

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • October 15, 2016

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Luther in the Wartburg Castle

To Live unto God: Justified by Grace*

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”

Galatians 2:19

It is necessary that we be well instructed to understand the difference between the righteousness of the law and grace. The righteousness of grace doth in nowise pertain to the flesh. For the flesh may not be at liberty, but must remain in the grave, the prison, the couch: it must be in subjection to the law. But the Christian conscience must be dead to the law, that is, free from the law, and must have nothing at all to do with it.

But this seemeth a strange and wonderful definition, that to live to the law, is to die to God: and to die to the law, is to live to God. These propositions are clean contrary to reason, and therefore no crafty sophister¹ can understand them.

Now to live unto God, is to be justified by grace, or by faith for Christ's sake, without the works of the law.

This then is the proper and true definition of a

¹ Sophister: An old term for sophist—a thinker, philosopher; or a fallacious reasoner, likely its sense here.

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Christian: that he is the Child of grace and remission of sins, because he is under no law, but is above the law, sin, death, and hell. And even as Christ is free from the grave, and Peter from the prison, so is a Christian free from the law; the conscience by grace is delivered from the law. So is everyone that is born of the spirit. But the flesh knoweth not from whence this cometh, nor whither it goeth, for it cannot judge but after the law.

On the contrary the spirit saith: let the law accuse me, let sin and death terrify me never so much, yet I do not therefore despair: for I have the law against the law, sin against sin, and death against death. In like manner I find death in my flesh, which afflicteth me and killeth me: but I have in me a contrary death, which is the death of death: for this death crucifieth and swalloweth up my death. But we must receive the benefit of Christ with a sure faith: for nothing is required of us but faith alone, whereby we apprehend Christ, and believe that our sins and our death are condemned and abolished in the death of Christ.

This the blind sophisters do not understand, and therefore they dream that faith justifieth not, except it do the works of charity. But let us now set apart the law and charity until another time, and let us rest upon the principal point of this present matter: which is this, that Jesus Christ the Son of God died upon the cross, did

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Subscription Price

\$24.00 per year in the US, \$36.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$24.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$12.00.

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Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
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bear in His body my sins, the law, death, the devil and hell. These invincible enemies and tyrants do oppress, vex, and trouble me, and therefore I am careful how I may be delivered out of their hands, be justified and saved. Here I find neither law, work, nor charity, which is able to deliver me. There is none but the Lord Jesus only and alone, which taketh away the law, killeth and destroyeth my death in His body, and by this means spoileth hell, judgeth and crucifieth the devil, and throweth him down into hell. To be brief, all the enemies which did before torment and oppress me, Christ Jesus hath brought to nought: He hath spoiled them, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them by His cross (Col. 2:15), in such sort that they can now rule and reign no more over me, but are constrained to obey me.

By this we may plainly see that there is nothing here for us to do, only it belongeth unto us, to hear that these things have been wrought and done in this sort, and by faith to apprehend the same. Now when I have thus apprehended Christ by faith, and through Him am dead to the law, justified from sin, delivered from death, the devil and hell, then I do good works, I love God, I give thanks to Him, I exercise charity towards my neighbours. But this charity or works following, do neither form nor adorn my faith, but my faith formeth and adorneth charity. This is our divinity, which seemed strange and marvellous, or rather, foolish to carnal reason: to wit, that I

am not only blind and deaf to the law, yea, delivered and freed from the law, but also wholly dead unto the same.

Christ, with most sweet names, is called my law, my sin, my death, against the law, sin and death: whereas, in very deed He is nothing else but mere liberty, righteousness, life, and everlasting salvation. And for this cause He is made the law of the law, the sin of sin, the death of death, that He might redeem from the curse of the law, justify me, and quicken me. So then, while Christ is the law, He is also liberty: while He is sin (for “He was made sin for us”), He is righteousness: and while He is death, He is life. For in that He suffered the law to accuse Him, sin to condemn Him, and death to devour Him, He abolished the law, He condemned sin, He destroyed death, He justified and saved me. So Christ is the poison of the law, sin, and death, and the remedy for the obtaining of liberty, righteousness, and everlasting life.

Thus Paul goeth about to draw us wholly from the beholding of the law, sin, death, and all other evils, and to bring us unto Christ, that there we might behold this joyful conflict: to wit the law fighting against the law, that it may be to me liberty: sin against sin, that it may be to me righteousness: death against death, that I may obtain life: Christ fighting against the devil, that I may be the child of God: and destroying hell that I may enjoy the Kingdom of heaven. 

EDITOR'S NOTE

After Darkness, Light

Last year's special issue of the *Standard Bearer* treated a number of key figures and movements that the Lord used to preserve His church and truth in the darkness of the Middle Ages. This year, our special Reformation issue treats Martin Luther and the Reformation God began through him. The light of biblical truth began to shine again through the writings and preaching of God's servants such as Luther because Luther was “convicted by Scripture.”

“After darkness, light” is the translation of the Latin phrase, *Post tenebras lux*. It comes from the old Latin translation of Job 17:12 and became one of the mottos of the Reformation. Calvin's Geneva used it on their coins and the motto is engraved on the Reformation wall

in Geneva. Indeed, the light of the true gospel shone so brightly that it beamed, and still shines, world-wide. But not so brightly anymore. The conviction about Scripture wanes.

In 2016, we also pray that light may come after the darkness of our day. May the Lord use these special Reformation issues to teach us to look back at God's great works in history and learn from them—and be bold to write, preach, and witness to the truth of Scripture; but also to look forward in hope—to God's greatest work, yet to come—the appearing of the Lord Jesus to bring an end to this present darkness and bring the light of the eternal day. Then we will see the Eternal Word and the light of His face.

— BLG

The Significance of the Reformation of 1517

On October 31, 1517, in the not-yet-famous city of Wittenberg, a gifted but largely unknown monk nailed to the door of the church a placard. The placard contained a long list of assertions—ninety-five, to be exact. The monk/priest posted them for the purpose of provoking debate—he declared himself willing publicly to debate any of the statements the next day. His heart was stirred out of concern for his flock, and it smoldered with anger against the sale of indulgences in his parish. Members of his own congregation, coming to confess their sins, insisted that there was no need for them to repent—their sins were forgiven by the purchase of indulgences. No instruction and no amount of admonition could convince them of the need for heartfelt repentance and turning from sin.

It was but a little spark. Ninety-five theses, intended for debate, with the hope that other pastors would likewise see the danger. The higher goal was that, perhaps, bishops and rulers would put a stop to the manner in which indulgences were being trumpeted in Germany.

But the little spark kindled a flame, and the flame spread like wildfire across Germany and into the surrounding countries. It would

change not merely the church in Germany, but Western civilization itself. God worked the greatest reformation ever to occur in His church.

How can the significance of the sixteenth-century Reformation be measured? Assessing the Reformation's significance is no easy task. Books have been written on this. The burden of this editorial is to express the heart of its significance by examination of two aspects of God's mighty work. First, the depths out of which God had to draw His church. Second, the majestic height to which God elevated His beloved church in and through the Reformation.

The Depths... Worship

When Calvin summed up the reasons why the Reformation was necessary, he began with worship. God saves a church to worship Him. But in the days of Luther, in most churches, chapels, and cathedrals, the worship of God was perverted to the point that God was no longer worshipped. Rather than worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24), the people bowed before idols. Statues of Jesus, pictures of Mary, relics of saints, and crucifixes filled the places of worship. In addition, the worship had become

external, not spiritual, including rituals, candle burning, mindless kneeling and recitation, and observing priests perform their ceremonies. Choirs replaced even the singing of God's people. Preaching, if it occurred, was simply a story or moral lesson, neither grounded on nor drawn from the Bible. And all of it in an unknown tongue for most of the worshippers. The people came, kneeled, watched, and perhaps received a small wafer that—so they were told—was the very body of Christ that the priest had offered for sin—for a fee. Idolatry, sacraments that obscured Christ, empty ritual, kneeling at appropriate places and times, with little or no preaching—that was worship, an abomination to the Lord.

The Depths... Church Polity

By the sixteenth century, the church had completely lost the form of government that the apostles had established in the early New Testament church. The offices of elder and deacon ceased to function. Preachers became priests whose main work was at the altar. The clergy had successfully suppressed the people under layers of hierarchy from bishops to pope.

The medieval pope epitomized the evil. Godless popes claimed to

be the head of the church as Christ's vicar on earth. Even though it was not yet officially decided by church council, the pope acted as though he were infallible. But he was an antichrist—the precursor of the final Antichrist—ruling contrary to the Word of Christ, persecuting those who rebuked him for his wickedness and errors, so exalting himself above God that he “as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (II Thess. 2:4).

The Depths... Lifestyle

The lives of the people—church members!—had sunk to a level almost beyond comprehension. They were ignorant of the Bible. Their lives were carnal, vile, and immoral. And the clergy led the way in fornication (arising out of the unbiblical prohibition of marriage), love of money, and grasping for power.

