

7-1-1943

Kiefl on Luther

Wm. Dallmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dallmann, Wm. (1943) "Kiefl on Luther," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 14 , Article 42.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol14/iss1/42>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

the Lutheran Church." (See A. R. Wentz, *History of Gettysburg Seminary*, p. 120. *The Pastor's Monthly*, 1931, p. 268.) What, Luther praising the beauty of diversity, Luther tolerant of certain kinds of false teaching? Luther, who says: "There is nothing under the sun more evil and harmful than the venom of false doctrine. It works deadly, unspeakable harm; it leads men farther and farther away from God, into all kinds of abomination and blasphemy." (III:1873.)

Unity in diversity, divided and still one—do not let Luther hear such talk! Luther, who says: "Verflucht sei solche Liebe und Einigkeit in Abgrund der Hoelle, darum dass solche Einigkeit nicht allein die Christenheit jaemmerlich zertrennet, sondern sie, nach teuflischer Art, noch zu solchem ihrem Jammer spottet und naerret." (XX:773.)

(To be continued)

TH. ENGELDER

Kiefl on Luther

"Luther's fundamental error of the whole system is that in the work of salvation God does everything and man nothing."

So wrote the late Franz Xaver Kiefl, Dean of the Cathedral of Regensburg and before that professor of dogmatics in Wuerzburg, in *Hochland* of October, 1917. His article is "Martin Luther's Religious Psyche the Root of a Modern World Picture," reprinted in 1922 as "Catholic World-View and Modern Thought."

That is Luther's fundamental truth of the whole system.

"Words of wonderful power of imagination" Kiefl calls Luther's description of his desperate condition, which he quotes:

"He has felt these pains of hell often and every time in the very shortest time. They were, however, so fearful and hellish, that no tongue can tell it, no pen write it, no uninitiated believe it. Were they completed or lasted half an hour or only the tenth part of an hour, he would be destroyed and all his bones turned to ashes. Then God appears terribly angry and at the same time with Him all creation. Then there is no escape, no comfort, neither within nor without, but all around only accusation. Then man in tears says with Holy Writ: 'I am cut off from before Thine eyes,' Ps. 31:22, and he dares not even say: 'O Lord rebuke me not in Thine anger,' Ps. 6:1. In this moment the soul strangely cannot believe ever to be redeemed. It only feels the punishment is not yet completed. And yet the punishment is eternal, and one cannot hold it for temporary. There remains only a naked longing for help and a fearful sighing. But the soul knows not where to

seek help. It is so to speak stretched out with Christ so that all bones can be told. There is no corner in it but what is full of the bitterest bitterness, fears, terrors, and sorrow, and that with the feeling they are eternal. When a bullet glides over a straight line, every touched spot of the line bears the whole bullet but does not grasp the whole bullet. Thus the soul, when the eternal inundation flows over it, feels nothing and drinks nothing but the eternal pain. But this does not last, but passes over. It is a hell pain, that unbearable, all comfort-excluding terror," Weimar, I:557.

"Luther's point of departure for his whole religious ideal is the Biblical thought of God's all-working, which he grasped so deeply but onesidedly that he replaced it with God's alone-working. Then man knows himself safe in the hands of a wise, mighty, and gracious father."

A happy salvation. What more does one want from religion?

"Luther proclaimed the religious sovereignty of the individual. The simple ground thought of his whole system of religious individualism was this: God Himself works all in the religious individual, and the individual nothing. The word of Scripture is the only enkindler of this life."

"In his *Galatians* Luther has pointed out this as the main attraction for his first followers. 'I well remember Dr. Staupitz in the beginning, when the Gospel arose, said to me: 'That comforts me most that this teaching of the Gospel gives all honor and praise to God and none to man. Now it is clear as day one can never give God too much honor.' In this mistake rests the ground-fault of the whole system."

"Luther himself said, 'Take this away, then he would have no reason for having undertaken his work?'"

"Much more justly — than by Erasmus and his modern admirers — is Luther judged by the Catholic Church, which in its deeper schools and better heads admits the justifiable in the religious beginning of Luther.

"Moehler says: 'In Protestantism the religious element is the brighter side, the ethical the darker. No one will miss the religious element in Protestantism who will recall the concept of divine Providence which Luther formed. . . . According to that all appearances in the human world are God's own work, and man only God's instrument. . . . Who can here misunderstand the religious view of all things? 'God is all in all.'"

