

Luther as Son and Father

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by Richard W. Grunze

Introduction

There was one major “fullness of time” in the Lord’s calendar of events: the incarnation of the Second Person of the triune God. There also were many minor “fullness of time” in that same calendar. All those events, the one major and the many minor, were under the Lord’s control; He so arranged the development of circumstances and controlled men that His purposes were accomplished exactly as He had planned. The inspired author of Proverbs 16:3 and 4 provides us with a divine promise and at the same time gives us an insight into the Lord’s ways: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for his own ends.” God-pleasing endeavors succeed because the omnipotent Lord works the success, and success is measured against the Lord’s purposes which He wills to achieve. The successes He gives are used by the Lord to bring His purposes to fruition.

Luther’s Reformation was one of the successes the Lord used to achieve His purpose for the elect of God and for His own honor and glory. As one of the minor “fullness of time,” the Lord caused and allowed events to occur and conditions to develop in preparation for the Reformation. His guiding control is clearly perceptible by all who believe Holy Scripture to be God’s Word and take all of that Word seriously.

Many writers who have researched Luther’s life and thoughts agree that he was a man of superb gifts and a religious genius, nearly in a class by himself. Even though Martin Luther looms exceptionally large and powerfully influential in religion and history, he still was only a simple instrument of the Lord’s. It was the Lord who brought Luther into existence during a certain period in history to carry out His gracious and salutary will for mankind. It was the Lord who controlled events and people so that in one way or another, they affected the life and work of the great Reformer. It was according to the Lord’s all-wise design that Martin Luther was born to a certain couple. It was also according to the Lord’s good will that Luther married a strong-willed, yet loving and faithful woman. The Lord’s will was again manifested in the six children born to Katie and Martin, thereby providing him with the glorious opportunity to function as a father.

He who had the economic, military, political, and religious powers arrayed against him was able to survive their ban and bulls and death threats to be a father for nearly 19-1/2 years only because the Lord controlled events and people for the accomplishment of His purpose through Luther as an instrument. What are such powers when compared with the Lord Almighty? They are but chaff which the slightest breeze of God’s will scatters.

To understand and appreciate Martin Luther as a son and as a father, those aspects of his life should be viewed within the framework of the Lord’s controlling influence. Some of the agencies through which this influence functioned were Luther’s parents, their families, Luther’s wife, his children, and the holy Scriptures.

I. Luther as Son

Luther's Parents

Experts have informed us that the sure cure for baldness is to choose the right ancestors. Even though this statement is ludicrous, it yet contains a significant truth relative to the kind of progeny a family line has or might expect to have. Because Luther was the son of a certain husband and wife and therefore was part of a larger family, he was the recipient of certain characteristics, and family influences played significant roles in his life as son.

His Parents' Families

Most biographers of Martin Luther refer to his mother as Margarethe Ziegler. But Ian Siggins maintains, on the basis of his extensive research, that she was a Lindemann. Since the Lindemanns were highly educated, Siggins concludes that Martin's mother must have been the more literate of his parents and should receive some credit for his superb verbal skills. "Martin was one of the century's great masters of language," for he had an "unmatched instinct for word and image." (Siggins, 48)

The Lindemann family lived in Eisenach, where, in 1497, Martin's uncle Heinrich was mayor. It was in that year that Martin's parents sent him to Eisenach to attend school, because he could be in the care of his mother's relatives. Melancthon said, "The reason he was sent to Eisenach was that his mother had been born there of an old and respected family." And in 1520 Luther stated, "Almost all my kinsfolk are at Eisenach." (Both quotes in Siggins, 48)

From the age of 13 until he entered the university in Erfurt when he was 17 years old, Martin Luther attended school in Eisenach. These adolescent years are highly impressionable for any person; therefore, Martin was undoubtedly influenced by the culture and devout spiritual life of his mother's family while he lived among them. "The Lindemanns, Schalbes, and Cottas were all part of the same patrician circle...and were closely related. They were leading citizens of the city, from whom its magistrates and municipal officers were drawn, and they held high educational ambitions and professional goals." (Siggins, 50) Later in life, Luther stated that his host in Eisenach was the prosperous merchant Henry Schalbe. Apparently young Martin ate his daily meals with the Schalbes and roomed with the Cottas. Ursula Cotta was a Schalbe. "As far as we know, it was here in the Schalbe household that [Martin] became acquainted with a circle of people for whom religion was the foremost interest in life." (Boehmer, 20)

There can be little doubt that during Luther's four years in Eisenach, the deeply religious Schalbes and Cottas exerted a profound influence on his spiritual life; for he also took his relationship with God very seriously. Obviously, these four years also prepared Martin for life as a university student and for his later contacts with political and ecclesiastical princes. Even though he regarded himself as a lowly monk, he did not stand before them dumb, frightened, and uncouth. Arthur McGiffert also recognized the significance of the Eisenach influence on Luther's later life. McGiffert claimed: "His intimate friendship with gentlefolk served to temper such roughness and uncouthness as he brought from the peasant's home and the mining town, and fitted him for association with the greater world. As a man he always showed extraordinary ease and freedom in dealing with men of all classes." (McGiffert, 11)

If Martin Luther had not been born the son of Margarethe Lindemann (Ziegler?), it is quite probable that he would not have experienced such spiritual and cultural influences. But it was the Lord's will that he was born to a relative of the Lindemanns, Schalbes, and Cottas; thereby preparing him for his calling as Reformer.

Luther's paternal ancestry was not without its contribution to the great Reformer's life. The home of Gross-Hans Luther, Martin's father, was in western Thuringia, in the small village of Moehra, not far from the Wartburg. Thuringian traits were also in Martin's genes. A Julius Hare said this of Luther: "He was a true Thuringian, by nature not one to sit mum or walk on tiptoe, nor yet a lover of fine gestures and smooth civilities. He took no thought for his dignity." [Quoted in Plass (16), 216] Luther himself admitted that by nature he was "more vehement" than he should have been. He described his writings as being done with a "pen which is not at all blunt." (Quoted in Schwiebert, 461) The Lord used Martin Luther's Thuringian characteristics for the work of reforming the church; he carried on the work without any concern for personal consequences. "Men might doubt his discretion and judgment, but there was no denying the man's sincerity and candor." [Plass (16), 215]

Both Hans and Margarethe were descendants of the peasant class; consequently, their second-born son Martin had the rugged strength and endurance of the medieval German peasants. Robert Fife recognized the value of the Reformer's peasant ancestry: "To the stalwart heritage of peasant ancestry he owed the physical vigor that enabled him to carry the burden of unremitting mental productivity and to stand without breaking [from] the nervous strain of a succession of emotion upheavals." (Fife, 9)

Thus, before he came into this world and became a son, the Lord had prepared for Martin Luther, through his ancestries, traits and attitudes which would be of great value for him in his role as Reformer.

A Description of His Parents

We are told that both of Luther's parents were "small, short people, a swarthy folk." Martin himself was of medium height, and his eyes and hair were brown. (Boehmer, viii) In 1527, Lucas Cranach painted portraits of Hans and Margarethe Luther. "The portraits make clear that Martin inherited facial characteristics from both Hans and Margarethe but also that there is a stronger resemblance to his mother." (Siggins, 11) And According to Spalatin, Martin was "the spit and image" of his mother.

In so far as his personality traits are concerned, Luther's father seems to have had the greater influence. Vergilius Ferm lists the following traits of Hans Luther: "full of vigor, courage, determination, self-respect, self-restraint; sturdy, honest, sane, independent, ambitious, industrious, shrewd, religious, disciplined, and disciplinary." (Ferm, 168) Henry Jacobs adds to that list common sense and thrift. (Jacobs, 6) Luther once declared that his father "was by nature a jovial companion, always ready for fun and pastimes." (Boehmer, 11) Such characteristics made it possible for Hans Luther to become a trustworthy friend of his fellow citizens in Mansfeld and enabled him to achieve success.