The Root Cause

But what was the cause? How did it happen that the church became corrupt in worship, government, and walk of life, to the point that this bride of Christ became the whore?

All the corruption in life and worship was rooted in doctrine. The church departed from the truth. Jesus is the truth. Ponder this! The church of God on the earth rejected Christ!

This apostasy began over a thousand years before 1517, when the church could not and would not maintain the doctrines of sovereign, particular grace—the doctrines that Augustine defended to his last breath. The church instead adopted

semi-Pelagianism, which teaches that fallen man is not dead in sin, but sick, and in need of a physician. He can do good if he tries, and that good can merit with God. God predestinates to eternal life those whom He knows (in advance) will believe.

In the next millennium, from that seedling grew a tree, yea, a forest of false doctrine. In its preaching the church ignored, if not denied, man's depravity. The theologians rather defended and exalted the free will of man. Works-righteousness dominated the doctrine of salvation. One earned his way to heaven by his own works (or money), by the merit and assistance of “saints,” and after death by the cleansing suffering in purgatory. One's righteousness before God was a combination of Christ's righteousness and one's own—justification by faith and works.

The carnal in the church lived as they pleased. Those with faith lived in terror. The church portrayed the Savior as an angry judge, coming in wrath to condemn all who failed to keep the law perfectly. The people toiled under the burden of guilt, doubt, fear, and the need to earn their own righteousness.

Living in Western society today, one can scarcely grasp the tyranny of the church, the oppression of one's conscience, and the hopelessness of salvation. Christians who live in predominantly Romish lands can easily relate.

Whenever I teach medieval church history, the students are aghast at the state of the church. How could the church be preserved? How could there be any believers left?

Lifting Up

But God did preserve His seven thousand who did not bow the knee to idols. And in 1517, God began to lift His church from the vile pit of false doctrine, idolatry, hierarchy, and immorality, to the heights of biblical truth and practice.

And note well, the reform hinged on *doctrine*, specifically, the doctrine of sovereign, particular grace. The truth of fallen man's total depravity. The truth of salvation by grace alone, though faith alone, in Christ alone. The truth of sovereign, double predestination. The essence of the Reformation was *doctrinal* reform. As vile and corrupt as the popes were, and as deep as the iniquity penetrated to the entire hierarchy, the Reformers insisted to a man that the wickedness of the clergy was not what made the Reformation a necessity. Rather, it was that the worship of God was profaned. And worship was profaned because the truth was lost.

Although Luther did not grasp that on October 31, 1517, little by little God led him to perceive it. By the time Luther wrote his masterpiece, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), he fully comprehended. That marvelous book was written against Desiderius Erasmus, whose *Diatribes* defended the Romish doctrine of free will over against Luther. In the conclusion to this work on free will, Erasmus offered Luther a compromise. He was willing to reduce the power of man's will to a minimum. He wrote “For in my opinion free choice could be so established as to avoid that confidence

in our merits and the other dangers which Luther avoids....”¹

Luther was not taken in. He insisted that the doctrine over which they were debating was “the grand turning point of the course.”² The Reformer expressed his appreciation that Erasmus, as Luther put it, had

not wearied me with those irrelevant points about popery, purgatory, indulgences, and other like *baubles*, rather than *causes*, with which all have hitherto tried to hunt me down,—though in vain! You, and you alone, saw what was the grand hinge on which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once.³

And the doctrine of salvation based on man’s free will destroys proper divine worship. For, insisted Luther,

[I]f I know not the distinction between our working and the power of God, I know not God Himself. And if I know not God, I cannot worship Him, praise Him, give Him thanks, nor serve Him; for I shall not know how much I ought to ascribe unto myself, and how much unto God.⁴

Not only that, but Luther saw

¹ Erasmus’ *Diatribes On the Freedom of the Will* is found in the series “Library of Christian Classics,” Vol. 17, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 35-97.

² *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. by Henry Cole, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 391.

³ Luther, 391.

⁴ Luther, 36.

how false doctrine eliminates the need for Christ, the Savior. “And thus, while you establish ‘Free-will,’ you make Christ void, and bring the whole Scripture to destruction. And though you may pretend, verbally, that you confess Christ; yet, in reality and in heart, you deny Him.”⁵

God reformed His church, lifting her from the depths of false worship, tyranny in church government, and immorality. But to do that, God had to deliver the church from false doctrine. Having seen the truth that man is totally depraved and his will bound in sin, Luther saw that salvation was of God alone, or there was no salvation. Luther repudiated the system of works-righteousness. The people of God are justified by faith alone, without works. He rejected a grace for all that could not save. He cast aside the conditional covenant maintained by the schoolmen. If your church yet today rejects these errors, you can thank God for Luther and for the Reformation. If your church has fallen back into those errors, she has begun the slide back to Rome.

Exalted

The Reformation was not only, or even mainly, about correction. In and through the Reformation God lifted His church to majestic heights. With Scripture established as the right foundation, advances come fast and furious. The Reformers, standing on the shoulders of Luther, rebuilt the church from the ground up. The three biblical of-

⁵ Luther, 375.

fices were restored and functioned. Worship was cleansed, idols removed, and preaching became the central element of worship. The sins of the people (and clergy) were disciplined and lives reformed. Back to the Bible.

But the greatest advances were in doctrine. Every area of doctrine advanced—rejecting the old errors and systematically setting forth God’s truth in one consistent whole. Not without a fight. Only one hundred years after Luther, the whole truth of sovereign grace was threatened by Arminianism. And God preserved His truth in the great Synod of Dordt (1618-19).

Reformed (Reformation) doctrine continued to flourish, the crown jewel of which is God’s everlasting covenant of grace. This is the height to which God lifted the church of the Reformation. To grasp and set forth clearly the goal of God in His work of salvation, namely, His covenant. To set it forth in perfect harmony with the doctrines of grace taught by Martin Luther and John Calvin. To sharpen it over against the Anabaptists, and thus see the place of children in that covenant. To sharpen it against the Arminians, ground it in election, and reject conditions in the covenant.

And then, to *live* in that marvelous covenant of grace—in fellowship with God! Secure, loved, with your children, looking forward with complete assurance to the full reality of this covenant life in glory. All because... salvation is God’s work. And we contribute nothing.

The significance of the Reformation of 1517. 

“Professor Luther”

Young Luther

Martin Luther’s father, Hans Luther, had designs for his son to become a lawyer, but God had determined otherwise. “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov. 19:21). As is said, “Man proposes, but God disposes.” Hans Luther devised son Martin’s way, but “the Lord directed his steps” (Prov. 16:9), first into the monastery, then into the university and seminary. In the end, Luther’s lifelong occupation was, as we would call it, seminary professor. By God’s design.

Because Hans Luther was a poor man, son Martin’s life began in poverty. The family was so poor that young Martin and his friends had to sing and beg for bread and board when they were at school away from home. But this was part of the sovereign God’s preparation of Luther for the important place he was to play in God’s reforming plans. The plan that Providence mapped out for Luther was God’s wise plan—poverty in his youth; a (probably too-strictly) disciplined home; the rigorous development of a mental discipline and work-ethic at grade-school and university (before teaching, Luther obtained both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in philosophy); and most importantly, the God-created restlessness of a sin-burdened soul that did not find peace until it rested in the sweet gospel of free grace.

After university studies and before law school began, God moved Luther to change course to the path of becoming a monk—to his father’s dismay and his friends’ great surprise. He chose the Augustinian Order of priests, both for its reputation for piety and its emphasis on learning. The rules of conduct were strict, but the standards of education were better. The Order of Augustinians had roots in the great church father Augustine, and had a strong emphasis on theology.

The long stories of Luther’s ‘conversion’ in the thunder-

storm, his pilgrimage to Rome, the development of his mind and heart in the gospel of free justification without works—all must be told elsewhere. Charles Terpstra’s article in this issue will mention biographies both old and new that you will want to read on cold nights this winter. What must be told here, at least briefly, is how this monk ended up in Wittenberg as a seminary professor on behalf of Reformation truth.

University of Wittenberg

In Luther’s youth, a German Elector named Frederick III founded a university in the little town of Wittenberg. *This* Frederick III was not *that* Frederick III who commissioned the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism. *That* Frederick was nicknamed “the Pious,” and was elector of the Palatinate. *This* Frederick III was Frederick “the Wise,” elector of Saxony, who died in 1525 when the other Frederick, of Heidelberg Catechism fame, was only ten years old. God used also *this* Frederick (“the Wise”) for Reformation causes in many ways, especially the later protection of Luther from the Roman Catholic authorities. This elector saw to it that Luther’s heresy trial was not held in Rome but in Germany; this elector refused to execute the papal bull against Luther; and this elector, after the Diet of Worms and the pope’s excommunication of him, even gave Luther refuge at the castle at Wartburg—where he stayed under a pseudonym for almost a year, translating the New Testament from Greek into German in less than ten weeks. This Frederick was truly used by God for the cause of Reformation!

