

A Man Named Martin

Part 1: The Man

Session One

[Comprehensive Reformation Website](#): Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) has developed a great website on the Reformation.

[Luther's Formative Years](#): In this *Concordia Theological Monthly* article (April 1946), E. G. Schweibert offers a fascinating account of Luther's formative years, up through his completion of elementary school.

[The Plague](#): This article describes the cause, transmission and symptoms of the plague that killed two of Luther's colleagues at Erfurt.

[Observant Augustinians](#): The monastic movement called the Order of Saint Augustine traced its founding to Saint Augustine (d. 430). Before Luther's time an observant movement started among the Augustinians to focus on increased spirituality.

[Welcome to a Day in the Life of a Monk](#): Experience a day in the life of a monk, from his early rising, to his praying, labor, and the overall austerity that marks a man's monastic decision.

Session Two

In the Monastery

[The Flagellants](#): This fanatical and heretical sect took self-flagellation to an extreme 200 years before Luther's time; their activities help explain the purposes of self-flagellation among monks like Luther.

[Of the Awful Judgment: For Awakening Fear in Oneself](#): Centuries before Luther, St. Anselm wrote about sin and righteousness. His meditations on the depth of our sinfulness help explain why Luther's monastic period made his feelings of guilt and unworthiness increase.

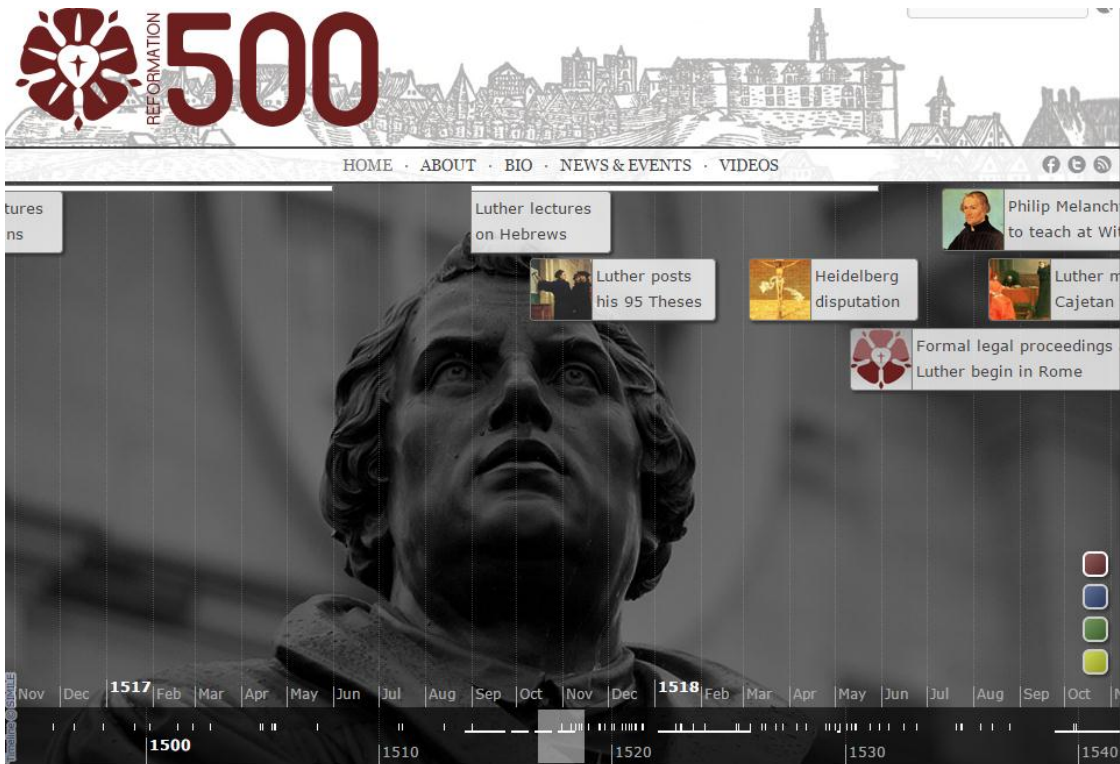
[Johann von Staupitz](#): This is a biographical sketch of Luther's Augustinian supervisor.

Luther's Trip to Rome

[Rome and Romans - - Martin Luther](#): This writing by Pastor Tom Browning certainly carries a Presbyterian bent, but its focus on historical detail helps explain the backdrop and particulars of Luther's first trip to Rome, which greatly discouraged him.

Comprehensive Reformation Website

<http://reformation500.csl.edu/>



Tuomo Mannermaa Dies

Posted on [January 21, 2015](#)

Tuomo Mannermaa (September 29, 1937-January 19, 2015), professor emeritus of ecumenical Theology at the University of Helsinki and internationally recognized Luther scholar, died this past week at age 77. Born in Oulu, Finland, he studied at the University of Helsinki and held ... [Continue reading →](#)



Posted in [News & Events](#) | Tagged [Finnish Luther Interpretation](#), [Robert Kolb](#), [Theosis](#), [Tuomo Mannermaa](#)

Tullian Tchividjian to speak at Concordia Seminary

Posted on [January 6, 2015](#)

The fourth Reformation500 annual speaker series at Concordia Seminary will feature well-known author, Tullian Tchividjian, senior pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The event will be held in Werner Auditorium on Thursday evening, March 19, 2015 at 7:00 pm. ... [Continue reading →](#)



Posted in [News & Events](#)

Luther's Truths, Then and Now

Posted on [May 6, 2015](#)

Editor's note: Robert Kolb delivered the following address at the International Conference on Confessional Leadership in the 21st Century, held in Wittenberg, Germany, May 3-8, 2015. Eventually, all of the addresses from the conference will be published together in book ...

[Continue reading →](#)



Posted in [Blog](#)

The "Three Kingdoms" of Simon Musaeus: An essay from the Festschrift for James M. Estes

Posted on [January 25, 2015](#)

James M. Estes has been a leading North American Reformation scholar for more than half a century. A student of Harold Grimm at Ohio State University, he became the leading interpreter of the thought and significance of the Swabian reformer ... [Continue reading →](#)



Posted in [Blog](#)

[return to index](#)

Luther's Formative Years

<http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/SchwiebertFormativeYearsLuther.pdf>

Concordia Theological Monthly

Continuing

LEHRE UND WEHRE

MAGAZIN FÜR EV.-LUTH. HOMILETIK

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY-THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Vol. XVII

April, 1946

No. 4

CONTENTS

	Page
The Formative Years of Doctor Luther. E. G. Schwiebert	241
The Greatest Missionary Problem. H. Nau	257
Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons	267
Miscellanea	280
Theological Observer	297
Book Review	315

Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Wölfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verführen und Irrtum einführen.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behält denn die gute Predigt. — Apologie, Art. 24

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — 1 Cor. 14:8

Published by the

Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, St. Louis 18, Mo.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Concordia Theological Monthly

Vol. XVII

APRIL, 1946

No. 4

The Formative Years of Doctor Luther*

By E. G. SCHWIEBERT

There can be no doubt that many of Martin Luther's contemporaries realized that he was one of the great men of history. Almost twenty years before he died, his friends began to collect the Reformer's letters and writings, while at different times twelve table companions recorded his conversations with the dinner guests. The three funeral addresses delivered at the time of Luther's death in 1546 testify to this same conviction. Since he had died in his native Eisleben, a service was first held there in the Andreas-Kirche, on which occasion Jonas, who had accompanied Luther on the journey from Wittenberg, preached the sermon. In this funeral sermon Jonas spoke of Luther's genius in glowing praise and pointed out that it had been recognized by all since his early student days. The manner in which the sorrowing people stood silently all along the route from Eisleben to Wittenberg reminds one of the passing of a distinguished world figure of the present day.

Three days later, after Luther's body had been returned to Wittenberg, Johannes Bugenhagen, the town pastor and for many years his friend and co-worker, spoke of him as the great Gospel preacher whom all Germany acclaimed and who was even highly esteemed in many foreign countries. On that same occasion Philip Melancthon gave a funeral

* This is Chapter IV of a book by Dr. Schwiebert entitled *The Living Luther*, which is soon to be published by Concordia Publishing House.

address on behalf of the University. This great Humanist, a brilliant man himself, compared his departed friend with the great men of the Bible and the greatest of the early Church Fathers. Melancthon regarded Luther as the most penetrating theologian of the Christian Church since St. Paul.

Yet, strangely, these intimate companions and admirers apparently took Luther's living, dynamic personality for granted, little realizing that someday he would be lost to them forever. Not one of his co-workers even thought of writing a description of him; nor did anyone take the time to write a biography while he was living.

Luther had promised his friends that he would write an autobiography for the second volume of the *Wittenbergische Ausgabe* of his works. Although it would have been a personal evaluation of his life and work, an autobiography by the Reformer's own pen would have been invaluable to the Luther student, as it would have added insight and understanding to his life and work impossible of attainment by any other writer. Unfortunately, poor health and overwork defeated his purpose. There remain but "a few glances over the shoulder" which the Reformer dashed off for the introduction to the first volume of the Latin edition of his works in 1545. To this may be added a few chance remarks by his fellow professor Nicolaus Amsdorf. The research student, therefore, is dependent for his information on materials gleaned in the form of indirect references found in Luther's voluminous writings and the use of other contemporary source materials.

Still more to be regretted is the fact that when Philip Melancthon at last undertook to write a biography of the departed leader a few months after Luther's death, he was satisfied to produce a mere sketch. Those ten pages do help to establish some of the disputed dates and facts of Luther's life. Yet with Philip's gift for writing and his intimate firsthand information about the man who was his friend, colleague, and neighbor for so many years, he could have given us a detailed biography of the central figure of the Reformation.

The first real attempt at writing a detailed biography of Luther's life was published in the form of seventeen sermons which Johann Mathesius preached to his congregation in

Joachimsthal between 1562 and 1564. *D. Martin Luthers Leben*, the title which he used for the first edition, 1566, is really not a biography in the literal sense. This series of sermons already incorporates much legendary material of that uncritical age; yet, since he was one of Luther's former table companions and also a reliable and conscientious observer, it contains invaluable personal observations. A second biographer, Matthaeus Ratzeberger, the court physician of the Count of Mansfeld and later guardian of Luther's children, supplied some new information and personal touches but must be used with great care because of the legendary embellishments. To this group must be added the biography by Luther's co-worker Friedrich Myconius, *Historia Reformationis*, which was published by Cyprian in 1715 and modernized by the Luther scholar Otto Clemen in 1915.

Martin Luther died in 1546, and shortly after the middle of the century Melanchthon, Jonas, and Amsdorf also passed from the Reformation stage, leaving a new generation that knew little or nothing of the true spirit of the Reformer. Luther's writings were available in the Wittenberg and Jena editions, but even these had not been too critically edited. If the text did not fit the traditions of the moment, this generation often took the liberty of changing it to satisfy their prejudices. Slowly a new Lutheranism began to emerge that stressed Luther's doctrines but knew little of the evangelical spirit with which the great Wittenberg professor had inspired his students and congregations. Even Luther, whom no one of this period remembered from life, was made a part of the new historical tradition, just as Washington and Lincoln have today been adapted to twentieth-century thought. A good example of this type of writer was Nikolaus Selnecker, who had heard much about Luther through his father but was now living in the conservative atmosphere of the Dresden court. His *historica narratio et oratio*, 1575, is the first defense of the Formula of Concord and makes of Luther a dogmatic personality. Selnecker's materials, however, did not become fully available until the nineteenth century. It was easy for this age to study Luther's Catechism and the Augsburg Confession but not so simple to recapture the Luther of life. Through Selnecker and other writers of the time an erroneous, one-sided impression was given of Luther, which required

centuries to eradicate in Germany and still prevails in some parts of America.

Another weakness of all the sixteenth-century Luther biographies is that they seem to take the formative years of the young Luther for granted. The whole emphasis was placed on the period after 1517. Luther's own sketch from the introduction to the Latin edition of his works also stressed the later period, while Melancthon and Mathesius devoted but a few pages to these early formative years, which are vital to an understanding of the real Luther.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the publishing of many heretofore unknown materials, German historians became intensely interested in the young Luther. They assumed that a careful analysis of Luther's boyhood would explain his whole later development. Scholarly studies and books appeared by such able scholars as Scheel, Holl, Ritschl, Koehler, Boehmer, Strohl, and others, exploring every possible aspect that might shed some light on Luther's formative years. Among the many studies of this period the best are Henri Strohl's *The Religious Evolution of Luther to 1515* (1922); Karl Holl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1921); Heinrich Boehmer's *Der Junge Luther* (1925); and Otto Scheel's *Martin Luther* (1930).

Following the last seventy-five years of Luther research, some very fundamental changes have been made in our conceptions of Martin Luther. Catholic historians have been forced to be far more cautious and less abusive, while Lutheran scholars have discovered that much of the traditional Luther could not be substantiated and that the original Luther must be re-established on the basis of sound historical evidence.

THE ANCESTRAL HERITAGE

All attempts at tracing the ancestral heritage of Martin Luther have ended in failure because of the scarcity of existing sources. Early records indicate a variant spelling of the family name — Ludher, Luder, Lueder, Lutter, Lauther — all of which philologists trace back to the old German name Chlotar. Nothing is known of the old Luther *Stammhaus*, the old ancestral home in Moehra, from whence the Luthers came, as the building shown to tourists was not erected until 1618 and belonged to a descendant of Luther's uncle, Klein Hans.

As far back as historical research has been able to trace the Luther ancestry, they were living in this Moehra region, just southwest of the Thuringian Forest in the neighborhood of Eisenach. The family belonged to a rather fortunate economic order known as *Erbzinsleute*, a family group that held a village and its neighboring lands in a kind of communal ownership. Since the Middle Ages the family had been free as individuals, for the *Zins*, or tax, which they owed to the Church and to the Elector, was on the land rather than the individuals. The Luthers lived in their German village, with fields, meadows, water, and a common woods divided for use but owned by the entire group from generation to generation. To insure continuous succession, the estate always passed to the youngest son. This custom left the older sons free to migrate to other parts if they felt that by so doing they might improve their circumstances.

Luther's ancestors seem to have been of pure German stock. Otto Scheel, who explored this problem rather thoroughly, contends there is no evidence of racial mixture. Since both his father's and his mother's families came from the western part of Germany, where the Wends had not penetrated, and their ancestral names are German, any claims of racial mixture seem to be without foundation. The family must have been quite large, for in 1521, when Martin Luther stopped off at Moehra on his way from Worms, he learned that his people occupied the whole region between Eisenach and Rennsteig. In 1536 the Luthers had five *Hoefe*, or small estates, occupied by different branches of the family but considered one under the legal title.

In this beautiful, green, hilly region of western Thuringia, not so far from the Wartburg, lived Heine Luder and his wife, the former Margarethe Lindemann. The four sons of Heine Luder, Grosz Hans, Klein Hans, Veit, and Heinz, must have loved and enjoyed this old family home, but historical records are silent on most of this family history. In this respect a biography by Luther himself or by his friend Philip could have been most enlightening. All that we know is that Luther's father, Grosz Hans, married a young lady of the neighborhood, Margarethe Ziegler. Seckendorf, who was fairly reliable as an historian, stated that her family was Franconian, but the statement cannot be proved. Me-

lanchthon spoke of her as a woman of commendable virtues. Hans Luder, Martin Luther's father (also called Grosz Hans to distinguish him from his younger brother Klein Hans), was an able, hard-working, ambitious young man, who felt that his future would not be too promising in the Moehra region, since he could not inherit any of the family estates. Accordingly he and his young wife decided to go to Eisleben, where the mining industry offered excellent opportunities for an ambitious, hard-working young couple.

In the southeastern part of Eisleben on "Long Street," not more than two blocks from St. Peter's Church, Hans and Margarethe Luder lived in a two-story house, the foundations of which stand to this day. The structure built upon the old foundations and now shown to tourists has little that dates back to the sixteenth century. Here, whether in the exact room on the first floor now claimed matters little, Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483, according to the best available evidence. It seems strange that there should be some uncertainty about the birth of so great an historical character as Martin Luther; yet Melanchthon tells us in his brief biography that not even his mother could recall the exact year of Luther's birth, although she was sure about the hour and the day. Luther's brother, Jacob, claimed that it had been the general impression of the family that the year was 1483, a date also substantiated by the *Liber Decanorum*, the dean's book of the University of Wittenberg. Georg Spalatin, a close friend of the Reformer, wrote in his *Annalen* that it had been in the year 1484. Some modern German historians have tried to prove that Martin Luther was born December 7, 1482; while one of the later *Tischreden*, a Table Talk account by Roerer, claims that Hans Luder had already moved to Mansfeld before Martin was born and that he was the second son in the family. However, modern historical research has discarded as spurious these legendary aspects told by later biographers, and the date set by the first biographer, Philip Melanchthon, has been accepted as the correct one. Nor is the debate as to the time and place of much consequence except that it emphasizes the lack of certainty about most of the story of Luther's boyhood.

As was the custom, on the day following the birth the young son was taken to the lower Tower Room of St. Peter's

Church, the only part of the structure then completed, and baptized by Pastor Bartholomaeus Rennebecher. Since this was on the day of the Festival of St. Martin, Hans Luder's son was named Martin. The original baptismal font used on the occasion had been replaced in 1518, but it was restored in 1827 and is still in use in the *Taufkapelle*, or baptismal room, of the present St. Peter- und Paulskirche.

THE BOYHOOD YEARS IN MANSFELD

Early in the summer of 1484, for some unknown reason, the Luders left the town of Eisleben and moved to Mansfeld, a town even closer to the Harz Mountains. Perhaps it was because this town was more in the very heart of the mining region. That it was beloved by the inhabitants is shown by a later sixteenth-century saying: "Whom the Lord cherishes, him he favors with a residence in the Mansfeld region." Mining was the principal occupation, but farming was a very close second.

