

MARTIN LUTHER'S INTERVENTION IN BEHALF OF THE BRETHERN OF THE COMMON LIFE IN HERFORD

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Editor's Note: This article is a shortened and edited version of Landeen's chapter "Martin Luther and the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford" in Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Dawn of Modern Civilization: Studies in Renaissance, Reformation and Other Topics Presented to Honor Albert Hyma* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1962, 1964²), pp. 145-164. The "*Devotio Moderna*" or "New Devotion" mentioned in the initial paragraphs was an international religious-reform movement which originated in the Netherlands in the late fourteenth century and consisted of three related groups: the Brethren of the Common Life, the Sisters of the Common Life, and the Augustinian Canons Regular of the Congregation of Windesheim. Luther attended a school of the Brethren in Magdeburg during 1497-98.

(The presence of ellipses from Landeen's somewhat longer original essay is not indicated in this edited version, except in the case of some of the direct quotations; but there is herein no discontinuity in the main line of thought.)

A brief sketch of highlights in Landeen's academic career appears at the end of this article.

The problem of the impact of the *Devotio Moderna* on Martin Luther has in recent years received deserved recognition. The first American historian to call attention to the probable influence of Gerard Groote's movement on the Wittenberg Reformer was Albert Hyma, who, in his *Christian Renaissance* and later in *The Brethren of the Common Life*,¹ did not hesitate to assert that "the principles of the 'New Devotion' became the spiritual food of many thousands of devout men . . . , and would later . . . be crystallized in the lives of great reformers, like Luther. . . ." ² That Hyma ascribes to the

¹A. Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1924); id., *The Brethren of Common Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1950).

²*The Christian Renaissance*, pp. 156-157.

"New Devotion" a not inconsiderable influence on Luther is clear from this and other statements.

More recently this subject has received special attention by Rudolf Kekow in a doctoral dissertation.³ Kekow examines the problem with careful, though not exhaustive, investigation and arrives at the conclusion that the *Devotio Moderna* influenced Luther peripherally rather than essentially. It is not possible to establish a connection between the Reformer and the "New Devotion" in his central thinking.⁴ And, Karl August Meissinger has suggested that the influence of Groot's movement on Luther was much more passing in character than it was in the case of Erasmus, adding that we meet in Luther's later life with "no trace of a deeper influence. . . ."⁵

But, Luther did know the *Devotio Moderna* not only from his reading and study but also from considerable personal experience. Various utterances by the Reformer on this subject must not be passed over too lightly. Scholars in the field could read with profit E. Barnikol's cogent essay on young Martin's stay in the Brethren School at Magdeburg.⁶ And what shall be said about the influence on Luther of Gabriel Biel, the last and most distinguished leader of Groot's movement in Germany, except that much research remains before adequate conclusions can be reached on this important question?

The most completely, though by no means fully, documented relationship of Luther and the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany is the case of the Brethren House in Herford. Here we meet the Reformer in correspondence with the Brethren; he defends their rights in a serious crisis, and he pronounces specifically upon their beliefs and practices. It is our purpose in this study to assemble the available materials bearing on this interesting and important story.

³R. Kekow, *Luther und die Devotio Moderna* (Düsseldorf, 1937).

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵K. A. Meissinger, *Der katholische Luther* (Munich, 1952), p. 24.

⁶E. Barnikol, "Martin Luther in Magdeburg und die dortige Brüderschule," in *Theologische Arbeiten* (Tübingen, 1917), pp. 1-62.

1. *The Herford Brethren: Backgrounds,
and Early Contacts with Luther*

The beginnings of the Brethren in Herford go back to 1426 when the priest Conrad Westerwold from Osnabrück obtained a large manor house on the periphery of Herford and proceeded to install a circle of Brethren who two years later were organized into a Brethren House. Papal approval came in 1431.⁷ The Sisters of the Common Life entered Herford in 1453.

