

Introduction to Volume 4

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The reader may well ask why the writings included in this volume—and not other writings—are subsumed under the heading “Pastoral Writings.” In some sense, all of Luther’s works were pastoral, driven by a deep concern not for “correct” theology but to provide consolation and hope to people suffering in body, mind, and spirit. Certainly his early questions about indulgences derived as much from a deep pastoral concern for people as from a theoretical questioning of the entire indulgence system.

Luther the pastor is often overlooked.^a Succeeding generations have thought of him as the great prophet, steadfast reforming figure, mover and shaker of his time, best-selling writer, brilliant theologian—even the national or denominational hero. But Luther was also a pastor who explained the basics of the Christian faith, taught people how to pray, visited and comforted the sick and dying, encouraged the doubtful, advised the prominent and the obscure, counseled the faithful, doubting, and

^a For a broad and recent treatment of pastoral care in this era see Ronald Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Gerhard Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge an seinen Briefen dargestellt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther’s Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

1. Fred W. Meuser notes, “Luther’s preaching ministry was remarkable, his productivity prodigious—almost miraculous . . . in 1528 he preached nearly two hundred times in spite of severe headaches and dizzy spells . . . most years he preached over a hundred times. . . . Of the approximately 4,000 sermons he preached in his lifetime, about 2,300 have been preserved in some form.” See Meuser, “Luther as Preacher of the Word of God,” in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136–48, at 136.

suffering, and offered concrete help in a number of situations. Luther’s actual pastoral work was broad ranging. It is estimated that he preached approximately four thousand sermons in his lifetime.¹ His skills as a poet still inform the ordinary Christian through his radiant hymnody. He shaped new Evangelical worship, catechetical, and prayer practices. He never considered himself above the usual activities of a pastor. Luther never wrote a manual for pastors, a genre used by medieval priests and later by Lutheran pastors.^b Nevertheless, his works provided guidance as to how his pastoral work was done.

A quick glance at the other volumes in The Annotated Luther series assures one that any number of other pieces could also have been considered “pastoral” and included in this volume. See for example, the *Sermon on Indulgences and Grace* (1518) in volume 1, which provides an explanation of the theological problems of indulgences at the lay level, or *Whether Soldiers too Can Be Saved* (1526) in volume 5. Surely Luther’s reform of worship, including the *German Mass* (1526) in volume 3, could also be considered “pastoral.” Any number of pastoral works are not included in The Annotated Luther series at all; see for example, *Fourteen Consolations* (1520)^c or his numerous letters.

The pieces in this volume are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. It was the editors’ opinion that this would aid the reader in considering Luther’s thought on particular issues of pastoral ministry. Of course, no piece fits solely into one category.

The volume begins with the theme “Sermon and Song.” Luther was an incredibly active and productive preacher. While some works published under the title of “sermons” were probably never preached, the *Invocavit Sermons* (1522), also known as *Eight Sermons at Wittenberg*, illustrate Luther preaching into a

^b See, for example, Scott Hendrix, trans. and ed., *Preaching the Reformation: The Homiletical Handbook of Urbanus Rhegius* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003). See also Amy Nelson Burnett, “The Evolution of the Lutheran Pastors’ Manual in the Sixteenth Century,” *Church History* 73 (September 2004): 536–65. A later rector at the Latin school in Eisleben, however, did assemble a variety of passages from Luther’s writings in his *Pastorale Lutheri* (Eisleben, 1582). See Robert Kolb, “Luther the Master Pastor: Conrad Porta’s *Pastorale Lutheri*, Handbook for Generations,” *Concordia Journal* 9 (1983): 179–87.

^c LW 42:121–66. Jane Strohl, “Luther’s Fourteen Consolations,” *Lutheran Quarterly* ns 3 (1989): 169–82.

particular situation of crisis. Returning from the Wartburg in 1522, Luther had to take in hand a reforming movement that, in his view, had gotten out of hand by claiming to carry reform to its logical ends yet returning to a legalism that Luther's reform opposed.

The *Selected Sermons* illustrate Luther's preaching on a number of topics and texts. Although Luther wrote down few of his actual sermons, the notes taken by listeners allow us to appreciate his forthright, energetic, and clear manner of expressing key Reformation insights in ways that all would understand. A sermon from one of his postils is also included. In the sixteenth century, a pastor's library typically included several *postils*, collections of sermons on Gospel and/or Epistle lectionary texts arranged according to the church year. Luther sought through his postils to provide preaching aids to other pastors and thus influenced the course of evangelical preaching. They provide a glimpse of how Luther wanted his insights preached and taught. Only recently have scholars started recognizing the importance of postils in the spread of Reformation preaching and teaching.^d

Luther was well aware of the power of hymnody to preach and teach the faith as well as provide opportunity for the laity to confess the faith. The first Evangelical hymnals were published in 1524, five years before Luther's catechisms. Luther continued to compose hymns throughout his life; some of these are sung to this day by Christians around the world. The hymns provided in this volume give insight into Luther's poetic genius for conveying the gospel in this form.

"Teaching and Prayer" contains several pieces specifically intended to teach prayer: *A Sermon on Prayer and Procession during Rogation Days* (1519), the *Little Prayer Book* (1522), Luther's *Small*



A 1548 printing of Luther's *Hauspostil*, with a historiated border that depicts images of God's instructions to Adam and Eve, the Fall and expulsion from Eden, Adam and Eve working the ground, John the Baptist pointing the way, the crucifixion, infant baptism, and the Eucharist.

