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### John Tauler His Life, Work and Influence on Luther

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JOHN TAULER  
HIS LIFE, WORK AND INFLUENCE ON LUTHER

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Bachelor of Divinity

1.) A Catalog of the Printed Sermons

2.) References to Tauler in Luther's Writings

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by

Walter Gerhard Boss

December 1944

Approved by:

*W. G. Pream*  
*Th. Hoyer*

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## JOHN TAULER

### His Life, Work and Influence on Luther

#### Abbreviations

- J.T., ed.N, - Johann Tauler Predigten, ed. Naumann (1923)
- J.T., ed.H, - Johann Tauler Predigten,  
ed. Hamberger (1864)
- Bvga. - Buch von der geistlichen Armut  
Denifle, Editor
- St. L. - Luthers Saemmtliche Schriften  
St. Louis - Walch Edition
- WA - Luther, Werke, Weimar Edition

Note: All quotations have been translated from the original into English.



learning, that was apparently well established by his family.<sup>1</sup>  
In the Dominican Cloister Tauler finished the prescribed  
course of study. "After finishing the foundation course in  
grammar -- Latin, Rhetoric, Logic -- he entered upon a two-  
year study of choral prayers ("Chorale") and the rules of

## JOHN TAULER

### His Life, Work and Influence on Luther

novitiate of one year. This course of studies embraced eight  
years, consisting of a three-year course in Logic, a two-  
year course in

#### I. The Life of John Tauler

Throughout the centuries the name of John Tauler has  
never passed into oblivion. He has been recognized as an  
outstanding preacher by the Protestant as well as the  
Catholic Church. J. H. Kurtz, the Protestant church  
historian, has called him "one of the most powerful ("ge-  
waltigsten") preachers of all time."<sup>1</sup> The Catholic scholar,  
Klemens Loeffler, considers Tauler as "one of the greatest  
mystics and preachers of the Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup>

John Tauler (also: Tauller, Thaler, Thauler, Tauweler)  
was born of wealthy parents in Strassburg, ca. 1300. His  
father was perhaps the same Nicolaus Tauler mentioned in  
1313 as a member of the Strassburg City Council.

It was also in Strassburg where Tauler spent the greater  
part of his life. His sister Margaret belonged to an order  
of nuns in this city. At the age of fifteen he entered the  
Dominican Cloister in Strassburg, "following an ascetic

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1. J. H. Kurtz, Abriss der Kirchengeschichte, 1889, p.118.  
2. Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912, Vol. XIV, p. 8.



leaning, that was apparently well established in his family." <sup>3</sup>

In the Dominican Cloister Tauler finished the prescribed course of study. "After finishing the foundation courses in grammar -- Latin, Rhetoric, Logic -- he entered upon a two-year study of choral prayers ("Chorgebet") and the rules of his Order. Courses in philosophy and theology followed a novitiate of one year. This course of studies embraced eight years, consisting of a three-year course in Logic, a two-year course in Natural Philosophy (based on Aristotle's writings on logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics), and three years of theology (one year of Bible study and two years of dogmatics). In addition to the works of Aristotle and Peter Lombard, the writings of Thomas Aquinas (died 1274) were compulsory for the Dominicans since 1278. Thomas Aquinas remained the foundation of Tauler's study as well as of his theology. This course of study was completed with the ordination to the priesthood which never took place before the 25th year of the life of the candidate. There are no records whatsoever concerning Tauler during this training period (in Strassburg) nor for the following period which Tauler spent in Cologne." <sup>4</sup>

It is possible that Tauler may have continued his studies at Cologne, but all evidence is lacking. It is unlikely that Tauler ever studied at the Seminary ("Prediger-Collegium") of St. Jacob in Paris. Carl Schmidt, well-known authority on

3. Johann Tauler, Predigten, ed. Naumann, p. 8.

4. J.T., ed. N., pp. 8-9.



Mysticism, assumes it to be a fact, that Tauler studied in Paris. But Denifle and Naumann reject this.<sup>5</sup> Naumann writes: "Tauler was never at the Sorbonne (the St. Jacob Seminary belonged to the Sorbonne) in Paris. Nor did Tauler ever obtain the degree of a Master or Doctor, although it has become customary to designate him with these titles since the fifteenth century."<sup>6</sup>

It is very likely that Tauler met Master Eckhart during his stay in Cologne. It is also very probable that he learned to know Heinrich Seuse (Suso). "All three certainly met in Cologne. Seuse verifies that Eckhart was his teacher. This cannot be established for Tauler. His (i.e. Tauler's) stay seems to fall during the time in which Eckhart was under accusation...But all this is mere conjecture as is also Seuse's acquaintance with Tauler, which is preferably assumed to be of a later date."<sup>7</sup>

But Tauler's sermons offer evidence that Tauler was strongly influenced by Eckhart. Tauler himself calls him "the great Master." "Tauler is the most faithful pupil of Master Eckhart, whose mystical teachings he likes to explain and defend; nevertheless, Tauler avoids painfully every pantheistic tendency."<sup>8</sup>

For an extended period of years we lack all reports on

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5. Denifle, Taulers Bekehrung, Strassburg 1879.

6. J.T., ed. N., p. 10.

7. J.T., ed. N., pp. 9-10.

8. Grosser Brockhaus, 15th edition, sub "Tauler".

9. J.T., ed. N., pp. 10-11.



time. Tauler's activity. It is very likely, however, that Tauler, having completed his studies in Cologne, returned to Strassburg his native city. In Strassburg Tauler found unhappy and unfortunate circumstances. Strassburg had become the center of the strife over the Interdict. This had arisen out of the controversy between the Pope, John XXII, and Ludwig of Bavaria. "Ludwig's difficulties were a result of the dependence of the popes, now sitting in French captivity in Avignon, on the rulers of France. When the King of Milan threatened the position of the papacy in Upper Italy by supporting the Visconti, Ludwig, who had just reached an agreement with Frederick the Fair, was served a summons. On the eighth of October 1323 it was announced that Ludwig was to resign under threat of the bann. On the 23rd of March 1324 the bann was imposed. On the 22nd of May Ludwig answered this with the "Sachsenhaeuser Appellation" in which he described the pope's demands for authority over kings and emperors as usurpation and tyranny."<sup>9</sup> In 1329 Strassburg and other cities favoring Ludwig's position were put under the interdict. This caused a division among the clergy. The one group was obedient to the pope and did not take part in any services: the other group of priests remained faithful to Ludwig and continued to conduct services and administer the sacraments in spite of the interdict. It is impossible to determine definitely whether or not Tauler remained faithful to the church or the Emperor during this

10. Schmidt, *Johannes Tauler von Strassburg*, p. 33.

11. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1912), sub "Tauler".

12. Tauler *Das Inner Way* (W. A. Hutton in the introd.

pp. 9. J.T., ed. N., pp. 10-11.



time. Tauler's position with regard to the Interdict will

perhaps Carl Schmidt, who bases his opinion on the report of the Strassburger chronicler Speckle (died 1589), believes that Tauler preached and administered the Sacraments during the time of the Interdict. Schmidt writes: "Tauler did not wait for papal permission in order to do that which he then considered the highest and most sacred spiritual duty. He was not only active in Strassburg (during this period), but already at this time made frequent excursions to Cologne."<sup>10</sup>

The Catholic historian Loeffler denies this completely. He writes: "The story told by the later Strassburg chronicler Speckle is a tissue of falsehoods; it relates that Tauler should have opposed the pope and the interdict that the pope had laid upon Strassburg in the struggle between the papacy and the Emperor Louis the Bavarian."<sup>11</sup> But Loeffler advances no proofs for his contention. "In the name of God, I would yield, for the Church

W. A. Hutton maintains, "The evidence certainly seems to point to the conclusion that Tauler, and the Dominican house at Strassburg, did submit (to the Interdict). But Preger to (Geschichte der deutschen Mystik, Vol. III) holds it as proved that a certain Merswin, a layman who had withdrawn from a distinguished civic position and led a penitential life as one of the "Friends of God", received the sacraments from Tauler during the Interdict."<sup>12</sup> But everything that the

Church has given us, she may take from us. And all this we

10. Schmidt, Johannes Tauler von Strassburg, p. 23.  
11. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1912), sub "Tauler".  
12. Tauler The Inner Way, (W. A. Hutton in the Introd. pp. XVIII-XIX).

13. J.T., ed.N., pp. 173-174; and Tauler Predigten (ed. Hamberger), III, pp. 121; also ed. 1498, Serm. LXXX.



Tauler's position with regard to the Interdict will perhaps always remain a disputed point. Nowhere in his writings do we find any reference to the Interdict. Nevertheless, one sermon in which Tauler clarifies his position over against the church, leads us to believe that Tauler submitted to the pope, and did nothing which might have been construed as disobedience of the church. Tauler writes in this sermon: "Should it come to this that the pope and the holy Church would want to deprive me of this sacred office (the priesthood), which I have received from the Church, I would leave it go altogether and not ask, why are they taking it from me...Even if I were to wear a gray coat (If they should let me have one) and were no longer allowed to remain in the cloister with my brothers, I would leave. And if I should not be allowed to remain a priest, neither hear confession nor preach in the name of God, I would yield, for the Church has given it to me and can also take it away from me. It is not for me to ask 'why?', otherwise I will become a heretic or be put under the bann. But if anyone else should wish to take even one of these things from me, I should rather choose death than let him take it from me. Even if the holy Church were to take the external use of the holy Sacrament from us, we would have to be satisfied with that. No one could hinder us from receiving it spiritually. But everything that the Church has given us, she may take from us. And all this we must tolerate patiently without murmuring or contradiction."<sup>13</sup>

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13. J.T., ed.N., pp. 173-174; and Tauler Predigten (ed. Hamberger), III, pp. 121; also ed. 1498, Serm. LXXX.



On the basis of this quotation from Tauler we feel compelled to agree with Naumann: "The quarrel between the emperor and the pope presents no problem to Tauler. It was self-evident that everyone owed the pope obedience, it was also self-evident that such external matters would not affect him (Tauler). There are reports from the friends of Margaret Ebner, that the conflict between the two powers called forth many inner struggles. But there is no reason to assume this in the case of Tauler, since his thoughts concerned themselves with other things. The Strassburg chronicler Speckle, who died 1589, reports that Tauler in connection with two other monks (Ludolph of Saxony, died 1377; and Thomas of Strassburg, died 1357) issued two writings against the pope with the accusation that he was guilty of having caused many to die without benefit of the sacrament. But this does not correspond with the facts...His activity was dedicated to the meditative souls in the country ("den Stillen im Lande"), the friends of God, and clerical and lay mystically-minded souls."<sup>14</sup>

In the year 1339 we find Tauler in Basel. We do not know why he came to this city. It is possible that he and the other Dominicans left Strassburg because of the Interdict.<sup>15</sup> He remained in Basel until 1347 (or 1348).

14. J.T., ed. N., p. 13.

15. Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 1911, sub Tauler.

*Indebted to the correspondence between Heinrich of Herford and Margaret Ebner, published 1882 by Philipp Strauch, ed. N., pp. 11-12.*



In Basel<sup>16</sup> he met Heinrich of Noerdlingen. Together they were the chief representatives of "the Friends of God." The "Friends of God" were societies of laymen and also clergymen, who immersed themselves in the contemplation of the mystical elements of religion. They emphasized particularly the Christian virtues, especially humility. Their deep seriousness in teaching and their great fervor in preaching made the "Friends of God" very influential in southern Germany. Through their zealous activity a religious awakening gripped the land of the Upper and Lower Rhine.

In Basel an event is said to have taken place, which is still disputed to this day. It is the so-called "conversion of Tauler" through Nicolaus of Basel, a layman, who was affiliated with the Waldensians.

In Basel and along the Upper Rhine there had been large groups of Waldensians for a long period of years. These Waldensians, in order to extend their influence, distributed religious pamphlets in the language of the land and also furthered the cause of German-preaching. The Waldensians were in close contact with the "Friends of God."

The Waldensians "persisted continually, in doctrine as well as in practice, in a direct return to the Scriptures. But along with this, religious feeling had become predominant

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16. "For our record of his (Tauler's) stay in Basel we are indebted to the correspondence between Heinrich of Noerdlingen and Margaret Ebner, published 1882 by Philipp Strauch." J.T., ed. N., pp. 11-12.