The city of Herford came under the influence of Luther's ideas rather early. In 1522, Gerard Kropp, rector of the Augustinians in Herford, began to preach the new doctrines with success. It is plausible to hold that the Brethren and the Sisters in Herford knew about Kropp's activity, but their interest in Luther came from another source; namely, from Jacob Montanus, scholar, humanist, friend of Melanchthon, member of the Brethren House, and Father Confessor to the Sisters of the Common Life in Herford.

Jacob Montanus, also known as Jacob of Spires, came out of the Münster circle of Brethren and humanists. He was a pupil of Alexander Hegius, the famous schoolmaster of Emmerich and Deventer, a schoolmate of John Busch, and a favorite of Rudolph von Langen, whose reform of the cathedral school in Münster made it a famous center of humanistic culture in the early fifteenth century. It was von Langen who, in or about 1512, sent Jacob Montanus to the Brethren House in Herford to assist the Brethren in their school activities in that city.⁸

Just when and how Jacob Montanus came under Luther's influence escapes us. It must have been before 1523, and the medium could well have been Melanchthon. When the now fragmentary correspondence between Wittenberg and the Brethren in Herford opens with Luther's letter to Montanus on July 26, 1523, there is already a fraternal and well-established relationship between this humanist and the Reformer. Wrote Luther:

⁷L. Hölscher, "Geschichte des Gymnasiums zu Herford I," in *Programm des Friedrichs-Gymnasiums zu Herford 1869*. The Statutes of the house were published in *Theologische Monatsschrift*, 2 (Mainz, 1851): 543-582.

⁸J. B. Nordhoff, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Münsterischen Humanismus* (Münster, 1874), pp. 93, 123.

Grace and peace. It is true, my best Jacob, that one theme keeps me preoccupied constantly, namely, the grace of Christ. This is the reason which you and all my friends must bear in mind if I do not write at all, or write seldom or briefly.

Concerning your latest communication on the subject of confession, I believe most assuredly that it is permissible to omit completely a recital of each and every sin. A general confession of sins is sufficient to receive the solace of the Gospel and the remission of sins. . . .⁹

The adherents of the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford were accepting Luther, and by 1525 both the Brethren and the Sisters of the Common Life had gone over to the Wittenberger. In that year both Gerard Wiscamp, the rector, and Henry Telgte, the prorector of the Brethren House, were imprisoned "as Lutherans and heretics" by Bishop Eric of Paderborn and Osnabrück, and were released only when the Brethren paid the sum of 300 gulden as a fine, and further assured the Bishop that they would pay another 1000 gulden should they ever fall into the same heresy again. Actually, Bishop Eric was suing the Brethren in Herford for this latter sum when his death in 1534 stopped the case.¹⁰

That Luther fell back on Jacob Montanus during these years of change in Herford seems certain. He says so expressly in his first letter to Gerard Wiscamp, rector of the Brethren House, dated September 2, 1527:¹¹

⁹Luther's *Werke, Briefwechsel*, Weimar Ausgabe (hereinafter cited as *WA-Br*), 3:117. Additional light on the Herford Brethren has recently been shed by Robert Stupperich, "Luther und das Fraterhaus in Herford," in *Geist und Geschichte der Reformation. Festgabe Hanns Rühert* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 219-238.

¹⁰The Brethren argued that their promise to pay 1000 gulden had been forced on them and was therefore invalid. See *WA-Br* 4:244, and L. Hölscher, *Reformationsgeschichte der Stadt Herford* (Herford, 1888), p. 16.

¹¹That Luther and Montanus exchanged letters during these years is further substantiated by a letter from Montanus to Willibald Pirckheimer, dated April 23, 1526, in which he asks Pirckheimer "to return the letters to Luther and Melancthon which, I believe, you have." See *WA-Br* 3:117. The editors of Luther's correspondence say (*WA-Br* 4:244) that Gerard Wiscamp became rector in 1528. This cannot be correct. He was imprisoned with his prorector in 1525 as responsible for the heresy of all the Brethren in his house and was held responsible ever after. Further, Luther's letter to him on September 2, 1527, is plainly written to him as rector.

