

**500th Anniversary of the Reformation:
Theologia Germanica— the second most
influential book in Martin Luther's life**

“Even when we think that we see farther than our predecessors, we should remember that it is only because we are sitting on their shoulders”

- Richard Elliot Friedman

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Historical Background: Bogomils/Cathars



Bogomils: Doctrines and Practices

- Attempt to revive the original teaching of Christ; Bulgaria-France-Italy-Bosna (928 – 1463)
- “Christian heresy” vs “true Christians”, “good men”, “good women”, Cathars, Albigensians
- Emphasis on Scripture: New Testament, the Gospel of John; allegorical interpretation; Lord’s Prayer
- Read in the vernacular (Old Slavonic, Provençal), equal access to ecclesiastical literature
- Confession without a priest – equality, brotherhood
- Baptism through the Holy Spirit, *consolamentum* – vital role for man’s salvation; belief in reincarnation
- Divine love; the *consolamentum* was intended to restore the believer to God’s love
- Christ - a teacher, example; equated with God

Bogomils: Doctrines and Practices

- Elevated role of women, equal to men
- Mutual, direct God-man relationship: ***Bog-o-mil***, i.e. “Beloved of God”, “God is beloved by me”
- God is united and one, but His manifestation is dualistic, occurs through the interaction of opposite pairs; creation myth in *The Secret Book*
- Organization: “**perfects**”, life of perfection (Matt 5:48) and “**believers**”; fasting, prayers; ascetic life as itinerant preachers
- Cathars in France – 1022, Cathar Church (1167)
- **Public debates with Catholic priests**
- Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229)
- **Formation of Dominican (1216) and Franciscan (1209) orders**
- Inquisition (1233); last Cathar burnt (1321)

***Theologia Germanica* – Historical Context**

- **Avignon Papacy (1309-78)**, power struggle between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, many clerics were forbidden to perform Catholic rites (the Interdict of 1324)
- **Origin of *The Frankfurter (T.G.)* – c. 1350**, anonymous manuscript, supposed author – “member of the Teutonic Order”; also associated with the Friends of God (FOG)
- **Friends of God**: medieval lay mystical group, c. **1340** in Basel, part of the German mystical movement/Dominican/Rhineland mysticism;
- **Meister Eckhart (1260- c.1328)**, a Dominican preacher and theologian and his heirs John Tauler and Henry Suso. M.E. held high posts in **Paris**, Saxony, Bohemia, Strasbourg, Cologne. Well-known for his popular German sermons and work with pious lay groups; distinctive expository style; tried as a heretic (1326-28).

***Theologia Germanica* – Historical Context**

John (Johannes) Tauler (c. 1300-1361)

- Dominican theologian and preacher from Strasburg, one of the leaders of FOG, spent his exile in Basel (c. 1339-43), mentioned them in his admirable sermons; he is also quoted in *T.G.*;
- appealed to the clergy not to forsake his flock; plaque in Strasburg (1347-49);
- Luther drew heavily on him – e.g., the concept of “universal priesthood”, doctrine of grace.

Theologia Germanica – Historical Context

- “**Friends of God**” (from John 15:15 – “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.”)
- Their operations extended along the Rhine, from Basel to Cologne, Bavaria, Strasburg, Nuremberg. Efforts to revive the spiritual life of those around them.

Friends of God: doctrines, way of living

- 1) Self-renunciation
- 2) The activity of the Spirit of God in all believers
- 3) An intimate union is possible between God and man
- 4) The worthlessness of religion based on fear or the hope of reward; “a sincere heart and a self-sacrificing life”
- 5) No “religious duties”/rites and ceremonies “can either give piece to man’s conscience”, nor give him strength against adversity
- 6) The essential **equality** of the laity and clergy, though for the sake of order and discipline the organization of the Church was needed; reform from within the Church
- 7) Members came from all strata of society, no discrimination of rank and sex
- 8) Did not renounce property, no asceticism; preaching, writing, and conversations; no interest in political and hierarchical power; learned, pious, and practical Christians.

Theologia Germanica

- “Next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book has ever come into my hands from which I have learned more of God and Christ, and man and all things that are.” - Martin Luther
- Viewed as pivotal in provoking Luther’s actions and the subsequent Reformation; first partial edition by Luther in 1516; **1517**; second edition in 1518 based on a new manuscript.
- Number of editions and translations: 8 manuscripts; about 200, published between 16th-20th c.; German, Latin, French, English (1648), Flemish, Swedish; was banned by the Catholic Church (1612 – until late 20c.); 2 camps: proponents (Arndt, Spener, Arnold) & detractors (orthodox Lutherans)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

A reaction against the turmoil in 14th century Christendom, the conflict between the throne and the altar, also against abstract scholasticism.

