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# Luther's View of Man in His Early German Writings

By HEINZ BLUHM

(EDITORIAL NOTE: Readers of our journal will not be surprised to find essays dealing with Luther in this October issue, the month in which the Reformation Festival is observed. Nevertheless this article as well as the following one have some unusual features. Both are the product of the same author. He presented them as a guest lecturer at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., in the Lyceum Program of the students on March 12 and 13 of this year. When at the end of the second article he refers to himself as a "profane" student of Luther, he indicates that he is not a theologian by profession. In his own field of endeavor, however, Dr. Bluhm holds a distinguished position: at Yale University he is head of the largest department of Germanics in this country. In these articles he demonstrates that in his pursuit of humanistic studies he has also acquired theological competence, rarely found among "profane" scholars. In publishing these lectures we are therefore motivated not merely by the desire to let a layman have his say and to say it as he sees it, but we are convinced of their intrinsic merit as contributions to the study of Luther. We hope furthermore that his plea to read the works of the great Reformer, as he evidently has done to a degree that puts many professional theologians to shame, will not go unheeded.)

When Luther's first essay, *Die Sieben puszpsalm*, appeared in the spring of 1517, it met with instantaneous success. The reception accorded the German works of the next few years was similarly, even increasingly, enthusiastic. Martin Luther was, from his initial literary venture, easily the most widely read and influential writer in the German language in the second decade of the 16th century, from 1517 on to be exact if we ignore a brief but profound preface to his important first edition of the *Theologia Germanica* of the year before. The author of approximately thirty

significant treatises in the vernacular between 1517 and 1520 was the favorite of the German reading public, a distinction that was to remain his for many years to come. In this lecture we must restrict ourselves to the first four or five years of Luther's literary activity in the language of the people.

What was it that caught the popular fancy? It could not really have been the style, certainly not in 1517 and 1518. The German in the first two or three years of Luther's writing is still awkward. The man who was soon to emerge as one of the greatest masters of the German tongue, if not indeed its greatest master, was still in the first stages of trying his wings. The power, the irony, and the sheer brilliance so evident in his works after 1520 or even 1519 are still lacking in the first pieces, though there are passages here and there pointing in the direction of the later supreme mastery. Yet it was these labored, heavy-handed early efforts to express what he had to say that won him a very large reading public — a public that eagerly snapped up everything that came from his pen. I am persuaded it must have been the ideas Luther had to propose that gained him his extensive audience. It was primarily what the man had to tell and not how he told it that compelled the intensive interest of his first readers.

If one examines closely all of Luther's early writings, one finds that, despite their amazing variety of subject matter, they are

fundamentally unified and definitely oriented in the same direction: they all have one and the same goal. Luther himself recognized this noteworthy fact publicly when he confessed in a celebrated passage toward the end of *Die Sieben pszpsalm* that he was indeed playing on but one string and singing but one melody: . . . *nit meer dan auff einer seyten lyren und nur ein lidleyn singen* (WA 1, 219). It was essentially a single message, vigorously and relentlessly presented, that took instant possession of the head and heart of his vast audience. A readily discernible thread runs through all his early—and for that matter his later—writings, a basic approach to life that even a casual reader could not miss.

In order to see Luther's immense success in a larger perspective we should be fully aware that the young Augustinian's voice was definitely not the voice of one crying in the wilderness. One should never forget that there were many writers on religion and morality. Genuine interest in matters religious ran high in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This was reflected in the enormous amount of religious literature available in German throughout the land. The humanist Sebastian Brant put it this way in his famous *Narrenschiff* of 1494:

*All land sind ietz vol heilger gschrift  
und was der selen heil antrift,  
bibel, der heiligen väter ler  
und ander der glich bucher mer.*

(From the *vorred*)

Whatever else may be said about what was hardly more than *Gebrauchsliteratur*—Sebastian Brant for one was quite sure it did not really lead to amendment of life—there was no dearth of it in the decades before the Reformation.

