

# THE *October 15, 2001* STANDARD BEARER

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Special  
Reformation  
Issue:

*Martin Luther*



Copy of an inexpensive indulgence  
sold by Tetzel

Translation: "In the authority of all the saints,  
and in compassion towards thee,  
I absolve thee from all sins and misdeeds,  
and remit all punishment for ten days."

Johannes Tietzel

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# The First Sermon, March 9, 1522, Invocavit Sunday<sup>1</sup>

**T**he summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another's ears, but every one must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian. And these are what you, my beloved, have heard from me many days ago.

In the first place, we must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all. Here we need a clear, strong text to bear out this point. Such is the saying of St. Paul in Eph. 2 [3]. Note this well; and though there are many such in the Bible, I do not wish to overwhelm you with many texts. "We are all the chil-

dren of wrath." And please do not undertake to say: I have built an altar, given a foundation for masses, etc.

Secondly, that God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in him and that whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and a child of God, as John declares in his first chapter, "To all who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" [John 1:12]. Here we should all be well versed in the Bible and ready to confront the devil with many passages. With respect to these two points I do not feel that there has been anything wrong or lacking. They have been rightly preached to you, and I should be sorry if it were otherwise. Indeed, I am well aware and I dare say that you are more learned than I, and that there are not only one, two, three, or four, but perhaps ten or more, who have this knowledge and enlightenment.

Thirdly, we must also have love and through love we must do to one another as God has done to us through faith. For without love faith is nothing, as St. Paul says (I

Cor. 2 [13:1]): If I had the tongues of angels and could speak of the highest things in faith, and have not love, I am nothing. And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among you, and I observe very well that you have not been grateful to God for his rich gifts and treasures.

Here let us beware lest Wittenberg become Capernaum [cf. Matt. 11:23]. I notice that you have a great deal to say of the doctrine of faith and love which is preached to you, and this is no wonder; an ass can almost intone the lessons, and why should you not be able to repeat the doctrines and formulas? Dear friends, the kingdom of God, —and we are that kingdom—does not consist in talk or words [I Cor. 4:20], but in activity, in deeds, in works and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words [Jas. 1:22], but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love. For a faith without love is not enough—rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit of faith, just as a face seen in a mirror is not a real face, but merely the reflection of a face [I Cor. 13:12].

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<sup>1</sup> In the original there follow the words "Sermon, D.M.L."

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Fourthly, we also need patience. For whoever has faith, trusts in God, and shows love to his neighbor, practicing it day by day, must needs suffer persecution. For the devil never sleeps, but constantly gives him plenty of trouble. But patience works and produces hope [Rom. 5:4], which freely yields itself to God and vanishes away in him. Thus faith, by much affliction and persecution, ever increases, and is strengthened day by day. A heart thus blessed with virtues can never rest or restrain itself, but rather pours itself out again for the benefit and service of the brethren, just as God has done to it.

And here, dear friends, one must not insist upon his rights, but must see what may be useful and helpful to his brother, as Paul says, *Omnia mihi licent, sed non omnia expediunt*, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful" [I Cor. 6:12]. For we are not all equally strong in faith, some of you have a stronger faith than I. Therefore we must not look upon ourselves, or our strength, or our prestige, but upon our neighbor, for God has said through Moses: I have borne and reared you, as a mother does her child [Deut. 1:31]. What does a mother do to her child? First she gives it milk, then gruel, then eggs and soft food, whereas if she turned about and gave it solid food, the child would never thrive [cf. I Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-13]. So we should also deal with our brother, have patience with him for a time, have patience with his weakness and help him bear it; we should also give him milk-food, too [I Pet. 2:2; cf. Rom. 14:1-3], as was done with us, until he, too, grows strong, and thus we do not travel heavenward alone, but bring our brethren, who are not now our friends, with us. If all mothers were to abandon their children, where would we have been? Dear brother, if you have suckled long enough, do not at once cut off the breast, but let your brother be

suckled as you were suckled. I would not have gone so far as you have done, if I had been here. The cause is good, but there has been too much haste. For there are still brothers and sisters on the other side who belong to us and must still be won.

Let me illustrate. The sun has two properties, light and heat. No king has power enough to bend or guide the light of the sun; it remains fixed in its place. But the heat may be turned and guided, and yet is ever about the sun. Thus faith must always remain pure and immovable in our hearts, never wavering; but love bends and turns so that our neighbor may grasp and follow it. There are some who can run, others must walk, still others can hardly creep [cf. I Cor. 8:7-13]. Therefore we must not look upon our own, but upon our brother's powers, so that he who is weak in faith, and attempts to follow the strong, may not be destroyed of the devil. Therefore, dear brethren, follow me; I have never been a destroyer. And I was also the very first whom God called to this work. I cannot run away, but will remain as long as God allows. I was also the one to whom God first revealed that his Word should be preached to you. I am also sure that you have the pure Word of God.

Let us, therefore, let us act with fear and humility, cast ourselves at one another's feet, join hands with each other, and help one another. I will do my part, which is no more than my duty, for I love you even as I love my own soul. For here we battle not against pope or bishop, but against the devil [cf. Eph. 6:12], and do you imagine he is asleep? He sleeps not, but sees the true light rising, and to keep it from shining into his eyes he would like to make a flank attack—and he will succeed, if we are not on our guard. I know him well, and I hope, too, that with the help of God, I am his master. But if we yield him but an inch, we must soon look to it how we may be rid

of him. Therefore all those have erred who have helped and consented to abolish the mass; not that it was not a good thing, but that it was not done in an orderly way. You say it was right according to the Scriptures. I agree, but what becomes of order? For it was done in wantonness, with no regard for proper order and with offense to your neighbor. If, beforehand, you had called upon God in earnest prayer, and had obtained the aid of the authorities, one could be certain that it had come from God. I, too, would have taken steps toward the same end if it had been a good thing to do; and if the mass were not so evil a thing, I would introduce it again. For I cannot defend your action, as I have just said. To the papists and blockheads I could defend it, for I could say: How do you know whether it was done with good or bad intention, since the work in itself was really a good work? But I would not know what to assert before the devil. For if on their deathbeds the devil reminds those who began this affair of texts like these, "Every plant which my Father has not planted will be rooted up" [Matt. 15:13], or "I have not sent them, yet they ran" [Jer. 23:21],<sup>2</sup> how will they be able to withstand? He will cast them into hell. But I shall poke the one spear into his face, so that even the world will become too small for him, for I know that in spite of my reluctance I was called by the council to preach. Therefore I was willing to accept you as you were willing to accept me, and, besides, you could have consulted me about the matter.

