

We are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper is a Villain: The Subject of Death in the Devotional Writings of Martin Luther

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We are familiar with Martin Luther the expositor, the gladiator for Scripture's truth, the biting polemicist, the penetrating exegete, the careful dogmatist. But what kind of pastor was he? For the past few months I have been studying his devotional writings (Volumes 42 and 43 of the American Edition of Luther's Works) in search of Pastor Luther.

As pastors we might be evaluated by the devotions we present at the Ladies Aid Society meeting or the Confirmation class pot-luck, or by the article we write for the monthly newsletter to members. Most likely some patterns would begin to emerge which would reveal our personal theological perspective.

Through his 21 devotional writings we can gain a sense of Pastor Luther's ministry. Several themes emerge. Prayer is the subject of five of the works. One deals with the Sacrament of the Altar (although this matter is taken up often enough in several seeming digressions in other writings so that I consider it a theme). Far and away the most treated subject is death: what is its fundamental cause? What is the Christian's attitude toward this terror? How can one prepare for death? The devotional writings reveal Pastor Luther's perspective on ministry to those facing death.

Martin Luther did not serve a church with padded pews. Probably he could have; some comfortable appointments existed in his day, for example among the cathedral chapters or the prince's chaplains. In fact, Luther could have been a promising candidate for a plush parish, given the depth of his theological insight, his wit, his plain-spoken nature and his ability to stand with confidence before the elite and powerful of his world.

But instead Luther's parish was a gritty one. In his devotional writings he seldom enjoyed the luxury of dwelling on relatively innocuous subjects such as the beauty of God's creation and the joy of serving Him. Instead, these writings portray Luther as one whose pastoral perspective is shaped by the hard task of applying God's truth to the grim circumstances of his day. He writes to a parish in the grip of the Black Death, to a congregation whose pastor was murdered, to Christians whose church was by mob action forced to embrace Romanism, to women who have suffered miscarriage. Is it any wonder that such harshness in daily ecclesiastical life required of Luther a pastoral attitude different from our own, at least in respect to unremitting, intense challenges to Christian faith?

In light of the difficulties of life Luther and his parishioners faced we understand why he would define the central and over-riding duty of a pastor this way:

Because this letter will go out in print for people to read, I regard it useful to add some brief instruction on how one should care and provide for the soul in time of death. We have done this orally from the pulpit, and still do so in fulfillment of the ministry to which we have been called as pastors. (Vol 43, page 134)

Clergy in any era can learn from Luther that the chief pastoral responsibility will always be to "care and provide for the soul in time of death." The prospect of death and destruction animates Luther's pastoral ministry, and because we, too, and those we serve "are guests at an

inn whose keeper is a villain” (Vol 43, 146) we must be pastors who will learn from Luther to bring to their parishioners a ministry which prepares them for their own last days.

Death’s cause

Although the death rate for every generation remains at 100%, in our day death is usually sanitized before we have to face it. Not so in Luther’s day. He and his people were quite familiar with fellow-evangelicals who had lost their lives in religious warfare, as had Francis von Sickingen (Vol 43, 59), and with those who suffered religious assassination, as had George Winkler, of whose murderer (perhaps a Church official!) Luther wrote,

Let this be the first comforting fact, that we know who that murderer is who slew our dear brother, George, though we certainly cannot know who those gentlemen were who gave the orders or whose fists and weapons did the deed. I hear loud defense of the bishop of Mainz as innocent, and I sincerely hope that he is and will let it go at that. (Vol 43, 147)

Elaborating on the evil days in which he lived, days when lives were lost or taken in ways so foreign to the more civil, atmosphere in which we live, Luther said,

We see this in every experience we have, for he (Satan) shows himself bluntly as the murderer in all the killing that is done throughout the world, on water and land, at home and at court: this man is stabbed; that one’s throat is cut; someone drowns; another burns to death; yet another is slain by a falling wall and the wolves devour the next, and so on and so on. People are killed in all sorts of ways, all of which are the devil’s work or that of his servants. (Vol 43, 146)

Luther himself was not exempt from the threat of violence, although he viewed that prospect sardonically:

They threaten us with death. If they were as smart as they are stupid, they would threaten us with life. It is a shame and disgrace to try to threaten and terrify Christ and his Christians with death for, after all, they are lords and victors over death. It is just like trying to frighten a man by bridling and saddling his horse and bidding him to ride on it. (Vol 43, 63)