"The Council of Trent unreservedly approved the justified thoughts in Luther's system without approving the excesses. Far from resting satisfied with the shallow pelagianizing of the argumentation of Erasmus, it with enormous intellectual labor made a careful separation between the divine and the human factors

in the work of salvation and just thereby most thoroughly uprooted Luther's system. It asserted an activity of man. The difference seems small, but it is of enormous importance. To Trent belongs the honor that in the mighty spirit-storm it saved liberty, the Palladium of all culture, in its deepest religious root.

"Erasmus, the idol of humanism, the much-lauded intellectual hero, could write: 'The Kaiser invites me to him in Spain, King Ferdinand to Vienna, Margaret to Brabant, the English king to England, Sigmund to Poland, Francis to France, and all with rich salaries.'

"With his world view of the free, unspoiled human nature he stood innerly much more estranged from the Church than Luther, but fought it only with dignified skepticism. Therefore Luther with fine psychology faulted him, he loved to talk about the sores and misery of the Church so as to force the readers to laugh instead of with deep sighs duly lament before God.

"How little he understood Luther is shown by the fact that he published 'the crown of his writings' against Luther's ground-dogma of the *Unfree Will*, but which is the proof he had not entered into the depth of the religious problem. He wrote weakly, and skeptically hesitant, everywhere neglecting the deeper religious side of the problem.

"In his *Unfree Will* Luther laid down his religious standpoint without reserve, yes, to the uttermost sharpness of paradox." No other writing is in like manner informing for his religious psychology.

For the Christians the only and greatest comfort in all troubles is to know God does not lie, but does all things unalterably; against His will there is no opposition, no possibility of change, no hindrance.

"Luther's ground-thought of the unfreedom of man he built up over all parts of the Church teaching structure into a compact speculative system.

"Theologians like Taube speak of an unchristian, fatalistic, mechanical God-idea of Luther and stress it to such a degree that we must even defend Luther because just he stresses God's freedom and holiness in the most gripping manner.

"We must also ascribe to Luther as a merit that though he often stands hard at the border of pantheism, he has never overstepped that line, much as some ideas of mysticism could seduce him.

"Luther's fundamental idea, which gave its impress to the Reformation for centuries, was in the beginning doubtless religious, but also philosophic and metaphysical, which in its logical out-workings had to attack and overturn not only the alleged practical abuses, but also the whole dogmatic system of the Church. . . .

Luther's teaching pierced the heart of Christendom, touching not only the abuses, of which there surely were enough, but also injuring the innermost life-nerve" of Romanism.

* * *

"Luther's justification leads to moral laxity," Catholics charge.

Kiefl says such objections only sharpen and poison the conflict. Luther does not wish to oppose the human works of faith to the human works of morality, but the work of God to the work of man. There is no dead faith. In the preface to *Romans* and in *Galatians* Luther scoffs at this alleged dead faith as an utterly useless, lazy, dead thing. "If faith is God's work, it is always active."

* * *

"Luther was wrong in claiming he was the first to unlock the meaning of the 'righteousness of God' in Rom. 1:16, 17," asserts Denifle. The Church ever taught the just man is rendered just by God's justification and understood the term just like Luther. With stupendous learning he dug up over sixty scholars as witnesses, and so Luther merely made a clumsy re-discovery of an old truth. Even some Protestants were bluffed into agreeing Luther was wrong.

The Catholic Kiefl proves the learned Catholic Denifle wrong and the clumsy Luther right. He declares Catholics teach in every stage man freely works together with God while Luther teaches the work is God's alone; justifying faith is exclusively the work of God. Prof. S. Merkle agrees with Kiefl.

Lawyer W. S. Lilly, Secretary of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, says: "It is certain that this doctrine, however we may feel towards it, was Luther's own particular and original deduction from the Pauline Epistles. Not a trace of it is to be found in any theologian from the second to the sixteenth century."

Prof. Lucien Febvre of Strassburg says: "Denifle is mistaken. The Church teaches by justification God only recognizes merit that man has acquired by a moral exertion undertaken 'under the impulse of and with the aid of divine grace.' Justification eliminates sin, but it leaves to natural virtue its role, its part, and its efficacy.