Mansfeld, a town of about the same size as Eisleben, lay about five miles to the northwest and ten miles from Sangershausen. The general pattern of the region that is presented by old cuts is one of hills, meadows, woods, and plains, all combined in a complex, colorful picture of rural life. Through the region ran the important highway from Nuernberg to Hamburg, bringing a constant stream of travelers from north and south. Spangenberg, in the *Mansfelder Chronik*, gives us a rough sketch of the town plan from this early period. According to this drawing the town of Mansfeld had one principal street, running rather haphazardly through the town, which was surrounded by a formidable wall with four strong towers. In the background on a fairly high, steep cliff stood the massive castle of the Grafen of Anhalt, an old and distinguished family related to the Ascanier of Wittenberg.

Near the center of the town was the church square. On a slight elevation stood the St. Georgskirche, and next to the church was the Ratsschule, the city school, which was later renamed in honor of the Reformer. To the villagers, St. George was the leading patron saint, while Andrew, Simon, Jacob, Thomas, and others were the fourteen assistants. The Virgin Mary, Anna, Elizabeth, Hedwig, and Ursula as well as the three Holy Kings were also called upon in moments of great need.

It was into this environment that Luther's parents moved to seek their fortune in the heart of the copper-mining region. That they were very poor seems to be quite evident. One needs but examine the lined faces and toil-worn hands of Luther's parents as painted by Cranach to be convinced that their life was not one of ease, but that they bettered their circumstances only through toil and thrift. Luther later described those early years as "*blutsauer*," extremely bitter, for the newly arrived couple. However, modern research is convinced that the poverty thesis has been much overemphasized as a contributing factor to Luther's later decision to enter the monastery. True, Luther's mother may have carried wood on her back during those early years, but so did the wives of other German burghers in the fifteenth century.

Hans Luder must have bettered his circumstances considerably by the time his son Martin started to school in Mansfeld. When Martin was about eight, his father was already one of the respected citizens of Mansfeld, for in 1491 he was selected as one of four citizens to protect the rights of his fellow burghers in the city council. The complete picture seems to be that of a rather thrifty, steadily rising young couple respected and accepted by the whole community. Just how early Luther's father became a small capitalist, leasing and operating mines and furnaces, we do not know. But an old record indicates that he renewed a five-year contract in 1507 and must have been operating since 1502. Thus by the turn of the century the young man from Moehra had ventured into the mining business for himself. During this time he also purchased a home, on which there was a hundred-gulden mortgage in 1507. He leased one mine and smelter from the Luttichs, the children of his former mining companion, for which he paid 500 gulden rent. Shortly thereafter he was made supervisor of all the property of these minor children. During the same period the records indicate a partnership with a Dr. Dragstedt as well as other interests extending over a rather large area.

When Martin became a priest, his father visited the monastery with a company of twenty horsemen and made a gift of 20 gulden to the Augustinians, a handsome sum in a day when one or two gulden was the price of an ox.

Mathesius recognized this prosperity when he wrote "God blessed the mining industry" of Luther's father and that Hans Luder brought up "his son in a respectful atmosphere, using the money he had rightfully acquired as a miner." When Martin later matriculated at the University of Erfurt, the records classified him as being from a family that "had." The pathetic picture of a poverty-stricken lad who sang from door to door to win his daily sustenance hardly fits into the frame provided by the historical records of a family that belonged to the better burghers of the town. Even the sons of *Patrizier* families, or the more well-to-do classes, participated in the street serenades. Although Hans Luder never became wealthy in the modern sense, he left a family estate of \$18,000.

Likewise, the severity of Luther's childhood has been overemphasized. Like other parents of that era, Luther's did not believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the child. Parents in the fifteenth century believed in unquestioning obedience; and as the young Luther possessed the same indomitable will manifested in his later life, he was, doubtless, a difficult child to handle. Luther said in one of his Table Talks that his father once spanked him so hard that he fled from him and for some time was very bitter about this mistreatment. But who does not recall similar experiences from his own childhood? This was not an age of child psychology, and Luther's parents, like others, lacked the training and time for insight and self-restraint when they felt the moral integrity of their child was endangered. Again Luther tells us that his mother once flogged him on account of a nut until the blood began to flow. But we do not know the whole story, and from the total picture we gather that this was not typical. His father also had his cheerful, jovial moments "over a stein of beer," while his mother often sang to the children. The life of the Luther home was not abnormal. Severity was a common practice in that day, for Luther later advocated a better child psychology for the new Lutheran schools of "placing the apple beside the rod." To be sure, Luther may have received fifteen paddlings in one morning because he did not know his Latin forms; but so did Melanchthon receive his daily beatings at Pforzheim some years later. Languages in that day were not taught; they were literally pounded in, and the average students took such treatment for granted and

loved their instructors just the same. Furthermore, records show that if these floggings exceeded the point of accepted practice, the parents complained or even withdrew their children from school. Scholars have searched in vain in the early environmental conditions of his boyhood for an explanation of Luther's later soul struggle. In fact, we may safely conclude that the Luther home was one of normal, sincere Catholics, who were highly regarded in the Mansfeld community. Luther's parents took a special interest in the promising young Martin, who, they hoped, might some day be one of the leading lawyers of the whole Anhalt community.

THE MANSFELD SCHOOL DAYS

Even though our sources of the Mansfeld school days are rather meager, there can be little doubt that they have been much misrepresented in many Lutheran circles. Too much emphasis has been placed on a mere reference to his training here in the tract of 1524 *To the Councilors of All German Cities*. When Luther exclaimed in this call to arms: "We were martyred there," we often forget that the occasion demanded strong language and that Luther was a master at getting the desired effect. After Worms, the enrollment of the University of Wittenberg rapidly dropped to about a third, and Luther, together with his fellow professors, greatly feared for the whole future of German education. In this document the Reformer sought to shake the indifferent German parents from their lethargy toward higher learning. Since monastic education no longer offered an easy retreat for the youth and the lucrative church positions were not a part of the new Lutheran system, Luther feared that the phlegmatic German might conclude that there was no longer a need for higher education. The Wittenberg professor was making an appeal for the new humanistic type of learning, and in such a presentation his own Mansfeld school days suffered by comparison. It is true, Mansfeld may not have had as good a Latin school as Eisenach or Nuernberg; yet the fact remains that after Luther had received his early training here, he was able to carry on at Magdeburg and Eisenach without difficulty. Melancthon praises this later excellent progress, which he says, was due to Luther's ability, but he does not imply that his early training had been inferior. As

we shall see later, when the new Lutheran school system emerged in the thirties, most of the methodology and school organization already in practice at Mansfeld was retained even though the new evangelical spirit supplanted the old Catholic instruction.

As there is considerable difference of opinion among his contemporaries, we are not exactly certain when young Martin began his elementary training in the Mansfeld Latin School. Seven was the customary age; yet there is some evidence which implies that he entered school quite early. Melanchthon, the famous school organizer of the Reformation, was certainly familiar with standard practice; still he implies that Luther was so young that Nicolaus Oemler, an old family friend, took him in his arms and carried him to school. Since the distance to school was but a few blocks, this would hardly have been necessary for a boy of six or seven. Nor would Melanchthon have mentioned it had not the incident been unusual. Mathesius' biography does not add much light when it states that Luther started in school when "he was old enough to comprehend" the instruction. Certainly that age would vary greatly between average and precocious children. In all likelihood Luther entered school on St. George's Day, March 12, 1488, when he was about four and a half years old, an age which would explain why he had to be carried to school.

The Mansfeld school that Luther attended was a *Trivialschule* in which the medieval *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric was taught. This was considered necessary for all students who were seeking an advanced education. As was common practice, this school was divided into three "Haufen," or groups. First there came the *Tabulisten*, or beginners, who learned the ABC's of Latin, which was largely a memorization of elementary forms and the contents of the *Fibel* or Latin primer. These little youngsters also learned the *Benedicite*, the prayer before meals, and the *Gratias*, the giving of thanks after eating. In addition they learned the *Confiteor*, or the Confession of Sins, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Decalog, and the Hail Mary. Three times in the morning and three times in the afternoon the *Tabulisten* recited, while in the evening at home they were expected to memorize a few Latin words with the help of their parents.

The second group, often called the *Donatisten*, were so named from the *Donat*, a medieval Latin textbook. The *Donat* was published with a German interlinear, providing the study of grammar by the direct method. The study of the Latin language in this division became much more formal. Frequently, the assignment was an entire Psalm or a section from the Latin Vulgate. Doubtless Luther's later mastery of the Latin Bible, his ability to quote verbatim almost at will even late in life, dates back to the Mansfeld days. By about the completion of the sixth grade the student was quite familiar with most parts of the Catholic church service and had mastered the elementary grammar of the Latin language.

The upper division group were known as the *Alexandristen*, from their textbook by Alexander de Villa, in which the student was given more advanced Latin grammar and syntax. It had also a German introduction and made ample use of this native language in the explanations. These students also began to use a Latin-German dictionary. Obviously the student who had finished a good *Trivialschule*, such as the one in Mansfeld, was ready to attend the University, where all assignments were made and delivered in the Latin language. Most of these aspects of the medieval Latin schools were retained by the Humanists and the Lutheran Reformers when they established similar institutions. In the upper division, students also served as choir boys and assisted in the Sunday service. That they might participate intelligently, they were taught the hymns, versicles, responses, and psalms and were given an explanation of the Epistle and Gospel lessons.

Music naturally played an important role in the curriculum of the *Trivialschule*. The students were taught the Catholic liturgy, processions, and recessions as training for the regular and special services held during the church year. Special instruction in all the holy days of the church calendar was given through the *Cisio Janus*. This was not a textbook, but a calendar in verse form, by means of which the students learned to calculate when the church festivals and saints' days would fall. In the *Cisio Janus* every month was treated by two verses. With its abbreviated, hieroglyphic forms the *Cisio Janus* seems somewhat confusing to the modern mind; but in a period in which there were so many saints' days

making up the church calendar, the reckoning of church festivals was quite complicated. Instruction in this medieval method seemed practical not only for the clergy but also for the lawyers, businessmen, and other laymen, who could order their daily tasks much more efficiently by avoiding conflict with the church festivals. Nor did the Reformers drop this practice. Melancthon prepared a revised edition of the *Cisio Janus* for the Lutheran schools.

Students were likewise introduced to the theory of music. They were required to learn the Psalm tones and the rules of harmony. In some schools counterpoint and singing in several voices were practiced. Some years ago there was found in the *Staatsbibliothek* in Berlin an old musical treasure which was a composition and versification by Luther in his student days at Eisenach. In this composition the tenor was the main part, with the bass, alto, and the descant woven around it. This explains Luther's later enthusiasm for music, a discipline he had mastered during the Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach days.

Rhetoric, even though it was no longer emphasized as in the early Middle Ages, still occupied a rather respected place in most school systems. According to some old fourteenth-century Luebeck discoveries, the Latin school system was much more practical than would be supposed. Here, according to Warncke, were unearthed all kinds of school materials, wax tablets used by pupils, exercises by students in the lower division, as well as a number of business letters. This seems to testify that much practical instruction was given in these Latin schools. Students were taught how to write letters, proper forms of address, good manners.

Another aspect of rhetoric was the literature which was read and memorized by the students. Through this the teacher also imparted much worldly wisdom which Luther late in life still regarded as very valuable. Among the works read were Cato, Aesop, Sallustius, Plautus, and Terence. All of these writers had been carefully edited, and the materials had been selected that seemed most in keeping with the needs of the times. All of this part of the medieval course of instruction Luther did not criticize in his *Weckruf* of 1524. He regarded some of this literature as being next in importance to the Bible in the building of morality. He did, however, complain that

too little time had been devoted to German history, the poets, and general history.

The Latin schools devoted many hours to an explanation of the Gospels and Epistles, the Lord's Prayer, etc. Even the study of the *Fibel*, the first course of instruction, was in a sense an elementary course in religion. Much of the course in music was also of a religious nature. The cantor was a religious instructor who understood the Latin liturgy and the technique of sacred hymn writing. His work was, therefore, regarded as religious instruction. Nor did the Reformation change this aspect of the music course in the Lutheran schools, although its content became more evangelical.

Since so much has been written about the severe discipline that prevailed in the Mansfeld school system, a few of the details and a general evaluation of it in relationship to other German Latin schools may be timely. In the Mansfeld Latin school, as was the custom generally, the lower division had a slate at the top of which was a picture of a wolf. Since the Latin word for wolf is *lupus*, every student whose name appeared on this slate became a *lupus*. Every eight days the teacher checked the record, and each offender received one stroke for the number of times his name was on the slate. Although we have no specific information about Mansfeld, in the statutes of some schools the regulations state that students were to be spanked in the place that God had naturally provided. The accepted reasons for flogging were: a lapse into German, failure to decline or conjugate properly, the use of profanity, or general misbehavior. Thus when Luther was spanked fifteen times one morning, it must have been for a whole week's accumulation of offenses. Nor does this experience imply that it happened frequently.

Another incentive to study was a method of putting students to shame when they were unable to recite or used German in their recitations. An *asinus*, or wooden donkey, was also used in the Mansfeld school. This was hung around the neck of the lowest student in the division at the end of the recitation period. Every time a student became an *asinus*, a record was made on the slate and added to the total of future whippings. Motivation, therefore, was a combination of fear and shame.

The human factor must doubtless have created a varied

condition in different schools. That there were individual cases of student mistreatment cannot be doubted in an age in which corporal punishment was the accepted practice. Yet there was a definite limit as to how far punishment could be carried. Neither parents nor the city council permitted much mistreatment. In most schools a definite system had been set up defining the exact punishment that should be meted out for a certain offense. Sometimes there were complaints on the part of parents, but in some instances, as at Stuttgart in 1501, the authorities passed a resolution that if the parents would not permit the punishment of their children, the children could not attend school.

The young Luther was no doubt frequently spanked, but so was the gentle Melanchthon, and many other boys who were not nearly so gifted. Probably all the boys took the "cleaning of the slate" as a matter of course. And when the Reformer later in life directed the establishment of similar Lutheran schools, the wolf, the donkey, and the rod were retained as an essential part of the psychology of instruction. Since this type of punishment was most effective with youngsters, its application was limited to the lower group. The middle and upper divisions were punished more generally by a system of fines, or *Geldbussen*, a German system still quite common in modern times.

Anyone interested in Luther's early education is confronted by the problem: Just how good was the Mansfeld Latin School? Walther Koehler and Otto Scheel present opposing viewpoints. Koehler claims that it was not even a fully equipped *Trivialschule*, that its instruction was poor, and that Luther could not obtain proper training for entry into the University of Erfurt in this school. This, he says, explains why Luther's father sent the young lad away to school at Magdeburg and Eisenach after he had reached his fourteenth year. Otto Scheel, who has investigated this period more thoroughly than anyone else, does not agree with this viewpoint. He evaluates the commonly quoted Luther criticisms of this period in the light of other contemporary evidence and completely recreates the entire Mansfeld atmosphere.

The early Luther biographies do not imply that the Mansfeld school was an inferior institution. Mathesius even says that there Luther learned his materials "with diligence and

great speed." Graduates from this school must have been prepared for university work, for the *Album* of the University of Wittenberg indicates that seven students matriculated there from Mansfeld between 1515 and 1523, several more between 1523 and 1527, while eighteen enrolled between 1530 and 1538. That these students were actually graduates of Mansfeld cannot, of course, be established as the *ex Mansfelds* of the *matrikel* only indicates the territory or region. But it is reasonable to assume that students did enter the University of Wittenberg directly from this institution. Such evidence leads us to conclude that the Mansfeld school was a full *Trivialschule*, even though its standing may not have been as high as the Eisenach, Ulm, or Nuernberg type of Latin schools.

The poor *Kirchenlatein*, or church Latin, which Luther learned here is often cited as evidence that the Mansfeld instruction was inferior. Luther himself later in life vehemently condemned this church Latin, but a wrong interpretation has sometimes been placed upon his remarks.

To really understand why Mansfeld and other schools instructed students in the late Medieval Latin, we must examine the objectives of its instructors. At the turn of the century, scholasticism was still very strong in the German universities. Humanism was just beginning to get a foothold. In such an atmosphere the German students who attended the universities were expected to understand lectures on the works of the various scholastic writers. To follow university lectures, they had to be familiar with the syllogistic method of reasoning and with the vocabulary of the Schoolmen. When Luther later broke with Rome and changed the University of Wittenberg into an institution in which Biblical Humanism was the accepted method of religious instruction, he naturally was offended with the "donkey manure which the devil had brought into the schools." Had he remained a Catholic, his earlier training would have been as adequate for his daily needs as it was for his Roman critics. It was not the type of Latin, but the change in the point of view that occasioned the Reformer's violent reactions to the former church Latin. Like Erasmus and the Biblical Humanists, he now wanted the Latin of the early Catholic Church and the Greek and Hebrew of the Bible. For his work as the Reformer of the Church his boyhood training was sadly wanting; but for his Roman Catholic con-

temporaries who retained the Thomist, Scotist, or some other scholastic point of view, the Latin of the *Trivialschule* was entirely adequate.

The impression has been left by some Luther biographers that there had been little religious instruction in the Mansfeld school. As had been mentioned, the German *Fibel* used in the lower division was also a book of religion. Although the materials were in Latin, the subject matter aimed to prepare the pupil to be a good Roman Catholic. In the morning the school was opened with prayer and a song, usually "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" or "Veni, Creator." Occasionally the morning session was varied with a few minutes of prayer and a song. The materials to be memorized by the pupils were selected from hymns, prayers, and versicles commonly used in the Catholic church service. In the second and third groups of the school this memorization resulted in the mastery of a considerable body of the *Plenarium*, a full church manual, as we know from Luther's later reaction when he saw the first Latin Bible. He was surprised that the Bible contained much material not found in the pericopes with which he was familiar. By the time a student graduated from one of these Latin schools, he was well prepared to enter into the spirit of Catholic church services and to participate in the various masses which all required their special liturgies. In brief, this training aimed to train the children into loyal members of the Church.

Valparaiso, Ind.