18. J.T., ed. N., p. 15.  
19. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 34.



with them, and had led them to a belief in visions, revelations and similar dreams and reveries."<sup>17</sup> Nicolaus of Basel was at the head of the Waldensians. He was burned as a heretic in France toward the end of the fourteenth century.

Nicolaus of Basel<sup>17a</sup> entered into close relations with Tauler. Through his conversations with Tauler, he exerted a great influence on him. When Nicolaus urged him to return to the cloister to dedicate himself to the contemplation of the life and suffering of Christ, he also gave Tauler a "golden ABC," a series of spiritual rules which he was to follow.<sup>18</sup> Nicolaus gave Tauler the further command not to preach during this time. In addition he imposed strict penitential discipline on him. In this way Tauler was to learn true humility.

"Tauler's spiritual exercises and inner struggles were to continue for two additional years; compelled by poverty he had to pawn his books; bodily ailments also began to afflict him."<sup>19</sup>

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17. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 28.

17a. There has been considerable dispute as to who the "great friend of God" is, who was said to have been responsible for the conversion of Tauler. We have agreed with C. Schmidt, who identified him with Nicolaus of Basel (Nicholas von Basel Bericht von der Bekehrung Taulers, 1875). Quetif and Echard (1719) suggested that the Friend of God was nobody at all, and that the story was an allegory. In 1826 Weis (Biographie Universelle) suggested the same. W. Preger also rejected this view (1869). And Denifle in 1870 refuted convincingly for many scholars the view that the person was Nicolaus of Basel. Jundt (Les amis de Dieu in XIV siecle) suggests that the "Friend of God" if he really existed, might have been John of Chur. (For a thorough discussion of "Who was the Great Friend of God of the Oberland?" see Seesholtz, Friends of God, 1934, pp. 148-154).

18. J.T., ed. H., p. 15.

19. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 34.

20; J.T., ed. H., pp. 25-31.



have Nicolaus visited him again. Then Tauler told him that he had heard a voice calling to him: "Remain in your peace and trust God." Pointing to this, Nicolaus now assured him, that he had heard the voice of God and that he should again begin to preach.

This experience of Tauler's is commonly referred to as his "conversion." While preaching his first sermon after his "conversion", Tauler was so moved to tears, that he was unable to say another word and had to leave the pulpit.

Tauler became the object of much mockery as a result, and since it was thought that he had brought shame and disgrace on his cloister and order, he was deprived of the permission to preach.

But Nicolaus again persuaded him to preach. Finally Tauler let himself be persuaded to deliver a sermon before the brethren of his order. This sermon made such a deep impression on them that he was again given permission to preach.

Tauler then made his first appearance as a preacher in a women's convent and preached on Matt. 25:6.<sup>20</sup> This sermon affected his hearers so deeply that many fell over "as if ~~hose~~ dead." That, at least, is the report.

Shortly before his death (1361) Tauler is said to have asked that Nicolaus of Basel come to him. He is then reported to have given him a number of manuscripts with the request that he publish them in book form. Nicolaus is then said to

the article by Von Lee, also a Dominican, in the eleventh



have published the Book of the Conversion of Tauler.

This story of the conversion of Tauler is rejected by most students. In 1879 the Dominican priest Denifle published his book Tauler's Bekehrung. This book remains the most thorough examination of the problem. Denifle disproves the account of Tauler's conversion on the basis of historical evidence. Dominican, Tauler dedicated himself to preaching

W. A. Hutton summarizes the various accounts in this way: "The story in question (Tauler's Bekehrung) had, in fact, been printed in every edition of Tauler's Sermons, and was regarded as an authentic and almost contemporary document. Quetif and Echard, in their Scriptures Ordinis Praedicatorum, had suggested, early in the eighteenth century, that the legend should be regarded as an allegory; and this view was supported by Weiss, in his article on Tauler in the Biographie universelle (1826). But it was reserved to H. S. Denifle, a learned Dominican of our own day, to point out that the story, as applied to Tauler, involves grave historical difficulties, and is barely reconcilable with certain matters of ascertained fact. His criticisms would seem to have settled the question; but to him, Preger, a Protestant, whose life has been largely devoted to the study of the German mystics, and who was selected to be the biographer of Tauler in the "Universal German Biography," has made a detailed reply, in the third volume of his Deutsche Mystik (1899). The latter's criticisms are, however, ably reinforced in the article by Von Loe, also a Dominican, in the eleventh



volume (1899) of the new edition of the Kirchenlexicon." <sup>21</sup>

In 1347 (or 48) Tauler returned to Strassburg. We know very little of the remaining years in Tauler's life.

Schmidt attempts to give a rather complete account of events in this period of Tauler's life, but his account can be substantiated only in part.

As a Dominican, Tauler dedicated himself to preaching and the curate of souls. He became a very well-known preacher and often addressed large audiences. His chief activity was the spiritual care in various women's convents. He also preached the majority of his sermons to nuns. In the period from 1350 to 1360 Tauler is said to have been in Cologne again, serving as spiritual adviser to the nuns at the Convent of St. Gertrud.

In his public sermons Tauler did not hesitate to chide the sins of his listeners or of the clergy. He reproved the clergy especially for immorality and vanity. He also preached against those priests who were engaged in business for the sake of gain and frequented the salons and cocktail lounges of their day. Nuns who loved to dance received a special measure of stern rebuke. Naturally such sermons did not suit the clergy. "They attempted to misinterpret his sermons in order to find sufficient evidence for accusation...Nevertheless, Tauler exerted an influence for good on many of the clergy." <sup>22</sup>

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21. Tauler, The Inner Way, (Hutton in the Introd., p. XVIII).

22. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 43.



Reference must also be made to the historical events of the day. Charles IV was elected emperor through papal influence on April 22, 1346. Emperor Louis (the Bavarian) had died on October 11, 1347. Since Strassburg did not want to recognize Charles IV, the interdict was not lifted. In addition to political and ecclesiastical disturbances, the "black death" came to Alsace and Strassburg in 1348 to further harass the people. In Strassburg alone 16,000 people fell victim to this horrible plague.

These events had as their natural consequence a deepening of spiritual life. Men and women everywhere immersed themselves in mystical contemplation. Tauler's preaching concerns itself much with the troublous times in which he was living. He laments the selfishness and greed of those men who had forsaken God and turned toward the world. He is always admonishing his hearers to forsake the world and unite themselves with God.

Schmidt relates an interesting event of this period in Tauler's life, which, however, cannot be confirmed.

In December 1348 Charles IV came to Strassburg in order to gain recognition as emperor from that city so that the interdict might finally be lifted. "When Emperor Charles came to Strassburg in December 1348 he was told of Tauler and his friends (Ludolph of Saxony and Thomas of Strassburg) and the liberal principles which they advocated. He summoned them to appear before him and defend their views. They read their confession to him and repeated without fear what they



had heretofore taught. Tauler especially was not the type of man who would fear any worldly authority, after he had opposed the much more formidable ecclesiastical authority (i.e. the pope). Even in his sermons he complains at times about the suppression of the people through the authorities, about unjust wars and acts of violence of the princes... These principles of the three monks are said to have had such an influence on the emperor that 'he himself was almost of their opinion.' The emperor consequently did not want any action taken against these men. The bishops that were present, nevertheless, condemned the three monks and denounced their teaching as heretical. They were commanded 'no longer to act with insolence against the church and the bann,' to retract (their teachings) through a public document, and, on threat of the bann, not to write similar things in the future."<sup>23</sup>

This event has all the appearance of an attempt by a chronicler to make Tauler an enemy of his own church and to portray him as a forerunner of the Reformation. Tauler did not at any time teach anything in his sermons which was not the common teaching of the preachers of that day. (We base this view on a careful perusal of all the genuine sermons of Tauler.) The event recorded by Schmidt contradicts the very spirit of Tauler's sermons. He who knows Tauler from his sermons, does not recognize the Tauler of this story. Schmidt reports only the results of his study, but does not

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24. J. T. ed. H. p. 14.

23. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 57-58.



give his source.

It has already been mentioned that Tauler was very likely the spiritual adviser of the sisters of the Convent of St. Gertrude in Cologne from 1350 to 1360. A detailed account of his activity in Cologne is not available.

Tauler died in Strassburg where he was born, on June 16, 1361, very likely in the Dominican Cloister "zu den Unden," to which also his sister belonged. His tombstone, which gives us the date of his death, may be found in the Protestant New Church in Strassburg.<sup>24</sup>

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24. J.T., ed. N., p. 14.



## II. The Works of John Tauler

"The works which Tauler has left us consist of his sermons and a letter to Margaret Ebner. Everything else has not stood the test of the research that was undertaken in the 19th century and aimed to arrive at that which is genuine. Every edition of his sermons since the 1498 print added new ones. Additions have so multiplied since the Cologne edition of 1543 that we count more than thirty today. Laurentius Surius translated the 1543 Cologne edition into Latin. This edition received a wide circulation. It was reprinted in Paris several times and was the basis of the Dutch and Italian translation. This edition was also retranslated into German by the Protestant Daniel Sudermann, 1621, and by the Catholic Carolus a St. Anastasio in 1660. The Pietist Spener extended the influence of this edition through a revision. Tauler has always been read by Catholics and Protestants alike. In the 18th century Pastor Oberlin of Alsace made Tauler the object of study. In the 19th century Schlosser made Tauler available in Frankfurt in 1826. The first critical examination of everything that was known about Tauler was undertaken by Karl Schmidt, 1841. The thorough research-work of Denifle and Preger followed. Since 1910 we have an edition of Tauler's sermons by Ferdinand Vetter, a part of the series of Texts of the Middle Ages edited by the 'Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften.' This contains

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1. see Appendix for a list of the editions of Tauler's sermons.



appeared in Basel containing the original 84 sermons of the all of Tauler's writings known to us today on the basis of 1498 edition plus 42 sermons "recently found" but with the the original Middle High German Text. This edition does not offer a critical text, but the foundation for one and will remain for many years the most scientific aid for all Tauler study." <sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

The oldest collections of Tauler's sermons (38) has been lost. Before this collection was lost, this first collection was increased by the addition of forty-one

This large variety of editions, with a constant increase in the number of sermons ascribed to Tauler, gives us an insight into the problem confronting the student of Tauler to be found in the Strassburg Library. A third MS is also available in Strassburg.

Also in Cologne a collection of Tauler's sermons was undertaken. "The majority of MSS came into existence during the fifteenth century in Bavarian cloisters. The Library of Munich has at least 12 manuscripts that were produced in Augsburg, Tegernsee, Rebdorf, Gars usw. The monastery of St. Gallen also produced such manuscripts, now available in Leipzig and Berlin." <sup>3</sup>

The first edition to be printed was the one of 1498 (Leipzig). This edition contained 84 sermons. The majority of these are considered genuine. In 1508 J. Otmar translated this edition into the Augsburg dialect. In 1521 an edition ascribe this work to Tauler. Denifle shows that not a single

2. J.T., ed.N., pp. 14-15.

3. J.T., ed.H., p. IX.



appeared in Basel containing the original 84 sermons of the 1498 addition plus 42 sermons "recently found" but with the editorial note "some may not be by Tauler." In 1523 a Low Saxon edition appeared in Halberstadt. This was an adaptation of the 1521 edition. Noviomagus published another edition containing the 84 original sermons of the 1498 edition, the 42 additional sermons of the Basel edition, and 25 sermons "some not written by Tauler." In 1548 Surius translated the 1543 Cologne edition into Latin.

This large variety of editions, with a constant increase in the number of sermons ascribed to Tauler, gives us an insight into the problem confronting the student of Tauler who seeks to find only that which is truly genuine.

In addition to his sermons, Tauler is also considered to be the author of several other works. The Buch von der geistlichen Armut deserves special attention. This book (also known as Das Buch von der Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi) has presented innumerable problems to every student of Tauler. Until the middle of the nineteenth century it was considered genuine and ascribed to Tauler. But recent scholarship has disproved this completely.