I was not so far away that you could not reach me with a letter, whereas not the slightest communication was sent to me. If you were going to begin something and make me responsible for it, that would have been too hard. I will

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<sup>2</sup> Scripture passages in Latin, though Luther undoubtedly spoke them in German.




not do it [i.e., assume the responsibility]. Here one can see that you do not have the Spirit, even though you do have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Take note of these two things, “must” and “free.” The “must” is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be unyielding; as, for instance, the faith, which I shall never permit any one to take away from me, but must always keep in my heart and freely confess before every one. But “free” is that in which I have choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way that it profit my brother and not me. Now do not make a “must” out of what is “free,” as you have done, so that you may not be called to account for those who were led astray by your loveless exercise of liberty. For if you entice any one to eat meat on Fri-

day, and he is troubled about it on his deathbed, and thinks, Woe is me, for I have eaten meat and I am lost! God will call you to account for that soul. I, too, would like to begin many things, in which but few would follow me, but what is the use? For I know that, when it comes to the showdown, those who have begun this thing cannot maintain themselves, and will be the first to retreat. How would it be, if I brought the people to the point of attack, and though I had been the first to exhort others, I would then flee, and not face death with courage? How the poor people would be deceived!

Let us, therefore, feed others also with the milk which we received, until they, too, become strong in faith. For there are many who are otherwise in accord with

us and who would also gladly accept this thing, but they do not yet fully understand it—these we drive away. Therefore, let us show love to our neighbors; if we do not do this, our work will not endure. We must have patience with them for a time, and not cast out him who is weak in faith; and do and omit to do many other things, so long as love requires it and it does no harm to our faith. If we do not earnestly pray to God and act rightly in this matter, it looks to me as if all the misery which we have begun to heap upon the papists will fall upon us. Therefore I could no longer remain away, but was compelled to come and say these things to you.

This is enough about the mass; tomorrow we shall speak about images. 

## Editorial

# “Luther’s Only Truly Congenial Disciple”

**I**t was said of famed Luther-scholar Karl Holl that he regarded John Calvin as “Luther’s only truly congenial disciple.” This high estimation of Calvin shocked the Lutherans, who have always nursed a grudge against Calvin and Calvinists. It might have surprised Luther, who was inclined to lump Calvin with the despised “sacramentarians.”

Luther and Calvin were contemporaries, although Calvin was twenty-six years younger than Luther. For about ten years, until Luther’s death in 1546, they labored together on behalf of the Reformation, Luther in Germany and Calvin in Geneva and Strasbourg.

They never met. They did not even correspond. The closest con-

tact that Calvin had with Luther was Calvin’s friendship with Melancthon, Luther’s colleague in Wittenberg.

Luther knew of Calvin. On two occasions, Luther spoke well of Calvin. In a letter to Martin Bucer, a common friend (at those times when Luther was not incensed with Bucer), Luther wrote: “Please greet reverently Mr. John Sturm and John Calvin. I have read their books with special pleasure.” Melancthon once reported to Calvin that Luther had referred to Calvin as “a gifted man”—praise that pleased Calvin immensely.

Nevertheless, Luther’s violent condemnation of all who denied a physical presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine

of the Lord’s Supper—the “sacramentarians”—fell also on Calvin. It is likely that Luther *intended* his condemnation to reach Calvin. And Calvin felt the sting of the great reformer’s diatribe.

On his part, Calvin esteemed and praised Luther highly. He was well aware of Luther’s serious weaknesses, especially his furious outbursts against those who differed with his doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. David Steinmetz observes that “while Calvin agreed with Luther that the defense of the truth required theologians to engage in polemical discussions ... he could not agree with the ferocity of Luther’s attacks on other Protestant reformers ... or overlook the self-indulgent character of Luther’s

piques and rages" (*Luther in Context*, Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 85, 86). In response to one such outburst by Luther, Calvin wrote: "I am thoroughly ashamed of him [Luther]," although he prefaced the remark with the words, "From my heart I reverence him."

Despite Luther's assaults upon him for his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, Calvin continued to hold Luther in the highest esteem. In 1544 (two years before his death), in the work, "Short Confession of the Lord's Supper," Luther savaged the Swiss, Calvin, and even Melancthon for their views of a spiritual presence of Christ in the Supper. Calvin reacted in a letter to Bullinger of Zurich: "I have already often said that were he to call me a devil, I should still continue to venerate him as a distinguished servant of God, who, while excelling in extraordinary virtues, also labors under some great faults."

According to David Steinmetz, "among the non-Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century, none was more reluctant to disagree with Martin Luther or more eager to find common ground with him than John Calvin" (*Calvin in Context*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 172).

Calvin's esteem for Luther was not hero-worship. It was not even the Christian virtue of respect for a great man of God in spite of his flaws. Calvin esteemed Luther highly because Calvin was "Luther's only truly congenial disciple." Calvin saw that Luther was the man whom Christ had chosen to recover the gospel for His church. This was why Calvin, always careful with his words, could refer to Luther as an "apostle." The fundamental doctrine of the gospel that Luther recovered, Calvin embraced, taught, developed, and handed over to the church that would follow. Thus, Calvin promoted the essential work of Martin Luther on behalf of God and His church. Only Calvin laid

hold of Luther's fundamental doctrine and promoted Luther's essential work.