[return to index](#)

The Plague

<http://uhavax.hartford.edu/bugl/histepi.htm#plague>

Plague

Arguably the ultimate scourge of mankind (and over 100 species of animals) was the so-called Black Death. The generic "plague" (with a lower case p) has entered the language as a descriptor for any deadly epidemic disease. Plague (with an upper case P) is caused by *Yersinia pestis*, a rod-shaped, Gram negative bacterium. As few as one bacterium is an infective dose! This electron micrograph is from Dennis Kunkel's [webpage](#), which is definitely worth many a visit.



Its reservoir consists of the fleas (the Indian rat flea, *Xenopsylla cheopsis*, of which only adult females feed on hosts. *X. cheopsis* is fairly hardy and can survive for 6 to 12 months off a host in dung, an abandoned rodent's nest, textile bales, and on rodents, such as prairie dogs, rats, squirrels, gerbils, field mice, etc. The micrograph of the flea was made at the University of Queensland in Australia.



The following picture was obtained from the CDC website. It has been illuminated from the rear so that you can see that the flea's gut is filled with blood after drawing a meal from a host.

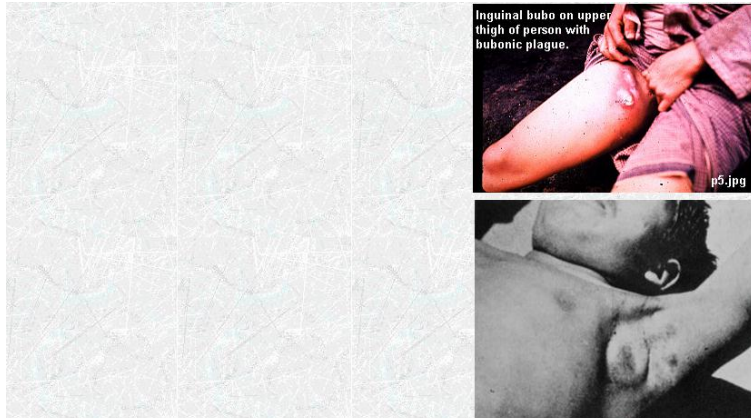


Y. pestis is **enzootic**, meaning it is endemic to these rodents (the **reservoir**), and can even survive in their burrows after an **epizootic** (an epidemic arising from a transfer of disease from animals).

Black rats (*Rattus rattus*-which were common in ancient times, but have since been supplanted by the larger and more aggressive brown rats, *Norvegicus rattus*) rarely move more than 200 meters from their nest and are good climbers, hence their adaptability to the thatched roof homes of either the Middle Ages, present day rural Africa, or parts of the Asian subcontinent. Normally the fleas live on the rodents in a form of equilibrium, but sometimes that equilibrium is upset when the organism multiplies rapidly in the flea's gut, eventually blocking the lumen (the space within its gut) so that the flea regurgitates infected material as it attempts to feed. This infects the rodent and it contracts a form of the fatal disease called **murine** or **silvatic Plague**. When infected, rats are asymptomatic until near death, whereupon they swell up (because the *Y. pestis* grow so rapidly and in such large numbers that they block the biliary duct) and stagger as if intoxicated. The fleas then leave their dying hosts and seek residence in the nearest warm-blooded animals. Considering that fleas can jump several feet, "nearest" is a relative term.

One to six days after a human receives a flea bite, the lymph nodes in the armpit (axilla) and groin become very tender and swollen (as large as an egg [They range from 1 to 10 cm in diameter]). These very painful swollen areas are called **buboes** (from the Greek *bubo*, meaning groin). The buboes may **suppurate**, i.e., break and discharge a particularly fetid pus. Each of the buboes shown below are on children (to give you a perspective of size).





Sometimes the original bite site becomes infected and suppurates. It is not rare for the area of the bite to become gangrenous and necrotic, i.e., the tissue dies. Other symptoms include restlessness, staggering gait, mental confusion, prostration, delirium, rapid pulse, nausea, aching of the extremities and back, and a high fever (at least $40^{\circ}\text{C} = 104^{\circ}\text{F}$). Then one of two avenues is followed. If the fever breaks, there is usually remission and the immune system has gained the upper hand over the pathogen, which it then proceeds to destroy and expel. If the fever doesn't break, the infection spreads to the blood, causing septicemia and death. This is the course of **bubonic Plague**.

In some cases the microbe can proceed directly to the blood stream and this **septicemic Plague** can occur *before* the formation of buboes and results in death before a diagnosis can be made. Some scientists feel that this form of Plague can even be carried by either the common human flea or the body louse. In septicemia, blood vessels break and leak under the skin causing a dark rash as the blood dries (hence the name *Black Death* which was given in the 1500s).

For both bubonic and septicemic Plague, there is hemorrhagic illness (bleeding), multiple system failure, and death. All of this occurs within three to seven days. The mortality rate for untreated bubonic Plague is about 50-75% and 100% for septicemic Plague.

As it rages throughout the population, Plague can change to a more virulent form and enters the lungs, whereupon the victims initially cough up a blood-spotted mucus and then graduate to coughing bloody froth, all the while spreading the disease by aerosol droplets. This **pneumonic Plague** has a 100% mortality rate, if untreated, and death can occur in a matter of hours. Small children having the Plague frequently went into convulsions, wherein their bodies jerked about uncontrollably prior to death—not a pleasant sight.

Streptomycin, gentamicin, and tetracycline are treatments of choice for all three varieties of Plague. Penicillin has no effect. Medication must be given within the first 18 hours of infection to be completely effective.

Quarantine (from the Italian *quarentina*, meaning forty days [based on no scientific reason, but rather on the number of days the bible said Christ spent in the wilderness]) for the time of isolation of ships entering harbor which were suspected of carrying some form of contagion is only somewhat effective at the outset of an outbreak. In the fourteenth century, Milan, Florence, and Venice employed quarantines with a vengeance. The homes of sufferers were sealed—well and sick left to die for lack of food and water. Of course, the human residents of such dwellings were constrained, while the rats could come and go as they pleased. Even rats aboard docked quarantined ships had easy egress, because they could climb down the mooring ropes and onto the docks.

The major Plague epidemics occurred in 540 at Pelusium, Egypt, reached Constantinople in 542 and spread into Europe and Asia (the Plague of Justinian) in the following decade; 14th century Europe, following the caravan routes, it was in the lower Volga River basin in 1345, the Caucasus and Crimea by 1346, Constantinople by 1347, Alexandria in the autumn of 1347, Cyprus and Sicily in that year, Italy by winter 1347, Marseilles by January of 1348, Paris in spring 1348, followed by Germany and the Low Countries in that year, Norway in May 1349, eastern Europe by 1350, and finally Russia in 1351, but smaller outbreaks continued for about 200 more years; Austria in 1711; the Balkans from 1770-1772. The last major pandemic ran from 1855-1896 worldwide, but mostly in China and India, wherein more than 12 million died. Manchuria in 1910-1911 witnessed about 60,000 deaths due to pneumonic Plague with a repeat in 1920-1921; and a minor outbreak occurred as recently as the summer of 1994 in Surat, India closely following an earthquake in September 1993.

From 1150-1200 there was a major warming throughout Europe. This, coupled with the rise of the mercantile class, led to improved diet and greater population growth. By 1340, Europe was significantly overpopulated. This was followed by the so-called Little Ice Age, which ended by 1351. The resulting climate was colder and wetter than normal. With population higher than it had been in some time, and crop yields reduced, per capita caloric intake fell precipitously, general health declined, and the pest population increased. Not a welcome combination of circumstances.

There are several theories to explain the onset of Plague, but they all agree that a major source was China, Mongolia, and Hunan province, in particular. The nomadic tribesmen that populated the region seemed to know instinctively that something was amiss. A series of customs arose designed to keep the microbe in check. Trapping marmots (a host for *X. cheopis*) was taboo; marmots could be shot at a distance only; slow-moving animals were to be avoided; furs of certain rodents could not be used.

Around 1330 Plague affected the local residents of the Orient and following the elaborate trade routes, established in the previous two centuries, made its way west. By 1345, it was in the lower Volga; by 1346 Astrakhan, the Caucasus, and Azerbaijan; by 1346 Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire; late autumn 1347 Alexandria, Egypt and southward along the Nile; India and what is now the middle east were next to be depopulated by the, soon to be ubiquitous, flea and its internal traveling companion.

During the summer of 1347 Genoese merchants and their families were living in the city of Kaffa on the Black Sea, in the Crimea, when it was subjected to a siege by Tartars. As the effects of the prolonged siege seemed to be overcoming the resistance of the residents, an outbreak of disease decimated the Tartar forces. In a fit of rage, the remains of the departing army are rumored to have catapulted corpses of the disease victims into the city. The merchants hastily departed the city in twelve vessels and set sail for Italy. October 1347 found the Genoese fleet outside the port of Messina, Sicily and the crews, or what was left of them, were found to be dying of some unknown malady. Michael of Piazza described the arrival of the sailors as "sickness clinging to their very bones." City officials sealed the vessels for two days—but, of course, this had little effect on the rats, and their accompanying fleas, who easily descended the mooring lines—and then dispatched them to their home port. Within two months nearly half of the population of Messina was dead. The disease soon spread throughout the ports of Italy and reached the inland cities by early spring, in most cases halving their populations. Reports of another Genoese merchant ship carrying the disease to Marseilles came in January 1348. By that summer, the Plague reached Paris. It then spread east to Germany and north to England, reaching London in December 1348. During this time it came to be known by the names: the Great Dying, *das Grosse Sterben*, the Plague of Justinian, and *Magna Mortalis*.

At that time, the population of England was estimated to be about four million, yet within a mere two and a half years about one third of them had died. Fully one third of the residents of Florence died in the first six months and 45%-75% in a single year. Venice lost 60% of its populace over the year and a half that the epidemic raged. Death was so rampant that the pope had to consecrate the Rhone River so corpses could be dumped into it. The death toll throughout Europe was at least 25 million out of a total population of 40 million. (In warmer months and in southern Europe, at this time, there was at least one family of black rats per household and an estimated average of three fleas per rat.)

Clergy were especially hard hit; 50% of the English clergy died; in Montpellier, of 140 Dominican friars at the outset, only seven survived; one third of the cardinals went to their eternal reward. Their numbers were slow to recover, taking several generations and some orders remained depleted until well into the seventeenth century.

This outbreak of Plague was accelerated by a total absence of sanitary procedures and lack of knowledge. For instance, the dead were heaped in piles, whereupon rats and dogs fed on the corpses and the cycle was extended. Homes were more like sties than what we would associate with buildings fit for human habitation. Roofs and walls were made of straw; floors were dirt; animals were kept inside. The streets, if that's what you could call them, of cities were barely wide enough for a single cart to pass, and they were perpetually covered with mud, garbage, and excrement. For lack of heated water, people rarely bathed and fleas were commonplace. When St. Thomas à Becket was prepared for burial in England in 1170, he was found to be wearing (from the outside in) (i) a large brown mantle, (ii) a white surplice, (iii) a coat of lambs' wool, (iv) a woolen pelisse, (v) another woolen pelisse, (vi) the black robe of the Benedictine order, (vii) a shirt, and (viii) a tight-fitting suit of coarse hair-cloth covered on the exterior with linen. During preparation for burial the cold English air stimulated so many of the critters occupying his hair suit that it "boiled over with them like water in a simmering cauldron."

Simple children's rhymes illustrate some profundities associated with the times, e.g.,

*Ring around the rosies,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes, ashes!
We all fall down.*

Rosies are rosary beads, presumably to gain divine intercession against this mysterious enemy. Most Plague victims emitted a rather strong and rather objectionable odor, so flowers (*posies*) were carried to mask the smell. *Ashes* are all that was left of a burnt corpse. Of course, to *fall down* means to die. Sometimes the second last line is replaced with "A Tishoo, a tishoo," meaning the sneezes of the victims of pneumonic Plague. To be sneezed on by them was a sure death sentence for all but the hardiest souls. [There is some debate about the relevance of this to Plague because the first printed version of this rhyme appeared in 1822, over 150 years after the last major outbreak in the British Isles.]

Throughout Europe, many areas were abandoned. Agriculture came to a virtual standstill as farmers fled or died in their fields. Consequently, food shortages compounded the problems of society. Governments ground to a halt as bureaucrats died. No civil authority remained and crime was rampant. Station in life was not an indicator of immunity. Plague attacked merchants and peasants with equal voracity. Only the very rich could afford to move to protected environs far from the disease and even that was no guarantee of survival.

Everyone feared the spreading contagion and no efforts were spared to avoid its fatal embrace. *"Kinsmen held aloof, brother was forsaken by brother, oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children to their fate, untended, unvisited as if they had been strangers,"* wrote Boccaccio in his preface to the Decameron. The pope's physician, Guy de Chauliac characterized the period as one where *"Charity is dead."* What more can be said?

Unaware of the cause of the disease (or even the rudiments of Germ Theory), people took to

- ☐ burning incense,
- ☐ dipping handkerchiefs in aromatic oils,
- ☐ ringing church bells and firing cannons,
- ☐ wearing talismans,
- ☐ bathing in human urine,
- ☐ placing "stinks" (dead animals) in their dwellings,
- ☐ bleeding via leeches and bloodletting,
- ☐ drinking the pus extracted from a suppurated bubo (Total Yuck!),
- ☐ applying dried toads to relieve the pain of the buboes by absorbing the "poisons,"
- ☐ drinking liquid gold or powdered emeralds (only for the very rich, of course), and
- ☐ joining groups of flagellants.

The "order" of **flagellants**, also called the Brethren of the Cross, (initially active in the late 1200s) was re-formed in Germany in 1348 and initially blessed by the pope. It forbade its members from bathing, washing their heads, shaving, sleeping in a bed, having any contact with the opposite sex, or even changing their clothes during a procession without permission of the "Master". Washing of hands was allowed, but only once a day and that had to be done when kneeling. Each member had to donate funds to cover the cost of their food for the duration. As if to satisfy the ascetic needs of a squeamish populace, the groups went from town to town and whipped themselves with scourges, i.e., sticks with three or four leather tails with large knots containing sharpened iron spikes. They continued until the blood ran and even when the spikes stuck in the skin and had to be torn out. Many of them died of infections of these open wounds. They formed in bands of 50 to 300 and moved in pairs with men in the front and women in the rear of this serpentine procession. Each group's "Master" heard confessions, imposed penances, and granted absolution—all to the total horror of the local clergy, who had enjoyed an absolute monopoly (and accompanying fees) over such practices for centuries. Each procession lasted 33½ days, the number of years Christ was said to have spent on earth. During their travels through Germany and the Low Countries they preached anti-Semitism. Their asceticism had no effect on the state of the epidemic and their personal hygiene may have helped to carry Plague from village to village. Eventually, in October of 1349, the pope ordered the military arm of the church to force the groups to disband.

Upon commission of the pope in 1348, a group of learned men (and at that time only men were deemed capable of being educated and hence, learned) of the medical faculty at Paris concluded that the disaster was a result of a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in the 40th degree of Aquarius at 1:00 p.m. on March 20, 1345. This caused hot, moist conditions, which forced the earth to exhale a virulent sulfurous miasma. So much for the Age of Aquarius!

The horror and fear faced by medieval people confronted with the bizarre and almost totally unknown symptoms of Plague is inconceivable to us today. To those who believed in spirits and devils (that was most of the people of the time), this infestation was a scene from their worst nightmares; one in which they were completely unable to effect relief, no less a cure. It was as if all the monsters of their psyches were being unleashed for reasons they could not comprehend. When your worldview is limited, your options in the face of calamity are even more limited. Any explanation is believable. The pope declared that it was not divine punishment for the sins of the world, but local clergy gave that as the *only* reason for such horrors. As a referent, you may want to look at a copy of the leftmost part of the triptych of Heironymous Bosch's the *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

As with most mysterious, unknowable, and uncontrollable tragedies, the thin veneer of human rationality is peeled back to expose a dark undersurface capable of incomprehensible horrors and unimaginable evil. People sought to blame others; scapegoating was in season; **xenophobia** was the norm—all strangers were suspected of spreading disease. As had happened before and since, Jews were the targets of choice (even though they died of Plague at the same rate as others). Rumors of their having poisoned wells ran rampant. There were pogroms and massacres. The rabble was loose. Zurich expelled all its Jews and closed its gates to them. On a single day in 1349, 2000 Jews were burned to death by a mob in Strausburg. Even officialdom entered the fray. The canton of Basel gathered all 4500 of its Jews in a specially built structure on an island in the Rhine and burned them to death, after which the town fathers passed a law forbidding Jewish residence in the canton for 200 years. The largest Jewish community in Europe was in Mainz, Germany where at least 6,000 Jews were incinerated after they fought and killed 200 of an attacking mob. Pogroms also occurred in Baden, Brussels, Burren, Dresden, Eisenach, Erfurt, Freiburg, Gotha, Landsberg, Lindau, Memmingen, Solothurn, Speyer, Stuttgart, Ulm, Worms, and Zofingen. There were over 350 separate recorded massacres of Jews during the years of the Plague.

The approach of a group of flagellants frequently incited townsfolk to embark on pogroms and when they didn't, the Brethren proceeded posthaste to the Jewish quarter where they murdered and looted with a viciousness, ferocity, and completeness that foretold the *Final Solution* of the Nazis in the twentieth century. Western Europe killed or expelled the Jews even as Pope Clement VI issued papal bulls forbidding plundering and killing them. As if on cue, local clergy either instigated anti-Semitic actions or failed to stop them, likely because properties of the Jews reverted to the Catholic Church upon the death of the families. What the Church lost in clergy and followers, it gained in tangible assets.

Eastern Europe, relatively unscathed by the Plague, tolerated the Jews. King Casimir of Poland offered to protect them. Some say it was because he had a Jewish mistress, but it is more likely that his country needed the skills they possessed. A return of the Jews to their former lands in western Europe was slow.

Once it ebbed, by the end of 1351, the Plague left Europe with a sizable shortage of workers and helped to destroy the feudal system when labor found itself in a seller's market. Abandoned homes were taken over by complete strangers, as there was a default redistribution of wealth.