What was young Luther's place in this maelstrom of religious publications? Since he was manifestly listened to in the confusion of the many voices clamoring for attention, it is rather safe to assume that Martin Luther must somehow have impressed the people as speaking with more authority than his rivals did. There must have been from the start an unmistakable individuality about this man, something that set him clearly apart from the rest of the writing guild. If readers flocked to him in ever-increasing numbers it was because he had things to say that they did not read elsewhere and that proved to be singularly meaningful to them. From the mass of the religious literature of the early 16th century Luther's writings visibly stood out by their immediate success. Though his first attempts to express himself in the vernacular were scarcely literary masterpieces, they were permeated with the ardor of a powerful personality straining every nerve to deliver himself of a vital message. There was an infectious inevitability about the man and his persuasive words. No reader of the early German works can fail to be swept off his feet by the personal involvement of the author. Every line he writes is aquiver with the excitement of a profound experience for which he is trying ever so hard to find adequate words so as to have others share it. The writer of these successful essays was evidently fulfilling the Nietzschean formula for truly effective communication: *Von allem Geschriebenen liebe ich nur das, was einer mit seinem Blute schreibt*. What was young Luther writing about—in blood?

His chief topic is the Christian religion. Every word he wrote about it shows that

he has endeavored to appropriate it with his whole mind. But in the very process of coming into his Christian heritage he had made a startling discovery: what his contemporaries called Christianity was not Christianity at all as he saw it.

Luther had actually known this for several years prior to the publication of his first work in the spring of 1517, almost six months before the epoch-making Ninety-five Theses. But before that year of decision he had presented this electrifying matter only to his fellow monks and students in the relative safety of the traditional Latin. Early in 1517 he took the fateful step of moving his case out of monastic walls and academic halls into the much wider arena of the German-reading lay public. Here was an author, excited and exciting, who was trying to put into idiomatic German what he had so far expressed only in the language of medieval scholarship. These early German pages are alive with meaning, whatever their relative linguistic inadequacy. It is the substance that matters in these first essays of Germany's mightiest writer.

There is sorrow, disappointment, anger in his voice. There is also determination that things must improve. Luther is profoundly disturbed because something has happened to the religion of his fathers, something extremely serious. His shocking charge is that Christianity has lost its identity and surrendered its genius. Perhaps one can express Luther's feelings best by slightly changing a famous passage from Goethe's *Faust*:

*Die ihm das Leben gaben, herrliche Gefühle,  
Erstarrten in dem irdischen Gewühle.*

The fiery young professor is persuaded that the church of his day is out of joint. He

is equally persuaded, after much travail of soul, that he was born to set it right. But unlike Hamlet he did not really complain about the gigantic task before him. Quite the contrary, once he had fully realized the inevitability of the tremendous struggle he undertook it resolutely with complete faith in the rightness of his cause. This irreversible decision to go ahead gives every word its unmistakable Lutheran ring.

Luther is infinitely troubled by the Christian idea of man that seemed to prevail in his time. He found it wanting in depth. Worse than that, he thought it was not Christian at all. What he saw in the world about him was an idea of man that was apparently a compromise between theology and philosophy. This confusion he could not tolerate. He was sure it was to blame for many of the ills of the church. A restoration of a thoroughly Christian view of man was desperately needed. With this analysis of the crisis in the church it is hardly surprising that the concept of man should loom so large in his early German writings.

How does Lutheran man differ from late medieval Roman Catholic man? That is the basic question of Luther's early essays. To give a succinct preliminary answer: Lutheran man rigorously eliminates each and every accretion to Pauline man that the centuries between Paul and Luther have permitted to occur. What young Luther insists on again and again is what his generation, or any generation for that matter, is ever so reluctant to hear: man's thoroughgoing sinfulness. Although post-Pauline and pre-Lutheran Christianity never completely abandoned this disturbingly harsh view of man, it did allow claims to some human dignity be-

fore God to dilute the austere Pauline picture of the sinful nature of man. It is against this progressive weakening of Paul's severe concept that young Luther protests with passionate vigor. Anything less than the full measure of Paul's analysis of the human situation will not do for Luther. Only the unaltered Pauline approach satisfies him.

