

William J. Mann

Unsound Devotional Literature



LutheranLibrary.org ● S95

Unsound Devotional Literature

Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org

- *The Missouri Doctrine of Election* by Otto Zöckler
- *Devotional Readings from Luther's Works For Every Day of the Year*
- *The Lord's Prayer: A Devotional Study Based on Luther's Smaller Catechism* by Charles Armond Miller

About The Lutheran Library



Still Life With Bible by Vincent Van Gogh

The Lutheran Library is a non-profit publisher of good Christian books. All are available in a variety of formats for use by anyone for free or at very little cost. There are never any licensing fees.

We are Bible believing Christians who subscribe wholeheartedly to the Augsburg Confession as an accurate summary of Scripture, the chief article of which is Justification by Faith. Our purpose is to make available solid and encouraging material to strengthen believers in Christ.

Prayers are requested for the next generation, that the Lord will plant in them a love of the truth, such that the hard-learned lessons of the past will not be forgotten.

Please let others know of these books and this completely volunteer endeavor. May God bless you and keep you, help you, defend you, and lead you to know the depths of His kindness and love.

Unsound Devotional Literature

By William Julius Mann

Originally Published in *The Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. 4.

Philadelphia
LUTHERAN CHURCH REVIEW
© 1885 / 2019
(CC BY 4.0)

[LutheranLibrary.org](https://www.lutheranlibrary.org)

"Zschokke presents to us a weak decoction, a totally "watered stock" of our sacred religion,
an emasculated Christianity." – William Mann

Contents

[Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org](#)

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[Unsound Devotional Literature](#)

[Copyright Notice](#)

[How Can You Find Peace With God?](#)

[Benediction](#)

[More Than 100 Good Christian Books For You To Download And Enjoy](#)

Unsound Devotional Literature

THE RECEPTION, which about seventy years ago Zchokke's "*Stunden der Andacht*" ("*Hours of Devotion*") experienced, was a somewhat phenomenal one. The book met with approval from tens of thousands. In 1858 it had reached its thirtieth edition. It was in 1870 reissued in somewhat changed form. Queen Victoria, in her distress after Prince Albert's death, was captivated by its sentiments and reflections, and caused its translation into English, and thereby threw new lustre upon it. And now it is in abbreviated form by the Rev. L. R. Dunn, D.D., laid before the American public.

In Germany the soil had been for many years well prepared for its reception. The Rationalism of Semler, Teller, Roehr, Wegscheider and others had through a whole generation been sown broadcast over the land of Luther. It was proclaimed from hundreds of pulpits. It was not of a frivolous, scoffing character. It was, by many well-meaning, but unenlightened persons, considered almost as a new Gospel, and those who were enraptured by it fully believed in it and proclaimed it with declamatory enthusiasm. It did not make much of sin; it found no cause to speak of the perversion of human nature, of man's lost condition before God, of the necessity of the Redeemer, of repentance and faith in God's mercy, revealed in his only-begotten Son, of the new birth as the work of the Holy Spirit. All these things, and many in addition to them, like the Sacraments, were, so to say, quietly and silently given to oblivion, like household utensils, going out of fashion, are put out of sight in some dark closet or removed to the hidden corners of a dusty attic. The old Liturgies and Church Hymns were remodeled or modulated. And even when the old terminology was used, it was not intended in the old dogmatical sense. True it is, that with some preachers theology took a very practical and utilitarian course; on Good Friday, which in all Germany is held as one of the greatest, most solemn church-festivals, you could hear from pulpits of the Christian Church harangues against the placing of burial-grounds in the midst of towns and villages, as if of the Gospel-lesson of the day no better use could

be made. Such treatises on such days and in such places appear to us in our times simply blasphemous. But the men who prepared them were quite serious and well convinced, that they were doing their share to drive darkness out of the world. In a word — religion, as the actualization of a personal relation to the living, holy God, was in that time at an exceedingly low ebb, and for the depth and greatness of the Gospel, undefiled and unadulterated, that generation had no feeling, no understanding. Especially among the large class of those who had received a certain literary education, and thought that they represented the progress and culture of the age, rationalistic ideas prevailed to a large extent. They were not atheists. Neither were they unprincipled as to morals. In fact all their religion had turned to morality. To the moral consciousness of man, to his own better self, to his free will, to his good nature, to his appreciation of the excellencies of a virtuous life, to his acknowledgment of the wisdom and love in the providential government of the world, to his aspiration for happiness in the existence beyond the grave — to such things thousands of sermons addressed themselves, and a flowery and moving reference to such objects as are calculated to operate upon the feelings of the weak and the sentimental, was pretty sure always to find a sympathetic echo, and this not only in female hearts.