The most generally agreed upon mortality figure was that one in three people were killed by the Plague—a total loss of well over 20 million in Europe and perhaps as many as 40 million worldwide.

[As with all things ancient and historical, there remains room for controversy. Scott & Duncan wrote *Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historic Populations* wherein they claim that the medieval plague was not due to Plague at all, but rather to some form of hemorrhagic viral disease. S. Cohn disagrees with those authors only insofar as the cause of the disease. Nevertheless, French researchers found *Y. pestis* in the dental pulp of bodies buried in Montpellier during the 14th century. Adding to this is a October 2001 paper of Parkhill, et al. in *Nature* 413:523-527. They announced the complete mapping of the bacterium's genome, all 4,653,728 base pairs (more of this in a later unit). They found 149 deactivated genes that once enabled the bacterium to thrive in the human gut, but are no longer needed.]

Although the Plague no longer killed millions, it remained present on the European continent for more than three hundred years, erupting in seemingly random locations until its final gasp in Marseilles in 1720. The last major infestation of Plague (over a million died) arose in China and India in 1855 and reached Hong Kong in 1894. Estimates are that 12 million died. It was here that Alexandre Yersin and Shibasaburo Kitasato independently described the causative agent. Strangely enough, it wasn't until 1897 that P. L. Simond identified the mode of transmission.

Today Plague is endemic in various places; Madagascar, Tanzania, Brazil, Peru, Burma, and Vietnam have experienced cases almost *every year* since the start of the last pandemic in 1880, and rodents in the southwestern United States carry it! In fact, 40% of the U.S. land area is infested by Plague-infected animals, mostly prairie dogs! Some national parks have signs saying not to feed the squirrels because they have Plague.

Since 1947, there have been 390 cases of Plague in the U.S. resulting in 60 deaths. From 1980-1994 this country has had 229 cases with 33 deaths. The last two Americans to succumb to Plague died in August 1996, both due to transmission by way of prairie dogs. A thirteen year-old Kazakhstani boy died of bubonic Plague on August 9, 1999—the first such death in that country in 25 years. Many other nonfatal cases have been reported.

Today east Africa and Hunan province in China are permanent reservoirs, called **inveterate foci**, for the disease. During 1965-1971, Vietnam (in addition to fighting a war against the United States) reported 25,000 cases of Plague. The World Health Organization received reports of 18,739 cases in the period from 1980-1994, of which there were 1853 deaths (that's a 10% death rate) and between 2000 and 3000 every year. What is disconcerting is that more cases were reported from 1990-1994 than in the entire previous decade (an average of 2025 cases/year versus 861 cases/year).

The last known case of human-to-human transmission occurred in Los Angeles in 1924.

The latest large, but not major, outbreak occurred on September 20, 1994 in the Indian city of Surat in the state of Gujarat. Initially the government of India did not recognize the presence of the disease until several hundred thousand people had fled the region. By October 2, there had been 2500 cases reported and official figures of 58 deaths. Considering that this strain was the highly contagious pneumonic variety, thus spread by aerosol droplets upon respiration and was amenable to treatment with tetracycline, such a low mortality figure may or may not be comforting.

A vaccine was available for those who expected to come in contact with animals that may have been infected, but it was not completely effective. The manufacturer discontinued production in 1999 and it is no longer available. It worked on bubonic Plague but not pneumonic.

Rather ominously, the September 4, 1997 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* carried a brief report from Galimand et al. describing a case of multiple antibiotic resistant bubonic Plague. The causative agent, *Y. pestis*, acquired a resistance plasmid from an unknown source. The thought of another worldwide pandemic of Plague that is resistant to modern medical treatment boggles the mind.

On August 26, 1999 the wire services carried a story announcing the development of a vaccine for bubonic Plague designed to protect against bio-terrorism. Human trials were to begin shortly. We await the results.

A separate issue is the use of *Y. pestis* for bio-warfare.

[return to index](#)

Observant Augustinians

<http://www.augnet.org/default.asp?ipageid=1199>

Observant movement - 01

In 1992 an eminent medieval historian, Professor Francis Xavier Martin O.S.A. (now deceased) stated that the Order of Saint Augustine has never adequately investigated the history of its observant movement during the times before, during and after the Protestant Reformation.

He attributed this partly to a degree of Augustinian shame about Martin Luther, who was a member of the observant movement throughout his life as an Augustinian.

The Order of Saint Augustine was not far past its Grand Union of the year 1256 when yearnings for its hermit (eremitical) origins of the previous two centuries led to corresponding steps being taken by the leaders of the Order.

The title, *Order of Hermits of Saint Augustine*, was in fact a misnomer, yet it truthfully reflected the origins of many of the groups that were drawn into the Order at the Grand Union of 1256.

Persons looking back at the traditional hermit (eremitical) origins of the Augustinians were often members who were looking for a greater spiritual intensity in Augustinian life.

They sometimes feared that the call of the Church to apostolic activity in the newer mendicant tradition had the potential to reduce the quality of spiritual and community life.

There was a similar sense in those called the "spirituals" amongst the Franciscans in Umbria, whereas the Augustinian hermit (eremitical) tradition was strongest in Tuscany.

In both the Franciscan and Augustinian Orders particularly, communities seeking this supposed "original" intensity of spirituality, penitence and a more strict observance of the spirit of Francis and Augustine were said to be part of an observant movement.

The observant movement was strong among the Augustinians in Tuscany partially because of a tradition that was later proved to be historically incorrect.

They had thought that Augustine had lived in - or even possibly instituted - a hermitage in Tuscany at some time between his conversion in Milan in 387 AD and his return to Africa and the community at Thagaste in 388 AD. (In fact, it is certain that he spent that time in Rome.)

This inaccuracy was compounded by a document later proved to be spurious, the so-called *Sermones ad Fratres in Eremo* ("Sermons [of Augustine] to the Brothers in the Hermitage").

From 1320 onwards, the unfounded claim was made about an unidentified Italian hermitage named Centumcellae in which Augustine was said to have resided and handed over his Rule, and another claim that he had visited the *Eremo di Lecceto*. These claims were actively believed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Because at this time members of the Order wished to believe that Augustine had literally founded their Order, Centumcellae was proclaimed to have been the very first house of the Order of Saint Augustine – established by Augustine himself 868 years before the Grand Union.

As previously stated, any lingering desire for and idealizing of the eremitical (hermit) style of life that had existed before the Grand Union would have resonated in spirit with many more friars who only desired that their current mendicant lifestyle was lived by them more authentically.

With the passage of time, the simplicity and especially the severity involved in their religious life was being eroded by the granting of privileges and the promulgation of dispensations and exceptions, and sometime also by the poor implementation of regulations and the bad example of lax discipline.

There was the destructive force of endless exceptions to the Rule and the ruination caused by the neglect of true poverty. A spirit of selfishness which sought personal comfort and individualism was gaining strength within the Augustinian Order, whose ideal was the common good.

In 1422, with the end of the Great Western Schism, the call for the Councils of Basel was for “a renovation in the head and members of the Church.” The assembled prelates sought to solve the problem by legislation, but if renewal is to be true and permanent it must come from within.

For this to occur within a religious order, some members must arise whose spotless lives and high ideals bring about a voluntary reform; whose steady courage and persuasive powers will carry along the average religious. The Austins had many such men.

Reform-minded Augustinians emerged in every nation where the Order was present, except in France in England. France, however, had a belated, violent reform movement in the seventeenth century.

Good religious chafed under this lawlessness but could do nothing because, in one sense, lawlessness had become legalized. In an era when not every Pope or Prior General was resistant to the granting of documents authorizing privileges and dispensations, these documents usually contained strictest orders to lower superiors not to interfere with the process.

The Observance hoped to move forwards by effecting a return to the exact observance of the Augustinian vows and Constitutions. The Reform Congregations within the Order of St Augustine abolished every personal privilege and every exception to the Rule. Above all they bound themselves to practice perfect common life in which no one called anything his own.

Frequently this true new way of life was bitterly attacked, and the reformers found that the best solution was to unite their followers in houses from which non observant members were excluded. They protected themselves against the interference of antagonistic provincials by the union of observant houses into new governmental groupings.

These new governmental groupings were called *congregations* to distinguish them from provinces, and were placed directly under the Prior General. This admittedly, created, mini-orders within the Augustinian Order, but the only other practical alternative was the breaking up of the original order into parallel but completely autonomous sections. (This outcome won the day in the Franciscan Order, with the splitting into three Franciscan Orders, which still exist today.)

This call for a return to the original spirit of the Gospels as seen in the writings of St Augustine was especially acute in various quarters of the Augustinian Order 1385, which was 121 years after the Grand Union. The Order had begun to decline in numbers, and materialism and decadence in the Church were blamed for it.

The scandal of the Avignon Papacy (1309-1378), the reduction of Augustinian numbers through the Black Death (1348-1352 and 1361), and the uncertainty then being caused by the Great Western Schism (1387-1417) led people to recall religious orders to their original ideals and virtues.

The *Eremo* (hermitage) of Lecceto was accepted as a touchstone with Augustine by people in medieval times because they firmly believed (incorrectly!) that Augustine had visited an *eremo* (hermitage) there.

Within the Order of Saint Augustine, Lecceto was regarded as a living expression of the desire for its spiritual reform and renewal.

Already by the middle of the fourteenth century the *eremo* at Lecceto was famous as a centre of mystical piety. Saint Catherine of Siena, who died in 1380, found one of her spiritual directors there.

And so it was that, at the Augustinian General Chapter at Gran, Hungary in 1385 Lecceto was set aside as the first designated Augustinian house (*convento*) of strict observance mandated from above. (Previously in 1357 the Augustinian *convento* at Pavia in Italy had been taken from the Lombard Province and placed directly under the authority of the Prior General, but this had been a local initiative.)

It thus became the official model for the Augustinian observant (or observantine) movement. This was reinforced by repeated decrees at the General Chapters of 1394, 1397 and 1400.

Lecceto was taken from the Province of Siena, and placed directly under the Prior General in a special way.

The observant (or observantine) movement in the Order of Saint Augustine had officially begun. The *eremo* (hermitage) of Lecceto, which was dedicated to San

Salvador ("the Holy Saviour"), was to be the good example of Augustinian community living that hopefully other communities would then strive to copy.

The plan was at least successful to the extent that Lecceto gave excellent example of Augustinian life.

As already stated, the Observant Congregation of Lecceto began after the Augustinian General Chapter at Gran, Hungary in 1385. Its congregation remained small never exceeding more than twelve houses.

Even so, from it came some of the most famous Augustinians of this period, for example Charles Sforza of Attendola O.S.A., a brother to the duke of Milan who was Archbishop of Milan; and Mariano of Genazzano O.S.A., the well-known humanist and opponent of Girolamo Savanarola. Another was the famous cardinal, Giles of Viterbo O.S.A..

It was followed by the large Congregation of Lombardy which grew from the reform of Matthew de Introduce O.S.A.. In 1540 it comprised almost eighty houses but had an unfortunate tendency towards complete independence from the Prior General.

The reform came to southern Italy through the Carbonaria of Naples which was approved in 1421. Its greatest son was Cardinal Jerome Seripando O.S.A., papal legate to the Council of Trent.

Simonetus of Camerino O.S.A. brought observance to the northeast section of Italy in 1436. His Congregation of Monte Ortone remained the smallest, its houses never numbering more than five. It gave the Order Blessed Gratis a Cattaro O.S.A. (Yugoslavia), a lay brother of extraordinary holiness. The north-western part of Italy was reformed by the Congregation of Genoa, approved in 1473.

Other reform groups were the Congregations of Perugia in 1436, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, in 1470, and Puglia in 1492. The Congregation of Santa Maria del Popolo had the Augustinian reform movement in Ireland affiliated with it.

All of these congregations added lustre to the Order. Their excellent monastic life induced King James IV of Scotland to petition Pope Julius II in 1509 for a foundation in his kingdom. This concerned re-using a building at Manuel, West Lothian, Scotland, but it is uncertain whether an Augustinian house was or was not ever established there.

Only one congregation failed and brought the Order to the brink of disaster: the Congregation of Saxony which produced Martin Luther. In Germany, Martin Luther at Erfurt was a member of an observant house of the Order of Saint Augustine. His ill-fated journey to Rome in the winter of 1510-1511 was on business of the Augustinian observant houses in Germany.

The Augustinian observant congregation of Germany was seeking greater autonomy from the other houses (called "conventual" houses) of the Augustinians in Germany. The Augustinian Prior General that Luther was to meet in Rome was Giles of Viterbo O.S.A., who like Luther was a member of an observant congregation, i.e., Lecceto.

Whatever the Saxon Congregation of Saxony lost for the Order was more than regained by the Observants of the Iberian peninsula. They produced Saints John of Sahagun O.S.A. and Thomas of Villanova O.S.A..

The latter initiated the great missionary work in South America from where it expanded to the Philippines, Japan and China. Reform also prepared Portugal for its missions in India especially along the Bay of Bengal.

In Spain, the observant movement became so strong that the remaining houses of the Order of Saint Augustine in Spain were well in the minority.

The disinclination of the observant houses in Spain to be open to directions from the Prior General in Rome was partly due to the increase in Spanish nationalism, and the awareness that in the matter of reform they had almost no equal - and did not feel that instructions from Rome were very necessary for themselves.

The friars who belonged to the Augustinian observantine congregations were sometimes considered the least learned of the Order. According to Herrera, a medieval Augustinian friar and historian, these friars "devoted themselves more to prayer than to study."

However, the definitors of the Spanish congregation - always one of the most rigid - rejected the unfavorable judgment of the conventual brethren who categorized them as "simple and unlearned".

They asserted in their chapter of 1493 that it was pure calumny and without foundation. "By the grace of God almost all our priests know how to read well and can both sing and understand what they read. Further, among our brethren there are many learned men and good preachers, even though they are not concerned about degrees."

An anonymous Carthusian reiterated the same basic point regarding the French Augustinians of that period. In his *De religionum origine*, composed c. 1475, he states that although he had met only a few Augustinians, those he knew were "venerable men and very good preachers." The same can be said of the English Augustinians (Austin Friars).

The Observance succeeded only after a long and at times bitter struggle. Provincials deeply resented the constant efforts of the Observants to wrest the largest and most substantial houses from their control. The latter's retort that the bad example of such houses in important cities was more scandalous than in small places was convincing, but the conventuals (i.e., the non-Observants) seldom credited the Observants with such noble motives.

The Observants usually won out because the secular arm supported them in most instances and the populace has ever admired a strict religious life. The attitude of the Prior Generals veered from the conventuals to the observants according to their own affiliation. All the great Augustinian Prior Generals of the fifteenth century came from the Observance.

In numerical summary, it can be said that on the eve of the Protestant Reformation (and when Giles of Viterbo O.S.A. was Prior General in 1507-1517), there

were at least ten observant congregations: six in Italy, two in Spain, one in Germany, and one in Ireland.

The movement was so successful in the Order of Saint Augustine that it captured the office of Prior General a number of times during the fifteenth century, including one friar who was one of the greatest-ever occupants of the office of Prior General, Giles of Viterbo O.S.A..

Observant congregations sought increasing autonomy, which unavoidably cut back the unity of the whole Order and the ability of the Prior General to exercise his authority.

This caused difficulties in Spain and Germany. In Spain, the matter was resolved amicably, assisted by Giles of Viterbo O.S.A. as Prior General acting with care and sensitivity.

To understand Martin Luther in the context of the complicated origins of the Protestant Reformation, it is beneficial to understand the Augustinian observant movement.

This was a movement of reform within the Augustinian Order decades before Luther broadened his scope to call for broader reform within the Church generally.

The first observant house designated by an Augustinian General Chapter was the *eremo* (hermitage) of Lecceto. It was declared thus by the Augustinian General Chapter at Gran, Hungary in 1585, and again by subsequent chapters.

At the local level, an Augustinian *convento* (house) could be declared observant if a majority of the community desired it, and often won consent of their Augustinian Provincial (local superior) to only be assigned henceforth members who wished to adopt this more strict form of community life.

Whereas observants of the Franciscan Order emphasised poverty above all else, the Augustinian observants focused on an interiority that came from Augustinian spirituality - an inner existence of prayer and meditation, supported by the following of the *vita communis* (community life).

This was to be achieved by an unfailing attendance together at meals and set community prayer, as well as through the removal of personal possessions and of all exemptions and dispensations.

Augustinian observant houses in a geographical area then formed a unit called a *congregation*, located within a standard Augustinian province yet in certain issues autonomous from it.

In a nation (e.g., Italy, Spain, Germany and Ireland), therefore, there would be two bodies of Augustinians - the observants, and the conventional group, called "conventuals."

Both were officially under the control of the same Prior General, yet the relationship between observant and conventual Augustinians in some nations was one of hostility rather than of Christian charity.

This tension was even greater, for example, in the more numerous Franciscan Order, such that in 1517 the Franciscan observants were granted permission to become an entirely separate religious order.

The observant congregations won exemptions. These were privileges or exemptions from general law obtained over time variously from the Prior General or from the Holy See (the Pope).

The impact of the observant movement on the Order of Saint Augustine is highlighted by the fact that the observant movement included the four Augustinians who were most influential before, during and after the Protestant Reformation.

These were Giles of Viterbo O.S.A. (who also was Prior General for twelve years), Martin Luther O.S.A. in Germany, Girolamo Seripando O.S.A. (Italy, and also a Prior General), and (Saint) Thomas of Villanova O.S.A. (Spain).

By the sixteenth century, however, its success led to its loss of spiritual tone, and this tone was partly replaced by an attitude of superiority over the greater number of conventual Augustinians.

The Protestant Reformation and subsequent civil upheavals affected adversely the number of members in the Order of Saint Augustine in a number of countries (Germany, France, England, Hungary, Poland, and less so Italy and Spain).

A number of observant congregations ceased.

A step in the opposite direction happened, however, at Toledo in Spain in 1588, when a Provincial Chapter approved the formation of the Order of Augustinian Recollects, which finally was granted complete separation from the Order of Saint Augustine in 1912.