Grace and peace. My previous letters have not been sent to you but to Montanus; now I am writing you, my dear Gerard, because I know that you and he are as one heart and mind in the Lord. When you show Montanus these lines thank him and ask that the Brethren pray for me the more solicitously, since their prayers and labor are of first concern to me. And I rejoice to be so well remembered by these pious men.

My commentary on Zechariah is now half finished, being delayed by the state of my health. Likewise, the Prophets in the vernacular have had to silence their harps because of our dispersion.¹² Ask Jacob to pray for us without ceasing that the fears and rumors of the pest may be stilled by the strong medicine of our Lord Christ, and that we again may be together to finish what we have begun. . . .¹³

The letter indicates clearly the state of affairs among the Brethren in Herford. Up to this time Jacob Montanus had been the chief spokesman for the Reformer and had actually carried both the Brethren and the Sisters of the Common Life with him in his endeavor. But from this point and on, Gerard Wiscamp, as rector of the house, is recognized as the leader of the Brethren, and Luther is specific in the matter. "You and he" (Montanus), says Luther, "are as one heart and mind in the Lord." It is plausible to hold that Luther had not been fully persuaded until he wrote this letter in response to one from Rector Gerard, that the Brethren in Herford had genuinely embraced his doctrines. His letter leaves no doubt that he had fully accepted them as his followers.

Luther alluded in the letter to his state of health. Soon after, he passed through a period of intense depression (*Anfechtungen*) and sickness. Gerard Wiscamp sent him a letter of consolation which elicited the following reply: "Grace and peace. I have received your communication of sympathy, my dear Gerard, with much pleasure and gratitude. Christ will reward you in eternity."¹⁴

¹²The pest in and about Wittenberg had caused many students and professors to flee to the University of Jena.

¹³*WA-Br* 4:243-244.

¹⁴*WA-Br* 4:319-320, January 1, 1528. Luther's illness fell in October, and Wiscamp's letter of sympathy was probably written in November, 1527.

The correspondence continues, now in a lighter vein. Rector Gerard had sent the Luther family some lamps, and the Reformer replies in his best humor:

Grace and peace in Christ. We have received with pleasure, my dear Gerard the Lightbearer, your letter and the lamps. So much radiancy of spirit and kindness of heart are shown in sending such a gift that it seems right and proper for me, I know not by what oracle or judgment, to nickname you "Lightbearer."¹⁵ For the light of your radiancy and the warmth of your favor are as conspicuous as is your bodily weakness. And so, my Kathy and I make use of your lamps each and every night, and I only regret that we are at this moment not able to send you anything to keep our memory with you alive. It is the more shame in that I cannot even send you something made of paper, which we ought to be able to do easily. But, as the messengers will tell you, nothing has been published recently, and in the meantime the bookdealers steal your purse, to boot. Nevertheless, without indebtedness I might send some items in a package after or at the time that I go to the booksellers. . . .¹⁶

The letters that have survived from this period continue in the fraternal spirit. Luther cannot find Gerard's latest letter and so does not remember its contents. He sends an autographed copy of one of his writings to a Sister of the Common Life in Herford who had sent him a gift. He would gladly send Gerard certain copies of his books, published at Wittenberg, but does not at the moment have them. He requests Gerard to pray for him and for the cause of Christ everywhere.¹⁷ To Montanus, he explains his stand toward Erasmus. He will not enter into further controversy with the humanist regardless of the latter's maledictions. And he sends Montanus some autographed writings.¹⁸

¹⁵Or, "Lampstand."

¹⁶*WA-Br* 4:584-585, October 20, 1528.

¹⁷*WA-Br* 5:87, May 28, 1529.

¹⁸*WA-Br* 5:88, May 28, 1529.

