

replacing Staupitz in Wittenberg as Professor of Sacred Scripture. Luther advanced to the doctorate October 19, 1512, and then began preparing intensively for his first major lecture course.

The only extensive documentation of Luther's thought before 1513 is the set of marginal notes he left in a copy of Lombard's *Sentences*, apparently from 1509-10. The notes do not mention the favorite Ockhamist theme of God's absolute power and the overarching freedom of the Creator which stamps every created relationship with the impress of freely-chosen, historical contingency. Luther also showed no interest in fallen humanity's powers and abilities, which Ockham had seen as considerable and as having a definite moral and spiritual role in preparation for receiving justifying grace. Luther, the young *Sententiarius*, expressed distaste for the "rancid philosophy" of Aristotle (WA 9, 43, 5), and tried to guide students away from the labyrinthine theorizing of the scholastics and toward Augustine and the other Fathers (29,1). Although Luther did not identify sin and concupiscence at this time, he did write pointedly on the perilous condition of fallen humanity, which is pulled toward rebellion and can only with difficulty obey God's law (75,11). In discussing the gift of grace, Luther portrayed the Holy Spirit as working immediately on the human will in eliciting acts of love without the created intermediary of the habit of created grace or charity (43,2). We glimpse in Luther's notes from 1509-10 a dramatic conception of human life, with the person experiencing on one side the downward drag of concupiscence, but also standing before God, who is always immediately at hand. God is right here — "*semper praesto*" (71,35) — to offer gracious assistance and guidance and so to make spiritual progress quite possible if one will only allow him to have the upper hand in shaping one's heart.

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becoming ~ shareholder in a copper-mining enterprise. Martin's later reminiscences stress the severity of his parents' domestic regime and the somber piety, tinged with superstition, of his earliest milieu. Martin spent nine years in the grammar school of Mansfeld (1488-97), a year at the Cathedral School of Magdeburg, and then his mid-teen years at Eisenach under the care of his mother's well-to-do family, the Lindemanns, who helped foster in Martin both a deep piety and the development of his native verbal skills.

In the Spring of 1501, Martin entered the University of Erfurt to study Aristotelian logic, natural philosophy, and ethics in an atmosphere dominated by the incessant speculative questioning of the "modern way" of William of Ockham (died 1347) and Gabriel Biel (died 1495). Martin's early semesters in the arts faculty brought him no great success, but by the time he gained the M.A. in early 1505 he ranked second among seventeen graduates. Under determined paternal direction, he entered the faculty of law in May 1505.

But in June Martin suddenly left Erfurt, probably because of the threat of plague, to stay for a time with his parents. While returning to Erfurt on July 2, 1505, he was overtaken by a storm and in terror cried out for the help of St. Anne, promising to enter a religious order and take vows if he were spared death or injury by a lightning bolt. Sixteen years later Luther prefaced his polemical attack on monastic vows with a letter to his father in which he claimed that he had not entered religious life freely but under the compulsion of a vow uttered in the face of sudden death (LW 48, 332). In spite of these circumstances, Martin was received into the Erfurt house of the Hermits of St. Augustine on July 17, 1505, and admitted to the profession of vows in September 1506. Luther's choice of the Augustinians is to his credit, since their Erfurt house belonged to a reformed ("observant") branch of the order, and it was respected for its promotion of learning among its members. In the monastery Martin immersed himself in the world of Scripture, beginning that avid reading of the Vulgate Bible which made him a master in citing its Latin text. Some months

study of Gabriel Biel's *Exposition of the Canon of the Mass* prepared him for ordination to the priesthood in April 1507. He later reported that as he celebrated his first mass he was struck with terror at the words of consecration as he sensed God's majestic presence. At the same time he again faced his earthly father who was still not fully reconciled to his son's religious vocation.

His order destined Martin for higher studies, and in the course of his program he spent a year (1508-09) teaching Aristotle's *Ethics* in the newly-opened University of Wittenberg in Electoral Saxony. Here Luther came under the stabilizing influence of an older confrere, Johann von Staupitz, whose spiritual guidance helped allay the anxiety left from Luther's melancholy broodings about predestination and the possible inadequacy of his penances. Staupitz taught Luther to look steadily at Jesus Christ the Savior, and in later years Luther gratefully recalled the help he got from this mentor. In March 1509, after some months with Aristotle, Martin wrote to an old friend that he was finding no relish in philosophy and would gladly move on to theology, where he could deal with ultimate questions, since theology "investigates the kernel of the nut, the germ of the wheat, and the marrow of the bones" (WABr 1, 5, 43; p. 17).

Luther was back in Erfurt in 1509 to begin the prescribed year of lecturing to undergraduates on the medieval textbook, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. But Luther had to interrupt his studies in late 1510 to travel to Rome. There he helped deliver the protest of the Erfurt Augustinians against Staupitz's plan to amalgamate the order's reformed and non-reformed congregations in Saxony. The protest bore no fruit in its defense of Erfurt's observant tradition, but it did give Martin the opportunity for pilgrim visits to the highly-indulged Roman shrines and stational churches. He also took the opportunity to make a general confession in Rome, but later he related that this brought him no lasting inner peace. Upon his return to Germany, Martin was again called to Wittenberg, where he was reconciled to Staupitz and directed to continue studies with a view to

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## 3

### Luther's Life and Career to 1512

The sixteenth century opened upon a Europe in which the pace of life was quickening. Ideas were circulating more rapidly, and this produced heightened yearnings. More effective individuals were at hand in the most diverse sectors of life. We shift now to one of those individuals, Martin Luther, whose pre-university studies were ending as the century opened. But let us keep in mind that expectations were rising all over Europe, and people were on the lookout for, among other things, better instruction in how to live as believers and how to approach God in prayer and worship.

The second son of Hans and Margarete Luder had been born on November 10, 1483, and the following day was baptized Martin in honor of the saint of the day, Martin of Tours. The birthplace, Eisleben, was in the domain of the counts of Mansfeld, and like the other places in which Luther spent his life lies today in the German Democratic Republic. In 1484 the family settled in Mansfeld, where the hard-working Hans sealed his rise from peasantry by