In August of 1527, the Black Death (bubonic plague) finally reached Wittenberg. This devastation killed one-fourth of the population of Europe. Luther was asked whether it was a failure of faith to flee. In *Whether one may flee from a deadly plague*, we have not only his answer, but an insight to the intimate familiarity people of his day had with death. How offended our sensibilities would be if we had to answer the question, “But our cemetery, what is it like?” in this way:

“Four or five alleys, two or three marketplaces, with the result that no place in the whole town is busier or noisier than the cemetery. People and cattle roam over it at any time, night and day. Everyone has a door or pathway to it from his house and all sorts of things take place there, probably some that are not fit to be mentioned. (Vol 43, 137)

If Luther’s pastoral ministry was colored (we should say, darkened!) by such a grim and close relationship with death, it is no surprise that the devotional writings focus on its cause: death and all the trouble of this world are caused by man’s fallen status before God. He follows the trail back to the Garden: “From the living wood (footnote: ‘i.e., the tree in the garden of Eden, Gen. 2:17’) came sin and death; from the dead wood (footnote: ‘the tree of the cross on Golgotha’), righteousness and life.” (Vol 43, 183). Luther continues the image: “it was difficult to stay away from the living tree;” he even contemporizes it: “there is in man’s heart the deeply

rooted desire to seek life where there is certain death.” (183). Connected to Adam’s first sin and continuing in it, we are subject to the same consequence, death.

Not only is death the natural result of the general fallen condition of man but Luther attributed it to some specific causes:

But today it is a horrible sight to see how thankless and ungrateful we have been toward it (God’s Word). As if our past sins were not enough in themselves, when we incurred God’s wrath (in our ignorance) by masses, purgatory, worship of the saints, and other deeds of human righteousness, and filled every corner of the land with such idolatries, supposing that we were serving God in a special way, we then top this by persecuting that word which calls us to repentance of past abominations. And we knowingly and deliberately defend such idolatry with violence and executions, with cursing and blasphemy so that it would be no wonder if God would let loose over Germany not only the Turks but also the devils themselves, or if he would long since have swept it away, with a deluge. (Vol 43, 219)

Luther sees suffering and death as punishment for sin; not in the sense that specific sin warrants specific penalty but in the sense that sinful humanity deserves nothing better. Things that we might consider to be in the category of testing or chastening, Luther seems to include under the broad heading of punishment.

What are other causes for suffering and death? God’s justice is seen when sinners suffer death and hell, and by comparison the Christian is comforted in being spared. In *the Fourteen Consolations* Luther explains: “Great as the evils of death and hell are that we see in the damned, so great certainly are the gains that we see in ourselves, and the greater our blessings, the worse are their evils.” (Vol 42, 155) Though to the world it may seem strange, the death of Christians may also constitute a message of warning and condemnation from God to unbelievers; and at the same time a deliverance from trials for the believers:

...it is a terrible sign to all unbelievers when God decrees that his blessed saints shall be shamefully murdered and taken away. It is a sure indication that a great catastrophe is at hand, which is to come upon this world and from which God has chosen to save his own lest they be caught in this world and perhaps even fall and be lost together with the unbelievers, as happened in Genesis 19. (Vol 43, 162)

Additionally, Luther would say that death is in the world, not only because sin is in it, but as a demonic counterthrust to the Savior’s presence. “Wherever Christ is, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, and Annas will inevitably be also, so also his cross. If not, he is not the true Christ.” (Vol 43, 63) So it is the Christian’s honor to experience what Christ experienced, even death. “It is unimaginable that Christ our head should wear a crown of thorns and die on the cross but that we should be saved without any suffering and with nothing but joy and delight.” (Vol 43, 165)

Man’s attitude toward death

Man’s attitude toward death is probably best described as it is perceived in two states, the state of unbelief and the state of faith. In this lengthy section, Luther speaks of the former:

Death looms so large and is terrifying because our foolish and fainthearted nature has etched its image too vividly within itself and constantly fixes its gaze on it. Moreover, the devil presses man to look closely at the gruesome mien and image of death to add to his worry, timidity and despair. Indeed, he conjures up before man’s eyes all the kinds of sudden and terrible death ever seen, heard, or read by man. And then he also slyly suggests the wrath of God with which he (the devil) in days past now and then tormented

and destroyed sinners. In that way he fills our foolish human nature with the dread of death while cultivating a love and concern with life, so that burdened with such thoughts man forgets God, flees and abhors death, and thus in the end, is and remains disobedient to God. (Vol 42, 101)

