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History 586-B, Undergraduate Research Seminar on the Middle Ages

Spring 2015

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The Perspective on Luther from a Lutheran Historian

Abstract:

Ernest G. Schwiebert (b. 1895 – d. 2000) numbered among the Reformation and medieval historians of the early twentieth century who came out of the Ivy League; in his specific case, Cornell. Schwiebert's legacy places him in high regard among Reformation and particularly Lutheran scholars, but in terms of a larger historiography figures such as Roland H. Bainton and Preserved Smith generally overshadow him. Nevertheless, Schwiebert's research provides a unique perspective on the Reformation as he used primarily German sources due to his time spent teaching in Germany whilst he wrote his book, *Luther and His Times*. Schwiebert also provides a unique view of Luther in that he himself confessed the Lutheran faith, and thus viewed his familiarity with the Reformer's work as an advantage. Overall, Schwiebert's view on Luther places Luther as a product of medieval times, who thought like a medieval man would have and in many ways reasoned like one, thereby questioning the distinction between medieval and early modern figures.

Essay:

The Reformation left a lasting divide in Christendom, which echoed into every cranny of the faith, including the universities. Protestant scholars, from contemporaries of Martin Luther onward, eagerly took up the burden of chronicling the deeds of the German reformer and most persecuted theologians who preceded him – or rather who could be construed as such. Protestant historiography frequently frames medieval reformers John Wycliffe (also spelled Wyclif, Wycliffe, or Wickliffe) and Jan Hus (also spelled John Hus or Huss) as Luther's spiritual forbearers in a progression from Roman Catholicism to whatever brand of Protestantism the historian so chose to write about. The trend to emphasize the conflicts between the medieval Catholics and the reformers in an attempt to establish connections between Wycliffe, Hus, and Luther exists even today.

However, within American Luther scholarship, an alternative view of Luther exists. Ernest G. Schwiebert (b. 1895 – d. 2000) described Luther less as a progressive figure and more as a conservative individual. The work of Schwiebert reveals insights into Luther's ideas which classify Luther as a medieval intellectual who lived during the reign of Renaissance popes, rather than the progressive-minded philosopher whom historians often portray. The Luther that Schwiebert writes about stands more as an equal to Wycliffe and Hus than as their spiritual progress. Schwiebert's characterization of a medieval Luther suggests a greater influence of the medieval period than the analyses of contemporary Protestant scholars who more value the Reformer himself.

In the context of American Reformation scholarship, Schwiebert holds popularity among Lutheran scholars. A review of his 1996 publication, *The Reformation*, called him, “a tireless contributor to the work of the Center for Reformation Research and the Missouri Synod Lutheran community of scholars.”¹ Schwiebert appealed to many scholars of the same faith, and spent much of his career working to develop a history of the efforts surrounding the denomination. While at the Lutheran-run Valparaiso University, students and faculty asked him to publish his lectures.² The lectures alone show the wealth of knowledge he possessed even though they do not take the form of an organized book; their demand shows the audience he found at Valparaiso. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s (hereafter, LCMS) Concordia Publishing House, who printed *Luther and His Times* called it “a monumental undertaking” and boasted that no other work about Luther had appeared like Schwiebert’s.³ His work pleased the heads of the church body to which he confessed enough that he published with them in 1950. Almost certainly by nature of his affiliation with the church, Lutheran scholars held him in high esteem.

His peers regarded him as thorough, but wordy. The year 1950 saw the publication not only of Schwiebert’s *Luther and His Times*, but also of Roland H. Bainton’s *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Bainton’s book contained about half of the content that Schwiebert’s did, and it presented Luther’s life in a much different voice, but the timing of their two publications caused frequent comparison of the two historians. Belmont University’s Steven H. Simpler writes in *Roland H. Bainton: An Examination of His Reformation Historiography*, that of the two

¹ Sunshine, Glenn S. "Reviewed Work: The Reformation by Ernest G. Schwiebert." *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 1997: 1365-1366. 1365.

² Schwiebert, Ernest G. *Reformation Lectures Delivered at Valparaiso University*. Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University, 1937. IV.

