

Wicks, Jared, S. J. *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther's Early Spiritual Teaching*. Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1968. xvi [+ii] + 410 pp. \$12.50.

This volume is among a number of recent books which illustrate the new kind of treatment that Catholic historians tend to give Luther today—a rather radical departure from the type of attention given to the Reformer by them only some 50 (or even 25) years ago. The Foreword to this book has been written by a recognized Lutheran scholar, George A. Lindbeck, who aptly states: “The informed reader will not be surprised to hear that this is a first-rate piece of research, not propaganda. It is not propaganda either for or against Luther, either for or against an ecumenically favorable view of the Reformer. It is simply a study of a great Christian thinker by a thoroughly competent scholar” (p. v).

Wicks treats Luther's early years of theological development. Rather than relying upon later autobiographical reminiscences by the Reformer, the author subjects various of the documents from the period itself—1509 through 1517-18—to careful analysis. Included among these documents are marginal notes from Luther's lectures of 1509 and 1510; his lectures on the Psalms (1513-15); his lectures on Romans (1515-16); his lectures on Galatians (1516-17); his lectures on the first five chapters of Hebrews (1517); sermons of July, 1516, to February, 1517; his exposition of the Penitential Psalms in 1517; the Disputation by Bartholomew Bernhardt on September 25, 1516; marginal notes made in Gabriel Biel's *Collectorium*; the “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology” of September, 1517; Luther's letter to Archbishop Albrecht on the sale of Indulgences; Luther's Indulgence Theses; his *Treatise on Indulgences*; his sermon on Zacchaeus; and several other works. The fact that Wicks has translated Luther's *Treatise on Indulgences* enhances the value of this book inasmuch as this treatise has altogether too often been neglected.

Luther's early spirituality, according to the analysis given by Wicks, gave more room for “transforming grace” than did his final position developed after 1517, when the forensic aspect took predominance. According to Wicks, “Luther's early theological and spiritual teaching reached a high point in early 1517” (p. 268), four points being given special attention as leading to this conclusion (pp. 268-271): (1) “Christ as the victorious and attractive head of the new humanity” as portrayed in the *Lectures on Hebrews*; (2) “the theology of healing and transforming grace that underlies Luther's work in early 1517, climaxing in the counterpointed theme . . . of the September disputation against the *via moderna*”; (3) “the conception of faith in Christ that Luther spoke of in his *Lectures on Galatians*”; (4) “the vision of Christian living that Luther presented in the *Treatise on Indulgences*” wherein “the Christian is one who goes to the roots of his sins, who sighs for healing grace to kill off these roots and transform his affections.” In Luther's presentation of these four themes, according to Wicks, the Reformer “moved well beyond the negative and pessimistic themes of the *Lectures on Romans*, and was at work in Wittenberg to bring about a genuine renewal of theology and Christian life” (p. 271).

Wicks' evaluations of Luther's early spirituality are also interesting: “The first notable weakness of the spirituality we have seen is in the anthropology

that underlay Luther's thinking about the Christian man. His view was excessively dualistic" (p. 273). However, "the weaknesses and one-sidedness we have noted do not cancel out the potential for reform and renewal this spirituality offered in the sixteenth century and still offers in the twentieth" (p. 277). Moreover, "some aspects of Luther's earliest spirituality that especially commend themselves to our reflection today" are the following: "Luther incessantly stressed our impotence before God regarding our salvation"; "Luther always thought about man as decisively qualified by the spirit or by the flesh," and this "view of man as spiritually qualified either in faith or sin is an important 'word' for us today"; "Luther saw clearly that our life task is to do to death the roots of sin"; and "Luther thought of God as actively at work in our lives" (pp. 277-280).

It must be stated that Wicks has provided a good case for the analysis he has given. But as Lindbeck points out in the Foreword, this book will raise a good deal of debate. Lindbeck himself, as a Lutheran Protestant, takes issue and raises questions. Perhaps a Lutheran would tend to do so more than would some other Protestants. Nevertheless, Lindbeck also recognizes that Catholic readers "may well be surprised that a Lutheran finds this book unsettling. So great is its appreciation and understanding of Luther and its insistence on the lessons which he still has to teach Christians today that they are likely to think of it as creating difficulties only for Catholics and none for the sons of the Reformation. . . . Father Wicks has written with great learning, love for Luther, and objectivity" (p. ix).

There is no question but that this book makes an outstanding contribution to Luther studies. Its apparent high price is modest in comparison to the wealth of material it provides.

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