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Luther's Academic Relations to Erfurt and Wittenberg

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Modernists, who identify the resurrection with the immortality of the soul, and to the mediating Fundamentalists, who claim that there is no connection between the present body and the resurrection body. The connection, according to Paul, certainly exists. The resurrection body will be the present body, only changed and glorified. As Christ's humiliated body was essentially the same as His glorified body, so from the humiliation of this present life the believer will pass into the glory of the perfect, heavenly life, with a body free from the pollution of sin and perfectly adapted to the glorious life of holiness. As he has borne the image of the earthy, so shall he then in supreme perfection bear the image of the Heavenly. J. T. MUELLER.

Luther's Academic Relations to Erfurt and Wittenberg.

The word *academic* is here used in the special sense of something agreeing with scholastic rules, customs, and usages; for the age in which Luther lived was very particular in its observance of such relations. And although Luther, in his personal opinions and judgments, made use of great freedom in analyzing such customs, yet his abhorrence of any form of radicalism kept him from actions which might have been regarded as iconoclastic, also in the field of academic courtesies. In other words, while he was not excessively conscientious and punctilious about these customs, he took part in their observance with a manifest absence of self-consciousness. It was in agreement with a principle which he copied from the great apostle, a maxim that caused him to become all things to all men if he could do so without denying the truth in any manner.

Luther had such academic relations with both Erfurt and Wittenberg, and this involved not only the university in either city, but to some extent also the Augustinian convent. The latter is true partly because the members of the theological faculty in either university were in part members of the Augustinian Order, partly because members of the congregation or convent were usually enrolled in some course in the university. In a measure, at least, we may here think of affiliations such as those of certain seminaries located in university centers of our country to the respective institutions.

Until recent years there has been much haziness and uncertainty concerning the academic relations of Luther. In some quarters it was apparently not known that he was affiliated with the University of Erfurt for a second time, after he had once been sent to Wittenberg. In other quarters, where there was some knowledge of this fact, it has been concluded that his first attempt in the rôle of teacher was

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a failure, a statement which is as uncharitable as it is untrue. Fortunately, the research work of Kawerau, Boehmer, Buchwald, and others has now made it possible for us to form a fairly complete and correct picture of Luther's early years in the teaching profession. From the available data the following connected picture may be obtained.

That Luther received his secondary school-training in the school of the Brethren of the Common Life in Magdeburg, 1496—7, and in the School of St. George at Eisenach, 1497—1501, is a fact familiar to all readers of Luther biographies. At the end of April, 1501, "Martinus Ludher de Mansfeld" was enrolled in the University of Erfurt for the summer semester. Erfurt at that time had a standing second to none in the academic world, and the *bursa* which Luther chose to join had an excellent reputation in the city. Having passed the prescribed examinations at the earliest possible date, September 29, 1502, he was on that day given the degree of Bachelor of Arts. Without the slightest delay he enrolled for his master's degree, finishing the prescribed courses in Aristotle together with the entire *quadrivium* in somewhat more than two years, so that he was granted the degree of Master of Arts on January 7, 1505, his rank being second in a class of seventeen. On April 24 of the same year he began his lectures as *magister* of the University of Erfurt, and on May 20 he began the study of law. According to the rules of the university he was under obligation to serve for two years as lecturer, as a member of the faculty of arts.

Luther's career as instructor and student at Erfurt was rudely interrupted when, on July 17, 1505, he entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. Shortly afterward he was persuaded to prepare himself for the priesthood. He was ordained as subdeacon before the end of 1506, deacon on February 27, 1507, and priest on April 4, reading his first mass on May 2, as we learn from one of his letters to his friend Braun. (St. Louis Ed., 21a, 1.) He continued as an inmate of the Augustinian convent at Erfurt till October, 1508, the chief books which he studied being the so-called commentaries of Biel, Aillis, and Ockham.

Meanwhile academic history was in the making at Wittenberg, for the university, founded in 1502, was trying to become established and recognized, and the Augustinian order became interested. According to the regulations of the young university the Augustinians had charge of two professorships, that of the *lectura in Biblia* in the theological faculty and that of moral philosophy in the arts. Johann von Staupitz was its professor in theology, and he was supposed to be dean of the faculty during the winter semester 1508—9, although his office of vicar-general of the Saxon congregation kept him away from Wittenberg at least until the middle of October. The professorship

in the arts faculty, in October, 1508, was provisionally given to Luther, so that he was busy lecturing on the philosophy of Aristotle and directing the customary disputations of the students. At the same time, however, he was under obligations to continue his theological studies, a fact which made it necessary for him to attend two theological lectures on at least four days in the week.