³Schwiebert. *Luther and His Times*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950. IV.

biographies, *Luther and His Times* featured “particular emphasis on the philosophical, theological, and socio-geographical factors that contributed to Luther’s life and thought” while Bainton’s work “[comprised] an analysis of the reformer’s religious development.”⁴⁵ Simpler points out that Bainton and Schwiebert used different methods to study the life of Luther; Bainton focused on Luther’s religious life while Schwiebert went into great detail about the world which surrounded Luther. Simpler points out that Bainton and Schwiebert came to similar conclusions on Luther’s decision prior to the monastery, but later notes that Schwiebert took a view of Luther’s conversion based on his environment rather than his personality.⁶⁷ Simpler’s treats Schwiebert as a historian who looks at the issues surrounding the figure rather than focusing as much on the individual himself, as Bainton did.

A related, popular milieu claims that Schwiebert saw the Reformation as an intellectual movement which Luther happened to lead, rather than a revolution spurred on by Luther’s efforts. A contemporary of both Bainton and Schwiebert’s, Harold J. Grimm, claimed that Schwiebert presented the Reformation as an intellectual, social movement, while Bainton presented it as a revival centered on Luther. In Grimm’s review, he claims that while Schwiebert acknowledged that several outside forces complicated the Reformation, Bainton maintained that “all political, economic, and social interests were peripheral to Luther’s overwhelming religious interests.”⁸ According to Grimm, Schwiebert saw the Reformation itself as a product of its environment, but Bainton considered Luther as a sort of author to the Reformation. Grimm

⁴ Simpler, Steven H. *Roland H. Bainton: An Examination of His Reformation Historiography*. Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985. 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸ Grimm, Harold J. "Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther. by Roland H. Bainton; Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective. by Ernest G. Schwiebert." *Renaissance News*, 1951: 30-32. 31.

further explains the difference between the two, by examining Schwiebert's treatment of Luther as a professor. He writes that Schwiebert formulated, "an objective account which destroys many legends and presents Luther as... a scholar who was willing to reach a basis of agreement with others."⁹ However, Grimm does add a caveat to his review of Schwiebert. He writes that Schwiebert does not include much on Luther's life after the early days of the Reformation.¹⁰ Grimm's review compares Bainton and Schwiebert's books on Luther, and points out that Schwiebert views the Reformation as a social, intellectual movement that occurred naturally out of the Middle Ages.

One critical view of Schwiebert claims that he wrote such a detailed accounts of Germany at the time of the Reformation that he hampered access to the material which he tried to provide to the reader. G. Everett Arden of Augustana Theological Seminary, now the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, wrote in his review of Schwiebert's *Luther and His Times* that the sheer amount of detail, down to the janitors' salaries, slowed down the pace and readability.¹¹ Arden treats it both as a problem and virtue for Schwiebert; he praises as valuable source of information but criticizes that it may not have wide appeal. Similarly, Central Connecticut State's Glenn R. Sunshine describes Schwiebert's *The Reformation* as difficult to read due to the old-fashioned style in which he writes. He calls Schwiebert, a "link to a school of historiography a century old, a time when political history and detailed narrative were the order of the day."¹² The detailed narrative which Schwiebert provides focuses too much on the political sphere,

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ Arden, G. Everett. "Reviewed Work: Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective." *The Journal of Religion*, 1951: 217-218. 217.

¹² Sunshine, 1366.

Sunshine claims, and therefore makes it difficult for the reader to ingest the information he offers. He also criticizes Schwiebert's terminology within *The Reformation*. Sunshine claims that Schwiebert uses many terms from German historians and overemphasizes "the Germanness of his subject matter."¹³ Sunshine fears that Schwiebert gives the Germans too great a role in the Reformation, and that the author's familiarity with German culture will lose the modern reader. While considered highly detailed about the environment of the Reformation, critics of Schwiebert claim that the amount of content, especially focused on Late Medieval Germany, hampers reading as does some of the antiquated and foreign terms he uses.

Schwiebert's tendency to frequently refer back to the German terms represents a particular flavor of his scholarship overall – a fusion of German and American influences, including the culture of his own Lutheran faith. Schwiebert, born in Ohio of German ancestry, trained under leading American scholars in the methods set down by the American medievalist historians. However, he spoke German fluently and had known the language as a boy, and then worked in Germany prior to publishing *Luther and His Times*. Furthermore, Schwiebert's own views as a Lutheran greatly affected his scholarship; especially since many of his colleagues followed various forms of English Protestantism. His American medieval training, combined with his experiences with German culture and the minority of his Lutheran faith amongst his colleagues created a stark contrast with the historian of Schwiebert's day.