"For Luther, on the other hand, justification leaves sin untouched and affords no room for natural morality. The righteousness of man is fundamentally irreconcilable with the righteousness of God. Original sin is, as Luther expresses it in his *Commentary to the Romans*, a defect of any rightness or efficacy whether of body or of soul, whether of the inner or the outer man. In brief, a complete opposition to God. We judge a man is justified by faith, apart from works of the law. Rom. 1:16, 17.

"An invention of Luther's, this discovery in the tower? No. A gift of God to be carried aloft that all men might reverence it on its own transcendent account.

"A teaching of peace and also of power. But for this one would not know how to explain that burst of virile power and above all the audacity of the fighter of 1517.

"This gift of faith unites God and man and fills him with the love of the good. 'Not to do good is not to love God.' This joy of union with God spurs on to action for God; life is a progress from good to better till the last breath. Justification by faith is a store of dynamic energy. God's love gave itself to man in order that man might give himself to God.

"Every line of the letter Luther wrote Albrecht of Mainz on October 11, 1517, is that of a man with God on his side and within him."

* * *

"Luther's fundamental tendency was to fell every dogma and with his fiducial faith make disposition alone decisive."

Kiefl declares this is the modern trend which finds support in Denifle and Weiss for the first phase of Luther's development.

"So far can scientific criticism fall into error. . . . Never has Luther stood for such an undogmatic Christianity."

* * *

"Luther makes God the Author of Sin," is a charge often made.

Kiefl writes: It was plainly the religious feeling that hindered Luther from building out the dangerous predestination thought with the ruthlessness of a Calvin. And when one knows the horrible utterances of a Calvin, Beza, and Zwingli about God as the author of evil, one will never in this manner find the awe of God's holiness violated by Luther, also not in respect to the "hidden" God, whom he places against the "revealed" God. He did not thereby wish to carry the moral antinomy into God's being, like Calvin. Luther's "hidden" God means an antinomy in human reason, not in revelation and the Divine Being.

"Calvin wrote: 'God sneaks into the hearts of the non-elect and works an appearance of good to have an excuse for damning them.' Luther was never guilty of anything like that."

* * *

"Luther began with the libertinistic destruction of the Church authority and then later put together his dogmatic system," says Denifle.

Kiefl says Denifle is wrong. "It is just Luther's dogmatic ground-thought of the all-working of God that Luther forcefully

carried through in the whole field of the conception of salvation. For Luther everything depended on this, and where he met opposition, it inflamed him to uncanny energy and passionate severity."

* * *

"Luther is the Antichrist," said Dietenberger, and others have said it for four hundred years.

"The Papacy is the Antichrist," said Luther, and many earnest Catholics before Luther and hundreds of scholars after Luther.— See Hans Preuss, *Der Antichrist*. 1906.

Karl Pearson, by no manner of means friendly to Luther, declares: "It is impossible to escape the dilemma: the orthodox Christian must regard Luther either as nigh inspired of God or else as a child of the Devil. There can be no reconciliation of Lutheranism and Catholicism; if the teaching of the one is true, the doctrine of the other is false. An 'Interim' would be no more successful today than it was in 1548."

Father Bertrand Weaver, C. P., in *America* of April 27, 1940: "The Pope is either the supreme head of Christendom, the infallible teacher of infallible truth, the successor of St. Peter, and the vicar of Christ on earth, or he is an impostor with whom no respectable person should have dealings."

"Now popes and cardinals have become antichrists!" cried Canon Tizio of Siena at Leo X, whose court has been called "a great classical bacchanalia and a monstrous orgy of paganism." Bishop Stafileo called Rome "the whore of Babylon."

The Catholic Friedrich von Kerz speaks of "that eternally disgraceful period" of Alexander VI, Julius II, and Leo X, and cries out, "No wonder Luther saw the working of the Antichrist in such a hierarchy."

Sebastian Merkle, Catholic Professor of Church History at Wuerzburg, says in "Luther in Oekumenischer Sicht": "That Luther believed to see the work of Antichrist in such a hierarchy ought to be conceivable."

Kiefl speaks of Luther as "the man with the deep religious spirit which has scattered such pearls in his hymns and writings; the man with the mighty will, who has started his work with such unmeasured energy as rarely in history an idea has been carried through; the man with the enormous language genius, who belongs to the real language creators of our nation. For just herein rests the uncanny power of his influence on the popular masses. . . ."