Even preachers, who had a traditional regard for the old landmarks of the faith once delivered to the saints, and were not quite devoid of the knowledge of the profound relation existing between the fundamental truths of Christian orthodoxy and the human soul and its deepest wants, maintained to them rather a passive relation, and tried to give them, by their way of reasoning, a sort of doubtful support. It seems, they felt as if they needed almost an excuse for preaching the apostolic truths before a Christian congregation. They could not use them with the freedom of the Spirit; they proved, that from their real bearing they themselves were more or less alienated.

The moralizing tone of a rationalistic theology, its decided position against a frivolous view of life and the world, increased its dangers. Apparently it was so pure, so spiritual, so full of respect for God and his holy laws, so full of admiration for the character of Jesus, so warm for everything good and noble, so enthusiastic for mental and social progress, so aspiring to light and ever more light, that it required much spiritual experience and a deep understanding of the mystery of godliness and the

genuine substance of undefiled Christianity, to perceive that those principles, sentiments, views, coming in winning phrases from rationalistic preachers and authors, were not only totally and shamefully misrepresenting Christianity, but were undermining its very foundation in the consciousness of thousands of the educated of our age.

It is hardly necessary to state, that even in those times, when Rationalism held full sway over large classes of the population of Germany, those who had a clear insight into the superficiality and danger of rationalistic theology and preaching, were not wanting. Whilst in towns and cities and among the higher social ranks Rationalism found much assent and applause, nevertheless Christ and Him crucified was preached, though in rather exceptional cases from pulpits of towns and cities, and still more among the country population. Indeed, in many a place the most zealous rationalist could, by his tirades and phrases and sentimental declarations, drive his hearers out of the church, but not Christ out of their hearts.

We can quote Goethe as to the cause of this phenomenon. In his conversations with Dr. Eckermann, he once remarked:

“There is no danger that Rationalism and Infidelity ever will get the upper hand in the world; for nobody will for any length of time have to do with mere sterility.”

Herewith the very character of Rationalism is indicated. It is a fact, which deserves notice, that, whilst in a great many places in Germany that form of Rationalism which was a legitimate sequel of the premises of the metaphysics of Kant, still was dominant, the sermons of Ludwig Hofacker were sold by tens of thousands of copies. Nobody will maintain, that they in any way catered to rationalistic taste.

That form of Rationalism which during the last decades of the eighteenth and the first ones of the present century had to such a large extent prevailed in Germany, held fast to the belief in God, the Creator, Ruler and Judge of the world, also to the acknowledgment of the divine moral law and of retribution, of man's free volition and responsibility, and of individual immortality. By these principles the Bible was interpreted. What was in it contrary to the rules of ordinary reasoning was considered as belonging to the superstitions of olden times or as misunderstanding or exaggeration on the part of the authors of the books of the Old and New Testament. Jesus, it was said, had in many harmless things accommodated himself to the errors

of his times. He was one of the good and wise men of the history of the human race, even the best and wisest of them. For this reason, not on account of a higher metaphysical relation between him and the Father, he preeminently deserved to be called the Son of God, whilst all men are children of the same Father. As a moral hero he died true to the principles which he had proclaimed. All a Christian has to do is to learn from Jesus and to follow in his footsteps and to strive after an exalted virtue. To this end the teachings of Jesus offer us the best inducements and strongest motives.

There is no difficulty in perceiving that that form of Rationalism, which now has become very obsolete in Germany, reduced Christianity to moralizing Unitarianism or Socinianism. It had no appreciation whatever of those great substantial ideas of Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, Justification, Regeneration. Its tendency was to restrict the Supernatural to the narrowest limits and to measure the very depth of substantial Bible-truth and of all revelation by the gauge of ordinary common sense. Everything mysterious and transcendent had to accommodate itself to human reason, which, as every day's experience teaches us, is a thousand times the most unreliable and unreasonable thing to be found. What was left of that Christianity which a St. Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, had proclaimed and believed? A mere scanty remnant of a grand painting, the essential features and colors of which were successfully washed out with caustic soap.

And now let us return to the book, the subject before us. Zschokke's "*Hours of Devotion*" first appeared in eight sections in the years 1809–1816. It was reported, that the whole of the work was by no means exclusively Zschokke's labor. It was said, that in the composition of the whole even some Catholic priests had assisted him. In this we place no reliance for various reasons.