Before receiving his Ph. D, Schwiebert learned either from American medievalists themselves or from people whom the medievalists trained. His first encounter with a medievalist came at the University of Chicago while pursuing graduate studies. Schwiebert recalled that he

¹³ Ibid., 1366.

owed Chicago's James Westfall Thompson a large debt for introducing him to the study of the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Thompson's influence set Schwiebert on a course that led to further graduate studies in the field of European history, but Schwiebert's interest centered on the Reformation, in which Thompson did not specialize. Schwiebert went to Cornell for his Ph. D, where the leading Reformation expert in America, Preserved Smith, worked. Smith studied under Columbia University's James Harvey Robinson, who believed that the scientific study of history led to the betterment of mankind.¹⁵ Robinson's idea of the "New History" which owed much to science and objectivity of fact lent a progressive tone to Smith's work. Smith shared Robinson's belief, which bore more than a few similarities to the ideas which American medievalist Charles Homer Haskins espoused.¹⁶ Smith both taught and practiced techniques similar to Haskins, and worked, if not in the same field, in the next over. Haskins's contributions and presence in the writings appear in the preface of *The Age of Reformation* where Smith thanked Haskins for his edits to the text.¹⁷ Haskins's help in the writings of Preserved Smith blurred the line between medievalist and Reformation scholar, this lack of distinction affected Smith's student, Schwiebert.

Schwiebert's focus on the Reformation and its close proximity to the medieval period culminated in his doctoral thesis, thanks to Preserved Smith at Cornell. Schwiebert admits Smith's influence in *The Reformation*, where he credits Preserved Smith, his mentor, with establishing him as Reformation historian: Smith asked Schwiebert to write a doctoral thesis on the University of Wittenberg at the time of Martin Luther.¹⁸ Smith provided more than simply an

¹⁴ Schwiebert, *The Reformation*, x

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁶ Arnold, John. *What is Medieval History?* Cambridge: Polity, 2008. 14.

¹⁷ Smith, vi.

¹⁸ Schwiebert, *The Reformation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. ix

assignment for Schwiebert; he also provided a livelihood. Schwiebert credited his suggested doctoral thesis and his career in general to Smith's aid. In *Luther and His Times*, he claims that Smith "first kindled the flame that [continued] to consume every available hour of time for over two decades."¹⁹ Smith's influence on Schwiebert provided impetus not only for the immediate task at hand, but for a book that came to publication twenty years later. Medievalism's influence appears more directly when Schwiebert himself acknowledges both the American medievalist school of thought and the ideals of the German Leopold von Ranke in his work. In *Luther and His Times*, Schwiebert claims that the need for a new perspective stems from a scarcity of historians who approach the subject matter "as actually was," like von Ranke would have, and remarked that "to the historian there can be no higher tribute" than Robinson's comments on the mostly objective work of Heinrich Böhmer as individual without religious or historical bias.²⁰ Schwiebert praised the objectivity attempted by the American and German medievalists. Overall, Schwiebert's career as a historian benefitted greatly from the foundations laid down for him by the American medievalists, who learned in the style of von Ranke, and it provided Schwiebert himself with a side interest in the Middle Ages.

German cultural influences appeared early on Schwiebert's career as a scholar, beginning from his childhood and continuing throughout his professional life. In the preface to *The Reformation*, Schwiebert thanks Jacobus Bomgarten, a pastor who had taught him – then a five-year-old boy - in parochial school how to write Germanic script.²¹ Even as a boy at school, Schwiebert learned the German language, and became exposed to that culture. Schwiebert's

¹⁹ Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, vii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ Schwiebert, *The Reformation*, x.

association with the LCMS, an organization which called itself “The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States” until 1947, can even be seen as a German tendency.²² The older members of the congregations he would have attended spoke German at home and most likely at church. However, association with Germany continued through his service in the First World War into his career after the Second World War, where he served as a guest professor at the University of Erlangen.

In Germany, the research Schwiebert did with the resources both at the University of Erlangen and with scholars at Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg (hereafter, MLU) exposed him to influences previously unexplored in English speaking historiography. Schwiebert found that the Reformation period already had a plethora of writers involved therewith, as far it concerned German history.²³ The German people had long held Luther as a cultural hero, and writers of nearly every literary art had written about him. However, in 1917, despite the Great War, the German Empire experienced a bit of a revival in Luther scholarship in honor of the 400th anniversary of the post of his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg.²⁴ 1917 saw publications from several authors whom Schwiebert drew from when composing *Luther and His Times*, but especially Otto Scheel, whose two volume biography of Luther, Schwiebert referred to extensively, and Walter Köhler, whom Schwiebert specifically thanks in his preface. These two historians provide examples of the German historiography in which Schwiebert actively studied.

