

CURRENT ISSUES AND TRENDS IN LUTHER STUDIES

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Could the Luther Quincentennial Year 1983 and the present 450th anniversary of Luther's complete German Bible *possibly* bring forth anything significantly new concerning the great sixteenth-century Reformer—a personage whose life, work, and thought have been so abundantly and painstakingly scrutinized for four to five centuries?

Yes indeed! For not only have there been lacunae in the attention given Luther, but Luther seems ever new, even when well-worked terrain is revisited. The ongoing exploration of his career, achievements, and legacy—as an individual whose deep and pervasive impact in shaping the modern Christian world is easily discernible and readily acknowledged—provides, in fact, a study area of continuing challenges and fresh insights.

The present essay proposes to take an “over-the-shoulder glance” at some of the more significant recent developments in the study of Luther, with emphasis on areas wherein there has been special interest during the two back-to-back Luther anniversary years of 1983 and 1984. The discussion will, of course, include background to the current situation. Also, focus will be primarily, though not exclusively, on Luther *literature*; therefore, this article will take somewhat the form of a bibliographical-review essay.

The purpose herein will be to provide a sampling of recent developments relating to six selected themes or topics within the somewhat broad category of “Current Issues and Trends in Luther Studies.” These themes or topics are (1) Luther as Bible translator, (2) Luther's later years, (3) Luther and the Jews, (4) Catholic research and Catholic-Protestant dialogue on Luther, (5) Luther in the German Democratic Republic (“East Germany”), and (6) Luther's so-called “Reformation breakthrough.” The final two topics are treated in somewhat more brevity than the others, and therefore are grouped together in the fifth and final section of this essay.

Before we move on to a discussion of these six topics, one item that does not fit readily under any of them should be noted because

of its monumental significance: announcement in 1983 of the long-awaited completion of the Weimar edition of Luther's works. This project was begun on the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth, in 1883. With some 90 or more huge volumes (about 100, if all separately bound parts are counted as volumes), it is considered to be the most exhaustive and authoritative edition of Luther's works in their original languages. Aside from its numerous volumes of "collected works" (including treatises, commentaries, lecture notes, and sermons), there are multi-volume sections devoted to correspondence (*Briefwechsel*, which includes letters to Luther as well as letters written by him); the "table talks" (*Tischreden*); and Luther's German Bible (*Deutsche Bibel*).

1. LUTHER AS BIBLE TRANSLATOR

Because 1984 is the 450th anniversary of Luther's first complete German Bible edition of 1534, I have chosen to begin this essay on this topic, even though it is one which in recent years has received rather minimal attention in comparison with other areas of Luther research—especially on the American scene. However, at least one significant new work will appear in print during the present year, as will be noticed below.

The general lack of attention to Luther in his Bible-translational activity is unfortunate indeed, for as Albert Hyma stated so aptly nearly three decades ago, in his *Martin Luther and the Luther Film of 1953* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1957), republished as *New Light on Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1958):

One of his [Luther's] most important labors was the translation of the Bible into virile German. Although fourteen editions had already appeared in High German and four others in Low German, Luther was the first to produce a translation that met the demands of the masses. He literally produced the modern language of Germany. Being situated in the center of the German-speaking countries, about half-way between North and South, and also between East and West, he was destined to become a tremendous figure in the field of philology. At the Wartburg he translated the whole of the New Testament. . . .

It is remarkable that Luther's most important contribution to the making of German civilization in modern times has been

treated with indifference on the part of many theologians and even historians. His creation of modern High German is a tremendous feat, worthy of untold eulogy. But endless thousands of pages have been written about his little disputes with insignificant persons, as if those were the main theme of Luther's life at the Wartburg. Even his debate with Eck at Leipzig is not a matter of world-shaking importance, as compared with his translation of the New Testament. What he had in mind particularly was the proper diction, the choice of certain phrases. He was thinking about his own relatives near the castle. They were the sort of people who were dwelling in darkness to a certain extent, because so much of the ritual of the Church was in Latin and the translations of the New Testament in their language were unsatisfactory. His linguistic work is of staggering significance. . . (p. 111 in both editions).

However, in addition to the immeasurable impact of Luther's German Bible both on the German language itself and on the very progress of the Lutheran Reformation (due to the wide circulation and acceptance this translation enjoyed¹), one must take note of the fact that Luther's work in wrestling with the text in the original languages of Scripture unquestionably had an impact on his own life and reformatory activity, as well. His translational work brought him to the "heart of Scripture" in a new and deeper way than had his preparation for his earlier exegetical lectures. In fact, this new experience significantly supplemented and added to the extensive grappling with the biblical text that he had already done as an exegete. His basic religious understandings, attitudes, and insights; his

¹It has been estimated that the multiple editions of Luther's German NT between 1522 and the appearance of the 1st ed. of his complete Bible in 1534 totaled some 200,000 copies. When subsequent editions of the NT and of the complete German Bible that appeared before Luther's death are also taken into account, the dissemination which Luther's translation enjoyed during his own lifetime becomes staggering indeed. In fact, it has been determined that at least some 430 editions of Luther's rendition of the complete German Bible or parts of the Bible (notably the NT and the Psalms) appeared from the presses of various printers throughout the German lands between 1522 and 1546. Most of these were in High German, but some represented Low-German translations. (Information on the printings may be gleaned from introductory materials in the *Deutsche-Bibel* volumes of the Weimar ed. of Luther's works [cf., e.g., 2: xxviii] and from the analysis by E. Zimmermann, "Die Verbreitung der Lutherbibel zur Reformationszeit," *Luth. Vierteljahrsschrift der Luthergesellschaft*, 16 [1934]: 83-87.) On the basis of the information available, if the editions averaged some 2000 to 3000 copies each, about a million copies of Luther's translation in full or in part would have been in circulation by 1546!

sermons, letters of spiritual counsel, and theological treatises; his basic reformational activities in general—all these were undoubtedly highly influenced by, and heightened through, his personal experience as a Bible translator working more precisely and in greater depth with Scripture in the *original languages*. Herein lies a vast and significant field for Luther research, concerning which too little has been done to date. Indeed, in this 450th anniversary year of Luther's first complete Bible edition, one of the chief desiderata for Luther studies is, to my mind, further in-depth research as to the impact of Luther's translational work in refining his own religious thought and in influencing his reformatory activities.

But now, what is the present status of studies on Luther as a Bible translator? Before we focus on 1983–84, it will be well to take a glance at certain high points in the earlier attention given this topic. At the outset, it must be stated that the *Deutsche Bibel* volumes of the Weimar edition of Luther's works are rich with information and are fundamental to research concerning Luther as a translator. Still useful, too, is the rather comprehensive overview given by Johann Reu fifty years ago (on the 400th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of Luther's complete German Bible): *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, Ohio, 1934). As a backdrop to Luther as a translator, Reu first surveys Latin and pre-Lutheran German editions of the Bible (plus *plenaria* and History Bibles, etc.); treats Luther's own developing acquaintance with Scripture (beginning with the Latin version, of course), and discusses his early exegetical lectures; notes Luther's progress in dealing with the Scriptures in their original languages; and reviews Luther's training and travel experiences that fitted the Reformer exceptionally well to utilize an elegant German that could be readily understood throughout far-flung regions of the German lands by princes and common people alike. Reu's treatment of such "preliminaries" and of Luther's translational work itself is followed by a section of endnotes rich in information, and is further supplemented by a hefty section of excerpts from the primary documents—pre-Lutheran sources, Luther's exegetical lectures, his commentary on Galatians, and his Bible translation itself as represented in various editions.

