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The Symposia of Concordia Theological Seminary (January 1996)	241
Luther's Reception of Bernard of Clairvaux Theo M. M. A. C. Bell	245
Books Received	278
Preaching the Passion of Christ on the Eve of the Reformation Franz Posset	279
Pastoral Letter on the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office of the Church Jobst Schöne	301
Book Reviews	317



Preaching the Passion of Christ on the Eve of the Reformation

Franz Posset

In the history of Christian preaching few have done more to promote a specific focus on the sufferings of Christ than Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) through his immense personal and professional influence as well as his own sermonizing. The theme of the passion of Christ has recently become an object of study by those interested in the literature and art of the late Middle Ages.¹ Such research helps to shed light on that which a preacher who was well known in the early sixteenth century had to say as he tried to fulfill the most central task of Christian proclamation, preaching the passion and the cross of Christ.

I. General Considerations

Historians have already investigated what was preached during the "early years" of the Reformation,² but pay little attention to the years immediately prior to the beginning of Luther's Reformation in 1517. Centering on the cross of Christ is not, in fact, a development distinctive to preaching following 1517, and Luther's own "theology of the cross" is best appreciated in the context of late medieval trends. The occurrence of cross-centered preaching on the eve of the Reformation will be demonstrated here in regard specifically to the spring of 1512. The sermons were delivered in an important central European city of that time, namely, Salzburg, which was the seat of the oldest monastery located in German-speaking lands, St. Peter Abbey, and the seat of an archbishop with several suffragans,

For the first time in English, some samples are presented here of sermons of Johann von Staupitz (who died in 1524), which originally were delivered in Early New High German and which were first published in a critical edition in 1990.³ Staupitz was Martin Luther's superior in the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine and the leading officer of the Reformed Augustinian Congregation in all German-speaking lands.⁴ Staupitz usually spent the winter months at Salzburg, where he was invited to preach a series of Lenten sermons in 1512. The significance of these sermons is properly understood, however, only in the context of the peculiar ecclesiastical institution of the late Middle Ages known as the "preacher-position" (*Prädikanten-Stelle*) which had been established in many

places and, above all, in the free imperial cities of the Holy Roman Empire, including Wittenberg, where Staupitz was a professor of Holy Scripture and Luther a graduate student. It is precisely through this institution of endowed preaching posts that a few years later the way was paved for the rapid spread of the Reformation in the German-speaking lands.

II. The Preacher-Positions in the Late Middle Ages

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries preaching was a highly esteemed activity, and good preachers were in demand everywhere. People listened to sermons by good preachers gladly, and the financing of such preachers was apparently no problem. Preaching posts had been established in many central European cities since the late fourteenth century, usually well endowed by gracious donors. Within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation virtually every free imperial city had established such endowed posts at one of their churches. The oldest such positions are found in the city of Nuremberg, where the endowment for the preacher-position at St. Sebaldus Church is assumed to be as early as the year 1397 and the position at St. Lorenz Church dates from the year 1423. Following the example of St. Sebaldus Church, other cities in southern Germany, such as Riedlingen (1414) and Giengen on the River Brenz (1420), had already instituted similar positions prior to the one in St. Lorenz Church. The preacher-positions in the southern cities mentioned were funded by a wealthy physician.⁵ The small free imperial city of Isny in the deep south of the German-speaking lands received its endowed preaching post in 1462, when a son of Isny, John Guldin, a canon at Constance (then the seat of a diocese), provided the necessary funds to St. Nicholas Church. The endowment was meant "for instruction unto eternal salvation." Three years later, in 1465, the same donor provided funds for the erection of a separate chapel, a house for the preacher, and even a private library for him. In the preacher's library at Isny one may find yet today, for instance, an edition of 1490 of Bonaventure's *Meditationes in Vita Christi*, printed in Paris, and an edition of 1519 of a book in Hebrew by David Kimchi.⁶ The most famous preacher of that era was probably Johann Geiler von Keisersberg (who died in 1510), who held the preacher-position at Strasbourg, the major

city in the south-west of the German-speaking lands.⁷ Johann Geiler knew well the burden of preaching during Lent and Holy Week, especially on Good Friday; the preacher was expected to speak for an hour or so in delivering the so-called "long passion," which Geiler mentioned at one point.⁸ The preacher-position at Wittenberg in Electoral Saxony had also been created already in the fifteenth century; subsequent to 1512 it was filled by Martin Luther, probably after he had received his doctor's degree in theology in October of that year and after Staupitz had departed from Wittenberg for good. Luther's preaching role in the city of Wittenberg ought not be confused with the one which he filled in the Holy Spirit Chapel of the Augustinian friary of Wittenberg, nor with his preaching activity in the Castle Church. The town of Wittenberg had attempted for a long time to gain control of ecclesiastical affairs, and thus a preacher's post was created and financed by the city council at the city's church. The city-council was under the control of the various craft-guilds, as there were no patrician burghers in the city (as was the case, for instance, at Nuremberg). There was virtually no dominant family which would have been able to make a large enough gift to endow a preaching post.⁹ The cities of Altenburg, Eisenach, and Allstedt in Thuringia also had such preachers' positions by this time.¹⁰ There is no intention here, of course, to give a complete list of cities in the German-speaking lands that had endowed pulpits. Those already mentioned, however, may serve as representatives of their regions.