There is something deeply moving about the personal intensity with which Luther defends Paul and attacks contemporary theological thought and, especially, religious practice. Luther takes extraordinary pains to tell his readers why, against the spirit of the times, he subscribes to the uncomfortable views held by Paul. There is an astonishingly high degree of spiritual affinity between the two men, with Luther fully appropriating the relevant thinking of his chief master in matters religious. A close reading of Luther shows that his fundamental agreement with Paul is not based merely on the external authority of this greatest single human figure in the Christian tradition. The impression is inescapable that Paul's deepest insights struck home with Luther. One is reminded of Goethe's first acquaintance with Shakespeare or of Nietzsche's first reading of Schopenhauer.

Small wonder that Luther in his earliest writings with their less than perfect mastery of the German language is most eloquent when he portrays human sinfulness. It is very important to understand fully what Luther means by sin. If we fail to grasp his literally staggering idea of sin, we shall never do justice to the genius of Luther or fathom his profundities.

It can scarcely be stated too emphatically or repeated too often that young

Luther does not inveigh primarily against obvious transgressions of the Ten Commandments. He is concerned with a much deeper layer of the human personality. It goes without saying that he expressed his extreme displeasure with gross sin as a matter of course. It is equally true that he does not dwell on it at great length. Everybody else does. There is no compelling reason why Luther, occupied with more subtle things, should merely add one more voice to the universal disapproval of sin in its clearly visible manifestations. His was the searching mind penetrating to regions not accessible to most writers of his own or any other age.

Sin, as normally understood, is definitely not Luther's chief topic in his analysis of the human condition. He probes far deeper. What usually passes for sin is altogether too superficial an interpretation of the principal fact of life on the Lutheran level: an all-pervasive sense of total human inadequacy in the sight of God. Anything short of this shattering experience is branded by Luther as pre-Christian or extra-Christian. He is a Christian thinker determined to live forever on the heights and in the depths of what Paul taught him to regard as genuine Christian insight into the nature of man. Luther will not budge an inch from this hard-won position. The word compromise does not exist in his vocabulary. Having wrestled with the idea of sin as few men ever have, he makes his readers feel on every page that he knows exactly what he is talking about. Disturbing and unsettling as his picture of man is, it is set forth with disarming power and winsome persuasiveness. Luther has his readers hanging on his lips.

As he relentlessly presents the matter, sin runs deep in human life. It reaches into our most hidden recesses. Take for example Luther's early interpretation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." For Luther its meaning is in no way exhausted by the explicit injunction to abstain from taking human life. So far as I can see, he goes even beyond the extension of its scope in the Sermon on the Mount. He is not willing to let things go at the level of avoiding anger with one's brother. Luther is not primarily concerned with the "Thou shalt not" aspect of the commandment. He insists that man, Christian man, rise to a far-reaching positive interpretation of all its implications. The essence of this commandment, he argues, is missed if one remains within the merely preventive and negative area of its applicability. For Luther the assumption is that decent human beings, whether Christians or not, do not resort to murder in the first place. The substance of this commandment for him is rather a voluntary, even joyous, coming to the aid of others. It is basic to a real understanding of Luther's thought that the words "voluntary" and "joyous" are taken at their face value. Just helping one's neighbor is not enough *coram Deo*. This help must not be grudgingly given. It must be utterly spontaneous and freely offered, from a heart overflowing with altruism and generosity. Anything short of this inner attitude is unacceptable in the sight of God. As Luther sees it, all those who do not fully measure up to this high standard of excellence are breaking the commandment. In his eyes it is a grievous sin to fail to live up to this indispensable requirement of utterly voluntary, eager help extended to others.