That Luther managed to cover the ground very well indeed appears from the fact that he received the degree *baccalaureus ad Biblia* on March 9, 1509, a distinction which obliged him, in addition to his work in the arts faculty, to lecture on designated chapters of the Bible in the theological department. What his sentiments in the matter were we see from a letter written on March 17, 1509, addressed to his friend Johann Braun. He states, in part: "I am now at God's direction and permission in Wittenberg. But if you desire to have information concerning my condition, I am well, thanks to God, only that the study is forced upon me, in particular that of philosophy, which I, from the beginning, should have preferred to have exchanged for that of theology, with that theology, let me say, which examines the kernel of the nut and the marrow of the wheat and the marrow of the bones. But God is God; man is often, yea, always in error in his judgment. This is our God; He will govern us in kindness, in all eternity." (21a, 4. 5.)

Luther now continued his study in theology, for the next step was his advancement to the rank of *sententiarius*, which enabled him to have lectures on the renowned Sentences of Lombard, the foremost dialectic treatise in the field of theology during the Medieval Age. To this advancement he refers in a letter of June 16, 1514. This honor, however, did not come to Luther in Wittenberg, although he had made all examinations and met all the other requirements for the degree at the Saxon university. He was suddenly called back to Erfurt, not because he had been a failure in his work at Wittenberg (the contrary being shown by his advancement during the year that he had spent in the city on the Elbe), but because his former teachers, particularly Johann Nathin, wanted the gifted young man in their own university. The jealousy of the Erfurt people was so great that they refused at first to acknowledge the work which Luther had done in preparing himself for the degree of *sententiarius*. But Nathin took his part, and the promotion was duly solemnized by a lecture on the part of the candidate. Thus another year went by, with Luther as an instructor in Erfurt.

But his work at the University of Erfurt was interrupted by the events which caused the Augustinian convent of that city to oppose a plan of Staupitz, a step which culminated in Luther's journey to Rome as *socius itinerarius* of an older member of the order, who was to present the formal appeal of the seven opposing convents, including

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Nuernberg and Erfurt, to the procurator of the order in Rome. From late in October or early in November, 1510, to March, 1511, Luther was absent on this trip. The appeal failed, as was to be expected, and the report was duly rendered to the dissenting convents. But when the general of the order in Germany wanted to close the episode, Staupitz came forward with certain compromise suggestions known as the *recessus Jenensis*, with which he hoped to gain the good will of the opponents. When the matter was brought before the convent of Erfurt, the majority of the brethren voted against the *recessus*, only two men, Luther and Johann Lang, declaring for peace with Staupitz. The result was that both men were dismissed, or "sent into exile," as the saying was. Johann Lang was enrolled at Wittenberg on August 17, 1511, and we also find Luther in Wittenberg in September of the same year. He had been transferred to Wittenberg for political reasons, since he felt himself obliged to oppose the majority of the Erfurt convent. It was undoubtedly a most unpleasant episode for Luther, but the blame for the transfer to Wittenberg cannot be placed upon him, as some historians seem to think, for he was certainly entitled to his own opinion in a matter or a policy of the Augustinian Order. As for the aftermath of the *recessus Jenensis*, Staupitz dropped the project which he had inaugurated almost five years before, so that peace was once more restored in the Saxon congregation in May, 1512.

Meanwhile Luther, having been in Wittenberg since September, 1511, had been in close touch with Staupitz and the university. About the middle of September his friend had encouraged him to become a preacher and to enroll for the highest degree in theology. Luther thereupon was active as preacher in the Black Cloister at Wittenberg, and Staupitz arranged to have him take over the *lectura in Biblia* at the university, the chair which he had himself held all these years. At the beginning of June, 1512, after Luther had attended the meeting of the Augustinians at Cologne (May 2—8), where he had stopped the mouth of his chief detractors at Erfurt, he entered upon his new office at Wittenberg. On October 4 he received the *licentia magistrandi in theologia*, for the chief obstacle hindering his promotion into the theological faculty had been removed by the gift of fifty *gulden* by the Elector, the acknowledgment of which is found in a receipt by Luther's own hand. (21a, 7.) On October 18 the preliminary celebration took place in the Castle Church, with Carlstadt presiding, and on the next morning, at seven o'clock, the solemn academic act, the *aula cathedralis*, was celebrated. As a part of this rite Luther was obliged to give an oath, stating that he would not teach false doctrines. On October 22 the newly created doctor of theology was formally received into the faculty senate as a full-fledged member of the faculty. As nearly as can be determined, his

first formal lecture was delivered on Monday, October 25 at seven in the morning. Thus Luther became a teacher of the Church and was pledged, as he later writes, to defend the Bible against every form of error.