The fundamental doctrine of Martin Luther was the glory of God in Jesus Christ in the salvation of elect sinners by free, almighty grace, apart from the works, worth, and will of these sinners. Luther believed this truth with all his heart and confessed it with a prodigious outpouring of mouth and pen. He believed it because this truth is God's own Word about Himself, Holy Scripture. "(Salvation) is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). This doctrine exposed the Roman Catholic Church as a false church, and destroyed it. This doctrine reformed the true church, which had been corrupted by the lie that God will try to save those who show themselves worthy, and established her—in genuine Protestantism—as the glorious, indestructible kingdom of God in the world.

The specific denial of God's sovereignty in salvation that prevailed at the time was the false teaching that a sinner becomes righteous before God by his own good works. Therefore, Luther, who always practiced the rule that one must defend the truth at the precise point where it is presently being attacked, emphasized justification by faith alone. The justified sinner is righteous before God apart from any work of his own, including the good works that faith produces and faith itself as a good work.

Luther's emphasis was a righteousness for guilty humans consisting only of the obedience of Jesus Christ in His life and death. But his fundamental doctrine was God's sovereign grace in the salvation of elect sinners. Because the divine sovereignty in salvation was his fundamental doctrine, Luther taught election and its necessity.

On your view [says Luther to a defender of the heresy that God

merely helps willing people to save themselves], God will elect nobody, and no place for election will be left; all that is left is freedom of will to heed or defy the long-suffering and wrath of God. But if God is thus robbed of His power and wisdom in election, what will He be but just that idol, Chance, under whose sway all things happen at random? Eventually, we shall come to this: that men may be saved and damned without God's knowledge! For He will not have marked out by sure election those that should be saved and those that should be damned; He will merely have set before all men His general long-suffering, which forbears and hardens, together with His chastening and punishing mercy, and left it to them to choose whether they would be saved or damned, while He Himself, perchance, goes off, as Homer says, to an Ethiopian banquet! (*The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, James Clarke, 1957, pp. 199, 200).

Because Luther taught biblical election, he taught that the eternal decree appointing some to salvation included the ordaining of the others to damnation. Luther taught eternal, sovereign reprobation: "God ... of His own mere will abandon(s), harden(s) and damn(s) men" (*Bondage*, p. 217).

In their perceptive "Historical and Theological Introduction" to their translation of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, Packer and Johnston call attention to Luther's fundamental doctrine.

The doctrine of free justification by faith only ... is often regarded as the heart of the Reformers' theology, but this is hardly accurate. The truth is that their thinking was really centred upon the contention of Paul ... that the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only. The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this principle, and that not its deepest as-



pect. ...To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort. "Justification by faith only" is a truth that needs interpretation. The principle of *sola fide* is not rightly understood till it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *sola gratia* (pp. 58, 59).

For Luther, religion is not man-centered, but God-centered. Not man and his happiness (achieved in the final analysis by man himself!), but God and His glory (accomplished by God Himself!) is the heart of the Christian gospel. This is why Karl Holl regarded Calvin not merely as Luther's best disciple but as Luther's only truly congenial disciple. Correctly, Holl was

critical of the notion of contemporary scholarship that the formula "seeking the glory of God" is "a Calvinistic concept." "Here too," Holl declared, "Calvin only continued Luther's work" (Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* Fortress Press, 1977, p. 106).

The only truly congenial disciple of Luther was John Calvin.

Where are the truly congenial disciples of Luther and Calvin today?

They are not the Lutherans, most of whom (contrary to their own creed) teach that God's salvation of sinners is dependent upon sinners' choosing Christ by their own free will. The rest teach that God saves those who do not resist, which comes down to the same thing: man is sovereign in salvation. That the Lutherans are not truly disciples of Luther is evident from their embarrassment at Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*.

They are not the fundamentalists and evangelicals. These are outspoken that salvation depends on men's decision for Christ, that God does not even know who will be saved and lost, and that God exists to make people happy.

Neither are they the majority of the Reformed and Presbyterians. They are no truly congenial dis-

ciples of Luther and Calvin who insist that the gospel is God's saving love and earnest desire to save all without exception, which love and desire are frustrated by the unbelief of many. They are no truly congenial disciples of Luther and Calvin who make faith a condition that the sinner must fulfill in order to make God's general promise effective and thus obtain salvation for themselves. They are no truly congenial disciples of Luther and Calvin who are teaching (albeit coyly and damnably obscurely), and receiving those who are teaching, that sinners are justified by faith *and by the good works of faith*. They are no truly congenial disciples of Luther and Calvin who, as soon as they hear a good, hearty, consistent confession of the sovereignty of God in salvation and damnation, turn white and gasp, "hyper-Calvinism!" or turn red and protest, "But man is responsible!"

Where are the truly congenial disciples of Luther and Calvin in A.D. 2001?

They exist, as surely as Christ will not let His work in the sixteenth century Reformation of the church come to nothing.

Wherever they are, there are the gospel and the true church.

— DJE 

Rev. Garrett Eriks

# Martin Luther: A Sketch of His Life

## Luther Becomes a Monk

**M**artin Luther was born November 10, 1483, in Eisleben in Prussian Saxony. His parents

were very poor, but they were hard-working and pious members of the Roman Catholic Church. In home and in school, Luther was taught to be a good Roman Catholic. His parents taught Luther to pray to God and the saints, to revere the church, and to fear devils

and witches. In school, Luther learned the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and several Latin and German hymns.

In 1501, at the age of 18, Luther entered the University of Erfurt, where he studied scholastic philosophy. Luther studied some of the an-

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

cient classics and he sufficiently mastered Latin so that he could write it clearly. During these years of his education, Luther became concerned about his personal salvation. He often despaired because of his sinfulness. Therefore, Luther was drawn to the study of theology, but according to the wish of his father Luther began to study law.

But God led Luther to the monastic life through two events. First, the news of the sudden death of a friend shocked him. Secondly, soon after his friend died, Luther was caught in a terrible storm. Thinking he would die in that storm, Luther cried out, "Help, beloved Saint Anna! I will become a monk." Luther honored his promise, entering the Augustinian convent at Erfurt two weeks later. But God would not allow Luther to remain an Augustinian monk his whole life.

