

Research Notes

Theses on Clergy Divorce and Remarriage¹

The words “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) give a requirement for pastors that is disturbing for many. Divorce is rampant, not just in the general population, but also among Christians, and even pastors. But what does “husband of one wife” mean? Must all pastors be married? Does it exclude remarried widowers? Divorced men? Remarried divorcés? My position is as follows: “husband of one wife” is not vocationally specific to pastors but applies to all married men; in some cases it is possible that a pastor is an innocent party to a divorce; innocently divorced pastors may remarry and remain pastors; and Treatise 78 applies also to pastors: “Unjust also is the tradition which forbids an innocent person to marry after divorce.”²

In a recent, short article, Canadian Lutheran professor John Stephenson wrote:

We need honestly to confront the restriction placed by the Holy Spirit through St. Paul on the ordination of married men, each of whom, if in the wedded estate, is to be “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). Little could be more contemptible than reducing Paul’s meaning to an insistence on serial monogamy with exclusion of the possibility of bigamy. In a brief essay still in circulation, the late Martin Scharlemann made short shrift of such an argument.³

Scharlemann’s position was that the words *μίας γυναικὸς ἄνδρα* in 1 Timothy 3:2 (and thus also Titus 1:6) forbid a *remarried* man from being a pastor. For support, he appealed to ancient Christian documents.⁴ Scharlemann also opposed the Reformation Lutheran view that if God permits a divorce, he also permits a remarriage. This classic Lutheran position is based on Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9, and 1 Corinthians 7:15.⁵ For Scharlemann, on the other hand, divorce is sometimes

¹ Selection taken from Benjamin T. G. Mayes, *Divorce & Remarriage: Ecclesiastical Discernment and Pastoral Care* © 2026 Concordia Publishing House. Used by permission. For ordering information, contact Concordia Publishing House.

² W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 527.

³ John R. Stephenson, “A Potato Uncomfortably Hot for Handling,” *Logia* 34, no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2025): 64.

⁴ Martin H. Scharlemann, “The Pastoral Office and Divorce, Remarriage, Moral Deviation,” *Concordia Journal* 6, no. 4 (July 1980): 141–150, here at 144. Scharlemann’s article is not a very thorough statement of this opinion. For a more detailed and careful argument, see A. Andrew Das, “The One-Spouse Criterion in the Pastorals (1 Tim 3.2, 12; 5.9; Titus 1.6),” *New Testament Studies* (March 2026), 1–15.

⁵ See Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986), vols. 56–82, ed.

permissible, but remarriage is never permitted as long as the first spouse still lives.⁶ One wonders whether Scharlemann knew that the position he advocated was exactly what was decreed at the Roman Catholic Council of Trent.⁷

In 2017, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), a partner church of the LCMS, published theses on clergy divorce. In these theses they say that the historic position of the church is that no remarriage is permitted while the first spouse still lives, even if God permitted the divorce (Matt 5:32, 19:9).⁸ They also recognize that the Lutheran Church (Tr 78) confesses against this position.⁹ They are not careful in explaining “husband of one wife.” “The minister must be ‘husband of one wife’ (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6) because Christ is husband of one wife,” they write.¹⁰ But if this were so, no celibate man should be accepted for the ministry, and if a pastor’s wife dies, he should be removed from ministry. But that is absurd, and is probably not what the Canadian Lutherans meant. Stephenson added an important clarification when he wrote recently about pastors, “each of whom, *if in the wedded estate*, is to be ‘husband of one wife.’”¹¹ The Canadian Lutherans also present qualifications and limitations of “husband of one wife.” They say it does not require marriage, does not exclude a widower from being a pastor, and does not prevent a widower pastor from remarrying.¹² These limitations are simply asserted without proof or explanation. I believe these limitations are true and am glad that the CTCR of LCC limited their previous statements. But *why* is this the proper understanding of “husband of one wife”? And if these limitations are true, does this not conflict with their previous statement that a pastor’s marital status to his human wife must correspond to Christ’s marital status to the church?

Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 45:30–35 (hereafter cited as AE); Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), in AE 46:310–315; Philip Melancthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 490–496; and Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, part 2, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 740–755.

⁶ Scharlemann, “The Pastoral Office and Divorce, Remarriage, Moral Deviation,” 145–148.

⁷ Session 24, Nov. 11, 1563, can. 5, 7, in Heinrich Denzinger et al., eds., *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 426, nos. 1805, 1807.

⁸ Commission on Theology and Church Relations of Lutheran Church—Canada (hereafter CTCR of LCC), “‘Husband of One Wife’: Exegetical and Historical Notes on Clergy Divorce and Remarriage,” *The Canadian Lutheran*, September 2017, no. 9, <https://www.canadianlutheran.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Husband-of-One-Wife-Exegetical-Notes-on-Clergy-Divorce-and-Remarriage.pdf>.

⁹ CTCR of LCC, “Husband of One Wife,” no. 10.

¹⁰ CTCR of LCC, “Husband of One Wife,” no. 20.

¹¹ Stephenson, “A Potato Uncomfortably Hot for Handling,” 64. Emphasis added.

¹² CTCR of LCC, “Husband of One Wife,” no. 22.

The CTCR of LCC excludes an innocently divorced pastor from remaining a pastor. By divorce he is said to be no longer “husband of one wife.”¹³ But by this reasoning, a widower, too, is no longer “husband of one wife.” And a celibate man never was a “husband of one wife.” Yet, as Stephenson rightly pointed out, “husband of one wife” is a conditional command: “if in the wedded estate.”

The Canadian Lutherans go on to say that even if the church allows an abandoned pastor to remain in office, remarriage should be absolutely forbidden to him. They say remarriage conflicts with “husband of one wife” and that it “disrupts the iconic nature of his marriage as a proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is devoted to one Bride alone.”¹⁴ But if remarriage is forbidden to an innocently divorced pastor on the basis of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, why is it not also forbidden to a widower pastor? And if the physical marriage of the pastor is necessary, so as to depict the spiritual marriage of Christ and the church, why is a celibate man not excluded? Why are *all* divorced men not excluded? Why are widowers not excluded?

Ever since the mid-twentieth century, the LCMS and her sister churches have heard conflicting voices on “husband of one wife.” In an attempt to clarify the meaning of this controverted phrase, I present a few theses here on clergy divorce and remarriage.

Theses

1. In the pastoral epistles (1 Tim, 2 Tim, and Titus), both ἐπίσκοπος (“bishop, overseer”) and πρεσβύτερος (“presbyter, elder”) refer to the same office, the office now most commonly known as “pastor” (Tr 61–65).
2. The requirements listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9 apply to pastors.
3. Μίας γυναίκος ἄνδρα (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) means either “husband of one wife” or “man of one woman.”
4. It means “not a multi-woman man,” that is, not a polygamist (simultaneously), not in concubinage (simultaneous polygyny), and not unchaste.
5. It is equivalent to 1 Corinthians 7:2: “Let each man have his own wife.”
6. It does not forbid remarriage. Widower pastors may remarry and remain pastors.
7. While polygamy (plural marriage) was not common among Jews or Romans in the first century, it was actually practiced sometimes by both

¹³ CTCR of LCC, “Husband of One Wife,” no. 23.

¹⁴ CTCR of LCC, “Husband of One Wife,” no. 25.

Jews and Gentiles at that time,¹⁵ and in any case it was tolerated in the Old Testament.