In the half century since Reu's magnificent volume, major attention to Luther's German Bible has been only intermittent, especially in America. Reu himself made some further contributions, but perhaps the first really giant step forward was the appearance of

Heinz Bluhm's *Martin Luther: Creative Translator* (St. Louis, Mo., 1965). Bluhm, who in my opinion is today the leading expert in America on Luther as a Bible translator, broached new questions and produced new insights by making a rather thorough study of Luther's translational method and also by revealing that Luther's "Christmas Postil" prepared at the Wartburg was based on the Latin in contrast to the "September Bible" (or "September Testament," Luther's first German NT edition, printed in September 1522), which was translated from the Greek (pp. 49-77). (This discovery of the difference between the nature of these two translations shatters the earlier thesis put forward by W. Köhler, A. Freitag, and Reu that suggested the "Christmas Postil" as a background or preliminary step to Luther's German NT.) Another intriguing suggestion by Bluhm is that whatever use Luther may have made of earlier German translations in producing his own Bible version, he was making more use of *plenaria* than of the pre-Lutheran printed editions (pp. 5, 15).

Moving seven years onward from Bluhm's publication, we would quite naturally expect that the year 1972, as the 450th anniversary of the appearance of Luther's celebrated "September Bible," would bring forth publications on Luther's Bible version. And indeed this was the case. In America, Ann Arbor Publishers produced a magnificent reproduction (in full size) of that particular NT, entitled *Luther's "September Bible" in Facsimile* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1972), for which I prepared the "Historical Introduction." This Introduction, which actually appears at the end of the volume, touches very briefly on most of the significant points relating to the background, immediate setting, and translational activity involved in the production of that first Luther NT. It also looks quickly beyond that edition in a brief survey of some of the Reformer's continuing translational activity.

As a sort of supplement to this project, the same publisher also published in 1972 a two-volume set of materials compiled by the present writer from various editions of Luther's German version subsequent to the "September Bible" and illustrating the text of two of Luther's favorite NT books. The set is entitled *Facsimiles from Early Luther Bibles*, and the subtitles for the separate volumes are as follows: vol. 1, *The Gospel of John from the "December Bible" and Wittenberg Editions of 1534 and 1545*; and vol. 2, *The Epistle to the Romans from the "December Bible" and Wittenberg Editions of 1530, 1534, and 1545*.

Another impressive venture was undertaken that same year in Germany, where Hans Volz (already well-known among the specialists for his outstanding work on German Bible translation, pre-Lutheran as well as Lutheran) edited a two-volume set in which the text of Luther's 1545 edition is given in complete form (not, however, in facsimile): *Die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch. Wittenberg 1545* (München, 1972). A supplemental volume (*Anhang und Dokumente*), appearing at the same time, provides many helpful items, such as identification of the vocabulary used by Luther (as compared with modern German) and even a glossary/lexicon to Luther's German. Working with Volz were Heinz Blanke and Friedrich Kur, the latter being responsible for the text redaction. Six years later, Volz produced a further volume delineating the history of Luther's Bible translation: *Martin Luthers deutsche Bibel. Entstehung und Geschichte der Lutherbibel*, ed. Henning Wendland (Hamburg, 1978). This magnificent volume is profusely illustrated (some 416 illustrations).

In 1973, an intriguing analysis of Luther's translational method was presented by John Bechtel in his "The Modern Application of Martin Luther's *Open Letter on Translating*," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 145-151. After first determining six basic translation principles or guidelines indicated by Luther in his *Open Letter on Translating*, Bechtel draws a comparison with principles set forth by the American Bible Society (and subsequently the United Bible Societies) in producing *Today's English Version, Good News for Modern Man*.

Over the years, there have been text-probe studies dealing with the linguistic aspects of Luther's German rendition—at times in comparison or contrast with Catholic German versions subsequent to his—; but this sphere of research is beyond the scope of the present survey. However, because of its appearance during the Luther quinquennial year, the following title may be noted: Hans Gerhard Streubel, "Sprechsprachlich-kommunikative Wirkungen durch Luthers Septembertestament (1522)," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, Jg. 32, Heft 1/2 (1983): 65-84.

This brings us again to Heinz Bluhm and the most current exploration in the area of Luther as a Bible translator. In scholarly papers presented to conventions during the Luther quinquennial

(in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 1; in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on September 28), Bluhm provided some interesting insights as to the relationship of the English Bible to Luther's translation. It has long been known that there was, indeed, an influence from Luther's German Bible to the English Bible of William Tyndale (see, e.g., L. Franklin Gruber, *The First English New Testament and Luther: The Real Extent to Which Tyndale Was Dependent upon Luther As a Translator* [Burlington, Iowa, 1928]). What is remarkable now, in view of Bluhm's researches, is that much stronger ties seem to link subsequent English editions, such as Coverdale's, to the Luther version. The significance and implications of this discovery for the history of the English Bible are self-evident.

During the present year (and perhaps off the press by the time this issue of *AUSS* appears), Bluhm's monumental new volume on Luther's Bible is to be published in Bern, Switzerland, by the Peter Lang Verlag. This volume, entitled *Luther—Translator of Paul: Studies in Romans and Galatians*, treats two of Luther's favorite NT books by means of an in-depth probe that covers a remarkable array of data pertaining to backgrounds to Luther's Bible, that Bible itself, and its impact on the English translations. The total contents are too extensive to describe here, but the following brief summary may be of interest to *AUSS* readers: Part I, "Romans," first delves into pre-Lutheran Latin Bibles, three of the pre-Lutheran High-German printed Bibles (Mentel, Zainer, and Koberger) and the earliest Low-German editions, the Gotha MS of the NT, the Bämle *Plenarium* of 1474, and the Augsburg *Spiegel* of 1489. Then Bluhm discusses the Wyclif English translation, follows the development of Luther's rendition beginning with the "September Testament" of 1522, and examines Jerome Emser's "emendation" of Luther's translation. Finally, he returns to the English scene, devoting three chapters, respectively, to the sources behind the Tyndale NT, that NT itself, and a panoramic view of the subsequent history of the English Bible from the Matthew Bible to the NEB. A rather similar format pertains to Part II, "Galatians," but there is somewhat less attention to the pre-Lutheran sources, considerably more material provided on the Luther translation and its revisions, and only one chapter relating to the English Bible ("Luther and the First Printed English Bible" [the Tyndale Version]).

Aside from this massive production by Bluhm—both in its range of coverage and in its size (expected to be some 500 or 600

pages)—we still wait to see what other productions concerning the Luther Bible may possibly be forthcoming during this 450th anniversary of Luther's 1534 edition. It may be mentioned that in the German Democratic Republic there has been a special interest in Luther as a Bible translator, but this interest is basically on linguistic and philological grounds rather than with regard to theological concerns. (Sect. 5 of this article will take brief further note of the current scene with regard to Luther in the German Democratic Republic.)

2. LUTHER IN HIS LATER YEARS

A cursory glance at the massive literature that is available today will reveal a decided predilection for treatment of the "young Luther"—a phrase used, in fact, as the title for a work by Herndon Fife (*The Young Luther* [New York, 1928]) and which traced the Reformer's career to 1517. A subsequent, much-enlarged volume by Fife carried the account to 1521: *The Revolt of Martin Luther* [New York, 1957]). Curiously, earlier than Fife's work, the "young Luther" title had also appeared in Germany at the hand of Heinrich Bornkamm (*Der junge Luther* [Gotha, 1925]).² But the trend toward looking primarily at the "young Luther" was much broader and more widespread than simply what is represented by book titles.