This Frederick, at age thirty-eight, determined that Saxony needed another university. Little Wittenberg was too poor to support a university, but Frederick determined a way. He would see that capable priests became pastors in Wittenberg’s churches, which capable men could also teach at his new university. He founded the school in 1502, obtained Martin Luther in 1512, and Philip Melancthon in 1518.

Luther’s appointment to the University of Wittenberg was as “Lecturer in Moral Philosophy,” which was the

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Roman Catholic way of saying, “Professor of Ethics.” In those days, “moral philosophy” included much more than teaching the ten commandments and the various vices and virtues of then-Roman Catholic doctrine, and certainly more than ethical dilemmas that a modern ethics course would treat. It embraced much of what we would call dogmatics, or systematic theology, with special focus on anthropology and soteriology, and required many semesters of instruction. Luther’s text was Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, the “handbook” of doctrine that was divided into three main parts: Faith, Hope, and Love. He taught in Wittenberg from 1512 until his death in 1546.

When we had opportunity a few summers ago to visit our friends in Giessen, Germany, we took the time to see the important Luther sites in Wittenberg, which combined have become the largest Reformation museum in the world. We toured the entire facility called *Lutherhaus*—the spacious convent facility where the Augustinian friars formerly lived, but was later made available to the university’s poor students, visiting preachers, and sometimes run-away nuns. On these grounds were Luther’s personal living quarters (*Lutherstube*), where Luther, Katie, six of their own children, an aunt, and several orphaned nieces and nephews stayed—along with several servants. We saw the pulpit Luther regularly ascended in the *Stadtkirche*, walked through the impressive hall and stood behind the (now) ornate desk from which he lectured to a large classrooms of students. One could not leave except with the deep sense that Luther gave his life to Christ’s church—to teaching and preaching—so that his students could be useful servants of that church.

Exemplary Professor Luther

If there were a way to prepare a newly appointed seminary professor (or to test the qualifications of one being considered for such appointment) by giving him a course on “Luther, Professor at Wittenberg,” the course could be valuable in many ways. Let me list a few of the elements that I would want to include if I would construct the course, preaching (God willing) to myself first of all.

Only with *greatest reluctance* did Luther accept the position of professor. It took over five years finally to bring him to be a priest in Wittenberg. He was certainly not unaware that the “pastorate” in that little town involved an appointment to the “seminary.” And it was this—not the

ministry/priesthood itself, but the professorship at Wittenberg—about which he famously said, “Thus, I was *drawn* into the work of a teacher. If I had then known what I know now, ten horses would not have pulled me there.”¹ No ambition here—fatal flaw for any servant of God.

Second, Luther was a *master of the Bible*. Although he did not see a copy of the entire Scripture until he came to the University, after that his life was consumed with reading God’s Word. The man God formed to begin the Reformation did not occupy his day reading *about* the Bible, although he certainly knew what the books said about the Bible. But he occupied himself with the Bible itself, so that he became a master of it. If a degree could be given to a man who “mastered” the Bible, Luther would have obtained it. “Dr. Martinus Luder, Master and Doctor of Holy Scripture” his diploma could have been inscribed. Listen to Prof. Luther:

You should diligently study the Word of God and by no means imagine that you know it. Let him who is able to read take a psalm in the morning, or some other chapter, and study it for a while. This is what I do. When I get up in the morning, I pray and recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer with the children, adding any one of the psalms...I do not want to let the mildew of the notion grow that I know them well enough.²

Luther also knew there were improper motives for reading Scripture: “For there are many who seek their personal interests in the Word, namely, how to obtain honor by it and how to enjoy a great reputation in the world, considering godliness a trade.... But woe to these.”

He never became “old enough” to stop reading Scripture systematically and at length. When he was still fifty years old he said, “For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches, I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what there was and what it had to offer.” That he read the Bible more than *comments* on the Bible he made clear:

The Bible is being buried by the wealth of commentaries,

¹ There are many versions of this quotation. Probably Luther said something similar in different situations. This comes from Donald K. McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

² From a sermon preached in 1530, on Luke 23:12-35, from *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 79.

and the text is being neglected.... As a young man I accustomed myself to using the Bible. By frequent reading I came to know the place where a given passage is to be found. Thereafter I directed my attention to the commentators. But finally I had to disregard all of them and drown myself in the Bible, for it is better to see with your own eyes than with foreign eyes.³

Third, Prof. Luther *was a man of prayer*. He engaged in no study except it was preceded by and permeated with prayer. "That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God to accomplish something for His glory—not for yours or any other person's—He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words." It must have been his pious parents at home that formed this habit in him, for even when he was younger one of his colleagues reported that Luther told him, "He who prays aright has finished his studies more than half."⁴ Fervency in prayer and frequency in Scripture were at the core of Luther's qualifications.

Fourth, what made Luther outstanding in his day was *his unique view of a theological professor*. He was not to write theology for theologians, spinning arguments only intellectuals could understand. Nor was the professor to keep himself in his ivory tower, aloof from the real life of the church and from his students. Luther was a man of the people, aiming his sermons at the common man and constructing his theological lectures with the welfare of the church in view. He was not, that is, a professional training more professionals, but a theologian preparing men of God to serve God and His people, "in the trenches," as they say. So, in addition to his important formal lectures, Luther sat regularly with his students and others who lived at *Lutherhaus*, and talked and talked and talked. The conversations were transcribed. Six large volumes of this "Table Talk" have been published. One learns about the man by reading these, too.

When the professor reads Luther, he will certainly be entertained; but especially he will be humbled by the open piety of Professor Luther. Luther was *spiritual*,

personal, and experiential in the right way. Like John the Baptist, he pointed his students to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that bore Luther's sins away and whose righteousness became Luther's righteousness, freely. At age thirty-three, before he posted the Ninety-five Theses in 1517, he gave truly pious counsel to a friend cast down:


Now I would like to know about the state of your soul. Have you learned to despise your own righteousness and to put your trust in the righteousness of Christ alone? Many do not know the righteousness of God which is given us abundantly and freely in Christ; but they endeavor to do good works and depend on their own efforts, their own virtue, their own merits. You were full of this great error when you were here, and I was full of it. Even now I must fight against it, and have not finished. Therefore, my beloved brother, learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to despair of thyself and to say to Him: 'Thou art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou hast assumed what was mine and given me what was Thine. Thou hast assumed what Thou wast not, and hast given me what I was not.' If by our own exertions we could attain peace of conscience, why, then, did Christ die?⁵

There are many other traits that would make up a useful course on "Luther, Professor at Wittenberg," but no course would be complete without pointing to Brother *Luther's boldness*. Of all the men of his day who should have done it, it was left to Luther to bell the cat. And what a cat to bell! Certainly, Luther did not create battles for the sake of being a warrior. He also knew the difference between his friends and his enemies. His friends he treated courteously, charitably, even if in disagreement and intending to correct them. But his enemies he treated with the fierceness of a warrior fighting for the survival of his own town and family. When it came to conflict, he did not flinch. Never cowed into submission or intimidated, he only grew stronger in the Lord. So when a friend once warned him, "They will not stand it!" he responded, "Suppose they have to stand it?"

At greatest personal cost.

"May Christ live, and Martinus die."⁶

At one point, before the alternatives of recanting his faith or being beheaded he exclaimed: "If I had a thousand heads, I would rather have them all cut off than to revoke."

Exemplary, indeed. 

³ Hugh T. Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 16.

⁴ Quoted in John Louis Nuelsen, *Luther: The Leader* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1917), 23.

⁵ Nuelsen, 46.

⁶ Nuelsen, 70, 71.

The Ninety-five Theses

More than anything else, what do we need in order to live happily in this world and to die in peace? Is it not the certain knowledge that our many sins, which are so great and terrible, are forgiven by God because of the death of Christ? Is it not the assurance that after this life we will go to be with Christ because not even death can separate us from His love? All who receive this gospel of salvation through Christ by a true faith have joy and comfort in life and in death. This gospel of the glory and grace of God, which assures us of our forgiveness in Christ, was lost in the Middle Ages. But our faithful God restored it to His church in the sixteenth century through many mighty men, beginning with Martin Luther and his Ninety-five Theses.

The Evil of Indulgences

In 1517, and for many years prior to it, the people of God were robbed of the only true comfort of the gospel by men such as John Tetzel, and indeed by the entire system of Roman Catholicism. Tetzel was a Dominican monk commissioned by Albert the Archbishop of Mainz, with the support of a bull of Pope Leo X, to preach and sell indulgences. The sale of indulgences went back hundreds of years and was supported by the medieval scholastic theologians. But it developed over time from bad to worse.