A bit of Hans Luther's biography will illustrate some of his God-given traits and may help us to understand some of his famous son's behavior as the Reformer.

Custom dictated that as the oldest son, Gross-Hans could not expect to inherit any of the land his father owned. Consequently, he and his young wife moved to Eisleben and later to Mansfeld to gain his livelihood and fortune in the copper mining industry. He and his family lived in poverty for a time, but through determination and persistence he eventually became "part owner of at least six [mine] shafts and two foundries." (Boehmer, 11) Of course, we must also consider the deciding factor so many ignore: The Lord blessed his toil and thrift.

The Lord blessed Hans Luther with modest wealth also. When the son in whom he had such high expectations became a priest, Hans visited the monastery with 20 horsemen and made a gift of 20 gulden to the Augustinians. Although he “never became wealthy in the modern sense, he left a family estate of \$18,000.” (Schwiebert, 109—according to the value of the dollar in 1950)

Hans Luther’s neighbors in Mansfeld recognized and respected his good common sense, honesty, and industriousness and “entrusted him with an important office, that of representing his quarter (of the city) as one of the four aids to the city council.” (Fife, 5)

Both Hans and his wife were deeply religious and “were staunch, loyal supporters of the Roman Church.” (Schwiebert, 280) Despite this loyalty, Hans had the strength of character and conviction to oppose that which he believed violated God’s will. Once, when he lay critically ill, the attending priest exhorted “him to make his peace with God by giving money to the clergy. Hans Luther replied: ‘I have many children. I will leave my property to them; they need it more.’” (McGiffert, 6)

His courage to voice his religious convictions is well demonstrated when he and Martin confronted each other at the festival meal following Martin’s first mass. Hans had been vehemently opposed to his son becoming a monk. So, as they sat together at the meal with other guests and the Augustinian brothers, Martin asked for words of assurance that his father was no longer angry with him for taking the vow. Even though Martin’s cloister colleagues defended his former resolve, Hans “flared up before the doctors and the masters and guests, ‘You learned scholar, have you never read in the Bible that you should honor your father and your mother? And here you have left me and your dear mother to look after ourselves in our old age.’” (Bainton (1), 42) So strong were his religious convictions, that Hans Luther, peasant-miner, could not be intimidated by men of great learning and pious mien.

Luther’s mother also had her share of influencing characteristics. Vergilius provides this list of her traits: “sensitive, imaginative, religious, emotional, quiet, strict, cheerful, optimistic, and given to wholesome humor.” (Ferm, 168) “Melanchton spoke of [Luther’s mother] as a woman of commendable virtues.” (Schwiebert, 103) Luther remembered his mother as one who sang a great deal; for she was able to see the brighter side of life, and her reaction to bitter experiences was a ready smile.

Margarethe Luther firmly believed in the spirit world, and she impressed her belief upon her children. For her “the woods and wind and water were peopled by elves, gnomes, fairies, mermen and mermaids, sprites and witches. Sinister spirits would release storms, floods and pestilence, and would seduce mankind to sin and melancholia.” [Bainton (1), 26, 27] “On one occasion she thought herself and her children bewitched by an unfriendly neighbor.” (McGiffert, 7)

Both of Martin’s parents were diligent in their prayer life. Melanchthon said this about Luther’s mother: her “modesty, fear of God, and prayerfulness were especially obvious.” (Quoted in Siggins, 50) And friends reported that “his father was found bending over his child’s cradle in earnest prayer.” (Jacobs, 9)

One more characteristic of his parents must be considered. Perhaps the Lord used this trait more than any other to generate the Reformation. Luther’s parents demanded from him strict obedience and, I assume, from their other seven children as well. “Devout parents had trained him from childhood in the fear of God.” (Jacobs, 4) This fear of God refers to terror at the thought of divine punishment as the consequence of sin. His parents did not spare the rod when disciplining young Martin. Later in life he said, “My parents dealt with me so severely that I was

completely cowed. My mother once beat me for the sake of an insignificant nut until the blood flowed. Her strictness and the rigorous life she compelled me to lead drove me into the monastery.” (Quoted in Jacobs, 8, 9) According to Luther, “his father once spanked him so hard that he fled from him and for some time was very bitter.” (Schwiebert, 109)

The Parents’ Influence on their Son

By and large, personality traits are inherited, and they are used by the Lord to fulfill His salutary purposes for sinners. By means of His Word and through faith in Christ, the Lord sanctifies inherited traits and utilizes them for His honor and glory. St. Paul is an example which substantiates these assertions. One of his natural traits was a zeal for a cause he firmly believed. When Paul persecuted Christ’s church, he did it zealously (Acts 22:3,4), and after his conversion, his zeal was used to propagate the Gospel with untiring energy. As for Luther, there should be little doubt that his parents greatly influenced their son through training, example, and inherited personality traits.

His mother’s belief in the spirit world’s harmful affect upon people may have been partly responsible for Luther’s beliefs regarding demons and Satan. Annually drownings occurred in the Elbe River near Wittenberg, because of the constantly shifting sandbars. In one of his sermons Luther ascribed these drownings to Satan. Luther once said, “We must not doubt that pestilences, fever, and other grave diseases are the work of demons.” (Quoted in Fife, 11) “Occasionally in his Wartburg letters he referred to the visitations of Satan he was called upon to endure. ‘You can believe that I am exposed to a thousand devils in this indolent solitude,’ he wrote to his friend Nicholas Gerbel.” (McGiffert, 216)

Frederick the Wise died in 1525. In a letter in which Luther wrote about his elector’s death, he stated: “The sign of it [the impending death] was a rainbow that Philip and I saw over Lochau one night last winter and a child born here in Wittenberg without a head; also another with club feet.” (Quoted in Plass (16), 106]

In regard to one of the periodic plagues which afflicted Wittenberg, Luther wrote this to Spalatin: “A pestilence has broken out here, but it is rather mild. Still it is wonderful to see how men are terrified and put to flight. I have never before seen such a prodigy of Satanic power, so greatly is he terrifying everybody.” In 1528 Luther wrote the following to Wenzel Link: “My opinion of lunatics is that all idiots and insane persons are possessed by devils, though on that account they will not be damned; but I think Satan tries men in different ways...Physicians may attribute such things to natural causes,...but they are ignorant of the power of devils.” (Both quotes in Ferm, 147)

Candor was probably one of Luther’s outstanding traits. Unite this with an intense nature and a peasant’s coarseness, and we recognize Hans Luther in his son Martin. He did nothing half-heartedly; instead, Martin Luther expended all his energy into whatever he was undertaking. “For better or for worse, he had to reveal exactly what was within him. He seems never to have given his candor any particular thought until his friends called his attention to it and suggested that perhaps a little reserve might be advisable.” [Plass (16), 213] McGiffert has this description of candid Luther: “...fiery-tempered, passionately imperious...Full of contradictions, he had the frankness and carelessness of genius, and what he was he showed, and what he thought he said, without concealment or diplomacy.” (McGiffert, 3)

In contrasting himself with Melanchthon, Luther gave this self-appraisal: “I was born to fight with mobs and devils, and so my books are very stormy and warlike. I must remove trees

and stumps, cut away thorns and thickets, and fill up quagmires. I am the rough woodsman.”
(Quoted in McGiffert, 110)