8. Simultaneous polygyny (having a wife plus a concubine, or having adulterous affairs) was common in Greco-Roman society and is known throughout human history.
9. Nowhere else in Scripture are successive marriages forbidden if the former marriage is ended (such as through death).
10. Perpetual widowhood may be advised but it is not commanded (1 Cor 7:1–2, 7:8–9, 7:39–40).
11. Unlike for the patriarchs of the Old Testament, to whom God had permitted polygamy, Christian marriage is of one man and one woman (Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–8). So also a pastor, if in the estate of marriage, must be the husband of one wife.
12. Most of the qualifications and requirements in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are shared with all Christian men, but some are vocationally specific for pastors, such as being able to teach, not being a novice, and having a good testimony with those who are outside (1 Tim 3:2, 3:6–7). Because there are both common commands and vocationally specific commands, the inclusion of “husband of one wife” among these qualifications does not determine whether it is vocationally specific.
13. One cannot argue that since pastors are held to a higher standard, one part of that higher standard must be that he can only ever be married once and can never remarry, even if the first wife dies.
14. Even if the rules on marriage are the same for pastors and laymen, pastoral exemplarity is still required, and comes from following the common rules in a blameless way, not from different rules.
15. “Husband of one wife” is a conditional command, not an absolute command. If married, the pastor must be “husband of one wife.”
16. If it were an absolute command, a widower pastor would have to remarry before he could continue his ministry, which is absurd.
17. Since a married man can be chosen for the ministry, an unmarried minister may marry after having become a minister.
18. The conjugal bond lasts until death.
19. A widower no longer has a wife. If he remarries, he is the husband not of two wives but only of one.

¹⁵ David Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 52, no. 2 (2001): 230–231, and Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 88–89.

20. "Husband of one wife" does not mean "not divorced." Divorce is not mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1.
21. "Husband of one wife" is a present, conditional requirement.
22. If it excludes the innocently divorced from ministry, it also excludes widowers, since in both cases the men are no longer married.
23. If a pastor has had an affair or committed some other manifest sexual sin, he is no longer a "man of one woman" and is not credible, and thus should be removed from office.
24. Divorce makes a pastor not credible, no longer above reproach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) if he was the cause of divorce by committing adultery (Matt 5:32, 19:9), or if he repudiated his wife (1 Cor 7:10–11), or if the situation is not clear and fault for divorce seems to lie with both the husband and the wife.
25. If someone has become divorced for a reason that God's word does not permit, God has not approved the marriage, and he is actually (in God's eyes) still married to the first spouse. If such a man remarries, he is no longer the "husband of one wife." He is a man of more than one woman.
26. A pastor who suffers divorce against his will or who divorces an adulteress should not be disqualified from ministry.
27. To disqualify him would be to judge him not by his conduct but by the choices made by someone else against his will and out of his control.
28. The pastoral qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 deal with the pastor's character and actions, not the bad decisions of others against his will and out of his control.
29. In some situations, an innocent pastor who suffers a divorce is not guilty of managing his own house badly (1 Tim 3:4–5).¹⁶
30. A person who divorces his spouse on grounds of unchastity is no longer married, and this is so by divine permission (Matt 5:32, 19:9).
31. A person who has been maliciously abandoned is no longer "under bondage," that is, no longer married, and this is so according to the Lord's apostle, who we believe had the Spirit of God (1 Cor 7:40).

¹⁶ Likewise, even if Christian parents raise a child in the way he should go, sometimes the child still rebels and rejects the Christian faith. A pastor should not be dismissed from office due to the apostasy of his child, if for his part the pastor raised the child in the fear and admonition of the Lord. It would not be right for a parent to bear the guilt of his child in this way (Ezek 18:20). Samuel did not contribute to the iniquity of his sons, nor did he condone them leniently, and he was not deposed from the priesthood (1 Sam 8:4). But Eli was removed from life and priesthood for this reason (1 Sam 2:28–36). Sometimes a parishioner disregards the right teaching that he hears from his pastor and commits manifest sin, or even becomes apostate. Yet the pastor, who is the spiritual father of the congregation (1 Cor 4:15; Phlm 10; cf. LC I 159), should not be dismissed from office due to the apostasy of his hearer, if for his part he preached aright. Otherwise not even St. Paul should have remained an apostle (2 Tim 1:15, 2:17, 4:10), which is an absurd claim.