In 1877 Denifle edited the Buch von der geistlichen Armut with a critical examination. Denifle reaches the conclusion on the basis of his investigations that it is impossible to ascribe this work to Tauler. Denifle shows that not a single manuscript of the Bvga. bears the name of Tauler. Denifle shows further, that upon comparing the Bvga. with Tauler's



sermons it becomes evident that there is no real inner work relation between the two, even though some similar teachings appear in both, "but, first of all," says Denifle, "even these similar ideas are dealt with differently; and secondly, they are peculiar neither to Tauler nor the author of the Bvga., but are either the teachings of Master Eckhart or some earlier theologian."<sup>4</sup>

Denifle also calls attention to the differences in style between Tauler's sermons and the Bvga. Denifle comments in his characteristic way: "The teachings and style of the Buch von der geistlichen Armut are so contradictory when compared with the known genuine sermons of Tauler...that the Bvga. may well be ascribed to almost any other author rather than to the author of the 'Taulerschen' sermons."<sup>5</sup>

Also Kurtz believes that the Bvga is not by Tauler, but is "because of its highly exaggerated (ueberspannte) endorsement of poverty a book of Franciscan origin."<sup>6</sup>

Cohrs too refers to the fact that already A. Ritschl had proved that the Bvga was a compilation.<sup>7</sup>

Another work that has been falsely ascribed to Tauler is the Medulla Animae (first appearing as Goettliche Lehren in the edition of Novianagus; Hohburg, 1644, adds the title

(Novianagus and Surius) seem to consider a complete tract of

4. Denifle, Buch von geistlicher Armuth, p. XLV. Schmidt

5. Denifle, Bvga., p. IX.

6. Kurtz, Abriss der Kirchengeschichte (1889), p. 118.

7. Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (1911) sub Tauler; and A. Ritschl, "Untersuchung des Buchs von geistlicher Armut" in Zeitschrift fuer Kirchengeschichte, (1881) 4, 337 ff.



Institutiones divinae; this work is also printed as a work of Tauler in Spener's edition of 1681). That this work is not by Tauler, but a compilation of extracts from the writings of other mystics has been proved conclusively by W. Preger, the outstanding scholar of German mysticism, in his monumental work, Die Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter.

Preger traces the origin of this book in these words:

"Noviomagus (1543) adds a series of mystical writings, divided into 77 chapters, to his edition of Tauler's sermons. The first 39 chapters have this heading: "Des erleuchten Dr. J. Tauleri goettliche leren. Wie man durch geystliche uebungen und tugenden zu lieblicher vereining gots kommen sol, new gefunden." In the Latin translation of this edition of Tauler by Surius (1548) the above title, meant only for the first thirty nine chapters, is used to head the entire appendix (all 77 chapters) with the additional title of Institutiones divinae. In Christian Hohburg's edition (Frankfurt 1644) this same work is called Medulla animae. Surius makes the remark concerning the appendix, that it was compiled from various writings of Tauler and that selections from the writings of other well-known writers had been added to it. Even the first thirty-nine chapters, which the two editors (Noviomagus and Surius) seem to consider a complete tract of Taulers..., is a compilation of various tracts. K. Schmidt has proved that chapters 2, 6, 36 and 37 are taken from the book "Buch von der Nachfolge des armen Leben's Jesu;" chapters 9-12 are from Ruysbröck's de praecipuis virtutibus; chapter



27 from Ruysbröck's de calcuto; Surius himself ascribes the authorship of chapter 39 to Master Eckhart."<sup>8</sup>

The letters ascribed to Tauler in Peter Nymwegen's (Noviomagus) edition of 1543, "Epistolen odter Sendtbriefff Tauleri zu seynen geistlichen freunden und kindern", have also been found to be spurious. Schmidt says of these letters: "They have been written in such a highly ("taendelnden, ueberschwaenglich") sentimental tone, that they can hardly be by Tauler, to whom this sentimental tone is entirely strange."<sup>9</sup>

The Book Exercitia super vita et passione salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi is not by Tauler, but a Latin translation of some German work with an unknown author.<sup>10</sup>

The hymns which have been ascribed to Tauler<sup>11</sup> are not from the pen of Tauler.<sup>12</sup> They remind us rather of Eckhart.

Also the tracts De decem caecitatibus et quatuordecim divini amoris radicibus and Betrachtungen zur Vorbereitung auf einen seligen Tod are not by Tauler.<sup>13</sup>

The following tracts, frequently ascribed to Tauler, are completely spurious: Von neun Staenden des christlichen Lebens, a mere excerpt from Rulman Merswin's writing on the "neun Felsen"; and Wie der Mensch moege ernsthaftig, innig, geistlich und gottschauend werden, a translation of Ruysbröck's

furthered through the discovery of the MS of 1497. The

8. Preger, Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter, Vol. III, p. 85.

9. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 75.

10. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 76.

11. Wackernagel, P. Das deutsche Kirchenlied, No. 456-467, II, p. 302 ff.

12. ibid.

13. ibid.

14. Tauler, Predigten (Spener ed., Frankfurt 1802), Preface (Pages are not numbered).



De calculo.

The authorship of the Theologia deutsch (also known as Teutsche Theologia and Buch von der deutschen Theologie) has long been in dispute. But for a considerable period of time, beginning with Luther's discovery of the book, Tauler was considered its author. In the Spener edition of Tauler's sermons (Frankfurt 1681) the Teutsche Theologia is appended to the volume. Spener himself does not ascribe the authorship of this volume to Tauler, but in the preface to the entire volume (pages not numbered) he introduces a quotation from Luther on the value of the Theologia deutsch with these words: "In the preface to the little volume called Teutsche Theologia which Luther ascribes to Tauler, he says the following, etc."<sup>14</sup> It seems then that Luther was among the first to suggest Tauler as a possible author of this little work which was so dear to him. (Luther says of this work in his preface: "Next to the Bible and St. Augustine I have not found another book from which I have learned more about the true essence of God, Christ, man and all other things, than from this little volume.") Dr. Lisco has entered thoroughly into the problem and has come to this conclusion: "The question of the authorship of the Theologia deutsch has neither been answered nor furthered through the discovery of the MS of 1497. The author remains unknown unless an unexpected fortunate literary discovery should reveal his name. Luther, the great student of mystical theology in general and of the writings of Tauler

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14. Tauler, Predigten (Spener ed., Frankfurt 1681) in Preface (Pages are not numbered).



in particular, has remarked in his preface quite correctly that the subject matter is very similar to that of the writings of Dr. Tauler. Nevertheless, those who consider Tauler the author are in the wrong. Tauler is older. That the unknown author of the book should quote Tauler at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter is certainly not an effort to hide his own authorship with an attempt to ascribe it to that mystic."<sup>15</sup>

Susanna Winkworth reaches the same conclusion in the historical introduction to her Theologica Germanica. She feels that the book is not by Tauler although it resembles his style."<sup>16</sup>

Schmidt reaches the same conclusion. Of the Theologia deutsch he says "this book had its origin in the fifteenth century."<sup>17</sup>

Only the sermons remain as the genuine work of Tauler. All other works ascribed to Tauler have not withstood the test of thorough research. Only in recent years have his sermons been subjected to a critical analysis (F. Vetter in 1910; and A. Corin from 1924-39). It is now evident that even among the sermons many are spurious. But of those sermons which we know to be genuine we can say with Loeffler that they are "among the finest monuments of the German language, of German fervour of belief, and of profound spiritual feeling."<sup>18</sup>

Sterngeasse, but he is more Christian and popular than both of

15. Lisso, F. G., Die Heilslehre der Theologia deutsch, p. 15.

16. Winkworth, S., Theologica Germanica, Introd, p. Li.

17. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 77.

18. Catholic Encyclopedia, (1912), sub Tauler.



### III. The Sermons of Tauler

Tauler is remembered primarily as a great preacher. Although other works ascribed to him have not stood the searching examinations of scholars, his sermons have remained as a great monument to him. The very fact that more than twenty editions of his sermons have appeared since 1498 bears testimony to their enduring worth. These sermons have influenced Catholics and Protestants, Lutherans and Pietists.

In his own day too, Tauler was revered as a preacher throughout the area of the Rhine Valley. His forceful and direct yet always sympathetic manner made a deep impression on his hearers. Men and women traveled far to hear the words of this great Friend of God.

Vilmar, well-known theologian and student of literature, describes Tauler's sermons in this way: "John Tauler's sermons have an inwardness, sincerity and depth as it is achieved perhaps only once during a century. Even today they remain as a hardly attainable and scarcely surpassable example of preaching."

Schmidt says of Tauler's sermons: "Among the German preachers of his time, Tauler stands forth as the greatest... As a preacher Tauler surpasses Master Eckhart and all other mystics of this time whose sermons have come down to us. He is, indeed, less transcendental than Eckhart or Gerhard of Sterngasse, but he is more Christian and popular than both of

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1. Vilmar, Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur, (1890), pp. 236-237.



these. He has greater depth than may be found in the simple sermons of Nicolaus of Strassburg or in the almost fanciful sermons of Suso."<sup>2</sup>

Klemens Loeffler subscribes to this judgment: "The sermons (of Tauler) are among the finest monuments of the German language, of German fervour of belief, and of profound spiritual feeling."<sup>3</sup>

Preger is equally commendatory in judging Tauler's sermons: "Their strength lies in the fact that Tauler knew how to put into them his whole heart, the fulness of his moral being. So utterly and completely is he penetrated by love of God and Christ, so happily is the sublime and unworldly zeal of the orator blended with gentleness and freedom, that he masters the will unawares, and lays the heart open to the demands that he makes upon it."<sup>4</sup>

In the period of the Reformation the sermons of Tauler were esteemed highly. Within less than a hundred years, 1498-1593, ten editions appeared in several German dialects as well as in Latin and Italian. This alone pays high tribute to a man who had lived a century and a half earlier. Luther spoke highly of these sermons and recommended them to his students and friends. (This will be discussed at length in another chapter). Speckle, a younger contemporary of Luther, but a historian and chronicler rather than a theologian, has

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2. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 83.

3. The Catholic Encyclopedia, (1912), sub Tauler.

4. Tauler, The Inner Way, (Quoted by) A. W. Hutton in Introd. pp. XXIX-XXX.



left us his estimate of Tauler's sermons. "His sermons were unique. He presented neither dry scholastic doubts, nor useless stories of saints. But in very simple words, with deep warmth and heartfelt sincerity, he spoke to the inner man and sought to give him that peace which he sought in vain among the tumult of the outer world. He wanted to take men away from the vanity of everything earthly and temporal and lead them--through complete abstinence and self-denial, through absolute poverty of the spirit and through common love--to the union with that which is alone truly good, God."<sup>5</sup>

The chief characteristic of these sermons is their vivid reality and their inwardness. Their main theme is the union of the soul with God. Yet he does not lose himself in mere admonitions, warnings and consolations. The sermons are practical in their application throughout. They have what Kunze has called "kasuelle Faerbung."<sup>6</sup> At a time during which most sermons were either pious fables or mere moral tales, it is easy to understand Tauler's popular appeal.

His method is that of the church fathers. He explains the text allegorically or mystically. This explanation is then accompanied by practical application.<sup>7</sup>

Tauler's sermons are distinguished by the frequent occurrence of dialogue. Whenever Tauler illustrates with a story, he lets the characters speak for themselves. This

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5. Speckle, T. I, fol. 200, quoted in Schmidt, op. cit., p.39.

6. Kunze, Paul, "Einiges ueber Taulers Predigt", in Mancherlei Gaben usw., Vol. 38, p. 95.

7. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 80.



helps him achieve a dramatic reality which is rare. We would, of course, hesitate to endorse such a homiletic device, yet in the hands of Tauler it is very effective.

Picturesque expressions and parables are found frequently in all of his sermons.<sup>8</sup> He gives many examples to make abstract ideas concrete. He tells numerous stories that serve as illustrations. His parables are taken from the daily life of his times and deal with such subjects as hunting, the planting of vineyards, river travel, farming, etc. The purpose of these parables and picture language is to clarify to his hearers the dogmatic and mystic terminology of Christian teaching. In one sermon, for example, Tauler describes deer hunting in all its details and then makes an application to Christian life.<sup>9</sup> In another sermon he compares the Christian with the farmer. He tells his hearers that "the Christian should do as the farmer, who surveys his fields in March. With the coming of spring he prunes his trees, digs and weeds, and plows his fields with tireless energy. Even so men should plow their own inner field, turn over the ground of their works and prune their trees, that is, their carnal mind and base passions, and dig out all weeds."<sup>10</sup> In another sermon he draws the Christian's attentions to the wisdom of the serpent. He says, "You should know wherein the wisdom of the serpent consists. When the serpent notices that it is beginning to

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8. Vogt-Terhorst, Der bildliche Ausdruck in den Predigten J. Taulers, Breslau 1920.

