

MARTIN LUTHER: PERSONAL AND FAMILY LIFE

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The year 1967 was the last great Luther anniversary year. And I only remember that because of the 3x4 inch sticker Professor Vogel had on his briefcase from the synod convention in Saginaw that year. In 1967 I was a freshman at Northwestern and on the receiving and not the instructional end of the educational spectrum. At any rate I just don't remember much of anything being done about Luther then.

It seems that much of the Luther research and writing takes place in conjunction with his anniversary dates. The years 1896, 1917, 1930, 1946, just to mention a few, brought out a great many books -- if one is justified in making deductions from the copyright dates. In these books the great stress, as well it should be, is on what Luther did as a reformer. His home life and personal life usually merits a chapter, sometimes as little as a paragraph.

While all of these books mention different aspects of Luther's home life none contains everything - nor will this paper. The purpose of this paper will be to explore Luther, his personal life and how that related to his family, his wife and children, how he handled money, his recreation, personal habits, a day in the Luther home, plus a few miscellaneous items.

WIFE AND CHILDREN

I'm not sure that we'd hold Luther up as an example of "how to do it" when instructing our young people on engagement. His truly must have been a whirlwind courtship because as late as the end of November 1524 he wrote George Spalatin (chaplain to Elector Frederick the Wise) "I shall never take a wife, as I feel at present...my mind is averse to wedlock because I daily expect the death of a heretic." Even in April of 1525 when he visited his parents he had not made up his mind to ask Katherine yet (although he very likely received encouragement along those lines from his father).

While he had been avoiding marriage for the sake of his cause in a short time it became evident to him he should marry for the same reason. He was urging many others to marry but not doing so himself. And yet other factors entered in. Although the Augustinian Cloister had housed 40 monks as late as 1523, they were all gone; the income generated by their begging was also gone. Gone was the care provided for the monks. Luther was not eating regularly nor caring for his health in general. Years later he said his bed had been unmade for more than a year prior to his marriage and had begun to rot from perspiration (he'd been so tired when he fell into it he had never noticed). Finally even he recognized that he needed a "helper suitable for him." Furthermore we may add to this the disappointment he felt he had caused his parents by not giving them grandchildren.

How foreign to our romance-crazed society today to hear Luther admit he wasn't in love with Katherine when they were married. Nor is it likely that she was with him. She had only recently been rejected by Jerome Baumgartner's parents as a suitable bride for their son and her hoped-for-marriage with him was off. Add to that the fact that she had offered to marry either Amsdorf or Luther. It certainly appears to have been a marriage based on intellect and will rather than on desire or emotion. Some feel the emotion on Luther's part was sympathy. His writings had led the fugitive nuns to

Wittenberg in the first place. It was therefore his responsibility to find them homes. Katie was the last of the nine nuns who had come to Wittenberg who needed help. And she wasn't getting any younger. At age 26 she needed a husband; and Luther at 42 certainly needed someone to take care of him.

Undoubtedly he married in a hurry lest by delaying and announcing his intentions many would find cause to criticize in order to dissuade him. After the marriage (which took place June 13, 1525 in the presence of but five people) there certainly were many who criticized, but then it was too late. The die had been cast; Martin and Katherine were one. Then in order to quell the rising tide of controversy about that secret ceremony, two weeks later they held a public celebration to which everyone was invited (including Luther's proud parents). Among their wedding gifts was the Black Cloister and 100 gulden from Elector John (brother to Frederick who had just died in May), a silver pitcher decorated in gold, a barrel of beer, and amazingly enough 20 or 25 gulden from the Archbishop of Mainz (the very same one who had commissioned Tetzel). Luther refused it, but Katie accepted it behind his back, much to his chagrin and amusement. That pretty well set the tone for the marriage: Luther the theoretically minded theologian, Katherine the practically minded penny-pincher.

What began as a practical solution to several problems resulted in a true love match. In public she always spoke to him as "Herr Doctor" and used the respectful pronoun not the familiar one.

She was proud of him, proud to be his groaning helpmeet (sic), proud of his faults of buffoonery, coarseness, unreasonableness, and his demanding ailments, proud to bow to his tenets of God-given authority.

In his letters we have many different ways he used in addressing her:

Mr. Kate, My dear Kate, Dearly beloved wife, My kind master, Frau Katherine von Bora, Dr. Lutheress, My gracious girl, My darling, My heartily beloved wife, Katherine Luther, Zulsdorfian Doctress, The deeply learned lady Katherine L., My gracious wife, The saintly, anxious-minded lady K.L., Doctress and Zulsdorfian at Wittenberg.

He would sign his letters "Your devoted servant, Your dear lord, Your old darling, Your beloved M.L." In his humorous style he would refer to her as "my lord Katherine, my Katie, my Kette, my rib, Doctor Kate, my lady of the orchards and princess of the pig market," among others. There was more than a little truth in each of those names, for Katherine was a proud person who was rather strong willed. In fact it perhaps caused Luther some hesitation initially because he wrote in 1526 "She is well, by the grace of God, and is in all things more compliant, obedient, and obliging than I dared to hope, - thanks be to God! - so that I would not exchange my poverty for the wealth of Croesus." Or almost as if in relief a few years later speaking of his marriage, "It has turned out well, God be thanked. For I have a pious and true wife, on whom her husband's heart can rely."