These positions were not identical with the offices of the pastors of parishes. The pastors of parishes were normally not very much inclined either toward reform in general or toward the gospel of the Reformation in particular. When the magistrates of the cities wanted to introduce religious reforms, and later on the Reformation as such, they had to use the institution of the preacher-position and not the pastorate, since in the late Middle Ages the hiring of preachers had come under the control of the city governments rather than that of the pastors or even of the local bishop. Thus, the "secular" authorities used the channel of the preacher-position to achieve the reforms which they desired. Obviously, moreover, the work of preaching was not closely tied to the traditional and well-established ecclesiastical organization of the administration of the sacraments,

which usually was in the hands of the pastors. A city was thus able to attract a qualified preacher who was independent of the pastors. Such a preacher had to have, first of all, an advanced degree, usually a doctorate in theology, and secondly he needed personal credibility as far as his life style was concerned. The donor, for instance, of Isny's endowment stipulated that the preacher to be hired be a person "whose words and deeds correspond to each other."¹¹ Very often these preachers came from the ranks of the so-called mendicant orders, such as the Dominicans (whose official name was the Order of Preachers, *Ordo Praedicatorum*), Franciscans, and Augustinians. Thus, preacher-positions which were held by the most reform-minded friars (at that time the Augustinian Order and the Reformed Congregation to which Luther belonged) became in the free imperial cities of the German-speaking lands the prime agents of the propagation of spiritual reform and, later on, the thinking of Reformation.¹² What, then, was preached by such a preacher on the eve of the Reformation in a significant city such as Salzburg?

III. The Lenten Sermons of 1512 of Johann von Staupitz

At Salzburg an endowed preacher-position came into existence in 1399, funded by two citizens, Virgil Säppl and Ott Hofpekch, with the stipulation that the preacher—first called "chaplain" and later on "foundation-preacher"—had to celebrate mass daily, preach on Saturdays during the year as a whole, and preach daily during Advent and Lent. This endowed preacher-position (*Stiftsprädikatur*) was under the control of the city government, not of the church's pastor or even of the archbishop. The salaries may tell more than words how highly esteemed such preachers were in the late Middle Ages. As to the preacher's salary in Salzburg, we know that it was higher than the income of the archbishop's personal physician. In 1477, likewise, the professors of medicine at the neighboring University of Ingolstadt received eighty gulden, while the preacher in Salzburg earned eighty-four gulden. The names of the preachers in Salzburg are known from 1446 on. They are not to be confused with the guest preachers who came into town on the occasion of the collection of alms (*terminarii*) and who were members of the mendicant orders. From 1482 to 1510, for twenty-eight years, the position was held by Father Nicholas Vitzthum.¹³ Subsequently, Paul

Speratus (1484-1551) held the post for some time, perhaps already from 1511 (at first perhaps without tenure) until 1517, when he married a lady of Salzburg and joined Luther's Reformation, becoming a Lutheran bishop in Prussia in 1529.¹⁴ Johann von Staupitz filled the preacher-position for the Lenten season of 1512, on the basis of an untenured contract, for a honorarium of twenty-one *pfund pfennig*. At that time Staupitz was in the process of winding down his reforming efforts within the Augustinian Order, and by the autumn of 1512 he gave up his professorship in Holy Scripture at Wittenberg, when Luther was installed as his successor. Staupitz had already been in Salzburg since the end of the year 1511 when, during the Lent of 1512, he delivered a series of twelve sermons on the passion of the Lord. These sermons of 1512 show Staupitz to have been a gifted preacher. His message was so attractive that local Benedictine nuns (the so-called "St. Peter's Ladies") began to record them. The manuscript so produced has, fortunately for us, been preserved.¹⁵ These sermons of 1512 are the first of which we know to be delivered by Staupitz in the vernacular, and they are the only extant sermons subsequent to his first set of Latin sermons of 1498, which he had delivered at the friary of Tübingen on the first verses of the Book of Job.¹⁶ We possess no sermons from Luther's monastic superior from the period between 1498 and 1511, a time-span which includes his tenure as professor of Holy Scripture at Wittenberg, when, we may assume, he was a significant influence on Luther.

The sermons of 1512 were delivered to the ordinary parishioners of Salzburg. His audience included, however, the nuns of St. Peter's Abbey (a "double monastery" comprehending both monks and nuns—in separate quarters, of course). Staupitz may have begun his series already on Ash Wednesday, but none of the sermons were recorded until the Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare) when the nuns began to write them down. On that day, March 23, 1512, Staupitz began to preach on the narrative of the passion, and he continued his daily preaching for twelve days until Wednesday of Holy Week, April 8, except on Sundays and feast-days.¹⁷ The scarlet thread that is woven through the first three of the extant sermons is the concept of "departure." The first of the sermons has as its topic Jesus' departure from His mother at Bethany. The

second sermon deals with His departure from His disciples after the Last Supper. The third sermon focuses on the scene on the Mount of Olives where Jesus departs "from Himself." The following sermons no longer feature "departures," but certain encounters. The topics are divided along the lines of the biblical narrative: Peter's denial (sermon 5), Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (sermon 6), Jesus being led from Caiaphas to Pilate (sermon 7), Jesus before Pilate and Herod (sermon 8), His flagellation by the Romans and condemnation (sermon 9), His flagellation by the Jews and the way to the cross (sermon 10), His crucifixion with Mary beneath the cross (sermon 11), and His death and burial (sermon 12).