Indulgences had to do with penance, one of the seven sacraments of Rome. Jesus began His earthly ministry calling men to repent (Matt. 4:17). In the Latin Vulgate, the Greek word for “repent” was translated *poenitentium agite* (“do penance”) and explained to be a sacrament. Penance required three actions for one to receive remission of sins: contrition, confession (to a priest), and satisfaction (by good works). God alone could forgive

the eternal punishment of sin. But the church had control over temporal punishments, including purgatory. For the church to grant a man remission of temporal punishments, to shorten his suffering in purgatory, that man had to do penance, that is, be sorry for his sin, confess it to a priest, and make satisfaction by doing good works.

Enter indulgences (letters of remission). If we could ask, “What are indulgences, Sir Tetzel?”, we would hear him say, “Well, if you give money to the church, I will give you a letter on behalf of the pope that cancels some of your punishments in purgatory (or some of the punishments of your loved one who is in purgatory!). If you do not want to be bothered with doing good works, consider this: you can purchase indulgences instead of doing good works!”

And if we could respond, “How can that be, lord Tetzel?”, he would say, “Very simply, the pope, the great Vicar of Christ, has at his disposal a vast treasury filled with the superabundant merits of Christ and the saints, and he will reckon some of them to your account, if you pay! Do you want to suffer in the flames of purgatory?! How can you in good conscience enjoy your life while your dear, deceased mother is enduring the fires of purgatory?! Buy indulgences! For *as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.*”

In 1517, in nearby Wittenberg, there was a man who was beginning to see the light of the true gospel, and he was infuriated with Tetzel. Already on October 31, 1516 Martin Luther had preached a sermon warning people not to trust in indulgences. But in the Fall of 1517 he felt the need to do something more to expose this evil, by starting a public debate to bring it to an end. He wrote ninety-five theses, succinct statements against the abuses of indulgences. By this action God lit a flame that would ignite the Reformation of His church and again put the “true treasure of the church,...the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God” (thesis 62) into the hands of His people.

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“The True Treasure of the Church...”

Luther's Ninety-five Theses are a doctrinal treasure, yet at the same time still strangely Roman Catholic. The theses are like a diamond mined out of the earth, but still in need of refinement. Luther himself later lamented about “how weak I was, and in what a fluctuating state of mind, when I began this business. I was then a monk and a mad papist, and so submersed in the dogmas of the Pope that I would have readily murdered any person who denied obedience to the Pope.”¹ At this early date, the dawn of the Reformation, “Luther had as yet no idea of reforming the Catholic Church.”²

In the Ninety-five Theses he does not condemn indulgences as such, only the abuse of them; he does not talk about justification by faith alone; he still believes in purgatory; and he still acknowledges the power and authority of the pope. For example, he writes in thesis 71, “Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.”³ In thesis 16, “Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.” Again, in thesis 50, “Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.” Luther gave the pope the benefit of the doubt that he had good motives for selling indulgences.

Yet when we read the Ninety-five Theses with the benefit of knowing the doctrinal development that followed, we can see the diamond clearly enough. We see here “the mighty working of an earnest mind and conscience intensely occupied with the problem of sin, repentance, and forgiveness, and struggling for emancipation from the fetters of tradition.”⁴ Luther cuts through the system of his day, and lays his finger on the heart of the matter, when he writes in thesis 62, “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.” The true treasure is not an invisible treasury of extra merits that the pope can grant to those who pay.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 157.

² Schaff, 144.

³ All quotations of the theses are from *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Ed. Timothy F. Lull, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 21-29.

⁴ Schaff, 158.

But the true treasure is the holy glad tidings of the grace of God in granting full remission of sins to all who repent and turn to Christ. For, as he writes in thesis 36, “Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters”; and in thesis 37, “any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.”

One historian writes,

Luther's Theses stated that even the Pope had no special powers beyond those declaratory powers given to all the priesthood. God was placed once more into the foreground as “the Lord over life and death.” Once the soul had left this life, asserted Luther, no Catholic canon controlled it any longer. Religion was once more restored to a personal relationship between man and God, a spiritual inner attitude in man known only to God, between which the clergy with their sacerdotal system could not intervene.⁵

Thus, in reply to Tetzel's audacious claim, Luther wrote in thesis 28, “It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.”

“The Entire Life of Believers...”

Furthermore, Luther criticizes the outward show of religion in regard to penance and indulgences. In the first three theses, he writes,

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh.

Luther was appalled at what he observed among his people in Wittenberg: the bold waving around of indulgence letters and the claim of being forgiven, while continuing in awful sins. Already on February 24, 1517 Luther

⁵ E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 320.

preached a sermon at Wittenberg in which he “deplored the fact that people were regarding sin so lightly and that they seemed to have so little fear of punishment. He added that indulgences should perhaps be called an *Abläss*,⁶ because they permitted people to sin.”⁷ Luther emphasized the true meaning of repentance: when Jesus said “repent,” He meant that the entire life of believers must be an ongoing repentance, a constant changing of the mind followed by those outward mortifications of the flesh required, for example, by the apostle in Colossians 3:5.

Followed also by good works! Luther warned that “papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest the people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love” (thesis 41). “Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences” (thesis 43). “Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God’s wrath” (thesis 45). Luther was not only zealous for the true *doctrine* of the gospel, but also for the *Christian life* of good works.

The Relevance of the Theses

Clearly, then, the Ninety-five Theses are powerfully relevant to us today. They call us to remember what our true treasure is, “the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God” in Jesus Christ. Let us not put more value on money and what money can buy! Let us not put trust in what money can buy, as so many customers of the indulgence market did. We have a marvelous treasure in the gospel of Christ. We have the full and free remission of our sins by faith in Christ. We have the blessed assur-


ance that after this life we are not headed to purgatory, but have a place in glory with Christ.

Moreover, the theses call us to a life of repentance and good works. Let us not be deceived. Let us not think that we can go through the motions of outward religion, sitting in church on Sunday, saying a prayer before we eat, and so on, while also indulging our sinful desires and laying up for ourselves treasures on earth. Luther shouts

to us down the corridors of history, “The entire life of believers is to be one of repentance! He who gives to the poor does better than he who has an empty show of religion!”

Still more, the theses call us to take our stand on the Word of God, and to be always reforming. We do well to examine regularly, in the light of Holy Scripture, the system of doctrine and life that we call our own. We who are church leaders, let us examine whether we are preaching the Word of God faithfully, or perpetuating and developing errors. Errors develop. The idea of indulgences went from bad to worse until it became a monstrous evil. Let

us learn from Luther how to be courageous, to stand and speak the truth, if need be, in the midst of overwhelming opposition.

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Although no public debate took place in Wittenberg, as Luther had proposed in the introduction to his theses, loud voices from the Romish side strongly condemned them. But God used them to kindle a flame that would purify His church and once again display the diamond of the gospel that had been hidden for so long. Surely, the anniversary of this event, known to us as Reformation Day, is worthy of remembering and celebrating in profound thankfulness to God every year. 

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He meant that the entire life
of believers must be
an ongoing repentance,
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of the mind followed by
those outward mortifications
of the flesh....*

⁶ German word meaning “indulgence” but in the sense of “pardon, remission, tolerance.”

⁷ Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 313.

Luther's Struggle for Assurance

God in His wise and wonderful providence raises up special men and women for His church in special times. One such man was Martin Luther, as we well know.

What was special about Luther was not just his intellectual gifts and abilities, though they were outstanding, but also his acute spiritual sensitivities. Luther was a man through whom emotions rolled like great tsunamis at times, but emotions that were tied to an overwhelming God-consciousness, an awareness that afflicted his conscience in his early life to the point of despair again and again. Was there no way out for a damn-worthy sinner?

A God-consciousness with an acute sensitivity to sin that Luther never lost. A man raised up by God whose intense spiritual struggles with their resolution resulted in determining the very course of history and of Western civilization from the sixteenth century onward.

When it comes to the Reformation, our attention usually focuses on Luther nailing his Ninety-five Theses on the church door in Wittenberg on All Hallows' Eve of October, 1517. The controversy that followed set in motion an avalanche that brought down not only Rome's domination in ecclesiastical affairs, but changed the whole civil and social landscape of Europe, fragmenting Europe into Protestant versus Romish camps of loyalty. Nothing was ever the same in Europe once the fires of controversy sparked by Luther's Ninety-five Theses began to burn across the continental landscape.

But we must understand that the controversy unleashed by the Ninety-five Theses was the result of a deep spiritual struggle, a 'controversy' that had taken place in Luther's own heart and soul in the years prior to their posting.

The Ninety-five Theses drawn up to challenge Rome's abuses and man-invented doctrines (largely meant to

profit Rome's financial interests) were preceded by another event that had taken place in Luther's soul some four years prior, the exact date of which is not known (sometime in April or May of 1513 scholars think), known as the 'tower experience.'