2. *The Brethren's First Conflict with the City Officials, and Luther's Intervention*

This happy state of things was not to continue. As has already been observed, Luther's teachings had entered the Augustinian Monastery in Herford as early as 1522. The Franciscans had also joined the new movement, and both Augustinians and Franciscans had been supported in their actions by the Brethren of the Common Life under the influence of Jacob Montanus and Gerard Wiscamp. The first secular church in Herford to become Lutheran was located in the new city. It adopted the new faith in 1530, and about a year later the old-city church also became Lutheran.¹⁹

The city council had, it seems, appointed in 1525 a special commission of nine citizens to deal with the problems arising out of the monastic establishments in Herford. By 1532 the commission had decided on the usual secularization. The monasteries were to cease as such, their inmates must attend the city churches, partake there of the sacraments, and change their clothing and habits of life.

The Brethren and the Sisters in Herford refused to comply, and they appealed to Luther. They sent him also an "Apology" for their mode of living and asked him to approve of their statement, which they would read before the city council. Gerard Wiscamp's letter is specific:

Grace and peace. Honorable dear doctor and father in Christ. Necessity demands that we send you with this letter an "Apology" for our mode of life, which we plan to read before the city council on Sunday, February 18. Therefore I beg you to examine the statement, and if you find in it anything misleading or false to delete the same, but to let stand whatever is true before God. And kindly state your opinion below (if God impresses you to read the "Apology"), together with your signature. Give my regards to your dear wife. God bless you. January 13, 1532.²⁰

¹⁹The principal agent in winning these churches was John Dreyer, an Augustinian monk in Herford. He became in 1532 the first Lutheran pastor in Herford and drew up an excellent church order for the city.

²⁰WA-Br 6:248-249.

The "Apology" or "Lebensgrund"²¹ which the Brethren and the Sisters laid before Luther for endorsement is unique among Reformation documents because it presents two houses of the *Devotio Moderna*, which, though Lutheran in spirit and belief, were still determined to continue to live as they had begun—in the common life with all that is included in that concept. The arguments of the "Apology" are all traditional *Devotio Moderna* arguments and can be found in the constitutions of the various houses in Germany and in the Low Countries.

In the first place, appeal is made to Holy Scriptures as the source of the common life with all its requirements as to labor, dress, sacraments, and good works in Christ "in whose name we have been baptized."²²

Second, the Bible clearly permits in addition to the married state the state of purity, which the Brethren and the Sisters practiced. Historically, this type of life, freely undertaken without binding vows, was found in the schools of the prophets in the Book of Kings, in the Acts of the Apostles, in the school which Mark the Evangelist founded in Alexandria, and in Augustine's life with his clergy.²³

Third, "we desire that our chartered rights in the municipality of Herford shall be protected, just as the canonical status of the school in Wittenberg was left with its rights and honors. . . ."²⁴

The "Apology" ended with the affirmation that everybody in Herford, and especially the Lutheran pastors, knew what the Brethren had believed and suffered, and why their request should be honored.

Luther had been asked to endorse the "Apology," if he could. He responded without reservation: "I, Martin Luther, confess over this my signature that I find nothing unchristian in this statement. Would to God that all monasteries might teach and practice God's

²¹Published by Baxmann, in *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie*, 1861, pp. 632-634.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 632.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 632-633.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 633.

word so earnestly." In returning the "Apology" with his endorsement to Jacob Montanus and Gerard Wiscamp on January 31, 1532, he wrote almost with abandon:

Grace and peace. I have received your communications and have written about this matter to the senate of your city and asked that your house might be protected and spared the uncertainty which the agitators²⁵ are occasioning you. As for your mode of life, whensoever you teach pure doctrine and live according to the Gospel of Christ, I am greatly pleased. And oh that the monasteries had been or were today so excellent. I scarcely dare wish so much, for if all were thus, the Church would be blessed overmuch in this life. Your manner of dress and other laudable practices have not hurt the Gospel; rather these old usages serve, once the Gospel is firmly planted, to keep under control the raging,²⁶ licentious, and undisciplined spirits which today are bent upon destroying, not building. Stand, therefore, in your state, and under this manner of life propagate richly the Gospel, which, indeed, you are doing. Live well and pray for me.²⁷

