to the Christian laity, even to the extent of apologizing at the outset for his often crude way of speaking: “I shall pretend not to understand their game at all, so that not everything goes wrong for them, I ask them in return not to notice that when I hit the pack I was aiming at the mule.... I ask every devout Christian to understand that my words though they are perhaps mocking and cutting, come from a heart which must break with great sorrow” (LW 39, 56).

However, in the response to Alveld, Luther several times sharpens the issues of the dispute in terms that neither laymen nor theologians could fail to understand. This then is the matter in question: “Whether the papacy in Rome, possessing the actual power over all of Christendom, as they say, is derived from divine or from human order; and if so, whether it would be a Christian statement to say that all other Christians in the whole world are heretics and schismatics—even though they adhere to the same baptism, sacrament, gospel, and all articles of faith in harmony with us” (LW 39, 57).

Luther breaks the argument into three parts and carefully buttresses his counterarguments with Scripture. The texts that receive the closest attention are Matthew 16 and 18. To the Roman assertion that the keys are given to Peter and are the power of the papacy, Luther argues,

They want to make a power to rule out of the power of the keys....The power of the keys extends only to the sacrament of penance to loosing and binding sins, as is clearly written in Matthew 18 [:18] and in the last chapter of John [20:22,23]....

The words of Christ are nothing but gracious promises to the whole community, given to all of Christendom, as was said,



so that the poor sinful consciences are consoled when they are “loosed” or absolved by a man. (LW 39, 89, 90)

Along the way, unlike in his preceding disputes on the papacy, Luther here takes up the doctrine of the church, where his terms anticipate his discussion of the church in the Large Catechism, third article: “Christendom means an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ, as we pray in the creed” the point of which is “he who says that an external assembly or unity creates Christendom speaks his mind arbitrarily” and “it follows ... that just as being under the Roman unity does not create Christians, so also being outside this unity does not make either heretics or non-Christians” (LW 39, 65–67).

Luther’s argument in the treatise against Alvelde *On the Papacy in Rome*, seems a better argument than that offered in *Address to the Christian Nobility*. There may be a couple of good reasons, however, to prefer the latter as a programmatic treatise for the Reformation: 1) the Alvelde treatise is a response to an individual, and “gives as good as it got” by way of invective, while the *Address* can rightly be called a manifesto, being addressed to a larger audience with a minimum of Luther’s typical crudity. 2) *On the Papacy* is essentially a theological, polemical document, the primary point of which is exegetical/dogmatical, while *Address* is a political document, in which Luther aims to authorize the temporal realm to reform the church since the ecclesiastical authorities of the church lacked the will to do so. Thus, it is a manifesto to the German nation to take action.

We now turn to a summary of *The Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.

### *Treatise Part I*

*Address to the Christian Nobility* is divided into three parts. The first part of the treatise consists of a description of three walls Luther believes have been erected by the papacy in order to protect its existence. This section is the most well known, and in fact has often captured the primary attention in studies of the treatise. However, there are other issues introduced by Luther in this treatise that are more significant for the Reformation.

It would be a daunting task, but it would not be accomplished by relying on human might:

The first and most important thing to do in this matter is to prepare ourselves in all seriousness. We must not start

something by trusting in great power or human reason, even if all the power in the world were ours. For God cannot and will not suffer that a good work begin by relying upon one's own power and reason. ... We must tackle this job by renouncing trust in physical force and trusting humbly in God. (LW 44, 125f.)

After citing some examples from the history of the Holy Roman Empire that have not gone so well, Luther betrays what might be either a naïve confidence in the recently elected, boy emperor Charles or a utopian hope: "That it may not so fare with us and our noble Charles, we must realize that in this matter we are not dealing with men, but with the princes of hell" (LW 44, 125).

The theme of the first part of the treatise is "the Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them" (LW 44, 126). These walls are identified before a further explication of them takes place: 1) "When pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal." 2) "When the attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they raise the objection that only the pope may interpret the Scriptures." 3) "If threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but the pope" (LW 44, 126).

In his discussion of the first wall, Luther bases his argument on the spiritual priesthood: "As far as that goes, we are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2[:9]. ..." Also Revelation 5:9–10, "Thou hast made us to be priests and kings by thy blood." After illustrating with the case of a group of Christian laymen cast into prison without a priest, Luther asserts, "It follows from this argument that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests" (LW 44, 127f.). Luther has much more to say about the priesthood in many other places, but it becomes clear here what his purpose is. In our day, we expect a discussion of the universal priesthood to lead to a discussion of evangelism. However, that is not Luther's purpose here. This assertion of the Christian priesthood is the foundation for Luther's vision of a reformation of the church:

Since the ecclesiastical estate has not been able to reform the church and itself, it is the priesthood of all Christians which must do it—and in this case that means the nobility (in Luther's broader meaning of it) of the German nation—that is, the German part of the church catholic.

Incidentally, it should also be observed that in this treatise, and in his writings generally, Luther does not refer to “the Catholics,” or even “the Roman Catholics,” but “Romanists.” Even though Luther says “Christian” instead of “catholic” in the creeds, he never loses sight of the one holy catholic church which is all believers, and behind all of his critique of Rome is that it claims to be identical to the church catholic. Luther argues elsewhere that one cannot say that the Pope is the head of all Christians, because he is not the head of the Greek church, or the Hussites, or others which clearly confess Christ. To put it another way, Luther might want to say that there is no such thing as the Roman Catholic church, since “Roman” is parochial, provincial, while *καθολικός* (*katholikos*) is universal.

Luther's decisive distinction in the treatise is: “Priests, bishops, or popes, are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office” (LW 44, 130). From that, he refines the point in a paradox: “Inasmuch as the temporal power has become a member of the Christian body it is a spiritual estate even though its work is physical” (LW 44, 131), that is to say, the temporal authority, the emperor (soon to be Charles), because he belongs also to the spiritual estate, has the authority to reform the church.

The second wall, Luther holds, falls of its own weight and needs not so much explication: “The second wall is still more loosely built and less substantial. The Romanists want to be the only masters of Holy Scripture, although they never learn a thing from the Bible all their life long” (LW 44, 133). The key point in his refutation is that the Romanists base this assertion on the claim that this power was given to Peter when the keys were given, although “it is clear enough that the keys were not given to Peter alone but to the whole community” (LW 44, 134).

Likewise, when the first two walls fall down, then the third comes down as well. That only the Pope has the authority to call a council is refuted simply by the fact that in Acts 15, it was not Peter who called the Jerusalem council, but the apostles and elders. Which is to say—you can't have it both ways—if Peter had supremacy, the apostles and elders did not have that authority.

Furthermore, on the basis of Matthew 18:15–17 (“If your brother sins against you...”), it follows that if “the Pope becomes an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council. No one can do this so well as the temporal authorities, since they are also fellow-Christians” (LW 44, 137).

### *Treatise Part II*

Parts II and III of the address fall into the category of the *gravamina* (grievances) which had already become a standard part of the fifteenth-century diets in the empire. In several nations, there had been grievances against the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. At the Council of Constance, a list of eighteen grievances were brought to the council by the German Nation and others. Luther’s criticisms and proposals in *Address* were not at all without precedent. An article in the *Oxford Reference Encyclopedia* describes the practice:

From 1450 the grievances or “*gravamina* of the German nation” were aired regularly at imperial, territorial, and municipal diets in the empire. They were brought up at receptions of papal emissaries, as on the occasion of Nicholas of Cusa’s travels in Germany in 1452.<sup>36</sup>

The second part of the treatise addresses some of the worst corruptions of the papacy. They are matters “which ought to be properly dealt with in councils,” but in the absence of action on the part of the popes, cardinals, and bishops, “let the ordinary people and temporal authorities do it without regard to papal bans and fulminations. ... Therefore let us awake, dear Germans, and fear God more than man” (LW 44, 139). A distinction between the two kingdoms, though not necessarily a rigid separation, became a firm principle for Luther. However, it doesn’t follow that Luther is here caught in self-contradiction. We have already seen that he argues that the Christian laity is not the kingdom of the left, even if “laity” includes princes and emperors, or even bishops. As the Christian priesthood of the believers, they have a duty to act where the ecclesiastical authorities are unwilling to do what is right.

The issues that Luther deals with in part II are deeply ethical and spiritual questions:

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<sup>36</sup> “Gravamina,” Gerald Strauss, *Oxford Reference* <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195064933.001.0001/acref-9780195064933-e-0595>.

It is horrible and shocking to see the head of Christendom who boasts that he is the vicar of Christ and successor of St. Peter going about in such a worldly and ostentatious style that neither king no emperor can equal or approach him. He claims the title of “most holy” and “most spiritual,” and yet he is more worldly than the world itself. (LW 44, 139)

“This kind of splendor is offensive,” says Luther. Not yet ready to name the bishop of Rome “Antichrist,” he nonetheless makes a connection: “He ought to leave the crown of pride to Antichrist” (LW 44, 140). Not much later, Luther might have cited that offensive splendor as a distinctive characteristic of Antichrist.

Luther also finds that beyond the Pope, there are far too many cardinals: “Twelve of them would be enough” (LW 44, 141). Ninety-nine percent of the papal court could just as well be abolished, since they are mostly parasites. He complains that the Romanists cannot even keep their own self-devised canon,<sup>37</sup> and moves on to a critique of the avarice which overwhelms the papal court.

In his exposé of avarice in the curia, Luther dwells especially on the system of benefices in the Roman Church. The terminology goes back to Roman times when a *beneficium* was a grant of land given to a Roman soldier for his service. In the early middle ages, it was used by the western church to refer to an endowed pastorate, or institution. In the early middle ages, it had been appropriated by the church to refer to the privilege of the clergy to receive income from designated properties of the church for temporal support. By the late middle ages, however, it had become a vehicle for amassing money and property for the Roman curia, and in that sense it became a major piece of evidence for Luther’s charges of corruption against the Roman church and its curia. By Luther’s time, “benefice” referred to the position in a parish, diocese, or institution, without regard to the incumbent, even if it was vacant. Canon law (Roman church law) provided that in the case that a benefice was vacant, the earnings of its endowment went to the bishop, and later, a portion of it went to the Pope. Luther calls it simony.<sup>38</sup>

A benefice was also called a “living.” In part II, Luther presses home the charge of avarice by focusing on the abuses of the system of

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<sup>37</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines Canon law as “the body of laws and regulations made by or adopted by ecclesiastical authority,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/c.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> See Acts 8:18–20, the case of Simon the Sorcerer who wanted to purchase the apostolic powers.

benefices, some of the worst of which came in the selling of benefices or church positions and the provision that in the case of a vacant benefice, the income went to the papal treasury. Luther illustrates the way the system was abused: “Avarice lies in wait where fat prebends [stipend] or bishoprics are held by an old or sick man, or even by one with an alleged disability. The Holy See gives a coadjutor, that is, an assistant, to an incumbent of this kind. This is done without the holder’s consent or gratitude, and for the benefit of the coadjutor, because he is a member of the pope’s ‘household,’ or because he has paid for it or has otherwise earned it by some sort of service to Rome” (LW 44, 149). In his critique, Luther shows that he has done his homework — that he has researched canon law, and has grasped the actual practice of the benefices by the Curia.

Luther’s final judgment on the system is harsh:

Since then such devilish rule is not only barefaced robbery, deceit, and the tyranny of hell’s portals, but ruinous to the body and soul of Christendom, it is our duty to exercise all diligence to protect Christendom from such misery and destruction. (LW 44, 156)

### *Treatise Part III*

In the third part, Luther offers twenty-seven “propositions for the improvement of this dreadful state of affairs” (LW 44, 156). These 27 theses may be considered in three categories.

I. 1–13. The first category concerns certain powers which have accrued over the years to the papacy, but which must be abolished or corrected, with some overlap with the discussion of the three walls. For one thing, the nobility is asked to set itself against the Pope. The Pope should be removed from the process of confirming bishops, and no temporal matters are to be referred to him. No more benefices are to be seized by Rome, nor shall the Pope have any authority over the emperor, or over states like Naples or Sicily. And please, no more kissing the Pope’s feet! Most of the festivals should be abolished, but some saints’ days can be fruitfully celebrated. He wants the emphasis to be on the Sunday masses. Endowed masses are to be ended, as well as the brotherhoods.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> LW 44, 192n194: “The brotherhoods flourished in the sixteenth century. Members of brotherhoods were obligated to recite certain prayers and to attend certain masses at appointed times. Membership in the association meant that each member

II. 13–24. The second group of proposals consists of various reforms to be applied to institutions of the church, especially the monastic system and the priesthood, including abolition of forced celibacy.

III. 25–27. Three proposals in particular are saved for the end and get more extensive discussion. “25: The universities, too, need a good, thorough reformation” (LW 44, 200). Luther’s proposals here anticipate his two major writings on education “To the Councilmen in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools” (LW 45, 339–378), and “Sermon on Keeping Children in School” (LW 46, 210–258). “What are they?” he asks, “but places where loose living is practiced, where little is taught of the Holy Scriptures and Christian faith, and where only the blind, heathen teacher Aristotle rules far more than Christ?” (LW 44, 200). While we might all like to hear in more detail what Luther found objectionable in the student life of the day, it is the dominance of Aristotle in the curriculum that alarms him most. However, it wasn’t all of Aristotle’s writings that Luther objected to; logic, rhetoric, poetics, and such writings promoting liberal learning were to be kept. They were necessary then, and still are today. But it was the Aristotelian ethics of virtue and happiness and his metaphysics that were especially objectionable because they were the foundation for the worst of the Roman theology of works righteousness, freedom of the will, and superficial morality. The canon law of the church was likewise rooted in Aristotelian thought. He comments, “The study of canon law only hinders the study of the Holy Scriptures. Moreover the greater part smacks of nothing but greed and pride” (LW 44, 202). Luther’s ultimate aim for the universities is that they “ought to turn out men who are experts in the Holy Scriptures, men who can become bishops and priests, and stand in the front line against heretics, the devil and all the world” (LW 44, 207).

Proposal 26 deals with the Holy Roman Empire. At least in 1520, Luther believed that the Holy Roman Empire was foretold in Daniel 2:44 and Numbers 24:17–19, 24. Luther’s argument to the German nobility is that it was by the machinations of the Pope that the crown of the real Roman Empire was taken away from the Greeks and given to the Germans. The true Roman empire was destroyed when the Visigoths sacked Rome in A.D. 410 and the Muslim empire arose and conquered the Asian and African territories of the Romans. The Pope “invented a little device to rob this emperor of his empire and his title

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participated in the benefits accruing from the good works of all the members. In the case of most of the brotherhoods the membership enjoyed certain indulgences....”

and to turn it over to the Germans, who at that time were warlike and of good repute” (LW 44, 208). Thus, in Luther’s view, when Charlemagne, a German, was installed as Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III, Leo did so as a stratagem to subdue the Roman Empire and place it under his control. Thus, Luther concludes, “There is now a second Roman Empire built by the pope upon the Germans” (LW 44, 208). Once again, it is not merely a theological problem, but a national one as well. For Luther, the distance between national identity and nationalism is not so terribly great. Luther’s conclusion for the nobility is:

Now may God, who, as we have said, tossed this empire into our lap by the wiles of tyrants and has charged us with its rule, help us to live up to the name, title, and insignia, and to retrieve our liberty. Let the Romanist see once and for all what it is that we have received from God through them! If they boast that they have bestowed an empire on us, let them! If that is true, then let the pope give us back Rome and all that he has gotten from the empire; let him free our land from his intolerable taxing and fleecing; let him give us back our liberty, our rights, our honor, our body and soul; and let the empire be what an empire should be, so that the pope’s words and pretensions might be fulfilled. (LW 44, 210f.)

This proposal is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum* (reduction to the absurd or impossible) argument against the Roman assertion of supremacy over temporal authority voiced in Luther’s “first wall.” The proposal behind Luther’s fanciful historiography is: “Therefore let the German emperor be really and truly emperor” (LW 44, 212). In other words, Luther challenges the young Charles to exercise the authority bestowed upon him as the heir of Charlemagne to right the wrongs done by the papacy to the German nation. And thus, Luther offers an unabashed nationalistic appeal to the nobility to reform the church in Germany.

Proposal 27: “We shall now devote a section to the failings of the temporal estate” (LW 44, 212; as if to say, *Sorry folks, I’ve been so hard on the ecclesiastics, I really should spread the misery around*). In this proposal, Luther has in mind some serious economic issues. In previous proposals, Luther bemoans the outflow of German money to the papal coffers. Here, Luther lists five great ills of the German economy, but suggests that there are many others that need attention, such as the youth.



- 1) Extravagant and costly dress; not only does the importation of silk and other costly items for clothing suck money out of Germany; it also leads to pride, envy, and covetousness.
- 2) Importing of spices, or in general, “spice traffic”; “By the grace of God more things to eat and drink grow in our own land than in any other, and they are just as nourishing and good.” (If you aren’t fond of German cuisine, blame brother Martin!)
- 3) Zynskauf. The Zynskauf was a legal substitute for usury, from which Rome has especially benefitted.<sup>40</sup>
- 4) German gluttony;
- 5) Prostitution.

#### IV. Conclusion

Does *Address to the Christian Nobility* offer a platform for the Reformation? The *Besserung* of the title can be translated as Reformation.

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<sup>40</sup> See LW 45, 235f., Editor’s Introduction to *Trade and Usury*:

The word Zins, which in its modern usage may be translated either as “tax” or as “interest.” . . . In medieval usage, however, and hence also in Luther’s usage, the word had an additional meaning in the area of capitalist economics and financial contracts, a meaning which developed out of, and hence must be understood in terms of, the feudal system of the Middle Ages.

When a feudal landlord turned over a piece of land as a fief in perpetuity, he normally received from the tenant a specified, usually annual, return in the form of livestock or produce from that plot of ground. This return was called *Rente* (rent) and the contract, from the standpoint of the landlord, was called a *Rentenkauf* (the purchase of rent). Begun as early as the twelfth century, this basic transaction was varied in many ways as it became more widespread in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. . . .

At the same time, it became increasingly important to distinguish this type of contract from the interest-bearing loan which was universally and earnestly condemned as usury. With the growth of cities and of commerce, and particularly with the huge impetus given to world trade in the age of discovery, the demand for money to support an expanding economy—not to speak of the very dependence of the church upon the regular receipts accruing to it from its vast income-producing properties—made urgent a theological analysis of such “loans” in terms that would justify their exemption from the ban on usury. This analysis by and large regarded the contract as a sale (*Kauf*) rather than a loan and the *Zins* or *Rente* as a delayed cash payment on a purchase made for credit rather than as an interest payment on a loan. Since the creditor, on this analysis, was actually nothing but a purchaser who bought (with money or property) a fixed and regular income or the right thereto, and the debtor was nothing but a seller who (for money or property) sold such income or right, the contract itself, the *Zynskauf*, was held to be not usurious.

Perhaps. But it did not turn out to be *the* platform. Luther was overly hopeful about the resolve of the nobility, from Emperor Charles on down. Foremost among the few who did have the resolve and the fortitude were the electors of Saxony and a few others. By the time he wrote, Luther had visited Rome and he had been attacked by two of the prize theologians of the Roman church, Sylvester Prierias and John Eck. While Luther professed that he did not really want to debate the issue of papal authority, both Prierias and Eck forced him into it, or perhaps we should say, Luther *let* them force him. If we accept Luther's initial inclinations, he still loved the church and grieved for its corruption, which only a hundred years after the corrupt Avignon papacy remained vivid in the mind of clergy and people, so he was hardly out to destroy it.

Already in 1519 and 1520, it was clear to Luther that the Curia was not going to cure itself, and so the cure was going to have to come from a different direction. Luther was well enough aware of the history of the church to know that there had been proposals even before William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua that the church in some way belonged to the people and not to the priesthood or the Curia, so reformation would have to come from the people. Luther did not invent the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers for this purpose, but he certainly had a clear vision of its applicability to the problem.

Though Luther may have been a little late in coming to the realization that it was the supremacy of the papacy that had to be attacked and dethroned, rather than serious issues like the false ideas of repentance (Indulgences), semi-Pelagianism, and self-righteousness, the chain of events certainly led him inexorably to that conclusion.

While the *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* can hardly be considered a great success, there is something about this writing that demands admiration. Part III is well researched and shows that Luther was familiar enough with Canon law and the inner workings of the Curia that he could not be accused of being an outsider who didn't know what he was talking about. (In fact, Luther has a much better understanding of Canon law than one would expect from a monk or an Old Testament professor.) A search for the Luther of 1520 does not yield an angry monk who had been left behind; Luther was climbing the ladder and might have progressed to some powerful influence in the Augustinian order and even in the Curia had he kept silent.

It cannot be denied that *Address to the Christian Nobility* had an impact on the Reformation, even if not decisive. It was a significant

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unveiling of what the issues were, and of where the Reformation was headed. As such, it is a worthy partner to *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *On the Freedom of the Christian*. LSQ

# The Freedom of a Christian

James Langebartels  
Pastor, St. John's Lutheran Church, Rib Lake, Wisconsin  
Zion Lutheran Church, Ogema, Wisconsin

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I BEGAN THIS PAPER WONDERING WHAT THE GOAL of the paper should be. Should I be motivating you to read Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*? But no, surely everyone here has already read this third of Luther's 1520 treatises. Most read it through carefully in preparation for hearing this paper. Or at least they had it on their list of things to do to read it, right after they finished reading the first two treatises which we considered yesterday. Is it possible that we are as a group not as familiar with Luther's treatise as we would like to be at this point? Is it possible that I would benefit you most if I simply read the treatise to you? But no, that will not do.

If you have not read *The Freedom of a Christian* ever or recently, I do encourage you to read it. It has been published in several different editions, easily available, each with obvious advantages and disadvantages.

- Translated by W. A. Lambert, revised by Harold J. Grimm, LW 31:327–77. This is the first volume of the second half of Luther's Works, published in 1957. The translation of the Latin treatise originally appeared in the Philadelphia Edition, *Works of Martin Luther* (PE 2:312–48). Reprinted as *On Christian Liberty* (Fortress Press, 2003).
- Bertram Lee-Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther I. The Basis of the Protestant Reformation* (Lutterworth Press, 1952;

Cambridge, reprinted 2002); pages 356–79 is his translation of the German treatise (BLW).

- *Luther's Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), part of the series *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, provides the English translation of the German treatise in a new translation by Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (LS).
- *Christian Freedom: Faith Working through Love*, a Reader's Edition (Concordia Publishing House, 2011) provides a new translation of the Latin text by Christopher J. Neuendorf and J. A. O. Preus II, along with many quotations from other of Luther's writings on freedom (RE).
- *The Annotated Luther*, volume 1: *The Roots of Reform*, includes a new translation of the Latin treatise by Timothy J. Wengert (1:467–538). This edition features abundant headings, divisions, and notes (AL).

Perhaps then I should just restate the treatise in my own words, and that will motivate you to go back to Luther and study his words. There is no way that I can outluther Luther, so that you would eagerly return to the master after listening to the student stammer away. Instead, I decided that I would offer a few things to help the comprehension of this treatise. First, it does have a historical background. Second, it does have some order and structure. Third, it does have some application to our lives.

### 1a. Historical Testimony

These three treatises have been given special treatment for a long time by historians. Julius Köstlin (1826–1902) said this:

Now Luther put his hand to those writings which can truly be called the chief writings of his reformation struggle, since they elaborate most extensively on all the defects and needs of the Church, penetrate most sharply into all the bulwarks and foundations of his opponents, and most boldly and powerfully summon Christendom to rise practically and energetically from slavery to treasure its most holy possessions. At the same time he was preparing these writings, the Roman Church completely kicked him out of their fellowship as someone excommunicated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther: Sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Berlin: first edition, 1875; fifth edition with Gustav Kawerau, 1903), 1:303.

Theodor Kolde:

This is perhaps the most beautiful writing Luther wrote, more the result of religious contemplation than of theological work, a writing full of deep, mystical thoughts which again and again transcend the world of mystical ideas with its unique esteem for the Word of God and its constant glance back at the real relationships of life.<sup>2</sup>

Albrecht Ritschl:

The theoretical, and even the practical, attitude of Protestantism would be more friendly if the assemblers of the *Book of Concord* had had the discernment to admit Luther's treatise on Christian liberty (in the Latin text) into the symbolical books of the evangelical church.<sup>3</sup>

James Mackinnon on the second part of the treatise: "In discussing this part of the subject Luther is at his very best as a religious teacher. The discussion is perhaps the finest thing he ever wrote, the gem of Reformation literature."<sup>4</sup> Ernest Schwiebert:

Where the first two tracts had been of a revolutionary nature, the third was calm and conciliatory. As the title indicated, Luther discussed that freedom which comes to the Christian who has been truly justified by faith.... This treatise of Luther's clearly stated his position with reference to the Christian's participation in the community life in which he found himself, and as clearly refuted the claims of those who sought to connect Luther with the indifferentism of modern German Lutheranism.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Fife writes:

*On the Freedom of a Christian* is one of the most original of Luther's works. In vigor of thought and natural eloquence it is

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<sup>2</sup> Theodor Kolde, *Martin Luther: Eine Biographie* (Gotha, 1884), 1:274.

<sup>3</sup> This quote from his *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* is taken from August Baur, *Luthers Schrift von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen nach Entstehung, Inhalt und Bedeutung* (Zürich, 1876), IV.

<sup>4</sup> James Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation* (1925, 1962), 2:267.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his Times: The Reformation From a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 478–80.

among the most remarkable books of that age.... The German text is marked by a warmth and a conviction that has given it a high place among the prose monuments of that language. Twelve reprintings at the Wittenberg and Leipzig presses and elsewhere within a year of its appearance testify to the interest which contemporaries took in the work."<sup>6</sup>

John Dillenberger:

If one were to single out one short document representing the content and spirit of Luther's faith, *The Freedom of a Christian* would undoubtedly be at the top.<sup>7</sup>

Heinrich Boehmer says about the letter dedicating the treatise to Pope Leo X and about the treatise itself:

The letter to Pope Leo ... shows how completely Luther had broken with the old church. He paid due reverence to Leo X, but he declared frankly and candidly, "It is all over with the Roman See; the wrath of God has overtaken it. It is not worthy of the esteem of such as either you or I. Satan ought to be pope, for he certainly reigns in the new Babylon more than do you." ... What he wrote in the first part concerning the power and might of faith is one of the noblest things he ever wrote, even though, properly speaking, he was writing concerning ideas which had long been familiar to him.<sup>8</sup>

Martin Brecht:

The treatise has become one of Luther's most famous writings. With *To the Christian Nobility* and *On the Babylonian Captivity*, it is usually considered one of the three main works from the year 1520. Judging from the treatise's fame, that is certainly justified, although this classification of "main works," which

<sup>6</sup> Robert Herndon Fife, *The Revolt of Martin Luther* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 546.