Today members of the Order of Augustinian Recollects (O.A.R.) minister in nineteen nations, most of which have a Hispanic background: Spain, throughout much of Latin America, Philippines, and also in Taiwan, China, Sierra Leone, USA and England.

There are presently no officially designated observant houses or congregations in the Order of Saint Augustine in an official sense.

In recent times, the Convento Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano, Italy has been recognised as a place of Augustinian pilgrimage and prayer, yet the two Augustinians there are ascribed members of the Augustinian Province of Italy in the same manner as in any other Italian *convento* of the Order of Saint Augustine.

Another special place in Augustinian history and spiritual tradition is the *Eremo* (hermitage) of Lecceto. It is now occupied by Augustinian contemplative nuns.

AUGUSTINIAN OBSERVANT REFORM MOVEMENTS

(Following the previous pages, this second coverage of this topic is summarised from an older German Catholic Encyclopedia.)

In the fourteenth century, discipline became relaxed in the Augustinian communities (and in those of other mendicant orders as well.)

This was the result of various causes, such as the mitigation of the *Rule*, either by permission of the pope or through a lessening of fervour, but chiefly in consequence of the Plague (1348-1352 and 1361), the Avignon papacy of 1309-1378, and the Great Western Schism of 1378-1417.

In an effort to counteract the sudden decrease in numbers caused by the plague ("Black Death"), the admission standards to religious orders were lowered and a reduced quality of preparation was given to new members.

And with the seventy-year embarrassment of continuously two claimants to the papacy, the Great Western Schism dramatically lowered both the respect for and the effectiveness of higher authority in the Church.

In a phenomenon similar to that which struck other religious orders, there emerged a number of Augustinian reformers anxious to restore the Order to its initial fervour and spirit.

These highly motivated Augustinians began several reformed congregations (i.e., regional groups of reform-seeking Augustinian communities), which received papal encouragement and recognition.

(The reform communities were called "observant congregations" because they called for a stricter observance of the *Rule* of Augustine, the *Constitutions* of the Order, and of the practical aspects of religious poverty and fasting.)

By the papal recognition of their observant congregation, the members of a declared observant (reformed)*convento* were guaranteed that the local Augustinian Provincial (regional superior) could not henceforth transfer them to a non-observant *convento*.

Some Augustinian Priors General actively promoted observant congregations as a vehicle for the reform of Augustinian communities. Other Priors General, however, disfavoured them out of their fear for losing the unity of the Order.

(Their fear was a real one, for in 1517 the division in the Franciscan Order became so severe that the Franciscan observants succeeded in becoming a completely separate Order.)

These Augustinian Priors General regarded observant congregations as being a divisive movement that supported the impression that there existed separate "strict" and "lax" Augustinian communities.

They thought that this could bring about reform only to limited sections of the Order, which would possibly be detrimental to the prospect of its universal reform.

Once approved by Rome, each of these regional observant movements elected its own vicar-general. Thereby generally removed from the authority of the Augustinian Provincial (regional superior), all were nevertheless ultimately under the control of the Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine.

The most important of these observant congregations was centred on the Augustinian *eremo* (hermitage) of Lecceto (*see photo gallery*), in the Tuscan district of Siena. The Augustinian community at Lecceto was constituted as an observant congregation in 1385, and soon drew 12 participating Augustinian convents into its movement of community reform and renewal.

In chronological order, other Augustinian observant congregations in Italy were those of St. John in Carbonara (Naples) founded about 1390 and having 14 convents; of Perugia (1491), having 11; the Lombardic Congregation (1430), 56; the Congregation of the Spanish Observance (1430), which after 1505 comprised all the Castilian monasteries; of Monte Ortono near Padua (1436), having 6 convents; of the Blessed Virgin at Genoa, also called Our Lady of Consolation (c. 1470), 25; of Apulia in Italy (c. 1490), 11; the German, or Saxon, Congregation (1493) (see next paragraph); the Congregation of Zampani in Calabria (1507), 40; the Dalmatian Congregation (1510), 6; the Congregation of the Colorites, or of Monte Colorito, Calabria (1600), 11; of Centorbio in Sicily (1590), 18; of the "Little Augustinians" of Bourges, France (c. 1593), 20; and of the Spanish, Italian, and French congregations of Recollect (and sometimes called Discalced, or Barefooted) Augustinians.

Among these reformed congregations, besides those of the Recollect Augustinians, the most significant was the Augustinian Observant Congregation of Saxony (in Germany).

As had happened in Italy, Spain, and France, reform began as early as the fifteenth century in the four German Augustinian provinces that had existed since 1299.

Johannes Zachariae O.S.A. of Eschwege, a Provincial of the Order in Saxony and a professor of theology at the University of Erfurt, began a reform in 1492.

Andreas Proles O.S.A., prior of the *convento* of Himmelpforten near Wernigerode, strove to introduce the reforms of Father Heinrich Zolter in as many Augustinian monasteries as possible.

Proles, aided by Father Simon Lindner of Nuremberg and other zealous Augustinians, worked assiduously until his death in 1503 to reform the Augustinian communities in Saxony, even calling in the assistance of the secular ruler of the region.

As the result of his efforts, the German, or Saxon, Augustinian Observant (Reformed) Congregation, recognized in 1493, comprised nearly all the important convents of the Order of Saint Augustine in the four German provinces of the Order of Saint Augustine.

Johann von Staupitz O.S.A., his successor as vicar of the Augustinian observant congregation of Saxony, followed in his footsteps. Staupitz had been prior of the Augustinians at Tübingen, and then at Munich.

He then had taken a prominent part in founding the University of Wittenberg in 1502, where he became a professor of theology and the first dean of that faculty.

Even after the public outbreak of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 Staupitz entertained friendly sentiments towards Martin Luther O.S.A., looking upon his proceedings as not being heretical but as being directed only against ecclesiastical abuses.

By 1519, however, Staupitz gradually changed his impression of Luther and turned away from his theology.

Staupitz resigned his office of vicar-general of the Augustinian German observant congregation in 1520, and soon afterwards transferred to the Order of Saint Benedict.

Father Wenzel Link O.S.A., a preacher at Nuremberg and a former professor and dean of the theological faculty at Wittenberg was elected his successor.

Link, however, shortly afterwards cast his lot with Luther, whose views were endorsed at a chapter of the Augustinian Saxon province held at Wittenberg in January 1522.

In 1523 Link resigned his office, and this virtually ended the German observant movement of the Order of Saint Augustine.


The German Augustinian observant communities that remained faithful to Rome then affiliated with the Lombardic observant congregation of the Order in northern Italy.

[return to index](#)

Welcome to a Day in the Life of a Monk

http://www.pbs.org/empires/martinluther/monk_welcom.html


nineNetwork PBS HOME PROGRAMS A-Z TV SCHEDULES WATCH VIDEO DONATE SHOP PBS SEARCH PBS



MARTIN LUTHER

A MONK'S LIFE

- home
- about martin luther
- the characters
- luther trivia
- a monk's life
- who said what?
- behind the scenes
- martin luther DVD
- classroom resources



Welcome to a Day in the Life of a Monk

The life of a medieval monk such as that of young Martin Luther was not easy and required enormous physical and mental sacrifice. They prayed eight times a day, slept little, performed painful penances and worked to support their brethren.

Experience a day in their life, the early rising, the praying and labor.

This Interactive feature is designed for most browsers including (Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0, 5.0, or 6.0 and Netscape Navigator 4.0 and above). In order to use this interactive feature you will need Macromedia Flash, [download here](#), download the free plug-in [here](#)

The extensive material within has resulted in some large file sizes. Please be aware this may cause delays for those with 56K modems.

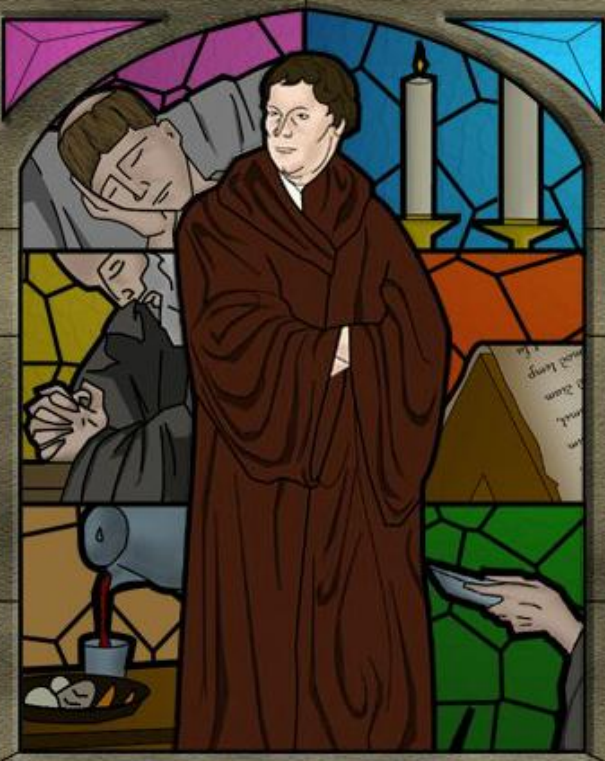
[Enter a Monk's Life](#)

If you do not have the Flash player you are able to view the non-Flash Version [here](#)

[Back to top](#)

[home](#) | [about luther](#) | [characters](#) | [luther trivia](#) | [monk's life](#) | [who said?](#) | [behind the scenes](#) | [DVD](#) | [classroom](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Credits](#) | [Pledge now](#)
©2003 Deviller Donegan Enterprises. All rights reserved.



A Day In The Life Of A Monk

"I was indeed a pious monk and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortifications even to death, by means of my watchings, prayers, reading, and other labors."

Martin Luther writing to Duke George of Saxony

Click on one of these scenes to experience a day in the life of a medieval monk.

Are you ready for the Quiz ?



Rest

Times: 3.30am-4.00am, 1.45-2.45pm, 8.00pm-1.45am

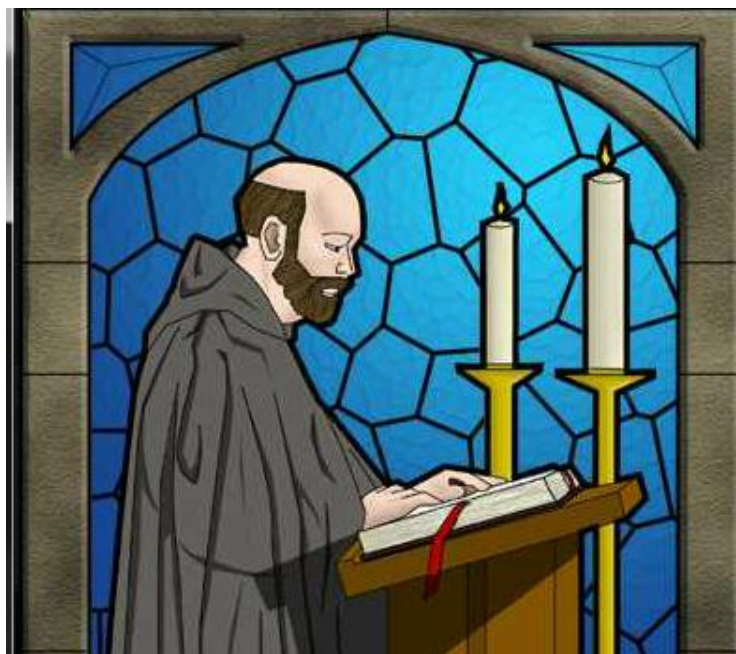
The life of a monk was harsh and uncomfortable. They lived in communal dormitories, or in single bare cells, which were hot in summer and freezing in winter.

Between praying up to seven times a day and working a medieval monk got little sleep. They averaged approximately five hours sleep between evening prayers and the 2am church service, and then snatched another half an hour before being up at 4am for more

prayer.

They were allowed to rest again after their midday meal but many spent that time in private reflection and reading.

They slept on narrow slaps of stone with only straw for padding, with only coarse blankets as a covering.



Church Service

Times: 2.00-3.30am, 4.00-5.00am, 6.00-6.30am, 8.00-9.15am, 11.45am-12.00pm, 2.45-3.00pm, 6.00-7.15pm, 7.45-8.00pm

Mass and the worship of God formed the heart of a monk's life. Communal prayers averaged about five hours per day, while private prayer and contemplation could take up to four further hours.

A monk's day began with the ringing of bells, some time between midnight and two a.m., signaling the first prayers of the day, which included hymns, psalms and

readings. After a short nap, prayers were again held at sunrise, and then at three-hour intervals throughout the day.

The 6am prayers were called Prime. Around 11.45am the monks would conduct the Chapter Mass, which is similar to the Catholic service of today.

In the early evenings the friars chanted Vespers in the monastery chapel. As each psalm came to an end they stood up and bowed in praise of God.

On Sundays the Psalms were sung in one or other of the eight plainchant modes. Later, before bed, came the final choir office, Compline or completion with its brief and beautiful 'anthem' to Mary at the end.

If anyone was late and missed processing with the other monks, he would have to come in alone to the chapel and stretch himself out on the floor in the middle of the choir, as a sign of apology for being late. When the sub-prior gave a signal, the latecomer was allowed to rise and go to his place.

Alongside the official liturgy, private prayer, especially mental prayer, always held an important place, with the monks spending many hours in personal contemplation of God and their faith.

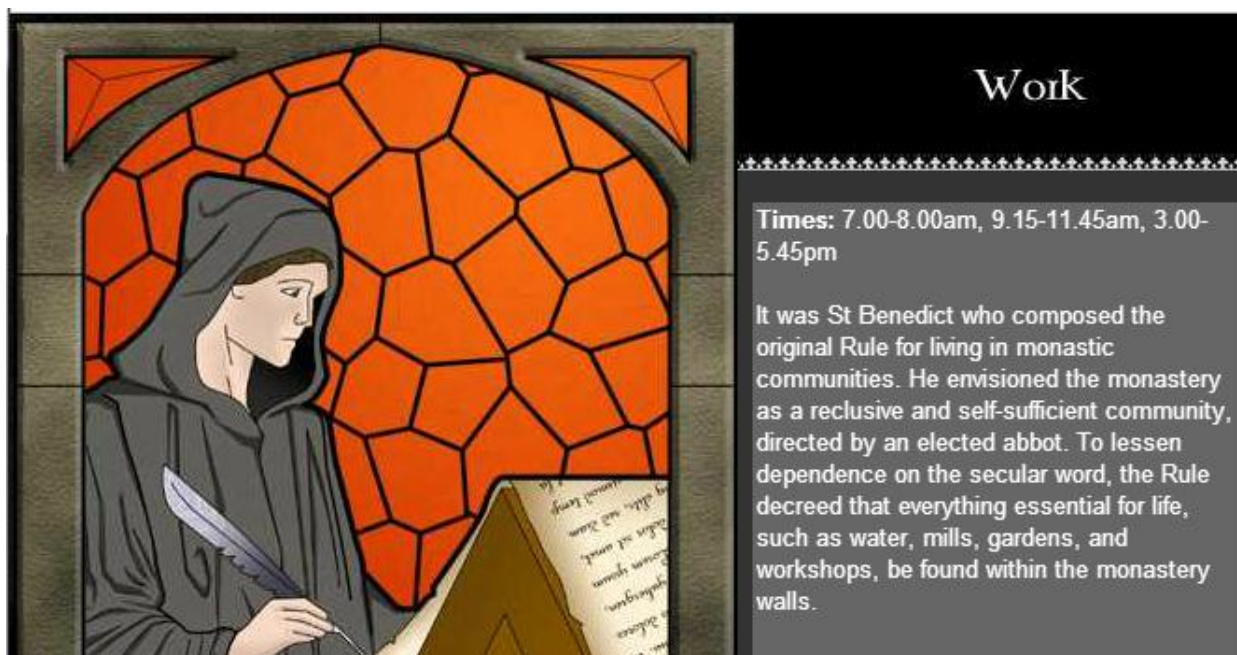


so seriously he was known to leave the confessional and then go straight back in to repent further sins.

The importance of penance also led to a culture of self-mortification where monks performed rituals designed to test their faith and endurance, and to show how humble they were before their God.

These included fasting, manual labour and could include sleeping on hard benches, without any blankets on or in Luther's case sleeping or lying out in the snow.

Medieval Christians were intent on purging their sins and proving their faith which is why penance played such a large role in their lives.



Aside from prayer a monk needed to be industrious to help the monastery survive. During the day, Monks worked in the monastery garden, helped with the cooking, cleaning, and laundry, and did other jobs that the abbot – the chief monk – gave them to do.

Growing crops such as wheat and barley and vegetables was the core occupation. Monks became so sophisticated at providing for themselves that many monasteries became well-known commercial operations. They also invented ground-breaking methods of agriculture that are still used today.

Because supplies of clean water were rare in the Medieval world, monasteries also specialized in beer and wine production – a skill which many have continued into the modern world. In England some monasteries became enormously wealthy by raising sheep and selling the wool.

And then there was the maintenance of the monastery itself; opening and shutting the gates, winding the clocks, sweeping and polishing the church and cleaning out the cells.

But the chief occupation of many monasteries was creating books in the scriptorium. In the days before printing, books were written out by hand using colors combined with egg whites, even real gold and silver to painstakingly illustrate and enhance their handiwork.

Writing out long books by hand was hard, slow work. An expert monk might copy out two or three books in a year – working full time. But it was through the work of these medieval monks that many of the great works of ancient literature were preserved through the dark ages and into the modern era.

The life of a monk was on the whole, a hard one.



Meals

Times: 6.30-7.00am breakfast, 12.00-1.00pm lunch, 5.45-6.00pm dinner

As with many of a monk's daily activities, meals were a solitary and silent affair, not to mention infrequent. Some monasteries only allowed one meal a day during the wintertime and two in the summertime.

In most monasteries monks were not allowed to talk during mealtimes instead developing a sophisticated sign language to compensate.

Foods consisted of what was grown within the monastery and what could be begged from nearby towns.

