

2. THE LUTHER RESEARCH CONGRESS IN ERFURT

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Approximately 300 Luther scholars gathered at Erfurt on Sunday, August 14, 1983, to mark the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth by devoting a week to a sharing of the results of the latest research on the main facets of the life and thought of the great Reformer. For this Luther Research Congress, they met together for almost a week in the unforgettable setting of the Augustinian monastery where Luther spent his monastic years. The building had been almost completely restored for the occasion. The many nations, the many religious traditions, and the many political systems represented—all gave a vivid idea of the spread of Luther's influence.

On Sunday night, Lewis Spitz of Stanford University presented the opening address on "Luther, the Man." He stressed the fact that Luther was first of all a pastor.

During the week, the morning plenary sessions held in the church of the monastery were devoted to four major themes: "Luther's Cause," discussed by Leif Grane and Martin Seils; "Luther and the Church," by Inge Lönning and Otto Pesch; "Luther and Culture," by George Forell and Helmar Junghans; and "Luther and Society," by Thomas Brady, Jr., and Geoffrey R. Elton. Vigorous and lively exchanges followed the exposés of the speakers, which gave the participants the chance to realize that in spite of all the books that have been written on Luther, scholars are still far from any general agreement on many a point.

On Wednesday night Gerhard Ebeling announced the completion of the Weimar edition of Luther's works, and recalled the toil of those who through the years edited the different volumes.

The afternoons during the week were devoted to seminars, which dealt with topics such as "Luther and the Jews," directed by Heiko Oberman; "Luther and the Papacy" (Ulrich Kuhn); "Luther and Aristotle" (Karl Heinz zur Mühlen); "Luther and Humanism" (Lewis Spitz); "Luther and the Beginning of the Reformation in the

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Cities" (Gottfried Seebass); "Luther and the Princes" (Eike Wolgast); "Luther and the Peasants" (Siegfried Bräuer); "Luther's Ecclesiology" (Martin Schloemann); "Luther and the Change in the Understanding of the Sacraments" (James McCue); "Spirit and Word" (Horst Beintker); "Luther's Christology" (Gerhard O. Forde); "Baptism and New Life" (Bengt Hägglund); "Luther's Sixteenth-Century Successors" (Robert Kolb); "Luther and Women" (Jane Dempsey Douglass); "Luther's Confession in the 'Vom Abendmahl Christi'" (Jan T. Bakker); "The Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans" (Martin Brecht); and "Luther and the Other Saxon Reformers" (Gert Haendler). One afternoon was devoted to field trips which took some to the Wartburg and Eisenach, others to Mansfeld and to Eisleben, and still others to Allstedt, where they viewed the still-unfinished mausoleum to Thomas Müntzer. Wittenberg was the object of a special visit on the Saturday after the Congress.

During breaks, and especially during the receptions held in the evenings, the participants had the opportunity to visit old friends and become acquainted with new ones. The elaborate fare offered on those occasions contrasted rather sharply with the rather limited choice of fruits and vegetables available in the local stores. The Monday-night reception offered by the government at the Erfurter Hof gave an opportunity to observe the fine blend of tension and acceptance that must characterize the relations of church and state in the German Democratic Republic. The Secretary of Cults and Joachim Rogge, head of the Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, exchanged good wishes, sweet-sour observations which only the initiates could fully comprehend, and gentle "ribbing" as they proposed toasts in honor of their guests. Although words and signs of welcome greeted the participants on every hand, they were often overshadowed by posters and huge red banners marking the centennial of Marx's birth. At times, mottoes such as "Marx for the present and the future," in obvious contrast to all the references of the admirers of Luther to the past, gave away the true cultural setting of the Congress. There was place in the program, however, for religious fervor. After the reception by the Evangelical Church on Wednesday night, a moving, under-the-stars worship was held in the cloister of the Augustinian monastery. Beautiful dahlias were passed out to everyone; and the blending of word, music, and flowers created an atmosphere that is unforgettable.

With so many appointments, there was difficulty for the members of the Congress to find time to visit the points of historical interest that are found everywhere in that beautiful city of Erfurt. Exhibits had been prepared in several of the local churches. The account of Luther's young years in the monastery library, located just beside Luther's cell, brought out vividly the traits of his education and his experience as a monk. Moreover, everywhere in Luther's land, monuments connected with those fateful years had been restored and made attractive. As an additional effort to immerse the guests of the Luther Research Congress in the atmosphere of the sixteenth century, meals at Erfurt were taken in two restaurants that had already been opened at that time.

The immense significance of Luther, however, was best manifested by the presence not only of Lutherans, but also of Catholics, Marxists, and representatives of many Protestant traditions besides Lutheranism. This fact led Leif Grane, who will head the next Luther Research Congress—to be held in Oslo, Norway, four years from now—to comment that Lutherans claim Luther, Catholics claim Luther, and even Marxists claim him. Does it mean, he wondered, that Luther is a man without a face? "No," he uttered loudly, "for Luther was a seeker for truth, and we who love Luther must share that concern." Certainly, the Luther Congress at Erfurt was a forceful witness to the power of truth upon those who commit themselves to proclaim it.