<sup>7</sup> John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Boehmer, *Road to Reformation: Martin Luther to the Year 1521* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), 259–60. See LW 31:337 for the words he quoted; these words do not conform to the German original (WA 7:6.8–10) or to the Latin original (WA 7:44.30–31), but are Boehmer's very free rendering; see Heinrich Boehmer, *Der junge Luther* (Leipzig, 1939; sixth edition, 1954), 293–94; Lee-Woolf, 339, has basically the same mistranslation.

ignores something like the important *Sermon on Good Works*, is not without its problems.<sup>9</sup>

James Kittelson:

Leo could scarcely have taken much comfort from this [dedicatory] letter, which was quickly forgotten by all sides. What was remembered was the little book to which it was attached, Luther's *On the Freedom of a Christian*. Here he briefly summarized the practical consequences of his theology for the conduct of the Christian life.<sup>10</sup>

Eberhard Jüngel first quotes the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, and then applies those words to *The Freedom of a Christian*:

"The number of books on theology must be reduced and only the best ones published. It is not many books that make men learned, nor even reading. But it is a good book frequently read, no matter how small it is, that makes a man learned in the Scriptures and godly." One cannot read often enough Luther's treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian* ... [which is] justly described as "the most perfect expression" of Luther's "Reformation understanding of the mystery of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

Robert Kolb points out that

Justification, understood as the forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection, was the subject of the treatise entitled *The Freedom of a Christian* in German and *On Christian Freedom* in Latin.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1:406; *Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990); *The Preservation of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993). For the *Sermon on Good Works*, see LW 44:15–114.

<sup>10</sup> James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1986; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>11</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1988), 17–18, 20 (quoting Wilhelm Maurer).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Kolb, "Forgiveness Liberates and Restores: The Freedom of the Christian according to Martin Luther," *Word & World* 27, no. 1 (Winter, 2007): 5.



Timothy Wengert confesses:

I must say that I had not even begun to comprehend what Luther was saying in this piece until I went to translate it on my own [for *The Annotated Luther*].... This tract can lay claim to being one of Luther's most popular theological writings ever.<sup>13</sup>

## 1b. Historical Background

The immediate cause for writing *The Freedom of a Christian* was the third intervention of Charles von Miltitz (ca. 1490–1529), who

came from the lesser Saxon nobility, had studied a little in Cologne and Bologna, but, as his deficient Latin reveals, was not especially learned. He knew how to enjoy the good life. Miltitz had attempted to make a career at the papal court, but he had not been able to advance further than the relatively low position of a privy chamberlain and secretary. Since he had connections through his father with Frederick the Wise, however, he appeared to be suitable as a nuncio in this case. Although Miltitz certainly was not capable of comprehending serious diplomatic affairs, and while he did undertake questionable acts on his own, to portray him as a comic figure in the Luther drama, as is done again and again, is to present only half the truth.<sup>14</sup>

Charles von Miltitz has acquired but one biographer over the years, although many have referred to him.<sup>15</sup> His “clever appearance, liveliness,

<sup>13</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, “Luther’s Freedom of a Christian for Today’s Church,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014): 1.

<sup>14</sup> Brecht, 1:265. Luther, however, referred in a letter in early 1519 to Miltitz’s “Judas’ kiss” (*osculo [Iudae scilicet]*) and “crocodile tears” (*bas crocodile lacrymas*); Brecht 1:269n24, citing WA Br 1:313.16–19; Kolde, 1:187; Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Heinrich August Creutzberg, *Karl von Miltitz (1490–1529): Sein Leben und seine geschichtliche Bedeutung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1907). It is necessary to add here that Paul Kalkoff felt the need to respond to this biography; his *Die Miltitzziade: Eine kritische Nachlese zur Geschichte des Ablassstreites* (Leipzig, 1911) points out the serious flaws in Creutzberg’s biography. First, Creutzberg exaggerated Miltitz’s role in the Luther affair—but then so did Miltitz! Second, Creutzberg made Miltitz the central figure in his biography of Miltitz, and this skewed things! I think of the *rabies theologorum*. Hans-Günter Leder, *Ausgleich mit dem Papst? Luthers Haltung in den Verhandlungen mit Miltitz 1520* (Berlin, 1969), 11 speaks of Kalkoff’s “remarkable sharpness,” his “many distinctly negative judgments,” the “sarcastic and

and untiring willingness to serve, paired with ambition and ability, made it possible for him to ingratiate himself with the highest dignitaries of the church in order to obtain their favor, affection, and trust.”<sup>16</sup> “In recent years, people have more and more gone over to regarding Miltitz’s mission as quite insignificant and representing him as a blockhead and a swindler (*einen Dummkopf und Betrüger*).... Yet it seems to me that people have gone too far in criticizing Miltitz and disparaging his life’s work.”<sup>17</sup> Boehmer calls him an “incorrigibly optimistic diplomat” who built “air castles on paper.”<sup>18</sup>

Miltitz was chosen to take “the prized golden rose, blessed by the pope in person during the Fourth Sunday in Lent and offered only once annually to some Christian king or prince”<sup>19</sup> to Elector Frederick the Wise in order to win his support for the papal candidate in the election of the new emperor and for his agreement to the process against Luther. After seeing the elector at the end of 1518, Miltitz met with Luther at Altenburg on January 4–6, 1519. Luther sent a report of this meeting to the elector, noting his promise to be silent if the other side was silent,

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dogmatical character” of his remarks. Wilhelm Borth, *Die Luthersache: Die Anfänge der Reformation als Frage von Politik und Recht* (Lübeck und Hamburg, 1970) cites over a dozen Kalkoff titles, does not even mention Creutzberg, has nothing on Miltitz’s third visit with Luther, and will not trouble us again. Fife, 307n11 provides a balanced treatment: “These authorities [Creutzberg and Kalkoff] come to widely different conclusions as to [Miltitz’s] personality and the nature of his commissions from the Curia. That he proceeded independently of his instructions there can be no doubt, but it is equally evident that he was something more than a messenger. His efforts to bring Luther to a compromise were, as matters lay, foredoomed to failure; but both Luther and Frederick took Miltitz and his mission seriously, and the letters of Martin as well as those of the Saxon court show that the young nobleman must have had considerable charm of personality and diplomatic tact as well as tenacity. He certainly was not without skill in judging a confused situation, and if his procedure was at times devious and insincere, the same may be said of that of all others concerned in the episode, including Luther’s and Frederick’s, and was quite in accord with the diplomatic practice of all periods. His personal character was that of a scheming and pliant papal courtier of the Medician era.”

<sup>16</sup> Creutzberg, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 30; Kalkoff puts on the cover of his *Miltitziade* Luther’s May 16, 1519 words: *Ridiculum Caroli Miltitii caput*. These words come from the very beginning of Luther’s letter to Spalatin on that date: “Greetings! The ridiculous head of Charles Miltitz” [that is, ridiculous Charles Miltitz] “admits that the command has not come from the city” [of Rome], “but he summons me anyway. He is summoning me, not the archbishop” [of Trier]. “Then I am to come into the presence of the cardinal” [Cajetan]. “Are people mad? I have written to him, but in the meantime counsel me, I beg you” (WA Br 1:394.5–8).

<sup>18</sup> Boehmer, 359.

<sup>19</sup> Schwiebert, 361.

to write something,<sup>20</sup> and to write a letter to the pope.<sup>21</sup> Regarding this letter to the pope, Luther wrote his elector:

I was willing to write to His Papal Holiness and submit myself with greatest humility. I wanted to confess that I had been too passionate and sharp, yet that I did not intend to disparage the holy Roman Church with this tone; I wanted to show the reason why I, a faithful child of the Church, had fought against the blasphemous preaching which has brought the Roman Church great scorn, slander, dishonor, and scandal among people.<sup>22</sup>

This could be a description of the letter Luther wrote to the pope dedicating *The Freedom of a Christian* to him, except that that letter has been read differently; this letter of Luther to the pope appears to be completely straightforward. Luther wrote to the pope:

Hearing this, I was deeply grieved that my most loyal service has had such an unhappy outcome and that what I had undertaken—to guard the honor of the Roman Church—had resulted in disgrace and was suspected of all wickedness, even so far as the head of the Church was concerned. But what am I to do, Most Holy Father? I do not know what to do further: I cannot bear the power of your wrath, and I do not know of any means to escape it. The demand is made that I recant my theses. If such a revocation could accomplish what I was attempting to do with my theses, I would issue it without hesitation. Now, however, through the antagonism and pressure of enemies, my writings are spread farther than I ever had expected and are so deeply rooted in the hearts of so many people that I am not in the position to revoke them. In addition since our Germany prospers wonderfully today with men of talent, learning, and judgment, I realize that I cannot, under any circumstances, recant anything if I want to honor the Roman Church—and this has to be my primary concern. Such a recanting would accomplish nothing but to defile the Roman Church more and more and bring it into the mouths of the people as something that should be accused. See, Father, those whom I have opposed

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<sup>20</sup> *Luthers Unterricht auf etliche Artikel, die ihm von seinen Abgönnern aufgelegt und zugemessen werden* (1519) (WA 2:69–73); *Luther's report on the articles attributed to him by his enemies* (LW 71); this is summarized in Brecht 1:270–71.

<sup>21</sup> LW 48:96–100; the letter to the pope (LW 48:100–2).

<sup>22</sup> LW 48:99.

have inflicted this injury and virtual ignominy on the Roman church among us.<sup>23</sup>

Although a rough draft of Luther's letter to the pope was preserved, it was never sent, since Miltitz sent his own report of the meeting to the pope. "Luther perceived that as a scholar Miltitz was a zero, and later he even called him nothing but a gossip."<sup>24</sup> "Miltitz imagined that he could handle the matter himself (*auf eigene Faust führen zu können*); he hoped in this way to play a role, to obtain fame and honor as an assistant judge in such an important matter, and to return to Rome as a conquering hero."<sup>25</sup> "Luther had seen through the chatty, two-faced, puffed up fellow from the start."<sup>26</sup>

In response to Miltitz's report to the pope, Leo wrote a letter to Luther in which "in gentle tones" he comments on the favorable attitude of Luther from Miltitz's report and is prepared to welcome Luther back into the fold. The letter does not seem to have ever reached Luther, since he never comments on it.<sup>27</sup>

Miltitz made a follow-up attempt to meet with Luther in May, 1519, but that attempt was fruitless. Miltitz was ordered on May 5 finally to take the golden rose of virtue to Elector Frederick, who was still complaining the next month that he had not yet received it; the rose did not reach the elector until September.<sup>28</sup> As had been agreed in Altenburg, Miltitz invited Luther to come to Koblenz where he could meet with the archbishop of Trier and Cajetan, with the help of Miltitz. Luther declined this invitation, in part because it would interfere with his attendance at the Leipzig Debate, at which Luther debated John Eck on July 4–14.

After the Leipzig Debate, Miltitz succeeded in arranging a second meeting with Luther at Liebenwerda on October 9, 1519. Luther saw no danger in this meeting on Saxon territory, although he did call Miltitz a "fox" because of his friendly invitation to this meeting.<sup>29</sup> Luther and

<sup>23</sup> LW 48:101.

<sup>24</sup> Creutzberg, 50; see Luther's October 13, 1519 letter to Spalatin (WA Br 1:528).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–52.

<sup>26</sup> Kalkoff, *Luther und die Entscheidungsjahre der Reformation* (Munich, 1917), 101.

<sup>27</sup> Leo's letter is in WA Br 1:364f.; see Fife, 318 for the details.

<sup>28</sup> "It was the best day in the life of poor Miltitz when he entered Altenburg on September 26 with the golden rose...; he brought his mother there for the occasion," Kalkoff, *Entscheidungsjahre*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Creutzberg, 74; see Luther's October 3, 1519 letter to Staupitz: *datis ad me suavissimis (vulpem intelligo) literis* (WA Br 1:513.12).

Miltitz both wrote reports on this meeting, but the reports disagree. Luther reported briefly to Spalatin:

To begin with, he ordered me to greet our Most Illustrious Sovereign in his name. Secondly, he also ordered me to give his greetings to you, too. Thirdly, he asked whether I would stand by the agreement we had made at Altenburg, to the effect that the Archbishop of Trier should be judge. I said I would. This was the last act of the drama. At the end he said that by this conversation he had fulfilled his apostolic commission and would soon go back to Rome, and that he had not wanted to leave without having directly discussed the case with me.<sup>30</sup>

Miltitz maintained that Luther had agreed to travel with him directly to Koblenz for the meeting before the archbishop of Trier, which did not happen.<sup>31</sup> Luther would not meet with the archbishop of Trier until the Diet of Worms.<sup>32</sup>

Miltitz prefaced his third and final visit with Luther by meeting with John Staupitz and the Augustinians at Eisleben on August 28, 1520. Miltitz persuaded Staupitz to appeal to Luther to write to Leo. In addition, Miltitz involved Frederick the Wise in convincing Luther to meet with Miltitz one more time. That meeting took place at Lichtenberg on October 12, 1520. The result was that Luther again agreed to be silent if his adversaries were silent; Luther would write a friendly letter to the pope as the preface to a brief writing dedicated to the pope. The letter was to be predated September 6, so that it did not appear that this writing was done as a reaction to the papal bull which threatened to excommunicate him, which had arrived in Wittenberg on October 10. This friendly letter and the brief writing dedicated to the pope are *The Freedom of a Christian*.<sup>33</sup>

Before we look at this third meeting between Miltitz and Luther in more detail, we need to be aware of what else was going on. At the same time that Luther was preparing *The Freedom of a Christian*, he was also responding to the papal bull. The papal bull, *Exsurge Domini*, was dated June 15, 1520, proclaimed on July 24, 1520 by being posted in Rome, and then was posted by John Eck in Meissen on September 21,

<sup>30</sup> LW 48:127.

<sup>31</sup> Brecht 1:341–42.

<sup>32</sup> Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 134.

<sup>33</sup> Brecht 1:404–9.

in Merseburg on September 25, and in Brandenburg on September 29. News about the bull spread to Wittenberg, and in the first part of October, Luther published *On Eck's new bull and lies*, in which he claimed that he would not believe that the bull was real until he saw its "lead, wax, ribbons, signature, seal, and everything on the bull."<sup>34</sup> By the end of October, the printing of *Against the Bull of the Antichrist* was finished,<sup>35</sup> thus at the very same time that Luther was writing his letter to the pope and *The Freedom of a Christian! Against the Bull of the Antichrist*

is sharply satirical. Martin's object is to hold the bull up to ridicule and especially to show that its authors have made no attempt to establish the heresy of his ideas.... Martin declares that it is his eager desire never to be absolved or reconciled or to have anything in common "with that most unlearned, impious, and furious Antichrist."<sup>36</sup>

The bull actually arrived in Wittenberg surreptitiously on October 10, accompanied by a letter from Eck apologizing for the way the bull arrived; it was forwarded to Prince John who was in control while his brother, Frederick the Wise, was on other business. On the next day, Luther wrote to Spalatin: "Finally the Roman bull is here, brought by Eck. I despise it and charge it with being godless, lying, and completely Eckish. You can see that Christ Himself is condemned in it.... Already I am much freer because I have finally received the certainty that the pope is the Antichrist and has been publicly exposed as the seat of Satan. May God preserve His own so that they may not be led astray by his most godless pretense of holiness."<sup>37</sup>

Two days after Luther first saw the bull, *Exsurge Domini*, he met with Miltitz and agreed to write a friendly letter to the pope as a preface to a brief writing dedicated to the pope.<sup>38</sup> Although Luther's letter was to be dated September 6, well before the bull had actually arrived in

<sup>34</sup> Brecht 1:402; *Von den neuen Eckischen Bullen und Lügen* (WA 6:159–94); *On Eck's new bull and lies* (LW 71).

<sup>35</sup> WA 6:614–29 (LW 71).

<sup>36</sup> Fife, 553.

<sup>37</sup> Brecht 1:404; *Venit tandem Bulla ista Romana per Eccium allata* (WA Br 2:195); Bernd Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2017), 175.

<sup>38</sup> Leder, 9, calls this meeting nothing but an intermezzo, not connected to reality. "Actually, the significance of these negotiations staged by Miltitz on his own initiative regarding the possibility of a peaceful agreement between Luther and the pope was nothing more than an incident on the fringes of Reformation history."

Wittenberg, there could be no doubt that the bull would put a damper on Luther's relationship to the pope. In this context, the irenic tone of Luther's letter to the pope and of his brief writing, *The Freedom of a Christian*, is truly amazing.

Miltitz's goal with this final meeting with Luther was to make the pope's bull null and void by accomplishing all that was desired with Luther. He had failed to accomplish these things in the past, but he was still under the delusion that he was a great negotiator. Since the bull did not go into effect until sixty days after it reached Luther, he thought he still had time to patch things up. However, Miltitz feared for his own safety if he were to travel to Wittenberg, and so he invited Luther to name another place where they might meet.<sup>39</sup>

The meeting was held in Lichtenburg, less than twenty miles southeast of Wittenberg. Lichtenburg is perhaps more famous for the Nazi concentration camp established at Lichtenburg Castle. Luther and Melancthon, accompanied by a few others, arrived there late in the afternoon on October 11, and Miltitz arrived shortly thereafter. Their meeting took place the next morning. Luther left Lichtenburg in the early afternoon, but before he left he had time to write a letter to Spalatin (which indicates how short the conference with Miltitz was). Luther wrote:

Greetings. My Spalatin, Sir Charles Miltitz and I have met at Lichtenberg. We agreed—and as I understand from him, this has great possibilities—that I should publish a letter in German and in Latin, addressed to the pope, as a preface to some brief writing. In this letter I am to relate my whole story and show that I never wanted to attack the pope personally, and throw the whole blame on Eck.

As all this is true, I can easily do it, and I will offer, as humbly as I can, to keep silent, provided that others keep silent too, so that I may not seem to omit anything in my power to make peace. This is my desire, and, as you know, I have always been ready to do it. I shall prepare this, therefore, at the earliest possible moment. If it turns out the way we hope, it is well; if it turns out differently, it will also be well, because this is then the will of the Lord.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Creutzberg, 94.

<sup>40</sup> LW 48:180–81.

So Miltitz persuaded Luther to go along with the popular fiction that it was all Eck's fault, not the pope's fault. To make this extra clear, Luther's letter to the pope was to be antedated, to make it appear that he was writing before he saw the papal bull. One wonders if anyone then was deceived by this ruse!<sup>41</sup> Miltitz, however, was convinced of his own tremendous success, and boasted to Elector Frederick, among others, about what he had accomplished. He praised Luther's willingness to submit completely to His Holiness, the pope. He was convinced that Eck was totally vanquished.

Was it really all Eck's fault? John Eck (1486–1543) certainly bears much blame for the whole situation. Although professor of theology at Ingolstadt from 1510 on, he lived to debate. He once debated all day about unbaptized children.<sup>42</sup>

What tournaments are to a knight, the disputation is to a scholar. Theologians sought to shine especially in such dialectical duels, and often traveled far to gain fame and honor. Eck regarded it as the greatest honor to be the master and victor on this battlefield, and overlooked no opportunity to shine in this way.<sup>43</sup>

Miltitz was that florid sixteenth-century type, an Italianate German with enormous self-confidence, always planning diplomatic gestures on the grand scale which deceived nobody more than himself, a kind of ecclesiastical Von Ribbentrop. Eck was a theologian with a prodigious memory, steeped in scholasticism, skilled in disputations (people did not forget his energetic *Distinguo*). He was also vain, loud-mouthed, violent, a heavy drinker, who according to an unamiable account looked like a butcher—for all the world like the caricature of Luther imagined by some people. Between them their intrigues add a streak of fantasy to the papal strategy in these months: on the one hand, the “Walrus and the Carpenter” tactic of Miltitz (“‘I weep for you,’ the Walrus said, ‘I deeply sympathize’”); and on the

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<sup>41</sup> The introduction to Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2003), ix was deceived.

<sup>42</sup> Theodor Wiedemann, *Dr. Johann Eck, Professur der Theologie an der Universität Ingolstadt* (Regensburg, 1865), 29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Erasmus nicknamed him the “militant theologian” (*theologum militarem*, 329).



other, the summary “Off with his head!” of Eck, as the Queen in *Alice*.<sup>44</sup>

After Luther’s Ninety-five Theses, Eck wrote a tract against Luther early in 1518 called *Obelisks* (†, “In the Middle Ages they were used for marking false and heretical statements”), to which Luther responded in March, 1518 with his *Asterisks* (\*, “the critical signs that marked the most valuable texts”<sup>45</sup>). Karlstadt also attacked Eck, and a debate was arranged for Leipzig in 1519. After Eck and Karlstadt first debated, then Eck and Luther debated on July 4–14. What is called *The Leipzig Debate* in LW 31 and printed just before *The Freedom of a Christian* is actually Luther’s statement of his thirteen theses for the debate (*Disputation and Defense of Brother Martin Luther against the Accusations of Dr. Johann Eck*, LW 31:313–18) and Luther’s letter to Spalatin written a week after the debate ended (LW 31:318–25).

In early 1520, Eck was mocked in the satire *Eccius Dedolatus* (Eck soundly cudged).<sup>46</sup> He traveled to Rome and, in the view of some,<sup>47</sup> misled the pope into an overly hasty bull against Luther. Eck was not only appointed to take the bull threatening to condemn Luther to Germany, but was also given some freedom about determining its contents. The pope gave Eck full authority to add up to twenty-four names of those to be condemned with Luther! Eck freely took revenge on some of his personal enemies, but was satisfied with adding only six names: Karlstadt, Egranus, Johann Dolz from Feldkirch, Bernard Adelman, Pirkheimer, and Spengler.<sup>48</sup> Spengler wrote to Pirkheimer about Eck that he wished people would drown the idiot!<sup>49</sup>

This, then, is the immediate background for Luther’s writing of *The Freedom of the Christian*. The dedicatory letter and the treatise itself are divided up in this way:

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms* (London, 1951; Harper, 1964), 64. Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946) was the Nazi foreign minister who negotiated the non-aggression treaty with Russia; he was the first to be executed after the trial at Nuremberg. For the Queen, see *Alice in Wonderland*, chapter 8; for the Walrus and the Carpenter, see *Through the Looking-Glass*, chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> Brecht 1:211.

<sup>46</sup> Or, *The Purified Eck*, Fife, 389; Kolde, 1:235; or, *The Planed Eck*, Roper, 140n45.

<sup>47</sup> Wiedemann, 152.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

Latin	German
Dedicatory letter to the pope, WA 7:43–49; LW 31:334–431 AL 1:474–87; RE 27–39	Dedicatory letter to the pope, WA 7:3–11; BLW 336–47
	Letter of dedication to Mayor Mühlphordt, WA 7:20; LW 31:333; LS 70; BLW 356
<i>De Libertate Christiana</i> WA 7:49–69; LW 31:343–71; AL 1:487–531; RE 47–78	<i>Von der Freyheytt eynesz Christen menschen</i> , WA 7:20–38; LS 70–90; BLW 357–79
Against the Freedom of the Flesh, WA 7:69–73; LW 31:371–77; AL 1:531–38; RE 78–86	

## 2a. Structure of the Letter

It is suggested that Luther wrote this originally in Latin and then translated it into German. It is also suggested that Luther wrote this first in German and then translated it into Latin. Sometimes assertions replace suggestions. No evidence remains of which version came first, the German or the Latin, except for the texts themselves. These texts have been studied in great detail in an attempt to answer this question. “The German version appears fresher and more spontaneous and was probably written first.”<sup>50</sup> “Apparently both were prepared first in Latin and then in German.”<sup>51</sup> Birgit Stolt wrote a thorough monograph on Luther’s letter to Pope Leo and his treatise, comparing the Latin and German versions often phrase by phrase; she reached the firm conclusion that the Latin came first.<sup>52</sup> Wilhelm Maurer, doing a similar comparison, reached the opposite conclusion.<sup>53</sup> It might be helpful to note that *Against the Bull of the Antichrist*, prepared at this same time,

<sup>50</sup> Brecht 1:405; Roper, 166, says that it was “written in German,” and completely ignores the Latin.

<sup>51</sup> Fife, 544.

<sup>52</sup> Birgit Stolt, *Studien zu Luthers Freiheitstraktat, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Verhältnis der lateinischen und der deutschen Fassung zu einander und die Stilmittel der Rhetorik* (Stockholm, 1969); 12–90 cover the letter, 91–117 the treatise. See also L. E. Schmitt, 5: “The German treatise was more effective than the Latin original.”

<sup>53</sup> Wilhelm Maurer, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen: Zwei Untersuchungen zu Luthers Reformationsschriften 1520–21* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 66–73. See also Reinhold Rieger, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen; De libertate christiana* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 5–12 for a comparison of the two views.

also appeared in both Latin and German versions at the same time, which were very different from each other.<sup>54</sup>

Here is the explanation of why there is a second dedication to Mayor Mühlphordt. The printer Johann Grüenberg acquired Luther's German dedication to Pope Leo and, "knowing a bestseller when he saw one,"<sup>55</sup> printed it alone. Then, when it was time to publish the German treatise, rather than republishing the dedicatory letter to the pope, Luther was asked to write a second dedication, which he did to Hermann Mühlphort (ca. 1486–1534), mayor of Zwickau. It is suggested that Luther chose to dedicate the treatise the second time to him to support him in dealing with a church controversy in Zwickau. The pastor of St. Mary's, Johann Sylvius Egranus († 1535), had sided with the "Martinians" against the Franciscans; Egranus, however, leaned more toward Erasmus than toward Luther. Egranus had been a friend of Luther and had accompanied him to the Leipzig debate, but was soon to turn away from Luther.