Staupitz follows along the lines of the biblical accounts of the passion of the Lord, but he embellishes the narrative with scenes not found in the biblical text. The tendency to fill in some details and add legendary material to the biblical narratives is a typical trait of late medieval "passion-literature."¹⁸ Staupitz lets Mary follow Jesus all the way to the cross; he lets Jesus be scourged twice (of which Staupitz thought he had evidence in the gospels of Matthew and John), and he lets Christ heal a legendary blind soldier beneath the cross by the name of Longinus. Yet at several points the preacher and former exegetical professor conscientiously relates his sermons back to "the text" or to "the story." He does not appear, however, to follow any one specific gospel. He seems, instead, to have had in mind the narrative of the passion in some sort of harmony of the gospels. All in all, however, the chief source of his preaching is the Bible, which is not surprising as Staupitz had been professor of Holy Scripture in the University of Wittenberg during the previous ten years. Staupitz lays special emphasis, moreover, on the immense suffering which Christ endured in the course of His bloody passion.

A. The Opening Sermon on Christ's Passion

The overall goal of his preaching is meditation on the salvific suffering of Jesus Christ, as Staupitz states in the opening passage of his first extant sermon of 1512:

I want to present to you your Captain, Jesus Christ, who will lead you to victory over your enemies. Therefore, be happy and rejoice, the triumph is won and death is over-

come and gone. Trust in your righteous God will never depart from your hearts.

The first main point [is this]: All our suffering and all our illness is completely tied up and overcome in His suffering. We need to contemplate [His suffering] in great gratitude. Truly, if one does not contemplate His suffering, it does not taste, it does not taste sweet; then, what would serve for one's salvation is not pleasing.¹⁹

Staupitz communicates the salvific "sweetness" of bitter suffering of Jesus Christ in traditional devotional language.²⁰ In doing so his preaching is completely centered on Christ; His suffering alone brings about the believer's "deification": "Who would not want to be glad knowing that the mercy of God swallowed up one's sin completely? Christ's suffering deified man. There is nothing more blessed on earth than Christ's suffering, because all salvation depends on it."²¹

The preacher's second point is this: "Nobody who contemplates will receive any sweetness from it unless that person enters into full contemplation of the body of Christ, then arrives at [His] soul and passes through it and [finally] arrives at His divine nature."²² Staupitz operates here with the strange concept of "three natures" of Christ, which is used as a structural principle for most of his sermons of 1512:

The divine person has three natures—body, life [soul], and divinity—in which body and soul are united and make a happy being, but remain one person. If you want to meditate well and rightly on the suffering of Christ, you must look at three aspects today and in every suffering of which I shall speak.

Firstly, [let us look at] His holy body and, in looking at it, at the strokes and painful marks, and let us pray to God: "O Thou tender God and my Lord, how art Thou torn up because of me, cut up, scourged, and crowned!" Only a hardened person would not feel sorry and take [these things] to heart; if it were a little dog or animal that you saw tortured in this way, you would have mercy with it.

Take note: Eagerly meditate upon the suffering of Christ; do not stop until you find in your heart some compassion or motion of your heart. When you feel that, do not stand still, but proceed to the soul [of Christ] and think—this is the second point: "O Thou most noble soul, how art Thou? The body is already maltreated. What do I notice in Thee? [I see] a complete, perfect obedience to the Heavenly Father; and Thou didst not want to walk away from suffering, but to be obedient unto death. O, my God, grant that I may follow Thee obediently as is Thy will."²³

Staupitz in a prayerful way leads his hearers to speak to God in Christ directly. He then turns to his hearers with this exhortation:

And do not stand still here either; penetrate through the suffering of the soul and see what the divinity adds to it: the third [essence]. Thus you will find that the suffering of the body and the obedience of the soul flow out together from God's fountain of mercy. "O my God, now I see Thy love; I recognize Thy grace and Thy mercy; as I was Thine enemy, Thou didst this [for me]. Was there ever anyone who suffered death for his enemy? Who deserved this from Thee since we all were Thine enemies?" But it flows out [from Thee]; there is nothing but mercy; and finally it was mercy which devoured sin, hope [which devoured] fear, joy [which devoured] sadness, triumph [which devoured] suffering and grief, strength [which devoured] weakness, life [which devoured] death, and God [which devoured] man.