Their main foodstuffs included vegetables such as turnips or salad, dark breads, porridges, an occasional fish, cheese curds, beer, ale, or mead. Fish was smoked and meat dried to increase their longevity.

As a rule, monks did not eat meat except if they were ill and on special occasions.

As there was no clean water, beer and wine were the standard beverages and many monasteries housed a brewery or a vineyard. Indeed, monks are believed to have invented beer.



Community Work

Times: daily

Monasteries were an important part of any community, providing spiritual leadership to those living around, and they were often involved in the administration of a town as well.


But monks also relied on a town's generosity to help sustain them. Laden with his bread-bag, the monk would wander the streets and beg from house to house, presenting himself at the doors of those who had once been his friends or his

inferiors.

In return, the community would also rely on the expertise and knowledge of monks who had devoted their lives to study. They would turn to the monastery for help with sickness and disease; monasteries were the first institutions to provide ongoing health care – the precursors of modern hospitals.


And most importantly, the monasteries were often the sites of the first schools. Originally set up to train young monks in the making, these schools soon extended their intake to include the children of the local community.

These monastic schools are still common across Europe, and are recognized as some of the best available.



Daily Timetable

01.45	- Wake up
02.00	- Church Service
03.30	- Sleep
04.00	- Church Service
05.00	- Private reading and prayer
06.00	- Church service then breakfast
07.00	- Work
08.00	- Church Service
09.15	- Work
11.45	- Church Service
12.00	- Midday Meal
13.00	- Private reading and prayer
13.45	- Sleep
14.45	- Sleep
15.00	- Work
17.45	- Meal
18.00	- Church service
19.15	- Private reading and prayer
19.45	- Church service
20.00	- Bed and sleep



St Benedict's rules for monks

1. Once you have entered a monastery, you must stay there until you die.
2. All monks must take turns working in the kitchens, and waiting at table.
3. Monks must remain busy, either with manual work, or in study and prayer.
4. Monks must remain silent, unless they have to speak.
5. The Abbot must be a father to his community.

6. The Abbot must hold meetings with all the monks to decide monastery business.

7. The Abbot's orders must be obeyed without argument.

8. Every monk must take a vow of chastity.

9. No one should own anything.

10. Monks must pray together seven times a day.

11. At every meal, there must be a reading from the bible.

12. Great care must be taken of those who are sick.



Glossary

Abbot - the chief monk, the father of the community (abbess in a nunnery).

Almoner - looked after the poor who visited the abbey (giving alms).

Brother - all monks were addressed as brothers.

Bursar - in charge of financial accounts.

Cellarer - in charge of food and general provisions.

Chancellor – in charge of the library, and the copying by hand of books.

Cowl – hood

Crozier – ornamental shepherd's crook, carried by abbot (or bishop)

Girdle- rope belt, with attached crucifix

Habit- the loose robe worn by all monks

Infirmarian – in charge of medical care, particularly herbal medicine

Insignia – general word for ceremonial clothing and objects

Hospitaller – looked after the guest house – no visitor to the abbey was denied hospitality.

Mitre – ceremonial hat worn by abbot (or bishop)

Novice – a beginner; someone who has recently joined a monastery. Novice monks spent two or three years in training, before deciding whether to take their final vows.

Precentor – in charge of music; the abbey choir-master

Prior – assistant to the abbot, or chief of a small monastery (prioress in a nunnery).

Sacrist – looked after the monastery's treasures, and vestments.

Tonsure – shaved hair-style, leaving a circle of hair (like a crown of thorns)

Vestments- ceremonial clothing worn sometimes during church services.

[return to index](#)

The Flagellants

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06089c.htm>

Flagellants

A fanatical and heretical sect that flourished in the thirteenth and succeeding centuries, Their origin was at one time attributed to the missionary efforts of St. Anthony of Padua, in the cities of Northern Italy, early in the thirteenth century; but Lempp (Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, XII, 435) has shown this to be unwarranted. Every important movement, however, has its forerunners, both in the idea out of which it grows and in specific acts of which it is a culmination. And, undoubtedly, the practice of self-flagellation, familiar to the folk as the ascetic custom of the more severe orders (such as the Camaldolese, the Cluniacs, the Dominicans), had but to be connected in idea with the equally familiar penitential processions popularized by the Mendicants about 1233, to prepare the way for the great outburst of the latter half of the thirteenth century. It is in 1260 that we first hear of the Flagellants at Perugia. The terrible plague of 1259, the long-continued tyranny and anarchy throughout the Italian States, the prophecies concerning Antichrist and the end of the world by Joachim of Flora and his like, had created a mingled state of despair and expectation among the devout lay-folk of the middle and lower classes. Then there appeared a famous hermit of Umbria, Raniero Fasani, who organized a brotherhood of "Disciplinati di Gesù Cristo", which spread rapidly throughout Central and Northern Italy. The brotherhoods were known by various names in various localities (Battuti, Scopatori, Verberatori, etc.), but their practices were very similar everywhere. All ages and conditions were alike subject to this mental epidemic. Clergy and laity, men and women, even children of tender years, scourged themselves in reparation for the sins of the whole world. Great processions, amounting sometimes to 10,000 souls, passed through the cities, beating themselves, and calling the faithful to repentance. With crosses and banners borne before them by the clergy, they marched slowly through the towns. Stripped to the waist and with covered faces, they scourged themselves with leathern thongs till the blood ran, chanting hymns and canticles of the Passion of Christ, entering the churches and prostrating themselves before the altars. For thirty-three days and a half this penance was continued by all who undertook it, in honour of the years of Christ's life on earth. Neither mud nor snow, cold nor heat, was any obstacle. The

processions continued in [Italy](#) throughout 1260, and by the end of that year had spread beyond the Alps to Alsace, [Bavaria](#), [Bohemia](#), and [Poland](#). In 1261, however, the [ecclesiastical](#) and [civil authorities](#) awoke to the danger of such an epidemic, although its undesirable tendencies, on this occasion, were rather political than [theological](#). In January the [pope](#) forbade the processions, and the [laity](#) realized suddenly that behind the movement was no sort of [ecclesiastical](#) sanction. It ceased almost as quickly as it had started, and for some time seemed to have died out. Wandering flagellants are heard of in [Germany](#) in 1296. In Northern [Italy](#), [Venturino of Bergamo](#), a [Dominican](#), afterwards [beatified](#), attempted to revive the processions of flagellants in 1334, and led about 10,000 men, styled the "Doves", as far as [Rome](#). But he was received with laughter by the Romans, and his followers deserted him. He went to [Avignon](#) to see the [pope](#), by whom he was promptly relegated to his [monastery](#), and the movement collapsed.

In 1347 the Black Death swept across [Europe](#) and devastated the Continent for the next two years. In 1348 terrible earthquakes occurred in [Italy](#). The [scandals](#) prevalent in [Church and State](#) intensified in the popular mind the feeling that the end of all things was come. With extraordinary suddenness the companies of Flagellants appeared again, and rapidly spread across the Alps, through [Hungary](#) and [Switzerland](#). In 1349 they had reached [Flanders](#), [Holland](#), [Bohemia](#), [Poland](#), and [Denmark](#). By September of that year they had arrived in [England](#), where, however, they met with but little success. The English people watched the fanatics with quiet interest, even expressing pity and sometimes admiration for their devotion; but no one could be induced to join them, and the attempt at proselytism failed utterly. Meanwhile in [Italy](#) the movement, in accordance with the temperament of the people, so thorough, so [ecstatic](#), yet so matter-of-fact and practical in religious matters, spread rapidly through all classes of the community. Its diffusion was marked and aided by the popular *laudi*, folk-songs of the Passion of Christ and the Sorrows of Our Lady, while in its wake there sprang up numberless brotherhoods devoted to penance and the corporal works of mercy. Thus the "Battuti" of [Siena](#), [Bologna](#), [Gubbio](#), all founded *Case di Dio*, which were at once centres at which they could meet for devotional and penitential exercises, and hospices in which the sick and destitute were relieved. Though tendencies towards [heresy](#) soon became apparent, the sane [Italian faith](#) was unfavourable to its growth. The confraternities adapted themselves to the permanent [ecclesiastical](#) organization, and not a few of them have continued, at least as charitable associations, until the present day. It is noticeable that the songs of the *Laudesi* during their processions tended more and more to

take on a dramatic character. From them developed in time the popular mystery-play, whence came the beginnings of the Italian drama.

As soon, however, as the Flagellant movement crossed the Alps into Teutonic countries, its whole nature changed. The [idea](#) was welcomed with enthusiasm; a ceremonial was rapidly developed, and almost as rapidly a specialized [doctrine](#), that soon degenerated into [heresy](#). The Flagellants became an organized [sect](#), with severe discipline and extravagant claims. They wore a white habit and mantle, on each of which was a red cross, whence in some parts they were called the "Brotherhood of the Cross". Whosoever desired to join this brotherhood was bound to remain in it for thirty-three and a half days, to swear obedience to the "Masters" of the organization, to possess at least four pence a day for his support, to be reconciled to all men, and, if married, to have the sanction of his wife. The ceremonial of the Flagellants seems to have been much the same in all the northern cities. Twice a day, proceeding slowly to the public square or to the principal church, they put off their shoes, stripped themselves to the waist and prostrated themselves in a large circle. By their posture they indicated the nature of the [sins](#) they intended to expiate, the murderer lying on his back, the adulterer on his face, the [perjurer](#) on one side holding up three fingers, etc. First they were beaten by the "Master", then, bidden solemnly in a prescribed form to rise, they stood in a circle and scourged themselves severely, crying out that their blood was mingled with the Blood of Christ and that their penance was preserving the whole world from perishing. At the end the "Master" read a letter which was supposed to have been brought by an [angel](#) from [heaven](#) to the [church](#) of St. Peter in [Rome](#). This stated that Christ, angry at the grievous [sins](#) of [mankind](#), had threatened to destroy the world, yet, at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, had [ordained](#) that all who should join the brotherhood for thirty-three and a half days should be saved. The reading of this "letter", following the shock to the emotions caused by the public penance of the Flagellants, aroused much excitement among the populace. In spite of the protests and criticism of the [educated](#), thousands enrolled themselves in the brotherhood. Great processions marched from town to town, with crosses, lights, and banners borne before them. They walked slowly, three or four abreast, bearing their knotted scourges and chanting their melancholy [hymns](#). As the number grew, the pretences of the leaders developed. They professed a ridiculous horror of even accidental contact with [women](#) and insisted that it was of [obligation](#) to fast rigidly on Fridays. They cast [doubts](#) on the necessity or even desirability of the [sacraments](#), and even pretended to absolve one another, to cast out [evil spirits](#), and to work [miracles](#). They asserted that the ordinary [ecclesiastical](#)

jurisdiction was suspended and that their pilgrimages would be continued for thirty-three and a half years. Doubtless not a few of them hoped to establish a lasting rival to the Catholic Church, but very soon the authorities took action and endeavoured to suppress the whole movement. For, while it was thus growing in Germany and the Netherlands, it had also entered France.

At first this *fatuus novus ritus* was well received. As early as 1348, Pope Clement VI had permitted a similar procession in Avignon in entreaty against the plague. Soon, however, the rapid spread and heretical tendencies of the Flagellants, especially among the turbulent peoples of Southern France, alarmed the authorities. At the entreaty of the University of Paris, the pope, after careful inquiry, condemned the movement and prohibited the processions, by letters dated 20 Oct., 1349, which were sent to all the bishops of France, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and England. This condemnation coincided with a natural reaction of public opinion, and the Flagellants, from being a powerful menace to all settled public order, found themselves a hunted and rapidly dwindling sect. But, though severely stricken, the Flagellant tendency was by no means eradicated. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were recrudescences of this and similar heresies. In Germany, about 1360, there appeared one Konrad Schmid, who called himself Enoch, and pretended that all ecclesiastical authority was abrogated, or rather, transferred to himself. Thousands of young men joined him, and he was able to continue his propaganda till 1369, when the vigorous measures of the Inquisition resulted in his suppression. Yet we still hear of trials and condemnations of Flagellants in 1414 at Erfurt, in 1446 at Nordhausen, in 1453 at Sangerhausen, even so late as 1481 at Halberstadt. Again the "Albati" or "Bianchi" are heard of in Provence about 1399, with their processions of nine days, during which they beat themselves and chanted the "Stabat Mater". At the end of the fourteenth century, too, the great Dominican, St. Vincent Ferrer, spread this penitential devotion throughout the north of Spain, and crowds of devotees followed him on his missionary pilgrimages through France, Spain, and Northern Italy.

In fact, the great outburst of 1349, while, perhaps, more widespread and more formidable than similar fanaticisms, was but one of a series of popular upheavals at irregular intervals from 1260 until the end of the fifteenth century. The generating cause of these movements was always an obscure amalgam of horror of corruption, of desire to imitate the heroic expiations of the great penitents, of apocalyptic vision, of despair at the prevailing corruption in Church and State. All these

things are smouldering in the minds of the much-trying populace of Central Europe. It needed but a sufficient occasion, such as the accumulated tyranny of some petty ruler, the horror of a great plague, or the ardent preaching of some saintly ascetic, to set the whole of Christendom in a blaze. Like fire the impulse ran through the people, and like fire it died down, only to break out here and there anew. At the beginning of each outbreak, the effects were generally good. Enemies were reconciled, debts were paid, prisoners were released, ill-gotten goods were restored. But it was the merest revivalism, and, as always, the reaction was worse than the former stagnation. Sometimes the movement was more than suspected of being abused for political ends, more often it exemplified the fatal tendency of emotional pietism to degenerate into heresy. The Flagellant movement was but one of the manias that afflicted the end of the Middle Ages; others were the dancing-mania, the Jew-baiting rages, which the Flagellant processions encouraged in 1349, the child-crusades, and the like. And, according to the temperament of the peoples among whom it spread, the movement became a revolt and a fantastic heresy, a rush of devotion settling soon into pious practices and good works, or a mere spectacle that aroused the curiosity or the pity of the onlookers.

Although as a dangerous heresy the Flagellants are not heard of after the fifteenth century, their practices were revived again and again as a means of quite orthodox public penance. In France, during the sixteenth century, we hear of White, Black, Grey, and Blue Brotherhoods. At Avignon, in 1574, Catherine de' Medici herself led a procession of Black Penitents. In Paris, in 1583, King Henry III became patron of the "Blancs Battus de l'Annonciation". On Holy Thursday of that year he organized a great procession from the Augustinians to Notre-Dame, in which all the great dignitaries of the realm were obliged to take part in company with himself. The laughter of the Parisians, however, who treated the whole thing as a jest, obliged the king to withdraw his patronage. Early in the seventeenth century, the scandals arising among these brotherhoods caused the Parliament of Paris to suppress them, and under the combined assaults of the law, the Gallicans, and the sceptics, the practice soon died out. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Flagellant processions and self-flagellation were encouraged by the Jesuits in Austria and the Netherlands, as well as in the far countries which they evangelized. India, Persia, Japan, the Philippines, Mexico, and the States of South America, all had their Flagellant processions; in Central and South America they continue even to the present day, and were regulated and restrained by Pope Leo XIII. In Italy generally and in the Tyrol similar processions survived until the early years of the nineteenth century; in Rome itself they took place in

the [Jesuit](#) churches as late as 1870, while even later they occurred in parts of [Tuscany](#) and [Sicily](#). Always, however, these later Flagellant processions have taken place under the control of [ecclesiastical](#) authority, and must by no means be connected with the [heretical](#) epidemic of the later [Middle Ages](#).

Sources

One of the best modern accounts of flagellation and the Flagellants is an article by HAUPT, *Geisselune, kirchliche, und Geisslerbruderschaften*, in *Realencykl. für prot. Theol.* It contains full and excellent bibliographies. Some of the original authorities for the outbreak in 1260 will be found in PERTZ, *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, XVII, 102-3, 105, 191, 402, 531, 714; XIX, 179. For the heresy of 1348 may be consulted: *Chroniken der deutschen Städte*, VII, 204 sqq.; IX, 105 sqq.; *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, XXI (1881), 21 sqq.; *Recueil des chroniques de Flandre*, II (Bruges, 1841), 111 sqq.; FREDERICQ, *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis hæreticæ pravitatis neerlandicæ*, I (Ghent, 1889), 190 sqq.; BERLIÈRE, *Trois traités inédits sur les Flagellants de 1349*, in *Revue Bénédictine*, July, 1908. Good accounts are to be found in MURATORI, *Antiquitt. Ital. med.*, ævi, VI (Milan, 1738-42), diss. lxxv; GRETSER, *Opera*, IV (Ratisbon, 1734), 43-5; ZÖCKLER, *Askese und Mönchtum*, II (Frankfort, 1897), 518, 530-7.

[return to index](#)

Of the Awful Judgment: for Awakening Fear in Oneself

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anselm/meditations.iv.ii.html>

St. Anselm's Book of Meditations and Prayers.

SECOND MEDITATION.

OF THE AWFUL JUDGMENT: FOR AWAKENING FEAR IN ONESELF.

[§ 15. *The sinner's fear.*] My life affrights me. For when carefully reviewed, its whole course shows in my sight like one great sin; or at least it is well-nigh nothing but barrenness. Or, if any fruit is seen in it, that fruit is so false, or so imperfect, or in some way or other so tainted with decay and corruption, that it must needs either fail to satisfy God, or else utterly offend Him.

So then, sinner, thy life, so far from being almost all, is altogether all steeped in sin, and therefore worthy of condemnation; or else it is unfruitful, and deserving of disdain. But why distinguish the unfruitful from the damnable? For surely, if it is unfruitful, it is damnable by that very fact. For what the Truth hath spoken is as evident as it is true: 'Every tree that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire' (St. Matt. iii. 10). For if I employ 37 myself in constructing something useful or serviceable, surely I do not value the result of my labour at the price of the bodily sustenance which I consume while employed on the work. Who feeds a flock, pray, which is to bring in less than the value of its pasturage? And yet Thou, O God, Thou dost all too bountifully feed and foster me; and dost await me, good-for-nothing worm and foul sinner that I am. O, how less offensive is a dead dog to the human senses than a sinful soul is to God; how much more loathsome to God is this than that is to men! Ah, no; call not the sinner a man, but a reproach, a disgrace to humanity; viler than a brute, more odious than a carcase. My soul is weary of my life; I am ashamed to live; I am afraid to die.