²² *About Us: Our History*. 2015. <http://www.lcms.org/aboutus/history> (accessed May 10, 2015).

²³ Schwiebert, Ernest G. *Luther and His Times*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950. 3.

²⁴ Köhler, W., and A. E. and W. Fr. "Reformation und Gegenreformation." *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1919: 335-351. 341.

Köhler, as a scholar of the Reformation, kept tabs on the relationship between the Germans and Martin Luther. Walter Köhler himself presented a volume titled, in English, *Martin Luther and the German Reformation* two years before Schwiebert's *Luther and His Times*, which he prefaced with the declaration that, "the Reformation as a cultural problem is the theme of this book; a Luther biography is not my aim, nor a compendium of German history."²⁵ For an author even to discuss Luther in German, he entered a deep pool of scholastic tradition and his work had to compete with much even to be read; it also gave Schwiebert plenty of source material to dig through. Even in his own analysis, Köhler noted the extensive connection between Luther and the German people continued into the twentieth century, because Luther represented the German people on a greater stage.²⁶ In the German people's love of Luther, described by Köhler, Schwiebert saw bias that he thought might cripple his research. However, Schwiebert returned to the training of his mentor Smith for his research. Schwiebert claimed that he looked scholars who conducted their business in the manner of von Ranke, who tried to view history "as it really was." Schwiebert saw one such scholar, who had the methods of the medievalist von Ranke, in Scheel. Scheel's two volume biography on Luther bears many similarities to Schwiebert's *Luther and His Times*. Both of them, unlike most of the English language books on Luther, spent a great deal of time on Luther's childhood, education, and the setting on which the Reformation drama played out. Schwiebert perhaps saw inspiration for his own work there, but he definitely had found a predecessor. Not only Schwiebert, but the greater community of German historians

²⁵ "Die Reformation als Kulturproblem ist das Thema dieses Buches; eine Lutherbiographie ist nicht meine Ablicht, ebensowenig ein Compendium deutscher Geschichte." Köhler, Walther. "Martin Luther und die deutsche Reformation." *hathitrust.org*. n.d. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89097239214> (accessed March 27, 2015).
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²⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-120.

recognized the value of Scheel's work.²⁷ The favorable reaction from the German academics would have doubtless proved a more than credible character reference for Schwiebert.

Schwiebert's love for the German culture and Germany itself probably came from his upbringing in Ohio, speaking the German language as a child, and attending a "German Lutheran" church. Synodical heritage aside, the Lutheran church at the time of Schwiebert's career fostered a scholarly tradition with frequent associations with religious studies. While Schwiebert taught at Valparaiso University, he lectured during the administration of O.P. Kretzmann, who heavily emphasized the connection that historians should make with matters of the faith. Kretzmann presided over Valparaiso for twenty-eight years, and he employed the idea that "a true university... would stand squarely and courageously in the Christian tradition."²⁸ For Kretzmann, learning had no place without religious beliefs to back it up, and he demanded his staff abide by that rule. An upbringing in Lutheran church provided an educational and spiritual background for several religious scholars, most famously, Jaroslav Pelikan. Pelikan, a prodigy with a Ph. D from the University of Chicago at age 22, received a B.D. from the Lutheran Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, run by the German Lutheran Synod, and remained a Lutheran from 1923 to 1998, when he converted to the Eastern Orthodox faith.²⁹ Pelikan's father once proudly claimed that Jaroslav, "combined German Lutheran scholarship with Slavic orthodox piety."³⁰ Pelikan stands out as perhaps the most stellar of Lutheran scholars merely for the broad stroke of his interests. In 1948, Pelikan and Schwiebert both published articles on Luther; years

²⁷ Scharff, Alexander. "Otto Scheel." *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1955: 436-439. 436-437.

²⁸ Kretzmann, O. P. "The Idea of a University." *The Christian Scholar* (Penn State University Press), 1961: 312-318. 312.