Johann Sylvius or Wildenauer, named Egranus from his hometown of Eger, was an especially good friend of Luther. In 1518 he was a preacher in Zwickau, and accompanied his friend to the Leipzig debate. Eck wrote to George Hauer and Franz Burkhard that "the insolent Egranus" accompanied Luther. It is certain that he applied to Eck for absolution, for on November 4, 1520 Luther wrote to Spalatin:

Our Adrian has told me that Egranus has become my enemy, claiming that I taught that good works have no value but only faith. He can scarcely restrain himself from publicly railing against me. He has finally insulted me outrageously, the miserable guy who knows so little theology. He is worthless and can quickly be dismissed from consideration. He has gone to Leipzig, probably to join up with Eck.<sup>56</sup>

When Egranus took a leave of absence from May to October, 1520, to pursue humanistic studies in Nuremberg, Thomas Münzer (1488?–1525) was called to fill in for him. Münzer took a firmer position against the Franciscans, and was regarded as closer to Luther's position. When

<sup>54</sup> Fife, 555–56.

<sup>55</sup> AL 1:468.

<sup>56</sup> Wiedemann, 176–77; Eck's July 1, 1519 letter to two law professors at Ingolstadt (W<sup>1</sup> 15:1457: *der freche Egraner*; StL 15:1228: *der Lehrer der Frechheit Egranus*); Luther's November 4, 1520 letter to Spalatin (WA Br 2:210).

Egranus returned on October 1, conflict broke out between them. Egranus left to become pastor in Joachimstal, and Münzer eventually found his way to Muehlhausen.<sup>57</sup> Luther could have chosen to dedicate the treatise to Mühlphort for two reasons: (1) to support his authority as mayor in dealing with the conflict in Zwickau, and (2) to provide evangelical substance to the dispute with the Franciscans.

Luther's dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X has been read from different perspectives. Some see it as a friendly letter from a submissive monk which intends to speak well of the pope and patch up any differences. For example, Timothy Wengert writes:

The Renaissance context of this letter ... helps explain the tone of the piece—what to modern ears might appear stilted and even obsequious at times. *Not* to have addressed the pontiff with such respect would itself have been considered a shocking breach of etiquette and further proof of Luther's contempt for all authority in the church and government. To read this letter as if Luther were hiding his true feelings or even being deceitful imposes modern sensibilities on a very different age and with its very different expectations.<sup>58</sup>

These words led me to wonder to whom he was responding and to seek out others who read Luther's letter to Pope Leo X as I did. My reaction to many of the things I read in the letter was similar to what the great theologian Archie Bunker said, "You know, a guy could take that two ways." Some greybeards may remember that Michael Stivik replied, "Knowing Lionel, I'm sure he only meant it one way." I think that Luther's words in his letter to Leo can be taken in two ways. But I suspect that Luther only meant them in one way. Perhaps I am misleading myself in this. I'm sure the lawyer did not mean his ad on Milwaukee television the same way I heard it: "We'll work hard to get the money you deserve!"

I did find that I am not alone in reading between the lines of Luther's dedicatory letter. For example, Bernd Hamm writes:

But amid this (in his view) diabolical escalation [the publication of the bull *Exsurge Domini*], how could Luther strike the promised conciliatory tones by combining the tract on freedom

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<sup>57</sup> Brecht 1:407; see especially Eric W. Gritsch, *Reformer Without a Church: The Life and Thought of Thomas Muentzer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 23–34.

<sup>58</sup> AL 1:469–70.

with a letter to Leo X? In fact, his letter does reveal this aim, which has constantly caused confusion in research on Luther. The dedication letter has been viewed as a dubious document full of contradictions, oscillating between harshest tones of uncompromising criticism of the pope and a humble obsequiousness..., which Luther could not really have meant seriously. However, a careful analysis of the letter—taking into account its connection with the tract on freedom—does indeed reveal that it is quite theologically coherent in its construction and formulation.<sup>59</sup>

When Hamm says, “The dedication letter has been viewed as a dubious document full of contradictions,” he is referring specifically to a statement made by Erwin Iserloh in the *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, published in ten volumes by H. Jedin:

The letter Luther sent to Leo X is a questionable document, insofar as Luther calls the pope, whom he otherwise had already called the Antichrist, the “Most Holy Father” or “pious Leo.” Luther wants to be regarded as never having undertaken anything evil against the pope, and to be so disposed toward him that he wishes him the very best. At the same time, however, Luther gushes forth with wild outbursts against the Roman Curia.<sup>60</sup>

Scott Hendrix puts it this way:

Luther could hardly have expressed himself more pointedly to Leo if he had called him the Antichrist outright without the use of irony.<sup>61</sup> Whether Miltitz was able to arouse in Luther

<sup>59</sup> Bernd Hamm, 178.

<sup>60</sup> Jedin, *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (Freiburg, 1962–79), 4:75; Iserloh is perhaps best known for his 1966 (English in 1968) book *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther Between Reform and Reformation*. Bernd Hamm points to these words as they are quoted in *Martin Luther: Studienausgabe*, published by Hans-Ulrich Delius (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982), 2:260–61, where I also found them.

<sup>61</sup> Luther had identified the pope as the Antichrist already in August in the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, where he wrote: “Hear this, O pope, not of all men the holiest but of all men the most sinful! O that God from heaven would soon destroy your throne and sink it in the abyss of hell!” (LW 44:193), and in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, where he wrote: “The papacy is truly the kingdom of Babylon and of the very Antichrist” (LW 36:72); he had written to Spalatin on February 24, 1520: “I have hardly any doubt left that the pope is that very Antichrist himself which the common report

even the slightest hope for a change of heart in Leo is impossible to determine. From the letter itself there is little reason to assume that Luther truly expected Leo to change his mind. Why, then, did he write the letter?

External factors were more important than internal ones. Luther's awareness that the elector wanted him to meet with Miltitz and the public character of an open letter suggest that it was primarily a political document. It is the final public statement of his case directed to the pope....

Given the public, political character of the letter, is a charge of duplicity or dishonesty justified by this appeal of Luther to the person of Leo over the papal see? The distinction which Luther makes between the person of Leo and the office of the papacy is indeed an artificial one when viewed from the angle of the papacy or even from the facts of Luther's case.<sup>62</sup>

Bertram Lee-Woolf is obviously wrestling with this question:

The instructed reader can scarcely avoid being confused, or even offended, by his first glance through the open letter: Luther's personal attitude to the pope may appear self-contradictory, perhaps insolent; and his discussion of public affairs immoderate as well as largely irrelevant. But account must be taken of the critical pass to which matters had come, and of the promise which Luther had given to Miltitz. These circumstances meant that Luther felt compelled to write, and also to keep in mind the general terms of his last conversation with Miltitz. Approached from this angle, the letter becomes clear, self-consistent, timely, and of great importance in the reforming movement now getting under way. In his own mind, Luther tries to make a distinction between Leo X, on the one hand, and the papacy in its evil repute on the other. Taken in the strictest sense, this distinction is maintained, but it is doubtful if this is what was popularly understood; for the indictment of the papacy is so severe and so well merited that it is difficult to escape the impression that Luther regarded Leo to some extent as a consenting party, and that, by implication at least, Luther

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expects, so well do all the things he lives, does, speaks, ordains, fit the picture" (WA Br 2:48, quoted in Rupp, 81).

<sup>62</sup> Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 114–15.

depicts him as such. Still, in passages where Leo is directly addressed, Luther's tone is sufficiently respectful.<sup>63</sup>

More simply, Hendrix later wrote, "The letter was a mixture of fact and fantasy."<sup>64</sup> Bernhard Lohse:

It is not possible to assume a contradiction between Luther's usual criticism of the papacy and the many seemingly reverent expressions of Luther's dedicatory letter. The accusation that Luther here was simply acting for political effect is also hardly right. It is clear, however, that the question of the papacy was still not a closed question as far as Luther was concerned. And it was his intention not to do something that would frustrate the possible success of Miltitz's efforts before they had even begun. Luther's attempts to resolve the dispute between himself and the papacy became meaningless only after he was finally excommunicated.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps I should confess that I am somewhat predisposed to read Luther's letter in this way. I have in the past felt guilty because I found greater joy in reading Luther's polemical writings than in reading his calmer writings. I felt that I should want to read his works of edification, such as his commentaries on books of the Bible, and I do enjoy Genesis. But I had found a much greater interest within myself in Luther's polemics, such as what I regard as his perfectly delightful exchanges with Goat Emser.<sup>66</sup> A friend directed me to an article C.F.W. Walther wrote for *Lehre und Wehre* on "The Fruitful Reading of Luther's Writings," which contained the significant Thesis VII:

The best way to be stimulated to read the writings of Luther and to get a genuine appreciation and insight into these incomparable writings is to begin by reading the polemical writings. Above all, begin with these writings: *That These Words of Christ, "This is My Body," Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics* [1527, LW 37:3–150]; *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528) [LW 37:151–372]; as far as the papacy is concerned: *On the*

<sup>63</sup> Bertram Lee-Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, 334.

<sup>64</sup> Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 97.

<sup>65</sup> Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>66</sup> Four of them are found in LW 39:105–238.

*Papacy in Rome* (1520) [LW 39:49–104], and *Against Hanswurst* (1541) [LW 41:179–256].

This list is based on my own experience. The polemical writings of Luther are now very much despised, but they are the noblest things that have been written by human hands. Here we find the scriptural truths proven with certainty; here we see Luther's heroic faith and his spiritual joy. Everything supports that. Luther speaks so roughly because he is doing battle either with the Antichrist or with the miserable fanatics. Not every sickness can be cured with buttermilk and honey; there must also be bitter medicine. Luther had before him a thousand-year-old oak tree of enormous size; he could not cut it down with a pen-knife, but had to use mighty axes and sharp saws. But at the same time his heart was on the point of melting with distress for the poor souls who sat in darkness. Whoever takes offense at his ardent zeal, takes offense at God, who chose such a tool.<sup>67</sup>

Luther says in his dedicatory letter that he never intended to attack the person of the pope. What, after all, did he know about the person of the pope? Giovanni de Medici, the second son of Lorenzo, was seven years older than Luther, and had been thirty-seven years old when he became pope in 1513; he would die the next year in 1521 at age forty-five. Did Luther know that Leo had given a safe conduct in 1517 to Alfonso Petrucci, who was involved in a plot to assassinate the pope by poisoning him, and given assurances that Petrucci's life would be spared? As soon as Petrucci reached Rome, "he was thrown into prison and condemned to death." Did he know about Leo's devotion to art and literature?<sup>68</sup> Luther wrote:

We now have a very good pope, Leo X, whose integrity and learning are a delight to all upright persons. But what can this man who is so worthy of our respect do amidst such confusing circumstances? He is worthy of having become pope in better times, or of having better times during his pontificate.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> WLQ 113:110–11.

<sup>68</sup> Although scriptural citations and allusions abound in Luther's letter, he does refer to Virgil's *Georgics* and to Terence's *Eunuch*, and alludes to Cicero's *On Friendship*.

<sup>69</sup> *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* (1518) (LW 31:155).



Did he know that many regarded Leo to be a pagan? Did he know Leo's most famous saying: "Since God has given us the Papacy, let us enjoy it"?<sup>70</sup> Leo died on December 1, 1521, after catching cold at his hunting lodge La Magliana where he frequently spent time since it was only five miles from Rome.<sup>71</sup>

Is it possible that Luther distinguished between the person of the pope, Giovanni de Medici, and the office held by the pope? Some might say that it is a distinction without a difference to try to distinguish between the person of the pope and the Roman Curia, which the pope headed. Luther seems to have said as much in June, 1520, when he wrote: "Some people have invented the fiction that in the pope person and office are two different things."<sup>72</sup> Is it possible that Luther never attacked the person of the pope, which he knew only by reports from others, but did attack the papacy as such? This is the way I read Luther's letter of dedication, "his last words in this business."<sup>73</sup>

Luther begins by wishing Leo "salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord," since Leo was without salvation otherwise. His first sentence is: "Living among the monsters of this age with whom I am now for the third year waging war, I am compelled occasionally to look up to you, Leo, most blessed father, and to think of you." Surely it was entirely a coincidence that Luther mentioned "monsters" and Leo in the same sentence; surely Luther wishes to distinguish Leo from the monsters and not to identify him with the monsters! "I have truly despised your see, the Roman Curia,<sup>74</sup> which, however, neither you nor anyone else can deny is more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom ever was, and which, as far as I can see, is characterized by a completely depraved, hopeless, and notorious

<sup>70</sup> Hendrix, *Visionary Reformer*, 67.

<sup>71</sup> G. F. Young, *The Medici* (New York: The Modern Library, 1933), 295–312. Some have suggested that Leo was poisoned in 1521 just as had been attempted in the summer of 1517; see Luther's reference to poisoning (LW 31:336) and Lee-Woolf, 339n4.

<sup>72</sup> *On the Papacy in Rome* (1520) (LW 39:89); not to be confused with *Against the Roman Papacy, An Institution of the Devil* (1545) (LW 41:257–376).

<sup>73</sup> Leder, 44. Jerome ("the goat") Emser accused Luther of just this in December, 1520 in his *Wider das unchristliche Buch Martini Luthers Augustiners, an den deutschen Adel ausgangen*: "When Luther makes the excuse that he has not intended to attack this pope Leo's person, this is an obvious lie.... He is a windmill which blows warm and cold out of the same mouth." See Ludwig Enders, *Luther und Emser: Ihre Streitschriften aus dem Jahre 1521* (Halle, 1890), 1:53–54. Luther had written to Spalatin a month earlier about his intentions in writing this letter: "I will write that I never intended to attack the person of the pope. What can I write more easily and more truthfully than that?... But it will be sprinkled with salt" (WA Br 2:184.12–15).

<sup>74</sup> That is, "The papal court, consisting of cardinals, bishops, and other clerical functionaries" (AL 1:477).

godlessness.” This, of course, does not apply to Leo, who is in charge of all this corruption!

Now you see, my Father Leo, how and why I have so violently attacked that pestilential see. So far have I been from raving against your person that I even hoped I might gain your favor and save you if I should make a strong and stinging assault upon that prison, that veritable hell of yours. For you and your salvation and the salvation of many others with you will be served by everything that men of ability can do against the confusion of this wicked Curia. They serve your office who do every harm to the Curia; they glorify Christ who in every way curse it. In short, they are Christians who are not Romans.<sup>75</sup>

It is clear that Luther is not attacking Leo’s person, but only the office of the papacy in these words, as he tells Leo not to do what the popes have commanded be done:

In short, believe none who exalt you, believe those who humble you. This is the judgment of God, that “... he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree” [Luke 1:52]. See how different Christ is from his successors, although they all would wish to be his vicars. I fear that most of them have been too literally his vicars. A man is a vicar only when his superior is absent. If the pope rules, while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a vicar of Christ? What is the church under such a vicar but a mass of people without Christ? Indeed, what is such a vicar but an antichrist and an idol? How much more properly did the apostles call themselves servants of the present Christ and not vicars of an absent Christ?<sup>76</sup>

Luther concludes: “I am a poor man and have no other gift to offer, and you do not need to be enriched by any but a spiritual gift!” Leo, of course, had access to the family money, but he was totally lacking in spiritual gifts!<sup>77</sup> Leder observes:

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<sup>75</sup> LW 31:338.

<sup>76</sup> LW 31:342.

<sup>77</sup> Luther’s thesis 86: “Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?” LW 31:33.

We can imagine the disappointment of the ex-nuntius [Miltitz] as he held Luther's letter to Pope Leo in his hands and had to realize that although Luther had held exactly to the stipulations they had drawn up, there was nevertheless not a trace of humble submission to the pope!

Luther's actions in Lichtenburg thus sprang from the first certainty of having the truth of the divine Word on his side. This certainty is not only the real background of his decision in Lichtenburg, but at the same time also the true "secret" of his letter to Pope Leo.<sup>78</sup>

The following outline has been identified for the dedicatory letter:

- I. Introduction (LW 31:334)
- II. Luther's defense against the charge that he had attacked the person of the pope (LW 31:334–38)
  - a. Luther answers three questions in his defense
    - i. Whether he committed the offense
    - ii. What Luther actually did and whether this was proper
    - iii. Summary conclusion
  - b. Proof that Luther acted properly
    - i. The corruption of the Roman Curia
    - ii. Luther's compassion for the pope
    - iii. What the pope should do
    - iv. Recapitulation of part one
- III. A narrative of Luther's case (LW 31:338–41)
  - a. The real cause of the dispute
    - i. John Eck at the Leipzig Debate (July, 1519)
  - b. The progression of the case
    - i. Cajetan at Augsburg (October, 1518)
    - ii. The first meeting with Miltitz (January, 1519)
    - iii. The Leipzig Debate (July, 1519)
    - iv. The third meeting with Miltitz (October, 1520)
  - c. A closing plea for mercy
- IV. Advice for Pope Leo (LW 31:341–43)
- V. Introduction to the treatise (LW 31:343)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Leder, 50–51.

<sup>79</sup> Most of this outline comes from AL 1:474–87, which also gives credit to Birgit Stolt.

## 2b. Structure of the Treatise

In October, 1519, after the Leipzig Debate, Elector Frederick sent a request through George Spalatin that Luther would turn from “sharp and violent polemics” to more “peaceful studies.”<sup>80</sup> This led Luther to begin working on what eventually was called the Church Postils. It also explains his statements to the pope: “I turned to the quiet and peaceful study of the Holy Scriptures so that I might be helpful to my brothers around me,” “I have always both offered and desired peace so that I might devote myself to quieter and more useful studies,” and, “From this book you may judge with what studies I should prefer to be more profitably occupied, as I could be, provided your godless flatterers would permit me and had permitted me in the past.”<sup>81</sup>

The number of books written about *The Freedom of a Christian* is astounding. For example, Reinhold Rieger was cited earlier; after an introduction, his book is primarily a word for word commentary on the treatise; he devotes eleven pages to the first paragraph!<sup>82</sup> If you would like to compare the Latin and German versions of the treatise, you can find that available.<sup>83</sup> Schmitt also compares the Latin and German versions of Luther’s letter to Leo.<sup>84</sup> The *Reader’s Edition on Christian Freedom* cautions:

In subsequent generations, Puritans and Rationalists have appealed to Luther’s treatise to support their own ideals. Marxists and Liberationists have complained that Luther’s teachings about Christian freedom held Germany back from genuine social progress. People hear “freedom” and conclude, “Anything goes!” These interpretations require readers today to exercise greater caution as they study this most widely read tract from Luther, which has also been most widely misunderstood.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “*Bissigen und stürmischen Streitschriften*” to “*friedlichen Studien*” (WA 7:458); Brecht 1:386; Fife, 437.

<sup>81</sup> LW 31:338, 341, 343.

<sup>82</sup> Reinhold Rieger, *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen; De libertate christiana* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 39–49 on the first paragraph in Latin or German, the first two paragraphs in English (LW 31:343–44).

<sup>83</sup> Hans-Ulrich Delius, *Martin Luther: Studienausgabe* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982), 260–309.

<sup>84</sup> L. E. Schmitt, *Martin Luther: Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (Tübingen, 1954).

<sup>85</sup> *Christian Freedom: Faith Working through Love*, a Reader’s Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 17. Jürgen Moltmann, “Sun of righteousness, arise!:. Die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen—damals und heute: für Täter und Opfer

Bernd Hamm stresses the connection between the letter to Leo and the treatise:

The compositional interrelatedness of the letter and the tract reveals not only that the tract proves to be a key to understanding the letter but also, conversely, that the letter is a key to understanding the tract. Ignoring the letter and the conflicts of 1520, one can certainly read the tract entirely correctly as a tract on justification and salvation that deals with existential, Christian, and biblical fundamentals. As we know, this is the particular preference of systematic theologians. But if we carry out Luther's movement from dedication letter to doctrinal tract, then the tract on freedom can be seen through its context as an ecclesiastical manifesto against the power of the Roman papacy and against every form of bureaucratic lordship.<sup>86</sup>

After writing about captivity, Luther now writes about liberty.<sup>87</sup> He had used the name Eleutherius for a short time, from November 11, 1517 through January 24, 1519. Actually, it was at this same time that Luther was changing his signature from Luder to Luther. It is possible that Luther was playing with the humanistic practice of choosing a learned name. Youthful Philip Melanchthon, who would arrive in Wittenberg as professor of Greek the following August, had followed that practice, and changed his birth name of Schwarzerd to Melanchthon. Luther's good friend George Burckhardt had changed his name to one that reflected his hometown of Spalt: Spalatin. In the first recorded usage of this new name, Luther wrote: "Friar Martin Eleutherius, or rather a slave and very much a captive," which might be paraphrased: "Brother Martin, [freed by God and therefore] free, but still all too much a slave and prisoner [of sin]."<sup>88</sup> Moeller and Stackmann suggest that Luther

der Sünde," *Communio Viatorum* 54, no. 2 (2012): 140, summarizes the treatise in easy German, and, since Luther did not include liberation theology in his treatise, adds a third proposition of his own creation: "A Christian will inherit the future life, in which there are no longer any masters or servants."

<sup>86</sup> Bernd Hamm, 183.

<sup>87</sup> Rieger, *op. cit.*, 35 makes this contrast, as does Maurer, 28, 30. Later, Luther would again write about captivity in *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) (LW 33:3–295); see Hans Joachim Iwand, "The Freedom of the Christian and The Bondage of the Will," *Logia* 17, no. 2 (2008): 7–15; we are not free to choose whether we act for or against God, but are set free by Christ from any need to earn God's favor so that we can be bound by His love for us to serve others.

<sup>88</sup> LW 48:55n12; the Latin original is: *P. Martinus Eleutherius, imo dulos et captivus nimis* (WA Br 1:122); Bernd Moeller and Karl Stackmann, *Luder—Luther—Eleutherius:*

abandoned the name Eleutherius because it was too “one-dimensional”: “*The Freedom of a Christian* could not have been written by an author with the name Eleutherius.”<sup>89</sup>

Luther begins his treatise by talking about the meaning of the word “faith,” which many misunderstand to mean the virtue of faithfulness. No, faith is trust in God’s promises, and so faith is increased through tribulation; since Luther has endured [more than] his share of temptations, he has “attained to a little faith,” that is, to “a drop of faith.”<sup>90</sup> Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed makes the point that the size of our faith makes no difference, but the size of the One in whom we have faith does. People do say that seeing is believing, and a more wrong statement cannot be made than that. Tribulations take away the seeing so that we must believe what God has told us, since we no longer see that it is true.

The two propositions Luther treats in the treatise of *The Freedom of a Christian* are these:

English: LW 31:344	Latin: StA 2:264	German: StA 2:265
A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.	<i>Christianus homo, omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subjectus.</i>	<i>Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn freyer herr uber alle ding vnd niemandt unterthan.</i>
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.	<i>Christianus homo, omnium servus est officiosissimus omnibus subjectus.</i>	<i>Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn dienstpar knecht aller ding vnd yderman vnterthan.</i>

Luther immediately points out that he has taken both of these statements directly from St. Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians: Ἐλευθερος γάρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἐμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα, “Being free from all, to all I enslaved myself” (1 Cor. 9:19), and to the Romans: Μηδενι μηδὲν ὀφείλετε, εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). The same thing is true of Jesus, as Paul wrote to the Philippians, for Jesus ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, but then μορφήν δούλου λαβὼν, “being in the form of God, He took on the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6–7).

*Erwägungen zu Luthers Namen* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 32; Bernd Hamm, 167n36, 177n17; Kolde, 1:146.

<sup>89</sup> Moeller and Stackmann, 36; perhaps they mean that he could not have written the very two-dimensional statement: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (LW 31:344).

<sup>90</sup> LW 31:344; AL 1:488 has “a drop of faith”; Luther wrote *guttam fidei*.

This can also and will also be referred to as the two parts of a human being: the bodily nature and the spiritual nature, that is, the spiritual, inner, new creature, and the fleshly, outer, old creature. These two parts are called the “spirit” and the “flesh” (Gal. 5:17), and the “inner nature” and “outer nature” (2 Cor. 4:16). The source of this contrast is located in Luther’s second Psalms commentary done earlier in 1520; there Luther wrote: “Therefore, see that everything is free for us through faith, and nevertheless everything is bound for us through love, so that at the same time we are in servitude to freedom and in freedom to servitude, because we are to owe nothing to anyone except to love one another.”<sup>91</sup> Luther had made similar statements in his 1519 commentary on Galatians.<sup>92</sup>

Let’s outline now where the treatise is going before we look at some parts in more detail.

What follows is not intended to be a “Reader’s Digest” edition of Luther’s treatise. Rather, if you have read Luther’s treatise, let these words remind you of its contents. If you have not read Luther’s treatise, let these words stimulate your appetite to read Luther’s own words. I do not claim to include here everything Luther wrote, nor that everything here was written by Luther.<sup>93</sup> Timothy Wengert<sup>94</sup> provides perhaps the best summary of Luther’s treatise by quoting large sections of it; the

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<sup>91</sup> Maurer, 24 points this out; *Vide ergo, quam omnia sunt libera nobis per fidem et tamen omnia serva per charitatem, ut simul stet servitus libertatis et libertas servitutis, quod nulli quicquam debemus, nisi ut diligamus invicem* (WA 5:407.42–408.3).

<sup>92</sup> “Let us set this up in a diagram:

Freedom from righteousness	Service of sin
Service of righteousness	Freedom from sin

For he who is free from sin has become a slave of righteousness, but he who is the slave of sin is free from righteousness, and vice versa” (LW 27:325).

<sup>93</sup> Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Viking Press, 2004), 63–66 includes a brief summary of the letter (“fawning praise for the papal office”) and treatise in which “he drew on conjugal, almost erotic images from the apostle Paul.” Remarks like that tend to reveal more about the writer than about the one written about. Fife, 544–60, has a more useful summary. Jüngel, 47–87, also says that he is summarizing the treatise, which might not be clear if he didn’t tell you. Although leaning heavily on Jüngel’s book, Kirstin Johnston Largen, “Freedom from and Freedom for: Luther’s Concept of Freedom for the Twenty-First Century,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (Fall, 2013, September): 232–43, provides a very readable summary of Luther’s treatise, which ends with an application to gun control and large sodas. Maurer, 48–79, manages to “summarize” the treatise at greater length than Luther. Rupp summarizes, 86–90. See also Kalkoff, *Entscheidungsjahre*, 174–78.

<sup>94</sup> “Luther’s Freedom of a Christian for Today’s Church,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 28 (2014): 1–21.

only better summary would be to quote the entire treatise, and perhaps it would be more helpful if I simply read it to you!