What, then, remains for thee to do, O sinner, but all through thy whole life to bewail thy whole life, and in such wise to do so as that all thy whole life may be a bewailing of itself?

But here again my soul is sadly bewildered, and bewilderingly sad as well; for it grieves not in proportion to its knowledge of itself, but slumbers on in such security as if it knew not in what plight it is. O barren soul, what art thou doing? O sinful soul, why dost thou slumber? The day of 38 judgment is coming, the great day of the Lord is at hand; at hand, I say, and all too swift. The day of wrath that day shall be; the day of tribulation and anguish, the day of calamity and misery, the day of darkness and gloom, the day of cloud and whirlwind, the day of trumpet and the trumpet-

cry. O bitter voice of the day of God! Why dost thou slumber, thou lukewarm soul? Thing neither hot nor cold, and fit only to be vomited out of the mouth, why dost thou slumber? He that awakes not, he that trembles not, at such thunders is not asleep but dead. O barren tree, where are thy fruits? Tree fit only for the axe and the fire, fit to be cut down and burnt, what are thy fruits? Why, they are only pricking thorns and bitter sins I Would to God the thorns pricked thee to repentance and so got broken; would to God those bitter fruits dropped off and perished!

Perhaps thou thinkest some sin or other a little thing. Would that thy strict Judge thought any sin a little thing! But, ah me, does not every sin by its unholiness dishonour God? What then; will the sinner dare to call a sin a little thing? When is it a little thing to dishonour God? O dry and useless tree, worthy of eternal flames, what wilt thou answer in that day when a strict account, ³⁹down to the twinkling of an eye, shall be required of thee of all the time dealt out to thee for living in, as to how it has been spent by thee? Ay, then will be condemned whatsoever shall be found in thee of labour or of leisure, of speech or of silence, down to the slightest thought; even the very fact that thou hast lived; if that life has not been ruled and directed to the will of God. Alas, how many sins will then start into view, as from an ambush, which now thou seest not! More, assuredly, and more terrible, it may be, than those which thou now seest. How many things which thou now thinkest not at all wicked, how many which thou now believest to be good, will then stand forth unmasked, sins of the deepest, blackest die! Then without doubt thou wilt receive according as thou hast done in the body; then, when there shall be no more time of mercy; then, when no repentance shall be accepted, when no promise of amendment may be made.

Here reflect on what thou hast done, and what award thou must receive. If much good and little evil, rejoice much; if much evil and little good, grieve much. What! O good-for-nothing sinner, are not thy evil deeds enough to extort a great and bitter cry? Are they not enough to distil thy blood ⁴⁰and thy marrow into tears? Wo to the strange hardness, which such heavy hammers are too light to break! O, insensible torpor, that such sharp goads are not sharp enough to waken! Alas for the deadly sleep, that thunders so terrific are too dumb to startle! O worthless sinner, all this should be enough to prolong a ceaseless grief; and surely it is enough to draw perpetual tears!

But why should I smother in silence aught of the weight or of the magnitude of the misery that threatens? Why cheat the eyes of my soul? Shall I do so, that sudden sorrow may rain all unforeseen on the sinner; or that the intolerable storm may pelt upon him unawares? Surely this is riot for his interest. But if I should put into words whatever I might contrive to conjure up in imagination, yet that could never bear any sort of comparison with the reality.

Therefore let my eyes drop tears all day and all night, and never rest. Come, sinner, come; add fresh griefs to thy load of griefs; add terror to terror; add cry to cry; for He the very God will

judge thee, in despite of whom I sin in every act of disobedience, and in every waywardness; He who has returned me good for evil, whilst I have given Him evil for good; who is now most long-suffering, but ⁴¹ will then be most severe; who is now most merciful, and will then be most just.

Wo is me! wo is me! Against Whom have I sinned? I have dishonoured God; provoked the Omnipotent. Sinner that I am, what have I done! Against Whom have I done it! How wickedly have I done it! Alas, alas! O wrath of the Omnipotent, fall not on me; wrath of the Omnipotent, where could I endure thee? There is no place in all of me that could bear thy weight. O anguish! Here, sins accusing; there, justice terrifying; beneath, the yawning frightful pit of hell; above, an angry Judge; within, a burning conscience; around, a flaming universe! The just will scarcely be saved; and the sinner entangled thus, whither, whither shall he fly? Tight bound, where shall I crouch and cower; how shall I show my face? To hide will be impossible, to appear will be intolerable; I shall long for the one, and it is nowhere; I shall loathe the other, and it is everywhere! What then? What then? What will happen then? Who will snatch me from the hands of God? Where shall I find counsel, where shall I find salvation? Who is He that is called the Angel of great counsel, that is called the Saviour, that I may shriek His Name? Why, here He is; ⁴² here He is; it is Jesus, Jesus the very Judge Himself, in whose hands I am trembling!

[§ 16. *The sinners hope.*] Breathe again, sinner, breathe again; do not despair; trust in Him Whom thou fearest. Fly home to Him from Whom thou hast fled away; cry cravingly to Him Whom thou hast so proudly provoked. Jesus, Jesus; for the sake of this Thy Name, deal with me according to this Name. Jesus, Jesus; forget Thy proud provoker, and bend Thine eye upon the poor invoker of Thy Name, the Name so sweet, the Name so dear, the Name so full of comfort to a sinner, and so full of blessed hope. For what is Jesus but Saviour? Therefore, Jesus, for Thine own self's sake be a Jesus to me; Thou who formedst me, that I perish not; who redeemedst me, that Thou condemn me not; who createdst me by Thy goodness, that Thy handiwork perish not by my iniquity. Recognise and own, Benignest, what is Thine; take away what is another's. Jesus, Jesus, mercy on me, while the day of mercy lasts, that Thou damn me not in the day of judgment. For what profit shalt Thou have in my blood, if I go down into eternal corruption? 'For the dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord, nor any of them that go down to hell' (Ps. cxiii. 17). If Thou ⁴³ fold me in the wide, wide Bosom of Thy mercy, that Bosom will be none the less wide on my account. Therefore admit me, O most desired Jesus, admit me into the number of Thine elect; that with them I may praise Thee, and enjoy Thee, and make my boast in Thee amongst all who love Thy Name; who with the Father and the Holy Ghost reignest gloriously throughout unending ages. Amen.

Johann von Staupitz

<http://reformation500.csl.edu/bio/johann-von-staupitz/>

Johann von Staupitz



During his time as Luther's supervisor in the Augustinian order, Johann von Staupitz had a direct influence upon his spiritual and theological development and Luther later attributed much to his former monastic superior. It was Staupitz who heard Luther's confessions, served as his spiritual advisor during the spiritual struggles of his early career, and eventually directed him to channel his prodigious intellect and personal scrupulosity into his teaching at Wittenberg. It was also Staupitz who would impress upon Luther an Augustinian understanding of sin and grace that contributed to his criticisms and rejection of the Nominalist view of salvation.

His birth date unknown, Staupitz came from noble stock in the Saxon town of Motterwitz, where he counted as a childhood friend the future prince of Electoral Saxony and patron of the Reformation, Frederick the Wise. He received his education in liberal arts at Thomistic strongholds in Leipzig and Cologne, arriving in Cologne in 1482 and earning his master of arts in 1489. Sometime shortly thereafter, he took monastic orders with the Hermits of St. Augustine at their cloister in Munich. In 1497, he left Munich to continue his theological studies at Tübingen, earning his doctor's degree by 1500.

Staupitz's education at Tübingen exposed him to the more fashionable Nominalist teachings of the day. Noted Nominalist Gabriel Biel had taught earlier at Tübingen, and his pupil, Wendelin Steinbach, remained there when Staupitz arrived. The Nominalist views he learned did not lead the young Augustinian back to his Thomistic roots, nor to embrace the *via moderna*, but instead to the namesake of his order: Augustine of Hippo. While Nominalists made election contingent upon the foreknowledge of God, which merely saw in advance the obedience of sinners doing what was in them and accordingly dispenses grace to them (*facientibus quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*), Staupitz aligned election with an Augustinian notion of predestination. God initiates salvation by first dispensing his grace, then justifies the sinner according to the grace given. It was this Augustinian understanding of sin and grace that Staupitz would impress upon Luther during their time together and would help shape Luther's early theological development.

Staupitz became Luther's superior when he was named vicar-general of the Reformed Congregation of the Hermits of St. Augustinian in Germany in 1503. After graduating from Tübingen, Staupitz served from 1500 to 1502 as prior at the Munich cloister where he took orders, but his longtime friend, Frederick the Wise, called him in 1502 to serve as professor of Bible and dean of the theology faculty at the newly founded university in Wittenberg. The Augustinian prior accepted, but within a year he was named vicar-general of the reformed Augustinians. In the later Middle Ages, many religious orders were divided between Observants and Conventuals; the former sought a strict reform according to the order's rule, while the latter resisted such stern disciplinary measures. The Reformed Congregation was a confederation of Observant houses throughout Germany, including Luther's Black Monastery in Erfurt, and it was constituted under direct supervision of the pope, not the Augustinian general in Rome.

When Staupitz was chosen vicar-general, he hatched a plot to reform the Augustinian orders throughout Saxony by uniting the Reformed Congregation with the Saxon Conventuals in 1507. He received approval from the papal legate to Germany, Cardinal Carvajal, through a 1510 papal bull. Upon hearing of the bull, however, seven of the 29 Observant houses in the reformed congregation opposed the measure. This eventually led the Erfurt cloister to send two representatives to Rome to appeal the decision, one of which was Luther himself. While the decision in Rome favored Staupitz (and as a consequence led to tension between Luther, who

later came to support Staupitz, and his Erfurt brothers, who continued their opposition), the vicar-general eventually tabled the merger in 1512 because of stiff resistance.

These affairs led to another unintended contribution of Staupitz to the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation: he chose Luther to replace him as professor of Bible at Wittenberg in 1512. The relationship between Staupitz and Luther began as early as 1507, when Staupitz sent Luther to Wittenberg to lecture in his place the next year and earn his bachelor of Bible. He would serve as Luther's confessor and spiritual advisor for a decade, leading to his suggestion that Luther earn his doctor's degree in theology and become a professor. Staupitz had been taxed by his teaching and administrative responsibilities and he needed someone to succeed him in the chair at Wittenberg. Luther would receive his doctor's degree in an October 1512 ceremony and two days later take Staupitz's post as professor of Bible.

With the attempted reform of the Saxon order and his professorship at Wittenberg behind him, Staupitz devoted the remainder of his tenure as vicar-general to visitation and preaching. He was especially well-received at Nuremberg, where a famous circle of disciples formed using the name *Sodalitas Staupitziana*. The group included several members who would become significant figures after the onset of the Reformation: Lazarus Spengler, the future councilman and reformer of Nuremberg; Albrecht Dürer, the famous painter; and Christoph Scheurl, a humanist who remained Catholic, but was still prominent in the administration of affairs in Nuremberg. The group later changed the name of its sodality to *Martinianer*, reflecting Luther's influence.

Staupitz's relationship with Luther continued well into the controversy over indulgences. It was Staupitz who accompanied Luther during his October 1518 interview with Cardinal (Tomasso de Vio) Cajetan, mediating between the two and urging Luther to submit to authority. When Luther would not, Staupitz absolved him of his monastic vows, freeing him from the supervision of the Augustinian order to pursue his theological reforms. Nonetheless, Luther's 1518 *Resolutiones*, an explanation of the 95 *Theses* that he deemed congruent with the thought of his mentor Staupitz, included a letter to his vicar-general requesting that Pope Leo X consider the treatise favorably. In subsequent years, Staupitz began distancing himself from Luther's reforms. He eventually resigned his post with the Reformed

Congregation at a 1520 chapter meeting in Eisleben to take a position as court preacher and advisor to Cardinal Lang in Salzburg. A year later, he would receive a papal exemption to cut ties with the Augustinian Hermits and join the Benedictines, soon becoming abbot at the house in Salzburg.

Contact between Luther and Staupitz waned in the succeeding years. Luther sent a 1523 letter to his former superior, criticizing him for taking the post in Salzburg, as well as for remaining loyal to the pope and in service to a cardinal. Staupitz replied later, taking issue with the direction the Reformation had turned, both in its theological positions and in the conduct of its adherents. Soon after composing the response, he would die on December 28, 1524, and was buried at the Benedictine monastery in Salzburg. Though Staupitz never left Rome for the Reformation, his writings raised enough suspicion during the Counter Reformation that they were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1559.

[return to index](#)

Rome and Romans - - Martin Luther

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/browning/Lesson7.pdf>

FROM THE PULPIT MINISTRY OF PASTOR TOM BROWNING
ARLINGTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The History of the Reformation...



HOW CHRIST
RESTORED
THE GOSPEL
TO HIS
CHURCH

Rome and Romans Martin Luther

In order to properly understand the importance of Luther's journey to Rome in the winter of 1510, it is important to understand something of the place and standing of indulgences in medieval Catholicism. I bring that up even though indulgences were not, in fact, the reason Luther went to Rome. At the time, Luther was an up and coming young priest in his order and he accepted the Catholic Church's teaching regarding indulgences without reservations of any kind. His opposition to indulgences would come later and when it finally did come it was really only directed toward those scandalous abusers of the practice like Tetzel. No it would be later, much later in fact, before Luther would finally call into question the sacrament of penance and the whole concept of indulgences. You see when Luther visited Rome in the winter of 1510, he longed to obtain for himself and for those he loved just about any and every indulgence he could. Still that is not the principal reason he went.

Actually, when Luther went to Rome in 1510, it wasn't because of indulgences ...it was rather because he was sent. He was sent as one of two representatives for his monastical order, the Order of the Augustinian Hermits. He was sent along with another monk to represent one side of a conflict over how the Order of the Augustinian Hermits ought to be organized and governed. Now the details of that conflict aren't very important. Besides, Luther wasn't even the principal representative or leader on the trip. He was the junior partner...in fact, he was simply a traveling partner...the Augustinians required monks travel in pairs. But that was all right with Luther. His secondary role allowed him a good deal of free time to see and to explore the glories of Rome.

Now when Luther visited Rome in the winter of 1510, he wasn't really interested in any of the great archaeological sites tourists want to see today. He wasn't really interested in the

Roman Forum or even the Pantheon. No, when Luther visited Rome in the winter of 1510, he was only interested in the great ecclesiastical sites. That is, he was only interested in seeing for himself those religious shrines and holy places that provided opportunities to do works of penance and to gain indulgences. That is why, of course, I mentioned the fact that to understand the importance of Luther's trip you have to understand something of the nature and place of penance and indulgences in medieval Catholicism. You see...many...most of the religious shrines and holy places in Rome had indulgences attached to them. When a person visited such a shrine and listened to a mass...made confession and received communion, they were eligible to obtain whatever indulgence was attached to the place. The indulgence they received then reduced the amount of time or temporal punishment that person or whatever person they designated in their place would receive in purgatory. As a result, Luther's journey to Rome, more or less, took on the nature of a quest...a pilgrimage...meaning that Luther was striving to obtain as many indulgences as he could. So, Luther wanted to see everything. Of course, what actually happened was that he saw and learned a great many things that disappointed him. But before I talk about that, I think I ought to take just a minute or two and put into your mind something of the difficulty of Luther's journey to Rome.

The trip from Erfurt to Rome is six hundred and thirty-four miles by air. But, of course, Luther did not take the trip by air. Nor did he travel by coach or wagon or even by mule. No, Luther walked...he walked the whole long way. Just so you can get a sense of the kind of distance we are talking about...the trip from Erfurt to Rome is just about exactly the same distance as a trip from Arlington to Denver.

Of course the walk in his day would have actually been a lot longer than six hundred and thirty-four miles and the principal reason for the additional mileage was that Luther would not have been able to walk in a straight line from Erfurt to Rome. There was a small obstacle in his way...a small geological obstacle otherwise known as the Swiss Alps¹.

Now during their trip, Luther and his companion would have walked from one major city or town to the next. In that regard they would have been fortunate. Larger towns had monasteries and since they were monks, they would have been permitted and even welcomed to stay in any number of monasteries along the way and that would have been important because it would have resolved the problem of food and shelter for them. Of course, they would not have always been able to make it from one monastery to the next in a day's journey and would have had to sometimes manage for themselves.

Now, I mentioned the Alps a moment ago but I ought to add that in Luther's day, travelers did not especially enjoy scenic trips through the mountains like we do today. That would have been especially true in winter. The travel would have been dangerous and it was grueling. The Septimer Pass heading down to Milan was lined with a number, perhaps hundreds, of crosses where travelers had been killed along the way.² Many of the wilder spots in the Alps were so terrifying they were given names of places from hell.³ Still, the two monks made it in one piece.

Right before the two men reached Rome, Luther had to be hospitalized for a stomach ailment. Still, the two men managed to make it to Rome in just a little over a month, which if you think about it was really not bad at all. That meant that they averaged about twenty to twenty-five miles a day.

Now I bring that up, not because I want you to become experts on travel in medieval times but rather because I want you to understand something of the personal sacrifice involved when pilgrims traveled in Luther's day. It was a terrifying undertaking and it was exhausting. It was dangerous and the danger was not just related to thieves and robbers but to disease, and to difficult geography and to inclement weather. Now that raises the question, **"Why would anyone purposely want to go through that kind of journey?"**

The answer is that the medieval Catholic believed the spiritual rewards associated with such a trip were great. Individuals could, by making a pilgrimage, do works of penance that that would restore the baptismal grace they had lost in committing sin. They could also obtain indulgences, indulgences which helped do away the debt of temporal punishment...owed for sin.

Now the reason that happened...the reason penance and indulgences were important...was because medieval Catholics viewed justification like this. They believed that at baptism a person received the grace of baptism and that a person was restored to a state of innocence. They also believed that after that whenever a person sinned a measure of that justifying grace was lost.