In 1531, Luther wrote a pamphlet entitled “Against the Traitor at Dresden.” He gave this description of his belligerent attitude towards false teachers: “I will toll them to their tombs with my thunder and lightning. For I cannot pray without at the same time cursing. If I say, ‘Hallowed be Thy name,’ I have to add, ‘Cursed, damned, reviled be the name of the papists and of all who blaspheme Thy name.’ If I say, ‘Thy kingdom come,’ I have to add, ‘Cursed, damned, destroyed be the papacy, together with all the kingdoms of the earth, which oppose Thy kingdom.’ If I say, ‘Thy will be done,’ I have to add, ‘Cursed, damned, reviled, and destroyed be all the thoughts and plans of the papists and of everyone who strives against Thy will and counsel.’ Nevertheless I have a kind, friendly, peaceable, and Christian heart toward everyone, even as my worst enemies know.” (Quoted in McGiffert, 151, 152) In my opinion, Luther’s final statement was not an attempt to place himself into a favorable light, for he was an honest person who frankly spoke his mind, even though such disclosures might offend the delicate ears of others. From my very limited research in preparation for this essay, I have concluded that whenever Luther’s enemies attacked him personally, no matter how vituperative, vile, and vindictive their rebukes and charges may have been, he accepted them good naturedly and with a forgiving spirit. But when the enemies of the Gospel spoke out against Scriptural doctrines and impugned the truth of God’s Word, Luther’s pen became a slashing sword and a contentious cudgel. With these he violently attacked those who were essentially the Lord’s enemies, using words and expressions that we today would horrifyingly classify as hateful, vulgar, crude, grossly insulting, and obscene.

Courage was another personality trait Martin Luther inherited from his father. It required great courage to persist, almost single-handedly, in a course opposed by ecclesiastical and political powers. In mid-1518, Luther, an obedient son of the Roman Church, was summoned to Rome to answer for the “heresies” found in his Ninety-five Theses and other writings of his. At the time of this summons, the Diet of Augsburg, presided over by Emperor Maximilian I, was in session. The papal legate at the diet was Cardinal Cajetan. On August 5th, Emperor Maximilian wrote a letter to Pope Leo X in which he voiced great concern about the “heretical” teachings of Martin Luther. The emperor promised to “make all our subjects obey” whatever the pope decided about Luther. Soon after receipt of this letter, the papal curia reversed its former decision, and Leo instructed Cajetan to deal with the heretical monk at Augsburg. Cajetan was empowered to arrest Luther, and if necessary, call upon the emperor and the German princes for aid.

Gerard Hecker, the provincial of the Augustinian Order in Saxony, also received a letter from Rome; it was written by Gabriel Volta, the General of the Augustinian Hermits. In this letter, Volta commanded Hecker “to proceed to capture said Brother Martin Luther, have him bound in chains, fetters and handcuffs, and detained under strict guard in prison.”

Since both Cajetan and Hecker were empowered to arrest Luther, and Emperor Maximilian I and many German princes gave vocal support to the papal position on the Luther issue, one can well understand why Luther believed that he could expect death at any moment if he went to Augsburg. Yet, he was able to write: “The more they threaten, the bolder I am.” (Schwiebert, 339-344) Bainton observed, “He started for Augsburg with grave misgivings. The danger was vastly greater than three years later when he went to Worms as the champion of an aroused nation. At this time [1518] he was only an Augustinian eremite suspected of heresy.” [Bainton (1), 91]

But we must not assume that such courage was solely an inherited trait; Luther himself makes that clear. In 1520 he wrote a pamphlet entitled “Ground and Reason of All the Articles Unjustly Condemned in the Roman Bull.” This pamphlet was Luther’s response to John Eck’s publication in Germany of the papal bull against the Augustinian monk. In his writing Luther voiced this conviction: “If I am not a prophet I am at any rate sure the word of God is with me and not with them, for I always have the Bible on my side, they only their own doctrine. It is on this account I have the courage to fear them so little, much as they despise and persecute me.” (Quoted in McGiffert, 188)

One other example of Luther’s courage is worth our consideration. Prior to 1525 Luther was a hero of his fellow Germans. Peasants and princes praised him and looked to him for guidance; and the peasants, in particular, regarded him as their champion, for they equated Luther’s Reformation with social, political, and economic improvement. Then in early 1525, the Peasants’ Revolt erupted. Originally, Luther had sympathized with the oppressed peasants, and he had castigated the nobles for their heartless oppression of the peasants. But when the rebellious peasants grew violent, destructive, murderous, and anarchical, Luther hammered out the tract “Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants.” In it he urged the nobles to “smite, slay, and stab secretly or openly” the hellish rebels. Since Luther was not one with an egocentricity which beclouds and shuts out reality, he surely realized what effect his tract against the peasants would have on their attitude toward him. Yet, he courageously had it published. McGiffert, who occasionally faulted Luther for his decisions and actions, did not do so in this case. He wrote: “At a time when weakness and hesitancy marked the conduct of most of those who should have acted promptly and firmly, unblinded by sentiment and unmoved by personal considerations, he came out boldly and decisively for the one course possible in the circumstances.” (McGiffert, 259)

In my judgment, the most valuable and significant influence Hans and Margarethe Luther had on their famous son was in the spiritual realm. Their deeply religious attitude and strict and sometimes harsh disciplining resulted in their second-born son acquiring a sensitive conscience. Several quotes from biographers of Luther and one historian emphasize this truth.

A serious sense of responsibility to a divine Judge is one of the recurring memories of his youth. (Bornkamm, 1)

He was a serious-minded boy. He had been piously trained, and religion was a very real thing to him...He was emotional by temperament, subject to fits of depression, and exposed to attacks of anxiety and dread as to his fate...Even as a child he was frequently distressed by his sins and terrified by the fear of eternal punishment. The harsh treatment he was early subjected to had given him a timorous conscience and made him abnormally apprehensive. (McGiffert, 18)

Luther possessed a deeply religious nature and a particularly delicate and sensitive conscience...Few men have ever had deeper and more oppressive convictions of sinfulness than Luther...Already as a student he felt himself a sinner in the sight of a holy God and he knew that as such he lay under the wrath of an offended judge. (Klotsche, 163)

Luther's sudden decision to enter the Augustinian Order of Hermits in 1505 owed far less to the thunder and lightning of Stotternheim than to the religious storm which was raging within his own soul. (Lazareth, 67)

Luther suffered perhaps as few of the heroes of literature and of history from periods of utter despondency and despair. Speaking of his own experiences he confessed: "I know a man who has often, though only for brief periods, suffered the pains of hell such as no tongue or pen could describe and no one could believe...If they had lasted for a half or even a tenth of an hour, he would have perished altogether and his bones would have crumbled to ashes." (Ferm, 86)

For such a person, belief in the Gospel truths that "a righteousness from God, apart from law" was his personal possession "through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:21, 22); that he, along with every other sinner, had been "justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24); "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19); and that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1) was life from death. He who takes his sins seriously and is tormented by them and by the fact of his sinfulness and finds it necessary to cry "out of the depths" for the Lord's mercy, truly appreciates gratefully the Gospel after the Holy Spirit has created in him faith in that Gospel. Such a person was Martin Luther. This should help us to understand why Luther had such a great zeal for the Gospel and why he defended each particle of it vigorously, courageously, and zealously. Perhaps our Savior had Luther in mind when He said, "The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matt. 11:12).

Even a non-theologian and non-historian such as I can perceive that had it not been for Luther's parents and the wisdom, power, and grace of our Lord, Luther's Reformation would have been limited to the intellectual plane, such as Zwingli's and Calvin's or merely to a frustrating attempt to clean the Augean stables of Roman immorality, such as the attempts by Savonarola and Erasmus. But Luther's Reformation went to the very heart of the problem of establishing a peaceful relationship between the holy, just God and the guilty sinner. A conscience-and terror-stricken Luther had sought a solution to that problem in the Law, but by God's grace Luther came to believe that that relationship had already been established by the Lord Himself through the vicarious atonement of Jesus, the Christ of God. On that firm, rock-based foundation Luther's Reformation was established, and the gates of hell have been unable to undermine that foundation.