It was as he was studying Scripture, sequestered in a tower in Wittenberg, confronted again by that dread phrase "the righteousness of God," a phrase found so often in the Psalms and Romans, that Luther, as if struck by a bolt of lightening from heaven, suddenly grasped the gospel significance of Paul's statement in Romans 1:17 that "the just shall live by faith", and that "therein is the righteousness of God revealed."

Luther later described the event in these words:

Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...."¹

That Luther would describe the proper understanding of the phrase "the just shall live by faith" in terms of "rebirth" and "paradise" and a opening of the "gates to heaven" indicates just how deep his prior struggle with his own sin and guilt had gone, as well as with God's holy, righteous character and just wrath. So deep as to despair of the possibility of his own salvation, and so overwhelming that he acknowledged later that he came not only to dread the phrase "the righteousness of God," but that in time he came to hate it. It was a righteousness so high that it was bound to find fault with and defeat all of his attempts to please God by his most zealous, ardent labors of obedience and penance and contrition. Why even try?

A God, a so-called 'Father,' impossible to satisfy or please. And having required the impossible, this Al-

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¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 65.

mighty God then judging one to have failed and punishing one for the failure. And then, evidently, taking pleasure in casting the guilty one into eternal torment. Who could speak of any hope for mercy to be found in such a demanding, even heartless, God?

Luther the monk, a tormented soul.

As we know, what drove Luther to seek refuge in a monastic order was a great thunderstorm that broke over his head as he traveled on an open road to Erfurt. As the lightening strokes crackled around him, he pled with St. Anne (the virgin Mary's mother) to petition God to spare him, and if she would, he would take the vows of a monk. Luther's dread certainty was that if he died at the age of 21, he would be consigned to eternal damnation, that was all.

Spared, Luther per his vow, entered an Augustinian order.

Whatever Rome's theological weaknesses in Luther's day might have been, challenging the truth of God as the almighty and righteous Judge, and calling into question the reality of everlasting punishment were not among them.

Roland Bainton has it nearly right when he states that under Rome's influence "The entire training of home, school, and university [and monastery] was designed to instill fear of God and reverence for the Church."² It would be more accurate to say that Rome intended a child's entire training "to instill a [dread] fear of God *primarily in the interests of reverence for the Church and unquestioned submission to her bishops.*"

Who will save a man from this dreadful, most righteous, judging God? Only mother Rome, mother Church. "You will do as we, the magisterium, say, or else we will turn you over to this God!" The whole emphasis of Rome's theology was in the service of her own supreme authority and enrichment. Lack of assurance profited her. How much money will a man not give in exchange for his own soul when death looks him in the face? And in the late Middle Ages incurable diseases and death loomed like a specter over the whole of life, from the cradle on.

To use the wording of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 12), the great error of Rome was not her insistence that "...by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve tem-

poral and eternal punishment." Rome drove that home. The great error of Rome was her answer to the question, what is "...[the] way by which we may escape that punishment and be again received into favor?"

Rome's prescribed 'way' had precious little to do with Christ and the mercy of God through His Son as the Mediator and sacrifice for sin and sinners.

To be sure, Christ by His blood and atoning suffering (as made by and taught in the mass) obtained a treasury of forgiveness and pardon. But now the great question: what had one done to deserve (merit, earn the right) to lay hold on that forgiveness and sacrifice for oneself?

For Rome, it was and is a matter of penance, and penance is a matter of doing. Have you done all that is required of you? And have you ever done enough?

This is why the conscience-stricken Luther (and many other earnest seekers of forgiveness and deliverance from hell fire) entered monasteries. There, through the discipline of their monastic order, they could devote the whole of their waking hours to prayers and devotions, to penance and afflicting oneself for one's sins. There one could avoid the fleshly temptations that loom so large outside the cloister walls. There, free from worldly intrusions, lay the best possibility for doing what Rome required for earning forgiveness and being free of the corrupting influence of the fleshly appetites stimulated by the world. There a man's righteousness could be obtained at last, or at least the assurance that God at last was satisfied with one's sincere endeavors.

So Luther hoped.

It was not to be, not with Rome's system of penance and merit, and not for a man with as acute a sensitivity to sin as Luther's, and his knowledge of how holy and righteous God was.

Just how acute his spiritual sensitivities were is revealed in Luther's account of his experience as he presided over his inaugural mass as a newly ordained priest in 1505 (age 23). He related:

When I read the words, "Thee, therefore, most merciful Father," etc. and thought I had to speak to God without a Mediator, I felt like fleeing....

At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, "With what tongue shall I address such majesty, seeing that all men ought to

² Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 27.

tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? ...Shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say, 'I want this, I ask for that?' For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God."³

For a man with such an acute awareness of his own deep-rooted corruption and of God's high righteousness, Rome's system of penance offered no solace.

Lifting his analysis from Luther's *Table Talk*, Bainton makes the following commentary about Luther and the inadequacy of Rome's sacrament of penance, a sacrament that required that the penitent

...should confess all their wrongdoing and seek absolution. Luther endeavored unremittingly to avail himself of this signal mercy.... He confessed frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours on a single occasion. Every sin in order to be absolved was to be confessed. Therefore the soul must be searched and the memory ransacked and the motives probed.... Luther would repeat a confession, and to be sure of including everything, would review his entire life until [his] confessors grew weary [of his recitation]....

...Luther's question was not whether his sins were big or little, but whether they had been confessed. The great difficulty which he encountered was to be sure that everything had been recalled. He learned from experience the cleverness of memory in protecting the ego, and he was frightened when after six hours of confessing he could still go out and think of something else which had eluded his most conscientious scrutiny.⁴

With those who would speak critically of 'this' Luther, asserting that such a burden of guilt and fixation on failures 'to measure up' were simply the psychological residue of a man having been raised by a demanding and austere father (labeled a "father-complex"), we sharply disagree.

We do not deny that God used Luther's upbringing to mold and shape facets of his character (as God uses every man's upbringing to this end to some degree), but to relegate Luther's conviction of his own deep-rooted corruption and unrighteousness before a just and holy

God to the category of a "father-complex" is mistaken to the extreme.

The simple fact is that Luther's fierce struggle with his guilt and unworthiness was not an indication of some lamentable psychological disorder, but was nothing less than the workings (stabs) of the Holy Spirit on the acutely sensitive conscience with which God had formed Luther from the womb. Luther was exactly correct in his self-appraisal, where every man, left to himself and his own labors, stands before God, worthy of eternal damnation.

And it was this deep internal struggle, bordering on despair at times, that drove Luther to go back to ponder again and again Paul's statement that "the just (the righteous) shall live by faith." Paul, the former blasphemer, seemed to ground all of his comfort and assurance, all his hope and joy in that truth. How could that be?

And then, when the Holy Spirit determined "The time is now!", the gospel truth suddenly dawned on him. Suddenly, the scales fell from his eyes. Paul was not talking about the righteousness of God as God *judges* a man, but the righteousness that God grants to one who simply *believes* and puts his trust—the *whole* of his trust—in the atoning blood and sacrifice and *perfect obedience* of Christ.

And what righteousness is that? Nothing less than the "righteousness of God!" God's own righteousness is granted and imputed to one who comes in faith. And if it is God's own righteousness that is granted to one's account, how can God ever find fault with *that* righteousness?

The just (those justified by God) shall live (escape the sentence of wrath and death, and go free) by faith. No need for meritorious works or trying to do enough, which will always fail. Simply *believe* God's Word and work in Christ the Righteous one, and by faith lay claim to the righteousness God worked through Christ's suffering, death, and obedience. No wonder Paul gloried not in his own works but in the cross, Christ crucified, and in Him *alone*. By faith *alone* means trusting in Christ's atoning work *alone*.

All this God accomplishing in a most righteous and unassailable way. God's own righteousness provided by God Himself for sinners standing in the need of mercy and grace.

³ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 28.

⁴ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 54, 55.

That God had provided for sinners a perfect righteousness to make their very own in this manner was a revelation to Luther. This God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, was a most merciful Father after all.

Scales of blindness fell from Luther's eyes. Peace and assurance flooded his soul. The gospel was made plain. Righteousness and mercy have kissed.

Luther had to tell others, which he did, in Wittenberg for four years as a Bible lecturer.

But it was this "tower experience" that drove him in the end to nail the Ninety-five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, not only to refute and expose the monstrous errors of Rome that obscured and mutilated that liberating gospel, but also to begin to publish what had set his own soul free from its bondage of guilt and torment, so that others might glory in the same gospel of almighty God that he now did.

Thanks be to God for a man so spiritual as Luther.



REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

Luther and Scripture

Martin Luther would be unknown to us if it were not for Scripture. The Spirit did not write the name "Martin Luther" in Scripture as He did the name "Moses" or "Malachi." But the Spirit wrote the Scriptures in Martin Luther, giving to him the convictions that made him the historical giant that he was, and propelling him into the spotlight of the ecclesiastical and national scene in sixteenth-century Germany. Without Scripture and the profound impact it had on his life, Martin Luther was just another man that time, like an ever-rolling stream, would silently bear away. Sure, he was a brilliant man, industrious in character and dynamic in personality; but that alone would not have made him known.