See, my child, and learn from it, what use and fruit come to you from [His] suffering. If someone meditates in one's heart upon the suffering of Christ and really sinks into it, then he must be filled with more joy than with sadness. O what sweet tears flow from the loving soul who in contemplation enters into God. If you taste the body's [suffering] alone, it is a bitter taste; but if you look at the soul's [suffering], it brings some joy. But when you enter into the Godhead, it is the most sweet thing. You should not remain with the meditation of the suffering of His body, but come forth and enter into discipleship: He suffered, and so we

suffer, too; He struggled, and so we struggle, too. Keep in mind the three points: Fellowship in suffering is in the body, discipleship is in the soul, joy is in the Godhead.²⁴

At this point Staupitz makes a critical reference to a contemporary devotional practice, and in doing this he probably follows the advice of spiritual leaders of his time²⁵ to be careful with the use of depictions (and with rhetorical devices capable of leading hearers to fantastic flights of imaginations):

Many people make holy cards for themselves. I do not condemn this practice, but I also do not praise it. Such things are useful for becoming mindful [of Christ's suffering]. But, as soon as you are enkindled in your contemplation, close your eyes, but do not remain there. The external picture of the [tortured] body only shows you Christ's suffering in the body, while contemplation of the soul [of Christ] makes this suffering fruitful to you, and it is in the divinity [of Christ] where one finds hidden the kernel of sweetness. It is to be sought deep down in the well of mercy. Once you have found it, it is your's and nobody else's.²⁶

The sermons of Staupitz are clearly, then (in the sense indicated), christocentric and grace-centered; and they aim at the hearts of the listeners who are urged to taste the "sweetness" which is to be found only in the suffering of Christ. The preacher wants to lead his hearers beyond the external observation of depictions of this suffering to a spiritual understanding of the religious meaning of the suffering of the Son of God for us and our salvation.

B. The Fifth Sermon

Among the total of the twelve extant sermons of Staupitz in 1512, the fifth is of special interest to students of the Reformation by reason of its concluding passage. In speaking of Peter as "the sick rock" the Augustinian preacher anticipates the typical Lutheran interpretation of Matthew 16:18 ("... and on this rock I will build My church"). There are several diverse topics knit into this sermon. As usual, Staupitz addresses his hearers with the opening phrase, "Friends of Christ," and then he makes a brief connection with the

previous sermons before he enters into the exposition of his new topic, the imprisonment of Christ and His denial by Peter. Staupitz ties these points together with some openly anti-Jewish sentiments, talking about the role of "the Jews" in the suffering of Christ. He also utilizes mystical terminology as he has Christ speak to the mystical "bride" who is the individual believing soul:

You have heard how Christ, our Savior and strong hero, stood up at the arrival of the Jews who wanted to capture Him—how Christ showed them in seven ways His true divinity: in the order and measure within which they were to capture Him and in no other way, in power, in wisdom, in goodness, in mercy, and in patience. Today look at His imprisonment; there are three points to it. Firstly, Christ, our Lord and God, gave courage to the approaching Jews, who at that time had been beaten down, so that now they would stand up and regain their evil will as before. For He wanted to offer Himself as a sacrifice, give up everything that would belong to a man of strength, have His eyes closed, let His hands be tied, and become silent like a lamb.

Three things took place at His imprisonment: the devil was depressed and imprisoned; the devil regained his strength; and, thirdly, the disciples fled. Firstly, He caught the devil in the net of the fear of God. Record in your heart that the devil has recognized God (in Christ), but the people did not. When the Lord convinced the people with one word—"It is I" (John 18:5)—the devil thought: "Now the truth is out: He is true God; no human being could have done what He did." And the devil gave up his efforts to bring about His death. He [that is, the devil] gave it a rest and remained quiet in the hearts of the Jews. Secondly, however, when the evil spirit saw that He let Himself be captured and tied so miserably, he started up again and thought to stir up again the devilish hatred. Therefore, the hearts of the Jews were awakened again to envy and hate of the Lord. My God and my Lord, how lettest Thou Thyself be caught so infamously by the Jews? Why doest Thou so? Response: "O My child, who gave you the strength to sin?"

Who gave you the mouth to speak evil words? I did it, because all strength is of God. Why should I not provide also that by which you would be cleansed? I gave My hands to be tied, so that your hands might be cleansed from evil works. I took spit in the face, so that your face might be cleansed. Let it be, My bride; I must pay the debt which you ran up." Yes, my Lord, if this is so, that it was Thy will, then it is all right, because Thou hast really helped to bring it about. Therefore, my God and my Lord, much has been written of Thee by the prophets, how men beat Thee, torture Thee, and cause Thee pain. If it is so written, we must do it. Therefore, my Lord, be patient. We must do it, as the truth must be fulfilled completely in Thee, the truth that is prophesied of Thee. Thirdly, as the Lord now prepared His head and His entire body to be delivered, the disciples realized that it was all over: "O Peter, He is going to die!" As soon as He let them, these hungry dogs grabbed Him as if they wanted to tear Him totally apart already in their first attack. As they attacked Him, the disciples fled from the garden.