Luther, the Son

Apparently, not much is known about Martin Luther's childhood and how he behaved himself as the young son of his parents, for very little of that period of his life is found in biographies of Luther. Schwiebert surmises that "as the young Luther possessed the indomitable will manifested in his later life, he was doubtless, a difficult child to handle." He offers this opinion to explain "the severity of Luther's childhood." (Schwiebert, 109)

Even if young Martin had been somewhat headstrong, his parents did come to realize that intellectually he was an exceptionally gifted son. Therefore, his father wanted Martin to become a jurist and in that profession obtain sufficient wealth to support his parents in their old age.

As Martin grew older, he came to realize that the law profession was not to his liking. Yet, from obedience to his parents he felt a filial obligation to pursue the course his parents had laid out for him. Consequently, in the spring of 1501, Luther enrolled in the Liberal Arts department at the University of Erfurt. He acquired his Master of Arts degree in February of 1505. Great was the joy in the heart and home of Hans Luther! He now addressed his educated son with the respectful "Ihr." The following May Martin began the study of law. In a short time he became fully convinced that jurisprudence was not his calling. For at this time sadness was his regular companion. Later Luther explained that this sadness was caused by "anxiety over his sins and fear of the Last Judgment." (Boehmer, 33) This led him to apply for admission to the Black Cloister in Erfurt.

Martin Luther was a 21 year old adult when he became a monk. Despite his age, he regarded himself as the son of his parents and was convinced that the Fourth Commandment still applied to him. Several incidents from this time in his life show that Martin was an obedient and devoted son.

Luther was not bound by Augustinian rules to secure his father's permission or consent to enter the Order. "But it seemed utterly impossible for him to take this important step without the knowledge and approbation of his family. So even before July 17 doubtless he had informed his parents of his intentions and asked their blessing. His father acted like a madman...[and] cut him off completely from 'all paternal grace and favor.' His mother and the rest of his relatives also let him know that they would have nothing more to do with him." (Boehmer, 37) However, after Luther was ordained a priest, his father became somewhat reconciled to his son's monastic profession, presumably because two younger sons had died of the plague.

In all probability, there was no resentment in Luther's heart toward his father, for "unlike some monastic and humanistic celibates of the period, Martin did not break the ties of affection that bound him to the home of his childhood." (Fife, 8) He demonstrated this in 1507 by postponing for a month the celebration of his first mass to suit his father's convenience. Luther wanted his father to be present for what he considered at this time to be a most solemn occasion.

As a deeply religious son, Luther had great concern for his parents, as the following incidents illustrate:

In 1510, Luther was privileged to accompany a fellow monk on a trip to the Eternal City. A dispute had developed within the German Augustinian Order, and these two brothers were sent to Rome to present their case to the Vicar General of the Order. While in the "Holy" City, Luther made use of the opportunity to visit historical sites and to celebrate mass often in the many churches in Rome. It was in connection with the latter that he wished that his parents were dead so that he could deliver them from purgatory.

In September of 1518, while on his way to Augsburg to appear before Cajetan, Luther did not have great hopes of surviving the confrontation. "He saw ahead the stake and said to himself, 'Now I must die. What a disgrace I shall be to my parents.'" [Bainton (1), 91] Even though he considered himself to be seated under the sword of Damocles, yet, Luther was concerned about his parents' honor.

Luther made public his deep respect and affection for his father. After he had seen the light regarding monasticism, Luther wrote the treatise "On Monastic Vows." His preface to this work consists of an open letter to his father, whom he addressed as "my dearest father." In part of the dedicatory letter Luther said: "When in filial confidence I upbraided you for your wrath, you suddenly retorted with a reply so fitting and so much to the point that I have hardly ever in

my life heard any man say anything that struck me so forcibly and stuck to me so long.” (Quoted in Lazareth, 4)

While the Peasants’ Revolt was terrorizing parts of Germany, Luther, Melanchthon, and Agricola traveled to Eisleben. They had received the request from Count Albert of Mansfeld to establish a new Christian school. Since they were in the region where Hans and Margarethe lived, their now-famous son took of his time to visit with his parents.

Luther’s marriage also provided him with the opportunity to express in various ways his love and concern for his parents and obedience toward them.

It seems that initially Luther did not take seriously Katherine von Bora’s suggestion that she marry him. Not until he went to his parents’ home in Mansfeld and told them of the renegade nun’s offer did Luther consider it as a realistic proposal. His father wanted him to beget heirs so as to pass on the Luther name. In a letter to Nicolaus Amsdorf, written a week after his marriage, Luther stated: “I hope to live a short time yet to gratify my father, who asked me to marry and leave him descendants.” (Quoted in Plass (16), 249]

On June 13, 1525, Martin and Katie were married in the Black Cloister. “The engagement formalities and the marriage ceremony followed in quick succession on the same evening.” (Schwiebert, 589) Only a small group was in attendance. It consisted of “Jonas, dean of the Castle Church; Bugenhagen, the city pastor; Apel, a colleague of the law faculty; and the town councilor, Lucas Cranach and his wife.” (McGiffert, 279)

It was correctly surmised that this marriage would have adverse reactions from both friends and foes. Therefore, Luther was advised to hold a public celebration of his marriage to Katie. Immediately Luther sent out invitations to many relatives and friends. The recipient of one these invitations was requested to bring along “a barrel of the best Torgau beer.” (Lazareth, 23) Three Mansfeld officials were also invited, and Luther requested, “...if you can do so, pray come, along with my dear father and mother, for it would be a special pleasure to me.” Quoted in Schwiebert, 592)

On June 27, 1525, a special service was held in the Town Church, at which time Luther announced to the world that he had taken a wife. And later that day, in the Black Cloister, with his parents present, Martin and Katie’s wedding feast was celebrated.

In later life, Luther’s parents “followed him with implicit confidence as their spiritual guide and rejoiced in the freedom of the Gospel to which he led them.” (Jacobs, 9) Perhaps his greatest service to his parents as a Christian son, who was concerned about the preservation of their saving faith, took place during the last years of their lives. Luther knew that a person must be prepared for death during his lifetime—the hour of death is too late for such preparation. “For this reason he prepared his parents for death in letters pervaded with filial love and at the same time with spiritual authority.” (Bornkamm, 299)

When Luther learned that his mother was seriously ill and dying, he wrote to her on the Sunday after Ascension in 1531. His letter began: “Grace and peace in Christ Jesus, Our Lord and Savior. Amen. My Mother, whom I love from my heart: I have received a letter from my brother Jacob about your illness, and it certainly gives me deep grief, especially since I cannot be with you in the flesh.” He then stated that his purpose for writing was to give her comfort. He encouraged his mother to accept her illness as a gracious chastisement and to accept it with thanks, for her sufferings were slight compared to the sufferings Christ endured for everyone’s sins. Margarethe Luther’s son then called her attention to “the real foundation and ground” of her salvation, Jesus Christ, who provides consolation in all troubles. He assured his mother that she could place her full confidence in Christ, for He has overcome the world and the power of death.

Finally, the son urged his mother to be grateful to the Lord for having been brought to the knowledge of the saving faith and for having been rescued from popish error. (Siggins, 17-19) Margarethe Luther, the great Reformer's mother, died in the true faith on June 30, 1531.