The same day Luther sent the city council in Herford a letter most explicit in its language:

Grace and peace in Christ. Honorable, wise, esteemed Lordships! It has come to my attention that some would force the Sisters and Brethren to give up their manner of life and their dress, and live hereafter according to the formula of the parish priest and of the pastor. However, you know undoubtedly that unnecessary changes, especially in sacred matters, are very dangerous in that hearts and consciences are moved without conviction, when all should serve and work for peace and quietude. Since the Brethren and the Sisters, who were the first among you to receive the Gospel, lead upright lives and conduct an honorable and well-ordered community, and also teach and practice faithfully the true Word, it is my friendly wish that your Lordships will not permit them to experience unrest and disappointments

²⁵ . . . *Clamatores*; i.e., John Dreyer and Henry Vogelmann, Lutheran pastors in Herford.

²⁶ . . . *imo[in] genito euangelio multum iuvant contra furiosos*. . . .

²⁷ *WA-Br* 6:255-256, January 31, 1532.

in this matter, but that they be permitted to use clerical garb and practice ancient usages when these do not contravene the Gospel. For such monasteries and Brethren Houses please me beyond measure. And would to God that all monasteries were like these, for then would all parishes, cities, and lands be well served and advised. Pardon me, but your Lordships will know how to deal wisely and according to Christ in this matter, so that neither the pastor nor the parish will suffer but rather gain and improve. I commend you to the Lord. Dated Wittenberg, January 31, 1532.²⁸

3. *The Basis for Luther's Support of the Brethren*

This is Martin Luther, the destroyer of monasticism, defending and praising quasi-monastic practices. Why did he do this? Was it because of his friendship with Jacob Montanus, who had been his firm supporter in Herford for years and who had as humanist, scholar, teacher, and confessor to the Sisters helped so much in making these houses "the first among you to receive the Gospel"?

We may not err in making this factor a reason for Luther's support, but surely it was not decisive. Luther's reason is explicit: "For such monasteries and Brethren Houses please me beyond measure. And would to God that all monasteries were like these. . . ." And he admonished the Brethren: "Stand, therefore, in your state, and under this manner of life propagate richly the Gospel, which, indeed, you are doing." This was the Reformer's argument for endorsing the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford. That he understood full well what he was doing is inescapable. He had had dealings with the *Devotio Moderna* from his youth and up, and he knew the principles and aims of Groote's movement, as is shown by his correspondence with the Brethren and the city authorities in Herford.

In his letter to the Brethren, Luther had strong language for those who were disturbing them. He called his own pastors in Herford "agitators" and then went on to speak about "raging, licentious, and undisciplined spirits . . . bent upon destroying, not

²⁸WA-Br 6:254-255. Luther was ill and could only sign the letter written by an amanuensis.

building." While this was scarcely complimentary speech concerning his own followers, it seems to indicate how essentially conservative Martin Luther was: Ancient usages, vows, clerical garb are not barred provided they do not contravene the pure gospel. Peace and quietude are more important than changes forced upon those whose hearts are not moved by reason. The gospel is not necessarily outward change but inward peace.

4. *The Conflict Renewed*

What effect did Luther's intervention have upon events in Herford?

That his endorsement of the "Apology" of the Brethren and Sisters and his letter to the city council had blocked the plans to secularize the two houses, is certain. Doctor John Dreyer, the Lutheran pastor in the city church, complained bitterly to the prior of the Brethren House over his loss of face and prestige. This led Gerard Wiscamp, in an unguarded moment, to show Pastor Dreyer Luther's personal letter of January 31 to the Brethren. Infuriated by Luther's statements concerning himself and his fellow pastors, Dreyer now began a systematic campaign of slander, vilification, and falsification against the Brethren and the Sisters, which probably did not stop until the Lutheran leader moved to the city of Minden in 1540.