This imprisonment was so pitiful because among all those scoundrels there was none not full of hate. What is this perverted hate? Such a hateful person hates even a dead body and beats or pushes it although it no longer feels anything. But the Jews do so without reason. For no one punishes someone so hatefully whom one wants to seize legally for his debts and evil deeds; but such a person is punished leniently and reluctantly. Therefore, his pain is all the less. But when it happens out of hate, it hurts beyond measure. Thus, the hate and envy of the Jews against the Lord was most painful, a pain afflicted on Him externally. If it had been for a debt or in mercy, it would have been easy to take. Secondly, the hate of the leaders is even greater yet. Thirdly, the hate of Judas was the greatest [of all] and his concern was that He might escape."²⁷

The embellishment of the story of Judas within sermons on the passion was especially popular since the twelfth century when the

"Judas Legend" came into existence.²⁸ Staupitz, apparently, is not untouched by this popular tendency. The preacher continues as follows:

O what misery have you seen when watching them all gang up on Him! It was impossible for Him to stay on His feet; He had to fall. O devout Child, Thy Father deserted Thee! Here Thou liest below Thine enemies: One lies on Thy neck, the other on Thy heart. O Thou strong God, how Thou must suffer and let this happen to Thee. Here the most noble being in heaven and on earth lies in so much pain. O stop this struggle! It is enough! All participated in this thing; no one wanted to miss it. They shouted: "Seize the evildoer! Seize Him!" And their leaders, who came with a great crowd, grabbed Him; every one wanted to hurt Him. Look, here He lies, poor Lazarus, tied up and in fetters!²⁹

At this point in his sermon Staupitz reminds his hearers that the church of Christ "meditates on His imprisonment at midnight and gives Him thanks and praise." The "midnight" refers to the monastic observance of the "canonical hours" (*horae canonicae*). Staupitz then dramatizes Christ's suffering as follows:

The second aspect [is this]: When the Lord Jesus was imprisoned thus, they took Him first to Annas, and here He suffered the greatest blow on His head. Note: Jesus was bound and a prisoner when they brought Him with loud noise. At times He walked; at times He was dragged. One could see the blood on the stones [in the street and on the stairs] when they brought Him to Annas and without mercy jostled Him up the stairs. "Up, up, we bring you the scoundrel! Hurry, hurry!" And they accused Him of misleading the people with His teaching.³⁰

In order to make the situation better understandable, Staupitz speaks of the Jewish leader (the high priest) in the story of the passion as the "bishop." He simultaneously calls to people's minds the primary task of bishops in general, a task which he apparently sees often neglected in his own time:

The bishop asked Him what He taught in His presumption—since it is the bishop's task to question anyone on what his sheep are being taught, so that they are not fed poison and death, that they may not perish. Nothing should concern me except the passion of Christ. Hear Thou, my God, Thou Thyself are the truth. Teach that dog about his questioning! He [that is, Christ] did not talk about the disciples; they were all of no use at this point anyway. He wanted neither to praise them nor to reprimand them. . . . "I have taught nothing in secret. You should have joined in listening to what I had to say! Why do you ask Me [now]? Ask those who listened; they can tell you." The bishop was a fool; therefore he fell silent with his foolish question and could no longer say anything."³¹

Staupitz incorporates further parallels to his audience's contemporary experience as he calls to mind what would happen if someone treated the emperor in the way in which the Son of God was treated:

One of the servants who captured Him . . . started to hit Him from behind in His holy face. O what a miserable blow! He was so fierce, so without compassion. The prophets knew it beforehand and felt it. Hosea 3 [actually Micah 5:1] said: "They hit the holy judge of Israel in the face." This blow echoed in heaven, in hell, and on earth. The blow was so hard that not only Christ's cheek but also His teeth were wrecked. If you want to measure Christ's suffering, you must first take into consideration the noble nature of Christ, the person of Christ. [He was] not a peasant, but the son of a noble king—yes, of the highest emperor—the Son of God. What a sacrilege would it be to hit a bishop, an emperor, or a pope in the face? Such a man would lose his life instantaneously. What about in this situation? The righteous God, the emperor of emperors, was hit in the face by a servant, by a dog who was not worth being called a human being. One reads of this blow: "You have broken My teeth" (Lamentations 3:16). Furthermore, the prophet has written: "I offered My cheek to be struck" (Lamentations 3:30). It was a blow that should

never have been motivated by a human heart.³²

Staupitz then describes the universal protest of the entire created world which should have occurred at the witnessing of the sufferings of God:

Lord, my God, I wish to speak of Thine encounter. I see that Thou wantest to remain silent. All you elements, look at the Lord, the Law-giver of everything and Creator of all creatures. You earth, where is your power, you who long ago swallowed up Dathan and Abiram because they disobeyed the commands of their superiors? Where is your power now? You, water, take . . . them under, as you drowned the Pharaoh with his entire army when he tortured the people of God. Fire, where are you who burns up those who act against God? Where have you left your power? Do you sleep, you angels in heaven? And you, heaven, think how to revenge the blow. Man, think how much the Son of God is shamefully beaten . . .! It is a certain sign that we are to be saved. Nature says: "Do not seek revenge at the time when one should do penance." O Thou eternal and merciful God, see this blow on the sweetest of cheeks. It is, however, a blow dealt in order to give strength to everyone who is beaten. If your teeth hurt, if your mouth hurts, Christ was beaten for you!