When, in 1530, Luther was informed that his father was critically ill, he sent a letter to him in which he said, "This execrable life is nothing but a vale of tears; the longer a man lives, the more sin and wickedness and plague and sorrow he sees and feels, nor is there respite or cessation this side of the grave; there [in heaven] is repose, and we can then sleep in the rest Christ gives us until He comes again to wake us with joy. Amen." (Quoted in Plass (16), 40) Thus the loving and concerned son gave his dying father reality and joyous comfort.

During the time of the 1530 Diet of Augsburg (of the *Augsburg Confession*), Martin Luther stayed at the Coburg Castle, to be as near to Augsburg as he could be; for, because of the imperial ban, he was unable to attend the diet in person. He lived in the Feste Coburg for six months. While there, the sad tidings came to Luther "that his father had departed this life, strong in the faith his son had confessed and taught." (Jacobs, 294) Hans Luther had died on May 29, 1530. The news of his father's death greatly affected Luther. Several days after the receipt of the sorrowful news, Veit Dietrich, Luther's secretary at Feste Coburg, wrote a letter to Katie Luther. Among the news items was this one: "Although his father's death was very bitter to him, he ceased mourning for it after two days. When he read Reinicke's letter, he said to me: 'My father is dead.' Then he took his Psalter and went to his room and wept so much that for days he couldn't work. Since then he has not given way to grief any more." [Quoted in Plass (16), 270]

Luther himself expressed his reaction to his father's death in a letter he wrote to Melancthon on June 5th. Luther wrote: "Today Hans Reinicke writes me that my dear parent, Hans Luther, senior, departed this life...His death has thrown me into sorrow as I recall not only our natural relationship but also the great love I bore him, for from him my Creator gave me whatever I have. Although it was a solace to me to know that he fell asleep softly, strong in the faith of Christ, nevertheless misery and the memory of his most delightful companionship have stricken my heart so that I have scarcely ever so despised death." (Quoted in McGiffert, 340) Near the termination of his earthly role as son (13 months later his mother died), Luther's word about his father express succinctly the God pleasing son-parent relationship: he had "great love" for his father, and he realized gratefully that the Lord had utilized Hans Luther to give Martin Luther whatever he had. Obviously Luther did not include his knowledge and understanding of the Gospel and his faith in it among the "whatever he had." But he must have referred to his personality traits, his early training, and the education he had received. For these, Martin Luther, the child of God, was grateful to the Lord; and Martin Luther, the son, was grateful to his parents.

II. Luther as Father

Some of Luther's Related Basic Thoughts

The Influence of Luther's Theology

Pitiful is the person who professes one thing but lives another. By the grace of God, Martin Luther's theology was his guide regarding his roles as husband and father. "Faith and life were inseparable for Luther since he confessed Christ as the living Lord of both." (Lazareth, 102)

Luther believed that the Lord has established certain natural orders or positions to which each person is called for service to the Lord and his fellowman and for the preservation of society. Each person serves according to his particular God-ordained calling or office. Essentially, no calling is better than another, and, because of sin, no calling is easier than another. Each position has its own particular obligations and temptations, and if these obligations are met, crosses will increase. Luther said in regard to this: "If the father disciplines his son [as he should according to his calling], the lad will be ugly." [Quoted in Bainton (1), 245] In the case of disciplining, the positions have varying codes for enforcing behavior. The government official may use the sword, the father may use his fist, and those in the ministry are to use their tongues.

Luther insisted that a true faith manifests itself in good works; therefore, the Christian shows the existence of his saving faith by faithfully serving the Lord in his particular calling. In his "Treatise on Christian Liberty," Luther asserted: "Thus from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss." Near the end of his treatise Luther wrote: "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian man lives not in himself but in Christ and his neighbor. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love; by faith he is caught up beyond himself into God, by love he sinks down beneath himself into his neighbor; yet he always remains in God and in His love." [Quotations in Plass (16), 193]

Luther adamantly adhered to the Scriptural teaching that in faith the Christian is free from the Law, and he was just as insistent that the Christian is bound to the Law in love. He explained: "All Christian faith and life can be summarized simply in terms of faith and love, through which a man is placed between God and his neighbors as a medium which receives from above and transmits again through below...to nourish others." (Quoted in Lazareth, 95) In line with this thought, Luther also stated: "A man is to live, speak, act, bear, suffer, and die for the good of his wife and child...This is a truly Christian and good work." (Quoted in Forell, 103)

The Reformer maintained that in so far as outward works are concerned, there is no great difference between the believer and the unbeliever who lives an outwardly honest life. But there is a difference when motives are considered. The Christian father guides, controls, and disciplines his children on the basis of faith in Christ. Because of this faith, the fatherhood of a Christian is transformed into a Christian calling. No matter how menial a task may be which a father does when motivated by "faith expressing itself through love," it is a Christian good work and pleasing to the Lord. Luther said: "If a man should wash the diapers or do some other job which is commonly considered unfit for a man, and everybody should ridicule him..., if he does these works...in Christian faith..., who has any reason to ridicule him. God and all the angels and creatures smile." (Quoted in Forell, 152, 153)

Luther regarded the Fourth Commandment "as the undisputed backbone of all civil authority and social welfare in the kingdom of men on earth." (Lazareth, 138) He said: "From this commandment we learn that after the excellent works of the first three commandments there are no better works than to obey and serve all those who are set over us as superiors." (Quoted in Lazareth, 141) As a Christian father, Luther insisted upon obedience from his children.

To summarize in the context of our topic: On the basis of his Scriptural theology, Luther believed and persistently maintained that a Christian father serves the Lord by serving his children. Love for the Lord and love for the children the Lord has given him, motivate the Christian father to perform works for the welfare of his children, even though no gratitude, praise, or personal gain are the results. According to the natural order into which the Lord has

placed him, the Christian father joyfully and willingly fulfills the divine obligations of his calling. And Luther considered the Fourth Commandment of God's Law as the guide for a proper relationship between child and parent.

Luther's Views on Marriage

Within the Christian setting, we should not consider a father's role apart from marriage, for, according to the Lord's will, the begetting of children is to be confined within the framework of marriage.

Luther regarded marriage as an example of a divine natural order. His "monastic experience and biblical studies convinced him that marriage is the holy estate in which God wishes the vast majority of his children to live in mutual love and fidelity." (Lazareth, 11) And Luther believed that faith in Christ sanctifies the estate of marriage.

A few quotes from Luther on the subject of marriage as it relates to the topic of Luther as father will show that Luther did not march in conformity with the drumbeat of the consensus of society. The following few quotes were taken from *What Luther Says* by Ewald Plass, Vol. II:

This is a true definition of marriage: Marriage is the God-appointed and legitimate union of man and woman in the hope of having children or at least for the purpose of avoiding fornication and sin and living to the glory of God. (#2761)

The best thing in married life, for the sake of which everything ought to be suffered and done, is the fact that God gives children and commands us to bring them up to serve Him. To do this is the noblest and most precious work on earth, because nothing may be done which pleases God more than saving souls. (#2836)

You will find many to whom a large number of children is unwelcome, as though marriage had been instituted only for bestial pleasures and not also for the very valuable work by which we serve God and men when we train and educate the children whom God has given us. They do not appreciate the most pleasant feature of marriage. For what exceeds the love of children? (#2834)

People who do not like children are swine, dunces, and blockheads, not worthy to be called men and women, because they despise the blessing of God. (#2835)

Luther's Views Regarding Parents

Luther obviously believed that children are obligated to obey both parents, but he maintained that it is the father who is to exercise the foremost authority in the household. The father's authority over his family is equivalent to the authority of the magistrate in the civil realm. Consequently, the father functions as judge over against his children. Whenever they challenge the father's God-ordained authority, the children should be soundly punished—not in a harsh brutal manner, but in such a way that "rod and apple sit side by side." His parents' "severity made so painful an impression on him that...in his treatment of his own children he tried to make up to them for the sympathy he had lacked and the harshness he had suffered." (McGiffert, 8)

Even though this part of the essay deals with Luther as father, I believe that his viewpoints on the mother's role is germane to the topic.