Luther insists on *grundlich senfftmüt* as a necessary inner attitude: *dar jamert das hertz alles ubel, was seynem feynd widderferet* (WA 6, 267). Only those who aspire to these heights of behavior are recognized by him as *die rechten kind und erb gottis, und bruder Christi, der fur uns alle also than hat an dem heyligen creutz*.

This single example must suffice to suggest what young Luther means by sin. It is never a question of just adhering to the letter of the Law. The commandment must be richly and generously interpreted. Beyond refraining from murder a true Christian is expected by Luther to live up to any and all of the positive implications of the commandment. These must be executed with a cheerful heart eager to rush to the help of others.

Luther was the first to grant, with infinite sadness, that no man is capable of fulfilling this or any other commandment interpreted with such severity. In his first major essay of the great year 1520, *Von den guten werckenn*, Luther discusses all the commandments in the same searching manner. Unless all possible positive implications of all the commandments are fulfilled with gladness and perfect eagerness, man is a sinner before God even if he may succeed in impressing his vastly less critical and perceptive fellow-men with his apparent goodness. What matters is the judgment of God and not that of men. That is young Luther's immutable view.

It is hard to deny that Luther's concept of sin is profound. But as every student of the Reformation knows, so are all aspects of his prodigious theology. The more closely one reads his works, the superb Latin lectures as well as the challenging German essays, the more one is impressed

with the essential rightness of his claim that nothing less than his inexorable analysis of the human situation before God will do justice to the peculiar genius of Christianity.

It is of crucial importance to realize that young Luther was sure no other religion or philosophy he knew anything about had so profound a concept of sin as Christianity. This was one of the major reasons why Luther clung to it as tenaciously as he did. He had examined non-Christian views and found them wanting. He was not really surprised at that. But he was shocked no end and deeply hurt that the church of his day appeared to have given up this distinguishing heritage. What he could not brook under any circumstances was that Christianity was no longer concerned with its ultimate insights. He thought he had observed at close range that the very core of the Christian religion had been surrendered in favor of a reintroduction of pre-Christian and extra-Christian moral standards. With all his might he hurled himself against the leveling-out process he was witnessing all around him. He was determined to undo the fearful damage done to what he held dearer than life itself. Men must again take sin seriously. After reading Martin Luther many of them did.

Those who listened to his analysis of their real condition were soon crying for help. What should they do in their plight? What does Christian man, specifically Lutheran man, do in the very uncomfortable situation in which Luther had placed him? Stern young Luther had his readers where he wanted them. He had them where he had been himself a few years before. He wanted them to realize

that the divine law demanded the impossible from them. He wanted them to try to live up to it and to fail as he had failed after trying as hard as anyone ever had.

Luther was more than ready to show them the way out of their predicament. But in order for them to appreciate to the full the incredible solution of their problem he had first wanted them to see that there was a problem and that their problem was infinitely more serious than they had been led to think by the church of their time.

It will always be a very moving experience to read young Luther's dramatic presentation of the way out of the immense difficulty in which man finds himself. The sternness and sadness of Luther the moralist yield to the exultation and rapture of Luther the evangelist.

Luther is literally overwhelmed by the mercy of God. The reader feels that Luther is shaken to the core of his being. He is stirred beyond words that it was God who took the initiative in man's precarious situation, and he marveled day and night at God's decision to help helpless man. Young Luther thought he could never fully exhaust this greatest of miracles; the old Luther was still trying to grasp this central fact of the divine-human encounter. God's intervention meant that man merely had to accept the divine hand so graciously extended to him.

But this seemingly simple fact is beset with extraordinary difficulties for man. It is simple only on the surface and in theory. In reality it is one of the most difficult things, so difficult in fact that man cannot take advantage of the divine offer under his own power. Accepting the outstretched hand of God is impossible without divine

grace. Young Luther tried valiantly to make this rock-bottom experience crystal clear to his readers.

Thus Luther's amazingly profound sense of sin was accompanied by an equally profound apprehension and appreciation of divine grace. The two went hand in hand. The deeper young Luther's sense of sin, the deeper his awareness of grace. The intimate relationship between these two forces impresses itself indelibly upon the reader's mind.