Again, on April 13, 1532, the Brethren appealed to Luther. Again they explained carefully the charges made against them and told how no efforts were spared to malign them on their manner of life, even to the inciting of drunken men to stir up feeling against the houses. The schoolwork of the Brethren, always aimed especially at helping poor boys, was now equated with the monastic schools. Their unmarried status was attacked as contrary to the gospel. Their legal rights to exist were called in question.²⁹

The Brethren fought back. They now showed their "Apology," with Luther's approval, to Anna von Limburg, Abbess of Herford, and asked for help and protection. The Abbess took up their cause and arranged for a legal hearing of the case, only to find that the

²⁹WA-Br 6:290-293, April 13, 1532, Gerard Wiscamp to Martin Luther.

pastors were countering by sending a delegation to Luther to prevent further hearings. She appealed to the Reformer to trust the Brethren completely.³⁰

In his reply to the Abbess, Luther recounted his earlier efforts to aid the Brethren. He reiterated their rights to have their own pastoral care and to hold their own services, and asked the Abbess to act as peacemaker for both sides.³¹

Luther also wrote the Commission of Nine in Herford, which had been appointed by the city council to deal with problems arising between monastic establishments and the city during the period of confessional changes. The Commission had written Luther and had also sent a delegation to him—no doubt, to ascertain his attitude in these matters. The most difficult aspect of the Brethren problem was their insistence on continuing their own pastoral care with all the privileges incident to this right. The Lutheran pastors argued that if the Brethren were permitted this privilege, any citizen in Herford could demand the same right, which, if granted, would result in religious chaos.

Luther was explicit in his response, dated April 22:

... however, when the Brethren desire to retain their own church services and do not in their own interests attend your services, it is our judgment that you should in no way pressure or force them to give up theirs so long as they do not conduct them contrary to the Gospel. For one thing is clear: they do hold the right to have their own pastors, a right which is very common in any city. It does not follow from this, however, that every citizen may employ a pastor in his own household. That is not permitted. This is the important difference between a common and public assembly and a family assembly; namely, that what a citizen does in his home is considered as being done secretly.

Further, you know, as men of understanding, that there should be no interference in matters that lie outside of our jurisdiction. The Brethren are not under your jurisdiction, and so you

³⁰*WA-Br* 6:293-294, April 14, 1532. Anna von Limburg was styled "Abbess in the diocese of Paderborn."

³¹*WA-Br* 6:300, April 22, 1532. Melancthon wrote the letter for Luther, who was ill.

cannot push or force them into line. This is our advice and request, as you will kindly understand. Therefore, we ask you to consider that time will find its own counsel in this matter. They are old, honorable persons whom we should spare, and as men of understanding we should not permit anyone to practice malice toward them, for God has individuals among them who are His.³²

Both Luther and Melanchthon signed this communication and sent a copy of it to the Brethren. In a separate letter to Gerard Wiscamp, Luther counsels mildly that the Brethren might yield their right of pastoral care but that if they do not so incline, he will not criticize them. Moreover, "if you desire to retain your parish rights we do not disapprove. As for your garb, the possessions of the monastery, and your entire economy, we pronounce that they are altogether under your control. The city has no authority over you."³³

The energetic intervention by the Wittenberg reformers halted, for the time being, the efforts of the Lutheran pastors and the city council to limit the activities and rights of the Brethren. Luther was able to write Gerard Wiscamp: "I am glad, my Gerard, that the racket among you which Satan started, is sleeping. Christ be praised, who will establish His peace and cause it to increase. . . ."³⁴

However, the Brethren were still disturbed over their situation. Especially were they concerned about Luther's statement in his letter to the Commission of Nine that "time will find its own counsel." Could this mean that Luther actually would like to see the Brethren House die out for lack of new members? Gerard Wiscamp besought Luther for an explanation of the statement.³⁵

Melanchthon replied for Luther, who was still indisposed. He sought to quiet the minds of the Brethren but did not explain Luther's statement.³⁶ This caused the Brethren to renew their request for an explanation. They "were greatly disturbed" over the assertion and asked Luther and Melanchthon to clarify its meaning.³⁷

³²*WA-Br* 6:296-297, April 22, 1532.