For some specialists, 1517 seemed a good terminal point (e.g., Fife's first work mentioned above; and Otto Scheel's celebrated two-volume biography in German, *Martin Luther* [Tübingen, 1916 & 1917], does not reach quite that far!). For other scholars, the year 1521, during which Luther stood before the Diet at Worms, came to be a sort of apex or acme to his career, after which the Reformer supposedly waned in significance. But perhaps 1530, the year of the Augsburg Confession, can be considered the *terminus non post quem* for most major attention to Luther on the part of biographers in general.

²As we will notice later, however, Bornkamm by no means restricted his attention to only the early Luther; his last work is a monumental volume, published posthumously, on Luther's "mid-career" (title and publication facts will be given below).

There are at least two main reasons for the sort of limitations indicated above: (1) Luther had by 1521—or certainly by 1530—made his major contributions theologically (in a sense, true; but also in another sense, not so true³); and (2) his almost single-handed domination of the German-Reformational scene now gave way to an increasing number of participants who came to the limelight and began even to overshadow him (again, true in one sense, but not in another⁴). Furthermore, inasmuch as some of his later years were characterized by literature that had become increasingly venomous—to our twentieth-century minds, even uncouth, barbaric, and puerile—, scholars (especially Protestant scholars) have tended to shy away from any in-depth discussion of the later Luther. (An earlier generation of Catholic scholars, it is true, kept faulting Luther for bitterness and harsh language, but really did not research the matter to find out the full contextual background, setting, and significance of his statements.)

But, we may well ask, did Luther's influence terminate or become quite minimal after 1521, or even after 1530? Did he not in the last two decades of his life provide major input to a number of important areas of Reformation concern—university teaching, pastoral care, general education, church-organizational guidance, counsel to political rulers, and profuse theological literature, to say nothing of his continuing work on the German Bible?

³Although Philip Melancthon became the true systematic theologian of the early Lutheran Reformation, the impact of Luther's theological insights did not by any means vanish. As is evident from a work by Mark U. Edwards, Jr., to be noted later in this section, *even* Luther's polemical treatises of his later years had theological rationale and content, and they certainly did not go unnoticed. Cf. also the article by Albert Hyma in this issue of *AUSS*.

⁴It is true, for instance, that the visible constructive work in educational reform for the school systems in various cities and towns was largely in the hands of Philip Melancthon and Johann Bugenhagen; but both the background guidance and overt attention by Luther should not be overlooked. The same may be said with regard to a number of other areas of reformational activity. Even in the sphere of the paternalistic encroachment on church affairs by Elector John Frederick after 1532, Luther and his colleagues were not out of the picture; and Luther, in particular, was still looked upon for leadership in providing needed support for implementation, as well as for theological rationale. A survey of Luther's correspondence in his later years—with whom, topics covered, etc.—is alone sufficient to call into question any theory that deprives him of significant influence, even though his early high visibility may well have become somewhat dispersed to others.

Although there has been in the past a general tendency to look at only selected facets of Luther's later life—even by those biographers who have not totally omitted discussion of those years (they would deal primarily with such items as glimpses of Luther's family life, his Schmalkald Articles, and the activities of his last days, including especially the scene at his deathbed)—, a relatively small amount of detailed attention to this period has been in evidence. Until very recently, perhaps the one truly significant example of rather extensive attention is the two-volume Luther biography by Julius Köstlin, *Martin Luther. Sein Leben und seine Schriften* (the 5th ed., rev. by Gustav Kawerau, was published in Berlin in 1903). The second volume of this set was specifically devoted to Luther's later years. But since then, until 1983, relatively little has been done toward securing a comprehensive picture of the Luther from 1531 to 1546.

However, in 1957 Albert Hyma ventured a sensitive appraisal of "sticky" issues pertaining to this segment of Luther's career—issues that frequently have been sidestepped or "glossed over" by historians and theologians. Portions of Hyma's material have been compiled into the article bearing his name in the present issue of *AUSS* (pp. 71–79, above), and a further word will be said about this material later.

Another, more recent work is an intriguing different-from-ordinary type of biography: H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (New York, 1980). It endeavors to capture a portrait or "cross-section" of the total Reformer at a certain time in his mature life, focusing toward the year 1535. Rather than taking a diachronic journey through Luther's entire career or some segment of it, Haile seeks to uncover the "mature Luther" as a real, live, many-sided human being, who as such made a tremendous impact on the world about him.

It seems to me, however, that the major publication by Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), comes as close to any that we yet have toward significantly filling the gap pertaining to Luther's last years, although admittedly the volume does so in only the one basic area designated in its title. Edwards takes us through Luther's major writings from 1531 onward that attack Papacy, Papal supporters (such as Duke George of Albertine Saxony), Turks, Jews, and "false brethren." In contrast to the usual glib observations made about the

Reformer's vehement and unbecoming language—often attributed to old age, to physical or psychological deterioration, and/or to the fact that his enemies also used such language—, Edwards has carefully analyzed the contents and line of argument of the various major polemical works and has argued persuasively that these publications are the product of an organized rather than disoriented mind. The vehement, coarse, and (to us) distasteful language is, he points out, a calculated rhetorical device in view of the rationale and purpose underlying the polemical treatises. These treatises were produced in a *consolidation* phase of the Lutheran reform movement; they were not intended to win converts or even to convince the enemy, but rather to undergird the faithful by drawing the lines clearly between them and all of Satan's minions.

Indeed, Edwards relates the language in Luther's polemical works to the Reformer's growing and deepening apocalyptic conviction that (1) the end of the age was near and the foes he was attacking (whether Papists, Jews, Turks, or radical reformers) were enemies of the truth, who as such were also signs of that nearness of the end; and (2) these enemies of truth were only puppets of the true enemy, Satan, who in the background was the real culprit under his attack and for whom Luther felt that no vituperation which he could spew out would be harsh enough.

It should also be pointed out that Edwards rightly places Luther's polemical activity of 1531 and onward within the framework of altered political conditions that constitute a significant consideration in assessing and understanding his writings of that period. In 1530, the Protestants were outlawed by the Diet of Augsburg, and early in 1531 a number of Protestant princes and imperial cities established the defensive League of Schmalkalden, in which Philip of Hesse and Luther's own ruler, Elector John of Saxony, were prominent. These circumstances shortly led to Protestants and Catholics being divided into two armed camps. That new situation, with the need for theological rationalization to support the Protestant rulers' position (which seemed to strike against Luther's earlier-enunciated "Two-Kingdoms" doctrine), was one facet of the changing political scene.

Another significant political development for Luther and the other Wittenberg Reformers was the accession of John Frederick to

the electoral title and rulership of Ernestine Saxony⁵ in 1532. His father, John the Constant, had taken a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward the Reform movement, but John Frederick took the reins into his own hands to an even much greater degree. This heightened attention of the civil government to church affairs actually cut two ways, as far as Luther was concerned: He and the other Wittenberg theologians were frequently called upon *post facto* to justify theologically the political decisions made by John Frederick, Philip of Hesse, and the Schmalkaldic League. On the other hand, in his own polemical battles, Luther now had support from his ruler to a degree far beyond that given previously by John. In fact, whereas the latter ordered Luther to desist in polemics against Duke George,⁶ John Frederick urged him to engage in polemical responses to this Catholic prince.