Luther found great delight in defending his right of married happiness. Long before he had become convinced that celibacy was not so much a gift of God as a curse imposed by the pope. God's intent for a normal life included

a wife. In characteristic fashion he wrote Spalatin, who had himself just gotten married:

Greet your wife kindly from me. When you have your Katherine in bed, sweetly embracing and kissing her, think: Lo, this being, this best little creation of God, has been given me by Christ, to whom be glory and honor. I will guess the day on which you will receive this letter, and that night I will love my wife in memory of you with the same act and thus return you like for like. My rib and I send greetings to you and your rib. Grace be with you. Amen.

Katie truly was a God-send to Luther. She was much, much more than "just a housewife" and mother; she was a manager of a large household. In addition to their own five living children she cared for eleven orphaned nieces and nephews and as many as six tutors. At one time 25 people were living in their home, including servants but not including as many as a dozen or more students who regularly ate with them.

During their 21 year marriage Katherine's responsibilities also included:

a market orchard she took on, some little distance outside the town (where also she leased the said fields and pasture) growing apples, pears, grapes, peaches, and nuts; a fish pond with trout, carp, pike, and perch; for domestic use she kept hens, ducks and pigs; to say nothing of her services to family and neighbors as an unpaid physician, herbalist, masseuse, and brewer. She was generally regarded as stuck up, but everyone esteemed her skills; her son Paul (No. 5) who adopted the medical profession always said his mother was half a doctor, and her beer was noted as a healthful soporific and antidote to kidney stone. In times of epidemic the Luther household became Wittenberg's hospital, ...besides...being open to women friends for their lying-in.

Is it any wonder Luther exclaimed "I would not exchange Katie for all France or Venice because God has given her to me - and other women have worse faults."

Very realistically he recognized her faults, as he did his own. They both had quick tempers, and she had a quick tongue. As in all marriages harsh words passed between them occasionally. He once wrote "If I were to marry again I would carve an obedient wife for me out of stone, for I doubt whether any wives are obedient."

"I wish that women would recite the Lord's Prayer every time before opening their mouths."

Luther would not have fit in well in today's society with its unisex ideas, the degradation of the housewife-mother concept and the equal rights' movement. He was rather outspoken on the subject of the wife's subordination to her husband. "A woman should either be subject to her husband or not marry." In one of his sermons on marriage he said:

This (subjection) is the other penalty of woman for having misled her husband. And I readily believe that women would sooner and rather, even more willingly and patiently, suffer the former penalties, such as pain and anguish during pregnancy, than be required to be subject and obedient to their husbands. So fond are women by nature of ruling and reigning, following in the steps of their first mother, Eve.

Once in a conversation about a rather dominant, outspoken wife, the reformer said that if his wife were such a woman he would not hesitate to slap her foul mouth. Fortunately for the sake of their marriage Katie was not minded to be like that.

She was minded to become a mother. Within three months after the wedding she was pregnant and by October Luther was proudly announcing "My Katie is fulfilling Genesis 1:28." In the eyes of Rome this renegade priest's marriage to a runaway nun was the height of shamelessness and disgrace. In fact tradition had it that the antichrist was to be born of a priest and a nun. Of course with Katie's pregnancy known throughout Germany here was proof for that tradition. Even Erasmus, who was no great friend of Luther's could not stomach that kind of slander. He said even if the tradition were true there had been plenty of opportunities prior to Luther for the antichrist to be born.

Katie would have six children in eight and a half years. Hans' birth (June 7, 1526) became a cause for rejoicing all over Germany. By January Luther wrote Spalatin:

My little Hans sends greetings. He is in the teething month and is beginning to say "Daddy" and scold everybody with pleasant insults. Katie also wishes you everything good, especially a little Spalatin, to teach you what she declares her little Hans has taught her, namely, the fruit and joy of marriage, of which the Pope and all his world was not worthy.

There were sad times, too. The plague came to Wittenberg and Hans became deathly ill, not eating much at all for eleven days. Katherine, after nursing many others, herself became sick and barely recovered her health before giving birth to Elizabeth, December 10, 1527. Elizabeth never was healthy and died August 3, 1528 less than eight months old. "My little daughter Elizabeth is dead," wrote Luther. "She has left me sick at heart...I could never have believed how a father's heart could soften for his child."

Then almost as a Seth for an Abel, dear Magdalena was born May 4, 1529, followed by Martin November 9, 1531; Paul January 29, 1533; and Margarethe December 17, 1534.

The historian Philip Schaff says Hans gave Luther much trouble. This may be a deduction based on the recorded severity of the discipline Hans needed. One time Hans so offended his father that Luther refused to forgive him for three days in spite of the pleas of Katie. It was on this occasion he said he would rather have a dead son than a disobedient one. Undoubtedly much of his instinct for discipline came from his childhood home and early schooling. Yet he was very much aware that the "apple ought to lie next to the rod." His children's training was less severe and more loving than

his own had been.