As a monk, Luther's sole concern was to earn a place in heaven. So he solemnly vowed a life of poverty and chastity. No one in the convent surpassed Martin Luther in prayer, fasting, and confessing sins. Luther himself observed afterward, "If ever a monk got into heaven by monkery, I would have gotten there." But none of these pious exercises gave him peace in his soul. He saw sin in everything he did. When he read Scripture, the justice of God terrified him.

In this period of spiritual agony, an old monk, Johann von Staupitz, comforted him. He directed Luther to the gospel and to the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Staupitz reminded Luther that the law makes known sin, but it cannot heal. Through Staupitz's spiritual mentoring, Luther was directed from his sins to the merits of Christ. Luther began to learn through this spiritual struggle that salvation is not by the works of man, but by the grace of God alone.

### **Luther's Conversion**

During the second year of his monastic life, Luther was ordained

into the priesthood. He said his first mass on May 2, 1507. Luther was called by Staupitz from the convent in Erfurt to the convent in Wittenberg. After completing his doctorate in theology, Luther became a professor in the University of Wittenberg. In his lectures, Luther treated different books of the Bible: Psalms, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Psalms again. The Psalms and the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians remained his favorite books.

Through his study of Scripture, Luther began to understand and experience the gospel. This came about especially in his newfound understanding of Romans 1:17: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." For a long time, Luther had been troubled by the concept of God's righteousness. Luther knew that he could not attain perfection before God. He saw God's righteousness as His burning wrath against those who could not perfectly keep His ways. Therefore, he could not see the gospel in Romans 1:17. Then God opened his eyes. He understood that "the righteousness of God" is the perfect righteousness of Christ, which God imputes to sinners. This righteousness is freely given by faith. A crushing weight was suddenly lifted from Luther's soul. He experienced that he was without sin, not because he did not sin, but because of the freely given righteousness of Christ. This truth brought him the peace he desired in his own heart. By His providential leading, God was preparing Luther to be a reformer of the church, although Luther did not have this intention.

### **The 95 Theses**

Through the course of Luther's early life, God exposed some of the errors of Roman Catholicism to Luther. God exposed the error of works righteousness through Luther's spiritual struggle. When Luther visited Rome at the sugges-

tion of Staupitz, Luther's eyes were opened to the immorality and worldliness of the papacy. Although his faith in the Romish hierarchy was not shaken at the time of his visit, these memories of Rome returned to his mind during the Reformation. Then he had no problem calling the popery "an institution of the devil."

Another error that concerned Luther in 1517 was the abuses in the sales of indulgences. Indulgences, according to the Roman Catholic Church, removed or reduced the satisfactions required by sinners as a part of penance. The temporal punishment for sin could be removed on the condition of penitence and the payment of money to the church. Members of the lower classes of the Romish Church were led to believe they could buy their way into heaven. The sale of indulgences spread to Germany also. Tetzel, who became a famous orator and seller of indulgences, would prey on the emotions of the lower classes, convincing them to buy indulgences for their departed loved ones. Tetzel approached the Elector of Saxony to request permission to sell indulgences in Saxony. Although the Elector had great confidence in indulgences, he would not allow Tetzel to sell indulgences for fear that this might take too much money from his subjects. So Tetzel set up his business just outside the border of Saxony. Convinced that the sale of indulgences was evil, Luther chose the orderly way of a debate among the monks of the Augustinian order. To open up a public discussion, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Latin Theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517.

No one accepted the invitation and no discussion took place. But this did not mean the Theses went unnoticed. The Theses were copied, translated, and circulated throughout Germany and Europe in a few weeks. The Theses, along with other Reformation literature,

spread like wildfire throughout Europe. Although Luther wanted only to discuss the issue of indulgences, God used these Theses to begin the Reformation. Luther's fame from the Ninety-Five Theses drew him into many other disputations.

### Disputations

The printing of the Ninety-Five Theses began a war of tracts. Roman Catholic scholars wrote publicly against Luther's Theses. But their defense was weak because they could not defend indulgences from Scripture. Luther responded directly and indirectly to his opponents from the pulpit and with the pen.

The controversy over Luther's views led to a disputation in a large hall in Leipzig from June 27 to July 15, 1519. The main debaters were Martin Luther and John Eck. Eck was a skilled, conceited, and ruthless debater. Although Luther was not a skilled debater, he greatly surpassed Eck in the knowledge of Scripture. The debate between Luther and Eck turned chiefly on the subject of authority. With his skillful debating techniques, Eck drove Luther to positions that he had not previously held. For example, Luther denied the infallibility of church councils and the final authority of the papacy. Because of these denials, Eck charged Luther with being a Hussite. Luther admitted that Hus held some scriptural views and was unjustly condemned and burnt to death. Therefore, from a formal point of view, Eck won the debate.

These debates were important in the history of the Reformation for two reasons. First, Luther gained many followers from these debates. Secondly, under the providential hand of God, Luther stood on the sole authority of Scripture, which became one of the great "*sola's*" of the Reformation.

### Diet of Worms

After the Leipzig Disputation, John Eck returned to Rome calling

for the condemnation of Luther and his followers. In June of 1520, the bull of excommunication was completed in Rome. This bull called for the burning of all Luther's books and tracts. But Luther returned fire for fire by publicly burning the bull in the streets of Wittenberg. This burning signified the complete break between Luther and Rome.

In 1521, the Diet of Worms was called by Emperor Charles V to settle the problems that arose from Luther's new teachings. The ruling princes of the provinces of Germany and some Romish officials were present at this Diet. Charles V summoned Luther to this meeting with the guarantee of safe travel to and from the meeting. Luther's friends remembered that John Hus had been given the same promise and Rome did not honor that promise. They urged Luther not to attend. But Luther insisted on going for the cause of Christ.

Luther was not given an opportunity to defend his teachings, but was simply asked if the books lying on the table before him were his. After acknowledging they were his, he was asked if he would recant what he taught. Being unprepared for the question, Luther asked for a day to consider his answer and the emperor granted his request. When asked the same question the next day, part of Luther's well known answer was, "My conscience is bound in the Word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen."