In short, what Edwards has done in his *Luther's Last Battles* is to put the later Luther into *context*. Whereas previously the tendency has been to seek explanations for Luther's polemics within Luther himself—"in his theology, in his apocalyptic world view, or in his ill health and age"—, Edwards, while recognizing the "co-gency and usefulness" in that approach, also recognizes its shortcomings. He places before us an enlarged view—one which duly considers, as well, "the changed character of the Reformation

⁵In 1485, the Leipzig Partition had divided Saxony into domains governed by two brothers (who were hereditary heirs in the Wettin House, the ruling house of Saxony)—namely, Ernest and Albert. It is from their names that the designations "Ernestine Saxony" and "Albertine Saxony" have derived. Ernest inherited the electoral title as well (he was thus one of the seven electors in the Holy Roman Empire, as set forth by the *Golden Bull* of 1356), and this obviously gave him an especially high degree of power and prestige. Wittenberg was in Ernestine Saxony, and the successors of Ernest of Wettin with whom Luther had contact were Frederick "the Wise" (ruled 1486–1525), John "the Constant" (ruled 1525–32), and John Frederick (ruled 1532–54; but through an arrangement by Charles V, and as a result of his own defeat in the Schmalkaldic War of 1546–47, John Frederick lost the electoral title to Maurice of Albertine Saxony at the time of that war).

⁶Concerning Ernestine and Albertine Saxony, see n. 5, above. The strongly Catholic Duke George ruled Albertine Saxony from 1500 to 1539, being succeeded by his Protestant brother Henry (1539–41), who because of the principle *cuius regio eius religio* made Albertine Saxony officially Lutheran. Henry was, in turn, succeeded by his son Maurice (1541–53). (Interestingly, another Protestant prince, Landgrave Philip of Hesse [d. 1567], was Duke George's son-in-law.)

movement by the late 1520s,⁷ the new pressures impinging on Luther, and the severely limited alternatives that he faced" (pp. 4-5 in Edwards's "Introduction").

In concluding this section, note should be taken of one further recent publication that is particularly helpful in filling gaps in Luther's "middle years," the years from the Diet of Worms in 1521 to the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. This is Heinrich Bornkamm's posthumously published *Martin Luther in der Mitte seines Lebens. Das Jahrzehnt zwischen dem Wormser und dem Augsburger Reichstag* (Göttingen, 1979). This was edited by his daughter Karin Bornkamm. The Luther quincentennial year has seen it appear in an English edition, translated by E. Theodore Bachmann and published by Fortress Press: *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530* (Philadelphia, 1983). This massive volume of over 700 pages gives an unprecedented amount of careful attention to both the various crises and the reform activities of Luther during the decade covered. In spite of its depth of research, fullness of treatment, and attention to detail, the work displays a literary style and manner of presentation that makes it eminently readable.⁸

3. LUTHER AND THE JEWS

We next will take note of certain significant contributions of the Luther quincentennial year with respect to research on, and practical attention to, Luther's attitude to the Jews. First of all, we may observe that Mark Edwards has devoted a full chapter to Luther's attitude toward the Jews in his *Luther's Last Battles* (a book

⁷Inasmuch as Edwards himself deals with Luther's polemical writings in the period from 1531 onward, I have accordingly made mention above of only the changing environment relating to the rise of the Schmalkaldic League and to the accession of John Frederick; but there was earlier change also, as a certain consolidation phase of the Lutheran movement set in during the late 1520s (particularly as a response to the situation created by the 1st Diet of Speyer in 1526). Some of the earlier developments have been noted in my introductory article in this issue of AUSS, "Meet Martin Luther: An Introductory Biographical Sketch."

⁸Another recent publication on Luther's later life that deserves mention (though at the time of this writing I have not been able to consult it) is Helmar Junghans, ed., *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1983).

treated in Sect. 2 of this article): chap. 6, pp. 115–142. As we shall see in a moment, Edwards first takes note of the environment and of Luther's early somewhat favorable attention to the Jews; but the really thought-provoking part of his chapter is the section wherein he deals more specifically with the contents and significance of the 1543 Luther treatises which have brought the Reformer such a considerable amount of criticism: *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and *On the Ineffable Name and on Christ's Lineage*. A third treatise in the 1543 series, *On the Last Words of David*, was not basically polemical.

The treatment that Luther, in his *On the Jews and Their Lies*, recommended should be given the Jews by the secular authorities is enough to make one shudder; and the bald references to defecatory and urinary excrements when describing rabbinic exegesis and supposed Jewish beliefs is enough to make one blush. In the former category, Luther recommended such measures as destruction of the Jews' synagogues and homes; confiscation of their Talmudic writings and prayer books; revocation of their safe-conducts on the highways; prohibition of their usury, and even the confiscation of their money (this to be allocated to Jewish converts to Christianity); and sending them into the fields to work, or preferably expelling them from the country after a portion of their wealth had been taken from them.

Both Edwards and Heiko A. Oberman have noted the anti-Jewish sentiments of the times, the latter having devoted a work specifically to the question of the deeper and more pervasive roots of anti-Semitism. This work in its German original is entitled *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus: Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation* (Berlin, 1981) and is to be published in 1984 by Fortress Press in an English translation (the translator is James I. Porter), under the title *The Roots of Anti-Semitism: In the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*.

As Edwards has outlined (and also Eric W. Gritsch, in a publication that will be noted below), Luther grew up in an environment hostile to Jews, but in 1523 penned a treatise favorable to them, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. This treatise was produced ostensibly with the hope of securing conversions from among the Jews; however, Luther's later unfavorable contacts with some of them (especially a disputation which he had with several learned Jews) led him to the thought that work for the Jews was virtually

futile. To his mind, they were a race condemned of God and hopeless to reach with the Gospel. In addition, their own proselyting efforts were an endangerment to his religious-reform work. And thus, he felt called upon to usher forth vehement blasts against them.

That Luther's theological concern for the christological emphasis on OT Scripture (which obviously the Jews denied) lay somewhat close to the heart of the matter is not to be disputed, for the polemical treatises themselves are devoted partly to a concern with proper biblical exegesis of the OT. But Luther's unusually harsh language can hardly be explained on such grounds alone. A pertinent point that Edwards notes is the fact that Luther's language was even harsher to the Papists and almost as harsh to the Turks and "false brethren" (Edwards, pp. 140-141). Oberman has equally aptly pointed out that Luther's eschatological views lay very much at the center of his attacks on all four of these "enemy" groups (i.e., enemies to God and to God's work, in the view of Luther): The Papists, the Turks, the Jews, and the fanatics were all, in Luther's thinking, Satan's special tools in the final assault before Judgment Day; and as such, they must definitely be resisted with all the energy and all the vehemence possible (Oberman, *Wurzeln*, pp. 155-156).

Another significant publication in anticipation of the Luther Year is Walther Bienert, *Martin Luther und die Juden. Ein Quellenbuch mit zeitgenössischen Illustrationen mit Einführungen und Erläuterungen* (Frankfurt/M., 1982). This volume is, as its title indicates, a compilation of the sources on Luther in his relationship to the Jews. These sources are provided in modern German rendition. The basic compilation is given in seven chapters, followed by an "Afterword," a bibliography, and an index. The commentary that accompanies the collected source materials sets forth the thesis that Luther's attitude toward the Jews changed several times—from opposition to them (illustrated in the *Dictata* on the Psalms), to a change in the positive direction (most forcefully in evidence by 1523, in his treatise *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*), to a reversion from 1538 onward. The author also ventures the suggestion that in those later years Luther came to look upon the Jews as a threat, not only to the Gospel religion, but also to civil government.