Years before he was married Luther made this application in a wedding sermon:

There is nothing which will more surely earn hell for a man than the improper training of his children; and parents can perform no more damaging bit of work than to neglect their offspring, to let them curse, swear, learn indecent words and songs, and permit them to live as they please. Some parents themselves incite their children to such sins by giving them superfluous finery and temporal advancement, so that they may please the world, rise high, and become wealthy. They are constantly concerned to provide sufficiently for the body rather than for the soul...Therefore it is highly necessary that every married person regard the soul of his child with greater care and concern than the flesh which has come from him, that he consider the child nothing less than a precious, eternal treasure, entrusted to his protection by God so that the devil, the world, and the flesh do not steal and destroy it. For the child will be required from the parent on Judgment Day in a very strict reckoning.

Luther had an ability that all parents of young children would do well to cultivate - that of thinking like a child. It is best illustrated by the letter he wrote to Hans celebrating his fourth birthday while Luther was the Fortress Coburg for six and a half months during the diet of Augsburg in 1530.

I know a lovely, pleasant garden in which there are many children. They wear golden jackets and gather shiny apples...and have pretty little ponies with golden reins and silver saddles....Then the man said, "If he gladly prays, learns, and is good, he may also come into the garden, Phil and Justy, too. If they all come together, they shall have whistles and drums and lutes and all kinds of stringed instruments. They may also dance and shoot with little crossbows...."

What is more Luther always claimed to learn more from children than he provided for them. "They are far more learned in faith than we old people; for they believe in all simplicity, without any disputing and doubting that God is gracious to them and there is an eternal life after this one. They have no cares, God gives them grace so that they would rather eat cherries than count money, and a fine apple means more to them than a real gold gulden. They are not concerned about the price of wheat for they are certain at heart that somehow they will find something to eat."

In observing children and the growth of people in general he made this statement:

My boy Hans is now entering upon his seventh year. Every seven years a person changes; the first period is infancy, the second childhood. At fourteen they begin to see the world and lay the foundation of education; at twenty-one the young men seek marriage; at twenty-eight they are householders and patresfamilias, at thirty-five they are magistrates in Church and State, until forty-two, then they are kings. After that the senses begin to decline (Luther himself was fifty).

Thus every seven years brings a new condition in body and character.

In everything that children did Luther found parallels to spiritual truths, lessons to be learned in parable-like fashion. One day, apparently before the great leap forward in child-rearing known as the discovery of plastic pants, one of his youngsters made a mess in his lap. Not at all embarrassed Luther pointed out to his guests that it was a sad replica of the way in which people treat their heavenly Father. In spite of the fact that God cares and provides for them they respond to that love with the filth of their thoughtless ingratitude and sin.

On another occasion when one of the children was throwing a tantrum because it couldn't have its way he said, "What cause have you given me to love you so? How have you deserved to be my heir? By making yourself a general nuisance. And why aren't you thankful instead of filling the house with your howls?"

The October 1983 issue of National Geographic has a quote about son Martin that I found nowhere else. "If you become a lawyer," said Luther to his namesake, "I will hang you on the gallows, because some lawyers are greedy and rob their clients blind. It is almost impossible for lawyers to be saved. It's difficult enough for theologians."

Luther became very much attached to his second daughter, Magdalena appears to have been a very loving, lovable, obedient child, one who, according to some, never had to be reprimanded by her father. However she took deathly ill as a thirteen year old. When Luther returned from his trip, realizing the gravity of the situation, sent for Hans who was away at school in Torgau. The two oldest were very close to each other. Two weeks later as she lay on her deathbed Katherine could not bear to watch and turned away. Luther attempted to comfort her, "Katie, remember where she came from." Then he returned to the bed and asked, "Magdalena, my dear little daughter, would you like to stay with your father or would you willingly go to your Father above?"

She answered, "Dear Father, as God wills."

Then he too couldn't take it and turned away and said, "I love her very much. If my flesh is so strong, what can my spirit do? God has given no bishop so great a gift in a thousand years as he has given me in her. I am angry with myself that I cannot rejoice in heart and be as thankful as I ought." Then as Magdalena lay in the agony of death, her father fell down on his knees and wept bitterly and prayed that God might free her. Magdalena fell asleep in Jesus in her father's arms September 20, 1542. As he laid her in the coffin Luther said, "Dear Lena, you will rise and shine like a star, like the sun...I am happy in spirit, but the flesh is sorrowful and will not be comforted. The parting grieves me terribly... I have sent a saint to heaven."

On her gravestone he inscribed these words as translated in Schaff:

Here do I Lena, Luther's daughter, rest,
Sleep in my little bed with all the blessed.
In sin and trespass was I born;
Forever would I be forlorn,
But yet I live, and all is good -
Thou, Christ, didst save me with thy blood.

A short while later he wrote to a friend, "I have conquered the pain of a father, though only by a sort of fuming anger against death. By this counterirritant I have stanchd my tears. I loved her dearly; but I dare say death will find its punishment on that Day together with him who is its author."