In Luther's opinion, the woman was created to function as wife and mother; therefore, the home should be her sphere of operation. He observed in his lectures on Ecclesiastes: "A woman handles a child much better with one finger than a man does with both fists. Therefore let everyone continue to perform the work to which God has called him and for which he was destined." [Quoted in Plass (16), 258]

It was Luther's firm belief that God's order of creation included the mother remaining at home to care for her children. In his comments on I Peter 3:7, Luther said: "The Apostle reminds us that wives are also the tools or instruments of God. For they are used by God to carry, bear, rear, and protect children, as well as running the household. These tasks the wife should do since for this purpose she was created as an instrument or vessel of God." (Quoted in Lazareth, 225)

Luther had a rich sense of humor, and it seems that he utilized it once when speaking about wives. "It is a calamity of the first order from which many other evils follow" if a wife does not know her way around the kitchen. "You would gladly have a beautiful, good, and rich wife if you could. Indeed, we really ought to paint you one with red cheeks and white legs! These are the best, but they usually cook poorly and pray badly." (Quoted in Lazareth, 226)

Luther's Views Regarding the Training of Children

"When Luther looked at his family in 1538, he remarked, 'Christ said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Dear God, this is too much. Have we got to become such idiots?'" [Bainton (1), 302] This comment may give the impression that Luther had a very low opinion of children. Perhaps he was in a humorous mood at the time he said it, for the many thoughts he expressed about the training of children clearly show the high regard he had for them.

Luther believed that a child's education and training should begin early in life; in fact, the process of educating one's child should begin in the mother's arms. He held that parents had the primary and foremost responsibility for their child's training. Even after sending the child to school, the parents could not transfer the ultimate responsibility of the child's spiritual education to others. As Luther saw it, the educating of children is a precious and noble good work in the sight of the Lord.

Those who have even a limited knowledge of Luther's thoughts would not be surprised to learn that Biblical theology was the foundation on which he built the education of children. "You see," Luther wrote, "how rich the estate of marriage is in good works. For into the bosom of the family God places children who are conceived from the parents' own bodies and in need of their Christian works. For example, in making known the Gospel message to them, parents act as the children's apostles, bishops, and pastors." (Quoted in Lazareth, 220) He wanted his *Small Catechism* to be used by fathers as a fundamental tool for educating their children. Regularly fathers should examine their children to determine how well they are learning Scriptural teachings. If it is determined that a child does not want to learn God's revealed truths, that child should not eat. And Luther asserted that parents establish a strong foundation for their home when they teach God's commandments to their children.

Luther realized that, in addition to Biblical teachings, other educational disciplines are gifts from the Lord; therefore, they, too, should be taught. Before his marriage, he once said,

“For my part, if I had children, they would have to learn not only the languages and history but also singing, music, and the whole mathematics.” (Quoted in Ferm, 119)

Luther recognized the fact that the rearing of children can be a trial for parents. To one of his own children he once said, “Child, what have you done that I should love you so? You have disturbed the whole household with your bawling.” [Quoted in Bainton (1), 300] He often recalled his childhood and the occasional severe and harsh treatment he received from his parents and teachers. Therefore, from his own experience and from the profound wisdom with which the Lord had blessed him, Luther “knew that undue severity was pedagogically unsound. It crushed and intimidated the tractable and filled the intractable with rankling hatred and rebellion.” [Plass (16), 263]

With his own children Luther was gentle and humane without setting aside the Fourth Commandment. Luther’s wisdom is evidenced in this observation: “A father should handle his children in the manner in which we observe God handling us. God at times afflicts and chastises us, but He does not kill us; and in the midst of the affliction He consoles, strengthens, confirms, nourishes, and favors us.” [Plass (17), #421]

Luther offered some scathing comments for parents who neglected the spiritual training and education of their children. In a sermon on married life, delivered in 1519, he said: “Nothing can more easily earn hell for a man than the improper training of his own children.” [Plass (17), #414] And he was sure that one of the easiest ways for parents to incur God’s wrath was to neglect their children’s religious and ethical training. When parents give more attention to educating their God-given offspring in the ways and ideas of the world than in the ways of God, Luther declared those parents to be guilty of sacrificing their children to an idol.

Experience and observation taught Luther that disobedience and evil behavior in children are more the fault of parents than of the children themselves. In 1516, when still a celibate monk, Luther preached a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments. His sermon on the Fourth Commandment contained this warning: “The first destroyers of their own children are those who neglect them and knowingly permit them to grow up without the training and admonition of the Lord.” [Plass (17), #410]

Any man who possessed the Scripture-based convictions regarding marriage, parenthood, and child training as those of Martin Luther is a man fully ready for marriage. And according to the all-wise plan of our good and gracious God, that time had arrived in the life of the great Reformer.

Martin Luther and Katherine Von Bora Marry

The old saw about marriages being made in heaven was certainly true in Luther’s case. At first it didn’t seem that way, for it was known in Wittenberg that Martin’s and Katie’s conflicting and perhaps clashing, personalities and temperaments prevented them from getting along with each other. Many of his friends were sorry that Martin had decided to marry the unpopular Katie.

But it didn’t take long before Luther’s fearful friends came to realize how wrong they were. The Luther household turned out to be much different from what they had envisioned and predicted. “Katie was no doubt just the type of wife Luther needed. She was a conscientious mother, an efficient housekeeper, a wise manager of the farms, garden, cattle, and other livestock. Luther, who had little time from his labors to help rear obedient, God-fearing children,

often thanked God for such a ‘pious and true wife on whom the husband’s heart can rely.’” (Schwiebert, 593)

Martin’s favorite nickname for his wife was “Lord Katie,” because she was continually active and energetic. In 1526, Luther wrote to Spalatin: “I am a happy husband and may God continue to send me happiness.” At that particular time his joy was over a great blessing the Lord had graciously granted him—his first child had recently been born.

Luther’s Children Arrive

One of the more grotesque and lurid superstitions of medieval Europe “was the prediction that the Antichrist would be born from the union of a renegade monk and an apostate nun.” (Lazareth, vii) The time for “fulfillment” had arrived. Martin Luther, the upstart, renegade monk had united in marriage with the strong-willed apostate nun, Katherine von Bora, and they had conceived their first child. On October 21, 1525, Luther wrote to a friend: “Katie is fulfilling Genesis 3 where the Lord God said to the woman, ‘In pain shall you bring forth children.’” (Quoted in Jacobs, 34) Their first child, a son, was born June 7, 1526, and was named Hans in honor of Martin’s father. The infant was baptized in the Town Church that same day. After the baby had been bound in swaddling clothes, Luther is reported to have said to him: “Kick little fellow. That is what the pope did to me, but I got loose.” [Quoted in Bainton (1), 293]

When Martin and Katie’s first daughter Elizabeth was born on December 10, 1527, her father wrote to a prospective godmother: “Dear lady, God has produced from me and my wife Katie a little heathen. We hope you will be willing to become her spiritual mother and help make her a Christian.” [Quoted in Bainton (1), 293]

The next child was another daughter, whom her parents named Magdalena. She was born on May 4, 1529. Luther wanted Amsdorf to be sponsor at little Magdalena’s Baptism. “Honorable and noble sir,” Luther wrote to Amsdorf, “God the Father of all grace has given me and my dear Katherine a little daughter. I beseech you for God’s sake to assume the Christian office of father in God to bring this poor little heathen into the Christian fold through the Holy Sacrament of Baptism.” (Quoted in Jacobs, 34)

Martin, their fourth child, arrived on November 9, 1531. Luther stated that being the youngest, his and Katie’s love gravitated to their infant son.