9. J.T., ed.N., pp. 49-58.

10. J.T., ed.N., p. 71.

11. J.T., ed.N., p. 73.



age, shrink and stink, it looks for two stones that lie next to each other. The serpent will then force and squeeze itself between these two stones to shed the old skin under which a new skin has already grown. Man must do the same with his old skin, that is, with everything which he has by nature, no matter how great or good it might be. Certainly everything in man is aging and full of failing. Man must force himself between the two stones to lose all this. Which are these two stones? The one is the eternal God, who Himself is truth. The other is the loving humanity of Christ, which is the real way." "Such parables bear some similarity to those of Christ, especially inasmuch as the majority of them are also taken from the realm of nature.

Many of Tauler's sermons have a definite symbolic or allegorical character. He rarely explains the Biblical stories from their historical viewpoint. There is actually little that we might call textual exposition in Tauler's sermons. The Bible narrative in itself does not concern Tauler much. He is far more interested in the symbolical or allegorical meanings that he finds in the characters, circumstances and events of the accounts. A brief excerpt from Tauler's sermon on the Bethesda pool will illustrate: "This pool is the loving person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The water in this pool that was later stirred is the highly praised blood of the loving Son of God, who is both God and man and has washed us in His precious blood, and will wash out of love all those that come



to Him. The sick patients, of whom there were a large number at the pool waiting for the stirring of the water, are to be understood as all men, who were still in all their lifetime subject to the bondage of the old Covenant...The five halls of the pool are in one sense the five wounds of our Lord."<sup>12</sup> Tauler even has an allegorical explanation for the account of the flight of the Christ child into Egypt. Herod represents the world. Archelaus, his son, symbolizes man's carnal lusts. Egypt is the darkness of the world. And Joseph represents the godly life.<sup>13</sup> Many of Tauler's sermons are allegorical throughout; in some, on the other hand, he makes no use of allegory whatsoever.<sup>14</sup>

There has been some discussion as to Tauler's method of delivery. Some feel that Tauler read his sermons after having worked them out carefully. Others believe that Tauler used no manuscript and always preached extemporaneously. (Extemporaneous does not mean "without preparation"). Tauler's great popular appeal as a preacher, as well as the lively and realistic style of his sermons, lead us to believe that Tauler was given to extemporaneous delivery. Kunze comes to the same conclusion.<sup>15</sup>

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12. J.T., ed.N., pp. 4-41.

13. J.T., ed.N., pp. 22-27.

14. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 93.

15. Kunze, op. cit., p. 94. Kunze bases his views on the conclusions reached by Nebe, Zur Geschichte der Predigt, and Langdorff, Preface to "Tauler" in Predigt der Kirche, 16.



To be a popular preacher Tauler, of course, had to preach in German. This has never been doubted.<sup>16</sup> And in this way Tauler made a real contribution to the development of the German language and literature. Engel has awarded him a noble title indeed when he calls him "the most important forerunner of Luther as a writer of German prose" and "Meister der Tiefdenkerprosa."<sup>17</sup> "Along with Eckhart and Seuse (Suso) we may number Tauler among those creative geniuses, who through Luther, gave us our highest spiritual good--our German language of today."<sup>18</sup> Schmidt denies Tauler's influence on the development of German prose, although he concedes that Tauler, along with the other mystics, helped to create a more German terminology for philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Of course, Tauler made that contribution. But we are also willing (just as Naumann and Engel) to accord Tauler full credit for his contributions toward the development of the German language.

We have then in Tauler not only a great, although unique, preacher, but a father of the German language as well. A necessary prerequisite to an understanding of his influence on the great Reformer.

As long as the Buch von der Nachfolge des wahren Lebens Christi (Evangelium) was considered genuine, students found in this book a record of his teachings. But we have shown that this

16. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 78.

17. Engel, Eduard, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, Bd. I, p. 139.

18. J.T., ed.N., p. 20.

19. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

1. A most thorough discussion of Tauler's theology is to be found in Preger, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 144-241.



#### IV. The Theology of Tauler

Tauler did not introduce a new theology nor did he even initiate any new trends in theology. As a true "Friend of God" he was concerned in reducing theology to a practical and understandable form and then applying it to the needs of his hearers. He did not originate anything strikingly new, but he differed from other preachers of his day in that he ignored the "Aristotelian" formulas and definitions current in pre-Reformation theology and attempted to drive home instead the simple Christian truths which had long been obscured by much medieval speculation.

Tauler, of course, never systematized his theology. Yet a study of his theology (as we find it in his sermons) is essential to a study of Tauler.<sup>1</sup> Claimed and acclaimed by Protestants and Catholics alike, we are led to wonder what the source of this attraction is. Called by many a "precursor of the Reformation" we wonder what it was that brought him this title. An examination of his theology is, therefore, a necessary prerequisite to an understanding of his influence on the great Reformer.

As long as the Buch von der Nachfolge des armen Lebens Christi (Byga) was considered genuine, students found in this book a compend of his teachings. But we have shown that this book is no longer believed a genuine work of Taulers and therefore does not come under consideration when studying his

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2. For a complete description and analysis of the period in which Tauler lived, see Seesholts, Friends of God, Chapter 2.

1. A most thorough discussion of Tauler's theology is to be found in Preger, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 144-241.



theology. In studying his theology we must depend entirely on his sermons. A study, however, of Tauler's personality, his training and his time, will help to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the religious beliefs of this "Friend of God."<sup>2</sup>

Tauler is always remembered as a mystic, a member of the company of those who opposed the worldliness that was so very evident in the church of that day. A desire for reform in the church called forth this movement. Deep religious feeling, coupled with asceticism, was evidenced in the desire of the mystic to achieve a union with God. Tauler felt drawn to such a movement. (It must be understood that by "movement" we do not mean an organized group effort.) "Tauler's own deep feelings and sensibilities leaned toward contemplation rather than toward dialecticism. It was this that first attracted him to mysticism."<sup>3</sup> Scholasticism had reached its height shortly before Tauler's time. "The great teachers of the Church, Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas, had still sought to unite the mystical element with their philosophic speculation over the dogma of the church. But now scholasticism and mysticism were moving ever further apart...Scholasticism had lost itself in argumentation and debates that were conducted with great passion in the schools ever since the beginning of the fourteenth century. But amidst these countless

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2. For a complete description and analysis of the period in which Tauler lived, see Seesholtz, Friends of God, Chapter I.

3. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 91; compare J.T., ed.N., p. 8.



(philosophical) problems and abstractions the theologians lost sight of actual Christian life. Those, therefore, who found no satisfaction in these fruitless quarrels, began to withdraw from scholasticism in order to devote themselves more exclusively to mysticism, which followed either pantheistic-speculative lines, (e.g. Master Eckhart) or a more practical pattern. The latter is the essential character of Tauler's theology, although it too embodied the speculative element in a high degree."<sup>4</sup>

The disturbed and disturbing times, marked by the "Babylonian Captivity of the papacy", the Interdict imposed on Strassburg and vicinity, and the "Black Death" alone drove men to a deeper contemplation of God and religion. Add to this the confusion in the state, the moral decay, the prevailing selfishness among all classes, the ignorance of the clergy, and the disintegration of pious cloister life, and you will understand why devout men and women sought refuge in a system which sought to bring men into intimate communion with God. Men and women, thirsty for pure religion, could not find it in a church that emphasized religious externals and among a clergy that had become secularized. Therefore, like Tauler, they turned to an "inner piety, that lifted men above mere created things and sought to unite them with God, that gave them courage to bear patiently the overburdening circumstances of their time."<sup>5</sup>

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4. ibid.

5. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 90-91.



Not only the times but also Tauler's training in the church fathers and philosophers of his day influenced his theology. "Of the church fathers writing in Latin (those who wrote originally in Greek must have been available to Tauler in Latin translation), Tauler mentions Augustine most frequently (37 times), Bernard of Clairvaux (22), Gregory the Great (20), Dionysius Areopagita (15), also Albertus Magnus, Ambrosius, Anselm of Canterbury, Venerable Bede, Benedict, Boethius, Dominicus, Hilarius, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, Jerome, Origen and Thomas Aquinas. Of the heathen writers he mentions Aristotle, Plato and Proclus." <sup>6</sup>

#### On Scripture

Unlike Luther, Tauler did not insist on a return to the Scriptures. Of course, this could hardly be expected, since the study of the Greek and Hebrew original was first to receive its real impetus from Erasmus and Reuchlin more than a century later. But neither did Tauler have the conviction that the Bible alone was the source of all doctrine.

Frequently he insists on the importance of the Scriptures and praises the Holy Writings highly as, for example, in these words: "Even if one should read, preach and think through the holy, blessed Scriptures a thousand times, you would nevertheless find a new truth every time you read it that had never

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6. Vogt-Terhorst, Der bildliche Ausdruck in den Predigten Johann Taulers, p. 6.



before been discovered by men." <sup>7</sup> But even these laudatory phrases on the worth and value of the Bible do not entitle him to be called a "forerunner of the Reformation." Tauler remains a true mystic who feels that the revelation of the divine Word within the heart and soul of a pious, humble seeker after God is of much greater importance than the revealed written Word. <sup>8</sup>

In his exposition of Holy Scripture, Tauler leaves the clear, simple words remain only when they support his particular views, "otherwise he will not let even the slightest words remain; but in accordance with his teachings, that only the Spirit is truth and everything else must be removed as a worthless shell, he explains every word, every fact...; everywhere he finds deep secrets, and instead of saying: This refers to this or that statement, he simply says: this is." <sup>9</sup>

The New Testament was of importance for Tauler chiefly because it contained accounts of the life of Christ. He does not study the Pauline letters for their doctrinal content. The Old Testament was merely a figure or a shadow of the New. "The historical books as well as the prophets, and especially the Song of Solomon, the Book of Love, contain merely typical references to Christ and the Church." <sup>10</sup>

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7. J.T., ed.N., p. 22.

8. Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, sub "Tauler."

9. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 93.

10. ibid., ed.N., p. 17.

11. Kunze, op. cit., p. 176.



"Thomas Aquinas, and not the Bible is the foundation on which Tauler stands. And Thomas Aquinas' chief teaching of the "visio essentiae Dei," the vision of the essence of God, the recognition of God in man's soul, is, although not always apparent, the kernel of Tauler's thought. These views or visions--to use Tauler's expressions, "dies Ansehen, Durchsehen, Anschauen des Wesens oder der Wesentlichkeit des Wesens Gottes, Gott in der Seele wirklich zu erleben"--is the goal of the highest knowledge of God, in other words, the union with God in the soul (of man)." <sup>11</sup>

#### On God

Tauler's theology is chiefly "theology proper." God is at the very center of it. Very properly so, of course, but with an emphasis and an approach that is foreign to Biblical Christianity. He praises God in his illimitable and incomprehensible otherworldliness. And yet, though he acknowledges God as a supramundane Being, he frequently speaks of an immanent God.<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps his emphasis on God's immanence which has brought the charge of pantheism against him. Master Eckhart, a near contemporary of Tauler's and also a great mystic, had taught gross pantheism. But Tauler did not. His teaching of the necessity of a union with God in man's soul can hardly be perverted to pantheism. Nowhere is a

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11. J.T., ed.N., p. 17.

12. Kunze, op. cit., p. 176.



denial of the Trinity to be found in Tauler's sermons. In one sermon (J.T., ed.N., p. 193) we have a clear confession of his faith in the Trinity. subordinate position, and in order to be understood in Tauler's sense, must be viewed in On Christ with his speculative ideas... For Tauler reconciliation

In contradistinction to the Lutheran view, "Christ for us," Tauler, as also Thomas a Kempis, emphasized the view, "Christ in us."<sup>13</sup> He emphasizes the "imitation" of Christ in life and deed, rather than the work of the atonement on the cross of Golgatha. minology, we would not hail him as a pre-

Reformation teacher of Justification by faith. The center of On Justification, Good Works, Faith Imitation of Christ.