The other four children survived their father. Hans, for whom his father had plans of becoming a theologian, became a lawyer (turnabout is fair play) and died at age 49. Martin, who was to become a lawyer became a theologian but never actually entered the ministry and died rather young at 33. Paul, whom his father surmized would become a soldier, entered the field of medicine and became rather distinguished as a court physician. It was Paul who lived longest of the children dying at the age of 60. Margarethe married a Prussian nobleman's son George von Kunheim at the age of twenty. She too died young in her mid thirties. (The Northwestern Lutheran, November 1, 1983, notes that 5,000 people today can trace their ancestry to Martin Luther. Although the male line with the surname Luther died out in 1759 these people are descendants of either Margarethe Luther von Kunheim or female descendants of Paul Luther. Some 500 live in the United States. To perpetuate their famous ancestor's name they have nicknamed themselves Lutherids.)

Plass concludes about the children:

Although none of the Reformer's children except Paul achieved renown, 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 ardent prayers for them were answered, and his great love and care found their reward.

LUTHER AND HIS MONEY

I am convinced that much of what we have read or been taught concerning Luther's abject poverty because of his low salary are simply not true. And yet all the histories of Luther's life that I had at my disposal, as a matter of fact all that I can ever recall reading, either say directly that his salary was low or they show it by a conversion to dollars.

Before his marriage his salary for being a university professor was 100 gulden (a gold coin interchangeable with the florin). In 1525 because of his marriage it was doubled. By 1532 it was increased to 300 gulden. In 1541 his salary had grown to 400 gulden per year. What is so misleading is the method of computation used to convert gulden to dollars. Even Schwiebert makes a grave error by using research from 1913 in his 1950 book. He says that a gulden was worth about \$13.40. Thus the Electoral Statutes of 1536 showing Luther, Melancthon and Lawyer Embden to have salaries of 300 gulden he converts to \$4,020 annually. I doubt very much whether that even accurately reflected Luther's salary in 1550, and it certainly is out of line today.

For the sake of evaluation it is much more accurate to use comparative property values of 1536 and 1983. In 1544 Luther valued five cows for fifteen gulden or three gulden each. A milking cow today costs between \$1,000 and \$1,5000. Assuming that today's selective breeding had not inflated a cow's worth then let's choose the lower figure of \$1,000. Thus a gulden today would be worth a bit over \$300 each. And so Luther's salary of 300 gulden

in 1536 would be worth some \$90,000 today. Outrageous, you say. Not at all. That is perhaps some twenty to thirty percent higher than university professors' salaries today. But then a grateful elector saw to it that his favorite professors were very well paid. (Arthur McGiffert notes that these salaries were unusually large for professors of that day.)

To his regular salary were added gifts of all sorts from admirers in many parts of the world. It got to the point where he finally objected, writing to Elector John the Steadfast in 1529:

I have long delayed thanking your Electoral Grace for the clothes and the gown you sent me. I respectfully beg your Electoral Grace not to believe those who say I am in want. I have, unfortunately, especially from your Electoral Grace, more than I can conscientiously bear. It does not become me as a preacher to have a superfluity, nor do I desire it. I feel your Grace's all too mild and gracious favor so much that I am beginning to be afraid. For I should not like to be in this life among those to whom Christ said, "Woe to you rich, you have your reward." Besides, to speak humanly, I do not want to be burdensome to Your Electoral Grace. I know your Grace has to give to so many that nothing remains over; for too much destroys the sack. The brown cloth is too splendid, but, in order to show my gratitude to your Electoral Grace, I will wear the black coat in your honor, although it is too costly for me; and if it were not your Grace's gift, I should never wear such a garment. I beg your Electoral Grace will henceforth wait until I ask, that I may not be prevented by your Grace's anticipation of my wants from begging for others who are much more worthy of such favor.

Luther refused any pay for being the assistant pastor in Wittenberg and quite a regular preacher. He did not accept the students' honoraria, money customarily offered by individual students to their teachers in addition to the regular salary. He also declined a part ownership in a silver mine offered by the elector. Tax exemption was granted him in Wittenberg yet he always paid his taxes (although he regularly took wine from the town vaults without asking anybody for permission). In 1536 he was offered 400 gulden a year by the publishers of his books for their free use. He refused saying that God had rescued him from popery and so he couldn't sell God's free gifts (his writing ability). In short Luther could easily have been a rich man had he chosen to. He observed:

I have a strange housekeeping situation indeed. I use up more than I receive. Although my salary is but 200 florins, yet every year I must spend 500 for housekeeping and in the kitchen, not to speak of the children, other luxuries, and alms. I am entirely too awkward. The support of my needy relatives and the daily calls of strangers make me poor. Yet I am richer than all popish theologians, because I am content with little and have a true wife.

Finally it is not how much income a person has, rather what he does with whatever he does have. And Luther did much with his money--mostly, as he alluded to above, giving it away. That huge salary was gone usually by November or December of that current year. Luther, while he was in the monas-

tery, never had to take care of money. His clothing, food, shelter were provided. This coupled with his total trust in God to provide in all circumstances gave him a reputation of being a soft touch for a hand-out. Once a student came to him and in tears explained his need. Luther's wallet was empty so he took a silver cup that was gilded on the inside and said, "Take the cup and go home in God's name."