When we look first at the spiritual, new, and inner person, we must ask how this person comes to be such, that is, how we become Christians? This does not happen from the outside, but from the inside. In other words, what is done to the body does not necessarily affect the soul. If the body is healthy and well cared for, that does not mean that the soul is healthy and well cared for; if the body is afflicted with hunger or thirst, that does not mean that the soul is afflicted. “The soul is not harmed if the body wears street clothes, goes around in secular places, eats and drinks like everyone else, does not pray aloud, and fails to do all the things mentioned above that hypocrites could do.”<sup>95</sup> (IIa<sup>96</sup>)

Nothing else from the outside makes us Christians, not even contemplation and meditation, but only the Word of God. Luther quotes, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), “If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:36), “Man does not live on bread alone” (Matt. 4:4), and especially Psalm 119, which focuses on “every aspect of God’s Word from A to Z.”<sup>97</sup> There is no greater disaster than a famine of hearing God’s Word (Amos 8:11), and no greater blessing than when God sends forth His Word (Psalm 107:20). God’s Word means especially the Gospel which preaches Christ and thus produces saving faith. (IIb)

Faith is the only proper response to God’s Word, for faith believes God’s promise of life and righteousness through Jesus. Any thought that this life and righteousness depends at all on what we do destroys this faith.<sup>98</sup> Faith first believes what Scripture says about our sinful nature (Rom. 3:23, 10–12), and thus sees that this life and righteousness must come to us through Christ. It should be noted that we are sinful not because of some external work but because of our sinful nature which operates in our hearts. No external work makes a Christian, but only faith in Jesus in the heart. This faith is an incomparable treasure because it brings full salvation: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). (IIc)

Our faith will properly be placed in God’s Word when we realize that God’s Word must be divided into commands and promises, that

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<sup>95</sup> AL 1:490; cf. LW 31:345.

<sup>96</sup> See Addendum for the outline to which these notations refer.

<sup>97</sup> John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73–150* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 334.

<sup>98</sup> Boehmer, 359, notes that Luther quoted from this section of the treatise in his sermon on October 14, 1520 (WA 9:482).



is, into Law and Gospel.<sup>99</sup> Although the commands tell us what to do, they give us no power to carry them out. For example, it is impossible for us to keep the command: “You shall not covet” [Exod. 20:17; Rom. 7:7–13]. The commands must be fulfilled, but are only fulfilled in Christ. God’s promises fulfill what God commands. (II*d*)

The first power of faith is that “the soul which clings to [the promises] with a firm faith will be so closely united with them and altogether absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them.”<sup>100</sup> (II*e*)

The second power of faith is that it honors God as highly as possible by believing that what He says is true. Just as the highest honor we can give someone is to believe that what they say is true, so the highest contempt we can show to someone is not to believe that what they say is true. Just as the faith which believes what God says perfectly obeys every command of God, so the person who does not believe what God says is the greatest rebel against God. Just as faith honors God by believing that what He says is true, so God honors the believer by crediting His righteousness to us (1 Sam. 2:30; Rom. 4:3). (II*f*)

The third benefit or power of faith is “that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom.”<sup>101</sup> Just as bride and groom share everything with each other, so Christ and the believer hold all things in common. What things do they share? Christ shares His grace, life, and salvation with us, while we share our sins, death, and damnation with Him. He is our Champion who is unconquerable; when He takes on the bride’s sin, death, and hell, He completely defeats them in a mighty duel. Through “the pledge of faith,” that is, “the wedding ring of faith,” the bride is “free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ.”<sup>102</sup>

Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that

<sup>99</sup> For Luther’s teaching on Law and Gospel, see his 1521 introduction to the first Church Postils, *A Brief Instruction on what to look for and expect in the Gospels* (LW 35:117–24), and his 1525 writing, *How Christians should regard Moses* (LW 35:161–74).

<sup>100</sup> LW 31:349.

<sup>101</sup> LW 31:351.

<sup>102</sup> LW 31:352. AL 1:501 fortuitously translates *arram* (from ἀρραβών) *fidei* (WA 7:55.18) as “the wedding ring of faith.”

righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his,” as the bride in the Song of Solomon [2:16] says, “My beloved is mine and I am his.”<sup>103</sup> (IIg)

In the German version of this section, Luther introduces “the joyful exchange,”<sup>104</sup> which is not found in so many words in the Latin version.<sup>105</sup> Although the words are not used, Luther described the same concept a year and a half earlier with similar illustrations in his 1519 sermon on *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, where he preached:

Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: “Mine are Christ’s living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as He did.”... Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that He has becomes ours; rather, He Himself becomes ours.... This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as He. It is therefore impossible that sin should remain in him.<sup>106</sup>

Luther made similar statements in a letter three years earlier on April 8, 1516 to George Spenlein, an Augustinian friar who had recently been transferred from Wittenberg to Memmingen and later served as a pastor in Arnstadt:

Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to praise Him and, despairing of yourself, say, “Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, just as I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine and have given to me what is Yours. You

<sup>103</sup> LW 31:352.

<sup>104</sup> LS 76; *Hie hebt sich nu der frölich wechsel vnd streytt* (WA 7:25.34; StA 2:277).

<sup>105</sup> Maurer, op. cit., 69 identifies the “joyful exchange” with the Latin words *dulcissimum spectaculum*, “Here we have a most pleasing vision” (LW 31:351), “a most delightful drama” (AL 1:500); Wilhelm Maurer, concerned to show that the German version came before the Latin version, writes: “Which expression was thought of first and which carries the mark of creative inspiration: *dulcissimum spectaculum* or *der frölich wechsel*? To ask the question is to answer it” (72).

<sup>106</sup> LW 31:297–98.

have taken upon Yourself what You were not and have given to me what I was not.”<sup>107</sup>

These three powers of faith reveal why only faith, not works, accomplishes anything. “Though you were nothing but good works from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you would still not be righteous or worship God or fulfill the First Commandment, since God cannot be worshiped unless you ascribe to Him the glory of truthfulness and all goodness which is due Him.”<sup>108</sup> (IIIh)

As “the true and only firstborn of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary,” Jesus is over all others as king and priest.<sup>109</sup> His kingdom, that is, His rule as King, is not concerned with “the outer splendor of robes and postures,” but with spiritual things, “such as righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, etc.”<sup>110</sup> (IIIi)

Like Melchizedek, Jesus serves as a priest by praying for us and by teaching us. What the bridegroom has, He also shares with His bride, so that we, too, are kings and priests, as 1 Peter 2:9 says. As a king, “every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation.” This is clear from Romans 8:28 and 1 Corinthians 3:21–23.<sup>111</sup> Here Luther inserts the warning that this power and lordship of Christians is spiritual, not worldly. We do not have secular power over others, but only spiritual power. This is clear from the afflictions we endure, which make it appear that we have no power at all. Not only are we spiritual kings, but we are priests forever with Christ. Those, however, who are without Christ do not have any of this. “Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian? By virtue of his royal power he rules over all things,

<sup>107</sup> LW 48:12; Brecht 1:156–57; on Spenlein, see Meusel, *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, 6:350.

<sup>108</sup> LW 31:353.

<sup>109</sup> Reinhold Rieger’s commentary on the treatise (200 n488) lists the passages which speak of the firstborn belonging to God (Exod. 13:2, 12; Num. 3:12; Luke 2:23), and then quotes Karin Bornkamm, *Christus—König und Priester. Das Amt Christi bei Luther im Verhältnis zur Vor- und Nachgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1998), 193f.: “The connection of the primogeniture to the full power and authority of kings and priests is a familiar church tradition. Exegetically it is derived from Jacob’s blessing on Reuben (Gen. 49:3), which addresses the firstborn son as first in dignity and might. Since Jerome the Latin version of these words, *prior in donis, maior imperio*, have been explained as referring to the double office of the oldest son as priest and king among his brothers.”

<sup>110</sup> LW 31:353–54.

<sup>111</sup> LW 31:354.

death, life, and sin, and through his priestly glory is omnipotent with God because God does the things which he asks and desires.”<sup>112</sup> (IIj)

Through faith in Christ’s righteousness we are freed from all obligations to works. Any reliance on works robs us of this faith, just like “the fable of the dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth and, deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, opens his mouth to snap at it and so loses both the meat and the reflection.”<sup>113</sup> (IIk)

At this point, Luther inserts a digression on the terminology used to refer to Christians and to spiritual leaders in the Church. Scripture calls all Christians “priests,” “ministers,” and “spiritual” people. Some, however, are given a special office in which they “should according to the ministry of the Word serve others and teach them the faith of Christ and the freedom of believers.” But this has been so perverted that we Christian priests are in “an unbearable bondage of human works and laws” to “the vilest men on earth.”<sup>114</sup> (III)

Preaching Christ must be more than preaching the history of what Christ did. It is certainly wrong to replace preaching Christ with preaching human laws, or preaching to incite hatred against the Jews.

Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in Him may be established that He may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of Him and is denoted in His name may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what He brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept Him....

What man is there whose heart, upon hearing these things, will not rejoice to its depth, and when receiving such comfort will not grow tender so that he will love Christ as he never could by means of any laws or works? Who would have the power to harm or frighten such a heart? If the knowledge of sin or the fear of death should break in upon it, it is ready to hope in the

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<sup>112</sup> LW 31:355; Martin E. Lehmann, *Luther and Prayer* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), 144n26, points out the mistake in translation here: LW 31:355 has “because he does the things which God asks and desires.” Lehmann translates correctly from the German, *den gott thut was er bittet und will* (WA 7:28.16), which agrees with the Latin, *quia deus facit, quae ipse petet et optat* (WA 7:57.39–58.1; StA 2:282–83); this was not corrected in the 2003 reprint.

<sup>113</sup> LW 31:356. Luther’s 1530 translation of Aesop’s fables was published in 1557 (WA 50:432–60; LW 61).

<sup>114</sup> LW 31:356.

Lord. It does not grow afraid when it hears tidings of evil. It is not disturbed when it sees its enemies. This is so because it believes that the righteousness of Christ is its own and that its sin is not its own, but Christ's, and that all sin is swallowed up by the righteousness of Christ.<sup>115</sup>

This is the powerful conclusion of Luther's treatment of the first proposition! (II<sub>m</sub>)

The second major part of the treatise is to deal with the objection people make: "If faith does all things and is alone sufficient unto righteousness, why then are good works commanded? We will take our ease and do no works and be content with faith." No, Luther says, "a Christian is the servant of all and made subject to all."<sup>116</sup>

Good works begin with the proper attitude in the inner person. Then the constant struggle begins between the desire to do good and the laziness of the flesh. Paul speaks about this struggle in Romans 7:22–23; 1 Corinthians 9:27; and Galatians 5:24. Once again, works are not to be done in order to become righteous before God; rather, good works can only be done by someone who is already righteous before God. (III<sub>a</sub>)

Disciplining our bodies can be helpful "to repress the lasciviousness and lust of the body."<sup>117</sup> It is not the works we do to discipline our bodies which are important, but the repressing. Just as Adam and Eve performed good works in Paradise because they were already at peace with God, so faith puts believers back into Paradise so they can serve God as freely as Adam and Eve did before they fell into sin. Just as what a bishop does in his office does not make him a bishop, but he does these things because he is first a bishop, so the things we do as Christians do not make us Christians, but we do these things because we are first Christians. Remember these statements: "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works."<sup>118</sup> Just as a tree produces fruit, but fruit does not produce a tree, so a Christian produces good works, but good works do not make a Christian. Just as a good builder makes a good house, but a good house does not make him into a good builder, so a Christian produces good works, but the good works do not make him into a Christian. (III<sub>b</sub>)

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<sup>115</sup> LW 31:357.

<sup>116</sup> LW 31:358.

<sup>117</sup> LW 31:359.

<sup>118</sup> LW 31:361.

Again, works are not done to justify us, since faith in God's mercy does that. The works of unbelievers are evil not because of what they are, but because they come from unbelief. The works of unbelievers may appear to human eyes to be good, but not to God's eyes. Those who focus on the works and not on faith will not understand this. When works are joined to righteousness, as if the works made us righteous, then this comes from the Leviathan;<sup>119</sup> then the works are no longer free but compulsory. Leviathan always seeks to change works done in faith into works done to gain righteousness, and so to make them worthless. True preaching proclaims both Law and Gospel, that is, repentance and faith. (IIIc)

Good works are not so much what we do for ourselves, but only what we do for our neighbors, since "we do not live for ourselves" (Rom. 14:7), but for others. For example, the thief must stop stealing, and instead do something useful with his own hands, not so that he can support himself, but "so that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28). We should care for our own bodies, not because they are our own flesh and blood, but so that they may be strong enough to serve others. This is Paul's point in Philippians 2:1–4, and also in the example of Christ which follows.<sup>120</sup> In that example, Paul is not referring only to Jesus' two natures, divine and human, but especially to the two states, so that while He remained fully God, He humbled Himself to death on a cross before being exalted again, that is, again making full use of His divine power. So also Christians should humble themselves and humbly serve their neighbors. Without any merit in me, God has given me Christ; therefore, I will devote myself to serving my neighbor, just as Christ has served me. (IIIId)

Although Luther had been condemned for teaching against good works, his teaching is that the Christian overflows with good works. Since Christ has met all our needs for righteousness, we have been set free from any worry about achieving righteousness so that we can devote ourselves to serving others. After restating the propositions of this treatise, Luther observes: "But alas in our day this life is unknown throughout the world; it is neither preached about nor sought after;

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<sup>119</sup> The Old Testament word "Leviathan" is given two meanings: (1) that creature of God described in greatest detail in Job 41, and (2) the devil, a meaning given to this word by medieval theologians, seemingly without connection to the description of God's amazing creature in Job 41.

<sup>120</sup> There is speculation that Luther based this treatise and his earlier sermon, *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519) (LW 31:293–306), on a sermon on the Epistle for Palm Sunday, Phil. 2:5–11.

we are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christians or bear the name of Christians.”<sup>121</sup> We are named after Christ who gave us faith, but today Christ has been turned into “a taskmaster far harsher than Moses.” Mary is an example of the attitude we should have, since she willingly obeyed the laws about purification after childbirth, even though she needed no purification (Luke 2:22). The apostle Paul provides a similar twofold example, since he had Timothy circumcised when he could freely do so out of love for those who might be offended by an uncircumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), but then refused to have Titus circumcised when that was demanded as a law which had to be fulfilled (Gal. 2:3). A similar example is provided by our Lord Jesus who obeyed the tax laws not because He had to, but out of love (Matt. 17:24–27). All clerics and clerical institutions should do the same. (IIIe)

Those who have true Christian knowledge of these principles can also observe human church laws, not because they must, but out of willing obedience. Such works which do not discipline the body or serve others are not Christian works; unfortunately, much of what is done as church works (such as saying Mass in an empty church) are not Christian works. No work should be done for the purpose of obtaining some temporal or eternal reward, for that would harm our faith. Just as Christ “put us on” and did everything He did for us, so we also should “put on” our neighbor and do everything we do in service of our neighbor. “We conclude, therefore, that a Christian ... lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love.”<sup>122</sup> (IIIIf)

The final section of Luther’s treatise is the appendix on ceremonies, which is only found in the Latin version, not in the German version. Some insist on distorting things; when they hear that they do not have to fast to gain righteousness, they become convinced that they can gain righteousness by not fasting! This only serves to strengthen others in their conviction that they gain righteousness by fasting! Paul opposes both sides (Rom. 14:3). We have not been freed from the necessity to do works; we have been freed from the requirement to do works in order to obtain righteousness, but faith urges on us the necessity to do works out of love for our Savior and for our neighbor. “The unyielding, stubborn ceremonialists” are “like deaf adders, not willing to listen to the truth of liberty.”<sup>123</sup> These “blind guides” must be firmly resisted, just as Paul did

<sup>121</sup> LW 31:368.

<sup>122</sup> LW 31:371.

<sup>123</sup> LW 31:373; the Vulgate of Ps. 58:5 has *aspides surdae*; “In analyzing this description of the snake, it is pointless to discuss whether or not snakes really have ears, as some

not have Titus circumcised, and just as Christ defended His disciples who were breaking the Sabbath laws by threshing grain in their hands on the Sabbath. On the other hand, the simple people who have been misled by their shepherds must be treated gently. In other words, “Fight strenuously against the wolves, but for the sheep and not also against the sheep.”<sup>124</sup> “Since we cannot live our lives without ceremonies and works,” “the minister of Christ” must act wisely to protect people from “the pestilent, impious, soul-destroying traditions of our popes and the opinions of our theologians.” “As wealth is the test of poverty, business the test of faithfulness, honors the test of humility, feasts the test of temperance, pleasures the test of chastity, so ceremonies are the test of the righteousness of faith.”<sup>125</sup> Ceremonies resemble the blueprints for a building; once the building is built, the blueprints are stored away in a drawer somewhere; those who misuse ceremonies are like those who treasure the blueprints but never build the building. Natural reason will never understand this correctly; rather, we must be “taught by God” and drawn to Jesus (John 6:44–45). (IV)

### 3. Application

I would conclude with just a few thoughts on the effect of Luther’s treatise on some of those people involved in its creation. Johann Tetzel (1465–1519), who was the immediate cause for Luther’s struggle, died on August 11, 1519, long before the treatise appeared; Luther is said to have written him “a comforting letter” before his death.<sup>126</sup> Pope Leo X, as reported earlier, died a year after the treatise was published on December 1, 1521, after he had condemned Luther as a heretic in the papal bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, after Luther had been condemned as an outlaw at the Diet of Worms; there is no evidence that Leo ever read the treatise Luther dedicated to him. Charles von Miltitz faded from the limelight to no one’s regret and lived an obscure life as a minor official. His accidental death by drowning in the Main River near Groß-Steinheim on November 20, 1529 was not of great news value to anyone, except for those who made fun of him in his death. Some claimed that the one ferrying him across the river did not notice that he had fallen out of the boat, others that he drowned because he was dead

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commentators do. The point of comparison is that the wicked are as deaf as snakes. They do not listen to God’s Word no matter how wise its appeal may be” (John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalm 1–72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 555.

<sup>124</sup> LW 31:374.

<sup>125</sup> LW 31:375.

<sup>126</sup> Brecht 1:310.



drunk, still others that he drowned himself.<sup>127</sup> None of these stories have any validity, except to reveal how people thought about Miltitz. Creutzberg concludes:

Thus the verdict of his contemporaries on Miltitz was not the best. Many laughed at him. Most regarded him to be a weak, silly, two-faced, frivolous gossip. The chief fault in Miltitz's character is that he had so little success at the mission given to him.<sup>128</sup>

There is no evidence that John Eck ever reconsidered his position in opposition to Luther. After he died three years before Luther on February 13, 1543, "his professor's chair, beret, and hat were carefully preserved as precious relics.... The chair is still well worth seeing at the University of Munich."<sup>129</sup>

Martin Luther's blessed end is much better known, since it occurred on his final journey to Eisleben, where he had been born, to resolve a dispute. There his final sickness came on him. Justus Jonas famously asked him, "Reverend father, are you ready to die trusting in your Lord Jesus Christ and to confess the doctrine which you have taught in His name?" to which Luther distinctly answered "Yes."<sup>130</sup>

Luther's treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian* prepares each Christian for the most important day in their life, the day on which faith becomes sight. Every time spiritual leaders in the Church come face to face with death among their parishioners, they deal with the essence of *The Freedom of a Christian*. Is this person prepared to stand before God? Has this person been freed from all concern about earning righteousness through works? Does this person cling to Christ's righteousness given to us in the "joyful exchange"? Has this person been enabled to live a meaningful life of service to others in praise of the Savior? J. P. Meyer wrote:

God has honored us preachers with the privilege of being heralds of this freedom. We are to proclaim this freedom to our congregations. Our office is to train people for this freedom.

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<sup>127</sup> Creutzberg, 110.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>129</sup> Wiedemann, 358.

<sup>130</sup> Brecht 3:376; see Christof Schubart, *Die Berichte über Luthers Tod und Begrabnis: Texte und Untersuchungen* (Weimar, 1917); WA 54:478–96; some of this will be included in the biographical volume planned for the expanded series of Luther's Works.

We are to confirm them in this freedom so that they rejoice in it, live in it, and readily serve God and their neighbor.

This is the glory and the difficulty of our calling. The servile mindset is inborn in us and in the members of our congregations. Accordingly, it is always natural for us to operate with legal means. The members of our congregations for the most part respond much more easily to such means, at least as much as our eyes can see. On the other hand, they often display very little comprehension of Christian freedom, and the anticipated fruit depends on that.

This dare not make us tired. God has not called us to be slave drivers, but to be guardians of His free children.<sup>131</sup>

The day will come for each of us when those questions become even more personal. This becomes very personal for us when we bid farewell to our loved ones, yes, but especially when we close our own eyes in death. Have we grasped the significance of Luther's treatise for ourselves? Is this our confidence as we face that day? Can we look forward to that day, do we look forward to that day, with eager anticipation, as the day when we see our wondrous Savior with our own eyes, and take up residence with Him in an eternal lifetime of devoted service of praise to Him? To God alone be the glory!

Because we do look forward to that day, because the Lord Jesus really has taken us sinners bound to sin, living for sin, and freed us from all our sins; because He has completely freed us from the necessity of making up for our sins ourselves; because He has totally stripped away from us any need to make use of those flimsy excuses we use to try to cover over our sins; because He has led us to full faith in His forgiveness for all our sins; therefore, we do look forward to that day when our Lord will take us home. It will be the next great event in the history of our lives. It is a certainty that we will spend unending ages rejoicing with our Savior.

Are we not then set free to serve Him further each day? What better thing do we have to do with our lives than to serve Him by serving one another? What more meaningful way can we possibly spend our lives than by caring for the precious souls God places around us? As we do so, is there anything for us to be afraid of? Why should we be afraid when the absolute worst anyone could possibly do to us is move up the date when we enter the eternal home of our Savior? Was Jesus afraid

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<sup>131</sup> J. P. Meyer, "*Luthers Lehre von der christlichen Freiheit*" (WLQ 15:62).

of anything as He went about doing His work? He went everywhere without fear! He went among the lepers, He went among the hospital wards surrounding the pool of Bethesda, He went into the midst of the tax collectors, He spent time with the demon possessed, even the physically dangerous ones, He even dared to step into the circle of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and lived again to tell about it. Because our Savior has set us free from the need to pay for our own sins, He has also set us free to do whatever it is He asks us to do without any fear but only with joy in His service. To God alone be the glory! [LSQ](#)

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## Addendum

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- II. The Spiritual, New, and Inner Person (LW 31:344–58)
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  - b. The Word of God is necessary for the soul
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IV. Appendix: Against the Freedom of the Flesh (LW 31:371–77)

- i. Against trust in works
- ii. How to deal with the stubborn
- iii. Regarding the common folk
- iv. Concerning laws and the lawgivers
- v. For the young and untrained
- vi. Danger in ceremonies
- vii. The place for ceremonies
- viii. On hyper-religious people<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Most of this outline comes from AL 1:487–538.

# Presidential Quotes From the Past

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**B**UT NOW IT WILL NOT DO FOR US TO SPEAK OF orthodoxy and pure doctrine as though this were just an academic thing which we contend for, and which means little more to us than a worthy cause for men to espouse. Real orthodoxy must be and is a living thing which adorns the leading of a truly pious and a Christian life. Real orthodoxy embraced with the heart will carry with it the sincere desire of bringing it to others, of bringing the blessed tidings of salvation in Jesus Christ to those who are walking in the death and darkness of unbelief. And so controversy must not be carried on for the love of polemical victory but for the purpose of preserving God's Word inviolate for the salvation of souls—yes, that mission work may be carried on without the least leaven error which leads away from God, but that it may be carried on with the pure truth, in order that men may unerringly be led to Christ and His vicarious atonement.

The knowledge that we are living in the last time should be a signal that we must bestir ourselves, shake off all laziness and indolence, and use our time profitably for the preaching of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to bend every effort in our congregations and in our institutions that we may truly serve the Lord and be of real spiritual service to this generation and to those generations which may follow. For this work we need to lay aside every weight that hinders and the affairs of this life which entangle us. For this work all those who believe and teach the same in all details of doctrine should close the ranks,

putting aside factiousness and pettiness. Irritable and contentious spirits must be calmed lest the heathen find cause to blaspheme the truth for which we stand, and which we wish to propagate and disseminate into this world of sin. Patience must be practiced without giving way to false tolerance. We must be on our guard lest we seek by the law to accomplish what alone the Gospel can produce. The dignity and majesty of the Gospel truth must be preserved without showmanship or spectacular display. We must labor and work not to further our own personal honor and gain or to win the acclaim of the masses, but to hallow the name of God and to serve with the Word that the kingdom of God may come. LSQ

Excerpt from C. M. Gullerud, "President's Message—1953,"  
*Synod Report* 1953:11.

# Luther's Commentary on Genesis 28

*Christian H. Eisenbeis  
Pastor, First Trinity Lutheran Church  
Marinette, Wisconsin*

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## **Introduction: Lines thrown down**

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. (John 3:13 KJV)

I see Thee standing, Lamb of God, Now at Thy Father's right;  
But O how painful was Thy road That led to Zion's height!  
And what a burden Thou didst bear: The world's distress and  
shame,  
That made Thee sink, our woe to share, To depths that none can  
name.<sup>1</sup>

**S**URELY THE LORD WAS IN THAT PLACE, AND THE faithful men knew it. They just didn't know how to lay their burden before Him.

“On one of those days,” Jesus was teaching, and “the power of the Lord was with him to heal” (Luke 5:17 ESV). A crowd—not entirely made up of well-wishers—was sitting at His feet, obstructing the way to Him. But the resourceful men did not lose heart. They found another way to cast their anxiety on the One who cares.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Adolph Brorson, ELH 70:1.

The crowd looked, and behold, the roof was opened, and a paralytic descended upon the Son of Man! It was a sight beyond their expectation, almost as unexpected as what Jesus said to the man on the mat: “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (v. 20b). Jesus knows our need and well provides it.

This unexpected blessing and promise did not sit well with all who sat there. The scribes and the Pharisees questioned Christ’s credentials: “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone” (v. 21)? These “doctors of the law” (KJV) had come from every district in Palestine. They had traveled a long way to reject the gospel.

“True” Israelites had always harbored this kind of skepticism toward the Man of Galilee. There was “an Israelite indeed, in whom there [was] no deceit” (John 1:47), who had once asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth” (v. 46)? Yet it took only a few words to convince Nathanael of Cana that the Nazarene was the King of Israel.

The King offered Nathanael the vista of “greater things” (μείζω τούτων ὄψη) than those few words: “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (v. 50–51 NKJV).