Here is a question: Why did Christ not take the blow in silence so that we could take Him as our example. The answer [is this]: Yes, it is true, the Lord suffered and so He showed us how to suffer. But God cannot tolerate that the divine truth and doctrine should be suppressed or that the opinion should arise among people that He did not preach rightly or that His doctrine was wrong, so that people should be led into error and perish. God cannot and will not tolerate this [eventuality]. Therefore, He said: "If I said anything wrong, produce the evidence, so that one may know what I did wrong" (John 18:23).³³

Finally Staupitz arrives at the scene of Peter's denial which gives him the opportunity to clarify what is meant by the "rock" in

Matthew 16. From the patristic and medieval interpretations preceding him Staupitz had received the following options: the rock was Christ, the rock was faith, or the rock was Peter.³⁴ Staupitz opted for the first of these options:

Peter's denial hit the Lord much harder in His heart than the Jew hitting Him on His cheek. "O Peter, Peter, what are you doing? Are you the rock on whom to build? You are a sick rock up to this day. . . ."³⁵

Staupitz repeats: "O Peter, Peter, what are you doing to your good God? Why do you dare this thing when you are so afraid?"³⁶ Staupitz emphasizes the graveness of Peter's denial since Peter was not just any ordinary man: "O how much this [behavior] hurt the Lord! . . . This was not done by an ordinary man, but by a rock of the church."³⁷ Staupitz offers this explanation for Peter's weakness as he concludes his fifth sermon with words which could not be more christocentric: "Peter fell [by denying Christ] in order that no-one should think that the church is built on him," but that, instead, "one might see and recognize that one must build on Christ alone, who is the Rock, and on no one else. . . . Amen."³⁸ Christ alone is the Rock!

IV. Concluding Remarks

Several observations may serve as the conclusion to this study. Firstly, preaching enjoyed great esteem in the late Middle Ages. Preaching demanded much more of a priest than simply to be able to mumble his way through the missal. Doctors of theology usually assumed the responsibility for preaching in the vernacular. In order to obtain a more accurate picture of the religious situation on the eve of the Reformation, we must take note of lively late-medieval preachers and of a genuine religiosity which conflicts with the simplistic but popular myth of a total absence of pastoral care and preaching in all German-speaking lands until Luther came on the scene. One can no longer generalize and say that prior to Luther there was nothing but deformation. The poor quality of preaching before Luther is sometimes emphasized, so that the preaching of the Reformation may shine all the brighter against such a backdrop. Such a view misses, however, much of the religious reality at the

beginning of the sixteenth century. The lack of good preaching may have been true of many rural areas in Europe but not of the imperial cities and cultural centers. They, instead, took great pride in the endowing of preaching positions, such as the ones at Salzburg, Wittenberg, and Strasbourg (with Geiler von Keisersberg). There were abuses, it is true, and Staupitz and Luther pointed them out. But it is a mistake "to brand everything as corrupt and abusive."³⁹ The years on the eve of the Reformation and during the Reformation itself up to about 1524 were years in which the official preaching positions were the means by which reform-minded preachers could call for spiritual reforms and advocate unconventional theological ideas. The reform-minded preachers of the period before 1524 were so numerous and of such variety that one scholar has spoken of a "wild growth" (*Wildwuchs*) of religious ideas in the early years of the German Reformation.⁴⁰ One may see the sermons of Staupitz as contributing to this "wild growth," or one may actually count Staupitz among the first preachers of the Reformation as such.

Secondly, it is significant that these sermons of 1512 include some critical thoughts which were delivered not to a select or academic audience, but to the general population of one of the most significant ecclesiastical centers north of the Alps. Evidently Staupitz's sermons in the vernacular were perceived as being of such significance that the local Benedictine nuns made special efforts to preserve them. Staupitz's fifth sermon, in particular, demonstrates the possibility of interpreting Matthew 16:18, even before the Reformation, in such a way as to identify Christ as the "Rock" in which we are to trust. Thirdly, Staupitz's sermons of 1512 demonstrate the high quality of preaching on the passion on the eve of the Reformation, and they support what has been pointed out by scholars of late-medieval sermonic literature, namely, that there were at the time sermons which centered on Christ and which fostered the spiritual imitation of Christ, without any emphasis on human merits or work-righteousness.⁴¹ The distinctions between the preaching of the Reformation and medieval preaching need more discrimination when one takes into consideration the christocentricity of these sermons.

Fourthly, one notices that Jesus is often spoken of as "God" in

Staupitz's sermons of 1512. The medieval conception of "three natures" in Christ (body, soul, and divinity) is a characteristic of these sermons. Fifthly, Staupitz attempted an actualization of the story of the passion by speaking of "bishops" when he was talking about the leaders of the Jews. With this actualization some criticism of the contemporary scene enters the sermons as the preacher delineates clearly a conception of the office of a bishop which, however, he does not see realized in his own time. Sixthly, despite his christocentricity and his attempts to remain close to the text (the biblical "story"), Staupitz is still medieval inasmuch as he draws from legendary material to embellish the biblical text. In the seventh place, his sermons display an anti-Jewish tendency which is especially strong when he contends that the Jews were responsible for not merely one flagellation, but two flagellations of Christ. (A detailed study of "the Jews" in the sermons of Staupitz would be useful but is, of course, impossible to undertake here). In the eighth place, finally, we do well to keep in mind that these sermons were delivered by the vicar general and superior of the religious order of Martin Luther more than five years before the Great Reformer posted his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517. One can, therefore, easily believe what Luther himself said about his monastic superior, namely, that his own christocentric teaching stemmed from him: "My good Staupitz said, 'One must keep one's eyes fixed on that man who is called Christ.' Staupitz is the one who started the teaching [of the gospel in our time]."⁴² "I have everything from Dr. Staupitz."⁴³ Staupitz was a "preacher of grace and cross."⁴⁴