But the Augustinians at Erfurt were not satisfied, and it was undoubtedly jealousy and wounded pride that caused Johann Nathin in particular to attack Luther, alleging that the latter had acted contrary to accepted academic usage in transferring to Wittenberg and enrolling there for advanced degrees, Nathin's contention being that he should have done so at Erfurt. Luther, as stated above, had answered his detractors as early as May, 1512, but he was obliged to do so once more in 1514. The first letter on the subject is dated June 16 and is addressed to Prior Andreas Lohr and the Seniors of the Augustinian convent at Erfurt. Here we find the following statements: "Although I have heard and read many of the evil things which have been said about us, particularly about me, among you, yet I was recently, by the letters of Father Magister Johannes Nathin, who, as it were, writes in the name of you all, so moved by the lies, the pointed words, and the bitter and mocking challenges which he utters that I was almost at the point . . . of pouring out upon him and upon the entire convent the full vial of anger and indignation. . . . But now I hear an even worse report, namely, that that person everywhere represents me as a perjurer and vile person. I know not in what power he trusts. But I beg of you, since you (as I fear) cannot stop his mouth, that you at least restrain yourselves and instruct others to refrain from using his words. For I am not a perjurer on account of receiving my promotions elsewhere. For both universities and you all know that I did not receive the first degree, in connection with which it is customary to give an oath, namely, that *in Bibliam*, at Erfurt, nor am I aware of having given an oath in my entire [academic] career. And the beginning with the Sentences [as *sententiarius*] I did indeed make at Erfurt, but that I gave an oath I believe no one will allege." (21a, 11. 12.) The second letter was written on December 21, 1514, and was addressed to "the Dean and the Doctors of the University of Erfurt." From this letter we quote: "I have, worthy sirs, fathers, and highly respected lords, heard a rumor concerning me, namely, that I am being accused . . . of breaking my oath because I received my doctor's degree at another place and not in Erfurt. . . . Above all things this is certain that I became a *baccalaureus (biblicus)* not at Erfurt, but at Wittenberg; for that reason I did not give an oath for attaining to the *baccalaureate (pro Biblia)*, a custom which, I hear, is practised in your institution. But since I had already disputed here [at Wittenberg] in order to receive the degree of *sententiarius* and had, on account of being called to Erfurt, delayed the completion, I was received by

your, or rather our, faculty, although with a good deal of difficulty. . . . This I have most certainly in memory, and I am not conscious of an oath." (21a, 15—17.) Luther then, in spite of the correctness of his position in the premises, modestly asks his former teachers to overlook and forgive any transgression of academic custom and usages, since such behavior would have to be charged to ignorance.

It seems that this letter finally settled the controversy, for his later relations with both the university and the convent at Erfurt, though not exactly cordial, were no longer strained. In fact, after Luther had been made *vicarius* of his order, he found no difficulty in appointing his friend Johann Lang prior of the Augustinian convent at Erfurt, as he writes on May 29, 1516. (21a, 25, 26.)

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Preaching on the Augsburg Confession.

The four-hundredth anniversary of Luther's Small Catechism, celebrated wherever the name of Luther was known, has undoubtedly been a source of richest blessing. Pastors and people became better acquainted with its history and contents, learned to appreciate this little book the more highly, and thanked God the more sincerely for this precious gift. The sermons preached on the Catechism during 1929 were not in vain, but productive of splendid results, so sure as Is. 55, 10, 11 still holds good. Let us hope that similar streams of blessing will flow from the celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, which rounds out the series of anniversaries begun in 1917. Though last, it is by no means the least in this series and certainly deserves to be celebrated throughout the Lutheran world. The President of Synod has appointed a committee which is to suggest ways and means for a fitting celebration of this important event. This committee has requested the editors to supply sermon material and to encourage the brethren to bring out in their sermons also the great importance of those epochal events of June 1530. True, our church periodicals are bringing interesting articles on the history of the Augustana, yet it is an indisputable fact that most of our people do not read their church-papers. (By the way, ought not and could not the year 1930 be made a banner year for our church periodicals? Would not that be a very fitting manner of celebrating this anniversary?) Yet we should fail to improve on a God-given opportunity if we failed to call the attention of our people also in public worship to this event of outstanding importance in the history of our Church. We therefore heartily endorse the suggestion of our Dr. L. Fuerbringer in the *Lutheraner* of Jan-