Preger, always willing to defend Tauler, assures us that Tauler teaches the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. He points to Tauler's frequent disapproval of workrighteousness. Sanctification, he claims, is rooted in Justification for Tauler. Sanctification does not consist in a series of good works, but in the humble and faithful attitude which marks all Christian behavior.<sup>14</sup> But Schmidt finds no such clear teaching of Pauline Justification in Tauler. He writes: "Tauler teaches the grace of God in Christ throughout. At times he even declares, man is not justified through his works, but only through the rich merit of Christ (3 sermons on the Sacrament, fol. 68, a; Serm. for the 11th Sun. after Trin.,

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13. Krauss, Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche, p. 312.

14. Preger, op. cit., III, p. 233.



fol. 98, a). But the doctrine of redemption and justification is not the foundation on which his (i.e. Tauler's) theory rests, but is given a rather subordinate position, and in order to be understood in Tauler's sense, must be viewed in conjunction with his speculative ideas...For Tauler reconciliation is synonymous with a return to the source--union with God, and justification consists in this-- that we follow Christ."<sup>15</sup>

Our own study of Tauler's sermon leads us to agree with Schmidt. Although Tauler at times uses, what might be termed "Justification terminology," we would not hail him as a pre-Reformation teacher of Justification by faith. The center of his theology is union with God and imitation of Christ.

Yet Tauler must be given credit for a disavowal of mere external workrighteousness. But this is not solely Tauler's contribution to the religious thought of his times. Mysticism, as a movement, was a reaction to the externalism which prevailed in the religious life of that day. The "Friends of God", among whom Tauler is numbered, opposed workrighteousness as a group. Needless to say, Tauler was not a mere echo of the sentiment of these Friends of God, but spoke with full personal conviction when he decried Pharisaism in religion. In one sermon he writes: "God does not want works, if he is robbed of the heart and love. What good the chaff, if the grain belongs to another."<sup>16</sup>

(the German is better: "ein Nichtswelken") of the sermon

15. Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

16. J.T., ed.H., III, p. 15.

17. J.T., ed.H., I, p. 150.

18. Kunze, op. cit., p. 179.

19. Preger, op. cit., III, p. 128.



Nowhere, however, does he deny the value of good works, but rather emphasizes their importance for the Christian. In another sermon we read: "True hearts are also diligent to use all time in good and useful work for the glory of God and the good of their neighbor. Such work must be done with a spiritual joy. (Christians) are careful to exercise themselves in doing good works, in doing all things well and in retaining a real trust in God."<sup>17</sup>

Kunze, who has compared Luther and Tauler, becomes very enthusiastic about Tauler's correct view of "good works," and comments, "Das klingt ganz lutherisch."<sup>18</sup> ("That sounds entirely Lutheran"). We share neither his nor Preger's enthusiasm.<sup>19</sup> Luther opposed workrighteousness because it was un-Scriptural. Tauler opposed workrighteousness because it could not be brought into harmony with his views on the mystical union of the Christian with God. We must remember that Tauler was a mystic.

Tauler's concept of faith would not satisfy a Lutheran. Tauler does not speak of faith in the sense of "justifying faith" (*fides justificans*). He does not specifically mention faith as necessary for salvation. However, his definition of faith goes beyond a mere historical faith (*notitia historica*, *fides generalis*). Tauler's definition of faith fits well into mysticism. Faith is for him essentially a ready acceptance (the German is better: "ein Nichtzweifeln") of the divine

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17. J.T., ed.H., I, p. 156.

18. Kunze, op. cit., p. 179.

19. Preger, op. cit., III, p. 128.



mysteries, e.g., the trinity, the incarnation, the knowledge that God exists, etc.<sup>20</sup> Further, faith means to him a desire "to return to God" accompanied by true sorrow. This approaches the Lutheran view. But nowhere does Tauler define clearly the essence and object of a justifying faith. Kunze admits, that the "specific Lutheran faith in what Christ has earned for us" is not to be found in Tauler.<sup>21</sup>

Further light on this question will be found in Tauler's description of the way to salvation (via salutis). He says, "Now we shall examine the way that leads to true salvation and blessedness, about which you hear so much these days: that is, true humility and complete self-denial of man, so that he will think nothing of himself and the things he does. Man must deny himself everything and consider himself to be nothing, which, in truth, he is. If there is anything, it is not man's but God's. You must reach this goal. If your eyes are to become blessed, then you must learn to look toward this goal. For the Lord has left us this rule: Learn of me, for I am humble and meek."<sup>22</sup> In another sermon he expresses the same view: "Which is now the best way to enter and become one with God? Indeed, there is no other way, than to become dead toward all selfishness."<sup>23</sup> Frequently Tauler refers to self-denial and humility as "inner poverty" ("innere Armut").

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20. J.T.,ed.H., III, p. 185.

21. Kunze, op. cit., p. 178.

22. J.T.,ed.N., p. 153.

23. J.T.,ed.H., I, p. 267.

24. Denifle, op. cit., p. 178.  
 25. J.T.,ed.H., I, p. 267.



Denifle maintains therefore quite correctly that every page of Tauler's sermons has the same tone and theme--"Achieving inner poverty."<sup>24</sup> This too is characteristic of mysticism. With this in view, we must attempt to understand Tauler's entire teaching on justification. No attempt should be made to endow his terminology with a "Lutheran" meaning.

#### On the Sacraments

On Election does not speak of "the means of grace." Unlike

Luther, Tauler explains his teaching of election in these words: "Children, if we are not moved (converted) by God, we ought not blame God, as some people blindly say: the eternal God does not touch or move me as he does other people. Such talk is false and incorrect, for God moves and admonishes all men alike and wills that all men, in as far as He is able, be saved. But even though He moves, admonishes and gives gifts, He is not received and accepted by all alike. When God comes with His touch and gracious gifts to many, He finds the place occupied and unclean and other "guests" have already arrived. Then, of course, God must turn around and can not come to us, because we love and care for something other than the true and pure God. God will then have to turn around with His gift, which without exception He would like to offer to every man, who keeps his heart free, pure and clean of all earthly things. Children, that is the cause of our eternal destruction; the fault belongs to us and not to God."<sup>25</sup> A Lutheran could subscribe to that. But we must remember again that this is not a unique

24. Denifle, Bvga., p. XVII.; also Kunze, op. cit., p. 177.

25. J.T., ed.H., I, p. 16 ff.



truth rediscovered by Tauler. This doctrine did not become the subject of controversy until the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century conceived their own interpretation of election and reprobation. We find no Calvinistic germs in Tauler's statement.

### On the Sacraments

Tauler does not speak of "the means of grace." Unlike Luther he does not place first emphasis on the revealed Word of God, nor does he stress the sacraments in strict Lutheran fashion. The sacrament of Holy Baptism is scarcely mentioned. And even concerning the Lord's Supper he states that it can also be received in a "spiritual manner."<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless he considers the sacrament of the Altar as very significant. To him it was a deep, meaningful symbol of the union of man with God. "Tauler says several times, that in the Lord's Supper God gives Himself essentially and personally to man and unites Himself with him, so that no difference remains. It is therefore the choicest of the means of grace and works most blessed effects. Tauler also ascribes great value to the use of this sacrament."<sup>27</sup>

The question, whether or not a man receives forgiveness in the sacraments of the altar, was answered by Tauler in no uncertain terms: "Had a man lived a hundred years and committed a hundred or a thousand mortal sins every day, and God

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26. Kunze, op. cit., p. 179., pp. 172-174; also J.T., ed.  
 27. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 153 ff.  
 28. J.T., ed., p. 100.  
 29. We base this conviction on the evidence we have found  
 30. J.T., ed., p. 100.



would give him complete and true penitence and aversion to sin, and would then go to the Lord's Supper with this intention, it would be a simple matter for our Lord to forgive all sins in one moment through this high and noble gift. It would be as simple for him as blowing a grain of dust from your hand, and the conversion could be so complete, that all consequence and pain would disappear, and you could become a great saint."<sup>28</sup>

Also with respect to this doctrine, we cannot help but see Tauler's mysticism. Even so, we must remember that Tauler was a good Catholic and had the same high regard for the Mass which we might expect to find in any Catholic.

### On the Church

Tauler always remained a true son of his Church.<sup>29</sup> In the Church he recognized not merely an external form or organization, but the "way to salvation." He says: "Know this, my children: when a man travels this way aright--in the true and right faith of the holy Church--and is properly subservient and obedient, then this becomes the bottom step on which you follow the call of God. And those who are satisfied to walk this way are sure to come to God, if the fire (i.e. purgatory) will burn away all that in which they did not lead a holy life on this earth."<sup>30</sup>

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28. J.T., ed.N., p. 108.

29. We base this conviction on the evidence we have found in his own sermons. J.T., ed.N., pp. 172-174; also J.T., ed. H., III, 121.

30. J.T., ed.N., p. 165.



### On Eschatology

We find references but no extensive discussion of eschatological matters in Tauler's sermons. The emphasis on the next world is probably lacking since mysticism sought to bring man the feeling of closeness to and union with God already in this life. But nowhere is any doubt expressed as to the after-life. He accepts all the eschatological teachings of the Bible and more. Tauler was a firm believer in purgatory. There are frequent references to it in his sermons.<sup>31</sup> He also urges prayer for the dead. He says: "Man must pray for his friends, living or dead. That is more useful than reading a thousand Psalters."<sup>32</sup>

### On Mariolatry

The worship of Mary had not yet become a chief mark of the Catholic Church. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was not to be declared until five centuries later (Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," Dec. 8, 1854). In Naumann's collection<sup>33</sup> of twenty-five sermons, Mary is mentioned only five times. Only in passing does he say that Mary is without sin.<sup>34</sup>

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This is by no means a complete treatment of Tauler's doctrines. This brief presentation should suffice to give us

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31. ibid. and also p. 233.

32. J.T., ed.N., p. 197.

33. Tauler, Johann Predigten (Selected Sermons with an Introduction by Leopold Naumann). Insel verlag, Leipzig, 1923.

34. J.T., ed.N., p. 205-206.



a deeper insight into the man. It is a necessary prerequisite to a study of his influence on Luther. His teaching is comparatively free of Aristotelian influence. Tauler's mysticism brought him closer to evangelical truth than many of his contemporaries. He sought to find the essence of true religion and found it in union with God. A century and a half later a Wittenberg professor of theology also sought for the essence of true religion. Tauler helped him. Yet Tauler was no "evangelical teacher," no "forerunner of the Reformation." His teachings show that he remained a faithful son of his Church. He was a preacher of the truth as his Church helped him to understand it. Augsburg edition of 1808, edited by Johann Rymann.<sup>2</sup> The title is: Sermones des hochwelschen in quaden erleuchten doctoris Johannis Taulerii sancti dominici ordens. It was the second printed edition of Tauler's sermons, the first one having appeared in 1498. It contained only the original sermons of Tauler. Since this edition contained only sermons and none of the other works that were later attributed to Tauler, we can be certain that Tauler influenced Luther through his sermons alone. Luther's copy of Tauler shows signs of usage and thorough study. His marginal notes

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1. We do not claim completeness for this list. The Wolmar and St. Louis editions were used. References to Tauler in Luther's sermons not discussed in this presentation are the following: 1. Advent Sermon (1522), WA, 101, 8, p. 168 ff.; 2. Preface to Gochii fragments (1522), WA, 10, 2, p. 329; 3. Operations in Paulus, WA8, 163 ff.

2. Luther's own copy is now in the "Ratschulbibliothek" in Zwickau, Germany. (cf. Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Modern Research (Engl. ed) p. 73).



## V. An Examination of Luther's References to Tauler

Before evaluating Tauler's influence on Luther, we wish to examine critically those references to Tauler which we have found in Luther's works.<sup>1</sup> We will attempt to discuss these references, as far as possible, in their chronological order.