32. Whenever remarriage is forbidden in the New Testament, it is because a divorce was not approved by God.
33. But if God gives an exception in which divorce is permitted, then he has made clear that he regards the divorced people in that situation as no longer married. In this situation, remarriage is not adultery.
34. What applies to all Christians should apply also to pastors, unless God's word clearly says that it does not apply to them.
35. So if a pastor is legitimately divorced according to God's word, he is no longer married in God's eyes.
36. The reason why an innocently divorced pastor may remarry is the same for why a widower pastor may remarry: in God's eyes he is not married.
37. "Husband of one wife" cannot mean that divorced and remarried pastors are excluded from ministry while widowed and remarried pastors are included. Either all the remarried are excluded from ministry by these words, or remarriage is not what excludes a man from ministry.
38. If it is granted that remarried widowers can be pastors, then one would have to argue from elsewhere (i.e., not 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6) that an innocently divorced and remarried man cannot be a pastor. If one argues for this position based on Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 19, and 1 Corinthians 7 (passages that address all Christians, not just pastors), then one should admit that the marriage standards for pastors are the same as for all Christians.
39. Arguments taken from types are not certain, such as the iconic relationship between Christ's spiritual marriage with the church and the pastor's physical marriage with his wife.
40. Since Christ never married physically but remained celibate, one could argue from types just as easily for mandatory clerical celibacy, which the Lutheran Church was right to reject long ago (AC XXIII).
41. The image of Christ's faithfulness to the church is present not just in a pastor in his first marriage, but also in a faithful pastor who: (a) has never been married; (b) is a widower; (c) is a remarried widower; (d) has suffered a divorce against his will or divorced an adulteress; or (e) has remarried after suffering a divorce against his will or after divorcing an adulteress.
42. Treatise 78 applies also to pastors: "Unjust also is the tradition which forbids an innocent person to marry after divorce."¹⁷

¹⁷ Dau and Bente, *Triglot Concordia*, 527. See also Luther, *The Estate of Marriage*, 30–35; Luther, *On Marriage Matters*, 310–315; Melancthon, *The Chief Theological Topics*, 490–496; and Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 740–755.

43. Luther was right when in 1528 he defended the right of widower pastors to remarry by means of a public disputation in 132 theses.¹⁸
44. Luther was right when he twice encouraged the remarriage of innocently twice-divorced Pastor Michael Kramer in 1523 and 1525, and when he later recommended Kramer to a church to serve as a pastor.¹⁹
45. In all cases of divorce and remarriage, no one should be a judge of his own case (Deut 12:8; Judg 17:6; Prov 12:15, 21:2); instead, his case should be discerned by wise men in the church (1 Cor 6:5; cf. Ezek 44:24; Tr 77, 78, 80).

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Teacher Appreciation Day: Martin Luther's Personal View of Educators

In his 1524 treatise entitled *Address to the Councilmen of all German Cities that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (*An die Ratsherrn aller Städte deutschen Landes, daß sie christliche Schulen aufrichten und halten sollen*), Martin Luther predictably makes the very case that the title suggests, namely that the councilmen of all German cities should reestablish and build up Christian education.¹ In the treatise, he emphasizes the importance of training bright young educators. And those very educators, he argues, will produce nothing less than well-trained boys and girls fit to live and serve God and society at large as productive, thriving Christian men and women.

To make the case, he propounds in a rather bombastic fashion over the course of some twenty pages the importance of studying Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and states in no uncertain terms that it is impossible to analyze texts well or glean information from scholarly commentaries without knowledge of the languages. Moreover, he adds that people who have no knowledge of foreign languages can deservedly

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Theses on the Remarriage of Bishops* (1528), in AE 72:251–260.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, letter to the mayor, council, and preacher Michael [Kramer] at Dommitsch (Aug. 18, 1525), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1930–), 3:557–558 (hereafter cited as WA Br), and Martin Luther, letter to Spalatin in Altenburg (Aug. 25, 1533), in WA Br 6:513–514.