The inner logic of the necessity of humbly accepting salvation seemed irrefutable to young Luther. But he knew only too well that men do not think or act logically. Observing others and looking into his own heart he realized why man has such a hard time to accept the apparently simple divine solution of his plight before God: human pride, indomitable human pride. This ineluctable fact of human life stands in the way of taking the proffered hand of God. It is wholly impossible for sinful man to renounce his ineradicable urge to make a more or less substantial contribution to his basic situation vis-à-vis God. Vaguely aware of his guilt before God, man fancies he can do his share toward setting himself right with Him.

At this very point the main difficulty arises. God is utterly unwilling to accept man's cooperation toward his salvation. No matter how well meant man's efforts in the direction of moral improvement may be, they just do not count with God. As we have seen, according to Luther there remains in all human striving an inextinguishable element of egoism. This may be so hidden and refined that it can scarcely be recognized. Nevertheless it is there. As

long as a trace of the ego is present in the intended or executed moral act, it is immoral before God though not necessarily in the eyes of men. But since it is definitely a question of God's judgment and not of man's, man stands condemned. Luther insists that the hope of reward must be wholly absent as the motive of the action. A good deed to be held good by God must proceed from a pure heart unconcerned with reaping reward or, for that matter, with escaping punishment. Moreover, good deeds must be done altogether voluntarily and joyously; they must never be wrested from an unwilling heart. It is absolutely imperative that they spring from a heart jubilantly inclined toward the good, the wholly good. Measured by these Lutheran yardsticks human actions invariably and inescapably fall far short of their goal. The God of Martin Luther refuses to recognize what from His point of view are impure deeds.

It is manifest that this situation constitutes an impasse. God's demands are beyond man's power. God intervened out of unfathomable grace. All man needs to do is to accept. But he must accept without reservation. He must ever keep himself on the receiving end of this unheard-of relationship. It is the duty of man to realize with humility that his salvation is a gift with all that this word implies. He must never yield to the formidable temptation of presuming to be able to earn even the minutest part of this salvation. Knowing himself as well as he does, Luther reminds his readers again and again to be on their guard and to recognize that it is a matter of the utmost difficulty to refrain from the understandable desire to add something of their very own. Paul him-



self did not say more forcefully than Luther that complete dependence on divine grace is the only proper course of action or rather inaction, if this dangerous word is correctly understood. In young Luther's view of man total divine grace is pitted against total human sinfulness. The full acceptance of both is indispensable.

Against this dark as well as ultimately bright backdrop of the human situation the life of the workaday world unfolds. It will always be disconcerting to live with the realization that the light of reason does not shine in man's relation to God or rather God's relation to man. Reason does not lead either to the recognition of utter human sinfulness or to the full acceptance of divine grace. As a matter of fact it is this very reason which refuses to take seriously the idea of totally disabling human sin as well as the idea of totally saving divine grace. Reason insists on some degree of human dignity even before God. It rejects the shocking idea of the all-sufficiency of divine grace. Young Luther makes it perfectly plain that he too is upset that the light of reason fails to illuminate the ultimate regions where God and man meet. Though reason does not necessarily fight the idea of some divine aid, it vigorously fights the claim of sole divine action. With all the persuasiveness at his command young Luther appeals to his readers to leave defiant reason behind and move on into the dark realm of faith. Only faith, he pleads mightily, is ready to accept man's utter inadequacy and God's all-encompassing adequacy.

What are some of the principal implications of this picture of man as Luther so vividly portrays it in his early German

writings? In order to understand the sometimes startling yet always perfectly logical conclusions Luther draws regarding everyday living we must ever bear in mind that he had his being in the ultimates of faith. The world in which we live does not make it easy to follow his analysis and recommendations.