²⁹ Hotchkiss, Valerie and Patrick Henry. *Orthodoxy and Western Culture: A Collection of Essays Honoring Jaroslav Pelikan on His Eightieth Birthday*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005. 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 7.

later, Pelikan's interests strayed far afield and to the east. However, Pelikan provides another instance of the Lutheran scholastic background which also provided Schwiebert with his insights.

Lutherans, though frequently interested in religious history, could hardly stand out as more than a minority in a country with the number of Protestant denominations America has. In English-speaking scholarship, most of the Reformation and medieval scholars who trained, worked with, and preceded Schwiebert subscribed to different variations of English Protestantism. Prior to the twentieth century, Reformation studies, in English, had focused more on England than on Germany and many English language scholars covered Reformers such as Wycliffe rather than Luther. In the nineteenth century, the translations of Robert Vaughan, a Congregationalist minister provided the foundation for significant Wycliffe studies. The Lollard Society, a group of modern day Wycliffe enthusiasts, refers to Vaughan in their online bibliography of secondary sources as a seminal figure in the field of Wycliffe scholarship.³¹ As a translator, Vaughan provided a more accessible version of Wycliffe's primary texts. However, the Wycliffe field next came to be dominated by a Methodist, H. B. Workman. Workman did not approve of Vaughan's methods; he makes reference to Vaughan spending hours poring over Wycliffe's writing and yet still missing them.³² Failures that Workman saw, like Vaughan, inspired his books. Schwiebert's mentor, Smith, drew on these traditions when writing his own *The Age of Reformation*. Smith's own surname, Preserved, came as an heirloom from a Puritan ancestor, but his father, a Biblical scholar whom he described as "of remarkably independent

³¹ 2012. "Bibliography of Primary Sources." *lollardsociety.org*. September 2. Accessed March 27, 2015. http://lollardsociety.org/?page_id=9.

³² Workman, Herbert B. *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church*. Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1926; rep. 1966. 14.

[mind]” had trouble aligning with one denomination.³³ Smith came of age in a world rife with religious scholarship, but not necessarily restricted to religious traditions, and it left him open to any opinion about religion and man. Schwiebert’s colleague, Bainton, proudly called himself a nonconformist in the Congregationalist sense who came from a large family of nonconformist ministers, but he later aligned with the Quakers during the First World War.³⁴ Bainton, born in England but raised in America, viewed faith in a way that well fit in with his Yale Divinity School training long established in England-based Protestantism.

These English Protestant scholars provided a view of Luther, which saw him as in a connect-the-dots progression from Wycliffe to Hus to Luther presents a picture of the German professor as a sort of higher evolved man when in comparison with his older colleagues; the backdrop of which Schwiebert had to work with. Vaughan, in the nineteenth century, stressed a need for Wycliffe scholarship based on the unpopularity of Wycliffe, when compared to Martin Luther. He admitted Luther as wildly better known successor, and quotes an unnamed source who called Wycliffe a “voice crying in the wilderness.”³⁵ The voice in wilderness references Matthew chapter three, and the herald-savior relationship between John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ; the comparison emphasizes not only a definite connection but also theological unity. Workman also referenced a sort of divine succession. In his book, *John Wycliffe: A Study of the English Medieval Church*, Workman describes a Bohemian Psalter which features Luther, Hus,

³³ Gilbert, William. "The Work of Preserved Smith (1880-1941)." *The Journal of Modern History* (The University of Chicago Press) 23, no. 4 (Dec 1951): 354-365. 354.

³⁴ Bainton, Roland H. *Roly: Chronicle of a Stubborn Nonconformist*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Divinity School, 1988.

³⁵ John Wycliffe, *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe, D.D. with Selections and Translations from his Manuscripts, and Latin Works*. Edited for The Wycliffe Society, with an Introductory Memoir, by the Rev. Robert Vaughan, D.D. (London: Blackburn and Pardon, 1845). [Online] available from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1838>; accessed 3/27/2015; Internet.