The Emperor upheld the promise of safe conduct. But Frederick, Luther's elector, afraid that Luther would be captured, had Luther taken secretly to the castle at Wartburg, where Luther stayed for eleven months.

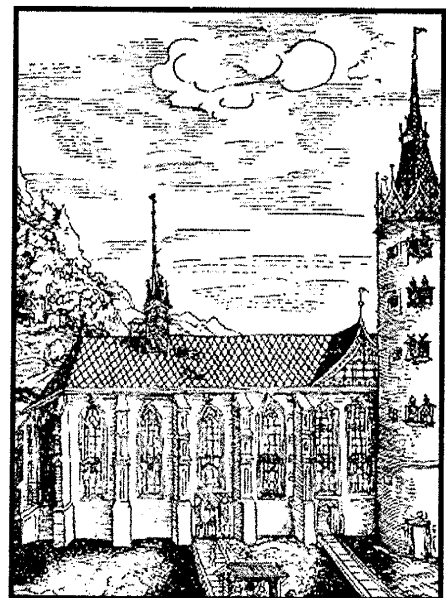
### Luther's Family

Although much could be said

about Luther's family life, space does not allow us to go into great detail. Convinced of the error of his monastic views, Luther married Katherine von Bora, whom he often called, "Kitty, my rib." She was a hardworking woman who served the constant stream of guests in their home while rarely having enough money. To Martin and Katherine were born three daughters and three sons, but two of the daughters died when they were young. The home of Luther was filled with spiritual activities: prayer, Bible study, and theological discussions. God brought reformation even to Luther's family life.

### Luther's Death

At the age of 63, Luther traveled to the city of his birth, Eisleben. There he died on February 17, 1546. During the last years of his life, Luther suffered from many ailments. But in life and in death Luther trusted in his heavenly Father. Through his life and work, God laid the foundation of the Reformation. The true church continues to give thanks to God for the work of this reformer. ☛



Castle Church in Wittenberg



# Luther's Doctrine of Justification (1)

## Entering Paradise: The Origin of Luther's Doctrine

**I**t is impossible to talk about Luther's doctrine of justification without also talking about Luther's experience of justification. It is never the doctrine which comes first but the experience and enjoyment of the blessings of God. This was especially and remarkably true in the case of Luther. His doctrine of justification was the fruit of his coming by grace and by faith to know his own justification before God.

He tells the story of his own spiritual pilgrimage:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged

with fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through its gates.<sup>1</sup>

This means, too, that the Reformation did not really begin with the posting of his 95 Theses, but with the reformation of Luther's own life; with a great and gracious work of God in Luther's own soul. It did not begin with a protest against abuses in the church, but with a God-given and biblical answer to Luther's own desperate question, "What must I do to be saved?" So it is always.

## Not Fishing in Front of the Net: The Importance of Luther's Doctrine

As a result of his own experience Luther believed that the doc-

trine of justification was fundamental. It was for him "the sum of all Christian doctrine," the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. He considered the teaching of this doctrine of far greater importance than reform of practice and ritual in the church, and insisted that the reform in other areas would follow if the doctrine were brought home to the hearts of God's people:

We ... beg and exhort you most earnestly not to deal first with changes in ritual, which are dangerous, but to deal with them later. You should deal first with the center of our teaching and fix in the people's minds what they must know about our justification; that it is an extrinsic (external) righteousness — indeed it is Christ's — given to us through faith which comes by grace to those who are first terrified by the law and who, struck by the consciousness of their sins, ardently seek for redemption.... Adequate reform of ungodly rites will come of itself, however, as soon as the fundamentals of our teaching, having been successfully communicated, have taken root in devout hearts. These devout people will

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<sup>1</sup> Helmut Lehmann, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1959-1967), vol. 34, pp. 336, 337, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings." Many of the quotations from Luther's works were gleaned from Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1975).

at once recognize what a great abomination and blasphemy that papistic idol is, namely, the mass and other abuses of the sacrament, so that it will not be necessary to fish in front of the net, that is, first to tear down the ritual before the righteousness of faith is understood.<sup>2</sup>

Reformation often fails because those who seek it do not remember that reformation of doctrine is first and fundamental, especially of such doctrines as these. They cry against abuses but show little or no interest in the doctrines of the church, and are even willing to see those doctrines compromised and cast aside, as the doctrine of justification has been by many evangelicals.<sup>3</sup> Luther was right. Reformation of doctrine will bring reformation of life, but attacking various abuses will not bring reformation at all, but will be as vain as the kind of fishing Luther describes.

#### **The Sweet Exchange: Luther's Understanding of Justification**

At the heart of Luther's understanding of justification lies the "sweet exchange." He explains it thus:

Therefore ... learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not, and have given to me what I was not."<sup>4</sup>

That exchange of our sins for Christ's righteousness, Luther understood to be by imputation. Our sins are *charged* to Christ and His righteousness *charged* to our account. Thus He was *made sin* for us and we were *made righteousness* in Him (I Cor. 5:21), the blessed result being that Christ is treated as Sinner in our place, and we

treated as Righteous for His sake. Luther rejected the Romish teaching that righteousness is infused or planted in us and that *on account of the resultant change of life* we are justified. That, of course, is just another kind of work righteousness.

According to Luther, righteousness is given as gift, then to those who are in fact still sinners, and the one who receives that gift of righteousness is not yet cured of his sin. He is, when justified, at the same time both sinner and righteous (*simul iustus et peccator*):

We are in truth and totally sinners, with regard to ourselves and our first birth. Contrariwise, in so far as Christ has been given for us, we are holy and just totally. Hence from different aspects we are said to be just and sinners at one and the same time.<sup>5</sup>

Luther, therefore, often referred to this righteousness by which we are justified as an "alien" righteousness, a righteousness which comes from beyond this world, and which is unattainable by any human effort or merit. It is not only the righteousness of Christ, but of *God* in Christ. God gives us His own righteousness and Christ is the bringer of it, exchanging it for our sins, a sweet exchange indeed.