We never would have heard of Luther if it were not for Scripture. Scripture made Luther, Luther. It made him the man that the two most powerful and recognizable figures of the world of his day—the pope and emperor Charles V—had to deal with. It made him the pivotal figure of whom all secular historians must give an account in recounting the shaping of the sixteenth century. It made him the dear father we Reformed believers remember as a token of God's covenant faithfulness.

Instead of presenting Luther's doctrine of Scripture by drawing from Luther's writings on the subject of Scripture, we will draw from Luther's *life*. What Luther *did*

with the Scriptures tells us as much of his view of the Scriptures as what he *wrote* about them.

Martin Luther joyfully lived in Scripture. It was his Delight.

Martin Luther boldly struck with Scripture. It was his Hammer.

Martin Luther humbly stood under Scripture. It was his Authority.

If we are truly sons and daughters of the Reformation, the same must be said of us.

Luther's Delight

While Luther did address the topic of the inspiration of Scripture and other related doctrines, his writings abound in exhaustive treatments of the *value* of Scripture. Luther knew from experience that Scripture is not a book of dead letters for a few elevated clerics to pour over in vain study, but the very Word of God, revealing the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ as sweetness to the soul of every believer. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). Luther's life proves he delighted in Scripture as sweetness to his soul.

First, Scripture continually delivered him from spiritual unrest and even depression. Often, but especially in his early years as a monk in the Augustinian monasteries, true peace of heart and comfort of conscience were painfully elusive. He grew up in the medieval religious system that was established on and that played on fear—the fear

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of failing to be a good enough monk in establishing his own righteousness by the law, and thus incurring the inexpressibly terrifying wrath of God in purgatory and hell. Profoundly painful were the inner torments of miserable Martin's bitter soul.

But how the Scriptures filled his soul with rapturous delight! In 1513, God's wonderful providence brought Luther to the university in Wittenberg to lecture from the Scriptures. Although he was initially apprehensive that a spiritually sick man could teach others, Luther began to pour over the Scriptures for class lectures, and it was in that personal study that God showed him the gospel of peace in Jesus Christ. He began with the Psalms. How sweet was Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" Luther could not immediately penetrate to the meaning. Those had to be the words of Christ, he thought. Christ had to have experienced the agony of God's judgments in hellish torments, a suffering far worse than anything Martin himself had ever endured. Why else would Christ cry like that? But why did God punish and forsake the sinlessly perfect Christ? How could...? Ah... then the disquieted monk was given to see the gospel of grace: Christ had taken *Martin Luther's sins* and the curse due to Martin Luther for them. God forsook Christ *for Martin Luther*.

Near the end of his commentary on the first verse of Psalm 22, Luther, speaking from experience, writes,

I have dwelt a little at length upon these things, in order that I might commend unto you more highly the grace of faith and the mercy of God, and that you might have a more full knowledge of Christ. For by this verse those are instructed who are exercised in the depths of the abyss of death and hell, and they are here furnished with an antidote against despair.¹

Second, that Luther delighted in Scripture is witnessed by his motivation to begin and complete the incredibly difficult and historically monumental work of translating Scripture into German. After the Diet of Worms where Luther made his famous stand in 1521, he spent some time hiding in the Wartburg Castle

and there began his project. His New Testament was finished quickly and published in 1522. However, the whole Bible was not completed and published as one volume until 1534. The work was as challenging as any work could be. To a friend Luther remarked, as only he could,

We are sweating over the work of putting the Prophets into German. God, how much of it there is, and how hard it is to make these Hebrew writers talk German! They resist us, and do not want to leave their Hebrew and imitate our German barbarisms. It is like making a nightingale leave her own sweet song and imitate the monotonous voice of a cuckoo, which she detests.²

Sweat and all, Luther pressed on determined to put a German Bible in the hands of the people. Had he never tasted Scripture's sweetness, Luther would have abandoned the project. But he was determined to have others share his delight in the Word of God read and preached.

Third, Luther's delight in Scripture as the Word of God was in part what energized him later in life to reject the teaching and antics of the radicals and revolutionaries like Thomas Munster and the Zwickau Prophets, who claimed to have special gifts of prophesy and continued revelations from the Spirit. This was a deeply personal matter with Luther, for if in the deep despair of his younger days he had to look beyond the living, objective Word of God in Scripture in expectation of some special, private revelation from the Spirit or had to look to his own spirit within, he would have found nothing but darkness.

Finally, it should be noted that the reason Luther was able to draw from Scripture delightful sweetness for his soul was that Luther believed all of Scripture testified of *Christ*. Luther read Christ; but his great service to the church was that he entered the pulpit and *preached* Christ. A half-year before he died, Luther preached a sermon on John 5:39ff. that was so well received in the city of Halle that the city council presented him with a golden cup. In the sermon he reveals the secret to profitable Bible-reading and preaching: "Therefore he who would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see

¹ Martin Luther, *Complete Commentary on the first Twenty-Two Psalms*, <https://archive.org> (accessed September 13, 2016).

² Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Books of the Bible" in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 35 (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 229.

to it that he finds Christ in it; then he finds life eternal without fail.”³

Luther delighted in reading, teaching, and preaching Scripture, because he found the sweetness of the gospel of Christ there.

Luther's Hammer

If anyone in church history could swing a hammer it was Martin Luther. His primary hammer was not what he may have used to post his theses to Wittenberg's church door on October 31, 1517. His hammer was Scripture: “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). Because his voluminous writings were faithful explanations of the truth of divine Scripture, the powerful Word of God was communicated through those writings, making them many hammers to break in pieces the rock of Roman Catholic false doctrine lodged in the hearts of men. Luther's writings were not like the fluff of many Christian publishing houses today. His writings infuriated the pope, served as kindling for the enemies' fires, and continually jeopardized his safety. But the Reformer kept taking the hammer of God's Word, swinging away in the service of the truth that salvation is of grace alone and, therefore, through faith alone in Christ alone.

With his Ninety-five Theses of 1517 Luther smashed into pieces the lie of papal authority and the efficacy of indulgences captured in Tetzel's famed jingle, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.” This was only the beginning.

With his “Address to the Christian Nobility” of 1520 Luther hammered away at the Romish doctrine of papal authority and infallibility, the sole authority of the Romish church to interpret Scripture, and the corruption of the distinction between clergy and laity. With the heavy “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” written also in 1520, Luther pounded away at the entire system of works-righteousness by smashing to pieces the Roman Catholic idea of the sacerdotal system and the sacraments—in particular the accursed idolatry that is the mass, so central to the life and work of the priests and of all the people. It is said that even Erasmus read this tract and declared that the breach with Rome was irreparable.

³ Cited in Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 69-70.

Luther's commentary on Galatians, published in 1535, was another heavy-hitting piece of writing.

Not every blow fell upon the rock of Rome. The erroneous theology of the aforementioned Erasmus also took a pounding. Erasmus was not one of the fathers of the Reformation, but a Dutch scholar of the Renaissance merely looking for some moral reform in the church. In response to Erasmus' treatise in support of natural man's free will, Luther published a careful point-for-point refutation in 1525 entitled *On the Bondage of the Will*. This was a work Luther reckoned to be among his greatest. It contains some of Luther's doctrine of Scripture, including the perspicuity of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and the rule of interpreting Scripture that requires taking the words in their grammatical and literal sense unless circumstances plainly forbid it. But especially, this work contains one Scripture passage after another, carefully explained and applied as a continual hammering against the heresy of free will and in praise of sovereign grace.

Additionally, Luther had to bring the hammer of Scripture down upon the practices of the Anabaptist radicals and revolutionaries in the Peasants' War of 1524-1525.

Man's word, even when vehemently expressed, as Luther's often was, is straw. God's Word is the Hammer. Luther's writings were like hammers because they were consciously and clearly grounded in the divinely inspired Word of God. One Luther scholar said of him,

We know of no man's writings that are more saturated with Scripture than those of this great champion of the Bible. Typical is his impatient exclamation in a writing against a papal antagonist: “Give me Scripture, Scripture, Scripture. Do you hear me? Scripture.” We repeat: the permeation of Luther's writings by both the letter and spirit of Scripture is one of his outstanding characteristics as an author.⁴

Luther's Authority

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...” (II Tim. 3:16). Luther found Scripture profitable for sweet comfort in his personal life and profitable for destroying the strongholds of Satan in

⁴ Plass, xv.

the church. But Scripture is only profitable because it is “God-breathed,” possessing the authority of God Himself. The most important truth of Scripture believed by Luther was the truth of Scripture’s absolute, underived, unquestionable authority. Especially *this* conviction made Luther, Luther. Two examples of Luther’s submission to and confidence in the authority of Scripture stand out in his life.