Luther's anti-Semitism has, of course, been drawn upon with baleful effect in later German history, by those who have failed to notice that his attitude was largely theologically based, not built on concepts of any social superiority of one race over another. After all,

to Luther, *all humanity*, irrespective of race, was in utter ruin, except as the grace of Christ was accepted through faith. This is a point overlooked by those who would draw support from Luther for their criminal misdeeds or who would stand passively by to watch such crimes committed. A point well made by Edwards (p. 142) concerning Luther's anti-Jewish polemics is worth quoting here in full:

To insist on the importance of context for a proper understanding of Luther's anti-Jewish treatises is not merely good history. It also makes it more difficult for modern anti-Semites to exploit the authority of Luther's name to support their racist beliefs. This is all to the good. But we cannot have it both ways. If the anti-Jewish treatises cannot be divorced from their context without serious distortion, then the same should be true for his other writings. It is not intellectually honest to pick and choose.

But when all is said and done—and even as appreciative as we can rightfully be for the contextualization indicated by Edwards, Oberman, and others—, the fact remains that Luther's polemics of 1543 against the Jews were ugly. Had his prescribed course of action against them been taken, their lot would even at that time have been made immeasurably harder than it already was within a prejudiced society. Whether the grounds were theological, rather than social and/or economic, makes no real difference as to the nature of the persecution and the plight and suffering of the persecuted. Placing Luther in context may perhaps make us less judgmental toward him, and it should indeed give us an awareness of the introspection we ourselves need so as to avoid allowing what may be legitimate theological concerns to disintegrate into bigotry and intolerance.

In contrast to this sordid episode in a great Reformer's career, stand some monumental events of the Luther Year in bringing Luther's spiritual descendants and Jews into a closer bond of fellowship and mutual understanding. On May 18–19, 1983, the Lutheran Council in the USA devoted part of its seventeenth annual meeting to a discussion of "Luther and the Jews." Guest speakers were Eric W. Gritsch of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Marc H. Tannenbaum, national inter-religious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee. A condensed version of their presentations—irenic and ecumenical in tone—appears in a booklet entitled *Luther and the Jews*, published in 1983 by the Lutheran Council in the USA, in New York City.

This booklet first lists Luther's "sincere advice" as to what Christians should do to the Jews (a summary of Luther's specific recommendations has already been given above). This listing is rightly introduced with the heading "A Difficult Subject" (p. 1). Next, Gritsch reviews the history of anti-Jewish sentiment up to and including the Reformation era; deals with Luther's attitude toward, and contacts with, the Jews (again, outlined briefly earlier in this article); assesses several of the explanations that are given for Luther's vehement castigations set forth in his 1543 treatise;⁹ notes three "essential aspects" that he feels must be considered in properly assessing Luther in this episode;¹⁰ and then draws conclusions that recognize a weakness in Luther's constructs, but exonerates him from the lion's share of the blame so long as anti-Semitism lingers on among Christians. In his concluding remarks, Gritsch states:

Luther's attitude toward the Jews illustrates the fragility of faith in a world plagued by suffering, evil and death. Despite pioneering insights into the universality of God's love, Luther turned the "good news" of this love into "bad news" for Jews and others whose hearts seemed to him so hardened. . . .

Luther may not be of much help to post-Hitler Christians on the "Via Dolorosa" toward better Christian-Jewish relations. But as long as anti-Semitism survives among Christians, Luther cannot take the lion's share of the blame. We honor him best when we search our own hearts and cleanse our own minds from at least those evils which prevent us from living in tolerant solidarity with others.

⁹These explanations are: "1. There is a basic difference between the young and the old Luther. . . . 2. Luther's anti-Jewish stance was fueled by a radical, apocalyptic world view. . . . 3. In his latter days, Luther was too ill to be his true self. . . . 4. Luther's attitude never really changed. . ." (p. 7).

¹⁰These "essential aspects" are: "First, neither Luther's life nor his work was dominated by the issue of anti-Semitism. . . . Second, Luther's 'final solution' for the Jews must be seen in the context of a fast-moving reform movement threatened by various forces from within and without. . . . Third, Luther succumbed to the evil of anti-Semitism through a theological failure of nerve. He so desperately tried to communicate God's unconditional love for Israel, as well as for the people of God called 'Christians,' that he could not stop moving from the proclamation of divine mercy to conclusions about God's wrath. When faced with what he considered self-righteous Jewish stubbornness in the matter of conversion, Luther no longer let God be God. One can know the hidden God with regard to his plans for the Jews, he decided: God had rejected them and was in favor of their rejection in the world he created!" (p. 8).

Rabbi Tannenbaum likewise traces the history of anti-Semitism up to and including Luther and the Reformation era, and then moves on to consider the impact that Luther has had on modern anti-Semitism, especially in Hitler's regime. In concluding his final section, entitled "Our Present Challenge," Tannenbaum states:

A fundamental principle of the Lutheran Reformation was that papal infallibility was not a Lutheran doctrine. And if the pope in Rome is not to be infallible, should infallibility then be transferred to Martin Luther?

If there's anything that should characterize the observance of the 500th birthday of Luther, I feel it should be the determination to face the bad in past tradition and to replace it by building a culture filled with caring, understanding and—above all—knowledge of one another, not as caricatures and stereotypes, but as we are, committed Jews and Christians.

Undoubtedly even more significant than the meeting of May 18-19, which included on its agenda the presentations by Gritsch and Tannenbaum, was a three-day consultation in Stockholm, Sweden, devoted specifically to dialogue between Jews and Lutherans. This consultation, on July 11-13, 1983, was the second official dialogue between the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations and the Lutheran World Federation. The statement released by the Lutheran participants is worth quoting here in full:

We Lutherans take our name and much of our understanding of Christianity from Martin Luther. But we cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews.

Lutherans and Jews interpret the Hebrew Bible differently. But we believe that a christological reading of the Scriptures does not lead to anti-Judaism, let alone anti-Semitism.

We hold that an honest, historical treatment of Luther's attacks on the Jews takes away from modern anti-Semites the assumption that they may legitimately call on the authority of Luther's name to bless their anti-Semitism. We insist that Luther does not support racial anti-Semitism, nationalistic anti-Semitism and political anti-Semitism. Even the deplorable religious anti-Semitism of the 16th century, to which Luther's attacks made important contribution, is a horrible anachronism when translated to the conditions of the modern world. We recognize with deep regret, however, that Luther has been used to justify such anti-Semitism in the

period of national socialism and that his writings lent themselves to such abuse. Although there remain conflicting assumptions, built into the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, they need not, and should not, lead to the animosity and the violence of Luther's treatment of the Jews. Martin Luther opened up our eyes to a deeper understanding of the Old Testament and showed us the depth of our common inheritance and the roots of our faith.

Yet a frank examination also forces Lutherans and other Christians to confront the anti-Jewish attitudes of their past and present. Many of the anti-Jewish utterances of Luther have to be explained in the light of his polemic against what he regarded as misinterpretations of the Scriptures. He attacked these interpretations, since for him everything now depended on a right understanding of the Word of God.

The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks, the violence of his attacks on the Jews, must be acknowledged with deep distress. And all occasions for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches.

Hostility toward the Jews began long before Luther and has been a continuing evil after him: The history of the centuries following the Reformation saw in Europe the gradual acceptance of religious pluralism. The church was not always the first to accept this development; yet there have also been examples of leadership by the church in the movement to accept Jews as full fellow citizens and members of society.