¹ Martin Luther, *Address to the Councilmen of all German Cities that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), 339–378 (hereafter cited as AE 45) (= *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. [Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009], 15:27–53 [hereafter cited as WA]).

be looked upon as brutish. But he does not stop there. He also calls attention to the fact that it is only by studying texts in their original languages that one can garner valuable rhetorical skills (like those of the ancient poets or orators) and discover vital historical facts. This paper will review Luther's general argument briefly, sifting through Luther's hopes for education and pointing up his view of both the profession of teaching and the value of educators themselves.

In *An die Ratsherrn*, his argument does not rest on any signal text—save Holy Scripture, of course—as much as it is built upon his repeated appeal to pay attention to the study of the ancient tongues:

Then [one should have] such books that aid in learning the languages (such as the poets and orators) regardless of whether they be heathen or Christian, Greek or Latin. For one ought to learn grammar from such tomes. Next, there ought to be the books comprising the liberal arts and further all the other arts. Lastly, also books about law and medicine should be there, albeit in this case as well a good choice among the commentaries is necessary.²

This is but a sample of Luther's argument, much of which follows along these same lines, no doubt meant to inspire future educators and, as Martin Brecht has noted, urgently to rebuke German society for having let education, too often guided by bald scholasticism, slip.³ Further, to make this argument Luther does not refrain from shaming his nearly monolithically German-speaking audience:

And that is why also no one knows anything about us Germans in other countries, and in the judgment of all the world Germans have to be called "beasts," who are capable of nothing more than fighting, devouring, and quaffing [e.g., beer].⁴

Amusing as such a caricature might sound to us today, no doubt in the ears of the councilmen addressed in this treatise it rang rather disturbingly. That said, the entirety of Luther's argument is not so gloomy. Indeed Luther, aware of the danger of hypocritical outcomes, deemed the goal of education as inspiring the student toward deeper knowledge and faith rather than simply being a means to learn various virtues that could be used as self-righteous rhetorical barbs. As Thomas Kothmann notes, "The scholastic thinking about education and training that governed the way Luther himself was taught at school was aimed at getting the child accustomed to

² Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:52.4–10 (= AE 45:376). All translations are my own.

³ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 140–141 passim.

⁴ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:52.17–20 (= AE 45:376–377).

piety and virtue. This was supported by the conviction that a child could be made more perfect by means of a good education based on reason.”⁵

Interestingly, in *An die Ratsherrn* Luther’s reaction to scholasticism is to turn to philology rather than philosophy. Thus he connects his loftier spiritual vision with the hard work of mastering the ancient languages:

As dear as the Gospel is to us, just as firmly let us keep our hold on the languages. For it was not for nothing that God had his Holy Writ recorded in only two languages, the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek. These languages God not only did not despise but above all others chose for his Word. So we, too, should esteem these above all others.⁶

Though *An die Ratsherrn* does formulate some specific educational goals, it does not concentrate upon the qualifications of the teachers. Rather, Luther focuses broadly on the need for solid Christian education and proper Christian schools, themselves incidentally administered in conjunction with the state, a connection well considered by scholars such as Gerald Strauss.⁷ In that regard, the greater part of Luther’s argument is straightforwardly pragmatic, and perhaps fittingly so, as it is addressed to councilmen who themselves likely were, in their role as civic leaders, pragmatic individuals.

Furthermore, as Brecht notes, except in a general sense, in *An die Ratsherrn* Luther does not often look back to the ancient texts regularly cited by Renaissance humanists.⁸ Unlike on other occasions where he shows his capacity to allude to authors such as Cicero or Quintilian, Luther would seem not to want to bedazzle the councilmen with such allusions or by interweaving citations of purple passages or other relevant pagan ideas with Christian thought. He may, of course, have viewed doing so as something akin to tossing pearls before swine, or perhaps he thought his audience on this occasion not only incapable of grasping such subtlety but possibly offended by it. Accordingly, though his educational goals are obviously lofty, the bread and butter of his argument is rooted in what one might regard as practical wisdom.⁹

⁵ Thomas Kothmann, “Luther as Educator: His Vision of Teaching and Learning and Its Significance Today,” in Stephen Hultgren, Stephen Pietsch, and Jeffrey Silcock, eds., *Luther@500 and Beyond: Martin Luther’s Theology Past, Present and Future* (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Ltd., 2019), 224.