We are not ignorant of the fact, that in those times and many years before them the traditional rigor of Romanism had considerably given way in Germany and other countries to laxer, more accommodating views. In 1773, Clement XIV abrogated the order of Jesuits. A chaplain to the court of one of the German Princes publicly gave to soldiers, who professed the Roman faith and belonged to a regiment, mainly consisting of members of the Evangelical household, the advice that in spiritual matters they should make use of the services of the Lutheran minister accompanying the regiment. During the Napoleonic wars in Germany, many Roman Catholic

soldiers willingly received, in the hospitals at Wittenberg, the Lord's Supper *sub utraque* from the hands of Dr. C. I. Nitzsch, then stationed in that fortress. The mild Christian spirit of Roman Catholic dignitaries of the type of Bishops Wessenberg, Sailer and others, was in those times not rarely found in larger circles of the same faith. The revival of Ultramontanism has since then crushed out all symptoms of a more evangelical character in the Church and Papalism. Monarchism has triumphantly, for the present, raised its head above Episcopatism in her. But in those days, in which a universal commotion brought the most conservative institutions somewhat nearer to the border-land of revolution, it would not have been impossible that Zschokke was in his work assisted by friends belonging to the Roman Church. If so, he certainly made of their labor such use that the remarkable unity of style of the whole large work does not suffer. Might we say, that those elements of it, which indicate a tendency to retain at least the appearance of a more orthodox Christianity, betray that foreign source: Or had Zschokke himself, who was a Protestant, an interest in accommodating himself to the views and feelings of those, whose religion had not yet given up the old traditional terms and forms of stricter orthodoxy?

Howsoever, the spirit of the work is, in spite of all endeavors to give to it a certain religious warmth, decidedly rationalistic. We are not deceived by moving apostrophes, addressed to Jesus the "Messiah," the "sublime sufferer," the "divine Teacher of the world." Even where he is called the Son of God, we know that the word is not to be taken in the sense, in which the Bible and the symbola of the Church take it. The Christianity, taught by Zschokke, ends all in a morality, which has its strongest inducement in its utilitarianism; it is essentially eudaimonistic. It may be influenced by the remembrance of God's kindness toward us, by the glorious example of Jesus, by other considerations, but it is above all the way to be rationally happy. The supernatural elements of Christianity are pushed into the background, and revealed religion is dragged down to the humanitarian level. That man should be born anew; that the Holy Ghost alone can implant in us true love of God and of our fellow-men; that Christ shed His blood for the remission of our sins and paid for us the ransom; that we are to be clothed in His righteousness — these, and others of the fundamental principles and truths of the Bible and orthodox Christian confessions, we can not discover in all the meditations in the book before us.

It exhibits a remarkable faith in the goodness of man's nature. It addresses itself to his noble emotions, better conceptions, powerful energies. It preaches a Pelagianism, which all phrases about divine assistance freely granted to all, striving after a better life, can not hide. There is presented to us any amount of reflections and meditations on a great variety of subjects, for instance, dangers of wealth, the happiness of poverty, celibacy, family joys, religion of childhood, old age, death of the patriot, solemnity of public religious services, the easy exercise of Christian virtue, ingratitude, meditations at the graves of our beloved ones, etc., etc. There is on all these, and many other subjects, no end to emotional moralizing.

The edition of 1860, in two octavos of unusually large size, contains 1,073 pages in double columns. Certainly Zschokke was a man of uncommon literary industry. We have no right to doubt the sincerity of his intentions. We are ever willing to admit, that there is in his effusions and addresses much more of genuine Christian substance than there was in many rationalistic sermons preached in those times in many a pulpit, and, compared with the mass of materialistic, pessimistic, atheistic effusions, which during the last thirty years deluged Germany, Zschokke's book is quite religious and very decent. Nevertheless, we maintain, that even in the well-known "*Almanac for Time and Eternity*," of the late ultramontane ALBAN STOLZ __, THAT POPULAR GENIUS OF RARE POWERS, THERE IS MORE GENUINE GOSPEL TRUTH IN SPITE OF ALL THE ROMISH ERRORS CONTAINED IN THAT PUBLICATION, THAN IN ALL THE PROTESTANT ZSCHOKKE'S "__HOURS OF DEVOTION." Stolz adds to Christianity's great and substantial features the Romish rubbish. Zschokke presents to us a weak decoction, a totally "watered stock" of our sacred religion, an emasculated Christianity.

It can not be denied that Zschokke's easy flowing and emotional style, his constant reference to a great variety of conditions and situations in human life, his ardor for moral principles and conduct, his sympathy with human nature, his respect for religion and Christianity, as he understands them, his warm addresses to the better features of human nature and other qualities, must prove very attractive to thousands who never enter into the Holy of Christianity, but tarry in its courts. They may there find so much, that corresponds to their own spiritual condition, addresses itself to the quality of their religious feelings and indistinct views and satisfies in a pleasing manner their minds; and all this with a show of highest reverence

for religion and all that relates to it. Here is just the danger of the book. Even many, who give proof that they can appreciate the grand truths pronounced in the Word of God or Luther's Catechism, are charmed by Zschokke's winning language and likely to forget the apostolic admonition:

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God.”

Even in the present time, when Zschokke's star has lost much of its former lustre, we may find his book used and admired in families, where we hardly suspected, it could be discovered and applied as an instrumentality for the furtherance of private devotion.