Sin, Satan, self-love and conscience incite in man a great fear of death. These Luther tackled down and triumphed over with the Gospel, which is the basis for the believer's view of death. But before we turn to the Christian's confident attitude toward death, we take up the question of the Christian's natural, human fear. For example, facing plague, can a Christian turn and run? First, no one has the right to abandon fraternal obligations in the effort to flee death, "in disobedience to God's word and command." (Vol 43, 120) Under this precept, Luther says pastors ought to stay and minister, city officials ought to stay and manage public affairs (unless they have arranged for qualified substitutes). Recognizing differences among Christians, Luther writes:

If someone is sufficiently bold and strong in his faith, let him stay in God's name; that is certainly no sin. If someone is weak and fearful, let him flee in God's name as long as he does not neglect his duty toward his neighbor but has made adequate provision for others to provide nursing care. To flee from death and to save one's life is a natural tendency, implanted by God and not forbidden unless it be against God and neighbor, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 4 (5:29), "No man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." It is even commanded that every man should as much as possible preserve body and life and not neglect them, as St. Paul says in I Corinthians 12 (:21-26) that God has so ordered the members of the body that each one cares and works for the other. (Vol 43, 123)

This is a pastoral Luther speaking. Knowing both the best of the devout and the worst of the doubter, he has a word for each.

Now, what can and should be the Christian's attitude toward death? First, and in general, Luther counsels not to doubt God's good and gracious will because of death. Offering *Comfort for women who have had a miscarriage*, he writes of God's hidden will

First, inasmuch as one cannot and ought not know the hidden judgment of God in such a case—why, after every possible care had been taken, God did not allow the child to be born alive and be baptized—these mothers should calm themselves and have faith that God's will is always better than ours, though it may seem otherwise to us from our human point of view. They should be confident that God is not angry with them...(Vol 43, 247)

Therefore the Christian can face death trusting that God is able to bring blessing from death. "It would be neither good nor useful for man to know what great blessings lie hidden under such trials. Some have wanted to fathom this and have thereby have done themselves much harm. Therefore we should willingly endure the hand of God in this and all suffering." (Vol 42, 183)

Though death frightens us, and though faith may be torturously tested when asked to trust God's promise as we draw nearer death, Luther encourages us to

turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us. Here we find the beginning of the narrow gate and of the straight path to life (Matt. 7:14). All must joyfully venture forth on this path, for though the gate is quite narrow, the path is not long. Just as an infant is born with peril and pain from the small abode of its mother's womb into this immense heaven and earth, that is into this world, so man departs this life through the narrow gate of death. And although the heavens and the earth in which we

dwell at present seem large and wide to us, they are nevertheless much narrower and smaller than the mother's womb in comparison with the future heaven. (Vol 42, 99) With such words Luther encourages the Christian to be unafraid, instead to see death for what Christ's redemption has made it become, a means through which God's plan of salvation is completed for us.

But there are other benefits to consider: for the Christian death is the end of temptation to sin, deliverance from the jeopardy of falling from faith or believing error. Of Winkler's murderers, Luther says, "they were his most useful servants, unknowingly and unintentionally, since by the gracious and fatherly dispensation of God and because of the devils raging hatred, they have helped this good man escape from all the dangers I have just mentioned." (Vol 43, 161)

It is a recurring theme with Pastor Luther that the Christian's suffering and death are not isolated events, unrelated to the Body of Christ. Instead the dying Christian takes his place among the honorable company of saints who have gone to the grave before, a friendly society.

Eighteenth, in the hour of his death no Christian should doubt that he is not alone. He can be certain, as the sacraments point out, that a great many eyes are upon him: first the eyes of God and of Christ himself, for the Christian believes his words and clings to his sacraments; then also, the eyes of the dear angels, of the saints, and of all Christians.