### 1. Luther's Marginal Notes to his edition of John Tauler's Sermons

The student of Tauler's influence on Luther is fortunate, since the copy of Tauler's sermons, the very edition that was used by Luther, is still extant. We are, therefore, certain that Luther used the Augsburg edition of 1508, edited by Johann Rynmann.<sup>2</sup> The title is: Sermons<sup>e</sup> des hochgelehrten in gnaden erleuchten doctoris Johannis Thaulerii sannt dominici ordens. It was the second printed edition of Tauler's sermons, the first one having appeared in 1498. It contained only the original sermons of Tauler. Since this edition contained only sermons and none of the other works that were later attributed to Tauler, we can be certain that Tauler influenced Luther through his sermons alone. Luther's copy of Tauler shows signs of usage and thorough study. His marginal notes

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1. We do not claim completeness for this list. The Weimar and St. Louis editions were used. References to Tauler in Luther's sermons not discussed in this presentation are the following: 1. Advent Sermon (1522), WA, 101, 2, p. 105 ff.; 2. Preface to Gochii fragmenta (1522), WA, 10, 2, p. 329; 3. Operations in Psalms, WA5, 163 ff.

2. Luther's own copy is now in the "Ratsschulbibliothek" in Zwickau, Germany. (cf. Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Modern Research (Engl. ed) p. 73).



(almost entirely in Latin) fill several pages in the Weimar edition.<sup>3</sup> Not all, however, but only twenty of the eighty four sermons in this volume have annotations. Luther's acquaintance with Tauler must have begun in 1516. It is generally assumed that Johann Lange, his friend at Erfurt, introduced him to Tauler. We make this assumption on the basis of a letter written to Lange by Luther. Kuiper suggests, that Luther received his copy of Tauler from Staupitz.<sup>4</sup>

2. Luther's Letter to Lange, September or October, 1516<sup>5</sup>

There is considerable doubt about the date of this letter. The Weimar edition dates it "after October 5, 1516"; the St. Louis edition, October 5, 1516; de Wette, "October 5, as it seems"; and Enders, September (?) 1516. But regardless of the exact date, it is very likely the first letter in which Luther mentions Tauler. In this letter Luther complains to Lange, the Prior of Erfurt, that he is sending him too many brothers that are to study in Wittenberg. He mentions Tauler only in passing.<sup>6</sup>

3. WA, 9, 95 ff.

4. Kuiper, Luther--Formative Years, p. 231.

5. WA, Briefe I, 65; St. L. ed., XXIa, 45; de Wette, Luther's Briefe, I, 33; Enders, Briefwechsel, I, 54.

6. "Heute dich daher, dass du, wie dein Tauler (iuxta Taulerum tuum) sagt, beharrest als ein nach beiden Seiten Abgesonderter, und in Bezug auf alles ein gemeinsamer Mensch seiest, wie es sich geziemt fuer den Sohn des gemeinsamen Gottes und der gemeinsamen Kirche." (St. L. ed.). Luther is warning Lange (in friendly fashion, of course) that he is to be concerned not only about Erfurt, but also Wittenberg. cf. Footnote 3, WA, Briefe I, p. 67.



From the phrase "iuxta Taulerum tuum" we gather that Lange was at this time studying Tauler and had very likely already recommended him to Luther. Luther must have owned a copy of Tauler by this time and must have been familiar enough with it to refer his friend Lange to a thought in Tauler's sermon.

4. Luther's Foreword to "Ein seydtlich Buchleyn."

3. Luther's Reference to Tauler in his Exposition of Romans, 1515-1516.<sup>7</sup>

Luther began his lectures on Romans on the 3rd of November, 1515 and finished them September 7, 1516. In Luther's exposition of Romans 8:26 Luther refers to Tauler in these words: "With regard to suffering and bearing our suffering patiently, examine Tauler, who above others has dealt excellently with this subject and brought it to light in the German language."<sup>8</sup>

We assume then again that Luther first learned to know Tauler in 1516. Whether Luther made this reference to Tauler before or after his mention of Tauler in the letter to Lange cannot be determined. Inasmuch as Luther finished the lectures on Romans already in September, we may conclude that this reference precedes the reference in the letter. The possibility, however, also exists, that Luther added the quoted remark to his lectures at a later date, since the section in which this

Some may think that Luther is here suggesting Tauler

7. Luther, Ausgewählte Werke, "II Ergänzungsband-- Vorlesung ueber den Roemerbrief 1515/16" (Munich 1937), p. 328.

8. ibid.



reference is found is headed "Zusatz."

Eduard Ellwein, editor and translator of the "Roemerbrief-vorlesungen", believes that Luther is here referring to p. 205, 21 in the Augsburg 1508 edition of Tauler's sermons.

#### 4. Luther's Foreword to "Ein geystlich Buchleyn."

On December 4, 1516 a small book, with a foreword by Luther, came off the press of Johann Grunnenberg in Wittenberg. This was Luther's first publishing venture. He had found the fragments of a book which impressed him very much. By 1518 he had found the complete book, author unknown, and published it as the famous Theologia deutsch. But in 1516 only one chapter of the book was in his possession. Luther gave it the title Ein geystlich edles Buchleyn, with the subheading "Was der alte und neue Mensch sei."

It is in the foreword to this book that we find another early reference to Tauler. There Luther writes: "This book was found without a title and the author's name, but if I were to judge according to a possible conjecture, it would seem that in content it resembles the manner of the enlightened Doctor Tauler, of the preaching order." ("Aber nach mueglichem gedencken zu schetzen ist die matery fast nach der art des erleuchten doctors Tauleri, prediger ordens.")<sup>9a</sup>

Some seem to think that Luther is here suggesting Tauler as the author. We do not find that in Luther's words. He

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8a. WA., I, 153; St. L., XIV, 180.



is merely saying that the theology of this book resembles that contained in the sermons of Tauler. When Luther published the complete Theologia deutsch in 1516<sup>3</sup> he made no mention of Tauler whatsoever. This problem will be examined more closely in connection with our study of Luther's letter to Staupitz of March 31, 1518.

### 5. Luther's Letters to Spalatin

By December of 1516 Luther had become an enthusiastic supporter of Tauler and his theology. We see his glowing enthusiasm in a letter to his friend Spalatin that is dated December 14, 1516. Luther writes: "If it pleases you to study genuine and real theology (entirely like the theology of the ancient teachers) that is written in German, then you should obtain for yourself the sermons of John Tauler, of the preaching order; of whose theology, behold! I am here sending a summary to you. For I have read neither in Latin nor in our own language a theology that is more sound or more in agreement with the Gospel."<sup>9</sup>

The "summary" which Luther mentions in this letter is a copy of Ein geystlich edles Buchleyn which had just come off the press ten days before. It cannot be said of Luther that he is here attributing the authorship of this booklet to Tauler. In this sermon Luther says: "They, who serve riches and

In the Spring of 1517 (May 6 or shortly thereafter)

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9. WA., Briefe I, 76-79; St. L., XXIa, 56; de Wette, I, 46; Enders, I, 75. It is to be noted that de Wette dates this letter as of August 1519. We find no support for this date. We prefer the WA. date, May 6, 1517.



Luther writes another letter to Spalatin<sup>10</sup> urging him more strenuously than before to read Tauler. He writes: "By all means get yourself the book of Tauler's sermons. You should be able to obtain it easily with the help of Christian Goldschmied. For from this book you will readily see how the learning of our day is like iron, yes, like clay, no matter whether it is Greek, Latin or Hebrew, in comparison to the true learning of real Godliness."

These words have always been considered a real endorsement of Tauler's sermons. When Spener published his edition of the sermons of Tauler (Frankfurt 1681) he quotes these two letters of Luther in his introduction. These letters certainly indicate Luther's high regard for Tauler.

Nor was Luther's interest in Tauler only of a temporary nature. We are sure that the book had a permanent place in his library. We shall see that he quotes Tauler as late as 1535. In the spring of 1517, Luther quotes Tauler for the first time in a sermon.

In the Latin original we read: "Ego sane secutus theologian

#### 6. Luther's Sermon, Sexagesima Sunday 1517

If May 6, 1517 is the correct date for the second letter to Spalatin, then the reference to Tauler in Luther's Sexagesima Sunday sermon on Luke 8:4 ff. is earlier.

In this sermon Luther says: "They, who serve riches and pleasures with all their heart and live without even attempting

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10. WA., Briefe I, 95-97; St. L., XXIa, 64-65; de Wette, I, 258-259; Enders I, 90-91. It is to be noted that de Wette dates this letter as of August 1519. We find no support for this date. We prefer the WA. date, May 6, 1517.



to give a good appearance, will, of course, not even reach the lowest grade, inasmuch as they do not recognize truth. But these others seem to reflect in a most wonderful way all virtue, but they are not aware of the thorns, that will choke even that which is concealed--their inclinations. For more on this subject see all the sermons of Tauler, who recognized this failing of hypocrites very well, and also wrote against it extensively."

Luther does not here intend to refer to any particular section of Tauler's sermons. But his observation is correct; Tauler did seem to recognize very well the failing of hypocrites.

7. Luther's Letter to Staupitz, March 31, 1518<sup>12</sup>

This letter contains an interesting and much controverted phrase. We quote the pertinent sentence: "I have indeed followed the theology of Tauler and of his book which you recently turned over for printing to our Christian Goldschmied." In the Latin original we read: "Ego sane secutus theologian Tauleri et ejus libelli, quem tu nuper dedisti imprimendum Aurifabro nostro Christiano, doceo, ne homines in aliud in quiequam confidant quam in solum Ihesum Christum, non in orationes et merita vel opera sud." (WA) The first part of this sentence interests us particularly. We wonder to which book (libelli), Luther is here referring. De Wette adds the

13. Joh. Staupitii opera I, 90.

14. WA., Briefe I, Footnote, p. 141.

11. WA., I, 137; St. L. XII, 1827. deutsch, p. 16; also

12. WA., Briefe I, 159; St. L. XXIIa, 93-94; de Wette I, 101-102; Enders I, 175ff.



note that "ejus libelli" refers to the Theologia deutsch which Luther had published in part for the first time in 1516 and then republished in complete form in 1518. It came off the press on June 4, 1518. Enders would have "ejus libelli" refer, not to any book that may have been mistakenly attributed to Tauler, but to the "Book of the Love of God" written by Staupitz,<sup>13</sup> the addressee of this letter. The editors of the St. Louis Luther edition concur in this view. But the supremely scholarly Weimar edition<sup>14</sup> subscribes to de Wette's view, that Luther is here referring to the Theologia deutsch. An investigation, according to the Weimar editors, of the "Zentralblaetter fuer Bibliothekswesen" (7, 197ff) reveals that John Grunenberg printed this work. Christian Duering (i.e. Christian Goldschmied) was the publisher (not the actual printer).<sup>15</sup> Although conclusive evidence cannot be obtained for either view, we favor the view of Enders and Knaake (cited by WA) who believe that "ejus libelli" refers to Staupitz' own work, since there is no conclusive evidence in the writings of Luther that he at any time believed John Tauler to be the author of the Theologia deutsch. It is true, that Luther in introductions to the first edition of the Theologia deutsch says that "in content it resembles the manner of the enlightened Dr. Tauler."<sup>15</sup> Luther seems almost painfully careful in

13. Joh. Staupitii opera I, 90.

14. WA., Briefe I, Footnote, p. 161.

15. Lisco, Heilslehre der Theologia deutsch, p. 15; also WA, 1, 153; and St. L. XIV, 180.

16. WA., 1, 557. (These "Resolutiones" are not to be found in the St. L. ed.).



distinguishing between Tauler and the author of the Theologia deutsch. This is already apparent in Luther's letter to Spalatin (Dec. 14, 1516). It may be that Luther suspected Tauler of being the author of this work but he never said so publicly. The Catholic scholar Grisar<sup>16</sup> is more accurate than the Lutheran historian Jacobs,<sup>17</sup> who expresses the view that Luther believed Tauler to have been the author of the Theologia deutsch. Grisar, on the other hand, states that Luther knew full well at the time of his second edition of the Theologia deutsch that Tauler was not the author. Since we have not found any definite statement by Luther in which he ascribes the Theologia deutsch to Tauler, we feel that we ought not make him guilty of such an inaccuracy. Luther may not have been trained in "higher criticism" but we still consider him a discriminating critic of literary sources, Biblical or otherwise. We don't think he would have made this mistake.

8. Luther's "Resolutiones" of 1518<sup>18</sup>

In 1518 Luther published his "Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute" (Theses for debate concerning the power of indulgences). In section five of "Conclusio XV" we find this reference to Tauler: "How many there must be who have tasted these punishments until this day! For also, what else does John Tauler teach in his German sermons than the sufferings for these punishments--and also adds some

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16. Grisar, Luther, I, p. 144.