First and foremost, Luther is emphatic in his demand that man regard himself as a stranger on earth, an exile in the full sense of the word. It behooves him to fix his gaze unerringly upon the world to come. Luther is not surprised that proud reason refuses to acknowledge this necessity. For him faith and faith alone lead to living on these perilous heights. Without divine grace man can never center his attention on heavenly things alone: . . . *keyn mensch ist so volkomen, der mit warheit sagen muge, . . . er hab nichts, er sey gantz frembd . . . , dan die natur sucht ye etwas auff erden und an got ym himel nit genugen lest* (WA 2, 83f). Natural man cannot divorce himself wholly from the earth as he ought to upon becoming a Christian. He cannot help looking for something down here because he finds it impossible to concentrate on God and heaven exclusively. Luther, who introduced wholesome aspects of the sternness of monastic life into the larger world, was the first to grant that it tries a man's soul to behave as a Christian.

The real Christian, tremblingly aware that earth is not his home, actually longs to depart this life, yearns for death. He is unceasingly troubled by the ineluctable fact of sin permeating all phases and recesses of human existence. It is a source of unending pain to him that God's name, which should be kept holy, is taken in

vain in so many places. Young Luther is ineffably saddened by what he sees and hears round about him. His overwhelming desire is to live in an atmosphere where the name of God is revered and glorified. There is just too much irreverence on earth. The praise of God cannot be duly sung in this foreign land. Luther's ardent wish to be rid of sin prompts his consuming longing for the heavenly home. His soul utters this prayer:

*O vater unser, der du bist in den hymmeln, wir deyne kind auff erden, von dir gesunder, ym elend, wye ein gross mittel ist zwischen dir und uns, wye soln wir ymer beim kummen tzu dir yn unser vater landt. (WA 2, 128)*

God replies to the soul's quest to return home:

*Eyn kyndt eret seynen vatter und ein knecht seynen hern. Byn ich dann ewer vatter, wo ist meyn ebre? Bynn ich ewer herr, wo ist meyn forcht unnd ebrerbietung? dan meyn beyliger name wirt bey unnd durch euch gelestert und voruneret. (WA 2, 128)*

The burden of this dialogue between God and the human soul is that nobody can sing God's praise *yn frembden landen* and that therefore it is the soul's ever growing aspiration to leave this earth and *heim kummen . . . yn unser vater landt*.

There is in young Luther an ultimate concern with God and with the proper service of God. Religion alone matters in his life. Utter dissatisfaction with the deep-seated sinfulness of life leads to a thorough hatred of this life, which falls so disastrously short of the glory man should have before God.

Although the desire to die early is strong, life on earth must be endured until

it pleases God to remove man from this unsatisfactory earthly scene. Aside from the basic all-pervasive feeling that man is far away from home, there is the undeniable fact of suffering as long as life lasts in this vale of tears. Men are hunted down and pursued mercilessly by all kinds of misfortune. Luther is persuaded that reason and daily experience suffice, or ought to suffice, to show us the essential misery of life. There is according to Luther only one source of true comfort in the persisting troubles of human existence: the Word of God with its revelation, sufficient for us, of the Why, Whence, and Whither of life. Young Luther speaks most eloquently of the hunger and thirst of the soul in its distress:

*Da ist der rechte hunger und durst der selen, Da seneth sie sich nach trost und hulff, und ist gar vil schwerer dyser hunger, dan der leipliche. (WA 2, 106)*

But in the midst of this travail a helpful hand is stretched out:

*Es hat uns got auff erden gelassen vil unglucks und da bey keynen andern trost, dan sein heiliges wort . . . Es ist schon beschlossen und wirt nyemant anderen, das in der werlt unfrid, in Christo unser frid ist. (WA 2, 106)*