⁶ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:37.17–22 (cf. AE 45:359).

⁷ Gerald Strauss, “The Social Function of Schools in the Lutheran Reformation in Germany,” *History of Education Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1988): 191–206, here at 193.

⁸ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping*, 141.

⁹ Susan Karant-Nunn, “The Reality of Early Lutheran Education,” *Lutherjahrbuch* 27 (1990): 128–146.

Perhaps that is why Aristotle, whose capacity to reason we know that Luther at least sometimes respects, is in *An die Ratsherrn* proffered virtually as a mere distraction from Holy Writ:

He [God] did the same [i.e., neglected good books and educated people], and instead of Holy Writ and good books, He allowed Aristotle to come [into the curriculum], along with uncountable harmful books that would only guide us ever farther away from the Bible. Moreover, [he allowed to come] the Masks of the Devil, the monks and the “wraith of higher education,” schools that we enriched with inhuman property, and many doctors, preachers, schoolmasters, priests and monks—to put it another way, large, rough, fat donkeys, bedecked with red and brown berets, like the [proverbial] sow with a golden chain and pearls, which we have maintained and loaded upon ourselves. These men taught us nothing of value but rather merely made us increasingly blind and deranged.¹⁰

Notably it is not schoolteachers but university professors—in whose cadre Dr. Luther of course held a prominent place—who incur the bulk of his wrath and disgust. His disdain includes what he calls the “wraith of higher education” (presumably scholastics), and he also includes on this bad list monks and priests, all of whom he insultingly dubs *fette Esel*, i.e. weight-challenged donkeys. His description of their garb, however, consisting of red berets and golden chains, in fact describes the attire of a typical university professor in Luther’s day.¹¹

Yet it was not merely universities that had failed their students. Luther also describes succinctly how during the Middle Ages, the church itself had become emblematic of both intellectual and spiritual wandering and, generally speaking, had failed its constituents:

Experience, too, has proven and still continues to demonstrate as much. For immediately after the time of the Apostles, when [the gift of] languages ceased, the Gospel, the faith, and all Christianity ever more declined, until under the Pope it completely sank. Further, since the time that languages fell, not much that is remarkable has been seen in Christendom, but rather many abominable abominations have occurred out of ignorance of the languages.¹²

Such an observation about intellectual decline was not new for Luther. Already by 1520 in his *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, Luther had lamented, Andrew

¹⁰ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:50.22–51.5 (cf. AE 45:374–375).

¹¹ As an academic himself, Luther was certainly not wholly antagonistic to the Academy. Cf. Paul F. Grendler, “The Universities of the Renaissance and Reformation,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2004): 1–42, esp. 17–21. For depictions of such attire, cf. Francis Kelly and Rudolf Swabe, *A Short History of Costume and Armour, Chiefly in England* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1931), 8, 31, and Francis Kelly and Rudolf Swabe, *Historic Costume: A Chronicle of Fashion in Western Europe* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1929), 43.

¹² Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:38.33–39.4 (cf. AE 45:360–361).

Pettegree notes, “that convents had abandoned their educational vocation . . . [and thus Luther] called for the establishment of new schools for women.”¹³ Luther’s own words express this emphatically: “And would to God that every city also had a girls’ school where the girls could hear the Gospel for an hour every day, whether in German or Latin.”¹⁴

In *An die Ratsherrn* Luther resumes the argument about education’s decline, to which he joins the notion that the educational institutions’ lack of regard for the languages has been the source of poor instruction. Thus does Luther go on further to describe that it was none other than the devil himself who had corrupted education:¹⁵