and Wycliffe together before he details that Luther's admiration for Hus, and unknowingly fondness for Wycliffe.³⁶ While Workman did not agree with all that Vaughan wrote, he perpetuated the definite connection between the three reformers. American Reformation historian Preserved Smith includes Workman's book, *The Dawn of the Reformation* in the bibliography of his own book, *The Age of Reformation*.³⁷ He had to return to Workman's already established scholarship when laying the foundations of his own expertise; he inherited some of his views from the English historiography. Smith himself made breakthroughs in Luther research in America, which featured influences in that he saw Luther as a revolutionary individual. Smith's *The Age of Reformation* portrayed Luther as "subtle and simple; superstitious and wise; limited in his cultural sympathies, but very great in what he achieved."³⁸ Smith's analysis of Luther positions Luther as a turning point in the greater development of mankind. Bainton's *Here I Stand* also emphasizes that Luther in many ways succeeded Wycliffe and Hus as the Reformer de jour. Chapters have titles such as "The Saxon Hus" and "The German Hercules" as well as sections where Bainton gave Luther fictionalized dialogue such as, "As for the article of Hus 'it is not necessary for salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others' I do not care whether this comes from Wyclif or from Hus."³⁹ Bainton viewed Luther as a kind of theological superman who picked the same torch as dropped by Wycliffe and Hus. In the English language historiography, Luther directly followed Wycliffe and Hus in terms that directly related the three reformers. By contrast, the analyses of German Protestants Scheel and Köhler did not mention either Wycliffe or Hus.

³⁶ Workman, 9.

³⁷ Smith, Preserved. *The Age of Reformation*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920; rep. 1950. 756.

³⁸ Smith, 125.

³⁹ Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. New York: Meridian, 1950; rep. 1995. 89.

Schwiebert then, as an American Lutheran fascinated by Germany, presented the “new perspective” of his title in that he saw Luther as a man who came about as a product of the times in which he lived – therefore, a medieval figure who did not use the Reformation, at first, as a way to initiate war with the Roman Church. He himself noted the possibility of disadvantageous bias, but also argued that it might allow him to better approach the subject.⁴⁰ He assumed that his Lutheranism would allow him more familiarity with Luther than other historians might have. The need for such a familiarity gave him the idea to write *Luther and His Times* in the first place, but he also felt that an audience who would appreciate a Lutheran presenter as well. While at Valparaiso University, Schwiebert taught courses and lectured on Martin Luther; at the request of both students and Lutheran ministers, Schwiebert published his lectures through Valparaiso’s university press. Schwiebert estimated that about one third of his lectures dealt with the medieval background of Luther.⁴¹ The amount of background Schwiebert felt that his students needed to understand Luther’s character shows how closely tied to the medieval Schwiebert places Luther. Schwiebert believed that Luther’s thought process had a medieval forbearer, but he did not stop at Wycliffe; Schwiebert claimed that, “there is a direct line of Medieval development that leads from [Augustine] the Church Father to [Luther] the Augustinian monk at Erfurt.”⁴² St. Augustine often receives credit for revolutionizing all medieval thought, not only those of the monks who borrowed his name. Wycliffe, a medieval academic who found himself frequently at odds with monks of many habit colors, referred back to St. Augustine frequently. In *Trialogus*, he notes, “the opinion, that if there be any truth, it is in the Scripture, which is often inculcated by

⁴⁰ Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*. 1.

⁴¹ Schwiebert, Ernest G. *Reformation Lectures Delivered at Valparaiso University*. Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University, 1937. IX.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 60.

Augustine, is manifestly just.”⁴³ In this case, Wycliffe credits St. Augustine with the doctrine of the divinely inspired nature of the Bible, and the importance of scripture to faith. In order to show their support for the Lutheran Reformation, allies of Luther adopted the phrase *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*, or “The Word of the Lord endures forever” to show their support for his doctrines which placed emphasis on scripture’s infallibility.⁴⁴ The connection could easily be made from Wycliffe to Luther, but even Wycliffe credits St. Augustine with the doctrine. The handing down of the doctrine from theologian to theologian shows that it did not from simply one author, nor would that author have been a reformer, but actually an early church father. The issue of the veracity of scripture in St. Augustine, Wycliffe, and Lutheranism exemplifies the medieval doctrines which Schwiebert claims Luther taught. Schwiebert lectured that, “the child (medieval thought) had reached adolescence and would soon be of age in the period of humanism and the Renaissance which was to follow.”⁴⁵ To Schwiebert, Luther’s teachings expressed a direct line of thought, but from St. Augustine, whose works inspired all medieval teaching.