17. Jacobs, Martin Luther, p. 48.

18. WA., I, 557. (These "Resolutiones" are not to be found in the St. L. ed.).



examples of them? And, indeed, I realize that this teacher was perhaps ignorant of the dissertations of the theologians and is on that account considered very much despised. But I know, nevertheless, that I have found more real and sincere theology in him (that is, of all those who wrote in the German language) than it is or will be possible to find in the scholastic doctors of the universities."

This is indeed real praise for Tauler. Spener (Frankfurt 1681) translated this quotation into German and gave it a prominent place in his introduction to his edition of Tauler.<sup>19</sup> Poch, the later owner of Luther's copy of Tauler's sermons, wrote a part of this quotation on the fly leaf.<sup>20</sup>

Luther's admiration for Tauler's theology must certainly have been genuine, for he was not accustomed to bestowing praise where it was undeserved.

#### 9. Luther's Exposition of the Psalms, 1519-21

In these lectures which Luther delivered at the University of Wittenberg from 1519-21, we have found three references to Tauler.

In a discussion of Psalm 11:1, Luther made this reference. "All those, who leave Christ stand and teach instead in the churches the necessity of their own pitiful works and a new manner of life discovered by them (and such teachers--mouths

19. See the introductory pages (no pagination) of Spener's edition of Tauler (Concordia Seminary Library, St. Louis).

20. WA., 9, 95.



of destruction that they are--may be found in great numbers today; John Tauler also makes frequent and fitting mention of them), do nothing else but torture men's consciences. And even though they are constantly teaching, they never bring anyone to an understanding of the truth." <sup>21</sup>

Here again Luther is not quoting any statement from Tauler in particular, but merely making a general reference. A reading of Tauler's sermons does reveal that Tauler denounces those who insist on mere works for justification. Tauler always adds that good works can only be done by those who have achieved a union with God. We have pointed out in the preceding chapter, that Tauler is not a teacher of justification by faith in Luther's sense. Tauler's emphasis is on "inwardness."

In his exposition of Psalm 16:7 we find another reference to Tauler: "At night man is free from all work and everything is quiet. Nights consequently prepare men best for those divine workings (i.e. such inner suffering as fear of death) through which the Spirit chastens man severely....He who would know more about these nights should read Tauler." <sup>22</sup>

Luther speaks almost like a true mystic in this instance. He must have had these words of Tauler in mind: "Children, in order to experience that (i.e. feeling of union with God), the situation and time must be favorable. You must have a quiet time and patience; and there must be no disturbing activities. Nights are very good for this--they are quiet and

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21. WA., 5, 353; St. L., IV, 795.

22. WA., 3, 459; St. L., IV, 982-983.



long."<sup>23</sup>

In his lecture on Psalm 19:12, Luther again quotes Tauler in support of his view on the evil nature of man's flesh.

Luther says: "No matter how careful and watchful you are, you will never be able to apprehend the treachery and deceit of the evil flesh....and see with what seemingly good intentions and piety it seeks to satisfy its own lust. Tauler speaks very nicely about this in those sermons in which he accuses the evil flesh of its deceitful intentions."<sup>24</sup>

11. Luther may have thought of these words of Tauler: "The other enemy is your own flesh, that continually attacks you with spiritual unchastity, such as all those who are living in sin and sensual pleasures enjoy. You must guard against this with greatest care....An inner unchastity will cause the Spirit to withdraw. And just as the Spirit is nobler than the flesh, so (an inner unchastity is even more harmful than an outer unchastity)."<sup>25</sup>

#### 10. Luther's Sermon, August 10, 1522

In his sermon on the eighth Sunday after Trinity on Matthew 7:15-23, Luther again mentions Tauler. "You cannot judge according to external works. Tauler also recognized this, that believers and unbelievers are often very much alike externally, so that no one can distinguish the one

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23. J.T., ed.N., p. 159.

24. WA., 3, 564; St. L., IV, 1165.

25. J.T., ed.N., p. 23.

Hutton (an English translation of 24 sermons-1901).



from the other....unless he has the spirit of God."<sup>26</sup>

This was perhaps suggested by such words of Tauler as these: "That is not real humility when people speak very convincingly of their humble spirit, but still think they are more exalted and higher than the cathedral. They want to appear big (in the Church). They may be deceiving the people, yet they are only deceiving themselves--for they themselves will remain deceived."<sup>27</sup>

# 11. Luther's Exposition of I John, 1529-1530

In his shorter exposition of the I Epistle of John (2:22) Luther brings a direct quotation from Tauler. Luther introduces it very simply: "Tauler writes: We are by grace, what Christ is by nature and essence. He is an heir by virtue of His nature; we are heirs by grace."<sup>28</sup>

We were unable to find this quotation in any of the editions of Tauler that we used.<sup>29</sup>

# 12. Luther's Sermon, March 1, 1534

On March 1, 1534, Reminiscere Sunday, Luther preached a sermon in his home on Matthew 15:21-28. In this sermon he shows that he is no blind follower of Tauler but is willing to disagree with him if necessary.

26. WA., 10III, 266; St. L., XI, 1401-1402.

27. J.T., ed.N., p. 144.

28. St. L., IX, 1558.

29. The following editions of Tauler were used in this study: Spener (1681); Hamberger (1864); Naumann (1923); Hutton (an English translation of 36 sermons--1901).



12. "Tauler says in one instance that a man should stop praying at times. But it is not right to say that in any sermon. We stop praying all too readily of our own free will. Our text, however, shows well enough, that we should never stop but we should pray continually."<sup>30</sup>

Luther may have been thinking of these words of Tauler: "There are times when we must perform pious and useful labors of love, so far as there is need and we are able. And again there are times when we must lovingly and secretly withdraw from such things in order to give ourselves over to pious and sincere prayer and the meditation of holy examples. But there are also times when we ought to do none of these things."<sup>31</sup>

### 13. Luther's Sermon, Second Sunday after Trinity 1535<sup>32</sup>

In this sermon on Luke 14:16-24, we have another reference to Tauler. Our Lord God is "as Tauler has said, much more desirous to give to us and help us, then we ever are or can be, in taking and asking. God asks and requests no more of us than that we open our heart and accept His grace."<sup>33</sup>

Tauler expressed himself very similarly at one time: "As often as man presents himself to God with love and thanksgiving, so often God meets him with a hundred-thousand more gifts, grace and comfort in every moment."<sup>34</sup>

30. WA., 37, 314; St. L., XIIIa, 258.

31. J.T., ed.N., p. 168.

32. There is some doubt as to the exact date of this sermon. The Weimar edition lists a different sermon for this Sunday.

33. St. L., XI, 1230.

34. J.T., ed.N., p. 80.

35. The St. L. ed. gives no date for this sermon. We were unable to find this sermon in the Weimar edition.

36. St. L., XII, 203.



#### 14. Luther's Sermon, St. John's Day <sup>35</sup>

We cannot determine when Luther delivered this sermon. We know, however, that it was a festival sermon delivered on the Day of St. John. Luther chose a text from the Apocrypha, Sirach 15:1ff. In this sermon we find these words: "A man justified before God....can instruct every man in this divine doctrine, as Tauler says: Such a man can judge and teach the whole world." <sup>36</sup>

Also in this instance we were unable to find these words in Tauler which Luther here quotes. But also this quotation helps to further our understanding of what it was that attracted Luther to Tauler.

\* \* \*

This examination of Luther's references to and quotations from Tauler has given us a deeper insight into the relation between these two great minds.

Luther welcomed the discovery of, what he believed to be, true evangelical Christianity in Tauler. He endorsed his sermons and recommended them to his best friends. He gave the book a permanent place in his library, and did not discard it in the course of a few years, but quoted from Tauler continuously. The references we have found show that Luther used and studied these sermons for at least nineteen years (1516-1535). His enthusiasm for Tauler and his frequent reference to his sermons makes us aware of this fact that Tauler influenced Luther not a little. It is now our task to give an estimate of Tauler's influence on Luther.

*Referenzen zu Tauler.* Bedeutung der Genoupiaceen in Luthers Leben und Lehre (Berlin 1906), quoted by Grisar, Luther I, p. 187.

35. The St. L. ed. gives no date for this sermon. We were unable to find this sermon in the Weimar edition.

36. St. L., XII, 203.



## VI. An Estimate of Tauler's Influence on Luther

Tauler will always remain important for the student of Luther. Although Tauler's influence on Luther may have been exaggerated at times, it can never be denied that Luther found much in this serious "seeker after God" that left its mark on his work. Jacobs goes so far as to say that "one who would thoroughly understand Luther must read Tauler."<sup>1</sup> Boehmer cites Buettner, Stange and Mandel who give to Tauler and to the unknown author of the Theologia deutsch the position of Luther's principal teachers.<sup>2</sup> We may not agree with these claims, yet we have already seen Luther's own high opinion of Tauler as expressed in letters to his friends, in his sermons and other works.<sup>3</sup> Tauler, therefore, deserves study as a significant factor in Lutheran Reformation history.

### Was Tauler a Forerunner of the Reformation?

Tauler has long been considered a forerunner of the Reformation. Enthusiasts have even looked upon the entire movement of mysticism as a pre-Reformation movement. The validity of these claims has been denied by every historian who has examined the field thoroughly. W. Braun, a Protestant theologian, rejects any such assumption.<sup>4</sup> Mysticism, to be sure, was a reaction to a religion that seemingly dealt only

1. Jacobs, Martin Luther, p. 46.

2. Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Modern Research, p. 61.

3. see Chapter V, "A Critical Examination of Luther's References to Tauler."

4. Braun, W., Die Bedeutung der Concupiscenz in Luthers Leben und Lehre (Berlin 1908), quoted by Grisar, Luther I, p. 187.



in externals, but it was not a reform movement. It began and always remained within the Church. Gustav Wolf,<sup>5</sup> Doerries,<sup>6</sup> Grisar,<sup>7</sup> Naumann<sup>8</sup> and others<sup>9</sup> agree that Tauler is neither a precursor nor a forerunner of Luther. Our own examination has<sup>also</sup> shown that no such claim can be substantiated. Tauler did not at any time oppose the Church, he was never charged with heresy, he himself wanted and claimed to be an obedient son of his Church, he had no organized following, and none of his sermons reveal a dissatisfaction with the Church as such. Tauler was satisfied to work within the framework of the Church. He attacked no abuses even though he was dissatisfied with the life of clergy and laity. He detected hypocrites in the Church, but did not identify them with members of the hierarchy. Tauler did only this--he gave a new emphasis to the personal union and relation of the Christian to God. Tauler himself would never have wanted to be considered a reformer. This will lead us to wonder what it was in Tauler's theology that attracted Luther.

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5. "Tauler galt in protestantischen Kreisen lange als Bahnbrecher der Reformation. Die naechere Bekanntschaft mit seinen und den ganzen zeitgenoessischen Religionsanschauungen lockerte diesen Zusammenhang stark.", Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationsgeschichte, I, 155.

6. "Zum Vorreformer freilich darf man ihn (Tauler) trotz Luthers anerkennendem Urteil nicht machen...Seine Froemdigkeit (ist) ein Verinnerlichen, nicht ein Zerbrechen des Alten." Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, V, 1028.

7. Grisar, Luther I, 187.

8. "Als Vorreformer im Sinne Luthers kann Tauler nicht gelten." J.T., ed.N., p. 16.

9. sub "Tauler" in Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. XI, p. 277.



### What attracted Luther to Tauler?

Luther was not attracted by any system of theology that Tauler might have represented. We would be much closer to the truth if we would say that it was Tauler's lack of a "system" of doctrine that appealed to Luther. Luther had grown weary of "scholastic theology." We have already studied his high praise for Tauler because he, Luther said, surpassed "all the scholastic teachers at the universities" (in Resolutiones). In his second letter to Spalatin, Luther tells his friend that in comparison to Tauler, the works of the scholastic theologians were "like iron or clay." Luther had been taught to apply the principles of Aristotelian logic and philosophy to theology. He had studied the Summa of Aquinas and the Sententiae of Peter Lombard. As a young professor at Erfurt he had lectured on the "Sentences" of Lombard. Introduced to Occam by his teachers in Erfurt, Luther soon gave up Aristotle entirely. He called him "a teller of fables." Peter Lombard's "Sentences" appealed to him because they were comparatively free of Aristotelian influence. But soon Luther showed that he disagreed also with Peter Lombard and in time he took Lombard out of the lecture hall and introduced the Bible as the subject of his lectures.