"A light-beam of mental-clear logic lights into the turbulent depths of Luther's religious psyche. Luther's dogmatic ground-idea was in the religious field. God alone is active in the spirit of man and every addition of man's doing must be rejected as an

abomination and blasphemy. If that was right, then a Church with demands such as the Catholic must make was really devil's work and the pope as the Vicar of Christ was the Antichrist. And Luther believed he had to fight the Antichrist."

* * *

"Luther's violent language against the Papacy is mere scoffing," say Catholics.

Kiefl denies it and holds "this soul phenomenon has so far not been made clear enough. Only Grisar is on the right track, asserting a deep and serious connection between that and his whole soul constitution, his innermost thought of the heart. We can more definitely designate the spiritual soil, out of which grew Luther's most violent polemic, which lets us look deeper than anything else into Luther's soul. Luther holds every working together of man in his own salvation is to be cast away as a blasphemous thought. Then the more must a mingling of divine and human, as it lies in the Catholic idea of the Church as an external saving institution and mediator of grace, appear outright as something Satanic and anti-divine.

"This uttermost consequence of the Lutheran justification thought it is which utters itself in the terrific expressions about the hierarchy and the Catholic priest-consecration, not the anger at pall money, bishop tax, and alleged indulgence traffic. He himself points out Hus did not attack the Papacy innerly, but only criticized moral abuses. 'But I have attacked the teaching and bit off the Pope's heart.'

"He that at the beginning had appealed to the Pope and then to a Council for his new teaching now was conscious that this teaching uprooted every external church, and in the last years of his life, when the Church got ready in a Council to sit in judgment on his teaching, his whole inner man reared up to defend the dogmatic ground-idea of his life and to attack the Papacy as the heart of the churchly unity.

"Only the firm conviction that he was defending the really highest life-question of religion, a conviction that also elsewhere uttered itself in the cry: 'Thus God rushes me,' forms a psychological explanation for the fierce heat of soul excitement that meets us in the polemic against the Church. According to his dogmatic concept he simply regarded as an impulse of the Spirit of God the powerful drive of an idea which dominated him with uncanny force and grew to enormous strength in the struggles which it had to sustain in inner and outer crisis. . . .

"Against the Catholic idea of the external Church being a mediator of God's grace Luther's dogmatic ground-idea rose with uncanny force and violence. There is perhaps in all the history of human polemic nothing comparable in intensity of passionate

488 Outlines on Old Testament Texts (Synodical Conference)

eruption to Luther when he comes to speak of the Roman hierarchy and its head, the Papacy. His treatise *Against the Papacy at Rome Founded by the Devil*, written in the feeling of approaching death . . . is calculated, mental-clear, and *raffiniert*. Language did not seem to him to suffice for the inner heat, and he thought up the notorious cartoons on the Papacy which he called his testament. . . . Even his friends were fearful over some of the 'figures'; but Luther claimed to be driven by the Spirit of God. Luther was without doubt a deep psychologist who knew his age."

* * *

"Luther's Sanctification is purely external," declares Denifle. Alfons Victor Mueller, a former Dominican, replies: "Denifle is in error. Luther teaches in baptism or justification the Christian receives a new, clean heart, from which good works come. God and Christ dwell in the soul whose sanctification has begun and must grow, as we read in the Smalcald Articles and elsewhere. These good works growing out of faith are indeed not perfect, but God in mercy so receives them. This is taught by Augustine, Pope Leo the Great, and Pseudo-Hugo of St. Victor."

* * *

"Luther, there is nothing divine in you" — is Denifle's dramatic dictum in summing up his work.

The Catholic Professor S. Merkle comments, "The Protestants could retort, this applies no less to Pope Alexander VI, whom the Catholics hold the vicar of Christ and 'holy Father,' also the Protestants hold Christ the founder of their religion and not Luther and revere Luther only as the proclaimer and explainer of the Gospel, and their faith does not depend on his person."

In April, 1942, in the Union Seminary Library in New York City a Catholic said, "Kiefl was my teacher. A wonderful article on Luther from his pen in *Hochland* 1917."

We found the *Hochland* in the University of Chicago library. It shows lies about Luther can be refuted by candid Catholics.
Oak Park, Ill. WM. DALLMANN



**Outlines on Old Testament Texts
(Synodical Conference)**

Third Sunday after Trinity

2 Chron. 33:9-16

Students of history follow a twofold purpose; they wish to know the events that have occurred in the world, and they seek to discover the forces that led to those events. Bible readers should