However, the works of St. Augustine represent only one facet of medieval life which Schwiebert argues pervaded Luther’s thoughts – according Schwiebert, Luther also saw politics through the lens of a medieval man. In 1943, Schwiebert published “The Medieval Pattern of Luther’s Views of State,” an essay which claimed that while Luther’s political views changed greatly over the course of his lifetime, they ultimately had basis in medieval history.⁴⁶

⁴³ Wycliffe, web.

⁴⁴ Concordia Publishing House. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006. 2.

⁴⁵ Schwiebert, *Lectures*, 62.

⁴⁶ - "The Medieval Pattern in Luther's Views of State." *Church History* (Cambridge University Press) 12, no. 2 (June 1943): 98-117. 98.

Schwiebert's analysis relies heavily upon the context of Luther as a man within the larger historical picture rather than trying to assign modern roles to his works. Concerning modern and medieval parallels, Schwiebert clearly states that terms like "church" and "state" should be defined, "as used in the literature of those times" because "the medieval man lived in an entirely different world."⁴⁷ The analysis begins with a declaration that Luther must be studied as a medieval figure. Schwiebert writes that "the two forces of church and state, according to the medieval pattern, were... in a harmonious unity."⁴⁸ Schwiebert points out that the medieval man would have viewed world politics as in continual, unseparated balance between the church and the secular officials. Schwiebert analyzes a quotation from Luther's "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" where the reformer says that Christendom "must firmly establish the temporal power and the sword, so that there may be no doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance."⁴⁹ Therefore, Schwiebert writes, Luther greatly supported the state as a military power in favor of the service of the church. Furthermore, Schwiebert points out that Luther supported the Holy Roman Emperor as a political authority. Schwiebert details in 1529 the electors of Saxony and Hesse feared an attack by Emperor Charles V, and asked Luther if they had religious justification to fight; Luther answered no, since as Schwiebert explains, "God had placed the Emperor over the princes."⁵⁰ According to Schwiebert, Luther would support the emperor on basis that God had established him as the sword, and that Luther would have had faith that the sword would not fall on him. Schwiebert concludes that Luther embraced the idea

⁴⁷ Ibid. 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 115.

of the temporal powers as an arm of God's kingdom, and therefore took a medieval view of state politics.

Further analysis of the medieval view of state which brought about Luther and the Reformation fills Schwiebert's best known book, *Luther and His Times*. In particular, *Luther and His Times* details the medieval schools of thought which shaped Luther's mind. *Luther and His Times* includes a description of the childhood of the reformer and the transitory nature of his father's employment, which moved the Luther family from Eisleben to Mansfeld and later Luther to Magdeburg and Eisenach. Schwiebert writes that in this freedom to work wherever they wished, the family carried in the same manner as their ancestors had in the Middle Ages.⁵¹ Here, Schwiebert establishes that Luther's childhood probably bore little difference to that of medieval Catholic children who preceded him. During Luther's studies as a monk, he outlines that Luther studied the great medieval thinkers. Schwiebert writes in particular that in addition to St. Augustine, Luther extensively read the medieval Schoolmen Thomas Aquinas, William Occam, Peter Lombard, and Duns Scotus, but he really found inspiration in Gabriel Biel, whose *Canon of the Mass* Luther called "the best book" at one of his famous post-Worms table talks with his students.⁵² The extensive training Luther had in medieval philosophy and theology carried on even after his break with church shows the fondness he had for the Middle Ages and the influence it had on his thoughts. Schwiebert details how Luther had practically memorized the great medieval scholars. Schwiebert writes that "in the beginning [Luther] followed Occam, Augustine, and others, but he soon discovered... the works of Tauler, which fascinated him for a

⁵¹ Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 103.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 148.

while” and “as the result of this humanistic approach, he returned to [the Bible.]”⁵³ By storing the church fathers away in his memory, Luther internalized their teachings and created new ways to interpret their doctrines. In *Luther and His Times*, Schwiebert greatly details the medieval philosophies which Luther internalized and with which he eventually forged his new doctrine.

Schwiebert’s work questions the definition of the Middle Ages by painting a picture of Luther and the Reformation which highlights the medieval schooling of Luther and the German environment he developed in. Unlike many scholars of his age, Luther immersed himself in German culture and developed much of his research from national sources. As a result, Schwiebert formulated research on Luther which portrayed the reformer as a product of medieval times. By emphasizing the medieval aspects of Luther, Schwiebert blurs the line between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. In doing so, Schwiebert questions the very definition of medieval.

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⁵³ Ibid., 578.

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