There is no doubt, as the Sacrament of the Altar indicates, that all of these in a body run to him as one of their own, help him overcome sin, death and hell, and bear all things with him. In that hour the work of love and the communion of saints are seriously and mightily active. (Vol 42, 112)

Christian confidence is in contrast to the fear of unregenerate man facing death. All credit is Christ's, who "has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing and shame the mother of glory." Vol 42, 141) Luther comments further on the contrast: "In death we are like all other men: the outward mode of our dying is not unlike that of others, except the thing itself is different, since for us death is dead." (Vol 42, 142)

Preparation for death

It is no surprise that Pastor Luther first directs those who would prepare for death to God's Word. "First, such a person must by no means rely on himself, nor must he be guided by his own feelings. Rather, he must lay hold of the words offered to him in God's name, cling to them, place his trust in them, and direct all the thoughts and feelings of his heart to them." (Vol 42, 183)

Next, the Sacraments comfort. "In the sacraments God himself grants you all the blessings we just mentioned in connection with Christ. God wants the sacraments to be a sign and testimony that Christ's life has taken your death, his obedience your sin, his love your hell, upon themselves and overcome them." (Vol 42, 108)

In Luther's pastoral ministry the Means of Grace form the foundation of preparation for death. Two particular works deal specifically with the subject: *A sermon on preparing to die and Fourteen consolations*. The following is a summarization of Luther's thoughts in the former. (Luther often numbered each point he made. In these writings successive numbers do not always make different points, but often one numbered point merely furthers the explanation of an earlier point.)

Summary of *A sermon on preparing to die* (Vol 42, 99-115)

“First, since death marks a farewell from this world and all its activities, it is necessary that a man regulate his temporal goods properly,” this to avoid “squabbles, quarrels” among survivors.

Second, “take leave spiritually,” forgive and seek forgiveness.

Third, “we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us.” In this section Luther compares death and the entrance to eternity with birth and the journey through the womb. He comments that “the death of the dear saints is called a new birth, and their feast day is known in Latin as *natale*, that is, the day of their birth.”

Fourth, confession of sin and the assurance of the Sacraments are in order (Luther also lists unction, though within two months of writing this he rejected it among the other unscriptural sacraments of Rome). “If they cannot be had, our longing and yearning for them should nevertheless be a comfort and we should not be too dismayed by this circumstance.”

Fifth, as the Christian prepares to die, the Sacraments must be esteemed, honored and relied upon because “God himself here speaks and acts through the priest.”

Luther points out the three great evils against which the Sacraments contend: “the terrifying image of death”...“the awesomely manifold image of sin”...“the unbearable and unavoidable image of hell and eternal damnation.”

Sixth, preparing to die is not the time to envision our own death; we should do that while we live. Because we are terrified by death’s image as we see it around us, we should (tenth) instead “look at death closely and untiringly only as seen in those who died in God’s grace and who have overcome death, particularly in Christ and then also in all his saints.” “Thus your heart will be at peace and you will be able to die calmly in Christ and with Christ, as we read in Revelation (14:13), ‘Blessed are they who die in the Lord Christ.’”

Seventh, preparing to die is not the time to reflect upon our own sin;

“During our lifetime, when we should constantly have our eyes fixed on the image of death, sin and hell—as we read in Psalm 51(:3), ‘My sin is ever before me’—the devil closes our eyes and hides these images. But in the hour of death when our eyes should see only life, grace, and salvation he at once opens our eyes and frightens us with these untimely images so that we shall not see the true ones. (102)

Instead of focusing on our sin at the time of death, we must (eleventh) “look only at sin within the picture of grace.”...“How is that to be understood? Grace and mercy are there where Christ on the cross takes your sin from you, bears it for you and destroys it.”...“In this way you may view your sins in safety without tormenting your conscience. Here sins are never sins, for here they are overcome and swallowed up in Christ.”

Eighth, preparing to die is not the time to dwell on the terror of hell, lest the soul “burdens itself with all kinds of useless presumptions, especially with the most dangerous undertaking of delving into the mystery of God’s will to ascertain whether one is ‘chosen’ or not.” Instead of regarding “hell and eternal pain in relation to predestination”,

(twelfth)...gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ, who descended into hell (I Pet. 3:19) for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned when he spoke the words on the cross, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!’—‘My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46) In that picture your hell is defeated and your uncertain election is made sure. (105)

Ninth, how can we fight against the discouraging images of death, sin and hell? “It is done this way: You must look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven, permitting nothing to divert you from that view.”

Thirteenth, it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament that on the cross Christ “prepared himself as a threefold picture for us, to be held before the eyes of our faith against the three evil pictures with which the evil spirit and our nature would assail us to rob us of this faith.”