The first is the Leipzig Debate. Before Luther was officially excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church, his teachings were challenged and debates were arranged. At Leipzig he engaged in an important debate in 1522 with a university professor named John Eck, a brilliant and formidable foe. The debate was about indulgences, but Luther went deeper and made papal authority the fundamental issue. He recognized that indulgences are based upon an erroneous doctrine of papal authority. During the debate Eck appealed to the decisions of church councils, to the decretals of the pope, and to history. It was not that Luther rejected the authority of church councils or the authority of lawfully ordained officebearers or the testimony of history. But because Scripture is the inspired and infallible Word of God, it has supreme authority, such that to it the pope himself must submit. Thus Luther appealed to Scripture. In the course of the debate Luther declared,


A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope’s decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor

the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and councils.⁵

By far, the most memorable event in Luther’s life was his famous stand before the ecclesiastical and civil powers at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He was the number-one heretic on the most-wanted list of the church and the state. Luther knew his life was in jeopardy. He came to the Diet of Worms and was asked to recant and renounce his writings. He would gladly have thrown any of his works into the fire—his hammers into the sea—if it could be proved that they were in contradiction of Scripture. Standing before the emperor himself, Luther declared those familiar words,

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of people and councils for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.⁶

The humble monk had no fear before these earthly powers because he stood under the supreme authority of Scripture as the final arbiter of truth. To stand under the authority of Scripture is to stand under the protection of the Almighty.

Sola Scriptura. 

⁵ Cited in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 103.

⁶ Bainton, 180.

REV. MARTYN MC GEOWN

Luther and the Church

Reformed ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) treats the following topics: the nature of the church, the gathering of the church, the attributes and marks of the church, the power and government of the church, and the means of grace of the church. In his ecclesiology, Luther disagreed with the other Re-

formers on some matters (especially on the sacraments), but in the main points there is considerable unity.

Luther was not a systematizer of doctrine. Unlike Calvin, he did not write an *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or his own dogmatics. Many of his works are polemical, written in the heat of the battle. Luther simply did not have time to engage in the quiet scholarship of a systematic theologian. This makes the task of seeking to define Luther’s doctrine of the church—or, for that mat-

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ter, Luther's doctrine of *anything*—a challenge. Luther's *Works* are voluminous, but none of them is devoted to pure ecclesiology.

Nevertheless, we can identify some characteristics of Luther's ecclesiology.

First, Luther was clear on the *nature* of the church. The medieval papacy defined the church as the pope and his clergy. The Roman church, therefore, was a hierarchical institution. Indeed, the common people as such did not constitute the church. In opposition to this, Luther viewed the church as the spiritual body of Jesus Christ made up of believers. In fact, insisted Luther, if the pope and his clergy are not believers (which is entirely possible, for Luther viewed the papacy as Antichrist), they are not the church at all. In 1537, Luther wrote in the Smalcald Articles, "For, thank God, [today] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (Part III, Art. XII). Elsewhere, in his Large Catechism, he wrote, "I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms" (Art. III).

What to us is obvious was to the ecclesiastical world of Luther's day revolutionary: the church is the company of believers (and their children), or, as the pre-Reformer Jan Hus had expressed it, "the church is the company of the predestinate." Such a definition of the church, when believed, was a deathblow to the pretensions of the Roman See. No wonder Luther was labeled a Hussite or a Bohemian heretic (Hus was from Bohemia)!

Second, Luther was clear on the *attributes* of the church. What Luther could retain from the ecclesiastical tradition that preceded him, he retained, if it was in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. Luther believed what Christians in every age have confessed in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe one holy, catholic church."

Luther did not deny, or even attack (as his opponents alleged) the unity of the church. Luther never intended to create a second church to rival the Roman church. Luther denied that the Roman church *was* the church. It was, and had become, a wicked, degenerate counterfeit of the true church. What Luther did (and what Calvin and the other Reformers did after him) in establishing congrega-

tions on the basis of the Word of God was *to continue* the *one* church of Jesus Christ. Luther's close friend and ally, Philip Melancthon, wrote in the Augsburg Confession,

It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places (Art. VII).

For Luther, the holiness of the church did not consist in the superstitious piety of monks and nuns, or in the superficial holiness of ceremonies, pilgrimages, indulgences, and relics. Rather, the holiness of the church is a spiritual holiness worked in believers by the power of the Spirit through the preaching of the Word of God and the use of the sacraments. Therefore, for Luther, not only is the church holy, but the holiness of the members necessitates their membership in the church. Outside of the church holiness is impossible.

The Holy Ghost effects our sanctification by the following parts, namely, by the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting; that is, He first leads us into His holy congregation, and places us in the bosom of the Church, whereby He preaches to us and brings us to Christ.... I believe that the Holy Ghost makes me holy, as His name implies. But whereby does He accomplish this, or what are His method and means to this end? Answer: by the Christian church.... But outside of this Christian church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness (Large Catechism, Art. III).

In his commentary on Psalm 118, he writes:

Anyone who hesitates to boast and confess that he is holy and righteous is actually saying, "I am not baptized. I am not a Christian. I do not believe that Christ died for me. I do not believe that He took away my sins. I do not believe that His blood has cleansed me, or that it can cleanse me. In short, I do not believe a word of what God has declared of Christ and all Scriptures testified." What kind of person thinks or says such things?¹

¹ Cited by Eugene F. Klug in "Luther on the Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (July 1983), 197.

Rome boasted in the church's catholicity, by which she meant one hierarchical center (the Roman See) from which the "Vicar of Christ" ruled over all churches and all peoples. Luther rightly rejected this, for the Catholic Church is not where the pope rules (where Peter is, as Rome expressed it), but where Christ is, whether in Wittenberg, Germany; London, England; or Zurich, Switzerland. (Had the church spread further in Luther's day, he would undoubtedly have included places in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, for example). "Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Ghost who creates, calls, and gathers the Christian Church" (Large Catechism, Art. III). To turn that around, where Christ *is* preached (wherever that might be), there the Holy Ghost *does* create, call, and gather the Christian church. It is precisely because Christ is *not* preached under the papacy that there is no church there, her boasts of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity notwithstanding.

Third, Luther was clear on the *marks* of the true church. If the church is a holy assembly of believers, the marks of the true church must be pure preaching, because pure preaching creates believers and strengthens the faith of believers; and the faithful administration of the sacraments, because by baptism and the Lord's Supper the faith of believers is nourished.

For Luther, the church was much more important than it seems to be for many modern evangelicals, many of whom despise the church by living in isolation from it. Carl Trueman explains: "For Luther, however, the idea that private Bible study might be a universal staple of the Christian life would have been bizarre: after all, few of his parishioners would have been able to read, even if they could afford a book."² "Luther's piety was rooted in the gathering of the church, in the Word preached *more than the Word read*, and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper."³

The preaching of the gospel was for Luther primary in the church, for in the preaching of the gospel the believer was confronted with Christ. Indeed, such a confrontation did not take place in the private reading of the Scriptures, at least not to the same degree and with the same effect. For Luther, this had important pastoral implications.

² Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 22.

³ Trueman, 23, emphasis added.

Again, Carl Trueman beautifully sets forth the views of Luther: "The person whose life is falling apart and who is tempted to despair needs to know Christ, and knowing Christ requires knowing who he is and what he has done."⁴ He will hear who Christ is and what Christ has done *in the preaching* in the true church. He will not hear it at home, and he certainly will not hear it in the false church.


Elsewhere, Trueman describes Luther's church-orientated approach to counseling:

One could imagine a person seeking Luther's advice for, say, struggles with assurance. Luther's first question of him would almost certainly be, "Are you going to church to hear the Word and receive the sacrament?" If the answer came back in the negative, it is safe to assume that Luther would send the person away to attend church for a few weeks before he would consider giving him individual counsel. If the person had excluded himself from the objective means of grace, not only would spiritual problems be expected, but also Luther could really offer nothing else to help him.⁵

Let that be a warning (and an encouragement) to the struggling saint who is tempted to forsake the means of grace today!

Finally, Luther *loved the church*. His great grief was to see what he called the "Babylonian Captivity" of the church, and his great desire was to see the church restored to her biblical foundations. Above all, Luther saw himself not as a mighty Reformer, or even as a great spiritual leader, but as a humble yet thankful member of the church:

I want to be and remain in the church and little flock of the faint-hearted, the feeble, and the ailing, who feel and recognize the wretchedness of their sins, who believe in the forgiveness of sins, and who suffer persecution for the sake of the Word which they confess and teach purely and without adulteration."⁶

That, too, is our thankful confession. We love the church, for in the church we find Christ. 

⁴ Trueman, 130.

⁵ Trueman, 120-121.

⁶ Klug, "Luther on the Church," 201.

Luther in Books

As part of this special *Standard Bearer* issue on Martin Luther, I was asked to submit an article featuring some of the classic works on Luther as well as some of the new works being produced in connection with next year's 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the Ninety-five Theses.