Over a period of time, a person committing a measure of sin lost more and more of their justifying grace. It is almost as if they viewed grace as a substance that **"leaked out"** when a person sinned...something like water out of a bathtub. Now if a person committed a mortal sin...all of the grace they had received in their baptism was lost.

The question then became and this was a very important question...what does a person do to restore themselves to the state of grace they had before. The answer was they were to do works of penance. The Council of Trent put it this way...

As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost: for this manner of Justification is of the fallen the reparation: which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost.⁴

Now to state that as plainly as I can, the Catholic Church taught that when a person sinned they lost the grace that they had first obtained in their baptism. It also taught that a person could restore themselves to a state of grace by doing works of penance. Penance then was a sacrament in that it was the vehicle through which God's grace was received, or perhaps it would be better to say received all over again. God's grace was first obtained in baptism and then if lost reattained through penance.

Now I am spending some time here because I want to distinguish in your minds the difference between doing works of penance and procuring an indulgence. Penance had to do with justification. That is penance removed the penalty of eternal punishment.

Indulgences, on the other hand, removed the penalty of temporal sin. Now that is hard for a good Protestant to grasp. We do not separate the two ideas. We believe that Jesus' death redeemed us from the temporal and eternal punishment of our sin. Although, we do freely acknowledge that God does sometimes chasten us temporally for our sin. Still, that is not how good medieval Catholics looked at it. They believed that sin had to be paid for both eternally and temporally. They believed that baptism and penance removed the eternal punishment for sin. But they believed that purgatory removed the temporal punishment of sin. That is, a fully justified person might not go straight into heaven until the temporal punishment of their sins was obtained. That is what indulgences did. They sped up or in some cases removed the temporal punishment of sin in purgatory. Now that is not always what people heard. Sometimes on account of their ignorance or on account of the unscrupulous nature of the person hawking indulgences people heard, **"Commit whatsoever sin you desire and obtain forgiveness for it."** But that was never the official position of the church. Still that happened and it happened, I think, a good deal more than the modern church is willing to admit. Now in case you think I am being unfair in my explanation of the difference between **"penances"** and **"indulgences"** let me read to you a quote from the online Catholic Encyclopedia.

In the Sacrament of Baptism not only is the guilt of sin remitted, but also all the penalties attached to sin. In the Sacrament of Penance the guilt of sin is removed, and with it the eternal punishment due to mortal sin; but there still remains the temporal punishment required by Divine justice, and this requirement must be fulfilled either in the present life or in the world to come, i.e., in Purgatory. An indulgence offers the penitent sinner the means of discharging this debt during his life on earth.⁵

Now you can see, I think, why Luther's trip to Rome was important for Luther. Listen to what Richard Friedenthal writes:

The city of Rome was the goal of every devout pilgrim. To go there guaranteed a large indulgence. To have seen the holy places was for many the most ardent desire and the greatest experience of their lives. Such must have been the attitude of the young Father Luther.⁶ When Luther first gained sight of the City of Rome he fell to the ground and shouted out, **"Holy Rome, I salute thee!"**⁷

There were all kinds of opportunities to obtain indulgences in Rome but not only was it possible to obtain an indulgence, it was possible to obtain a plenary indulgence, which meant that not just a part but the whole of temporal punishment could be discharged simply by visiting a shrine and listening to mass while there and making confession and receiving communion.

It was common for pilgrims to not only obtain an indulgence for themselves but also for their family members. This was especially true for priests...who sought for themselves the right to say mass in any shrine they could for saying the Mass for themselves gained them additional merit. Luther was to say later and you have to understand the way Luther was to get this, “

Oh! how I regret that my father and mother are still alive! What pleasure I should have in delivering them from the fire of purgatory by my masses, my prayers, and by so many other admirable works!”⁸

Anyway, Luther visited all of the shrines...that is, all of the important ones...including the seven major churches of Rome. We don't have anything like a daily log of his travels but we know enough to know that he hit all of the major spots. Luther was terrified at the lack of spirituality and decorum manifested by the Italian priests. He disliked them immensely and they returned the favor...thinking of him as lumbering, German oaf.

In one of the places where Luther was permitted to say Mass, one of the priests...the priest superintending the visitors who were performing the ceremony kept whispering, “**Passa, passa, passa...**” which is Italian for “**Hurry it up...get a move on.**” It irritated Luther immensely. But the Italians were used to visiting priests and the long lines of priests wanting to say Mass caused them to want to keep things moving. Richard Marius writes:

Roman priests like Christian priests everywhere at the time were paid to say masses for the souls of the dead. They sped along, Luther said, as if doing a trick...⁹

Luther, of course, was outraged that they lacked the same sense of reverence toward the Mass that he had come to know and love in Germany. He actually said their actions made him want to vomit. On the other hand, they were annoyed that he was such an idealist.

In another place, Luther recounted that one of the priests next to him had completed seven masses while he was still working on his first. The priest turned and spoke sharply to him saying, “**Hurry up and send the Son back to His mother.**”¹⁰

And in another place, when Luther was eating supper with a group of Italian priests he heard them brag openly about substituting in the Mass at the place where they were supposed to consecrate the bread these words, “**Panis es, et panis manebis; vinum es, et vinum manebis.**” Now, for a good Catholic such would have been blasphemous. What they were saying was, “**Bread thou art and bread thou wilt remain.**” The Luther added that the priests went ahead and offered the bread up for the adoration of the common people laughing all the while at their ignorance and superstition. It infuriated Luther. He later wrote,

I was a thoughtful and pious young monk. Such language grieved me bitterly.
If 'tis thus they speak at Rome, freely and publicly at the dinner table,
wondered I to myself, what would it be if... all — pope, cardinals, and courtiers
— thus repeat the mass!¹¹

But the behavior of the priests was really just a reflection of the lawlessness of the times. Many of the churches surrounding Rome were very difficult to get to because of bands of marauders that often swooped down on pilgrims robbing them of their money and offerings. In fact, while Luther was in Rome the situation had gotten so bad that the Pope had begun to send out a nightly patrol of three hundred horsemen to patrol the city. If they found anyone out on the roads they were punished. If they were armed they were immediately hung or thrown into the Tiber River.¹²

Now the most famous incident of Luther's stay in Rome occurred as he climbed the Sancta Scala in one of [his] pilgrimages.¹³ It was one of the most important shrines in all of Rome. It was staircase and it was believed to be the very staircase Christ ascended and descended in His appearance before Pilate.



Now does any question come to mind with me saying that?

It should. Jesus ascended and descended the steps up to Pilate, if there were any steps, not in Rome but in Jerusalem and Jerusalem is 1,428 miles to the east. So the question that ought to come to your mind is, **“Just how did a very large marble staircase wind up 1,428 miles away from where it was first installed?”** The answer to that question has been different in different ages. In Luther’s day, it was believed to have been magically transported from Jerusalem to Rome by angels. In our day, the faithful say St. Helen, who happened to be Constantine’s mother paid to have it removed and reinstalled in Rome.

Anyway, the *Sancta Scala* was enclosed in a small chapel just outside the church of St. John the Lateran. Pilgrims came from everywhere to climb the staircase on their knees and to kiss the steps and to pray an **“Our Father.”** Each step gained for the faithful pilgrim and indulgence of 9 years...that is, it removed nine years from a person’s stay in purgatory. There were certain steps that had crosses carved into them and each of those counted double. If a person climbed the whole staircase, and who could not climb the whole thing once there, procured for themselves or someone they loved a plenary indulgence, which meant a complete indulgence or release from all of the temporal punishment of sin to be suffered in Purgatory. Luther climbed the steps, all twenty-eight steps on his knees, kissing each step as he went and saying the necessary **“Our Father”** not for himself but for the benefit of his deceased grandfather.¹⁴

When he got to the top and turned and looked back down his son Paul later wrote that Luther said to himself, **“The just shall live by faith.”** But I have to tell you I don’t think that is what he said at all. I don’t think he had come to that conclusion yet. In fact, I think he was still about five years away from his breakthrough understanding of the gospel. Besides, Luther himself says later that he stood up looked back down the staircase and said to himself, **“Who can know if these things are so?”**¹⁵

Now that was, I think, a remarkable conclusion for medieval Catholic monk to draw.

Luther had come to Rome with an innocence and naiveté and he was going back home to Erfurt a **better, wiser, sadder man.** Later he would say, He came to Rome with garlic and left with onions...which I think amounts to about the same thing. Now, I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. Luther was not yet a reformer...but the Lord had planted seeds of disillusion in his mind. He was no Protestant...he was still in every way a Catholic...but the Lord had started a rumbling deep down in his soul and the Lord intended that disillusionment to grow until Luther was altogether miserable. It would be necessary for the Lord to hollow Luther out completely before he would be able to receive and hold the truth of the doctrine of justification for himself. And Rome had helped to push that process along. Luther was no longer quite so naive but he still believed in the medieval Catholic Church. He still believed that all that was needed was a strong reforming Pope to come in a sweep all the unbelief and

unbelievers and put an end to all the abuses. But alas, that was not what was going to happen. The pope of the future, Leo X, was exactly the opposite of what Luther hoped for. The abuses were going to get worse and then the gospel was going to break in on Luther and subsequently on the whole world.

Still Luther could not yet see it coming. Still, he was hopeful that things might be made right.

A month after he and his traveling companion had arrived in Rome, they set off again across the Alps and back to Erfurt. When Luther arrived he was transferred almost immediately to Wittenberg, which is a very small town in comparison to Erfurt. He was transferred, I think, because Von Staupitz wanted Luther's talent near him and he himself had been transferred to Wittenberg to take the theological chair at the new university. Luther was able to finish his doctorate work there and on October 18-19, 1512 he graduated as a Doctor of Holy Scripture.

Within the year, Von Staupitz switched him from teaching philosophy to teaching the Bible. Luther started first with the Psalms and then followed the Psalms with Paul's Epistle to the Romans. After that, he began to teach Galatians. Somewhere, during the Epistle to the Romans he came to his understanding of the gospel.

Now, the conflict for Luther and the breakthrough for Luther came in the word **"righteousness"** as it is used in Romans 1:17.

NIV **Romans 1:17**...For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: **"The righteous will live by faith."**

Now what Luther struggled to understand was what Paul meant by the righteousness of God. You see, the way scholars understood it in that day was that it was the righteousness God demanded and for an introspective, slightly neurotic monk, the righteousness God demanded was a terrifying thing. Later Luther would say this:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But...a single word in Chapter 1...stood in my way. For I hated that word **"righteousness of God,"** which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand *as that* righteousness...with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God...I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners...Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place...desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, **"In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, '"**

He who through faith is righteous shall live.” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith...*it is* the righteousness of God revealed by the gospel, *that is*, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates...And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word **“righteousness of God.”** Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.¹⁶

You see the reason for Luther’s confusion...the reason for much of medieval Catholicism’s confusion centered in the fact that they believed at baptism a person was made intrinsically righteous...that is, they believed a person was actually made holy on the inside. I think if you want to understand Luther’s battle you ought to keep this image in mind.

What that meant practically was that baptism and penance for medieval Catholicism was the key. Baptism made a person intrinsically righteous and penance provided an opportunity to restore righteousness lost through sin. Now, part of the misunderstanding stemmed back to Jerome’s translation of the Latin Vulgate. Whenever he translated the word for **“to justify”** he used the Latin word **“justificare”** which is derived from two Latin words...**“justis”** and **“facere”** which when combined mean to **“make righteous.”**

NIV **Romans 3:28**...For we maintain that a man is **justified** by faith apart from observing the law.

BGT **Romans 3:28**...λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.

VUL **Romans 3:28**...arbitramur enim **iustificari** hominem per fidem sine operibus Legis

The problem with that was that the underlying Hebrew and Greek words for **“to justify”** both carried the nuance **“to declare righteous”** rather than **“to make righteous.”** I hope you can see why that matters. If not maybe this will help. I am reading from Alister McGrath’s *Reformation Thought*.

What is Luther talking about in this famous passage, which vibrates with the excitement of discovery? It is obvious that his understanding of the phrase the **‘righteousness of God’** has changed radically. But what is the nature of this change?

The basic change is fundamental. Originally Luther regarded the precondition for justification as a human work, something which the sinner had to perform, before

he or she could be justified. Increasingly convinced, through his reading of Augustine, that such an act was *impossible*, Luther could *only understand* the righteousness of God...as a punishing righteousness. But in this passage, he narrates how he discovered a '**new**' meaning of the phrase — a righteousness which God gives to the sinner. In other words, God himself meets *His own demand*, graciously giving sinners what *He requires them to have* if they are to be justified. An analogy may help...

Let us suppose that you are in prison, and are offered your freedom on condition that you pay a heavy fine. The promise is real — so long as you can meet the precondition, the promise will be fulfilled. *Catholic theology worked* on the presupposition, initially shared by Luther, that you have the necessary money stashed away somewhere. As your freedom is worth far more than the money, you are being offered a bargain. So you pay the fine. This presents no difficulties so long as you have the necessary resources. But Luther increasingly came to share the view of Augustine that sinful humanity just doesn't have *any money*. *In that regard, Luther was correctly reading the Bible's analysis of man's condition*. Now, you can see why that caused Luther a problem. Since sinners you don't have the money, the promise of freedom *have any* relevance to their situation. For Luther, therefore, *and for Augustine before him*, the good news of the gospel is that you have been *given* the necessary money with which to buy your freedom. In other words, the precondition has been met for you by someone else.

Luther's insight, which he describes in this autobiographical passage, is that the God of the Christian gospel is not a harsh judge who rewards individuals according to their merits, but a merciful and gracious God who bestows righteousness upon sinners as a gift.¹⁷

Now that was Luther's discovery, rather his rediscovery of the gospel. It was not, however, Luther's gift to the church. It is the gift of the Lord Jesus to all those that call on Him in faith and I wonder this morning...I wonder if even here there might not be someone that is still trying to work their way into God's favor...or trying to work their best to keep God's favor. If you are, you never going to make it. You are never going to attain to a level of righteousness that will please Him because all your righteousness, not all your sin...but all your righteousness is as filthy rags. But He has promised if anyone will come to Him He'll not turn them away.

NIV Matthew 11:28..."Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Now do you know what that means? It means he'll rest you from pursuing righteousness to gain God's favor. It means he'll give you His own imputed righteousness to cover you over like a pure white garment and that He'll make you to be at peace with God. That's what Luther rediscovered and what Paul preached and what many of us have come to know experientially. You can know it too, if you don't...just come...not by works but by faith.

Let's pray.

- ¹ "Alps" taken from Dictionary.com...A mountain system of south-central Europe, about 805 km (500 mi) long and 161 km (100 mi) wide, curving in an arc from the Riviera on the Mediterranean Sea through northern Italy and southeast France, Switzerland, southern Germany, and Austria and into the northwest part of the Balkan Peninsula. The highest peak is Mont Blanc, 4,810.2 m (15,771 ft), on the French-Italian border.
- ² Richard Friedenthal, *Luther and His Times*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1967), 77.
- ³ Ibid, 77.
- ⁴ Council of Trent, Chapter XIV: On the Fallen and Their Restoration.
- ⁵ Taken from the article in the On-line Catholic Encyclopedia on "Indulgences." Cf. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm>
- ⁶ Friedenthal, 77.
- ⁷ J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the 16th Century*, Book 2, Chapter 6, 215.
- ⁸ D'Aubigne, 217.
- ⁹ Ricahrd Marius, *Martin Luther; The Christian Between God and Man*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 82. He writes: "The city swarmed with prostitutes, some living in elegant palaces, frequented by members of the high clergy and treated as grandes dames. They came from everywhere in western Europe. Homosexuality among the clergy was common, acknowledged by many Italians, its practice by clergy high and low later condemned by Pope Leo K Pope Julius II was said to suffer from syphilis, the new disease from the New World, and he was accused by some close to him of homosexuality. The streets were made dangerous by beggars, many of them vagabond monks crowding into the city to live off the tourist traffic. Luther was most shocked by the irreligion of Rome. Italian priests, he said, scorned those who believed all the scripture, a declaration that seems to indicate the progress of skepticism that may have come from humanistic study of classical texts. Many, he said, did not believe in a life after death. Nor did they take seriously the daily religious rituals that provided most with their living. Luther claimed that he went to mass time and again and was shocked by the irreverence of officiating priests—which made him want to vomit. "
Bread thou art, and bread thou shalt remain," they chanted in Latin at the altar, mocking the doctrine of transubstantiation and by extension the tradition of the church and the notion of the unseen world. Roman priests like Christian priests everywhere at the time were paid to say masses for the souls of the dead. They sped along, Luther said, as if doing a trick, and when he took his turn at the altar to say his own mass, slowly in the pious German way, the next priest in line hissed, **"Get on with it! Get on!"**
- ¹⁰ D'Aubigne, 217.
- ¹¹ D'Aubigne, 218.
- ¹² Friedenthal, 82.
- ¹³ James Strong & John McClintock, "Scala Sancta" in the *Cyclopedia Of Biblical, Theological And Ecclesiastical Literature*. "(Ital. for holy stair), a celebrated staircase, consisting of twenty-eight white marble steps, in a little chapel of the Church of St. John Lateran at Rome. Romanists assert that this is the staircase which Christ several times ascended and descended when he appeared before Pilate, and that it was carried by angels from Jerusalem to Rome. Multitudes of pilgrims creep up the steps of the Scala Santa on their knees with roses in their hands, kissing each step as they ascend. On reaching the top, they repeat a prayer. The performance of this ceremony is regarded as being particularly meritorious, entitling the devout pilgrim to plenary indulgence. It was while thus ascending these holy stairs that Luther thought he heard the words "The just shall live by faith," and, mortified at the degradation to which his superstition had brought him, fled from the spot."
- ¹⁴ Marius, 83.
- ¹⁵ D. Martin Luther, *Werke*, 67 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883—1997) See Volume 51:89. As noted by Marius, 83.
- ¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1960; reprinted 1999), 336-7.
- ¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 95-6.

[return to index](#)