On January 28, 1533, Luther’s third son was born. He was named Paul for the great Apostle. In asking a friend to serve as a sponsor to rescue little Paul from heathenism through Baptism, Luther also wrote: “Perhaps God may make him an enemy of the pope and the Turk.” (Quoted in Jacobs, 36)

The sixth and last child born to Martin and Katie was a daughter, whom they named Margaretha for Luther’s mother. Baby Margaretha entered this vale of tears on December 17, 1534.

Thus, over a period of eight and one-half years, the Lord saw fit to award a renegade monk and an apostate nun six special blessings. None of them became the Antichrist or antichrists, since, by the grace of God working through their parents’ Christian upbringing, they were children of God. Not one of them ever brought shame to the name of Christ or to the name of Luther.

Luther’s Crosses

Although the many crosses Luther bore in the later years of his life were not the result of his role as son and father, they should be considered because his crosses were part of his life while he was a father. When one becomes acquainted with all the physical, mental, and emotional sufferings he endured, one wonders how Luther could have been the kind, loving, joyous, and fun-loving father that he was.

Many of Luther's biographers write of his testiness, irritability, coarseness, and unheard-of-vehemence when, in his later life, he wrote about those who opposed his work of proclaiming the Scriptural Gospel of Christ. Heinrich Bornkamm lists seven reasons for Luther's irascibility and petulance:

1. his concern for the body and soul of his native land;
2. detecting new traces of Zwinglian error;
3. the narrow confines in which he moved in his later life;
4. petty tensions at the university;
5. discord among his co-workers;
6. the disorderly ways of students and citizens of Wittenberg;
7. lack of work on larger theological essays and Bible commentaries. (Bornkamm, 29,30)

When we add to these seven, Luther's many physical maladies which caused him much suffering, we will realize that along with the crosses the Lord gave to Luther, He also gave him supreme endurance. Luther once remarked that he was "a veritable Lazarus, greatly tried by sickness." [Quoted in Plass (16), 181]

From his fortieth year on, Luther was a very sick man. For six months in 1521 he suffered from severe digestive troubles. In 1523 he experienced a nervous affliction of the head, which became permanent. In 1526 he suffered severe pain from stones in his kidney, and from then on, Luther made frequent references in his correspondence to attacks of "the stones." A violent attack of "the stones" occurred at Smalcald in 1537, and as a result, Luther made out his will; he expected to die. In 1541 Luther wrote to Melanchthon about an infection in his ear which was very painful. Occasionally Luther spoke about his nervous troubles, accompanied by dizziness, a ringing in the ears, and sleeplessness.

The rest of his crosses will simply be listed: asthma, feverish rheumatism, sciatica, boils, hemorrhoids, dysentery, abscesses in the ears (which deprived him of sleep and hearing for weeks), toothaches, disease of the bladder, and fearful nervous constrictions of the chest. For many years he rarely had a good night's sleep because of an almost uninterrupted headache. (Plass (16), 181; Ferm, 106; McGiffert, 368] Vergilius Ferm remarked: "In the light of all this extreme suffering, it is remarkable to witness the constant good spirits and humor." (Ferm, 106)

The only reason one can give for Luther's joy and good humor in the midst of such suffering is the fact that he took Christianity seriously. He firmly believed the things he preached and wrote about the Gospel and eternal salvation in Christ. Luther regarded a permanently sad Christian as an abnormality. He is quoted by his table companions as saying: "Sadness is a tool and an instrument of the devil. The devil is the spirit of sadness, but God is the Spirit of joy, who saves us. We have more occasion for joy than for sadness; for we believe in the living God, and Christ lives, and we shall live also." [Quoted in Plass (16), 179]

Luther, The Father

If Luther were living today, with his imposing number of painful ailments, I'm sure that sociologists would classify him as a prime candidate for child abuser of the year or decade. But child abuser he was not, for he had great love for his children. Luther condemned any form of child abuse by means of which a parent gives vent to anger, frustration, and bitterness. "Commenting on Paul's words, 'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger' (Col. 3:21), he said, 'This is spoken against those who use passionate violence in bringing up their children. Such discipline begets in the child's mind, which is yet tender, a state of fear and imbecility, and develops a feeling of hate towards the parents.'" (Koelpin)

Luther's love for his children and the great delight he experienced in having them as his God-given blessings are well attested to by his biographers. When infant Hans was seven months old, Luther wrote to a friend: "Little Hans salutes you. He begins to cut teeth and blithely scolds everyone. Such are the fruit and joy of marriage, of which the pope is not worthy." [Quoted in Bainton (2), 34] Shortly after baby Elizabeth died at the age of eight months, father Luther lamented her departure: "Never have I thought a father's heart would be so tender for his children." (Quoted in Jacobs, 276)

During the 1530 Diet of Augsburg, Luther and his secretary Veit Dietrich lived in the Coburg Castle. In the letter, which was previously referred to, Dietrich included this warm observation for Katie: "You did well to send the doctor the portrait [of Magdalena] for it diverts him from his worries. He has nailed it on the wall opposite the table where we eat in the elector's apartment." [Bainton (1), 322]

Soon after Martin was born, Luther said: "God has given to me greater gifts than to any bishop in a thousand years. I have three children. I have lost one. They are more precious to me than all the kingdoms of Ferdinand." [Quoted in Bainton (2), 36]

After he had experienced the severe kidney stone attack at Smalcald, Luther expressed his love for his wife and his children in this way: "How eagerly I longed for my dear ones as I lay deadly ill at Schmalkalden! I thought I should never see wife and children here. How I mourned over the separation! I am convinced that the natural longing and love a husband has for his wife and parents for their children are greatest of all in those who are dying." (Quoted in McGiffert, 287)

Perhaps the most heart-rending incident in Luther's life was the poignant drama surrounding the death of 14-year-old Magdalena on September 20, 1542. She was "A child of singular depth of character, amiable, affectionate, and deeply religious. Without the ordinary failings of children, the father testified that she had never done an act that required parental reproof." (Jacobs, 396) Those of Luther's acquaintances who were present as Magdalena lay dying were profoundly impressed as they witnessed a man of such rugged strength being overcome by deep sorrow. They heard him pray, "I love her very much, but dear God, if it be thy will to take her, I submit to thee." Then as he turned to his dying loved one, he asked her, "Magdalena, my dear little daughter, is it not true that you would like to stay here with your father, and yet that you want to go to your Father above?" "Yes, dear father," came the answer, "just as God wills." Her father turned away and said, "I love her very much; if my flesh is so strong, what can my spirit do? I am angry with myself that I cannot rejoice in heart and be thankful as I ought." Then, as Magdalena moved in the agony of death, her father fell on his knees beside the bed. There he wept bitterly and prayed that God might free her. And gently, while in his arms, Luther's beloved Magdalena fell asleep in the Savior. Later, as Luther gazed upon his daughter's lifeless form in the casket, he was heard to exclaim, "Dear Lenchen, thou

wilt rise again and shine as a star, aye as the sun!” (Ferm, 80; Jacobs, 396) Eleven years before Magdalena’s death, Luther had remarked: “What a heart-stab it must have been to Abraham when he was commanded to kill his only son. Truly I would dispute with God if he bade me do such a thing.” (Quoted in Koelpin)

Father Luther found his children’s words and actions to be valuable lessons for the enlightenment of adults. He observed that his children edified him more than he entertained them. Once when little Hans was speaking eagerly about the glories of heaven, his father remarked: “They are far more learned in faith than we old people; for they believe in all simplicity, without any disputing and doubts, that God is gracious to them and there is an eternal life after this one.” [Quoted in Plass (16), 262]