The Endnotes

1. One may see the entire volume *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, edited by Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), which is dedicated to this subject, especially Ulrich Köpf, "Die Passion Christi in der lateinischen religiösen und theologischen Literatur des Spätmittelalters," 21-41, and Georg Steer, "Die Passion Christi bei den deutschen Bettelorden im 13. Jahrhundert," 52-75.
2. One may compare Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in*

the Reformation (London and New York: Longman, 1981), 10-14; Bernd Moeller, "Was wurde in der Frühzeit der Reformation in den deutschen Städten gepredigt?" *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 75, (1984), 176-193, covering the later years (1522 to 1529); Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "What Was Preached in German Cities in the Early Years of the Reformation? *Wildwuchs* Versus Lutheran Unity," *The Process of Change in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of Miriam Usher Chrisman*, eds. Phillip N. Bebb and Sherrin Marshall (Athens, Ohio: University Press, 1988), 81-96. On a more general note, one may see Bernd Moeller, "Piety in Germany around 1500," *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven Ozment (Chicago, 1971); idem, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1982). Popular piety in Germany around 1500 is studied also by Christoph Burger, "Volksfrömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500 im Spiegel der Schriften des Johannes von Paltz OESA," *Volksreligion im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, eds. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 1990), 307-327.

3. Johann von Staupitz, *Salzburger Predigten 1512. Eine textkritische Edition*, ed. Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen: Neuphilologische Fakultät, 1990). This edition was published independently from the planned complete edition of the works of Johann von Staupitz.
4. On the study of the life and works of Staupitz, one may see *125 Years of Staupitz Research: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies on Johannes von Staupitz (approximately 1468-1524)*, eds. Rudolf K. Markwald and Franz Posset, *Sixteenth Century Bibliography*, 31 (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1994, forthcoming).
5. One may compare Julius Rauscher, "Die ältesten Prädikaturen Württembergs," *Blätter für Württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (1921), 107-111.
6. One may compare the entry "Isny" in *Handbuch der historischen Buchbestände in Deutschland*, volume 8, ed. Wolfgang Kehr (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Olms-Weidmann, 1994), 17. A depiction of the title page of 1490 of Bonaventure's *Meditationes* occurs in *Praedikaturenbibliothek der evangelischen*

Nikolai-Kirche Isny im Allgäu (Munich and Zurich: Verlag Schnell und Steiner, 1976), 15; a depiction of the title page of Moses (presumably David) Kimchi (printed in Hagenau in 1519) is found on page 10. The author acknowledges with gratitude the help which he received from the Lutheran Pastor Johannes Ringwald (of Isny) in regard to the secondary literature on Isny.

7. One may compare Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (as in note 2), 11.
8. One may compare Burghart Wachinger, "Die Passion Christi und die Literatur," *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, 1.
9. One may compare John C. Jeske, "Luther the Preacher," *Luther Lives. In Commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of Martin Luther's Birth*, eds. Edward C. Fredrich, Siegbert W. Becker, and David P. Kuske (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1983), 21-32; Helmar Junghans, "Wittenberg and Luther: Luther and Wittenberg," *Martin Luther in Two Centuries*, eds. Terrence Dinovo and Robert Kolb (St. Paul, Minnesota: Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation Reformation Research Library, 1992), 17.
10. One may compare Irmgard HöB, "Humanismus und Reformation," *Geschichte Thüringens*, eds. Hans Patze and Walter Schlesinger (Cologne and Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1967), 1-145, here 51.
11. "... das sine wort und werk ainander glich seyn," as quoted in *Handbuch der historischen Buchbestände in Deutschland*, volume 8:17 (as in note 6 above).
12. A large number of later reformers were members of the Augustinian Order, while very few came from the Order of St. Dominic or the Order of St. Francis.
13. One may compare Johann Sallaberger, "Johann von Staupitz, die Stiftsprediger und die Mendikanten-Termineien in Salzburg," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige*, 93 (1982), 223-237.
14. One may compare Sallaberger, 244-254.
15. One may compare Schneider-Lastin (as in note 3), "Introduction,"

9-11.