³³*WA-Br* 6:298, April 22, 1532. Melanchthon wrote the letter for Luther.

³⁴*WA-Br* 6:380, October 19, 1532.

³⁵*WA-Br* 6:473, June 5, 1533.

³⁶*WA-Br* 6:472, July 4, 1533. Gives Melanchthon's answer.

³⁷*WA-Br* 6:535, October 10, 1533.

In their "Apology," sent earlier to Luther, the Brethren had written: "In order to stand in the liberty which Christ has given us, we do not take [binding] vows, but we retain our freedom, as Christ also forced no one to remain at the time when disciples were leaving Him (John 6:[66])."³⁸

The practice of non-binding vows was the very essence of the *Devotio Moderna* as an organized movement. The Brethren were not monks but desired to live lives of purity in the world without vows, which was the biblical custom, they reasoned. If Luther's statement in any way impinged upon this mode of life, it struck at their future existence.

In a letter dated January 6, 1534, Gerard Wiscamp returns to this point, and in so doing he restates the whole philosophy of Brethren life.

We have no other aim than that our life shall be free in Christ, as was at first ordained by our fathers, who 100 years ago stated clearly in writing: "We will not accept vows from anyone, were he even to insist upon them." Our life is meaningful when we can train our own members, which we have done often from our small numbers, to be preachers of God's Word. But, for this office our entire house does not now, so far as I know, have one qualified member, apart from some boys who are scarcely more than children. What will happen eventually? We would like to dedicate ourselves to this task [the training of preachers] permanently. You see, therefore, how you can support us by your confidence because we seek not our own good in this matter but God's. . . .³⁹

It seems that Luther delayed his reply to Gerard's letter. In the meantime, the Brethren were encountering new difficulties. The city school in Herford was languishing, and the senate was pressing the Brethren to take it over and to use their building for it. This they did not have the teaching force to do, and they did not want to engage teachers outside of their own ranks. Jacob Montanus died in the course of this year, and no one could take his place as a pedagogue. The Brethren, therefore, raised serious objections against

³⁸See Baxmann, p. 634.

³⁹WA-Br 7:7-8, January 6, 1534.

assuming new teaching responsibilities, which in turn brought on them fresh attacks from both the Catholic and the Lutheran sides. Again they appealed to Luther to explain himself and to succor them. They declared their readiness to train young boys, as they always had done, to live lives of purity without vows, and to become evangelists in their cause. "May the Lord give us good advice through you," they appealed to Luther and Melancthon.⁴⁰

Again the Reformer took up their cause with the senate in Herford. Again he repeated his earlier opinions concerning these adherents of the *Devotio Moderna*. The Brethren and the Sisters had indeed laid aside the papal yoke and were living in Christian freedom even though they retained their old garb and ancient customs. They lived pious and disciplined lives and worked with their hands as did the Apostle Paul (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12; Acts 18:3).

. . . I could wish that such people were, as God would give His grace, numerous, since they are not dangerous but useful because they are adherents of the Gospel.

I hear also that they should be burdened with the public school office and its care, although they were never founded for this purpose nor do they receive tax support for this work. Other foundations and monasteries do and should perform this service, but it is not right that these should use what they earn themselves, and are not paid, for such a purpose. . . .

I have written you earlier that the "time would find its own counsel." Now I hear that this is interpreted to mean that they should be forced to comply, although these words meant that time would tell whether they would remain [as they were] or would change of their own free will. I pray your Lordships for Christ's sake to help that no reason is given to speak evil of the Gospel. . . .⁴¹

Luther sent to Gerard Wiscamp a copy of his communication to the city senate. In the covering letter he again expressed concern that the Brethren and the Sisters were troubled by "the hypocrites of the new Gospel," and he reiterated earlier statements approving

⁴⁰WA-Br 7:106-108, October 9, 1534.