When Magdalena was four years old, she was speaking in her simple, childish way about Christ, angels, and heaven while in the presence of her father. He said to her: “My dear child, if only we could hold fast to this faith.” “Why, papa,” she responded, “don’t you believe it?” To this Luther observed: “Christ has made the children our teachers. I am chagrined that although I am ever so much a doctor, I still have to go to the same school with Hans and Magdalena.” [Bainton (1), 364]

One day, while visiting with guests, Luther was holding one of his infant children on his lap. As he and his guests were conversing, nature took its course—the baby befouled its father’s lap. Immediately Luther “bade the guests note that this performance was sadly symbolical of the manner in which most people treated their heavenly Father. God cared and provided for them, and they repaid Him with the filth of their sin and ingratitude.” [Plass (16), 260]

When seeing infant Martin nursing, Luther remarked: “The enemies of this child are the pope, bishops, Duke George, Ferdinand, and all devils, and yet he sucks away without the least concern. Truly Christ said, ‘We must become as little children.’” [Bainton (2), 36]

Luther, the father, did occasionally find the time to go on short excursions into the countryside with his wife and children. He found great delight in these outings. They would visit neighboring pastors or gather fruit and partake in an ample picnic lunch prepared by Katie. According to one source, it was on one of these outings that young Hans was disobedient. His father became very angry with him and refused to speak words of forgiveness, even though Hans expressed his sorrow and begged for his father’s forgiveness. Not even Katie’s intercessory pleas could alter Luther’s firm resolve. It was in regard to this incident that Luther remarked: “I would rather have a dead son than a disobedient one.” (Quoted in Koelpin)

The Luther Home Life

Luther was convinced that the support of a small or large household was totally dependent upon a gracious and munificent God who had revealed numerous promises to care for His own in Christ. Martin and Katie’s household was in great need of a munificent God, for theirs was a large “family.” In addition to their own five children, the Martin Luthers provided for at least ten of Martin’s destitute nieces and nephews and several of Katie’s relatives. Four additional children came under Luther’s care and roof after a friend’s wife died leaving him unable to care for his children. A fleeing Austrian Gospel preacher made it safely to Wittenberg, and Luther gave him room and board for seven months. Orphans, widows, transients, the sick, and the needy were all welcomed into Luther’s home. And it was customary for German professors to provide bed and board for university students, some of whom were unable to pay

for their keep. So, the Luther household was quite large, and most of its members depended on Luther and Katie for their support.

For such a large household the Luthers required a large dwelling. This they had in a wedding gift from Elector Duke John of Saxony; he loaned them the use of the Black Cloister. Later, on February 4, 1532, Elector John legally deeded this many-roomed dwelling to Luther; from then on, it was one of several properties Luther gradually acquired.

Martin Luther was a generous and hospitable child of God; in fact, his openhandedness caused frugal Katie moments of concern. To provide for the needs of the sorely distressed who came to him for help, Luther sold or pawned rings, plated cups, and other valuable family items. He even gave away the silverware his children's sponsors had given them at their Baptisms. Once when Katie objected to his generous ways, Luther replied: "We have a wealthy Father; He will provide." [Quoted in Plass (16), 195]

Everyone who became part of the Luther household was regarded as a member of the family and expected to conform to the family procedures. "They were expected to study the Catechism, pray and attend the family devotions. Luther was in every sense the bishop of his own household." (Schwiebert, 598)

Katie Luther was the first of the household members to begin the day's activities. Her husband called her the "morning star of Wittenberg" because she arose so early each morning. He began his day at five or six o'clock in private prayer. This was followed by the morning devotions for the entire "family." This was one of the ways Luther, as a Christian father, taught his children the ways of the Lord. After these morning devotions, Doctor Luther spent several hours each morning lecturing at the university and preaching.

At 10:00 a.m., Katie had ready the main meal of the day. This meal was not followed by a time of relaxation and extensive conversation by Luther, for after this meal was completed, he spent the entire afternoon, until 5:00 p.m., in the most intensive work of his day. He devoted this time to reading and his writings. At 5:00 p.m. supper was served. Prior to eating the meal, Luther read a selection from Scripture, which was discussed while the meal progressed—this was more education in God's Word for his children. It was at this evening meal that Luther truly relaxed and engaged in conversation with his numerous table companions, some of whom recorded his conversations. After several hours at the table, this period of the household's day concluded with the singing of chorales or old religious songs or the Latin responses of the church year. Luther usually accompanied this singing with his lute.

The few hours which remained before bedtime—Luther usually retired at 9:00 p.m.—were spent with his children. Part of the time was used to instruct them in the fundamental doctrines of Scripture by means of his *Small Catechism*, and the remaining time was given to singing and playing games, such as chess. [Plass (16), 265; Koelpin; Lazareth, 29]

In a Christian household, established by a God-fearing father, where Christ and His Word were prominent, Luther's children obviously grew spiritually in a positive spiritual environment.

Luther's Children After His Death

The limited research for this essay did not uncover much information about the lives of Luther's four children who survived his death. It obviously would be interesting to learn what were the results of Luther's labors as a Christian father. The few facts which were found lead one to conclude that by God's grace Luther's paternal efforts were not in vain. "It is a great satisfaction to know that even the lynx-eyed investigations of Luther's enemies have been unable

to find any stains in the lives of his offspring...His great love and care found their reward.”
[Plass (16), 259]

Luther had hopes that Hans would become a theologian, Martin a jurist, and Paul a warrior. But it was Hans who became the jurist. He was employed in the Weimar chancellery as a counselor. “Martin...studied theology, but his health being frail, he never entered the ministry; he married well and died early.” (Jacobs, 395) The most gifted of Luther’s three sons was Paul. He studied medicine, became a physician, and served with distinction first in the court of the Elector of Brandenburg and later in the court of Elector August of Saxony. Luther’s youngest and only surviving daughter, Margarethe, married Georg von Kunheim, who was of a rich Prussian noble family. Her marriage took place nine years after her father’s death.

Conclusion

This essay does not contain any adverse criticisms of Martin Luther, nor does it hold up for public viewing some particular glaring sins of the Reformer. I hope that these omissions will not lead anyone to conclude that I regard Luther as a super saint; that is, a Christian whose sins and mistakes are so minimal that they are barely visible and unworthy of our notice. Obviously he was a sinner who was by nature as dead in sin and corruption as any one of us. And after he became a saint, his Old Adam worked as vigorously to dominate his life as ours do to rule us. But since the title of this essay is not “Luther the Sinner,” I made no search for his overt sins.

If I had found incidents or examples of misbehavior in Martin’s youth, I would have included them. The nut incident and severe thrashing his father gave him, I suppose were merely tips of an iceberg; but what you cannot see, you cannot report. And I assume Luther was not the perfect father. Perhaps he left too much of his children’s upbringing to his wife; yet, his children were not spiritually neglected in truth, his nurturing of their spiritual lives was probably of a higher quality than that of many of us Christian fathers today. Besides, I believe that the Lord gave Luther a God-fearing and dedicated wife to relieve him of some of his children-nurturing responsibilities so that he could give more attention to his greater God-given responsibility as Reformer.

By the grace of our Lord, we are still spiritual heirs of Martin Luther; therefore, we can be edified by a study of Luther as a son and a father. From such a study we can learn that the Lord who directed Luther’s life and guided him with His Word, is the same Lord who lovingly and graciously rules and controls all things for our benefit. He wants us to immerse our souls and minds into Scripture, as Luther did, so that all we think, say, and do in our callings will be totally guided and ruled by God’s Word. Then we, too, will be successful in our Gospel ministries, for our Lord promises to give success to all endeavors which He uses to bring His purposes to fruition.

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