This was a significant move on Luther's part. It indicated an independence and newness of thought. Luther wanted something more vital. He wanted a theology that was not categorized or shackled to a system, which seemed to kill the very spirit.



We can well imagine his joy (we find it reflected in his letters of this period) when he discovers the Theologia deutsch and Tauler's sermons. Here he found an independence of thought, no long quotations from the "scholastic" theologians, no evidence of Aristotelian dialectic. There was something vital, something urgent in these writings which he had never found before. And we must remember this: he found great theological truths expressed in German. Something unusual for his day. Luther went to work immediately. He edited the section of the Theologia deutsch which he had found. And when he sends a copy of this work to Spalatin (Dec. 14, 1516), he also calls his attention to Tauler's sermons. This, Luther felt, was real theology! No fine and minute definitions, distinctions and differences, but simple yet divine truths, plainly stated in the language of the people.

Luther did not yet see that there were things un-Scriptural, particularly in Tauler's sermons. But the stress on the personal relation of man to God, common to all mysticism, appealed to him. He gave himself over to mysticism to the extent to which it agreed with his religious experiences up to that time.<sup>10</sup>

(Lutheran) and Grisar (Catholic) believe that the fact that Tauler wrote in German also caused Luther to

10. "Dass in der mystischen Theologie noch Anderes, nicht Schriftgemaesses, stecke, sah er (Luther) damals noch nicht. Er gab sich der Mystik hin soweit er in ihr etwas seinem eignen bisherigen Erlebnisse Entsprechendes fand." Plitt, Einleitung in die Augustana, I, 71.

12. Grisar, op. cit., I, 132.

13. Catholic Encyclopedia, (1912), sub Tauler, XIV, 466.

14. Plitt, op. cit., I, 70; Grisar, op. cit., I, 132.



Kunze came to the same conclusion in his study of Tauler and Luther. He remarks that Tauler was no friend of scholastic definitions and investigations in theology. "In this respect he is, just as Luther, entirely opposed to the scholastic spirits. Tauler, however, retreated from the purely dogmatical even more than Luther."<sup>11</sup>

Grisar, the Catholic scholar, shares these views. He points out that the very fact that Tauler's sermons were not marked by scholastic terminology attracted Luther. "Nor did it bring little joy to Luther that he did not find in (Tauler's language) the shackles of a philosophical and dialectic system so hateful to him."<sup>12</sup>

Klemens Loeffler, another Catholic scholar, has analyzed Luther's attraction to Tauler in this way: "What attracted Luther was probably not Tauler's doctrine itself, but only here and there some subordinate thought. Perhaps it pleased him that the word indulgence appears only once in Tauler's sermons, or it aroused his sympathy that Tauler laid less stress upon works, or again he was attracted by the tremendous earnestness of this seeker after God."<sup>13</sup> Although this analysis is rather vague, it does point in the right direction.

Both Plitt (Lutheran) and Grisar (Catholic) believe that the fact that Tauler wrote in German also caused Luther to be attracted to his writings.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Kunze, op. cit., 96.

12. Grisar, op. cit., I, 132.

13. Catholic Encyclopedia, (1912), sub Tauler, XIV, 466.

14. Plitt, op. cit., I, 70; Grisar, op. cit., I, 132.



Our own conclusion is in agreement with these writings. Briefly stated, Luther was attracted to Tauler for three reasons:

1.) Tauler's theology was not bound by the Scholasticism of the theology still current in Luther's day. It was free of the dialectic philosophy and theology which Luther hated.

2.) Tauler emphasized the personal relation of the Christian to God. Luther already believed this but had rarely seen it expressed.

3.) Tauler wrote in German. This was significant for a man who loved the language of his country. Luther wanted to reach the people in their own language. Tauler presented in a popular form and in the vernacular the theological truths of Occam. (Luther had come under the influence of Occam already during his years of study in Erfurt, 1505-1508).

#### Did Luther understand Tauler?

Our study of Tauler's theology<sup>15</sup> has shown us that Tauler was and remained a faithful son of his Church. We even found that Tauler taught such typical Catholic doctrines as purgatory, prayer for the dead, primacy of the pope and others.

On the other hand, however, we have noted the deep impressions that Tauler's sermons made on Luther. The influence of Tauler on Luther was not merely temporary but continuous. Even in his later years, when Luther had disavowed the papacy.

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15. see Chapter IV.

16. See also, *Luther and Luthertum*, p. 334 (see also pp. 484, 531-534).

17. Grisar, *op. cit.*, I, 132, 133.



and had reached a thorough understanding of Bible doctrine, he continued to quote from Tauler.

This has caused students to ask again and again: Did Luther understand Tauler?

Denifle, the Catholic biographer of Luther, answers the question with a sharp negative. He simply says, that Luther did not understand Tauler, "because he was accustomed to read the authors superficially."<sup>16</sup> Grisar agrees essentially with the verdict of Denifle, although he makes no such derogatory remarks as the Dominican biographer of Luther. Grisar says that Luther applied the doctrines of this great mystic without really understanding them.<sup>17</sup>

The Catholic viewpoint may appear prejudiced, but we find ourselves compelled to agree in this instance. Luther did not really understand Tauler. Luther interpreted Tauler's views in consonance with his own experiences and beliefs. Luther made no exact and scholarly study of Tauler. He read into Tauler his own beliefs. This was possible since Tauler himself had broken with scholasticism and did not represent scholastic theology in the same pointed fashion that other teachers of the time did. This very fact prejudiced Luther in favor of Tauler.

We find that no less an authority than the Lutheran historian Boehmer, one of the greatest Luther students of our time, substantiates these views and gives ample evidence.

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16. Denifle, Luther und Luthertum, p. 534 (see also pp. 484, 531-134).

17. Grisar, op. cit., I, 132, 188.



"These theories (of the mystics, i.e. Tauler and the author of the Theologia deutsch), says Boehmer, "made a great impression upon Luther, but only because he interpreted them entirely in the sense of his own views."<sup>18</sup>

Again Boehmer says: "Luther in every case imputed his own thoughts to the two mystics (Tauler and the author of the Theologia deutsch), and in consequence ended by interpreting the whole terminology of Mysticism in accordance with his own thoughts, as is shown especially in the great Commentary on the Psalms of 1519."<sup>19</sup>

Again: "He (Luther) involuntarily transformed these quite differently constituted minds into allies and kindred spirits, because in all he read he was ever involuntarily seeking answers to the entirely individual questions and problems which he had arrived at through his own meditation and experience."<sup>20</sup>

An example may illustrate. Tauler speaks much of the heaviness, the inward distress and all the pains which precede the "birth of God in the soul," the union of the divine element in the soul with the true God (mystical union). This was a typical mystical experience. Luther, however, interpreted it as the one entirely individual experience through which he had become a reformer, "namely the psychological turmoil into which he had been plunged by doubts of his vocation and the

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18. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 74.

19. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 75.

20. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 76.

21. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 74.

22. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 75.



fear of an uneasy conscience, which only ceased when his new understanding of Romans 1:16, 17 revealed to him that God was in essence pure love and mercy."<sup>21</sup>

Luther dealt similarly with the term "to suffer God," "Gott<sup>x</sup>leiden", that is found in Tauler and the writings of other mystics. To Tauler it meant the pains accompanying the birth of God in the soul (described above). To Luther it meant man's passive state in the work of justification, wrought only by God.

Boehmer summarizes his and also our own findings well in these words: "In general, he (Luther) understood all the strange minds that crossed his path only in so far as they resembled him or merely seemed to resemble him, and only what he believed he had understood, and was able to some extent to appreciate for himself, did he seize with sure instinct out of the abundance of new ideas he learned to know on such occasions. The most convincing example of this is his relation to Tauler and the Frankfurt theologian (author of the Theologia deutsch). Actually, on all the questions important to him, he completely misunderstood them both. But just because he misunderstood them, and only because he misunderstood them, was this acquaintance so fruitful to him."<sup>22</sup>

To reach this conclusion at the end of our investigation may leave the reader dissatisfied. But it should not. We

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21. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 74.

22. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 79.



are in no way detracting from Luther's character, scholarship or ability. Rather, we receive a new insight into the man. He lacks the exact scholarship and the cold scientific method of an Erasmus, but he is possessed with a burning desire for truth, understanding, and a solution to his own great spiritual problems. He already has the solution but can hardly be sure of it. He senses that his own solution is new, different, yes, radical. He is groping for support and encouragement. And he finds it in the writings of Tauler whom he completely misunderstands. Tauler's sermons lend themselves well to Luther's interpretation of the great truths of Scripture. With such encouragement from an unsuspected source, Luther's own deep convictions are strengthened.

Tauler, the great Friend of God of the fourteenth century, helped to give Luther the courage which he needed to nail the famous ninety five clear, simple sentences on Christian doctrine to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.



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# Catalog of the Printed Editions of

## Tauler's Sermons

1498 - Leipzig (in the Saxonian dialect). This edition is closest to the Strassburg MS. It contains 84 sermons.

1508 - Augsburg (Augsburg Dialect). Printed at the expense of Johann Rymanns and translated by J. Otmar.

1521 - Basel (in the Upper Rhine Dialect). Contains the 84 sermons of the 1498 edition plus 42 "recently" of which "may not be by Tauler."

## VIII. A P P E N D I X

1523 - Halberstadt (Low Saxon Dialect). This is an adaptation

### I. A Catalog of the Printed Editions of Tauler's Sermons.

1543 - Cologne. Edited by Peter Wynwegen (Neuionagus). It contains the 84 of the 1498 edition, as well as 25 others. This edition contains many

### II. References to Tauler in Luther's Writings.

### III. The Literature on Tauler.

distributed to Tauler. It does not go back to the oldest MSS. Sections which offended the Roman Catholic theologians were omitted.

1549 - Cologne. Latin edition by Lorenz Surinus. This is a translation of the 1543 edition.

1566 - Frankfurt.

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Romans, 1515  
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Dec. 4,  
1516

Exposition de  
paraboles, 1516  
Exposition

Dec. 14  
1516

Exposition de  
Apocalypse

May 6  
1517

Exposition de  
Ezechiel

1517

Exposition de  
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Oct 27.

March 31  
1518

Letter to  
Staphis

Briefs I,  
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XXIa, 98-6 de Vette I, 101-2  
Enders I, 178 ff.

1518

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1519-  
21

Exposition of  
Psalms (Psalm  
11:1)

I, 353

IV, 795

1519-  
21

Exposition of  
Psalms (Psalm  
16:7)

I, 469

IV, 982-3

1519-  
21

Exposition of  
Psalms (Psalm  
19:12)

I, 564

IV, 1165



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<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>Writings</u> <u>W.A.</u>	<u>ST. L.</u>	<u>OTHER SOURCES</u>
1516	Marginal Notes in L's edition of Tauler.	9, 95 ff.		
Sept.-Oct 1516	Letter to Lange	Briefe I, 64 ff.	XXIa, 45	de Wette I, 33 Enders I, 54
1515-	Exposition of Romans, (Chapt. 8:26)			"Roemerbrief" (Munich ed.) 328
Dec. 4, 1516	Foreward to "Ein geystlich edles Buchleyn."	1, 153	XIV, 180	
Dec. 14 1516	Letter to Spalatin	Briefe I, 76-79	XXIa, 56	de Wette I, 46 Enders I, 75
May 6 1517	Letter to Spalatin	Briefe I, 95-97	XXIa, 64- 65	de Wette I, 258-9 Enders I, 90-91
1517	Sermon (Sex-agesima) Luke 8:4 ff.	1, 137	XII, 1827	
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1519- 21	Exposition of Psalms (Psalm 11:1)	5, 353	IV, 795	
1519- 21	Exposition of Psalms (Psalm 16:7)	3, 459	IV, 982-3	
1519- 21	Exposition of Psalms (Psalm 19:12)	3, 564	IV, 1165	



<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>III.</u>	<u>W.A.</u>	<u>ST. L.</u>	<u>OTHER SOURCES</u>
Aug. 10 1522	Sermon Matthew 7:15 ff.		10, III, 266	XI, 1401-02	
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