⁴¹WA-Br 7:113-114, October 24, 1534.

their manner of life and organization. They should not be disturbed with public functions such as teaching; other institutions or monasteries could assume that task. And his last extant letter to the men and women of the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford closes with this wish: "I desire exceedingly that your mode of life may be preserved so that in the liberty and grace of Christ you can serve and be useful greatly in love. Salute all your Brethren and Sisters in Christ!"⁴²

Luther's intervention stilled the tumult for the time being. In 1537 it broke out again, only to be quieted once more by the efforts of Luther and Melanchthon. Two years later the Lutheran pastors seem to have made a special effort to destroy the Brethren and the Sisters, and it was not until 1542 that their houses were finally allowed to remain. Again it was Luther's and Melanchthon's advice that prevailed.⁴³ However, by then Doctor John Dreyer, the fighting Lutheran reformer of Herford, had gone to Minden,⁴⁴ and Gerard Wiscamp, the stubborn defender of the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford, had gone to his rest.⁴⁵

5. Conclusion: Luther's Posture in the Conflicts

Luther's part in the more than decade-long struggle was difficult but honorable. He criticized his own pastors consistently and, at moments, sharply, while to the city authorities he was courteous but firm. He sought constantly to transfer the conflict from the utilitarian plane of secularization to the higher plane of liberty in Christ to retain old customs and ways of living as long as these advanced the Gospel. That he understood and valued the aims of the Brethren and the Sisters in Herford is clear from his several pronouncements.

The entire episode reveals how many-sided the Wittenberg reformer could really be. Throughout, Luther was the defender of the

⁴²WA-Br 7:114-115, October 24, 1534.

⁴³WA-Br 7:112-113, gives a summary of these events.

⁴⁴In 1540. His leaving Herford may have been occasioned by his implacable attitude toward the Brethren.

⁴⁵Also in 1540. It was his successor in Herford who helped settle the issue, just as did the successors of John Dreyer.

weak, the counsellor of both the weak and the strong, and the advocate of compromise in the interests of peace.⁴⁶

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACADEMIC CAREER
OF WILLIAM M. LANDEEN**
(by the AUSS Editor)

William M. Landeen (died December 27, 1982, at the age of 91) was well known for Luther research, which at times he conducted even while engaged in heavy administrative responsibilities as President of Walla Walla College in the State of Washington (1934-39) and during two "retirement-years" stints as President of La Sierra College in Arlington (Riverside), California (1960-62 and January 1964 through June 1964). He served from 1939 to 1956 in the Department of History and Political Science of Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, retiring from that institution in the latter year as Professor of History. He had, during his tenure there, a term as acting head of the Department. His long and distinguished career saw him in the role of visiting professor at other institutions. Also, his period of teaching at Washington State University was interrupted from 1943 to 1946 by service in the United States Army, in which he was quickly promoted to the rank of Major and given assignments of an academic nature, first for U.S. troops in England and then as Chief of Education and Religious Affairs for Bavaria.

Landeen's publications on Renaissance and Reformation studies include several which broke new ground in Luther research (such as his convincing data and argumentation to show that Luther studied at an *actual school* of the Brethren of the Common Life in Magdeburg in 1497-98, rather than that he was simply a dormitory resident of theirs while attending another school). His *The Religious Thought of Martin Luther* (Mountain View, Calif., 1971) is a carefully documented account which contains discussion not only of the more common concerns but also of some areas not generally treated in even the larger standard works on the subject, such as that of Paul Althaus. Landeen's doctoral dissertation (completed under Albert Hyma at the University of Michigan in 1939) was on the *Devotio Moderna* in Germany, and included treatment of Luther's Magdeburg experience mentioned above.

⁴⁶That the Brethren in Herford returned to Catholicism cannot be established from the sources.