Beginning in the last half of the 19th century anti-Semitism increased in Central Europe and at the same time Jewish people were being integrated in society. This brought to the churches, particularly in Germany, an unwanted challenge. Paradoxically the churches honored the people Israel of the Bible but rejected the descendants of those people, myths were perpetuated about the Jews and deprecatory references appeared in Lutheran liturgical and educational material. Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was used to justify passivity in the face of totalitarian claims. These and other less theological factors contributed to the failures which have been regretted and repeatedly confessed since 1945.

To their credit it is to be said that there were individuals and groups among Lutherans who in defiance of totalitarian power defended their Jewish neighbors, both in Germany and elsewhere.

Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther's utterances on the Jews. We hope we have learned from the tragedies of

the recent past. We are responsible for seeing that we do not now nor in the future leave any doubt about our position on racial and religious prejudice and that we afford to all the human dignity, freedom and friendship that are the right of all the Father's children.

4. CATHOLIC RESEARCH AND CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT DIALOGUE ON LUTHER

One of the more intriguing aspects of this ecumenical age is the effort to see Luther as an "ecumenical person" (a Reformer to be claimed, in a certain sense, by Catholics as well as Protestants), or at least to engage in interfaith discussions of him in an ecumenical way. The Jewish consultations with Lutherans mentioned in the preceding section of this article furnish a notable example.

Perhaps there is no more striking example, however, than that which is to be found in recent Roman Catholic attention to Luther. This is manifested both in the independent studies by Catholic scholars on Luther and in an ongoing Catholic-Protestant dialogue. The trend, which began some years ago, is one of the "new directions" that was also much in evidence during the Luther quincentennial.

But before we come to the year 1983, it would be well to take a quick survey over some of the other more recent developments. Richard Stauffer's handy little volume, *Luther As Seen by Catholics* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1967) traces developments from the time of the bitterly negative treatments of Luther by Heinrich Denifle and Hartmann Grisar early in this century to the beginnings of an era of more favorable attention to the Reformer. One of the significant pioneers in this re-evaluation of Catholic historiography on Luther was Joseph Lortz in 1939. Several other Catholic historians and theologians continued this more positive approach soon thereafter.¹¹

¹¹Perhaps most notably the three-volume work by A. Herte, *Das katholische Lutherbild im Bann der Lutherkommentare des Cochläus* in 1943; and a significant work with theological approach by J. Hessen, *Luther in katholischer Sicht* in 1947. These and other German works of similar tone are reviewed by Stauffer in his chapter on "The Reassessment in Germany," pp. 37-62 in his *Luther as Seen by Catholics*; and the new approach to Luther in the English-speaking world is reviewed in his next chapter, "The Anglo-Saxon Re-evaluation," on pp. 63-70.

Subsequent to Stauffer's publication, a noteworthy ecumenically spirited Catholic-Protestant dialogue took place in New York City: the joint symposium in 1967 sponsored by Union Theological Seminary (Protestant) and Fordham University (Catholic) to honor the 450th anniversary of Luther's "95 Theses" of 1517. This symposium presented papers on Erasmus, Loyola, and Luther, and a number of the papers were subsequently published in a volume edited by John C. Olin, James D. Smart, and Robert E. McNally, *Luther, Erasmus, and the Reformation: A Catholic-Protestant Reappraisal* (New York, 1969). The irenic spirit which characterized the whole endeavor appears repeatedly throughout the pages of this volume. As just one example, Catholic John T. McDonough's opening statement in his chapter on "The Essential Luther" is indicative of the spirit that was evident on the Catholic side: "From the outset I would like to state that a phenomenon as widespread and as powerful as the Reformation cannot be attributed to sin and error alone. . . . Could such a phenomenon occur without being part of God's design, without contributing something positive to our salvation? After all, God is Master of History, at least for the Christian" (p. 59). Such a comment is, of course, a complete reversal of the position set forth earlier by Denifle, Grisar, and a host of Catholic writers who followed their lead and drew upon their arguments in attacking Luther.

McDonough also suggests that "there is a growing consensus among Catholic scholars that Martin Luther, on the fundamental issue of the Reformation, was absolutely right." This issue, he says, was "not politics, or economics, or indulgences, or papal authority, or even protest," but rather "simply the sovereignty of God" (*ibid.*).

It may be interesting to note that this sort of Protestant-Catholic symposium would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier, at the time of the 400th anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses. In fact, a Lutheran writer, William Hermann Theodore Dau, in *Luther Examined and Re-examined: A Review of Catholic Criticism and an Appeal for Re-evaluation* (St. Louis, Mo., 1917), discussed in a very non-irenic way the status of the then-current Catholic understanding of Luther. (Was it, perhaps, a return "in kind" to the Catholic harsh negative appraisals of Luther?)

A further volume of interest in the emerging new evaluation of Luther on the part of Catholic scholars is that of Jared Wicks, comp., *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago, 1970). In

this volume are presented chapters by Joseph Lortz, Erwin Iserloh, Otto H. Pesch, Paul Hacker, Harry J. McSorley, and Peter Manns. These chapters take the form of genuinely dialogical studies that endeavor to see Luther in his own setting. As Warren A. Quanbeck states in an "Afterword": "Roman Catholic Luther scholarship is quite clearly no longer a branch of theological polemics, but is historically informed, theologically sensitive, and possesses a genuine interest in the message of the Reformer" (p. 160). This statement describes not only the volume itself but the general trend that has been occurring in Catholic discussions of Luther. Two monographs by Wicks also deserve mention for their sympathetic approach to the Protestant Reformer: *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther's Early Spiritual Teaching* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968); and *Luther and His Spiritual Legacy* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983).

During the past two or three years, several Catholic works on Luther by European scholars, or originally appearing in Europe, have been forthcoming. These generally reveal an irenic and ecumenical tone, and include Otto H. Pesch, *Hinführung zu Luther* (Mainz, 1982), and Yves Congar, *Martin Luther, sa foi, sa réforme* (Paris, 1983), plus English and German translations of an earlier French work by D. Olivier (*La foi de Luther. La cause de l'évangélie dans l'église* [Paris, 1979]; *Luther's Faith: The Cause of the Gospel in the Church* [St. Louis, Mo., 1982]; *Luthers Glaube* [Stuttgart, 1983]) and an English translation of a German work by Peter Manns (*Martin Luther: An Illustrated Biography*, with introduction by Jared Wicks and photos by Helmut Nils Loose [New York, 1982]). Not quite so irenic, on the other hand, are Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit. Grundzüge der Theologie Martin Luthers* (Einsiedeln, 1980); and Jean Wirth's *Luther: Étude d'histoire religieuse* (Geneva, 1981).

The book by Manns, which is valuable for its illustrations as well as for its text, is a magnificent folio volume of some 223 pages. The American publisher responsible for the English edition of the work, Crossroad Publishing Company in New York City, has now abbreviated the material into a more popular version published in 1983—this in celebration of the Luther quincentennial. This shorter version bears the same title as the larger book, but carries the added notation, "New Popular Edition." This smaller edition contains 70 full-color photographs showing historical sites in

Luther's life, and portraits of Luther, his family, and various of his contemporaries.