^d See, for example, John Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Catechism (1529), and *A Simple Way to Pray* (1535). Often ignored, Luther's reformation of prayer theology and practice has gained more attention in recent decades. The works here illustrate how Luther used different genres—sermon, prayer book, letter, and catechism—to teach prayer. The *Little Prayer Book* is sometimes seen as a forerunner to *The Small Catechism*, as it contains many catechetical elements. Like the *Little Prayer Book*, *The Small Catechism* went beyond teaching prayer and illustrates Luther's efforts to concentrate his theology in an easily understandable (and learnable) form focused on the most important elements of the Christian faith. *The Small Catechism* is probably the most influential of all his works, shaping generations of Lutherans across several continents, who memorized and reflected upon its contents.

The pieces in “Pastoral Care and Consolation” show Luther dealing with a diverse set of pastoral challenges. In *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519) he consciously moved away from the advice given in the medieval *Ars Moriendi* literature while retaining some of the form of that literature. Departing from medieval Roman Catholic beliefs and practices surrounding death, Luther stressed that the dying could be certain of God's forgiveness because God had promised to forgive. Luther's instructions for dying removed the threat that one's disposition on the deathbed might put one's salvation in peril. Rather than focusing on death, sin, and hell, the Christian is to be consoled by God's sure promise.

Luther knew well that high regard for and devotion to the Virgin Mary were prominent in medieval piety and key to how laity understood and practiced their faith. While Luther firmly rejected any notion that Mary was a mediator between God and humans, he did not eliminate all mention of her but, rather, sought to teach a proper understanding and appreciation of Mary. He began his commentary on Mary's song in Luke 1 (*The Magnificat*) before he left for the Diet of Worms in 1521² but he did not complete it until he was at the Wartburg. Luther saw Mary's “humility” not as a virtue but, rather, as a description of her status as a lowly, poor, and even despised person. Rather than ascribing virtue to Mary, Luther praised her for her great faith and willingness to be the mother of God. Written for those who, like Mary, were “humble” and “simple,” this piece served also as a gift for the young prince John Frederick. Castigating

2. An imperial diet was an assembly of the political representatives of the Holy Roman Empire called by the Holy Roman Emperor. Luther was under the threat of excommunication by Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521), which by tradition meant that Emperor Charles V (1500–1558) should declare Luther an outlaw. Even so, Charles did allow Luther to appear at the Diet of Worms to get a hearing where he was expected to retract his writings against papal teachings. Luther did not retract, and supporters secretly stole him away to safety and exile at the Wartburg, the castle of Elector Frederick III (1463–1525) in May 1521.

many of the vices and failures that plague leaders, including their pride and presumption, it taught what a good and pious prince should be careful to avoid. A right understanding of Mary's song, with its teaching about God and how God regards the proud and the humble, can teach rulers how to conduct themselves.

Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague (1527) responded to a concrete challenge and offers opportunity to reflect on what Christian vocation means in the midst of threat and death. Plague—with its attendant threat of sudden death—was a regular event in Luther's era. While much of today's Western world may have lost the sense that one could be swept away quickly by epidemic disease, this threat was common up into the modern era and still exists in many parts of the world today.

That Christians Should Bear Their Cross with Patience (1530) illustrates Luther's use and extension of his theology of the cross. These were probably notes for his sermon to the Wittenberg entourage headed for the Diet of Augsburg (1530).³ Facing a potentially negative outcome of the Diet, and the resulting suffering and pain, Luther sought to give comfort and confidence to his fellow reformers. Readers may want to read these notes in connection with the sermon included under "Selected Sermons."

Consolation for Women Whose Pregnancies Have Not Gone Well (1542) addressed an all-too-common issue. It demonstrates not only Luther's pastoral care for women but also his response to the concern of all parents for the salvation of unbaptized children.

Luther carried on an extensive correspondence with a very diverse set of individuals, including rulers, church leaders, former students, relatives, friends, and strangers. The sampling of letters in this volume show Luther using this genre to extend pastoral care to those far away from him.



The plague known as Black Death is depicted in this image called "Dance of Death," published in the German printed edition of Hartman Schedel's *Chronicle of the World* (Nuremberg, 1493). The artist is thought to be Michael Wolgemut (1434–1519).

3. Emperor Charles called this diet and summoned Elector John Frederick (1486–1532) with the hope of ending religious division in his empire. Elector John asked Luther, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), and others to write and present a clear statement of their faith and teachings. Melanchthon submitted the *Augsburg Confession* to the emperor, but Luther did not attend in person for reasons of safety.

The volume concludes with “Reflections on Reform,” containing Luther’s *Preface to the German Works* (1539) and *Preface to the Latin Works* (1545). Luther was reluctant to let his works be assembled and published but realized that this would probably happen regardless of his wishes. He knew that a significant part of the audience for these would be pastors. He chose to use the prefaces to those editions to reflect on what was most important to him—namely his approach to Scripture and his Reformation breakthrough.

Luther’s Reformation breakthrough—the realization that God considers humans righteous for the sake of Christ, not on the basis of any human merit or worthiness, and that faith (trust) in this promise, a faith itself given by the Holy Spirit, is all that is needed for salvation—shaped his pastoral work and that of his followers in ways very different from their medieval predecessors. Both pastoral practice and lay piety changed significantly as a result of Luther’s insights into the heart of the Christian faith.