One became aware afterwards that with time unfortunately all the arts and languages fell away and instead of genuine books we have seen that the Devil has instead introduced stupid, useless, and harmful books written by monks: *Catholicon*, *Florista*, *Graecista*, *Labyrinthus*, *Dormi Secure*¹⁶ and similar donkey droppings—with the result that the Latin language has collapsed and nowhere does a viable school, teaching, or way of studying survive. Nevertheless, as we have experienced and seen, through much effort and toil the languages and arts have been brought back, yet quite imperfectly, from a few scraps and pieces of old books taken out of the dust and [pulled] away from the bookworms. Indeed, people still diligently search for them daily, even as men dig through the ashes of a destroyed city for treasure and jewels.¹⁷

In the second half of this citation Luther summarily recapitulates the recovery of the lost classical texts that early Renaissance pioneers like Poggio, Petrarch, and others had so vigorously undertaken. He notes, too, that the decline of education, whose foundation was in part based on the “classics,” can be viewed as a spiritual issue. The educational shambles that remain have produced something more sinister than merely blind guides:

But, assuming one allows the schools to go to ruin and does not establish other, more Christian ones, where shall one find for them [good pastors]? For the schools, as they have been maintained hitherto, although they have not wholly perished, are capable of producing nothing but forlorn, harmful deceivers.¹⁸

¹³ Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 265.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), in WA 6:461.13–15 (cf. AE 44:206). This passage is discussed by Lowell Green, “The Education of Women in the Reformation,” *History of Education Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1979): 96–97.

¹⁵ Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), 146.

¹⁶ For information about these medieval books, see AE 45:374n50.

¹⁷ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:50.8–18 (cf. AE 45:374).

¹⁸ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:47.23–48.3 (cf. AE 45:371).

As this citation more than merely suggests, bad education clearly has dire consequences. Those who upon graduation from school had taken up holy orders, Luther boldly states, were no less ignorant, even if they were ironically somehow regarded as peculiarly blessed:

Has it not hitherto been a wretched problem that a lad was required to study for twenty years or more, only to acquire enough bad Latin for him to become a priest and read the mass? And whoever got that far was “blessed”; blessed was the mother who had given birth to such a child! And yet the child remained a poor, uneducated person his whole life, capable neither of clucking nor laying eggs. We have had to encounter such teachers and masters everywhere, who themselves knew nothing and had no capacity to teach anything good or right; indeed, they have had no knowledge of the ways one should learn and teach.¹⁹

Such folks in Luther’s day made for (and indeed still today make for) horrible educators. Why? Simply put, they are reading bad stuff. For Luther, much of the problem is reducible, one might say, to the pedestrian but perhaps not untrue old saw “garbage in, garbage out”:

Who is at fault? There were no books available other than these fantastical books written by monks and sophists. What else could arise from such a source other than utterly stupid students and teachers, like the books that taught them! A jackdaw can hatch no doves, and a fool produces no wisemen. This is the reward of ingratitude, that no exertion has been made to maintain libraries; rather, good books have been allowed to perish, while the useless ones have been preserved.²⁰

Despite his view of education’s dire estate in 1524, Luther nevertheless relentlessly holds out hope for the future, putting feet on such hope, Brecht notes, in April of the following year by journeying “with Melanchthon and Agricola to Eisenleben . . . to establish a Christian Latin school.”²¹ In his *Exposition of Psalm 127, for the Christians at Riga in Livonia*, Luther would again make the case for Christian education, in that case somewhat more pointedly than in his more wide-ranging *An die Ratsherrn*, as Pettegree,²² inter alios, has pointed out. Scott Hendrix, whose book was published the same year as Pettegree’s, expands on Luther’s exposition and presentation to Riga: “Every year, he argued, town councils and inhabitants threw ‘a thousand guilders down the drain’ for personal excess and religious foolishness and then complained they would starve if required to pay good preachers and

¹⁹ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:51.8–16 (cf. AE 45:375).

²⁰ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:51.16–22 (cf. AE 45:375).

²¹ Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping*, 141.

²² Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, 33.

teachers.”²³ In *An die Ratsherrn*, Luther had already shown how the situation is remediable, even if that were to mean having to frankly confront the direness of the current climate:

Nowadays we have the finest, most learned young fellows and [even young] men, adorned with languages and all the arts, who could be of use if one wanted to employ them in the instruction of young folks. Is it not obvious that today one can train a lad in three years so that by the age of fifteen or eighteen he can accomplish more than any academy or monastery could ever do? Indeed, what have people learned in academies and monasteries up to now, save to become donkeys, fools, and blockheads?²⁴

In *An die Ratsherrn*, it is not without rhetorical flair and vigor that Luther lays out the why and even the how of the reinvigoration of education, specifically Christian education, in sixteenth-century Germany. Education in his homeland was in dire need of reform specifically because it had been neglected too long and fallen into gross disrepair: that is the why. As to the how, he makes it clear that church and state should work cooperatively to reposition education upon a better and more stable footing, not virtue-seeking scholasticism but learning grounded in biblical teaching, liberal studies, and especially knowledge of the ancient languages.²⁵ As we have seen, from time to time Luther speaks with comical flair about bad books, bad scholars, and bad teachers. Yet he even alludes, we also saw just a moment ago, to his hope specifically for a bright new generation of energetic educators. Perhaps there is much that in the twenty-first century we, too, can take away from Luther’s bold exposition.²⁶

But what does Luther think of teachers themselves? To some extent one can infer this easily from many of the passages of *An die Ratsherrn* cited already. Yet for a more pointed answer to that question, we may turn to the *Tischreden*, where one gets intimate glimpses of Luther’s candid opinions, as always, warts and all. And it is there that we learn more about his deep admiration for educators of all levels of students. A single quote among many summarizes his view nicely:

For schoolmasters have become accustomed to public speaking with their pupils in their schools about how one should treat and interpret the sayings of the Holy Scriptures. . . . But in a town, a schoolmaster is just as important as a pastor. We can do without mayors, elders, and nobility; one cannot do without

²³ Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 146, quoting Martin Luther, *Exposition of Psalm 127, for the Christians at Riga in Livonia* (1524), in AE 45:318 (= WA 15:361.13–14).

²⁴ Luther, *Address to the Councilmen*, in WA 15:31.11–18 (cf. AE 45:351–352).

²⁵ Kothmann has devoted several pages, well worth reading, to this very topic. Kothmann, “Luther as Educator,” 239: “Because the school is necessary for all the orders or estates (*Stände*) and for the wellbeing of the whole community, it is the right and duty of all citizens to take care of the school system.”

²⁶ Kothmann, “Luther as Educator,” 246–250.

schools, for they must govern the world. . . . And were I not a preacher, I could not imagine any position on earth I would rather have. But one must not regard how the world treats and rewards [the teaching profession], but rather how God values it and will extol it on that day.²⁷

In short, for Luther what seems to count most is the practice of the teacher, his or her dedication to the students, which dovetails entirely with Luther's larger argument about education, and is, in the end, a city's or town's very cornerstone.²⁸ Luther's clear exposition of such a spiritual proximity between pastor and teacher reveals his high regard not only for education per se but also for those who administer it.²⁹ His description of the teacher's value to society at large might well be viewed as a forerunner of what the Germans today call *Alles Gute zum Lehrertag*, or we Anglophones refer to as "Teacher Appreciation Day."

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²⁷ Table talk of September 2 to 17, 1540, no. 5252, recorded by John Mathesius, according to Aurifaber's adaptation, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912–1921), 5:28.14–16, 20–22, 25–27 (hereafter cited as WA TR).

²⁸ Cf. Kothmann, "Luther as Educator," 236. Kothmann deftly sums up the relationship of pastors and teachers: "The first concern of the reformers, when they became involved with schools and education, was the training of competent pastors and teachers to serve the gospel." Cf. also Luther's table talk dated between September 2 and 17, 1540, recorded by John Mathesius, no. 5247, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vol. 54, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, ed. Theodore G. Tappert and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 403–404 (= WA TR 5:26).

²⁹ Cf. F. V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education: Including a Historical Introduction, and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1889), 136–137.