John H. Todd is another Catholic writer who in recent years has devoted a significant amount of attention to Martin Luther. His extensive biography entitled *Martin Luther: A Biographical Study* appeared some two decades ago, published by the Newman Press in Westminster, Maryland (copyright date, 1964). A more recent Luther biography by Todd, which appeared in 1982, is entitled *Luther: A Life*, published by Crossroad Publishing Company (first published in Great Britain by Hamish Hamilton Ltd.). This biography is considerably more extensive than the earlier one and is also far more than a simple "rewrite." It is structured quite differently in organization, as well (to my mind, definitely not an improvement, however). As a sample and summary of this Catholic biographer's view of Luther, we may note the concluding paragraph of his main text in the 1982 publication (p. 373):

Of Luther himself it is impossible to speak summarily. The complex and remarkable story of his life, the tally of his works, and the witness of a great number of friends, acquaintances and enemies are there. Many loved him, many revered him, some were frightened of him, a few resentful. No one accused him, with any semblance of justification, of double dealing, or of cowardice. My principal image is of a man driven, driven by a passion for the Divine, driven, too, by a horror of evil; convinced of its eventual futility, he was ever conscious of its threat, and his life was one of prayer. His friends remembered him standing by the window of his room praying, often aloud. Under the rumbustious lover of life lay sensitivity, intelligence and imagination, and a failure to come to terms with a world which was never good enough, a failure he found confirmed in the crucifix, but glorified in what followed. At the Wartburg he wrote: "They threaten us with death. They would do better to threaten us with life."

Two further items pertaining specifically to the Luther quincentennial year deserve mention here: (1) an interconfessional consultation (and its resulting publication), and (2) a brief study guide on Luther co-authored by a Catholic and a Lutheran. The interconfessional consultation was held in Germany in October 1983, and was sponsored jointly by the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, and the Institute for European History in Mainz, Germany. The publication which is emerging from this

consultation (not yet available at the time of the present writing) will bear the title *Luther's Ecumenical Significance: An Interconfessional Consultation*, and will be published by Fortress Press in Philadelphia. It is edited by Peter Manns and Harding Meyer, in collaboration with Carter Lindberg and Harry McSorley. Although the entire volume, like the conference itself, manifests an ecumenical thrust, the first chapter is the one of primary interest to us here. It is a presentation by Peter Manns and Otto H. Pesch, entitled "The State, Method, and Ecumenical Relevance of Catholic Luther Research." It is a balanced presentation which is self-critical and opens the door for dialogue.

A shorter work which has appeared in 1983 represents another dimension of the Catholic-Protestant cooperative venture concerning Martin Luther. This is a small book co-authored by Lutheran scholar Mark Edwards and Catholic scholar George H. Tavard, *Luther: A Reformer for the Churches—An Ecumenical Study Guide* (Philadelphia, 1983). This publication, by Fortress Press, takes Luther through his career and considers briefly also Luther's world, his concept of justification by faith, some of his other basic beliefs, his personality, his later years and polemics of those years, and his general influence. An interesting feature in this volume is that the individual chapters are apparently co-authored, neither individual being indicated as responsible for any one chapter. The book is actually a popular study guide (it contains questions for review at the end of each chapter), and can certainly be used effectively as such. The presentation is fair and balanced.

In summary, Roman Catholic attention to Martin Luther has gone almost full circle. Following the lead of Luther's Catholic contemporary Johann Cochlaeus in his extremely derogatory biography, Roman Catholics for centuries took a comparably negative attitude toward the Protestant Reformer. Fairly detailed treatments by Heinrich Denifle and Hartmann Grisar during the first two decades of the present century prolonged the myth (in spite of certain valuable contributions which these Catholic scholars made). Their unjustly rabid or cynical attitude toward Luther was carried forward by other Catholic researchers and biographers with varying degrees of intensity. Some amelioration was taking place in the 1930s, with Joseph Lortz providing, toward the end of that decade, a watershed for a new sympathetic approach that later scholars tended to pick up. By 1983, the Catholic interest in better understanding Luther and in endeavoring to be fair to him had been

manifested repeatedly, and this Luther Year itself marked another high point both in sympathetic Catholic treatment of Luther and in Catholic-Lutheran dialogue.

5. OTHER AREAS OF CURRENT INTEREST

The two final topics to be surveyed here are grouped together because of the brevity with which they will be treated. It is hoped that at a later time, both of them may find a more detailed discussion in *AUSS*, either as articles or by way of literature reviews.

Luther in the "Luther Lands"

It is clear that Martin Luther has been given notable visibility by the German Democratic Republic (hereinafter referred to as "GDR," or "DDR" in German citations) during 1983, a year which that German state designated officially as a Luther Jubilee Year. In June 1980, the head of state, Erich Honecker, announced a special committee to direct the preparations, himself being the chairman. In his programmatic statement, he referred to Luther as "one of the greatest sons" of Germany, extolling this important historical figure for his outstanding accomplishments in behalf of the German people. It was clear that the official position looked upon Luther (1) as a revolutionary champion who broke the shackles of Roman tyranny, and (2) as a prominent figure in developing the German language, music, and arts. (Luther's Bible translation was valued, but from the linguistic and philological point of view, rather than for its theological significance and spiritual impact.) Huge sums of money were also devoted by the government to embellishing the chief sites in the "Luther Lands," such as Eisleben, Mansfeld, Eisenach, Erfurt, Wittenberg, and the Wartburg Castle.

This sort of expenditure was not new in the years immediately preceding 1983, for a similar effort had been made just prior to the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the "95 Theses" in 1967. But there were differences between the emphases of the two celebrations, and it will be helpful here to give a quick historical overview so as to highlight the changing scene.

In the early years of the Third Reich (1930s), Luther historiography in Germany began to undergo a metamorphosis that reinterpreted Luther's "Two-Kingdoms" theology into a conceptualization

(or conceptualizations) which so reduced the “spiritual” sphere of operation—the “divine realm” (the proper realm of the church)—that a new sense of passivity to secular politics set in. The church could now feel free to give full support to the national-socialist regime and also to stand idly by even when that regime perpetrated gross atrocities. Thus, a reinterpretation (and I would say, misinterpretation) of Luther allowed the Lutheran Church in Germany (though happily, not elsewhere) to become, as it were, either active participants or passive onlookers in the war crimes, holocaust, etc., perpetrated by the Nazi government (with some notable exceptions, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller).

The years immediately following World War II found Lutherans in Germany increasingly remorseful for the Lutheran Church’s stance during the former regime. The feeling was stronger in the Eastern occupied zone (later to become the GDR), inasmuch as the population in that zone was very largely Lutheran (some 90%), whereas in the Western zone there was also a considerable Roman Catholic population. Along with this repudiation of the Lutheran stance in Nazi Germany—and with the process of denazification in general—came a repudiation of the Martin Luther who was considered responsible for the misguided behavior of his followers in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, continuing research on Luther in the GDR began to rehabilitate him from connection with the earlier reinterpretation of his “Two-Kingdoms” doctrine. Moreover, although the communists could not appreciate the religious character of the sixteenth-century Reformer, they began to recognize a certain commonality with the Lutheran church in Germany—in that both the church and the communists had suffered at the hands of the National Socialists. Undoubtedly also, the communists, as their government was established and began to mature, came to recognize that a majority Lutheran population must somehow be taken into account with due respect. And furthermore, as Germans, they naturally began to look into the past for heroes who could be heralded as forerunners that would help to strengthen a feeling of German community and solidarity.