- **Renounce** all things for God's sake, give up our own will, live according to God's will
- Emphasis on **inner life**, i.e., know yourself by going within, what God is, how he will use us; "the highest art"
- "**Union with God**" is possible here and now; a preferred term to "salvation"

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **God-Man relationship:** mutual, direct

“Man could not without God, and God should not without man. Wherefore God took human nature...and was made man, and man was made divine.” (p.24)

- **The principle of dualism, binary pairs:** unmanifested God (the Godhead)-the manifested world (the physical world, man, “creatures”); perfect-imperfect; unknown-known; abstract-concrete; substance-works; heaven-hell; “True Light”(God)- “False Light”(Nature); God, “the Eternal Goodness”- Lucifer, “the Evil Spirit”; Lucifer(the Antichrist)-Christ; “True Love”- “False Love”; obedience-disobedience; inner man-outward man.

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

“Yet it is possible to *every* man ...to be rightly called Godlike” and “a partaker of the divine nature” (p.41, 2 Peter 1:4). How can this be achieved?

- “**Disobedience** and sin are the same thing”, it is man’s fault, God is “guiltless of sin”; self-will, ownership
- **True obedience**: “being quit of himself, that is of his I, and Me, and Self, and Mine, and the like.”(p.39)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Choice** – between disobedience (hell) and obedience (heaven); possessed by the Evil Spirit or by the Spirit of God:

“Men have more likeness to the Evil Spirit than to God...Be simply and wholly bereft of Self.” (p.48)

- **Free will** – “nothing is so free as the will”; misuse, “lawless freedom of license” – e.g., Brethren of the Free Spirit
- **Hell and heaven are on earth:** dynamic cycle of good and bad -“*two good, safe ways* for a man in this present time.” They are like the wind (John 3:8). ***Man is “as safe in hell as is in heaven,*** and so long as man is on earth, it is possible for him to pass oftentimes from the one into the other.” (p.35)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- The path to God is **through Christ** – a model, a *teacher* rather than a Savior
- **Christ** “taught in words and fulfilled in works” (integrity); “so utterly bereft of self”, “a house and habitation of God” (p.39), Jesus’s life - an example to follow.
- Dual nature of Christ and human beings:
 - 1) inner man of Christ – in eternal peace; his divine nature associated with his right eye
 - 2) outward man, “in perfect suffering”, left eye seeing into time and creatures (p.29)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

Inward-outward man dynamic:

I. **Outward life:** *morality/virtuous life*, good works, renounce all self-will and possession, follow God's will. Cultivate positive qualities: humility (poorness of spirit), lack of pride, no evil thoughts, joy, patience, diligence, perseverance; be like the sun (pp.55-56).

“No man cometh unto Me, except the Father draw him” (John 6:44)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Reciprocity:** the more man perseveres, the more willing God is to help a man and bring him to the best in himself.

When **learning a new art**, four things are needful:

- 1) A great desire and constant endeavor
- 2) An example from which to learn
- 3) Watch your master, be obedient to him
- 4) “Put your own hand to the work and practice it with all industry” (p.48)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Stages in discipleship** – “No one can be made perfect in a day,” even Christ needed time.

Four stages:

- 1) “give up one’s own will and natural inclinations”
- 2) “separate and cleanse himself from all sins and evil ways”
- 3) “humbly take the cross and follow Christ”
- 4) “Let him take and receive example and instruction, ...counsel and teaching from devout and perfect servants of God”.

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

II. Inward life:

The outward life—only the beginning, a way to access the true inward life; when man is *nothing* to himself, the true inward life begins.

- *After* rejecting “all temporal things”, one may “become *perfect* in a life of contemplation.” (p.37)
- The man that is in part will see “that all the parts are united in the Perfect, in One Substance.” (p.98)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Three stages** to attain **Perfection**; each of these stages has its own three ways to be achieved:

- 1) purification

- 2) enlightening:

“by the practice of virtue and *good works*”
(active)

- 3) **union with God:**

- (1) “by pureness and singleness of heart”

- (2) by love

- (3) contemplation of God (passive)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Union with God** does not depend on man's works, exercises, or words. For that we must be "*wholly at one* with the One Eternal Will of God" (p.57). Grace? Christ's *life*-an example of how God dwells in the man.
- **The state of the true enlightened being** – "unspeakable", "let him who who would know it, gave his whole *diligence* that he may enter therein" (p.47); what "further would happen to the soul, or would be revealed unto her, ..none can declare or guess" (p.98)
- Be free from pre-conditioning; individual path