It may be expected that the success of Zschokke's "*Hours of Devotion*" encouraged numbers of the *Dii minorum gentium* [gods of lesser nations] to try their hand in a similar task. Not one of them can boast of having in any degree attained to his mastership of style and manner; also on the part of those, who by the gorgeous colors of his language and the seeming religious tone of his meditations and admonitions were not deceived, but saw "the snake in the grass," attempts were made to counteract the effects of his alluring book. Dr. Tholuck published, not without a side view of Zschokke, a volume with the title "*Hours of Christian Devotion.*" But none of these works, in the manner of handling the subjects more or less following Zschokke's footsteps, though often influenced by a more decided recognition of truly Christian principles, ever attained to his popularity. He just struck that chord in tens of thousands of hearts, which at once gave an answer. He spoke in such a manner as to bring them at once in sympathy with him. Never was rationalism more charmingly disguised, never Christianity with more show of reverence and piety robbed of its very nerve and vitality. The poison was so skilfully hidden, that the masses of the people took it with a strange frenzy, and thought they had found a panacea to heal their moral diseases and even to set them right before God. This was in Germany, in those times, the result of the long-continued practice of a rationalistic theology, of a "science, falsely so called."

There is in English religious literature, of our century, much to be found, which reminds us of Zschokke's "*Hours of Devotion.*" Much of it is more in conformity with orthodoxy or with what is generally received as such. We have here before our mind especially one work, which by its meditative manner here and there calls back Zschokke, though it is much more sober

and infinitely less phraseological in its whole conception of Christianity, much more solid and in every way a much more substantial work; we refer to the “*Recreations of a Country Parson*,” and to it we may add the “*Every Day Philosopher*” and other publications of the same author.

That the Rev. L. R. Dunn, D.D., should have thought to make, by publishing an abridgment of Zschokke’s “*Hours of Devotion*,” a valuable addition to American devotional literature, may surprise us. True it is, that in the English form of the book many of the offensive features of it, as it in German came from Zschokke, are somewhat obliterated. When we read of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God the Father, the term conveys a meaning which Zschokke never would have given to it. Expressions like (Vol. II., p. 204) “Jesus spoke of death as a going in to the Father, a union with the Deity,” and many others of a similar character, are not to our taste.

That there is in the whole work an ominous silence as to the Means of Grace as such, a defect in a book of devotion least to be expected; this indicates sufficiently by what kind of a spirit it is animated. The Pelagian character of these often very sentimental effusions, may be fully illustrated by a passage, taken from Vol. II., p. 37; a father represented as lying on his death bed, apostrophizes his children and friends in this manner:

“Weep not; I will whisper to you in my last hour:” “That is not death where innocence, virtue and holiness live. Sin only is the death of the soul. Flee sin, hold fast to God, act divinely in as far as your powers will allow, and we shall belong to each other and remain united there as here.”

Now this is preaching self-righteousness without a disguise. *Sapienti sat.*
[Enough for the wise.]

W. J. MANN.

Book referenced: *Meditations On Life, Death And Eternity*. By J. H. D. Zschokke. Translated from the German by Fredericka Rowan. Compiled by Rev. L. R. Dunn, D.D., Author of “Garden of Spices,” “Mission of the Spirit,” “Holiness to the Lord,” “The Angels of God,” etc. Vols. I., II. New York: Philips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe. 1884.

Copyright Notice

This book was published 2019 by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org. Some (hopefully unobtrusive) updates to spelling, punctuation, and paragraph divisions have been made. Unabridged.

Originally published 1885 in *The Lutheran Church Review*, Volume 4.

This LutheranLibrary.org book is released under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, which means you may freely use, share, copy, or translate it as long as you provide attribution to LutheranLibrary.org, and place on it no further restrictions.

The text and artwork within are believed to be in the U.S. public domain.

s95 – v5

ISBN: TBD

How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

More Than 100 Good Christian Books For You To Download And Enjoy

The Book of Concord. Edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs and Charles Krauth.

Henry Eyster Jacobs. *Summary of the Christian Faith*

Theodore Schmauk. *The Confessional Principle and The Confessions of The Lutheran Church As Embodying The Evangelical Confession of The Christian Church*

George Gerberding. *Life and Letters of William Passavant*

Joseph Stump. *Life of Philip Melancthon*

John Morris. *Life Reminiscences of An Old Lutheran Minister*

Matthias Loy. *The Doctrine of Justification*

Matthias Loy. *The Story of My Life*

William Dau. *Luther Examined and Reexamined*

Simon Peter Long. *The Great Gospel*

George Schodde *et al.* *Walther and the Predestination Controversy. The Error of Modern Missouri*

John Sander. *Devotional Readings from Luther's Works*

A full catalog of all 100+ downloadable titles is available at LutheranLibrary.org .