It is not difficult to feature books on Luther. The difficulty is in knowing where to end the list. There is, indeed, a plethora of good ones. But we can and will highlight a few of the best for you here, so that you can begin or continue to do some reading on this mighty Reformer and renew your knowledge of and thankfulness for the great Reformation of the sixteenth century.

We begin with a few general works on Luther and the Reformation.

And allow me first of all to reference and recommend a new, general work on the Reformation. It is *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* edited by Peter Marshall (2015, 303 pp.). This is a beautifully illustrated book covering all the major branches of the Reformation (chapter titles are "Late Medieval Christianity," "Martin Luther," "Calvinism and the Reform of the Reformation," "The Radical Reformation," "Catholic Reformation and Renewal," "Britain's Reformations," and "Reformation Legacies"), well deserving of a place in your home library and of your browsing and perusal.

Another more general Reformation work but one specifically on Luther that may be mentioned at this point is *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (there is also one on John Calvin), edited by Donald K. McKim and published by Cambridge University Press (2003, 320 pp.). This work divides Luther and the Reformation into four parts: Luther's life and context; Luther's work; after Luther; and Luther today. Though perhaps not for general reading, this is a valuable reference work for understanding Luther's place in church history and in the history of doctrine.

As far as biographies of Luther are concerned, there is probably no better place to begin than the classic work by

Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: The Life of Martin Luther* (1950). Many editions are available, but Hendrickson Publishers has a fine new reprint (2009, hardcover; 441 pp.) in its "Hendrickson Classic Biographies" series. This book by a premier Reformation scholar is a "must" in every Protestant's library and ought to be read and re-read.

In addition, let me mention a couple of newer biographical books on Luther that are worth your reading: *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* by Stephen J. Nichols (P&R, 2002; 240 pp.) is a fine survey of Luther's life and work; and *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther* by Steven J. Lawson (Reformation Trust, 2013; 145 pp.) is a wonderful look at Luther's commitment to and preaching of the Scriptures.

Newer yet are these titles: *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (Yale University Press, 2015; 341 pp.) by Scott H. Hendrix (emeritus professor of Reformation history, Princeton Seminary), concerning which the publisher writes,

This bold and insightful account of the life of Martin Luther provides a new perspective on one of the most important religious figures in history, focusing on Luther's entire life, his personal relationships, and political motivations, rather than on his theology alone. Drawing on the latest research and quoting extensively from Luther's correspondence, Hendrix paints a richly detailed portrait of an extraordinary man who, while devout and courageous, also had a dark side. No recent biography in English explores as fully the life and work of Martin Luther long before and far beyond the controversial posting of his 95 Theses in 1517....

And along with that one, *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* by Timothy F. Lull and Derek R. Nelson (Fortress Press, 2015; 411 pp.), a major new study of the Reformer in which Luther is presented as "an energetic, resilient actor, driven by very human strengths and failings, always wishing to do right by his understanding of God and the witness of the Scriptures. At times humorous, always realistic, and appropriately critical when necessary, Lull and Nelson tell the story of an amazing, unforgettable life" (back cover).

While these last two books contain viewpoints and con-

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tent with which this Reformed reader differs (and probably most of you readers), as I believe that Luther was driven by the grace of God, however imperfect the man was, and that he had at the center of his life and work the gospel of pure grace in Jesus Christ, it is good to be aware of the current trends in Luther scholarship, especially in this time of special remembrance of God's work in Luther and in the church in the 1600s.

Among the new books being published on Luther are some studies on special periods of his life and special aspects of his work. I mention five here:

- *October 31 1517: Martin Luther and the Day That Changed the World* by Martin E. Marty (Paraclete Press, 2016, 114 pp.). In this work the famed American Lutheran minister and scholar gives a brief overview of Luther's 95 theses, placing them in and applying them to our modern context. While Marty's ecumenical interpretation of the theses will be judged critically by true Protestants, his is a voice to be heard.

- *Luther's Fortress: Martin Luther and His Reformation Under Siege* by James Reston, Jr. (Basic Books, 2015; 260 pp.). This fascinating study looks at the eleven-month period of Luther's life (April 1521- March 1522) when he was sheltered in the Wartburg Castle following the Diet of Worms and the edict of Charles V that Luther "be apprehended and punished as a notorious heretic." As the inside cover points out,

instead of cowering in fear, Luther spent his time at Wartburg strengthening his movement and refining his theology in ways that would guarantee the survival of Protestantism. He devoted himself to biblical study and spiritual contemplation; he fought both his papal critics and his own inner demons (and, legend has it, the devil himself); and he held together his fractious and increasingly radicalized reform movement from afar. During this time Luther also crystallized some of his most significant ideas about Christianity and translated the New Testament into German—an accomplishment that, perhaps more than any other, solidified his legacy and spread his bold new religious philosophy across Europe.

- *Luther Refracted: The Reformer's Ecumenical Legacy*, edited by Piotr J. Malysz and Derek R. Nelson (Fortress Press, 2015; 337 pp.). Another modern study of Luther, this book features a broad spectrum of interactions with and interpretations of Luther—Roman Catholic, Baptist, Episcopal, Reformed, Evangelical—with contemporary

Lutheran responses. Perhaps limited in interest for our readers, nevertheless, this title too is a good window into contemporary understanding of the great Reformer.

- *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation*, by Andrew Pettegree (Penguin Press, 2015; 383 pp.). This unique study focuses on how Luther used printing to advance the cause of the Protestant Reformation. "Pettegree illustrates Luther's great gifts not simply as a theologian, but as a communicator, indeed, as the world's first mass-media figure, its first *brand*. He recognized in printing the power of pamphlets, written in the colloquial German of everyday people, to win the battle of ideas" (inside jacket). If you need further encouragement to "take up and read" this important book, Prof. David Engelsma published a more extensive—and favorable—review of it in the April 2016 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* (which you may find online through the PRCA website (prca.org)).

- *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation*, by noted Lutheran theologian Robert Kolb (Baker Academic, November 2016; 512 pp.). The publisher informs us that in this work "Kolb examines the entire school of interpretation launched by Luther, showing how Luther's students continued the study and spread God's Word in subsequent generations. Filled with fresh insights and cutting-edge research, this major statement provides historical grounding for contemporary debates about the Bible."

It is not out of order also to call your attention to another book that involves Luther—and his beloved "Katy," his wife. While some of you may be familiar with an older work on Katherine Luther by E. Jane Mall titled *Kitty, My Rib* (Concordia, 1959), there is a "newer" work out on her, in English for the first time. *The Mother of the Reformation: The Amazing Story of Katherine Luther* (Concordia, 2013; 275 pp.) is a translation of the 1906 work *Katharina von Bora* by Ernst Kroker (Mark E. DeGarmeaux, translator). According to the publisher,

Kroker paints an intimate picture of Katie and of family life in the Black Cloister during the formative years of the Reformation, showing how Katie's marriage to Martin Luther was a multifaceted vocation, with such tasks as household brew mistress, cloister landlady, property overseer, gardener, cow- and pig-herder, and fishwife. Indeed, Katie oversaw their


home much like a “lord” in her kingdom, yet in the midst of it all stood the man to whom her work, concern, and duty were directed.

I believe our female readers will especially benefit from this new book.

As we close this look at Luther in books, it is perhaps in order to include a few quotes from Luther himself on the world of books, including his own writings—and God’s.

There never yet have been, nor are there now, too many good books.

If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.

The Bible is the proper book for men. There the truth is distinguished from error far more clearly than anywhere else, and one finds something new in it every day. For twenty-eight years, since I became a doctor, I have now constantly read and preached the Bible; and yet I have not exhausted it but find something new in it every day. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of First PRC of Holland express our sincere Christian sympathy to Jannet Moore following the death of her beloved husband,

RICHARD MOORE.

May she be comforted with the words of II Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Henry DeJong, Vice President
Darle Wassink, Asst Clerk

REMINDER

■ The September 15 issue marked the end of Volume 92. If you are interested in having your copies bound, drop them off at the RFPa office by October 31. Price—\$24.

The Reformed Witness Committee's Annual Reformation Day Lecture:

The Reformation's Zeal for Missions

Rev. Allen Brummel

Friday, November 4, 2016
7:00 P.M.

B.J. Haan Auditorium
Dordt College
Sioux Center, Iowa

Sponsored by The Reformed Witness Committee of
Calvary, Doon, Edgerton, Heritage, and Hull PRCs

Reformation Lecture

The Reformation's Recovery of Marriage and the Christian Family

Friday, October 21, 2016 at 7:30 P.M.

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

at Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church
4515 Green Acres Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49009

Hope's Lecture

The Necessity of Membership in a True Church of Jesus Christ

Speaker:

Prof. David Engelsma

Friday, November 11, 2016
7:30 P.M.

Hope PRC
1580 Ferndale Ave. SW
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Sponsor:

Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC
Will be live-streamed on SermonAudio