#### **The Wedding Ring of Faith: Passive Justification**

The exchange of our sins for Christ's perfect righteousness, according to Luther, takes place through faith:

By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a

mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, his life stronger than the death, his salvation more invincible than hell. Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious bride, "without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word" (cf. Eph. 5:26-27) of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hos. 2:19-20 says.<sup>6</sup>

According to Luther, that faith by which we are justified is entirely a work of God, and in no sense a work of man. By way of emphasizing this he often described justifying faith as *passive*:

For between these two kinds of righteousness, the active righteousness of the law and the passive righteousness of Christ, there is no middle ground. Therefore he who has strayed away from this Christian righteousness will necessarily relapse into the active righteousness, that is, when he has lost Christ, he must fall into a trust in his own works.<sup>7</sup>

By the use of the word "passive," however, Luther did not mean that justifying faith is without any activity at all. He did not deny that faith is believing and trusting, resting and relying upon Christ. Nevertheless, he believed that faith was first and foremost union with Christ, the marriage of Christ and the believer by which they become one flesh, the union through which the sins of the believer are actually transferred to Christ and the righteousness of Christ given to the believer.<sup>8</sup>

His emphasis continues to serve as a necessary antidote to the current teaching that makes faith another work. He was much



nearer the truth than those who deny gracious justification by speaking of faith as a decision of man's own will or by suggesting that faith is man's response to a well-meant "offer" of salvation in the gospel. Of this Luther would have nothing:

For faith is a divine work which God demands of us; but at the same time He Himself must implant it in us, for we cannot believe by ourselves.<sup>9</sup>



Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith.... This is due to the fact that when they hear the gospel, they get busy and by their own powers create an idea in their heart which says, "I believe"; they take this then to be a true faith. But, as it is a human figment and idea that never reaches the depths of the heart, nothing comes of it either, and no improvement follows.<sup>10</sup>

Faith is grace, a gift of God, not man's work. What a lost truth today!

#### **Cows Staring at a New Gate: Justification by Faith Alone**

By way of defending gracious justification, Luther spoke of justification by faith alone. That one word "alone" (*"sola"* in Latin), was at the heart of his theology. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Reformation was a battle over that one word. It was that word especially that distinguished the Reformation doctrine of justification from that of Rome. It is the loss of that one word that marks the decline of the Reformation these days.

His emphasis on the word "alone" is seen in Luther's (German) translation of the New Testament. As a result of his own struggles to come to an understanding of Romans 3:28, Luther, in his translation of the book of Romans, added the word "alone" to the passage. In answer to the many


criticisms he endured for this translation, he insisted that though the word was not found in the Greek or Latin it nevertheless expressed the meaning of the verse. He says:

Here in Romans 3:28, I knew very well that the word *solum* is not in the Greek or Latin text; the papists did not have to teach me that. It is a fact that these four letters *s o l a* are not there. And these blockheads stare at them like cows at a new gate. At the same time they do not see that it conveys the sense of the text; it belongs there if the translation is to be clear and vigorous.<sup>11</sup>

Though the word was indeed the gate "into paradise" for Luther, he insisted that it was really not a "new gate" but a very old one — the gate pointed out by the best of the Fathers and by Paul. He was right. The opposition between grace and works is the opposition between faith and works (Rom. 11:6 and Rom. 4:16).

By this word "alone," however, Luther not only meant to exclude all works from the justification of the sinner, but meant to emphasize that salvation, of which justification was the heart, was by *grace alone*, and therefore also through *Christ alone*:

[Christ] must be all — the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation. He must be the first stone, the stone on which other stones are placed and on which the entire vault or roof is constructed. He is the first, the middle, and the last rung of the ladder to heaven (Gen. 28:12). For through Him we must make the beginning, continue and conclude our journey into yonder life.<sup>12</sup>

His doctrine of justification, therefore, was not just born out of his own experience of that free and gracious gift of God's righteousness, but out of His love for Christ, the only Savior. 

#### Footnotes:

2 *Luther's Works*, vol. 49, pp. 262, 263, "To Some Pastors of the City of Lubeck, Wittenberg, January 12, 1530."

3 Witness the publication, signing, and defense in 1994 of the document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," by a number of leading "evangelicals," which document finds no essential difference between the Romish and Protestant doctrines of justification.

4 *Luther's Works*, vol. 48, p. 12, "Letter to George Spenlein, April 8, 1516."

5 Quoted from: Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press: 1988), p. 71.

6 *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, pp. 351, 352, "The Freedom of a Christian."

7 *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 9, "The Argument of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians."

8 By the use of the word "passive" Luther also meant that the faith which unites us to Christ unites us to His suffering (the words "passive" and "passion" are related). Thus, too, justifying faith is far from inactive in that it shares, through union with Christ, in Christ's suffering. That suffering, according to Luther, included not only sharing in Christ's reproach and persecution, but in the agony of dying to sin and being killed by the law.

9 *Luther's Works*, vol. 23, p. 23, "Sermon on John 6:28, 29."

10 *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, p. 370, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans."

11 *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, p. 188, "On Translating: An Open Letter."

12 *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, p. 48, "Sermon on John 14:6."



# Martin Luther: Training Children in the Home

**M**artin Luther loved children! His *Table Talks* are filled with remarks on children. "Children are the most delightful pledges in a loving marriage. They are the best wool on the sheep." Or again, "How great a joy posterity affords a man! It certainly is the most delightful joy of parents."

That Luther could make such statements is amazing, since the first thirty-eight years of his own life were lived under the conviction that as a monk he had to remain celibate. It was not until Luther was forty-two years old that he married a former nun named Katherine vonBora. She was twenty-six at the time. In the next few years Katherine gave birth to six children, two of whom died at birth. As busy as Luther was he always had time for his own children and others. In fact, in another of his *Table Talks*, he is recorded as saying, "The Jews highly esteemed children. Our women almost detest them. The reason: one does not want the burden of bearing and educating children; women only want leisure."