Was the opening of the roof and the descent of the paralytic one of those “greater things”? Yet there was a sight even greater to come, for the promise and the blessing spoken in that house were not empty wishes:

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. (Luke 5:24–25 KJV)

Because the Son of Man deigned to love Him, this sinner rose from his affliction and walked home, strengthened in body and soul, all of it the work of Jesus Christ. “And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen *extraordinary things* (εἶδομεν παράδοξα) today’” (v. 26 ESV).

Imagine the skepticism in the heart of the first Israel. There was a night when Jacob had no wife, no children, no friends to support him, no fig tree to lean on, no mat on which to rest; only a stone for a pillow and the word of his father. But God came to him. In the extraordinary vision of the ladder, a sight beyond all expectation, God established His presence with man through the promise of the One Mediator, the

Seed of Jacob, the true Israel, in whom there is no deceit, who comes to sinners and says, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Before Jacob could see this extraordinary thing and learn to trust in the Word, he had to be sent out. In the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, with Dr. Luther as our tour guide, we journey with Jacob from Beersheba to Bethel; from the house of Isaac to the house of God.

## Genesis 28:1–2

### v. 1

(Luther's Latin translation > Hebrew > Syntax > Essayist's translation)

*Vocavit itaque Isaac Iacob, et benedixit eum, praecepitque ei, et dixit ad eum: Noli accipere uxorem de filiabus Chanaan.*

וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב וַיְבַרֵךְ אֹתוֹ וַיִּצְוֶהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן

[AND CALL-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ISAAC TO JACOB AND BLESS-vav cons. Piel imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND COMMAND HE-vav cons. Piel imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND SAY-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. NO TAKE-Qal imperf. 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. WOMAN-fem. sing. FROM DAUGHTER-fem. pl. const. CANAAN]

*So Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him. And he commanded him and said to him, "Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan."*

### v. 2

*Surge, vade in Mesopotamiam, ad domum Bethuel, patris matris tuae, et sume tibi inde uxorem de filiabus Laban, avunculi tui.*

קוּם לְךָ פַּדְנָה אָרָם בֵּיתָה בְּתוּאֵל אָבִי אִמְךָ וְקַח-לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לְבָן אַחִי אִמְךָ

[ARISE-Qal imp. masc. sing. GO-Qal imp. masc. sing. PADDAN + dir. ARAM HOUSE-masc. sing. + dir. BETHUEL FATHER-masc. sing. const. MOTHER YOU-fem. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND TAKE-Qal imp. masc. sing. FOR YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. FROM THERE WOMAN-fem. sing. FROM DAUGHTER-fem. pl. const. LABAN BROTHER-masc. sing. const. MOTHER YOU-fem. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing.]

*“Get up, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, and take for yourself from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.”*

### Exegetical Notes

אָקִי does not require a preposition to call its object, but when it *summons* someone, it usually employs ל (Genesis 12:18, 20:9; 1 Samuel 3:5ff), or, less typically, אָל, as in v. 1 (BDB §1.5.a-c, 895; see also Genesis 3:9, 19:5; 2 Kings 18:18). אָקִי with ל or אָל can also precede a commissioning; e.g., Moses is drawn to the burning bush and appointed the deliverer of Israel (Exodus 3:4; see also Exodus 10:24; Joshua 4:4; 2 Kings 4:36; Jeremiah 42:8).

It is no trifling word that Isaac wishes to have with his deceptive son. This is a solemn occasion, a prelude to a very serious command. Putting aside any residual hard feelings, Isaac heeds Rebekah’s complaint regarding Esau’s Hittite wives and fulfills the responsibilities of his own calling as a father (Genesis 27:46).<sup>2</sup>

*Commentary: In marriage “one must venture in the name of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>*

*How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage!<sup>4</sup>*

*And if the pope were a Christian, he, too, would hold the marriage estate to be holy and pure.<sup>5</sup>*

In his 2016 Reformation Lecture on Luther and John Frederick, Dr. David Lumppp characterized the Reformer’s lectures on Genesis as both “an intense polemic against monastic life” and “an exposition and even celebration of authentic Christian vocation.”<sup>6</sup> Reading Luther through the *Lumpppfilter*, we see how he brackets his commentary on

<sup>2</sup> See also C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1:280.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–), 5:188–196; Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 73 vols. (Weimar: Herman Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009), 43:558–563.

<sup>4</sup> LW 45:17.

<sup>5</sup> LW 51:364.

<sup>6</sup> David A. Lumppp, “Martin Luther and John Frederick: The Confessor of the Faith and His (Emergency) Bishop,” *LSQ* 57, no. 1 (March 2017): 76.

Genesis 28 with a rejection of monastic vows at the end and a defense of marriage at the beginning.

Marriage is in need of such an advocate, for there is a perpetual case against it. Satan portrays it as “troublesome, odious, and hateful.”<sup>7</sup> The pope and his monks eagerly follow his lead and reduce this sanctified estate to the rutting of beasts. Thus the world and the sinful flesh do not understand it.

It is the solemn duty of parents, the government (!), and, the *Apology* adds, “teachers of the Gospel” to inculcate the proper understanding of marriage.<sup>8</sup> Lesson One is the proper definition of marriage. Though legal definitions may be serviceable, they are incomplete. Luther offers the “truer” and “complete” definition (*integra definitio*), integrating all four Aristotelian causes:

Marriage is the lawful and divine union [formal] of one man and one woman [material]. It has been ordained [efficient] for the purpose of calling upon God, for the preservation and education of offspring, and for the administration of the church and the state [all final].<sup>9</sup>

Lesson Two is a frank explanation of what to expect in married life. Be sure to have the young couple in your office for pre-marriage counseling read the following samples of Luther's honesty:

Therefore take heart, and bear in mind that this life is nothing else than misery itself.<sup>10</sup>

For it is pleasing to God that you toil and sweat among the thorns of marriage.<sup>11</sup>

Who wouldn't want to sign up for that?

In Lesson Three, to those who remain unconvinced that the misery and thorns of marriage are superior to the bachelor life, Luther presents an appetizing choice: a life of sin without punishment or a life of punishment without sin. Reason, the ever-present epicure, chooses the first. It rejects the example of the manly patriarchs and flees the cross, seeking the carefree life, but finding only iniquity. “But if wretchedness

<sup>7</sup> LW 5:190.

<sup>8</sup> Ap XXIII.55.

<sup>9</sup> LW 5:188; cf. LW 4:244.

<sup>10</sup> LW 5:191.

<sup>11</sup> LW 5:196.



must indeed be borne, we should bear it with God rather than with the devil.”<sup>12</sup> Faith, expressing itself in marriage, teaches a man not only to live without sin by using the remedy God provides, but to be a man at all times—*non noctu tantum*<sup>13</sup>—and to fulfill his God-given vocation through *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*. Faith despises the “punishments,” the daily annoyances of marriage. Husband and wife share the cross and cling to the consolation of the gospel.

Isaac helped his son by promoting divine marriage. The authority and consent of parents is vital for a godly union. Luther wrote extensively against clandestine betrothals and refused to recognize them as valid.<sup>14</sup> When a young couple invests in the Fourth Commandment and starts life together with the goodwill of parents and their heavenly Father, it will be well with them. Though “punishments” will certainly follow, a man and his wife will be free from sin.

### Genesis 28:3–5

v. 3

*Deus autem omnipotens benedicat tibi, et faciat te crescere, atque multiplicet te, ut sis in congregationem populorum.*

וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֶךְ אֶתְךָ וְיַפְרֶךְ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהֵייתָ לְקַהֵל עַמִּים

[AND EL-SHADDAI BLESS-Piel imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND BE-FRUITFUL YOU-Hiphil 3<sup>rd</sup> imperf. masc. sing. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND MULTIPLY YOU-Hiphil 3<sup>rd</sup> imperf. masc. sing. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND BE-vav cons. Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR ASSEMBLY-masc. sing. const. PEOPLE-masc. pl.]

*“Now may El-Shaddai bless you. May He cause you to be fruitful and multiply, that you become a congregation of nations.”*

v. 4

*Et det tibi benedictionem Abrahae, tibi et semini tuo tecum, ut possideas terram peregrinationis tuae, quam dedit Deus Abraham.*

וַיִּתֵּן-לֹדְךָ אֶת-בְּרַכַּת אַבְרָהָם לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּךְ אֶת-אֶרֶץ  
מִגְרִיֶךָ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם

<sup>12</sup> LW 5:191; see also 44:348–349, 394; 45:39; Ap XXIII.35.

<sup>13</sup> WA 43:560.

<sup>14</sup> LC I.53; LW 4:218–228, 288–289; 45:385–393; 46:268ff.

[AND GIVE-Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) BLESSING-fem. sing. const. ABRAHAM FOR YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND FOR SEED YOU-masc. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. WITH YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. FOR INHERIT YOU-Qal inf. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) LAND-fem. sing. const. SOJOURNING YOU-masc. pl. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. WHICH GIVE-Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. GOD FOR ABRAHAM]

*“And may He give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham.”*

v. 5

*Dimisit itaque Isaac Iacob ad Laban, filium Bethuel Syri, fratrem Rebecca, matris Iacob et Esau.*

וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיְלֵךְ פַּדְאָנָה אֲרָם אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי  
אָחִי רֵבֶקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו

[AND SEND-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ISAAC (DIRECT OBJECT) JACOB AND GO-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. PADDAN + dir. ARAM TO LABAN SON-masc. sing. const. BETHUEL THE ARAMEAN-masc. sing. BROTHER-masc. sing. const. REBEKAH MOTHER-fem. sing. const. JACOB AND ESAU]

*Thus Isaac sent Jacob. And he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.*

### Exegetical Notes

God introduces Himself as אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי to Abram and to Jacob upon the latter's return to Bethel (Genesis 17:1, 35:11–12). Jacob himself invokes אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי when he sends *all* his remaining sons to Egypt, with his benediction—perhaps as melancholy as Isaac's here—upon them (Genesis 43:14).

שְׂדֵי derives not from שָׂדַד, “to deal violently,” but, Luther informs us, from שֶׁד, “breast”.<sup>15</sup> It is not beneath the Almighty Father's dignity to be called upon as the Sustainer and Nourisher of all things, as we read in the last words of Jacob to Joseph:

By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty (שְׂדֵי) who will bless you With blessings of heaven

<sup>15</sup> See also Francis Brown, et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 994–995.

above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts (בְּרִכַּת שְׂדֵיִם) and of the womb. (Genesis 49:25 NKJV)

After the standard blessing formula וַיְפָרֵךְ וַיְרַבֵּךְ, Isaac adds an unusual *wish*, as Luther will call it, for his unmarried, childless son: וְהָיִיתָ לְקַהֲל עַמִּים. When Jacob comes back to Bethel with his wives and children, אֵל שְׂדֵי promises that the house of Israel will keep on expanding and extending its borders: גּוֹי וְקַהֲל גּוֹיִם יִהְיֶה מִמֶּךָ (Genesis 35:11; cf. וַנִּתְתִּיךָ לְקַהֲל עַמִּים in Genesis 48:4). The קַהֲל עַמִּים is not limited by political or ethnic boundaries, but clearly encompasses the kingdom of grace:

Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people (בְּקַהֲל־עַם), and praise him in the assembly of the elders. (Psalm 107:32 KJV)

While עַמִּים is consistently rendered “peoples,” English translations of קַהֲל do not quite capture the ecclesiastical meaning: “multitude” (KJV), “company” (ESV, NASB, RSV, NRSV), “community” (NIV), “assembly” (HCSB, NKJV; note Luther’s earthy *ein hauffen völicher*, “a heap of peoples”). The Vulgate contents itself with *in turbas populorum* (“crowds of peoples”), while Luther hits the mark with *in congregationem populorum* (cf. LXX εἰς συναγωγὰς ἐθνῶν).

אֵל שְׂדֵי will grant Isaac’s wish for his son through His own Son, the true Israel who will establish His Church, the communion of saints. The promise and blessing of the patriarchs will be extended to the Gentiles by faith in the Seed of Jacob:

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Galatians 3:14 NIV84)

### Commentary: *The two priestly offices*<sup>16</sup>

The commissioning service in Beersheba begins with the blessing, which is not just words: *res ipsa tradita et donata praesenter*.<sup>17</sup> The impartation and possession of the blessing are equally certain; over and over Luther repeats that the blessing belongs to Jacob *praesenter*. It is the same for all Christians. Through baptism, the Holy Spirit imparts the

<sup>16</sup> LW 5:196–196; WA 43:563–564.

<sup>17</sup> WA 43:563.

forgiveness of sins to us and creates faith that possesses it. The past merits of Christ's perfect obedience are truly and presently received, and the favor of God now dwells in the heart. By divine transfer, the entire Church possesses the means of grace and the keys that bind the sinner or set him free.

Now that the blessing and promise of the Messiah are truly present for his son, Isaac closes the service with a wish for the future. The wish does not come from doubt; Isaac's words are "filled with faith."<sup>18</sup> Isaac is simply dispensing the twofold priestly office: teaching and prayer.

Teaching entails the absolution and the sermon; it repeats the blessing to the congregation. Prayer naturally follows the proclamation of the gospel: *auss eine gute predig, sol ein gut vater unser folgen*.<sup>19</sup> Petitions are brought before God that we might increase in faith and grow in the blessing.

Looking ahead a few verses, Luther connects the Divine Service, the consummate expression of the twofold priestly office, to the ladder. First there is a descending in the Word; God speaks and we listen. Then there is an ascending in prayer; we speak and God listens. Through the twin priestly offices we are strengthened by the "already" to face the "not yet."

Jacob, in full possession of the blessing, now leaves the certainty of home for the uncertainty of exile.

## Genesis 28:6–9

v. 6

*Videns autem Esau, quod benedixisset Isaac Iacob, et quod misisset eum in Mesopotamiam, ut inde uxorem duceret, atque praecepisset ei, cum benediceret eum, dicens: Non accipies uxorem de filiabus Canaan.*

וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו בִּיְבִרְדָּי יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְשָׁלַח אֹתוֹ פְּדָנָה אֶרֶם לְקַח־תּוֹ  
 מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיֵּצֵא עָלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן

[AND SEE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ESAU THAT BLESS-Piel perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ISAAC (DIRECT OBJECT) JACOB AND SEND-Piel perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. PADDAN + dir. ARAM FOR TAKE-Qal inf. const. FOR HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FROM THERE WOMAN-fem. sing. IN BLESS HE-Piel inf. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc.

<sup>18</sup> LW 5:197.

<sup>19</sup> WA 43:564.

sing. AND COMMAND-vav cons. Piel imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ON HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR SAY-Qal inf. const. NOT TAKE-Qal imperf. 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. WOMAN-fem. sing. FROM DAUGHTER-fem. pl. const. CANAAN]

*Now Esau saw that Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan Aram to take for himself from there a wife, and that in blessing him he laid a command upon him, saying, "Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan."*

v. 7

*Et quod Iacob obedisset patri suo et matri suae, et abiisset in Mesopotamiam.*

וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדָנָה אֲרָם

[AND HEAR-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. JACOB TO FATHER HE-masc. sing. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND TO MOTHER HE-fem. sing. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND GO-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. PADDAN + dir. ARAM]

*And that Jacob listened to his father and mother and went to Paddan Aram.*

v. 8

*Videns etiam Esau, quod non libenter aspiceret filias Canaan pater suus.*

וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו כִּי רְעוֹת בָּנוֹת כָּנְעַן בְּעֵינָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו

[AND SEE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ESAU THAT EVIL-fem. pl. DAUGHTER-fem. pl. const. CANAAN IN EYE-pl. const. ISAAC FATHER HE-masc. sing. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing.]

*And Esau saw that evil were the daughters of Canaan in the eyes of Isaac, his father.*

v. 9

*Itit ad Ismaelem, et accepit Mahalath, filiam Ismaelis, filii Abraham, sororem Nebaioth, super uxores suas sibi in uxorem.*

וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו אֶל-יִשְׁמַעֵאל וַיִּקַּח אֶת-מַחֲלַת בַּת-יִשְׁמַעֵאל בִּן-אֲבִרְהָם  
אֲחוֹת נְבִיּוֹת עַל-נָשָׁיו לֹו לְאִשָּׁה

[AND GO-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. ESAU TO ISHMLWL AND TAKE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) MAHALATH DAUGHTER-fem. sing. const. ISHMLWL SON-masc. sing. const. ABRAHAM SISTER-fem. sing.]

const. NEBAIOTH ON WIFE HE-fem. pl. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR WOMAN-fem. sing.].

*So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, the sister of Nebaioth, on top of the wives he had, for a wife.*

### Exegetical Notes

Jacob's obedience to *both parents* (אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אִמּוֹ) is contrasted with Esau's disobedience. Whether or not Esau literally saw (יָרָא; cf. NIV "learned") what took place at the commissioning service, he sees that Jacob has left. He also sees that his Hittite wives do not please his father (רָעוֹת בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו). We can assume Rebekah had already made her feelings more than clear.

### Commentary: *The Tao of Esau*<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Esau's self-approval rating is at an all-time high: look at what his wrath can produce! His position as master of the house—and ruler of the church—is secure.

Esau is also secure in despising the promises of God. In his eyes, Jacob had been given, at best, an "accidental blessing,"<sup>21</sup> a little something to tide him over as he packed up to leave. Clearly, thought Esau, the entire inheritance had been relinquished to him. He did not understand that the blessing had been fully imparted to Jacob in accordance with the unbreakable will of God.

Magnanimous in victory, Esau decides to throw his old father a bone and take a wife from the house of Ishmael, the epitome of hostility to the covenant.<sup>22</sup> Thus Esau's despising the promises of God is expressed in despising his family. Isaac and Rebekah had overcome many an external trial only to find themselves, in their old age, under a new *tentatio*, a domestic cross "courtesy" of their son.

Though Scripture is silent as to whether or not Esau's decision "worked," Luther believes Isaac saw right through it. He knew that Jacob possessed the blessing. The "conversion" of Isaac shows how the Word of the Lord stands firm in spite of resistance. Isaac fell into line after being "beautifully deceived" by his wife's subterfuge.<sup>23</sup> Both by

<sup>20</sup> LW 5:198–201; WA 43:564–566.

<sup>21</sup> LW 5:198.

<sup>22</sup> LW 5:91–93; John C. Jeske, *Genesis*, People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 235.

<sup>23</sup> LW 5:200.

“accident” and now on purpose, God saw that the blessing was handed over.

For Luther, Esau is a *pulchrum exemplum impiorum*,<sup>24</sup> a prototype of hypocrites who flourish and abound in this life, who puff themselves up with the very Scriptures that oppose them (“Thank God I’m not like that Pharisee!”), who mistake glory for God’s favor and ignore God’s wrath. In the sixteenth century, the spirit of Esau—or the “Tao of Esau,” as I call it—ruled in the heart of papists and Turks and every man who classified himself a beloved, *accepted* child of God and sat on His lap by virtue of his own righteousness. Those who follow the Tao of Esau may soak up all the adulation in this life, “but in the end it will be seen who is calling the tune.”<sup>25</sup>

Are there practitioners of the Tao of Esau among us today? Far be it from me to suggest that hunting, fishing, and other sports come between a man and the Divine Service. Again, that Esau is an *exemplum impiorum* entails impiety not only toward his heavenly Father, but toward his earthly parents as well. Look at the weary couple sitting in the back of your sanctuary. Five years from retirement, they still work second shifts when they’re not recovering from their latest back surgery. They faithfully bring their grandchildren to church and Sunday School, at least on the weekends when their divorced (or never-married) child is supposed to have them; you know, the daughter who recently informed them that because they forced religion down her throat when she was a kid, she won’t go to church with them anymore (but they can still bring her children—she needs a break, after all); or the son who will move Mom or Dad (whoever is widowed first) into assisted living four hours from their church (and their friends), three towns over from where he actually lives, two towns from the church he no longer attends. Like Esau, these children know exactly what their parents desire, exactly what will please them regarding marriage, the Gospel, and the instruction of grandchildren. They hear the will of their heavenly Father expressed in the will of their parents.

But they despise their birthright.

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<sup>24</sup> WA 43:565.

<sup>25</sup> *Sed in fine videbitur, cuius Toni*; LW 5:199; WA 43:565.

## Genesis 28:10–11

v. 10

*Egressus itaque est Jacob de Beersaeba, ut veniret in Haran.*

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֹׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה

[AND GO-OUT-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. JACOB FROM BEERSHEBA AND GO-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> msc. sing. HARAN + dir]

*Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.*

v. 11

*Et cum venisset ad locum quendam: pernoctavit ibi, nam occiderat sol. Et tollens de lapidibus illius loci, posuit pro capitis sui cervicali, dormivitque in loco illo.*

וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שֶׁם בֵּי-בֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מֵרָאֲשֵׁתוֹ וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא

[AND MEET-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. IN THE PLACE-masc. sing. AND LODGE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. THERE FOR COME-Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. THE SUN-sing. AND TAKE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FROM STONE-masc. pl. const. THE PLACE-masc. sing. AND SET-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. HEAD HE-fem. pl. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND LAY-DOWN-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. IN THE PLACE THE HE-masc. sing.]

*And he reached the place and lodged there, for the sun had set. And he took from the stones of the place and set up his pillow and laid down in that place.*

### Exegetical Notes

פָּגַע (“meet, happen upon, encounter”) is so rich in meaning that Luther calls it “untranslatable.”<sup>26</sup> The “encounters” expressed by פָּגַע can be purely coincidental. Boundaries “happen to touch” one another (Joshua 16:7, 19:11ff). God’s people may “happen upon” all creatures great and small (Exodus 23:4, Amos 5:19); as Solomon writes, “Time and chance happeneth to them all” (בֵּי-עַת וּפְגַע יִקְרָה אֶת-כֻּלָּם) (Ecclesiastes 9:11b KJV).

<sup>26</sup> LW 5:211.



However, not every encounter is left to chance. Solomon also writes to Hiram that because God had given him rest, “There is neither adversary nor misfortune” (וַאִין פְּגַע רָע; 1 Kings 5:4 ESV). פְּגַע can convey overtones of menace and malice; e.g., the avenger of blood seeks his prey (Numbers 35:19–21). Your adversary may “happen to touch” you with the blade of a sword (1 Samuel 22:17–18, 1 Kings 2:29–34).

In prophetic contexts, where nothing is left to chance, פְּגַע is blessedly benign:

You meet him (פְּגַעְתָּ) who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. (Isaiah 64:5a ESV)

LXX ἀπαντάω occurs twice in the New Testament: the Lord is met by the ten lepers and promises that the disciples will meet a man carrying a jar of water (Mark 14:13, Luke 17:12). These meetings were hardly coincidental.

At Mahanaim, Jacob was met by angels before meeting Esau (וַיִּפְגְּעוּ-בּוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים; Genesis 32:1–2). Here, as he flees his brother’s wrath, he meets, in most English translations, “a certain place,” which doesn’t exactly build up the suspense. The vowel hidden beneath the בּ in בְּמָקוֹם gives us a clue that this is not just any place (cf. LXX anarthrous τόπος); indeed, it is an “apparently accidental, yet really, a divinely-appointed choice.”<sup>27</sup>

Luther’s translation of the “untranslatable” פְּגַע is simple enough (*venisset*; cf. German *kam*), but his interpretation blends the rich meanings: not only “meet” or “encounter,” but also “intercede” (Gen 23:8, Ruth 1:16, Jer 7:16). Here it is not so much that Jacob happened upon the place, but that the place “met” Jacob, a place where, contrary to expectation, “He who intercedes meets the one who is to be placated.”<sup>28</sup>

*Commentary: “Manifold and rich doctrine almost too grand for us to attain with our explanation.”*<sup>29</sup>

Esau represents the philosophy of prosperity; Jacob embodies the theology of postponement. Thus Esau despises Jacob—and why shouldn’t he? He doesn’t have to change a thing about his life, while Jacob’s life of faith will be tested for twenty years in Paddan Aram. When it comes to the blessing, Esau seems to have the “thing” itself,

<sup>27</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, 281; see also Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), 64.

<sup>28</sup> LW 5:211.

<sup>29</sup> LW 5:201–212; WA 43:567–575.

while Jacob has only the words. Jacob takes his place among the heroes of this theology, like David, who had to wait years for the throne to be emptied of Saul before the “empty” words of Samuel came true.

Our Lord Jesus Christ descended into hell, forsaken by His Father on the cross, before He ascended into glory, back to the Father's right hand. The Church, which bears His holy name, cannot expect anything less. It must wait in suffering for the hope that is unseen. We believe—along with all thoughtful pagans—that “what is postponed is not taken away.”<sup>30</sup>

Faith in the promise sustains us through the difficulties of waiting. It accepts that mortification is not destruction. It withstands the devil's darts of despair. It moves us to love God with our whole being during the delay of the promised blessing, recognizing the delay—the “not yet”—as the *sine qua non* of the Christian life. Because this faith is weakened and obstructed by original sin, it must be nurtured by the Word. Through the repetition of God's promises, the Word strengthens faith, extinguishes the fiery darts, and teaches us that God is not a liar, and will never fail us. Faith is formed into “a restless blessing in our heart” by the tandem of the Word and the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

The same tandem will comfort Jacob in his twin trials, both external and internal.<sup>32</sup> On that night in the wilderness, Jacob was alone with his thoughts, no doubt asking himself, “What have I done?” Luther calls our attention to the *tenderness* of this saintly man, as opposed to Chrysostom, who characterizes Jacob's as a “hardy spirit” which made him worthy to receive the imminent vision;<sup>33</sup> and opposed to self-righteous “stocks and logs.”<sup>34</sup> Let us look to the cloud of flesh-and-blood patriarchs, who teach us that faith alone conquers the world.

## Genesis 28:12–14a

v. 12

*Et habuit somnium: et ecce, Scala erat posita in terra, cuius culmen pertingebat usque ad coelum: et ecce Angeli Dei ascendebant et descendebant per eam.*

<sup>30</sup> *Quod differetur, non aufertur*; LW 5:203; WA 43:568.

<sup>31</sup> LW 5:205.

<sup>32</sup> *geminam istam tentationem*; WA 43:569.

<sup>33</sup> ACCS II.187.

<sup>34</sup> *caudices et stipites*; LW 5:10; WA 43:573; note that *caudex* is often used like English “blockhead.”

וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מַצֵּב אֶרֶץ וְרָאִשׁוּ מִגֵּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכָי  
אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ

[AND DREAM-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND BEHOLD LADDER-masc. sing. STAND-Hophal part. masc. sing. LAND-fem. sing. + dir. AND HEAD HE-sing. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. TOUCH-Hiphil part. masc. sing. THE HEAVEN-masc. pl. + dir. AND BEHOLD ANGEL-masc. pl. const. GOD ASCEND-Qal part. masc. pl. AND DESCEND-Qal part. masc. pl. IN HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing.]

*And he dreamed, and behold!—a ladder fixed upon the earth, and its top touched the heavens! And behold!—the angels of God ascending and descending on it!*

v. 13

*Et dominus innitebatur Scalae, dixitque: Ego, Dominus Deus Abraham, patris tui, et Deus Isaac: terram, super quam tu dormis, tibi dabo et semini tuo.*

וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרְהָם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי  
יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנַנָּה וְלְזֶרְעֶךָ

[AND BEHOLD LORD STAND-Niphal part. masc. sing. ON HE-3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND SAY-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. I-sing. LORD GOD-masc. pl. const. ABRAHAM FATHER YOU-masc. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND GOD-masc. pl. const. ISAAC THE LAND-fem. sing. WHICH YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. LAY-DOWN-Qal part. masc. sing. ON SHE-3<sup>rd</sup> fem. sing. FOR YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. GIVE-Qal imperf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. AND FOR SEED YOU-masc. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing.]

*And behold!—the Lord was standing upon it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying—to you I will give it, and to your seed.”*

v. 14a

*Eritque semen tuum sicut pulvis terrae.*

וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ

[AND BE-vav cons. Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. SEED YOU-masc. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AS DUST-masc. sing. const. THE LAND-fem. sing.]

*“And your seed will be as the dust of the earth.”*

### Exegetical Notes

סֶלֶם (usually “ladder,” but “stairway” in HCSB and NIV), a hapax legomenon, is derived from סָלַל, “to lift up, to cast up” (BDB 699–700). סָלַל and its derivatives describe “access road” construction, with military transport as the top priority; e.g. סֶלְלָה, “mound” (for besieging purposes), and מַסְלָה, “highway.”

The Lord builds up His highway with restoration as the goal:

Heap it up! Heap it up (סֹלֵו-סֹלֵו)! Prepare the way, Take the stumbling block out of the way of My people. (Isaiah 57:14 NKJV. See also Isaiah 62:10.)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways (מַסְלוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם) to Zion. (Psalm 84:5 ESV [MT 84:6]; see also Proverbs 15:19, 16:17; Isaiah 11:16, 40:3; Jeremiah 31:21)

Architecturally speaking, מָגִיעַ (Hiphil participle < נָגַע; “to reach, to touch”) bridges gaps. While God pronounces woe on “those who join house to house” (הוּי מָגִיעֵי בֵית בְּבֵית); Isaiah 5:8), His own house displays a pleasing symmetry; e.g., the wings of the cherubim touch each other and the walls of the Temple perfectly (2 Chronicles 3:11–12). Beyond walls, נָגַע reaches the extremes of heaven and hell and intercedes for the sinner. Though the troubled soul draws near to Sheol (וְחַיִּי לְשְׂאוֹל הַגֵּיעוּ); Psalm 88:3 [MT 88:4]; see also Psalm 107:18), the hyssop strikes the lintels with the blood of the lamb (וְהִגַּעְתָּם אֶל-הַמְּשְׁקוּף); Exodus 12:22). The unclean mouths of the prophets are touched and cleansed (Isaiah 6:7, Jeremiah 1:9).

The forms of נָצַב (“to take one’s stand”) reveal how God confirmed Isaac’s promise to Jacob and strengthened his faith. The ladder is set up (Hophal participle מְצַב). God takes His stand upon it (Niphal participle נִצַּב) and, through His Word, which is firmly fixed in the heavens forever (לְעוֹלָם יְהוָה דִּבְרֹךְ נִצָּב בְּשָׁמַיִם); Psalm 119:89), establishes His presence with man.

Commentary: “A very beautiful sermon and an extraordinary gem of this whole history.”<sup>35</sup>

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42 NIV84)*

Against the tendency to allegorize every rail and rung of Jacob's ladder into an ascent of man's achievement, Luther focuses our attention on the spoken Word, which imputes heavenly *sanctitas* to the sinner. The pope and all who cling to the righteousness of works ignore the Word and “do not ascend to the heavenly saintliness.”<sup>36</sup> When God speaks directly with the patriarchs, we do well to listen.

“But what is this ascent and descent?” Luther asks in the American Edition, which is not an accurate translation.<sup>37</sup> The question in the WA is not “what” but “who”: *Sed quis est iste ascensus et descensus?*<sup>38</sup> One little word unlocks the mystery of the ladder. The angels (who, for Luther, make up the ladder itself) ascend and descend to gaze into the mystery of the Incarnation, the inexpressible personal union of God and man,

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. (Psalm 8:5 KJV)

Then they proclaim this mystery to the world:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:14 KJV)

In heaven, the angels see the Divine Majesty sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. On earth, they see the Divine Majesty

<sup>35</sup> LW 5:212–225; WA 43:575–583.

<sup>36</sup> LW 5:213; see also SA III.[12]3.

<sup>37</sup> LW 5:218.

<sup>38</sup> WA 43:579.

“subjected to demons and every creature.”<sup>39</sup> But whether ascending or descending, they adore the Son. They are never ashamed to minister to Him (Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:43). While the Incarnation fills Satan with hatred—after all, why should God prefer our “wretched mass” to his lofty self?<sup>40</sup>—the angels rejoice that God has joined human nature to Himself to redeem it.

When Jesus spoke to the “true Israelite” in John 1, He revealed Himself as the only true Interpreter *and* Interpretation of the vision in Genesis 28. He is the Seed of Jacob, in whom “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9 NIV). He is the Ladder that bridges the chasm between God and the sinner. The “historical, simple, and literal sense” of the vision must remain the Incarnation, for “one must learn that God and man are one person.”<sup>41</sup>

The allegorical sense is the mystical union of Christ and the Church. Through Word and Spirit we ascend into this blessed unity. At the same time, our Savior descends to us in the means of grace and establishes His presence with us. The allegory nourishes faith; it teaches nothing regarding our works.

Jacob sorely needed this sermon from the mouth of God, for the devil “climbs across where the fence is lowest; and if the wagon is unsteady, he turns it over completely.”<sup>42</sup> God’s spoken Word comforts Jacob and confirms the transfer of Abraham and Isaac’s blessings to this “useless trunk of a tree.”<sup>43</sup> Through the same Word, God repeats His promises and imputes to us blessings both physical and spiritual.

## Genesis 28:14b–15

v. 14b

*Et tu dispergeris usque ad mare occidentale et ad orientem: ad septentrionem et meridiem. Et benedicentur in te et in semine tuo cunctae tribus terrae.*

וּפְרָצְתָּ יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל־מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה  
וּבְזֵרְעֶךָ

<sup>39</sup> LW 5:218.

<sup>40</sup> LW 5:222; see also Luther’s discussion of St. Bernard, the Qur’an, and Satan’s fall in LW 5:221–223.

<sup>41</sup> LW 5:224.

<sup>42</sup> LW 5:215.

<sup>43</sup> LW 5:217.

[AND BREAK-OUT-vav cons. Qal perf. 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. SEA-masc. sing. + dir. AND EAST-masc. sing. + dir. AND NORTH-fem. sing. + dir. AND SOUTH-masc. sing. + dir. AND BLESS-vav cons. Niphal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> pl. IN YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. EVERY FAMILY-masc. sing. const. + fem. pl. const. THE GROUND-fem. sing. AND IN SEED YOU-masc. sing. const. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing.]

*“And you shall break out toward the sea and toward the east, toward the north and toward the south, and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

v. 15

*Et ecce, ego tecum sum, et custodiam te, quocumque perrexeris, et reducam te in terram hanc: neque deseram te, donec fecero, quae loquutus sum ad te.*

וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל-הָאָדָמָה  
הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזֹבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם-עָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ

[AND BEHOLD I-sing. WITH YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND WATCH YOU-vav cons. Qal perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. IN EVERY-masc. sing. WHICH GO-Qal imperf. 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. AND RETURN YOU-vav cons. Hiphil 1<sup>st</sup> sing. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. TO THE GROUND THIS-fem. sing. FOR NOT LEAVE YOU-Qal imperf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. + 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. EVEN WHICH IF DO-Qal perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) WHICH SPEAK-Piel perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. FOR YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing.]

*“And behold, I am with you, and I will keep watch over you in every place you go, and I will bring you back to this ground, for I will not leave you, even when I have done what I have spoken to you.”*

### Exegetical Notes

Though not mentioned in previous blessings, the added promise of **וּפְרִיָתָּ** (**פְּרִיָּן** < **פְּרִיָּן**) reveals how “God really speaks in a friendly way with Jacob.”<sup>44</sup> **פְּרִיָּן** goes hand in hand with being fruitful and multiplying, all depending on God’s protection:

But the more [the people of Israel] were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad (**כִּי יִרְבֶּה וְכֹן יִפְרִי**). (Exodus 1:12 ESV)

Twenty years from now, Israel himself will see this promise fulfilled in his prosperity—and Laban’s:

<sup>44</sup> LW 5:226.

For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly (וַיִּפְרֹץ לְרֹב), and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. (Genesis 30:30 ESV)

The blessing will be confirmed again when Jacob's grandson Perez breaks forth from the womb (Genesis 38:29).

God promises children to the desolate through the Seed of Israel, children more numerous than those of the married woman:

For thou shalt break forth (תִּפְרָצִי) on the right hand and on the left; and on thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. (Isaiah 54:3 KJV)

The promise made to Jacob extends beyond the boundaries of Canaan. The Church will break forth in all directions, and, as we read in Luther's German Bible, at all times: *Abend, Morgen, Mitternacht, und Mittag*.

Continuing his exegesis of פָּרִץ, Luther discusses the substantive פְּרִיץ. Luther claims that the biological genus *Parus* comes from the Hebrew; פְּרִיץ refers to a "tomtit, because it is a cruel bird."<sup>45</sup> With respect to the University of Wittenberg's ornithology department at that time, this is suspect reasoning. Chickadees and titmice are *Paridae*. The consumption of sunflower seeds is not synonymous with cruelty.

Returning to the firmer ground of Scripture, God promises Jacob and His Church that He "will be a פְּרִיץ against a פְּרִיץ."<sup>46</sup> The jealous God will "rage against him who rages" and spread His Church and His gospel throughout the world.<sup>47</sup> The result of this battle is not the destruction of man or the inauguration of "carnal tyranny,"<sup>48</sup> but the blessing of man and salvation for the whole world. Out of the nations in general, families in particular (מִשְׁפָּחַת) will be blessed. The efficacy of the Word is such that "some from all families will embrace it."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> LW 5:225; cf. Ps 17:4.

<sup>46</sup> LW 5:226.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> LW 5:227.

<sup>49</sup> LW 5:228.



Commentary: “That we may acknowledge the magnitude of God’s grace, which has been revealed and given to us through the Gospel.”<sup>50</sup>

*O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. (Psalm 107:1–9 KJV)*

*Know for sure that you will have descendants. Now you are alone, without a wife, without children. You are exiled. But later you shall have children’s children (e.g. Perez) and that Son who will make children of God.<sup>51</sup>*

God’s promise drenches Jacob with joy and gladness. Since “this should be applied to our use,”<sup>52</sup> Luther connects the sermon to baptism, in which God absolves us of sin and transfers blessings both eternal and temporal. In those life-giving waters, God is our פֶּרִיץ; He tears our souls away from Satan, adopts us as His children, and declares us heirs of heaven. *O optandum et fortem comitem!* “O what a desirable and stout companion!”<sup>53</sup>

The Father wraps the promise of the Messiah in the swaddling clothes of the temporal promise—He “binds it up into a little bundle”<sup>54</sup>—for the spiritual promises will fail if Jacob fails to survive. By promising to protect the patriarch from the twin furies of Esau and Satan, and by preserving him through twenty annoying years under Uncle Laban, God is also preserving His Church for all eternity.

<sup>50</sup> LW 5:225–236; WA 43:583–591.

<sup>51</sup> LW 5:229.

<sup>52</sup> LW 5:229.

<sup>53</sup> WA 43:588; LW 5:231.

<sup>54</sup> LW 5:231.

As the sermon concludes, Luther again stresses the primacy of the *sanctitas* imputed to us through the spoken Word and received by faith. We live only by the saintliness outside us and above us, not by the “formal righteousness” of works: “The head in the life of the saints is the speaking of God itself.”<sup>55</sup> Faith that comes from hearing the Word of Christ must come before works. Jesus first declared the paralytic’s sins forgiven; only then did he pick up his bed and walk home.

We tend to read this sermon “carelessly and casually” because we think we’re not as weak or afflicted as Jacob.<sup>56</sup> But how quickly we, too, lose faith, in spite of the full transfer of blessings in baptism. We experience great conflicts and grave doubts when things don’t flow according to our will. The disciples, already clean because of the Word the Teacher spoke to them (John 15:3), forgot every word He ever spoke when they stood before His cross (if, in fact, they were there at all). The gospel cannot be repeated enough. Faith, which comes by hearing, is strengthened by repetition.

### Genesis 28:16

*Evigilavit autem Iacob de somno suo, et ait: Vere Dominus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam.*

וַיִּקָּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי׃

[AND AWAKE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. JACOB FROM SLEEP HE-fem. sing. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND SAY-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. SURELY EXIST LORD IN PLACE THIS-masc. sing. AND I-sing. NOT KNOW-Qal perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing.]

*Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I didn’t know!”*

### Exegetical Notes

In the Vulgate, וַיִּקָּץ becomes *cumque evigilasset* (temporal conjunction + pluperfect subjunctive), “whenever he woke up.” Luther prefers *evigilavit autem* (perfect indicative + post-positive conjunction “however, but”), as if to say, “Jacob would’ve kept on dreaming, but he woke up.”

יֵשׁ is a strong declaration of existence in biblical and modern Hebrew (LXX ἔστιν is emphatic). Taking examples from Genesis, שׁי marks existence or presence *contrary to expectation*. Abraham

<sup>55</sup> LW 5:234.

<sup>56</sup> LW 5:235.

throws out the number of fifty righteous men in Sodom—a wish at best (יֵשׁ חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים; 18:24). Jacob rejoices that there is grain in Egypt (יֵשׁ-שֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם; 42:1–2). Joseph’s brothers admit that, along with an aged father, one brother remains at home (יֵשׁ-לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיֶלֶד זְקָנִים קָטָן; 44:20). The presence of God in that “certain place,” outside the confines of his father’s house, was contrary to Jacob’s expectation: “Surely God is present—in all the fullness of His mercy, promises, and blessings—even in this place!”

*Commentary: On the interpretation of dreams*<sup>57</sup>

The interpretation of dreams is a tricky thing; indeed, trusting in dreams is often forbidden in Scripture (Deuteronomy 13:1–5, Jeremiah 29:8, Jude 8). The Word is the *norma normans* over visions. Dreams must be tested in its clear light.

Luther distinguishes between political, or private dreams on the one hand, and ecclesiastical, or eternal dreams on the other. This is not to discount the dreams of secular men like Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar, whose dreams may be perfectly true. Whether related to church or state, there are two marks of a true dream: 1) an analogy with the present (especially present anxiety); and 2) the “stirrings” of the heart that result from the dream, which we call faith.<sup>58</sup>

Jacob has heard that he now possesses the blessing, the “governor’s mansion,” and the “bishop’s seat.” Yet he finds himself in exile. He has received the foundation for his life’s work, but is troubled about the structure’s future completion. This is his present anxiety. While he sleeps, he hears the same words of blessing from the same Lord: the God of Isaac will be His Father and Protector. He awakens with faith renewed.

When we have present doubts regarding the temple God is building in us, the temple in which He dwells, we return to our baptism. Through water and the Word, the Spirit assures us that the blessings still exist, and our possession of those blessings is secure. We interpret our dreams according to our baptism (Romans 12:2).

Though the “certain place” remains unnamed until v. 19, Luther offers a few thoughts regarding the location of Bethel here. Jacob never expected that Bethel could be Bethel; his incommensurable lodging place was anything but the house of God. But by the sermon, the Father

<sup>57</sup> LW 5:236–244; WA 43:591–597.

<sup>58</sup> LW 5:236.

established His house in the midst of many devils; i.e., in the vicinity of Jerusalem:

The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. (Psalm 110:2 KJV)

Polytheistic Canaanites ruled this land in Jacob's time. Later Jeroboam would set up his anti-Church by setting up a golden calf at Bethel (1 Kings 12:28–29). The “holy site” of Jacob's Ladder provided Jeroboam a patriarchal *imprimatur* for his actions; his idolatry was established on “the authority of the fathers.” It was no different in Luther's time. Rome was simply the latest example of Satan pitching his tent in proximity to justification by faith. The Christian Church can expect nothing less than the same idolatry and chicanery, “sanctioned” by the authority of the fathers.

Luther prefers to equate Bethel with Calvary. Here Jesus died and slept in the sepulcher; here the angels witnessed the humiliation and exaltation of the Incarnate Son. Whether or not the equation is exactly true, what matters is that Bethel is found wherever God speaks and produces faith: *Ibi esse Ecclesiam Dei, ubi verbum Dei sonat.*<sup>59</sup> The presence of the Church is possible in Turkey, within the papacy, and even in hell due to the *notae ecclesiae*. The gospel is not bound. Wherever God speaks to us, there is the ladder, the ascent and descent of angels, the opening of the kingdom of heaven.

### Genesis 28:17

*Timuit igitur et dixit: quam terribilis est locus iste: non est hic aliud nisi domus Dei, et hic est porta coeli.*

וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם

[AND FEAR-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND SAY-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. WHAT FEAR-Niphal part. masc. sing. THE PLACE THE THIS-masc. sing. BE-NOT THIS-masc. sing. THAT IF HOUSE-masc. sing. const. GOD AND THIS-masc. sing. GATE-masc. sing. const. THE HEAVEN-masc. pl.]

*And Jacob was afraid and said, “How fearful is this place! This is nothing but the very house of God and the very gate of heaven!”*

<sup>59</sup> WA 43:597; see also LW 22:201–202.

### Exegetical Notes

*Timuit* (perfect indicative) is Luther's sensible translation of the finite verb וַיִּירָא, while the Vulgate offers the more poetic (present) participle *pavens*, "quaking," an equally sensible response to visions such as these (cf. *Cumque venisset pavens* [Niphal perfect נִבְעַתִּי] *corruí in faciem meam*, describing Daniel in Gabriel's presence in 8:17).

As for the Niphal participle גּוֹרָא, we typically find "awesome" in English (KJV "dreadful," KJV21 "fearsome"). In 1523 Luther wrote *schrecklich*, "terrible," but changed it to *heilig* in 1545. Exiles like Nehemiah and Daniel invoke the "great and awesome God" (הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא) of covenant faithfulness (Nehemiah 1:5, 9:32; Daniel 9:4), who is awesome in His sanctuary (גּוֹרָא אֱלֹהִים מִמִּקְדָּשָׁיו; Psalm 68:35 [MT 68:36]), yet descends to us and does awesome things (בְּעֲשׂוֹתָיךְ נִרְאֹת לֹא נִקְוָה יִרְדָּף; Isaiah 64:3 [MT 64:2]; see also Psalm 65:5 [MT 65:6]), especially when we don't expect them. When Philip invites Nathanael to "come and see" the Ladder for himself, he echoes the song of praise:

Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men (גּוֹרָא עֲלֵילָה עַל־בְּנֵי אָדָם).  
(Psalm 66:5 ESV)

*Commentary: "This is a very wonderful speech."<sup>60</sup>*

This is a peerless verse in Scripture; in one place we find the house of God and the gate of heaven. Contrary to expectation, God establishes His heavenly dwelling on earth and provides us with safe passage from the present life to the future. Our exit from His house on earth is our entrance into His heavenly home.

Recently, when the calendar in my office turned to "September," this testimonial caught my eye: "We love our annual trip to Skyline Drive. It feels as if we're in 'God's church!'" Clearly Patty Malone of Norfolk needs a refresher in the doctrine of the church. The house of God and the gate of heaven are present *wherever God speaks*. Only by the presence of the gospel in baptism and absolution—and by the presence of godly people gathered around the gospel—can churches presume to call themselves as such. God's house means His Word is there and He alone is the *paterfamilias*.

<sup>60</sup> LW 5:244–251; WA 43:597–602.

God's house also means that *papa et pompa*, which worm their way into the Church *ut subintroducunt et defendunt suas abominaciones*, are excluded.<sup>61</sup> Just as Ahab was unsuccessful in mingling God and Baal, so Christ and Satan cannot rule as consuls; they cannot coexist.

God furnished a pulpit in the wilderness and preached the inaugural sermon. The theme was the perpetuity of the Church. The congregation was Jacob and his descendants: you and I and all those who were "in his loins."<sup>62</sup> The pulpit of God is not too far for us to find if we know what to look for. The flesh sees stone and wood and water and hears the voice of man; at times it "sees so keenly" that it excludes God from His Word and Sacraments;<sup>63</sup> but the spirit, according to the Holy Spirit, senses the pouring of baptism's life-giving water and the resounding of the Word. Here we enter eternal life and approach the entrance to heaven. The Malones don't have to journey out to Skyline Drive. We don't have to search for "new foolish entrances" into heaven;<sup>64</sup> rather, let us look in faith for the pure *notae ecclesiae*—where God the Savior is *included*—and put up a sign that says, "THE GATE OF GOD."

In the Divine Service, God dwells with us that we may dwell with Him, and He always moves first. In the last book of the Bible, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven (Revelation 21:1–4). Here, in the first book, He appears with the ladder, descends and speaks to us, lives and works in us. May He be included in our churches! May we see and hear His words! "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11a KJV).

The marks of the church are the same throughout the world:

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20 NKJV)

Luther encourages us as pastors to put up the sign wherever we can:

Let this be done either in the church and in the public assemblies or in bedchambers, when we console and buoy up the sick or when we absolve him who sits with us at table.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> WA 43:597–598; see also SA III.[12]1.

<sup>62</sup> LW 5:246–247.

<sup>63</sup> LW 5:249.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., monasteries; LW 5:247.

<sup>65</sup> LW 5:247.

The sign also applies to our devotional life. In the vision given to the lonely patriarch, we learn that, even in private meditation, God is present with the angels.

### Genesis 28:18–19

v. 18

*Consurgens igitur Jacob mane tulit lapidem, quem posuerat pro cervicali capitis sui, et posuit illum in statuam, effundens oleum super summitate eius.*

וַיִּשְׁכֶּם יַעֲקֹב בְּבֹקֶר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ  
מִצֵּבָה וַיִּצֹק שָׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ

[AND RISE-vav cons. Hiphil imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. JACOB IN THE MORNING-masc. sing. AND TAKE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) THE STONE-fem. sing. WHICH PLACE-Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. HEAD-HE-fem. pl. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. AND PLACE-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT)-SHE-3<sup>rd</sup> fem. sing. PILLAR-fem. sing. AND POUR-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FAT-masc. sing. ON HEAD-SHE-masc. sing. const. + 3<sup>rd</sup> fem. sing.]

*So Jacob rose in the morning and took the stone which he had set up as his pillow and set it up as a pillar, and he poured oil upon the top of it.*

v. 19

*Et vocavit nomen loci illius BETHEL, quae prius Luz vocabatur.*

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית־אֵל וְאוּלַם לֹזוֹ שֵׁם־הָעִיר לְרֹאשְׁנָהּ

[AND CALL-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. (DIRECT OBJECT) NAME-masc. sing. const. THE PLACE THE HE-masc. sing. BETHEL AND-BUT LUZ NAME-masc. sing. const. THE CITY-fem. sing. FOR FIRST-fem. sing.]

*And he called the name of that place Bethel, although Luz had been the name of the city at first.*

### Exegetical Notes

The finite verb וַיִּשְׁכֶּם (Hiphil imperfect < שָׁכַם) is often rendered adverbially in English (ESV, NIV “early in the morning”). Those who neglect the Word of God get up early for a busy day of drinking (Isaiah 5:11). Those who truly hear the Word waste no time in obeying it. Abraham saddles his donkey for Moriah (Genesis 22:3). Moses

ascends Sinai with new tablets in his hands (Exodus 34:4). Hezekiah begins restoring Temple worship (2 Chronicles 29:29).

The stone used for a pillow has become a **מַצֵּבָה**, a “pillar.” Jacob will repeat this process throughout his life: to symbolize his newfound understanding with Laban (Genesis 31:45), to celebrate his return to Bethel (Genesis 35:14), and to mark Rachel’s tomb outside Bethlehem (Genesis 35:20).

A **מַצֵּבָה** is a memorial of God’s mercy; it is not an object to be worshiped, to the exclusion of God’s name.<sup>66</sup> Compare the spirit of Jacob with the spirit of Absalom:

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King’s Valley, for he said, “I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.” He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom’s monument to this day. (2 Samuel 18:18 ESV)

A proper **מַצֵּבָה**, here properly named “Bethel,” *includes* God and gives Him the glory:

In every place where *I cause my name to be remembered* I will come to you and bless you. (Exodus 20:24b ESV)

**וַיִּצֹק** marks the first anointing with oil in Scripture. For the most part, **וַיִּצֹק** is interchangeable with **וַיִּמָּשַׁח**. If there is a difference, it’s in the motions: the former is characterized by pouring (2 Kings 4:4), the latter by smearing. **וַיִּצֹק** is applied to both inanimate objects and animate beings, from the anointing of grain offerings (Leviticus 2:1) and the altar of the Tabernacle (along with its utensils; Leviticus 8:10, Numbers 7:1) to the grace poured on the Prince’s lips (Psalm 45:2 [MT 45:3]).

*Commentary: The restoration of God’s house...again*<sup>67</sup>

In the house of God there is perpetual war and perpetual peace. The pillar of Bethel marks a battlefield where God and Satan have already met and will continue to meet. By calling it “Bethel,” according to Luther, Jacob is not so much renaming Luz as restoring its original name.

Luther, who earlier had equated Bethel with Calvary, now equates Bethel with Moriah, the Temple Mount. Satan always seeks

<sup>66</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, 282.