Katherine quietly asked, "Are you going to give everything away?"

Luther responded by squashing the cup in his large hands and saying, "There, take it to the smith, I can't use it anymore."

One time Luther endured the scolding of Katie a bit for taking the children's savings for another needy case. Then he silenced her by saying, "God is rich, He will give us more."

On another occasion a man suffering because of his confession of faith came to the Black Cloister seeking aid. Luther had but one carefully-saved coin (a joachim) in his wallet. Without thinking too long he opened the wallet and said, "Come out, Joachim! The Savior is here."

Another time he wanted to send a vase to a friend for a wedding present but "P.S. I can't find the vase. Katie's hidden it."

Finally it got to the point where Lucas Cranach (who also happened to be their banker) refused to honor Luther's checks without Katherine's approval. Thus this method of budget destruction was closed.

To somewhat counteract that over generous spirit the German Electors saw to it that Luther should have real estate holdings to provide for him in his old age. Much of his property came from gifts by the electors. (His will of 1542 shows him to have assets of roughly 9,000 gulden or 2.7 million of 1983 dollars - 88% of which was real estate, 11% books, jewels, rings, chains, gift coins, etc., 1% livestock).

Luther by his actions put into practice what he taught. Correctly he didn't view wealth as sinful in itself. As part of his commentary on Amos he wrote: "God does not condemn the possession of wealth, but the evil use of it, that is, its use merely to satisfy one's selfish desire, without coming to the aid of the poor and without being a faithful steward of that which God has given." The Christian is to be of service to God and his fellowman. And so his money was to be used to benefit others. He commented on the wrong attitude toward money:

Wealth is the most insignificant thing on earth, the most trifling gift that God has bestowed on mankind. What is it in comparison with God's Word, what in comparison with corporal gifts, such as beauty and health? No, what is it in comparison with the gifts of character, such as understanding, skill, and wisdom? Yet men are so eager to gain riches that no labor, no pains or risk, are shirked in the course of its acquisition....But our Lord commonly gives riches to coarse asses whom He does not favor with spiritual blessings.

Explaining 1 Peter 1:17 he furthermore said:

We are to use all things on earth as a guest who goes on wearily and arrives at an inn, where he must tarry overnight and can receive nothing but food and lodging; yet he does not say that the property of the inn is his. So must we also act in regard to our temporal possessions, as though they were not ours and enjoy only so much of them as is needful to sustain the body, and with the rest we are to help our neighbor. Thus the Christian life is only a night's sojourning; for we have here no abiding city but must find it where our Father is in heaven.

As is obvious Luther's goal was not to have possessions, to obtain wealth. He wrote to his friend Wenzel Link:

Money and goods I do not have and do not desire. If I formerly possessed a good name and honor, these possessions are now being very energetically ruined....But I am satisfied with the possession of my sweet Redeemer and Propitiator, my Lord Jesus Christ, to whom I shall joyfully sing as long as I live.

LUTHER'S RECREATION

The years of monastic living had taken their toll. As long as he lived Luther would endure relatively poor health. But after his marriage he no longer spent unending hours at his desk. His changed attitude is shown by the following: After spending some six months at Coburg Luther was visiting Spalatin at mealtime. Finally after observing how Melanchthon's thoughts were totally engrossed with editing some portion of the Apology during the meal, Luther took the pen away and said to his friend, "God can be honored not alone by work but also by rest and recreation."

Gardening

Luther, as usual, practiced that he taught to others. He took great pride in his garden and was always interested in obtaining rare plants from distant parts of the country. Early in 1526 he wrote to Link thanking him for promising to send some garden seeds for the next spring. That summer he wrote Spalatin not with a little pride, "I have planted a garden and dug a well, and both have turned out successfully. Come and you will be crowned with roses and lilies." Luther always liked flowers but he was partial toward roses. About them he said, "Could a man make a single rose, we should give him an empire; but these beautiful gifts of God come freely to us, and we think nothing of them. We admire what is worthless, if only it is rare. The most precious of things is nothing if it is common."

He apparently had some degree of success with grafting fruit trees. Plass relates this: "Duchess Elizabeth of Brunswick once sent the Doctor a number of good cheeses and asked him to favor her in return with any 'extraordinary' plants which he might have on hand. The gardener Luther therefore forwarded her some small mulberry and fig trees with which he had been having good success."

Apiarist

Luther also kept a few beehives. Of course, he saw spiritual parallels here too. "Particularly in the manner in which the bees would swarm around the queen and would be lost without her seemed an apt illustration to him of the loyalty of believers to their Savior, without whom there would be no 'communion of saints.'"

Woodworking

For a while he took an interest in woodworking on a lathe. "If the world will no more support us for the sake of the Word," he said humorously, "let us learn to support ourselves by the labor of our hands." But that diversion didn't last long and soon he wrote Link not to send him anymore tools "unless he could discover some that would continue to work of their own accord after his servant Wolf Sieberger had neglected them and fallen asleep."