Not only did Luther have a personal love for children, but he also saw their importance in the church. For that reason he emphasized in many of his writings the need for the instruction and nurture of children. This care for children must take place in every sphere: in the church, in society

(Christian day schools), and especially in the home. It is striking that in all the doctrinal debates that Luther carried on during his lifetime, he never forgot to write concerning this all-important task. Even while living the life of a celibate monk he recognized the importance of sound Christian pedagogy that began already in the home in infancy. Writes Luther concerning this, "Here again we are plagued by the miserable fact that no one perceives or heeds this truth. All live on as though God gave us children for our pleasure or amusement ... only to gratify our whims, ignoring them, as though what they learn or how they live were no concern of ours."<sup>1</sup>

What made Martin Luther's view on child-rearing unique in his day was its doctrinal basis. We must recall that in the days prior to the Reformation, Pelagianism had become an integral part of the theology of Rome. The Pelagians maintained that children were not born with the inherited corruption of their parents. The depravity of Adam and Eve was not passed on to their posterity. The will of man therefore was not in bondage to sin. Instead, a child was born with the freedom of will to choose either good or evil, right or wrong. That Luther opposed such a notion not only reveals itself in his love for the writings of Augustine, but in his commentaries and writings on education.

Luther's pedagogical thought rests like his anthropology on the bedrock of his image of man as a

fallen sinner. "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." This line of Genesis 8:21 defined for him the innermost corruption of all human instincts and the impossibility of changing these by rational argument or humane appeal. It also identified the psychological source of that irreversible egotism that he saw as the all pervading symptom of human perversion. Not merely "inclined to evil" (*in malum prona*), but evil in substance, evil through and through. In principle, Luther was therefore forced to deny conventional educational wisdom along with the traditional anthropology of the schoolmen.<sup>2</sup>

The truth that man is a fallen sinner should guide parents in the way they view and deal with their children.

From this truth there are two important principles of child-rearing that parents must bear in mind when setting themselves to the task of training their children.

First, parents must remember that their children are depraved from birth. Children from birth have derived corruption from their original parent by the propagation of a vicious nature. Passed on to them according to their first birth is blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment, wickedness, rebellion, stubbornness and impurity (Canons of Dordt, Third and Fourth Heads, Articles 1, 2). That tiny infant who lies asleep in mother's arms a picture of contentment and peace, that infant who so often fills mother's and father's heart with overwhelming love and emotion, that infant is a depraved sinner. It



may be hard to believe. We may not want to believe it. But we as parents have passed along to our children our corruption. We must recognize and deal with the sin that is found in our children from infancy on.

The second truth Christian parents must keep in mind in training their children is their need for the cross of Jesus Christ. This does not mean, of course, that as parents we must attempt to convert our children. It does not mean that our children are without Christ until later in life. We certainly baptize our infant children with this assurance in mind, "... for as they (our children — WB) are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ."<sup>3</sup> Parents, however, are called to instruct their children concerning their daily need for sorrow over sin and forgiveness in the cross of Christ. Children must be trained to bow in humility before God and confess their sins. They must be reminded constantly to seek for their righteousness not in themselves but in the cross of Christ alone. Likewise, children must be taught to walk in daily conversion before God, mortifying the old man of sin and putting on the new man in Christ. From infancy on, a child must be trained to hate sin and to live a life of thankfulness before God.

That this was Martin Luther's view of the training of children comes to light in the advice he gives parents concerning the method of training their children. Though Luther spends time on many different aspects of Christian pedagogy, we concentrate on only three of them.

In the first place, Luther presents instruction to parents which we, who live in an age of prosperity and affluence, do well to heed. Parents must not spoil their children. Parents can do this in various ways. They can, when their children are young, ignore their

wrongs (sins) and, instead of reprimanding or disciplining them, pass off what they do as minor or even cute. Luther spoke these appropriate words in a sermon on the fourth commandment,

The first destroyers of their own children are those who neglect them and knowingly permit them to grow up without the training and admonition of the Lord. Even if they do not harm them by a bad example, they still destroy them by yielding to them. They love them too much according to the flesh and pamper them saying: They are children, they do not understand what they are doing. And they are speaking the truth. But neither does a dog or a horse or a mule understand what it is doing. However, see how they learn to go, to come, to obey, to do and leave undone what they do not understand. ... These parents will, therefore, bear the sins of their children because they make these sins their own.<sup>4</sup>

A parent must never allow his children, no matter what their age, to do wrong and view it as mere ignorance of what is right. Only by means of instruction and discipline will we teach children what sin is in their lives — and that even at an early age while their concept of good and evil is developing.

This coddling of children reveals itself in another way: when parents, due to an overabundance of wealth and affluence, give to their children the means to live the high life, allowing them to do whatever they please. This is a fault that we find in today's modern society and within the church as well. Parents will give everything to their children, then allow them to go out unrestrained to enjoy the pleasures of this wicked world. In another sermon on married life Luther declares,

Nothing can more easily earn hell for a man than the improper training of his own children; and parents can perform no more damag-

ing bit of work than to neglect their offspring, to let them curse, swear, learn indecent words and songs, and permit them to live as they please. Some parents themselves incite their children to such sins by giving them superfluous finery and temporal advancement so that they may but please the world, rise high and become wealthy.<sup>5</sup>

Here is a word to which the church of Jesus Christ does well to take heed today! Are not our own children often spoiled because of our wealth and comforts? With our wealth we allow our young people to purchase CDs on which are recorded indecent songs. We allow them to rent videos in which are portrayed the godless life-styles of the wicked, and which make evil seem good and good evil (Is. 5:20-22). It is little wonder that cursing and swearing can be heard from the mouths of some of our children at sporting events or conventions. It is little wonder that they walk in the ways of the ungodly. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!" (Amos 6:1).

Luther reminds us of a third way that children can be spoiled by parents: when parents allow young men and women to sit around the house with idle hands. Because there is no hardship from a financial point of view, children are given everything they desire without having to work for it. They are taught to be lazy. Such children grow up thinking that everything is owed them. The fame, position, and money of their par-

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1 *Luther's Works*, Weimar edition, vol. 1, p. 156.

