

Introduction

Theological German: A Reading Course has been written for students preparing to pass a Language Reading examination in German in the area of theology and religion. The text presupposes no previous acquaintance with German and concentrates on essentials for reading comprehension and for translation.

Theological German, by its very nature, is very philosophical, highly technical, intricately structured, and is based on a wide range of vocabulary. It is expected that students, upon completion of this text, will be able to recognize well over two thousand words and the correct meanings signalled by the basic grammatical structures in the German language, particularly the extended participial constructions. Students, with the help of a dictionary, should be able to read independently and at a reasonable speed fairly difficult passages in theological German.

The material of the text is divided into three parts. The first part consists of a Pronunciation Guide and sixteen chapters which provide the essential grammar and basic vocabulary. No dictionary work is needed since each chapter has several word lists. Students should stress those words in their learning which are especially related to their fields of interest. The exercise sentences are taken from original sources. Their purpose is to reinforce the new grammar material in each chapter and to allow the students to find the exact meaning of a sentence without depending on the general context of a larger passage.

The text material has been arranged progressively. High priority should be given to learning of grammatical signals, function words, and the study of word order. It is advisable that students periodically review the grammar of earlier chapters and reread the exercise sentences. This is important for acquiring a feeling for German sentence structure and for the process of vocabulary retention. Since students will most likely encounter older works printed in *Fraktur*, the last chapter has been devoted to learning this style type. However, with familiarity of the German language, students normally find that the reading of the German *Fraktur* presents no great problem.

The second part consists of thirty-two reading passages which have been selected and adapted from publications of well-known German theologians. From a theological point of view, however, these excerpts do not represent an anthology of theological thought. Their use is for illustration of the authors' style representative of theological German in general. To make these reading passages more manageable for students, many of them have also been edited. No vocabulary lists or footnotes have been provided because the students should learn to use a dictionary effectively. The vocabulary section was, therefore, not compiled as a dictionary substitute and, thus, does, not at all, cover the vocabulary needed for the reading passages.

The third part consists of four appendixes and a comprehensive vocabulary list. Students should pay special attention to the section on vocabulary building and learn thoroughly the list of the principal parts of the irregular or strong verbs. The vocabulary section of approximately four thousand words contains the vocabulary used in the sixteen chapters as well as many additional high frequency words used in theological German. This list, however, does not make any claim of completeness. It has been compiled from many sources - including unpublished documents - such as vocabulary lists and reading texts used for the study of theological German at various theological seminaries throughout the states. One must also keep in mind, that because of the nature of theological German and the entire field of theology and religion, the emphasis and, thus, the frequency rating of certain words will shift from student to student based on their area of interest and specialization. Nevertheless, most words found in this list are basic words of high frequency for most areas of theology and religion.

An adequate specialized dictionary is not available to cover the scope of treatment needed. Although a good specialized German-English Bilingual Dictionary of Theology and Religion is urgently needed and still forthcoming, the best alternatives are the better general dictionaries such as, the *Langenscheidt's New College German Dictionary*, or the latest edition of the *Cassell's German Dictionary*.

Even though students are urged to learn to use the dictionary at an early stage of their language study, they are warned not to rely on it because excessive vocabulary thumbing and searching for idioms in dictionaries will prove time-consuming and discouraging and will eventually lead to diminished interest in using the language as an important tool in doing serious research in the area of theology and religion.