Just how, and precisely when, the foregoing factors developed and functioned—and in what relationship to each other—may not be fully determinable; but the Luther historiography of the post-War years does show that by the 1960s and 1970s there was in the

GDR considerable rehabilitation of Luther as a German hero, even though not as a great Christian leader. As we look at the 1967 celebration, however, we find that although the date was in commemoration of an important event in Luther's career, the emphasis was more on the Reformation itself as a revolutionary movement than on Luther personally. He was but one of various significant figures within this movement.

The sort of conceptualization in vogue in the GDR at that time may perhaps be further illuminated by attention to the fact that in 1974-75 a great celebration anniversary was established to commemorate Thomas Müntzer, the revolutionary leader of the Peasants' Revolt. This individual was considered to be, it seems, fully as significant as Martin Luther—in a revolutionary process in which they both were leaders!

During the intervening years up to the Luther quincentennial, there has been further reinterpretation. Indeed, this is to the place where it appears that Luther is now being considered *in his own right* to be "one of the greatest sons" of Germany. This 1983 celebration, in contrast to the 1967 one, honored him specifically, and not simply as one great individual among many. But that honor has, of course, been basically within the context outlined by Erich Honecker. (The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thuringia has, though, made a degree of breakthrough in giving Luther *religious* recognition in its pronouncements and celebrations.)

The Luther quincentennial was characterized by various symposia and conventions in the "Luther Lands" (generally reported in the news media), and naturally that celebration year drew also an abundance of pilgrims to those places. Massive literature, promotional and otherwise, has also appeared; and there have been some major scholarly productions, including superbly done pictorial collections.¹² (At

¹²In addition to numerous introductions by journalists and other popular writers, there have recently also been scholarly reviews of literature on Luther in the GDR, studies on the developing and current status of Marxist attention to the German Reformer, etc. Note may be made here of but a few more recent short pieces from historians or other specialists: Max Steinmetz, "Betrachtungen zur Entwicklung der marxistischen Deutung des Lutherbildes in der DDR," in *Mühlhäuser Beiträge* 5 (1982): 3-8; Wolfgang Geierhos, "Die DDR und Luther," in *Deutsche Studien* 20 (1982): 371-384; and Franklin Bormann, "Martin Luther—Reformat. Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Fortschritt," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena*, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, Jg. 32, Heft 1/2 (1983): 11-25.

a future time, some of the more scholarly works may be reviewed in the "Book-Reviews" section of *AUSS*.)

For somewhat of a "feel" of what a tour to the Luther sites would be like, one may read the lead article in the October 1983 issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*. This article gives a delightful survey of highlights in the Reformer's career, set in the context of the author's visit to the various sites (in the order of their chronological importance in Luther's life). The author is *National Geographic* assistant editor Merle Severy, and his appealing narrative is accompanied by numerous color photographs by the magazine's photographer James L. Amos. The article, incidentally, gives certain glimpses, too, of the current situation of the Lutheran Church in the GDR, and of Catholic attitude toward Luther.

Just what has the Luther Jubilee meant in the GDR, and what may be expected, if anything, in the further rehabilitation of the German hero Martin Luther? These are questions that must await an answer in the future. In the meantime, the official stance has been set forth. As a further indication of it, we may close this section of our survey with Honecker's words posted on the visitors' bulletin board in Eisenach:

Zu den progressiven Traditionen,
die wir pflegen und weiterführen,
gehören das Wirken und
das Vermächtnis all derer, die
zum Fortschritt, zur Entwicklung
der Weltkultur beigetragen haben,
ganz gleich, in welcher sozialen
und klassenmässigen Bindung sie
sich befanden.

Erich Honecker

In diesem Sinne würdigt die DDR
die historischen Leistungen von
MARTIN LUTHER

(To the progressive tradition
which we foster and promote
belongs the influence
and legacy of all those who
have contributed to the advance,
to the development of world culture,

irrespective of the social
and class-level strictures in which they
found themselves.

Erich Honecker

In this sense the GDR values
the historical accomplishments of
MARTIN LUTHER)

Luther's So-Called "Reformation Breakthrough"

On the question of Luther's so-called "Reformation breakthrough" and/or "Tower Discovery," the literature to date is massive—indeed, so much so that this question can probably qualify as the most overworked topic in recent Luther studies. There are various areas of continuing debate, but in a broad sense the debate is still very much alive between the "traditionalists" who consider Luther's "breakthrough" to have occurred between 1512 and 1515 (most likely, as he prepared his lectures for either Psalm 31 [32] or 71 [72]), and the "revisionists" who would place that "breakthrough" in 1518–19. But there has also been a growing recognition that Luther's was indeed a *developing* theology and an experience wherein there might have been multiple times when the Reformer could have had "breakthroughs." W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, for instance, has surveyed the lines of argument for the early (1512–15) and late (1518–19) "Tower Experience," adding the possibility that the "Tower Experience" referred to in several of Luther's "Table Talks" and the "breakthrough" to which he refers in the Preface to the 1545 Latin edition of his works were in reality two different occurrences—in any event, the former being a *biographical* question, and the latter a *theological* one. (See the chapter entitled "The Problem of Luther's 'Tower Experience' and Its Place in His Intellectual Development," pp. 60–80 in his posthumously published volume, *Studies in the Reformation: Luther to Hooker* [London, 1980], ed. C. W. Dugmore.)

Heiko A. Oberman at the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research held in 1971 in St. Louis, Missouri, seemingly opened up a whole new and fruitful line for investigation: namely, that through Johann Staupitz, Luther had learned, embraced, and developed a strain or variety of Catholic theology (including, specifically, a soteriological view) already in evidence among the Augustinians—at least since the days of the earlier generals of the order,

Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) and Augustinus Favaroni (d. 1443).¹³ Whether or not this was so has, of course, implications as to how one should define what was "Catholic" and what was "Reformational" in Luther. And when, in the long process of Luther's theological development, did he then cease to be truly a "Catholic" and become a genuine "Protestant"? In any event, David C. Steinmetz, in his *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, N.C., 1980), reported negative results concerning his investigation of Staupitz's influence *theologically* on Luther; and these results, if correct, naturally place any special Augustinian variety of theology held by Staupitz outside the realm of Luther's own development. It would seem that as of now, however, the question is not fully settled, and the debate goes on.

The whole subject is much more complex, of course, than the foregoing brief introduction would indicate. The details picked up here and there in Luther's treatises, lecture notes, sermons, letters, table talks, etc., to support one view or another, surface almost *ad infinitum* in the recent literature on this subject. Is it possible that the discussions have become bogged down—entrapped in their own web, as it were—by an overworked too-exclusive investigation of *only* what Luther himself has to say? Is it time, perhaps, to look at the *broader context*; namely, to see the "breakthrough" in terms of the interaction between Luther and his contemporary Catholic society? That is to say, what precisely was involved in getting him into the position of being a "Protestant Reformer," rather than simply a "Catholic Reformer"—in *his* time and in *his* context? Such an added dimension to the study, it would seem, is certainly germane.¹⁴

But these and other considerations cannot be explored here. It is my hope that at some later time I will be able to provide the type of detailed review and analysis that this topic deserves.

¹³Oberman's paper has been published as chap. 3 in a volume of papers and reports from that Congress: Heiko A. Oberman, ed., *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 8 (Leiden, 1974).

¹⁴It may be of interest to observe here that in the Preface to the 1545 complete ed. of Luther's Latin writings—the basic source from which departures to other sources is generally made in studying Luther's so-called "Reformation breakthrough"—, Luther himself gives prominence to the historical developments that took him away from the Papacy and Roman church. An English translation of this Preface is given in the American ed. of *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV*, pp. 327–338.