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Perfect knowledge** cannot be obtained by reading the Scripture – this is “*belief*”(p.79); danger of **reason-**deceives itself and others that it is “the true Eternal Light”(p.46),
 - but by “forsaking the part,” denying oneself, and following Jesus (i.e. experiential) (p.45).
- **Divine Light and Divine Love** – components in the “Godlike man”; “But ... this Light or knowledge is worth nothing without *love*.” He who has only knowledge of God without love “will never be *saved*” (p.78)
- **False Love** – for the sake of reward, belongs to nature, which “loves nothing beside herself”(p.79)
- **Love**: “Knowledge and light profit nothing without Love. We see this in the Evil Spirit...The same is true of: *virtue, justice, truth, God and divine things*... “And this Love makes a man one with God that he can nevermore be separated from Him.” (p.76-7)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

- **Faith:** 1) to believe (e.g. “the articles of the Christian faith”); 2) to know a certain Truth “*by experience*, else you will never come to know it truly. This is the *faith* of which Christ speaketh” (p.88) – i.e., gnosis
- **Man united with God:** God’s counsel and teaching is “*the privilege* of the inward man,” after that he is united with God. And where there is such a union, the *outward* man is taught and ordered by the *inward* man so that no outward commandment or teaching is needed. But the commandments and laws of men belong to the outer man, and are needful for those men who know nothing better ...and would become like...beasts” (p.70-1).
- Four sorts of men with regard to order & laws: burden, reward, wicked ones mock the rules, the enlightened ones act from love alone.

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

Last counsel for the God seekers:

- To “give our whole *diligence* to amend our state; and this from love and *not from fear*, in all things and at all times. We must not seek our own, either in things *spiritual*, or in things *natural*.”
- In *two* commandments all others are *briefly* comprehended:
 - 1) ***To love the Lord*** with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind,
 - 2) “and ***to love thy neighbor as thyself***.” (p.100-1)

Main themes in *Theologia Germanica*

State of freedom

“These men,” i.e. the enlightened ones, “are in a state of freedom, because they have lost the *fear of pain or hell*, and the *hope of reward or heaven*, but are living in *pure submission* to the Eternal Goodness, in perfect freedom of *fervent love*. This mind was in Christ in perfection, and is also in His followers” (p.33)

Luther's Theology

- “Whether or not one is satisfied with Luther’s stance, it should be clear what the Reformer wanted to say by publishing *Theologia*. He wanted to say that he had tasted the power of the book and found it consonant with his experience.” (G. Arnold, *Impartial History of Church and Heresy*, 1699-1700)
- “Luther’s theological *intuition* told him that T.G. and Johann Tauler described the Christian condition in ways germane to the Christian faith...the ways of personality-mysticism (trust and forgiveness in this life), *experiential Christian knowledge*. And Luther’s kinship with FOG thinking endured throughout his life.” (Hoffman, p.20)

Luther's Theology

T.G., FOG, Tauler

1) Life according to God's will

2) Inner (the soul or spirit) - outer person

3) Mutual, direct God-man relationship

Luther's stance

1) Humility, penance; **doctrine of law** (destruction of the self) **and gospel** (God's love, promise of forgiveness, and new life)

2) Redefined: "inner," or "spiritual" refers to "**trust in God**"; "outer" or "fleshly"-all against that trust

3) Penance is not limited to a confession to a priest, directly to God; relationship of love & trust; rejection of distracting forces, incl. ecclesiastical authorities

Luther's Theology

T.G., FOG, Tauler

4) "Union with God" is possible here and now; both Grace and "good works" are essential. Christ as a role model.

5) Equality among FOG

Luther's stance

4) "**Salvation**" via God's gift of **Grace**, rather than "good works" alone (Catholic doctrine). **Christ** "raises" the believer, his "savior." Man can never become one with God, except via faith in **God's Word**.

5) - Justification by **faith** (*Sola fide*)- immediate access to God for all, not just for mystically gifted monks & nuns; no asceticism.

- "**Universal priesthood**" of all the baptized: a principle, reduced respect for clerical hierarchy; context - a letter to nobility in Germany.

Luther's Theology

T.G., FOG, Tauler

Luther's stance

6) Free will vs false freedom, licentiousness

6) “**Bondage** of the human will” vs “the will liberated by the Holy Spirit through faith”

7) Dualism

7) Opposite aspects in human life: **two kinds of righteousness** (passive-active); **two realms** (heavenly/right-handed - earthly/left-handed; vertical-horizontal)

8) Preaching – important for FOG

8) Preaching and **sermon** replaced the Mass at the center of church worship. God is present in Scripture, speaks to his people: 1) has expectations for human behavior, 2) conveys the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. **Bible's translation in German. Printing revolution.**

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