<sup>67</sup> LW 5:251–253; WA 43:602–603.



to undermine God's house by converting His sanctuary into a den of thieves. A thousand years before Christ cleansed the Temple of moneychangers, King David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan) the Jebusite in order to build an altar to the Lord (2 Samuel 24:16–24, 1 Chronicles 21:18–22:1). That there was a threshing floor in that fearful place, where Jacob slept and where the Temple would be built, shows that Satan had held the field for some time. Now, through His servant David, God was restoring it once more.

In the age of the patriarchs, God loved this place for the sake of Shem, “who preached and performed miracles there.”<sup>68</sup> As the pillow becomes a pillar, so the stone becomes the anointed cornerstone, dedicated to a future chapel. While “papistic apes”<sup>69</sup> use oil without the Word to spiritualize their human traditions, Jacob's impulse came out of the spirit of fear and worship. He wanted to honor the Word of the Lord. The holiness of Bethel comes from God's own choosing, not man's. God sanctified the place—He made it both *schrecklich* and *heilig*—by His own dwelling and preaching.

Now Luther will elaborate on life in Luz.

## Genesis 28:20–22

v. 20

*Vovit quoque Iacob votum dicens: Si fuerit Deus mecum, et custodierit me in via ista, quam ego ambulo, et dederit mihi panem ad vescendum, et vestimentum ad induendum.*

וַיִּדַר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר לֵאמֹר אִם־יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרָנִי בְדַרְדָּר הַזֶּה  
אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן־לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְבָשׁ

[AND VOW-vav cons. Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. JACOB VOW-masc. sing. FOR SAY-Qal inf. const. IF LORD GOD WITH I-1<sup>st</sup> sing. AND KEEP-vav cons. Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. + 1<sup>st</sup> sing. IN THE WAY THE THIS-masc. sing. WHICH I-1<sup>st</sup>. sing. GO-Qal part. masc. sing. AND GIVE-vav cons. Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR I-1<sup>st</sup> sing. BREAD-masc. sing. FOR EAT-Qal inf. const. AND CLOTHES-masc. sing. FOR WEAR-Qal inf. const.]

*Then Jacob vowed a vow, saying, “If the LORD God will be with me and keep watch over me on this way that I am going, and if He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear.”*

<sup>68</sup> LW 5:252; see also 4:99–101.

<sup>69</sup> LW 5:253; *simiae pontificae*, WA 43:603.

v. 21

*Reversusque fuero prospere ad domum patris mei: erit mihi dominus in Deum.*

וְשָׁבְתִי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל-בַּיִת אָבִי וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים

[AND RETURN-vav cons. Qal perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. IN PEACE-masc. sing. TO HOUSE-masc. sing. const. FATHER-I-masc. sing. + 1<sup>st</sup> sing. AND BE-vav cons. Qal perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. LORD FOR-I-1<sup>st</sup> sing. FOR GOD]

*“And if I return in peace to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God.”*

v. 22

*Et lapis iste, quem erexi in titulum, erit domus Dei: cunctorumque, quae dederis mihi, decimas offeram tibi.*

וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי מִצְבָּה יְהוָה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶנְנִי לְךָ עֲשֹׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרְנֹךָ

[AND THE STONE THE THIS-fem. sing. WHICH PLACE-Qal perf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. PILLAR-fem. sing. BE-Qal imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. HOUSE-masc. sing. const. GOD AND ALL-masc. sing. WHICH GIVE-Qal imperf. 2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing. FOR-I-1<sup>st</sup> sing. TITHE-Piel inf. abs. TITHE-Piel imperf. 1<sup>st</sup> sing. + 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. FOR-YOU-2<sup>nd</sup> masc. sing.]

*“And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be the house of God, and of all that You give me, I will surely tithe it to You.”*

### Exegetical Notes

Where does the protasis end and the apodosis begin? Most English translations divide the conditional at **וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים**, which is usually preceded by a result clause: “so that I return... then the LORD... and this stone...” The LXX agrees with English; *καὶ ἔσται* (future indicative < **וְהָיָה**; cf. *erit* in Latin), begins the apodosis of a future-more-vivid conditional.

Abram’s offering to Melchizedek is the first tithe in Scripture (Genesis 14:20). Jacob’s **עֲשֹׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרְנֹךָ** is the first promise of a tithe. But who will be the recipient?

Commentary: Providing for the children of Eber<sup>70</sup>

*But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.'" So Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. (2 Kings 5:20–23 NKJV)*

*Therefore if you give anything to scholars, you have given it to God Himself; and you should know that you have done God a most pleasing service and have brought a sacrifice adorned with this glorious and very high title that it is called a vow to God.<sup>71</sup>*

*For since Christ alone ascended into heaven, who also descended and is now in heaven, it is impossible for a Benedictine, an Augustinian, a Dominican, a Carthusian, and their like to ascend into heaven. The whole lot of them are seeking heaven with lamps that have no oil. In other words, they seek heaven by means of their own works. Without their own works they expect nothing of God, for this is what their way of life and their vows teach them. But a Christian man ascends to heaven by virtue of another, and that other is Christ, in whom he has been baptized and with whom he has been raised.<sup>72</sup>*

Does Jacob's vow come from doubt, after such a glorious vision? Luther knows it can and takes great pleasure in it. The weaknesses and doubts of the saints—the *tentatio sanctorum*—are of great benefit to us. They console us far more effectively than heroic acts and virtues. They teach us that there is no need for despair. The Word preserved and

<sup>70</sup> LW 5:253–265; WA 43:603–612.

<sup>71</sup> LW 5:262.

<sup>72</sup> LW 44:319.

sustained the heroes of faith. The Word will most certainly do the same for us.

The Word of the patriarchs has been made more sure by the voice of Christ, who speaks to us in the Sacraments and in the absolution, saying, "You are holy, blessed, forgiven." Our daily doubts and *tentationes*, along with the sobs of the saints, teach us never to neglect these promises of God, but to cling to them all the more, for

God could not retain and fulfill his promises in us if He did not kill that stupid, proud, and smug flesh in us.<sup>73</sup>

Luther's Latin epigram puts this nicely: *Nisi enim esset tentatus, esset inflatus*.<sup>74</sup>

We do not receive absolution and Holy Communion just to tempt God with idleness. God expects His means of grace—"His creatures"<sup>75</sup>—to be used, to build up His Church on earth. In this spirit, Jacob vows to use whatever is at hand, whenever it is at hand, for *whom-ever* is at hand.

Looking once more through the *Lumpffilter*, Luther returns to his anti-monastic polemic and refutes misinterpretations of Jacob's vow. That Jacob made a vow and kept it is sufficient for the opponents of AC XXVII.<sup>76</sup> Here is a *sedes doctrinae* for their abominations. Against them stands the cornerstone of the Christian life: justification by faith, given first and given freely. The first impulse of love comes from God. He moves toward us with justifying grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are purely passive as we are brought to a knowledge of the truth. The good works that follow are nothing but thanksgiving and praise to God, and all of them are equally good in His sight.

As far as the east is from the west, so is Jacob's vow from the monk's. The vow of Jacob is a fruit of faith, but Luther has bad news for the novice: "A vow does not make a tree."<sup>77</sup> To acknowledge God first leads to God-pleasing work. When men create other gods to glorify, they only glorify themselves and cannibalize their own tithes in their "horrible blasphemy."<sup>78</sup>

When we understand that Jacob was justified by faith, we can properly interpret the substance of his vow: he promises to establish a

<sup>73</sup> LW 5:256.

<sup>74</sup> WA 43:605.

<sup>75</sup> LW 5:257.

<sup>76</sup> See also LW 44:252; Ap XXVII.9.

<sup>77</sup> LW 5:259; see also LW 44:296; Ap XXVII.23.

<sup>78</sup> LW 5:260.

school and provide for its maintenance. Why else would tithes be given to God? Who else would receive those tithes but the Lord's ministers? Consider the Levites. God was their portion and their inheritance. He received the tithes and ate with them. It was no different in the time of the patriarchs. It is no different now. Tithes preserve the ministry by establishing churches and schools. They provide for the prophets and the prophets' sons, the "starving artists" of the gospel, the poor that we will always have with us.

The conclusion of Luther's commentary on Genesis 28 is the work of a master. The Reformer looks at the landscape through the eyes of Jacob. The children of Shem and Eber, who proclaim the good news of the coming Messiah, go about naked and hungry in Luz. Mount Moriah is in ruins again. Jacob makes a vow of love to restore what Satan has destroyed, for he, too, has a vision. He sees the dignity of the holy ministry. He sees the affliction of the Church, *saepe duriter a Tyrannis concussam esse et laceratam*.<sup>79</sup> But Jacob trusts in the promise of his Seed; He sees the succession and success of Christ.

### Conclusion: Confessing the Ladder at all times and in all places

*But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." (Isaiah 43:1, 5-7 ESV)*

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord*

<sup>79</sup> WA 43:611.

*in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 NKJV)

*Brighter scenes will then commence;  
This shall be my confidence.*<sup>80</sup>

Jacob's Ladder impresses three unions upon us: 1) the Father and the Son, according to divinity; 2) divinity and humanity in the Son; and 3) Christ—still in His divinity and humanity—with His Church. Satan seeks to break this cord of three strands by heresy and sect, but the Ladder is fixed in the heavens and established on earth.

Therefore, let us not give up gathering at Bethel and confessing the Ladder in our midst, as some are in the habit of doing. Let us not grow weary in repeating the promises of God to one another in the Divine Service.

In the Invocation, God summons us to His house. By our baptism into His holy name, we have received the full rights of His sons and stand to inherit eternal life.

By the twin priestly offices of absolution and prayer, He removes our internal doubts and relieves us of our external burdens. By His Word, His Spirit imputes *sanctitas* to us and cleanses us from sin. In response we join the angelic choir in the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, ascending to see the Son at the right hand of the Father, descending to see the Offspring of a virgin's womb, rejoicing in the Seed of Jacob, who has made full atonement for sin and reconciled us to the Father.

In the Creed we confess the doctrine of the Ladder and repel the attacks of the devil:

Being of one substance with the Father, By Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation *came down from heaven and was incarnate* by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and *ascended into heaven*, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And He *shall come again with glory* to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

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<sup>80</sup> C. F. Gellert, ELH 353:1.

Then the Word is proclaimed from the pulpit God has furnished. Declared righteous by faith, we offer vows and tithes of love to build up His Church and support His laborers.

Our time on the Ladder is not yet finished—it is so good for us to be here! We join the angels once more, ascending as we sing the threefold *Sanctus*. In the *Verba* our Lord and Savior descends to us and blesses us with His presence in, with, and under the bread and wine.

Now I am kneeling at the rail, shoulder to shoulder with the communion of saints. I am poor, wretched, and starving. Yet He deigns to love me: “This is My body, which is given for you. This is My blood, shed for you. Man, your sins are forgiven you.”

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God! This is the gate of heaven! I have seen extraordinary things today!

Then I pick up my mat of affliction and walk home, strengthened in faith toward the God of Israel and in fervent love toward Eber’s starving children. [LSQ](#)

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# Congregational Introits for Lutheran Churches

Daniel J. Hartwig  
Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Okauchee, Wisconsin

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## The Spoken Introit Problem

FOR THE MAJORITY OF MIDWESTERN AMERICAN Lutherans of German ancestry, the present-day tradition of worship is patterned on the liturgies presented in the monumentally important hymn book *The Lutheran Hymnal*,<sup>1</sup> published in 1941 (TLH). The impact of this hymnal is still seen in many midwestern Lutheran congregations and it is not impossible to find some congregations still using this hymnal over seventy-five years after it was published. But, like any hymnal, there were flaws in TLH.

In the hymnal's main liturgy, "The Order of the Holy Communion,"<sup>2</sup> the Introit is beset by this rubric, "Then shall be said or chanted the Introit. ... If the Antiphon and Psalm are said by the Minister, the Gloria Patri shall be said or chanted by the Congregation."<sup>3</sup> This rubric is not bad in and of itself—the Introit is a part of the service propers traditionally sung by a choir. The problem is this: TLH was released in 1941, but many of the supporting resources, including books of accompanying chant, were not released until years later.<sup>4</sup> And although there were already books with propers prior to the publication of TLH,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> TLH, 15ff.

<sup>3</sup> TLH, 16.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Music for the Liturgy of the Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944); Paul Bunjes, *The Service Propers Noted* (St. Louis: Concordia

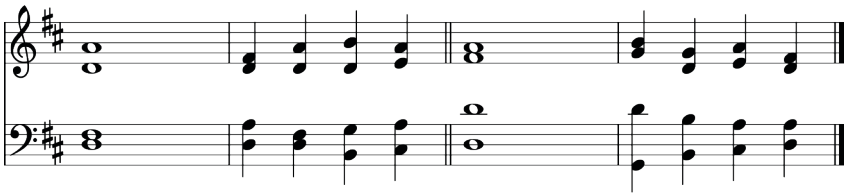
these propers were not designed to be musically compatible with the TLH liturgies.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when the rubric allowed for speaking the Introit and there were no tailor-made versions of the Introit available, the Introit was simply spoken by the pastor every week. Later on, when the supporting musical resources began to appear, they were not used in many parishes because by then the people were used to the pastor speaking the Introit. Thus, some of the important musical aspects of Christian worship were lost for a time in midwestern Lutheranism.

## The Revival of Congregational Psalm Singing

In the post-Vatican II era, there has been an increased emphasis on Psalm singing in Lutheran circles. The Psalms are the basis for the vast majority of Introits. Here we see again a weakness of TLH's format as it does indeed include a robust Psalter,<sup>6</sup> but without any musical accompaniment and without any pointing or other formatting for singing. Thus, the results were predictable: the TLH's Psalter was used rarely and even then the text was merely spoken and not sung. Modern hymnals have effectively improved the format of Psalms by including uniform chant tones and proper textual pointing to make singing psalm texts in chant style an achievable goal.

The *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*<sup>7</sup> (ELH) devised its own system of Psalm singing. The editors included four basic formulary tones to make the Psalter easier to sing. The Psalm texts in the hymnal are pointed to be sung interchangeably with any of these four simple tones. They are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

### Tone 1



Publishing House, 1960); Healey William, *The Introits and Graduals for the Church Year* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967); etc.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Choral Service Book* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1901); etc.

<sup>6</sup> TLH, 123–157.

<sup>7</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> ELH, 173.

Tone 2

Tone 3

Tone 4

Psalms are easily sung in this system by properly pointing the text of a psalm to indicate to the singer where the mediation and cadence<sup>9</sup> occur in each musical phrase. The mediation and cadence are simply the four syllables at the end of each musical phrase. An example of pointing a text to fit any of the above tones follows with Psalm 19:1–2.

The heavens declare the | glory of God; /  
And the firmament shows | His handiwork.

Day unto | day utters speech; /  
And night unto night | reveals knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, though the ELH has a comprehensive Psalter and includes the historical Introits for the liturgical year, the Introits are unpointed. I presume this is because of space limitations. Also, because

<sup>9</sup> The standard outline of plainsong chant is simplified in much of the ELH repertoire to this four-fold structure: dominant (the chief tone on which most the text is recited), mediation (the musical movement which concludes the first half of each verse), dominant, and cadence (the musical movement which concludes the second half of each verse).

<sup>10</sup> *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

they are located in a different part of the book, they are still largely spoken within our Lutheran group.

## A Pragmatic Solution For Liturgical Singing

Numerous liturgical musicians have written paraphrases of the Introits to make them approachable for broad congregational usage, utilizing familiar hymn tunes.<sup>11</sup> This is certainly a pragmatic approach and allows for ease-of-use for a normal congregation. However, to emphasize the liturgical aspect of the Introits and to tie their usage in with the regular Psalm singing already familiar in our circles, I propose an alternative solution. New antiphon melodies, conforming to the four formulary tones in the ELS, can be used. Because the ELH formulary tones are “adapted from ancient Gregorian tones,”<sup>12</sup> I have composed one set of melodies also based on the Gregorian tones. In addition, I have composed a series of modern tunes which also correspond with the tones. These tones, written with a strict musical meter, will give the congregation an approachable yet distinctive way to sing the Introit antiphons each Sunday and festival day.

The meter chosen for the project was 8.8. It matches no hymn tune which I know. It is a long enough set of syllables to give room for capturing much of the thought of the original Introit antiphon text, but it is still short enough that it serves as a refreshing and quick refrain to sing interspersed with the chanting of the formulary tones.

To present the full text of the Introit each Sunday, I suggest this format for the utilization of the following Antiphon paraphrases: First, the pastor intones the Introit by chanting the full unparaphrased text using the formulary tone assigned to the particular Sunday. Then, the congregation responds with the antiphon paraphrase sung once, followed by the Psalm verse(s) and *Gloria Patri*, and concluding with the Introit paraphrase repeated. This will lead into the ordinary liturgy—the *Kyrie*, *Gloria in Excelsis*, etc.

Because of the decline of the Introit in practice, many of the newer settings of the Lutheran liturgy have not included an Introit at all, but rather stand-alone Psalms to be sung among the reading of the Scripture lessons. This system of singing the Introits could very easily be used for singing these Psalms in those newer liturgies. Because of the flexibility of using the formulary tones when singing the Psalm verses, one could

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<sup>11</sup> See Christoph Tietze, *Hymn Introits for the Liturgical Year* (Mundelein: Hillenbrand Books, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> <http://els.org/resources/worship/elh-overview/>. Accessed 1 December 2017.

include as many verses as they wished between the antiphon “refrains” when singing in such a way.

The antiphon melodies I composed correspond directly with the formulary tones in the ELH. This means Antiphon 1 (a or b) would be used only with Tone 1 for chanting. The same is true for Antiphon 2 (a or b) and Tone 2, etc. To that end, these are the Antiphon melodies I have written to compliment the formulary tones in the ELH. The antiphon for Trinity Sunday is given as an example in each.

Antiphon 1-a: In the style of Gregorian tone V

O bless the Ho - ly Trin - i - ty

and praise the grac - ious Un - i - ty.

Antiphon 1-b: Modern setting

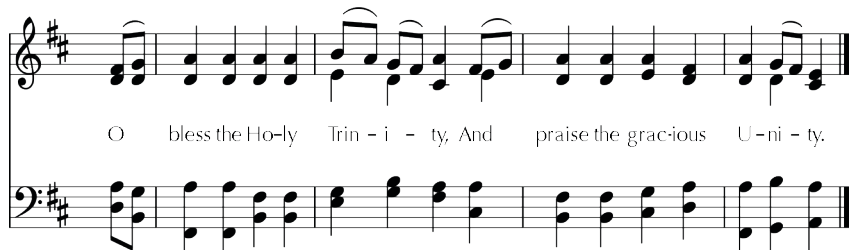
*Intro*

O bless the Ho - ly Trin-i - ty, and praise the grac -

*Final*

ious Un - i - ty. -ious Un - i - ty.

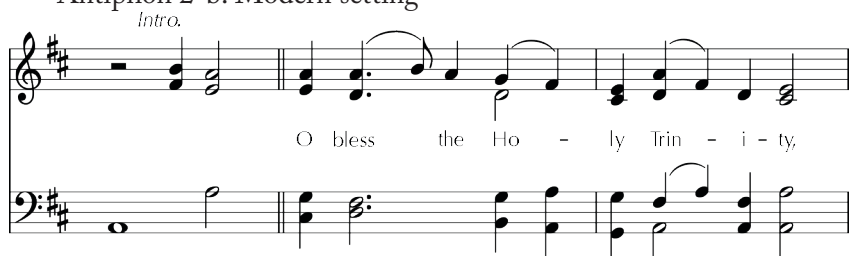
## Antiphon 2-a: In the style of Gregorian tone III



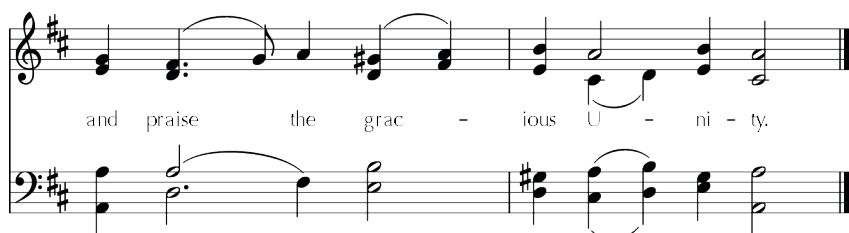
O bless the Ho-ly Trin - i - ty, And praise the grac-ious U-ni - ty.

## Antiphon 2-b: Modern setting

*Intro.*



O bless the Ho - ly Trin - i - ty,



and praise the grac - ious U - ni - ty.

## Antiphon 3-a: In the style of Gregorian tone IX (Perigrinus)

O bless the Ho-ly Trin-i - ty, and praise the grac-ious Un - i - ty.

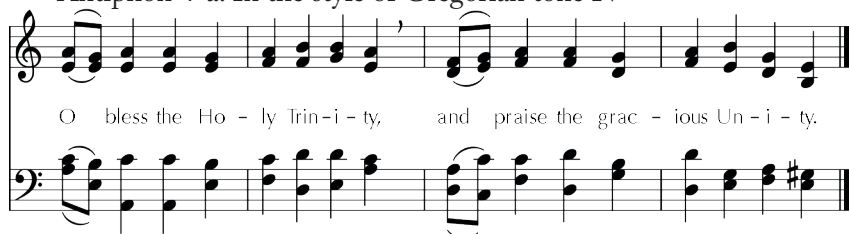
## Antiphon 3-b: Modern setting

*Intro.*

O bless the Ho - ly Trin - i - ty,  
and praise the grac - ious U - ni - ty.



## Antiphon 4-a: In the style of Gregorian tone IV



O bless the Ho - ly Trin - i - ty, and praise the grac - ious Un - i - ty.

## Antiphon 4-b: Modern setting



*Intro.*  
O bless the Ho - ly Trin - i - ty,  
and praise the grac - ious Un - i - ty.

The modern settings of these antiphons have a brief introduction meant to bring everyone to the correct starting pitch. If the organ accompanies the chanting, then repeating the introduction may be unnecessary when the antiphons are repeated during the singing. However, they are necessary when the chanting of the Psalm verses is done *a capella*, which is a relatively common practice in the ELH tradition.

These melodies are not necessarily meant to be the final version of this project. They are offered here with the hope that those who are more musically gifted can improve them.

### The Paraphrased Introit Antiphons

Because the full Introit texts are readily available in many worship resources, below I include only the Introit antiphons with my suggested paraphrases. The paraphrases are all written in an 8.8 meter so that any text could be used with any of the Antiphon melodies above. The

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New King James Version* (NKJV). Underlining indicates a single syllable which should be stretched over two notes.

## I. SEMESTER DOMINI (The Half-year of Our Lord)

Advent 1—*Ad Te Levavi* (Psalm 25:1–3a)<sup>13</sup>

FULL PSALM TEXT:

*To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. / O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed;*

*Let not my enemies triumph over me. / Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed.*

PARAPHRASE:

To You, O Lord, I lift my soul. Let none feel shame who Your name call.

Advent 2—*Populus Zion* (Isaiah 62:11; 30:30, 29)

*Daughter of Zion, surely your Salvation is coming. / The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard; and you shall have gladness of heart.*

As Zion sees Salvation near, Your voice will give us hearts of cheer.

Advent 3—*Gaudete* (Philippians 4:4–5)

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! / Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

Rejoice in God, Rejoice again! Be gentle for the Lord's at hand.

Advent 4—*Rorate Coeli* (Isaiah 45:8)

*Rain down, you heavens, from above, And let the skies pour down righteousness; / Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation.*

Let righteousness rain from above. Let earth receive God's saving love.

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<sup>13</sup> References were gathered primarily from two sources: Paul Z. Strodach, *The Church Year: Studies in the Intros, Collects, Epistles and Gospels* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1924), and Tietze, *Hymn Intros*.

*Christmas Eve (Wisdom 18:14–15)*

*When all was still and | it was midnight, / Your almighty Word, O Lord,  
descended from | the royal throne.*

When all was still, at midnight, Lord; From heaven's throne came  
down Your Word.

*Christmas Day (Isaiah 9:6)*

*For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the govern-  
ment will be up- | on His shoulder. / And His name will be called Wonderful  
Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, | Prince of Peace.*

A Child is born to us who will His many holy names fulfill.

*Christmas 1 (Psalm 93:5, 2)*

*Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness adorns Your house, O | LORD,  
forever. / Your throne is established from of old; You are from | everlasting.*

You Word and holy House are sure; O Lord, Your throne is ever-  
more.

*Circumcision and Name of Christ (Jan 1) (Psalm 8:1, 4)*

*O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who  
have set Your glory a- | bove the heavens! / What is man that You are mindful  
of him, And the son of man that | You visit him?*

Oh LORD, to all Your name is great! And yet You think of our  
poor state.

*Epiphany (January 6) (Malachi 3:1; 1 Chronicles 29:10)*

*Behold, the LORD, the | Ruler, has come; / And the kingdom and the  
power and the glory | are in His hand.*

Behold, the Lord has now come and He holds all glory in His hand.

*Epiphany 1 (The Boy Jesus in the Temple) (Isaiah 6:1;  
Rev. 19:6)*

*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high | and lifted up, / And the train of  
His robe | filled the temple.*

*And I heard the voice of a | great multitude / Saying, "Alleluia! For the  
Lord God Om- | nipotent reigns!"*

I saw God's throne and royal train, While many sang, "Praise God  
who reigns!"

*Epiphany 2 (The Wedding at Cana) (Psalm 66:4; 92:1)*

*All the earth shall worship You And sing | praises to You; / They shall sing  
prai- | ses to Your name.*

*It is good to give | thanks to the Lord, / And to sing praises to Your name,  
| O Most High.*

All earth shall praise Your name and sing, O Most High God, with  
thanksgiving!

*Epiphany 3 (Jesus Heals the Leper and the Centurion's Servant)  
(Psalm 97:6, 9)*

*The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples | see His glory.  
/ For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far |  
above all gods.*

Your righteousness we see above. You are much higher than false  
gods.

*Epiphany 4 (Jesus Calms the Storm) (Psalm 107:28–29)*

*Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, And He  
brings them out of | their distresses. / He calms the storm, So  
that | its waves are still.*

They cry to You and then You save. You calm the storm and still its  
wave.

*Epiphany 5 (Parable of Enemy Sowing Weeds among the Wheat)*  
*(Psalm 37:6, 18)*

*He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice<sup>1</sup> as the noonday. / The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall<sup>1</sup> be forever.*

Your justice shines like bright noon light. You give Your gifts to the upright.