Chess

Luther also played chess and is said to have been fairly good at it. Once he wrote to his friend Prince Joachim of Anhalt:

Your Grace must really look out for that marvelous chess-player, Franz Burkhardt, for he is quite sure that he can play the game like a professional. I would give a button to see him play as well as he thinks he can. He can manage the knights, take a castle or two, and fool the peasant pawns, but the queen beats him on account of his weakness for the fair sex, which he cannot deny.

Dancing

The subject of dancing received more than one comment by the reformer. Interestingly enough Plass in one place says that Luther did not dance while Melancthon did and in another quotes Luther as saying he danced. "Where decency prevails, I let the wedding run its usual and rightful course and dance as much as I please." He saw the folk dancing of his day, a sort of rhythmic processional around the room with the dancers holding hands, beneficial for developing social graces.

Dances are arranged and permitted that courtesy in group life may be learned and friendships may be formed among adolescent youths and girls. For in this way moral conduct can be watched, and an opportunity is also given to come together in a decent manner so that in the light of this acquaintance with a girl a young man can thereafter more decently and deliberately court her...But let all be done with modesty. For this reason decent men and matrons should be engaged to mingle with the dancers that everything may be done more decently. At times I myself shall be there so that my presence may keep the adolescents from the gyrations of certain dances.

Plass footnotes this comment with the following:

By the "gyrations of certain dances" Luther means the circling of the dancers while holding one another in close bodily contact. This type of dancing Luther condemned in a published opinion. Here he even says that the government ought to forbid such dancing as demoralizing.

Dramatics

Enactments of scriptural stories was no problem for Luther, in fact it is likely his "From Heaven Above" was written with just such actions in mind. Nor was the secular drama frowned on. His opinion was asked concerning a teacher wishing to put on a comedy by Terence. Plass relates Luther's advice that the pupils should be permitted to present it. "Such plays would be of great educational value to actors and audience alike. They are a mirror of life...Nor ought Christians be held to avoid them because at times coarse jokes and objectionable love affairs are found in them. If a man insists on taking offense, even the Holy Bible may give him occasion to do so."

LUTHER ON BIRDS

J.J. Audubon would have been proud of Luther because the latter very much enjoyed watching birds and their habits.

The swallow he describes as to its color, its noisy twitter, its uselessness, and its aggressiveness; "for," says he, "it molests the cows." Of the sparrows he says that they are a very pest to the peasants, robbing, stealing, devouring anything they can lay hold of: oats, barley, wheat, rye, apples, pears, cherries, and so on; birds that rapidly multiply, and whose entire song consists of "Scrip, Scrip." The cuckoo he describes as a dirty bird, which sucks the eggs of other birds, lays his own into their nest, and expects them to hatch them. The call of the cuckoo is merely his own name, while his habitat is generally found where the lark is. Of the peacock he reports that it is a very jealous bird, and he classes it with doves, pheasants, siskins, finches, wrens, thistle-birds, robins, and thrushes among the "proud birds." Of crows and blackbirds he gives it as his opinion that they enjoy their own cawing. He shows how birds during winter lie apparently dead along river banks, till spring calls them to new life. He tells of the ostrich how hard-hearted it is, not attending to hatching or tending of its offspring, and how it hides its head in the sand. He knows how owls and bats shun the light and how the magpie, by persistent effort, is taught to talk. He speaks of the filthy nest of the hoopoe and of the cleanness of the dove. He describes pigeons "with white shining wings like silver, but beautifully green and golden on the back, where the wings meet, birds without meanness." He mentions the keen eyes of the falcon and the circling of the hawk, who tries to take the chicks that hide under their mother's wings. He has watched the buzzard looking for carrion, and has seen the pigeon, sparrow, chicken, and yellow-breast pick up the seed of the sower from the furrows. He is acquainted with the sweet song of the birds and also the senseless chatter of the parrot.

Luther's servant Wolf once set out some nets to trap a few birds. That prompted this letter which Wolf found the next morning:

We thrushes, blackbirds, linnets, finches, plus other good and honorable birds, beg to advise you that we have information that Wolf Sieberger, your servant, has paid a high price for some old, worn-out nets, that he may rig up a trap to take from us our God-given liberty to fly in the air and gather grains of corn on the ground.

Since this is very hard for us poor birds who have no barns or houses, we humbly beg you to ask him to give up his plans until we have made our journey over Wittenberg.

If he will not do this, we hope that he may be repaid by finding in his trap, when morning comes, frogs, locusts, and snails instead of us!

Wolf sheepishly took the traps down.

Another time when Luther was relaxing in his garden at dusk he noticed how two birds were trying to settle into their nest for the evening. However each time someone passed by they were frightened. That prompted the following gem:

Ah, you dear little bird, do not flee. I am at heart truly your friend, if only you would believe my assurance. But just so we also do not believe and trust our Lord God, though He grants and gives us everything that is good; indeed, He does not want to kill us, He who gave His Son into death for us.