Fourteenth, as Christ at the cross was tempted by the ridiculing Jews to despair of God’s love (“let him come down,” “if he is the Son of God,” “whether God will deliver him”), the Christian will face the same assaults. We must “hold to Christ and firmly believe our sin, death and hell are overcome in him and no longer able to harm us. Only Christ’s image must abide in us. With him alone we must confer and deal.”

Fifteenth, since the Sacraments are a “sign and testimony” that Christ’s life and death has overcome death, sin and hell, “We must cling to them with a staunch faith...” Why can we do so? “It is God who has promised it, and he cannot lie in either words or deeds.”

Sixteenth, we must “highly esteem, honor, and rely upon the holy sacraments, which contain nothing but God’s words, promises and signs. This means that we have no doubts about the sacraments or the things of which they are certain signs, for if we doubt we lose everything.” But am I worthy to receive what the Sacraments offer? “Just see to it that you believe that these are sure signs, true words of God, and then you will indeed be and remain worthy.”

Seventeenth,

The right use of the sacraments involves nothing more than believing that all will be as the sacraments promise and pledge through God’s Word. Therefore, it is necessary not only to look at the three pictures in Christ and with these to drive out the counterpictures, but also to have a definite sign which assures us that this has surely been given to us.

That is the function of the sacraments. (111)

Eighteenth, at the time of death, the eyes of God, Christ, the angels, saints and all Christians are upon us. Concerning our reception by the angels and communion of saints, Luther says, “Therefore we must know that even though the works of God surpass human understanding, God yet effects all of this through such insignificant signs as the sacraments to teach us what a great thing a true faith in God really is.”

Nineteenth, the dying Christian “must practice awe and humility in all this, lest he ascribe these works to himself instead of allowing God the glory.”

In summary,

Twentieth, what more should God do to persuade you to accept death willingly and not to dread but to overcome it? In Christ he offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified by the images of sin, death and hell.

Furthermore, he lays your sin, your death, and your hell on his dearest Son, vanquishes them, and renders them harmless for you. In addition, he lets the trials, of sin, death and hell that come to you also assail his Son and teaches you how to preserve yourself in the midst of these and how to make them harmless and bearable. And to relieve you of all doubt, he grants you a sure sign, namely the holy sacraments. He commands his angels, all saints, all creatures to join him in watching over you, to be concerned about your soul, and to receive it. He commands you to ask him for this and to be assured of fulfillment.

What more can or should he do? (114)

As we would have expected, Pastor Luther directs the dying to the Means of Grace.

Pastor Luther's perspective on ministry to the dying

Among the pastoral characteristics of Martin Luther which we ought also to emulate are his ability to empathize with his parishioners and his sense of pastoral responsibility toward them.

In many ways, the members of Luther's parish were not much different from those to whom we minister today. Perhaps more graphically and intimately than our congregations, his hearers were assailed by the reality of death. Knowing they would be tempted to question God's love as they endured privation and death all around themselves, he called them to faith in God's promise.

Faith does not insist on knowing the reasons for God's actions, but it still regards God as the greatest goodness and mercy. Faith holds to that against and beyond all reason, sense, and experience, when everything appears to be wrath and injustice. That is why faith is called *Argumentum non aparentium*, the sign of things not seen (Heb. 11:1), indeed, the opposite of what is seen. (Vol 43, 52)

Encouraging faith in the midst of hardship is a pastoral duty; recognizing and accepting varying depths of understanding and commitment requires pastoral sensitivity. Luther shows that clearly. In *A Letter to Hans von Rechenberg* he takes up the question whether God can or will save people who die without faith.

Therefore, gracious sir, I counsel that you consider who is concerned with this question and with whom it is discussed. In accord with that I enjoin either speech or silence. If the people are rationalistic, presumptuous, and disputatious, eschew the question promptly; but if they are simple, spiritual, profoundly tried and tested in the faith, then no more useful question than this can be treated. For just as strong wine is the death of children, it is a refreshing draught of life for old people. In view of this, you cannot discuss all kinds of doctrine with just anyone. (Vol 43, 53)

Luther seems willing to acknowledge that his people may not share the same strength of faith which he himself enjoyed. Are we forbidden to speak the Word of God? "Let him who is strong ignore such an, order..." (Luther surely did!) "But he who is timid and weak I shall counsel differently, namely, secretly to rejoice, to thank God, to praise his word, as was said before, and to ask God for strength to speak openly about his word that the enemy and avenger may be destroyed." (Vol 43, 107)

Luther understood man's frailty. His people were not only vulnerable to violence and death, but also to doubt. The pastor must take this into account. "Since it is generally true of Christians that few are strong and many are weak, one simply cannot place the same burden upon everyone...When a strong man travels with a weak man, he must restrain himself so as not to walk at a speed proportionate to his strength lest he set a killing pace for his weak companion." (Vol 43, 120) Indeed, Luther claims that "sometimes faith is granted openly, sometimes in secret." (Vol 42, 13)

Pastor Luther displays a remarkable sympathy. He would never allow his own faith to flinch; he risked his life, compelled to express it. Yet he understands the weakness of his people's faith and treats them in love accordingly.