*Transfiguration (Psalm 77:18)*

*The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings<sup>1</sup> lit up the world; / The earth<sup>1</sup> trembled and shook.*

Your thunder and Your lightning bright Cause earth to shake and see Your light.

*Septuagesima (Psalm 18:5–6)*

*The sorrows of Sheol<sup>1</sup> surrounded me; / The snares of death<sup>1</sup> confronted me.*

*In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried<sup>1</sup> out to my God; / He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, e-<sup>1</sup>ven to His ears.*

The snares of death Surround me here! To my distress, Lord, Turn Your ear!

*Sexagesima (Psalm 44:23, 25a, 26a)*

*Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us<sup>1</sup> off forever. / For our soul is bowed down to the dust. A-<sup>1</sup>rise for our help.*

Awaken, Lord! O help us now! For in the dust We lowly bow.

*Quinquagesima (Psalm 31:2b–3)*

*Be my rock of refuge, A fortress of de-<sup>1</sup>fense to save me. / For You are my rock and my fortress; Therefore, for You name's sake, Lead<sup>1</sup> me and guide me.*

O Lord, my Rock, a fortress strong, For Your name's sake guide me along.

Ash Wednesday (Psalm 57:2, 1)

*I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs | all things for me. / And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities | have passed by.*

I cry to God whose wings supply True safety till harm passes by.

Lent 1—Invocavit (Psalm 91:15–16)

*He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him | and honor him. / With long life I will satisfy him, And show him | My salvation.*

O Lord, You hear us in distress. You satisfy and save and bless.

Lent 2—Reminiscere (Psalm 25:6, 2, 22)

*Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they | are from of old. / Let not my enemies triumph over me. Redeem Israel, O God, Out of | all their troubles!*

Recall Your mercy from of old. Redeem Your people from their foe.

Lent 3—Oculi (Psalm 25:15–16)

*My eyes are ever toward the LORD, For He shall pluck my feet | out of the net. / Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, For I am desolate | and afflicted.*

My eyes see You. You rescue me. You turn to me and have mercy.

Lent 4—Laetare (Isaiah 66:10–11)

*Rejoice with Jerusalem, And be glad with her, all | you who love her. / That you may feed and be satisfied With the consolation | of her bosom.*

Rejoice, Jerusalem, in love, And gladly nurse from God above.

Lent 5—Judica (Psalm 43:1–2)

*Vindicate me, O God, And plead my cause against an un- | godly nation; / Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the | God of my strength.*

Deliver me and keep me safe From unjust men, O God of Strength.

*Palm Sunday* (Psalm 22:19, 21)

*But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, has- | ten to help Me! / Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the | wild oxen!*

Be near me, Lord of Strength, I pray To save from horn and fang each day.

*Maundy Thursday* (Galatians 6:14)

*God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our | Lord Jesus Christ. / In Him is salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead; by Him we are redeemed and set | at liberty.*

Forbid that I should boast of me, But of the cross which set me free.

*Easter Vigil* (Psalm 139:18, 5–6)

*When I awake, I am still with You. | Alleluia! / You have laid Your hand upon me. | Alleluia!*

*Such knowledge is too won- | derful for me; / It is high, I cannot attain it. | Alleluia!*

Awake, my Lord is with me still. Such high knowledge is wonderful!

*Easter Day* (Luke 24:6a, 5–7)

*He is risen! | Alleluia! / Why do you seek the living among the dead? | Alleluia!*

*Remember how He spoke to you. | Alleluia! / "The Son of Man must be crucified, and the third day rise again." | Alleluia!*

Don't look for Him among the dead. He is arisen, as He said!

*Easter 2—Quasi Modo Geniti* (1 Peter 2:2)

*As | newborn babes, / Desire the pure | milk of the Word.*

As newborn babies, let us crave The milk of God's Word which He gave.

Easter 3—*Misericordias Domini* (Psalm 33:5–6)

*The earth is full of the good-ness of the Lord. / By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.*

God's goodness fills the earth throughout. By His Word heaven came about.

Easter 4—*Jubilate* (Psalm 66:1–2)

*Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! / Sing out the honor of His name; Make His praise glorious.*

Shout out with joy to God, O earth, And praise His name with glorious mirth.

Easter 5—*Cantate* (Psalm 98:1–2)

*Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! / His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.*

Sing to the righteous Lord new songs. His fame is seen by all nations.

Easter 6—*Rogate* (Isaiah 48:20)

*With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the ends of the earth. / The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob.*

With singing voice declare and tell: The Lord's redeemed His Israel.

Ascension (Acts 1:11)

*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? Alleluia! / This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. Alleluia!*

Why do you stare up at the sky? The Lord will come back from on high.



Easter 7—Exaudi (Psalm 27:7–9)

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! / Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me.*

My voice, O Lord, hear when I cry. Your face, O Lord, please do not hide.

Pentecost (Wisdom 1:7; Psalm 68:3)

*The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. Alleluia! / Let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. Alleluia!*

God's Spirit all the earth does fill. Let gladness spring from God's faithful!

Trinity Sunday (Liturgical Text and Tobit 12:6)

*Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity; / Let us give glory to Him because He has shown mercy to us.*

Oh bless the Holy Trinity, and praise the gracious Unity.

## II. SEMESTER ECCLESIAE (The Half-year of the Church)

Trinity 1 (First Sunday After Trinity) (Psalm 13:5–6)

*O Lord, I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. / I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

I trust Your mercy, my heart sings, For You give bountiful good things.

Trinity 2 (Psalm 18:18–19)

*The LORD was my support. In the day of my calamity He brought me out in to a broad place; / He delivered me because He de-lighted in me.*

The Lord supports in our dark days; He sets us in a broad, safe place.

Trinity 3 (Psalm 25:16, 18)

*Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. / Look on my affliction and my pain, and for-give all my sins.*

My desolate affliction see, And in Your mercy forgive me.

Trinity 4 (Psalm 27:1–2)

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; <sup>1</sup>whom shall I fear? / The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall <sup>1</sup>I be afraid?*

*When the wicked <sup>1</sup>came against me, / My enemies and foes, they <sup>1</sup>stumbled and fell.*

The Lord's my light; Whom shall I fear? My foes all fell when they appeared.

Trinity 5 (Psalm 27:7, 9b)

*Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, <sup>1</sup>and answer me. / You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of <sup>1</sup>my salvation.*

O Lord, please hear me when I cry. Help me and do not forsake me.

Trinity 6 (Psalm 28:8–9)

*The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of <sup>1</sup>His anointed. / Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them <sup>1</sup>up forever.*

The Lord gives His anointed strength; He ever shepherds them and saves.

Trinity 7 (Psalm 47:1–2)

*Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the <sup>1</sup>voice of triumph! / For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King o-<sup>1</sup>ver all the earth.*

In vict'ry clap and shout with mirth, For God is King o'er all the earth!

Trinity 8 (Psalm 48:9–10)

*We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness, in the midst <sup>1</sup>of Your temple. / According to Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full <sup>1</sup>of righteousness.*

We think within Your Temple, Lord, About Your grace and righteous Word.

Trinity 9 (Psalm 54:4–5)

*Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with those who<sup>1</sup> uphold my life. / He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them<sup>1</sup> off in Your truth.*

Behold, God helps and holds my life. He cuts off those who cause me strife.

Trinity 10 (Psalm 55:16–18, 22)

*As for me, I will call upon God, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed<sup>1</sup> my soul in peace. / Cast your burden on the LORD, and He<sup>1</sup> shall sustain you.*

I call on God. Hear hears and saves. Through all life's burdens He sustains.

Trinity 11 (Psalm 68:5–6, 35)

*God is in His holy habitation. He sets the solitary<sup>1</sup> in families. / The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power<sup>1</sup> to His people.*

Our God who dwells in His high place, Gives power to His chosen race!

Trinity 12 (Psalm 70:1–2)

*Makes haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to<sup>1</sup> help me, O LORD! / Let them be ashamed and confounded<sup>1</sup> who seek my life.*

Make haste, O God. Deliver me And shame those who my life would seek.

Trinity 13 (Psalm 74:20–23)

*Have respect, O Lord, to Your covenant; Do not let the oppressed<sup>1</sup> return ashamed! / Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; do not forget the voice of<sup>1</sup> Your enemies.*

Your covenant, O Lord, respect. Your cause and foes do not forget.

Trinity 14 (Psalm 84:9–10)

*O God, behold our Shield, and look upon the face of  
Your Anointed. / For a day in Your courts is better than  
a thousand elsewhere.*

Because of Christ, our Shield, we're blessed; A day with You exceeds the rest.

Trinity 15 (Psalm 86:1–3)

*Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; For I am poor and needy. /  
Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God.*

*Save Your servant who trusts in You! / Be merciful to me, O Lord, For I  
cry to You all day long.*

Lord, listen when I call to You; have mercy on me all day through.

Trinity 16 (Psalm 86:3,5)

*Be merciful to me, O Lord, For I cry to You all day long; For You Lord,  
are good, and ready to forgive. / You are abundant in mercy to all those  
who call upon You.*

Have mercy Lord. To You I cry. For you are good, abundantly!

Trinity 17 (Psalm 119:137,124)

*Righteous are You, O LORD, And upright are Your judgments. / Deal  
with Your servant according to Your mercy.*

God's judgments are upright and He Deals with His servants in mercy.

Trinity 18 (Ecclesiasticus 36:16–17a)

*Reward them that wait for You, O Lord, and let Your prophets be found  
faithful. / Hear the prayer of Your servants and of Your people Israel.*

Reward the ones who wait for You And hear their pray'rs, faithful and true.

Trinity 19 (Psalm 35:3b, 34:17a, 6b)

*Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." The righteous cry out<sup>1</sup> and the LORD hears. / He delivers them out<sup>1</sup> of their troubles.*

Speak Your salvation to my soul, And rescue me from my troubles.

Trinity 20 (Daniel 9:14; Prayer of Azariah 1:20b, 19a)

*The Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not<sup>1</sup> obeyed His voice. / Give glory to Your name, O Lord, and deal with Your servant according<sup>1</sup> to Your mercy.*

The Lord is right in all He does. He deals with us in glorious love.

Trinity 21 (Apocryphal Esther 13:9–10)

*O Lord, King Almighty, Your power is over all things; there is no one who is able to re-<sup>1</sup>sist Your will. / You have made heaven and earth and all things enclosed<sup>1</sup> by the heavens.*

God's power no one can resist, For by Him heav'n and earth exist.

Trinity 22 (Psalm 130:3–4)

*If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O<sup>1</sup> Lord, who could stand? / But there is forgiveness with You, That<sup>1</sup> You may be feared.*

If You marked sin, Lord, who would stand? But You forgive on every hand.

Trinity 23 (Jeremiah 29:11–12)

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and<sup>1</sup> not of evil. / Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will<sup>1</sup> listen to you.*

For you, I know my thoughts and cares. I think good thoughts and answer prayers.

Trinity 25 (Third Last Sunday) (Psalm 31:9a, 15b, 17a)

*Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I<sup>1</sup> am in trouble. / Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me. Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, For I have<sup>1</sup> called upon You.*

Remove my foes and troubles, Lord. I call upon You at Your Word.

Trinity 26 (Second Last Sunday) (Psalm 54:1–2)

Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate | me  
by Your strength. / Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to  
the | words of my mouth.

By Your name, save! By Your strength, bless! Lord, hear the prayer  
which I profess.

Trinity 27 (Last Sunday) (Isaiah 35:10)

The ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing,  
With everlasting | joy on their heads. / They shall obtain joy and gladness,  
And sorrow and sighing | shall flee away.

The ransomed shall return and sing. Their sorrows are now all  
ending. LSQ

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# Sermon on 2 Timothy 4:9-21: Come Before Winter

Craig A. Ferkenstad  
Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Mankato, Minnesota

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**Text:** *Do your best to come to me quickly. ... When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. ... At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ... Do your best to get here before winter. (2 Timothy 4:9, 13, 16-18, 21 NIV)*

**G**RACE AND PEACE TO YOU FROM GOD OUR Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What shall I say to a new pastor? What shall I say to a son? This afternoon, we are going to turn to what St. Paul said to the young pastor Timothy and what the apostle said to his “son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2).

## **I. Come before winter ... because the need is great**

Our text comes from the last letter that Paul wrote to the Christian Church. The book of Acts ended with Paul under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). By the time of our text, Paul had been released and arrested a second time (2 Timothy 1:8, 16, 17). From his prison cell in Rome, shortly before his death, Paul wrote his final words to the church. These words are, so to speak, his last will and testament. With these words, the



apostle was passing on the torch to the next generation. Paul wrote to Timothy and says, **Come before winter.**

Since travel in winter would be difficult, if not impossible, Timothy was to come as soon as possible. One of Paul's fellow workers had left him (Demas). Two of his companions had gone elsewhere to labor (Crescens and Titus). Only Luke was with him. So as Paul composed his letter to Timothy, he wrote "Do your best to come to me quickly." Paul was lonely—Come without delay [σπουδάζω]. Paul needed encouragement—"Do your best to come to me quickly" (2 Timothy 4:9). The need was urgent—**Come before winter!**

This is also how it is on this July afternoon. The need is great. You are being called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaim the full counsel of God. The apostle has just written that the truth of God's Word is going to be ignored. He writes, the time will come when men "will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). People will find man-made myths more acceptable than God's inspired Word. The day will come when preaching will fall on deaf ears. Not only will people not listen to the truth, but they also will find their own truth. God will be remade into the image of man. And having remade god, people will reject the only Savior of their eternal souls (Acts 4:12). As such, souls are on their way to hell! The need is urgent! Think of the reaction of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He walked on this earth, He saw the crowds of people and "he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

**Come before winter.** Come when the time is good because the need is great and the "night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4).

## II. Come before winter ... because this congregation is waiting for you.

While Paul was waiting for Timothy to come, he wrote "Do your best to come to me quickly" (2 Timothy 4:9).

It seems like that is what the members of King of Grace Lutheran Church have said. You have extended four calls for a pastor during the past two years. But you are not just "hiring" someone to "do the work"—as if it is just work that is to be done. You are "calling" a pastor to be a shepherd of your souls. He is here not to work *for* you, but to work *with* you "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every

good work” (2 Timothy 3:17). Members of King of Grace, your pastor is to teach the Scriptures to you.

Those same Scriptures were of special comfort to Paul. Remember the apostle asked that Timothy should “bring ... my scrolls, especially the parchments.” Possibly these scrolls were the books of the Old Testament. Perhaps these were the valuable parchments on which the New Testament books were being gathered. Paul already has explained that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) and is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). What could be of greater comfort to Paul in the loneliness of his prison cell than these Scriptures?

It hasn’t changed. These Scriptures still are the basis for our hope and life. I would like you to hear what Pastor U. V. Koren said about the Bible. He was one of the three “fathers” of our synod and the man who selected the words “It Is Written” as the motto of the old synod. Koren writes:

How does [God] become known to us poor, blind and ignorant sinners? He is known through the Word which He speaks to us. Here we come to the external Word in which He reveals to us His heart, His thoughts, His will. ...

That which is revealed to us is so wonderful in its simplicity and in its majesty that mankind cannot think of ever emptying or exhausting it. The experiences of these thousands of years show this. God’s thoughts are not as our thoughts, but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). And as God’s thoughts, so also His Word, which is the revelation of His thoughts. They are eternal, unchangeable, immovable, even though heaven and earth pass away.<sup>1</sup>

It is in these eternal Scriptures that we find the revelation of the Savior Jesus Christ and all that He has done for our salvation (Romans 1:17). In the words of the Bible we are told that no matter what we have done wrong, no matter the magnitude or the multitude of our sins, Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of God’s laws for us. He has resisted temptation for us. He has carried our sins to the cross and there

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from U. V. Koren are selected from “Address to the Students of a Theological Seminary,” *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging: Selected Sermons, Addresses and Doctrinal Articles by Ulrick Vilhelm Koren, D.D.* (Lake Mills, IA: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for Publications, 1978), 236-37.

He shed His holy, precious blood to make satisfaction for all of our sins. Then, on the third day, the Father raised His Son from the grave in glorious triumph showing the world that all of this is true!

During recent days, there were some chalk drawings on the sidewalk in front of our house. Last Sunday night, as thunderstorms rolled through, I stood outside our house and watched the rain wash the chalk markings away until there was no trace of them anymore. I couldn't help but thinking that in the same way, the blood of Jesus Christ has washed away our sins so that God the Father remembers them no more (Isaiah 43:25). Your sins are forgiven and this forgiveness is given to you today in word, water, and wine. Heaven is yours!

**Come before winter.** Come now, because this congregation is ready to receive you, support you, and work with you in proclaiming the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **III. Come before winter ... because God has promised to watch over you.**

Paul also says, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me." Paul is speaking about what had just happened to him before his imprisonment. Even though his friends had deserted him, Paul was not discouraged. The apostle said, "The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength."

That is God's promise to you. Oh, Satan will criticize and accuse you. People may despise your preaching or shrug their shoulders. But do not let this discourage you. Remember, "No servant is greater than his master" (John 15:20). God has promised to watch over you. He has said, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). We even are told that one night "the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision [and said]: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city'" (Acts 18:9-10).

It is significant that you are being ordained during the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Lutheran Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses. They were written in Latin for academic debate, but they were soon translated into German and distributed throughout the country. Immediately Luther was called a heretic. Many people called for his public execution. Luther was summoned to the city of Augsburg where he witnessed to the gospel. In the next months, Luther continued to preach and teach. Luther was excommunicated

and then summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms and ordered to recant. But he would not compromise God's Word. Luther said, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen." Luther was a witness to Jesus Christ and to the central teaching of the Bible—that we are justified by faith alone (Romans 3:28). So it is that you, too, are to testify to Jesus Christ who has promised to watch over you and to bless the word that you preach so that it does not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

Heed the words the apostle also wrote to Timothy: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction ... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2,5). The apostle also says, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:14–20). And finally, "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:14–15).

**Come before winter** because the time is right and God has promised to watch over you and will cause the seed which you sow to spring up and bear abundant fruit.

Here, then are Paul's final words to the church—that which he says to his "son in the faith" as he passes on the torch of God's word to the next generation.

**Come before winter** because the need is great.

**Come before winter** because this congregation has been waiting for you.

**Come before winter** because God has promised to watch over you.

"Let this, therefore be your prayer to God, that He will teach you to preach Christ, the Savior, the Good Shepherd, who has come to earth to make sinners righteous and who wants us to cast all our cares upon Him. He is our wisdom from God, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption, the Author and Finisher of our faith, our way, our life,

our ground of hope, and all this because He reveals God's love to us and Himself loves us and calls us to Him."

"Come, God the holy Spirit! Be Thou Shepherd to him who shall be the shepherd of the flock, be the Guide for him who shall lead the flock, give Thy gifts to him who has none and yet shall give gifts to the flock." <sup>(LSQ)</sup>

# The Ninth Triennial Convention of the CELC at Grimma, Germany

*Gaylin R. Schmeling*  
*President, Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference*

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**T**HE YEAR 2017 MARKED THE FIVE HUNDREDTH anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The year 1517 and the resulting Lutheran Reformation is of vital importance to confessional and orthodox Lutheranism. God through His servant Martin Luther restored true biblical doctrine which had long been a hidden treasure. The biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone is the central article of the faith. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His glorious resurrection, declaring the whole world righteous. This treasure is brought to us personally through the means of grace and is received by faith alone in the Savior which is worked through those very means of grace.

This truth, the central article of the faith, is revealed to us in God's inerrant and life-giving Word. This biblical truth is the heart of the teaching of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) and its member churches. We make our stand on the inspired, inerrant Scriptures, the only source of faith, doctrine, and life, and we subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a clear exposition of the doctrines of the Scriptures.

The ninth triennial CELC convention was held in Grimma, Germany. The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany; ELFK) hosted the convention at the Gymnasium St. Augustin in Grimma on

June 29–July 2, 2017. This is one of the places where Paul Gerhardt went to school, and the city is located in the vicinity of Wittenberg and other Luther and ELFK sites. Germany was chosen as the site of this convention in commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation.

The opening service was conducted by the Rev. Karsten Drechsler of the ELFK. The Rev. Jonas Schröter, also of the ELFK, preached a sermon on “Grace Alone,” with Psalm 2 as the text.

Three new church bodies were taken into membership by the CELC: South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission of Hong Kong, Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, and East Asia Lutheran Synod. This brings the total membership of the CELC to thirty-two.

The theme of the convention was “Reformation: Then and Now” and was addressed in four essays. The first essay was “The Lutheran Reformation Then and Now.” It was presented by the Rev. Holger Weiß, rector of the Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar in Leipzig, Germany. The Rev. Weiß gave an outline of the history of the Lutheran Reformation and its relevance for the church today. The benefits of confessional and orthodox Lutheranism were enunciated.

The second essay, “The Reformed Reformation Then and Now,” was presented by the Rev. Sung Gyu Choi, who is a professor at Seoul Theological Institute in Seoul, South Korea. The Rev. Choi gave an outline of the history of the Reformed Reformation centering in Zwingli and Calvin. He then explained the status of the Reformed Reformation and its effect on Christianity today.

The Rev. Julio Ascarrunz Martinez delivered the third essay, entitled “The Radical Reformation Then and Now.” The Rev. Martinez is a pastor in the Christian Evangelical Confessional Lutheran Church of Bolivia. This essay outlined the history of the Radical Reformation, including the Enthusiast (*Schwärmgeister*) and Anabaptist movements. The essay emphasized that the results of the Radical Reformation are most evident today in the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements.

The fourth essay, “The Catholic Reformation Then and Now,” was presented by the Rev. Timothy Schmeling, who is a professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. The Rev. Schmeling gave an outline of the Catholic Reformation or Counter Reformation including the Council of Trent. Then he enunciated the effects of the Catholic Reformation in the twenty-first century as a result of Vatican II and other more recent Catholic trends.

Before the first essay was read, Pres. Koelpin introduced Pres. Emeritus Gerhard Wilde of the ELFK. Pres. Wilde was one of the founding pastors of the CELC. He told the story of meeting ELS Pres. George Orvick during the early 1980s in the DDR. Pastor Orvick was with a tour group and had asked Pastor Wilde to meet him at the “Interhotel,” which was a Communist government-run hotel for western tourists only. Because of this, Pastor Wilde was not allowed to enter the hotel. Since the Orvicks were late, he had to wait in the street. When the Orvicks did arrive, Mrs. Orvick went into the hotel to hold a place for them at the banquet table while Pastor Orvick remained outside as long as possible discussing with Pastor Wilde the hope of beginning a new international Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Wilde reported how astounded he was that he could travel to the West in a united Germany in 1993 for the founding convention of the CELC at Oberwesel. God had brought down the wall dividing East and West. Pastor Wilde also marveled that the CELC convention in 2017 was being held in Grimma—once an impossible dream due to the former Communist government of East Germany.

There were reports from the various committees of the CELC. A special committee produced “Ninety-five Theses for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” as an anniversary project. These theses present all the basic Lutheran truths but also include topics that need to be addressed in our contemporary society. This idea follows in the tradition of the 95 theses of Claus Harms in 1817. The co-chairmen of this committee are the Rev. Thomas Nass and the Rev. John Moldstad.

The officers of the CELC are: president, Prof. Gaylin Schmeling; vice-president, Prof. Thomas Nass; secretary, the Rev. Timothy Buelow; treasurer, Mr. Mark Schulz; planning committee, the Rev. John Hartwig and the Rev. Larry Schlomer.

The Theological Commission of the CELC continues to produce *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. Article I is a study of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Article II of the doctrine of justification, Article III of the work of the Holy Spirit, Article IV of the person and work of Christ, Article V of the doctrine of eschatology, Article VI of the church’s mission, and Article VII of the church. These statements may be found in PDF form on the CELC website under the heading “Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession” <[www.celc.info](http://www.celc.info)>.

On Saturday, July 1, there was a tour of the Reformation sites in Wittenberg, Germany. The tour included, among other things, the



Castle Church where Luther nailed the 95 theses, the City Church with its Reformation altar depicting the means of grace, the Black Cloister where Luther and his family lived, and the Melanchthon House. The convention banquet occurred on Saturday evening at Göschens Gut. Our German hosts prepared a wonderful banquet and a very efficient and organized convention.

The closing service of the convention took place on Sunday, July 2. The Rev. Karsten Drechsler conducted the liturgy, and the preacher was Pres. Martin Wilde of the ELFK. His sermon, based on Romans 3:22–24, centered on the chief article of the faith (in German the “*Hauptartikel*”—the “head article”), justification by faith alone. This is the article on which the church stands or falls (*Articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). The service was conducted in English, following Rite 2 (the Common Service) from the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. The entire service was printed in German in the service folder alongside the English so that the liturgy could be understood by all in attendance.

Following the sermon, the installation of CELC officers was conducted by Pastor Martin Wilde. The elected officers vowed their faithfulness to the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The communion service was attended by many of the members under the gaze of Luther and Melanchthon from the stained glass windows at the front of the sanctuary.

The choir, from members of ELFK churches, sang a rendition of “*Ein’ feste Burg*”—“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The service concluded with the singing of “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage” by Nikolai Grundtvig, with a melody written by Fritz Reuter, the musician who grew up in the Zwickau-Planitz congregation of the ELFK and later served as a music professor at Dr. Martin Luther College (WELS) of New Ulm, Minnesota. Pres. Emeritus Gerhard Wilde wrote an additional three stanzas in German to this hymn, which have now been published in the new hymnal of the ELFK. The entire service was livestreamed and recorded for viewing on YouTube. There were over five hundred people at this service.

In the afternoon, there was a tour of the Nimbschen cloister on the outskirts of Grimma where Katherina von Bora lived as a nun. In the evening, there was a viewing of the new Luther film, *Return to Grace: Luther’s Life and Legacy*.

All those attending the convention have wonderful memories of their time spent at Grimma. Thoughts come to mind of Paul Gerhardt, Martin Luther, and other Lutheran heroes of faith. Most importantly,

this convention fixed in the attendees' minds the importance of the Lutheran Reformation. In the Reformation the wonderful treasure of the gospel was restored to its truth and purity. This truth gives us purpose and meaning in life and the blessed assurance of eternal life in heaven.<sup>1</sup> LSQ

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this report are a summary of the minutes of the convention prepared by the Rev. Timothy Buelow, which are printed in full in the 2017 *Proceedings of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference*.





Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato MN 56001

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