In spite of his very generous nature Luther was not unthinking when it came to money or the economy. He surmized, again using birds as an example: "No one can calculate what God needs only to feed the sparrows and useless birds; they cost him more in a year than the income of the King of France."

LUTHER ON DOGS

Luther, it appears, had a real weakness for dogs. He had one while living alone in the Black Cloister before his marriage. Affectionately named Toelpel (Clumsy) the dog was his constant companion whose liberties were questioned more than once by Katie, especially the time some of Luther's papers and even a Bible had telltale teethmarks on them. And yet Luther was very fond of that dog once wishing out loud that he hoped to see dogs in heaven. Another time when his dog was sitting at his feet at the dinner table waiting for a bit of food from his master, watching with open mouth and motionless eyes, Luther said, "Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. He has no other thought, wish, or hope."

LUTHER'S PERSONAL HABITS

Luther's neglect of his personal housekeeping chores prior to his marriage showed up elsewhere in his life as well. His office was a study

in disorder. "Desks, tables, chairs, and every available spot were covered with books, letters, and manuscripts, and he often lost things altogether in the confusion of the place."

His bodily care received about as much attention as his housekeeping in his office did. Under the press of work he would forget to eat and drink for days. It wasn't until his marriage that he began eating regularly and put on some weight. His peasant upbringing showed up in his taste for food. He preferred "healthy, simple home food" to rich delicacies. Melancthon reports with amazement that Luther could stay so round on such simple fare, working to capacity all day but then only eating a herring or two and a few pieces of bread. It needs to be noted that some of his weight was due to the defect he suffered in his metabolism caused by uric acid.

Nor was Luther an immoderate drinker. While Charles V is said to have regularly consumed three quarts of wine at dinner he never was accused of being an excessive drinker. That simply was the accepted beverage, much like coffee or tea is today. More so than wine Luther loved his beer (apparently a tradition among Lutheran clergymen that is fostered also in our circles). And Katherine made the best as far as he was concerned, for he wrote to her in 1534:

There is nothing worth drinking here, for which I am sorry. I like a good drink and recall the good wine and beer I have at home, and also a fair lady (or ought I say lord?). It would be a good thing for you to send me the whole wine-cellar and a bottle of your own beer as often as you can. If you don't I shall not return because of this new beer. God bless you and the children and household. Amen.

He also said,

If our Lord and Master can pardon me for having vexed him for well nigh twenty years by reading masses, he can also put to my credit that at times I have quaffed a good drink in his honor. May the world construe it as it pleases.

Later in life his glass of beer became a sedative for him. "In the evenings he would say to his pupils at the supper table, 'You young fellows, you must drink the Elector's health and mine, the old man's, in a toast. We must look for our pillows and beds in the tankard.'"

Much has been made of the coarseness of his language. Time magazine (October 31, 1983) reports "He was a powerful spiritual author, yet his words on other occasions were so scatological that no Lutheran periodical would print them today." That isn't hard to verify. Merely paging through the American Edition of his Table Talk certainly bears that out. However we dare not judge him across the centuries like that. Out of his Sixteenth Century element and thrust into our "sophisticated" Twenty-First he appears coarse. But listen to what his contemporaries said of him: "His friends and guests spoke of the 'chaste lips' of Luther."

"He was," says Mathesius (a guest in the Luther home for two years and

one of his first biographers), "a foe to unchastity and loose talk. As long as I have been with him I have never heard a shameful word fall from his lips." McGiffert writes "Despite the many unquotable things he said and wrote to illustrate a point or enforce an argument or give sting to his polemic, there is surprisingly little vulgarity or obscenity for its own sake either in his table-talk or in his writings." Furthermore by comparison to Shakespeare whose voluminous earthy language is legendary Luther was pure indeed.

Another quirk in his personality showed up in his choice of wall decoration. He dearly loved and highly respected the Virgin Mary and in the process of keeping her portrait in his room he greatly embarrassed a number of his friends.

And yet try as they might to scour through his dark closets looking for a skeleton with which to discredit him, about the worst his enemies could dredge up was this: Luther liked to dress up for state occasions with starched cuffs and a gold chain.

We dare not end this section on Luther's personal habits without a comment on his prayer life. Perhaps very few patriarchs, apostles, or saints have prayed as Luther did. Speaking of prayer he said:

Open your eyes and look into your life and the life of all Christians, particularly the spiritual estate, and you will find that faith, hope, love, obedience, chasteness, and all virtues are languishing; that all sorts of terrible vices are reigning; that good preachers and prelates are lacking; that only rogues, children, fools, and women are ruling. Then you will see that there is need to pray throughout the world, every hour, without ceasing, with tears of blood, because of the terrible wrath of God over men. It certainly is true that the need for prayer has never been greater than it is at this time, and it will be still greater from now on till the end of the world.

The way to pray is to use few words but to give them a great and deep meaning or intention. The fewer the words, the better the prayer; the more the words, the poorer the prayer. Few words and much meaning is Christian; many words and little meaning is heathenish.