Pastoral accountability is a theme Luther addresses in the devotional writings for he feels responsible for a wide parish, all of evangelical Christendom in his day, and for those who would, with him, be its shepherds. He could be direct:

To be sure, there are many preachers of the word nowadays, but they lack power, and they do not preach this word mightily. Even if they do preach the word, they do not do

this incisively; for they spare where they should not spare, namely, the big shots.

Moreover, their love is so cold and their life is so coarse that they offend more than they improve matters, and thus render God's arrows dull and weak. (Vol 43, 109)

For Luther pastoral accountability in the face of death might be approached from several points of view. First, aside from his office, the pastor is neighbor to those in need. His obligation to serve others with gifts God has given him springs up from the general duty to be a good neighbor. In fact, this duty extends so far that the pastor may have to risk personal safety. "No neighbor can live alongside another without risk to his safety, property, wife, or child." (Vol 43, 126) Because of the duty to neighbor, living in society puts all we have at risk. If one is deprived, other caring members may be required to give of their own to meet the needs of neighbors.

Specifically, there is a pastoral obligation which bears on those in the public ministry:

Those who are engaged in a spiritual ministry such as preachers and pastors must likewise remain steadfast before the peril of death. We have a plain command from Christ, "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but the hireling sees the wolf coming and flees" (John 10:11). For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death. (Vol 43, 121)

Few pastors today fear physical danger as part of the ministry. Luther and his colleagues did. He points to a murdered pastor, who died, Luther says "for the sake of the gospel, most of all because he wanted to teach and administer communion in both kinds. That was revolutionary; Satan and all his hired assassins had to defend themselves so that no further inroads would be made." (Vol 43, 150) Against fear Luther urges faithfulness in ministry and showed with his life that he took that precept to heart.

Conclusion

From Pastor Luther we learn that death is Satan's grip on fallen mankind. Of course we are frightened by it! Who wishes to grapple with such an enemy? But the Christian's perspective on death is unlike the unregenerate's. For the believer's attitude is tempered by the Gospel blessings which are found in death, especially heaven. How shall we prepare for the end of our lives? Luther points us to the Means of Grace, for there we meet our Savior, by whose life and death our souls are redeemed for eternal safety and peace. As ministers in service of the Church, we can learn from Pastor Luther to be sensitive to human weakness, and strong in our commitment to the spiritual needs of those we serve.

Though in the midst of life we be,

 Snares of death surround us:

Where shall we for succor flee,

 Lest our foes confound us?

To Thee alone, our Savior!

- Martin Luther, 1524

(The Lutheran Hymnary)

Devotional Writings cited

Volume 42

A Meditation on Christ's Passion, 1519

A Sermon on Preparing to Die, 1519 (A response to a request for “help in dealing with distressing thoughts about death”) (97)

Fourteen Consolations, 1520 (Spiritual comfort for Elector Frederick the Wise, thought to be near death)

Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations, 1521 (Luther on *Anfechtung*)

Volume 43

A Letter to Hans von Rechenberg, 1522 (A response to a soldier's question about whether a person who dies without faith can be saved)

A Letter of Consolation to All who Suffer Persecution, 1522 (A letter of encouragement to Hartmut von Cronberg, who “renounced an imperial stipend in protest against the Edict of Worms” (59) thereby bringing hardship upon himself)

A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg, 1524 (An evangelical congregation had been forced back into Romanism)

Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague, 1527 (Prompted by the Black Death, the bubonic plague)

A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle, 1527 (Upon the murder of George Winkler, evangelical pastor)

That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience, 1530 (A sermon Luther preached to the evangelicals on their way to the Diet of Augsburg)

Appeal for Prayer Against the Turks, 1541 (Written at the time of a perceived impending invasion)

Comfort for Women who Have Had a Miscarriage, 1542