16. A plan has been announced to make the writings of Staupitz available in a new critical edition of seven volumes in total. So far the first two volumes have appeared in reverse chronological order: Johann von Staupitz, *Sämtliche Schriften: Abhandlungen, Predigten, Zeugnisse*, eds. Lothar Graf zu Dohna and Richard Wetzel, in the series *Spätmittelalter und Reformation: Texte und Untersuchungen*, ed. Heiko Oberman (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter). Volume 1 (1987): *Lateinische Schriften I. Tübinger Predigten*, bearbeitet von Richard Wetzel. Volume 2 (1979): *Libellus de Executione Aeternae Praedestinationis*, bearbeitet von Lothar Graf zu Dohna und Richard Wetzel, mit der Übertragung von Christoph Scheurl; *Ein nutzbarliches Büchlein von der entlichen Volziehung ewiger Fürscheidung*, bearbeitet von Lothar Graf zu Dohna und Albrecht Endriss.
17. One may compare Schneider-Lastin, "Introduction," 8-9.
18. One may compare Burghart Wachinger, "Die Passion Christi und die Literatur," *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, 7.
19. Schneider-Lastin, 25.
20. On God's sweetness according to Augustine, Bernard, and Staupitz, one may see Franz Posset, "The Sweetness of God," *The American Benedictine Review*, 44 (1993), 143-178; idem, "Christi Dulcedo," *Cistercian Studies*, forthcoming.
21. Schneider-Lastin, 25-26. On the late medieval spiritual-theological concept of "deification," one may compare Franz Posset, "'Deification' in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 84 (1993), 103-126. One may note also the recent debate on *theosis*-deification in Luther's thought coming out of Finland.
22. Schneider-Lastin, 26.
23. "Die götlich perschon hat drei natur—ainen leib, ain leben und ain gothait . . .," Schneider-Lastin, 26-27. The concept of the three essences-natures of Christ may have been inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermo 3 in Vigilia Nativitatis Domini*, 9: "Verbum enim, et anima, et caro in unam convenere personam;

et haec tria unum, et hoc unum tria, non in confusione substantiae, sed unitate personae"; *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, IV:217:29-218:2. The concept is used also by the fourteenth-century author Marguerite Porete (who died in 1310) in chapter 14 of *The Mirror of a Simple Soul*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), 96. It is found again in the Augustinian Henry of Friemar (who died in 1350), who explicitly relies on Bernard in this regard in his *Tractatus de Incarnatione Verbi*, ed. Zumkeller, 136-137: "Hae autem tres substantiae fuerunt substantia Verbi, animae rationalis et ipsius carnis. Quae quidem tria sunt ita distantia, quod secundum Bernardum nequam possent misceri, nisi ea coniungeret 'glutinum Spiritus Sancti.'" Ludolf of Saxony (who died in 1378) also has the concept in *Vita Jesu Christi* I, 43a-44a, as identified by Schneider-Lastin, 26, note 12; Schneider-Lastin, however, does not take the Bernardine matrix of this concept into consideration. In his sermon 3 in Salzburg of 1523, Staupitz uses the concept again as quoted by Steinmetz, *Misericordia Dei: The Theology of Johannes von Staupitz in Its Late Medieval Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 147, note 3: "alle drey natur."

24. Schneider-Lastin, 27-28.
25. One may compare Fritz Oskar Schuppisser, "Schauen mit den Augen des Herzens," *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, 169-210, here 183-184. Artistic depictions as aides to meditation were not uncommon, as can be seen from Philip E. Webber, ed., *A Late Medieval Devotional Anthology from Salzburg ("Nonnberg Passion": Huntington Library HM 195). Commentary and Edition* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1990), which includes pictures allegedly stemming from the SalzburgNonnberg nunnery.
26. Schneider-Lastin, 28.
27. Schneider-Lastin, 57-59.
28. One may compare Wachinger, "Die Passion Christi und die Literatur," *Die Passion Christi in Literatur und Kunst des Spätmittelalters*, 8.
29. Schneider-Lastin, 59.
30. Schneider-Lastin, 60.

31. Schneider-Lastin, 60.
32. Schneider-Lastin, 60-61.
33. Schneider-Lastin, 61-62.
34. One may compare Karlfried Fröhlich, *Formen der Auslegung von Mt. 16,13-18 im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1963); one may also compare John E. Bigane, III, *Faith, Christ or Peter: Matthew 16:18 in Sixteenth-Century Roman Catholic Exegesis* (Washington: University Press of America, 1981).
35. ". . . ain kranker fels pistu auf den tag . . .," Schneider-Lastin, 62.
36. Schneider-Lastin, 63.
37. Schneider-Lastin, 63.
38. "Die ganz welt ist verführt; das man nit gedächt, auf Petre stuendt die kirchen, darumb ist er auch gefallen, das man säch und erkent, das alain auf Christum, den fels, zu pauen ist und sünst auf nimet," Schneider-Lastin, 64.
39. Jared Wicks, *Luther's Reform: Studies on Conversion and the Church* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1992), 7.
40. One may compare Franz Lau, *A History of the Reformation in Germany to 1555*, trans. Brian A. Hardy (London: Black, 1969). The author agrees with S. C. Karant-Nunn's defense of F. Lau's description against B. Moeller's reservations in this regard (on "wild growth").
41. See Adolar Zumkeller: "Das Ungenügen der menschlichen Werke bei den deutschen Predigern des Spätmittelalters," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie*, 81 (1959), 265-305.
42. ". . . Staupitz had die doctrinam angefangen," WA, TR, 1: 245:9-12 (no. 526); LW, 54:97.
43. "Ich hab all mein ding von Doctor Staupitz," WA, TR, 1:80, 6-7 (no. 173).
44. ". . . gratiae et crucis praeconem," WA, BW, 2:264, 48 (no. 376).