While Luther was at Coburg his companion Veit Dietrich wrote this to Melancthon about Luther's prayer life:

No day passes that he does not give three hours to prayer, and those the fittest for study. Once I happened to hear him praying. Good God! how great a spirit, how great a faith was in his very words! With such great reverence did he ask, as if he felt that he was speaking with God, with such hope and faith, as with a father and a friend. "I know," he said, "that you are our Father and our God. I am certain, therefore, that you are about to destroy the persecutors of your children. If you don't, then our danger is yours too. This business is totally yours. We come to it under compulsion: You therefore must

defend." ...In almost these words I standing a ways away, heard him praying with a clear voice. And my mind burned with a singular emotion when he spoke in so friendly a manner, so weightily, so reverently to God.

Luther made use of prayer as God has commanded all Christians to pray. He begged, pleaded, thanked, praised, commanded, and all done out of child-like faith. He said:

Let happen what will, we can accomplish everything by prayer; for prayer itself is a kind of omnipotence. By prayer we are able to bring into order whatever has been appointed; we can make crooked things straight, we can endure what cannot be healed. We can overcome in all adversities, and we can secure the possession of everything that is good.

Yet for all his private prayer he stated that praying in the company of others soothed him far more than private prayer at home.

LUTHER'S HEALTH

As St. Paul, so Luther with the "thorn in the flesh." The aches and pains that he suffered for the last quarter century of his life would have incapacitated many another man. "This toothache and earache I am always suffering from are worse than the plague. When I was at Coburg I was tormented with a noise and buzzing in my ears, just as though there were some wind tearing through my head. The devil had something to do with it."

A man was complaining to him one day of the itch; said Luther: "I should be very glad to change with you, and to give you ten florins into the bargain. You don't know what a horrible thing this vertigo of mine is. Here, all today, I have not been able to read a letter through, nor even two or three lines of the Psalter consecutively. I do not get beyond three or four words, when buzz, buzz! the noise begins again, and often I am near falling off my chair with the pain. But the itch, that's nothing; nay, it is rather a beneficial complaint."

He suffered very much from gall stones and almost died in 1537 while at Smalcald. He found relief only after a jolting carriage ride caused six stones to pass, the largest the size of a bean. Add to this: asthma, severe rheumatism, boils, hemorrhoids, dysentery, ear infections causing loss of sleep and hearing for weeks, and migraine headaches among other ailments. For the last ten years of his life his doctors expected him to suffer a stroke of apoplexy at any time. It's no wonder that in later years Luther's patience wore thin at times considering his bodily afflictions. Yet he preferred simple remedies, "My best medical prescription is written in John 3: 'God so loved the world.'"

DAILY LIFE

As industrious as Luther was he probably wasn't the first one out of bed in the morning. His nickname for his wife, "the morning star of Wittenberg" certainly implies that she beat him up. Yet he was no lazy bones because

he usually was up by five or six o'clock. After his private prayers he led his family in a joint devotion before going to the university to lecture or the church to preach. The main meal was served at ten in the morning. From eleven until five in the afternoon Luther spent in his study, reading, preparing lectures and sermons and writing letters and pamphlets. Occasionally some of this afternoon time was given to conferences and interviews. Before supper was served at five o'clock he would gather the household around the table and read a portion of the Bible to them. That would then serve as the basis for discussion during the meal. It was during this meal that Luther was his most relaxed and very most eloquent. Much of what he said was scribbled into notebooks later to be published as his Table Talks. Often they would not leave the table for several hours. The balance of the time between supper and the nine o'clock bedtime he spent either playing games with the children or catechizing them in the Chief Parts. Often they would sing, sometimes his own compositions, accompanied by him on the lute. Of course before retiring for the evening he would again spend some time standing before his open window privately praying to his heavenly Father.

Christmas brought out the child in Luther and he celebrated it with child-like joy. It was for his children that he wrote "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," to be acted out in pageant form by them. Some think he composed the music in one-two rhythm while rocking one of his children to sleep in his cradle.

Luther was constantly aware of his responsibilities as bishop of his household. And he carried out those duties well. Professor Koelpin relates:

In Luther's later years when sickness forced him to steer away from public preaching in the town, he prepared sermonettes or "Hauspredigten" for the home. "If I cannot preach in a church," he said, "I preach in my home, because of the office I hold and for my conscience, simply because as a family father it is my duty to preach to my family." These family sermons were recorded by some of the listeners and are real gems of Bible preaching.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the need for a paper of this sort, one that dwells on Luther as a man in relation to mankind rather than on what he taught, is that it shows Luther certainly lived by the code that he taught to others. Undoubtedly one of the greatest theologians of all time he could dispute on the basis of Scripture with the best the Roman Church had to offer. Yet at the same time he was child-like in his faith as he showed in his ability to communicate with children and reach them on their level. He was not overawed by princes and kings yet he took time to watch birds and scratch dogs behind the ears. Following his profound theological statements of the early 1520s culminating in the Augustana of 1530 perhaps his greatest practical contribution to us has been his family life, his teaching them the Catechism, his preaching to them, his prayers with them, his playing among them. What's most important, it worked! May God grant us the strength and ability to do the same so that His kingdom work may be furthered by our good example of family life.

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