The end of this life of wretchedness is death. Salvation from death is possible only and exclusively through Christ. There is no other way anywhere. And before death claims us we actually live in much darkness. We know only in part. God in His vastness is fundamentally unknown to us. All we know and can ever hope to know of Him is what He revealed to us. Luther often said that he would like to have many more questions answered than are answered, but he recognized, with a

heavy heart to be sure, the inexorable fact that God saw fit to remove the veil from the mystery surrounding us only sufficiently to inform us how to conduct ourselves. The supreme fact of the incarnation indicates both the depth of our plight and God's extraordinary scheme for our salvation. Man is completely dependent upon revelation. He did not even know the full extent of his difficulty until it was revealed to him. Martin Luther, throughout his life, desperately longed for much more information on God than he had. But he always realized that he could not go beyond what God had chosen to reveal. He accepted the limitations set by God, knowing that they were adequate to guide him through his exile on earth. For him there was no way but the way provided by the unsearchable God Himself.

When reading the early works of Luther one may get the impression that there is more gloom than glory, more despair than hope. This is not altogether wrong. Before the men of his generation could see the glory that was theirs they had to be brought low. Since they had by and large too superficial a view of their lamentable condition before God, Luther had first to make them fully aware of the extent of their fall. He wanted them to go through an excruciating experience of utter inadequacy before letting them see, when they had reached the nadir of their existence, the splendor of the grace of God.

But even while he was putting the stress on the insufficiency of man Luther was willing to grant that there may be a measure of progress toward some moral improvement on earth. He was of course too keen an observer of himself and of his environment even as a young man ever

to think of progress in a straight line. Man stumbles only too often on his arduous path, but he can rise again and perhaps do better the next time. It is not folly to expect some progress toward ethical goals. But it is unwise to expect too much.

With his sights set on the life beyond, man thus endeavors to change his ways for the better and to bring about some degree of "holiness" based on the ancient virtues of self-denial and asceticism. Young Luther never forgets to remind his readers that this life is essentially a *via crucis*. Man must bend every effort to follow Christ as closely as possible while fully realizing at the same time that his own life of the cross does not alter his basic relation to God at all. It would be the height of folly and blasphemy to assume for one moment that man's own suffering contributes one iota to his salvation. This is no easy task: living the life of the cross but believing that only the cross of Christ is the all-sufficient *instrumentum salvationis*. It is hardly conceivable that man's inveterate pride could be humbled more thoroughly.

Young Luther fought some of his most agonizing battles in this area of superlative human exertion and simultaneous humble acceptance of salvation from God. The line that forever separates Luther's understanding of the Christian faith from any other is both thin and broad. It is not easily perceptible on the one hand while constituting an unbridgeable abyss on the other. To accept salvation from God alone while working as though salvation depended on man alone—that is the very difficulty and distinction of the early Lutheran view of man.

This austere glorious concept of man

gathered from Luther's early German writings can be summed up as consisting fundamentally in the paradoxical reconciliation of human passivity over against God and human activity over against man. What is probably the finest summary of Luther's idea of man in this first period of his literary activity occurs in the last paragraph of his most famous early publication, *Von der Freyheytt eynisz Christen menschen*:

*Durch den glauben feret er (eyn Christen mensch) uber sich yn got, auss gott feret er widder unter sich durch die liebe, und bleybt doch ymmer ynn gott. . . .* (WA 7, 38)

In view of the surpassing excellence of these lines let me quote this passage also in Latin, Luther's other language:

*Per fidem sursum rapitur supra se in deum, rursum per charitatem labitur infra se in*

*proximum, manens tamen semper in deo. . . .*" (WA 7, 69) \*

These magnificent words, equally superb in his German and his Latin, suggest the breadth as well as the depth and height of Martin Luther's early view of man.

Yale University

\* May I say parenthetically that it is my unalterable view that Lutherans should know at least as much Latin as Roman Catholics. More than half of Luther will be closed to you if you don't. I do not want to undermine the sale of your splendid English edition of Luther. I am not doing so. When you first open a page of Luther's Latin, you will quickly reach for the English translation! Read a few lines of Luther in Latin every day, and — if a mere layman may dare to say so — the substance of your sermons will not suffer and your personal involvement as *hommes engagés* will grow. Once you discover Luther, in Latin and German — if you must in English — he will never let you go.