2 Strauss, Gerald, *Luther's House of Learning*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, p. 33.

3 Form for the Administration of Baptism used in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

4 Exposition of the Fourth Commandment in November of 1516.

5 *Luther's Works*, Weimar edition, vol. 2, p. 170.



ents are theirs simply by virtue of their birth. Luther writes in his typical forward manner, "Proud jackasses develop out of the sons of heroes who boast of the virtue of their fathers but make no effort to imitate it, dreaming instead that they, too, are heroes because they were born of heroes."<sup>6</sup>

A second area of Christian pedagogy that is necessary in the life of covenant home and family is that of discipline. Luther was not weak on this subject either. He recognized that sin is bound in the heart of a child. The rod was necessary at times, therefore, to train and discipline children in their knowledge of right and wrong. Writes Luther in his *Works*, "Just so a father can perform no act that is more unfatherly than sparing the rod and allowing the little child to have its own wanton way."<sup>7</sup> Admonition and discipline by the rod is a necessity in the life of a child because it teaches him what sin is, and that sin will be punished. The child is trained by discipline to understand that God holds man accountable for sin and God will punish it in His justice.

At the same time, Luther had a deep understanding of the purpose of discipline. It must be used to teach, not to harm. It must be used to lead our children to Christ, not to cause them to cower beneath a raging parent or fear a vengeful God. In an early sermon on the


commandments Luther proclaimed, "With the greatest care a child should be trained to have the right fear, to fear what is to be feared, but not to be timid. Some parents are satisfied if only their children are timid. But this is very harmful for later life." Luther railed upon abuse of the child by means of discipline. Parents were never to "vent their furious temper" upon their children, unconcerned that discipline was to be used to expose sin and lead to the cross of Christ. Luther insisted that when this was done in infancy it would cause irreparable damage in later life.

A third area which Martin Luther addressed as regards the training of children in the home was that of instruction itself. Luther placed heavy emphasis on this aspect of home and family life.

Formal catechizing did not, of course, exhaust a parent's teaching responsibilities. By daily example and counsel he was to guide his children's steps on their Christian journey. "This duty makes parenthood immensely rich in good works," Luther said, "for God has given this estate the care of souls upon whom parents may lavish a great plenty of Christian works. Fathers and mothers are apostles, bishops, and pastors to their children as they raise them in the knowledge of the holy gospels. No greater or nobler power exists on earth than that of par-

ents over children, for it is a power both secular and spiritual."<sup>8</sup>

Luther's plans for reform in Germany included not only religious training of children in the church but in Christian day schools as well. Also a part of this plan was daily study in the Bible in the home. Parents must see to it that wife, children, and servants gathered evenings and mornings for a time of memorizing and reciting Scripture. Luther wrote his Shorter Catechism to be used in homes and families in order that children might learn the doctrines of the church.

Luther was genuinely concerned with life in the home. He took a special interest in parents and children. We find in Luther a steadfast Reformer, a powerful preacher, an untiring writer, but also a man of the people. This is what made Luther so great. He was close to the people in their needs and cares. He was deeply aware of the struggles in their homes. He had a keen insight into the way God's truth might be preserved among the faithful. This made Luther a man fit by God to ignite the flames of the Reformation. 

6 Ibid, vol. 44, p. 421.

7 Ibid, vol. 51, p. 206.

8 Strauss, Gerald, *Luther's House of Learning*. p. 124.

Rev. Steven Key

## Luther on Preaching

**T**he history of Dr. Martin Luther and his influence on preaching is well worth considering. The Reformation took root, after all, by the restoration of faithful preaching,

with Martin Luther and the other Reformers leading the way.

Although it would be an overstatement to say that preaching had been entirely lost prior to the Reformation, it is true that there were very few faithful preachers left in the church, and preaching itself had certainly fallen on hard times.

The element of proclamation, the "thus saith the Lord" which is the heart of all true preaching, was all but lost. For that reason one of the most important contributions of Dr. Martin Luther to the church was his emphasis on preaching.

Luther himself gives us a view of what preaching commonly in-

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volved in his day, openly ridiculing and scorning that which passed for "preaching" by the unfaithful pastors in the church of his day. The sermons were superficial, often including fables or stories, and including a mixture of pagan philosophy. Moreover, these "sermons" were often told in a vulgar or comical way, in order to amuse the people. Christ was forgotten. The Scriptures were neglected.

"Oh, we have had blind preachers for a long time; they have been totally blind themselves and leaders of the blind, as the gospel says; they have left the gospel and followed their own ideas and preferred the work of men to the work of God."<sup>1</sup>

Never one to mince words, Luther spoke sharply when speaking of unfaithful preachers. "These are the lazy and worthless preachers who do not tell the princes and lords their sins. In some cases they do not notice the sins. They lie down and snore in their office and do nothing that pertains to it except that, like swine, they take up the room where good preachers should stand."

Over against that corruption of preaching, Luther fervently called for biblical, expository preaching. "It was Luther who rediscovered both the form and the substance of this preaching.... For him preaching was the veritable Word of God Himself, and, as such, occupied the central position in the Church."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on preaching the gospel developed into one of the chief marks of the churches of the Reformation and, as Luther never tired of pointing out, gave purpose as well as authority to their existence.

### Preaching with Substance

Martin Luther understood that faithful preaching must have substance. That substance is the truth of the gospel, the faithful exposition of Holy Scripture.

A. Skevington Wood, in his book *Captive to the Word*, summa-

rizes Luther's preaching as follows:

The salient feature of Luther's preaching was its biblical content and reference. It was subject to Scripture throughout. Luther submitted to a rigorous discipline. He was bound by the Word. His preaching was never merely topical. He could never turn a text into a pretext. "I take pains to treat a verse, to stick to it," he explained, "and so to instruct the people that they can say, 'That is what the sermon was about.'" His preaching was never a movement from men to the text: it was always a movement from the text to men. The matter never determined the text: the text always determined the matter. He was not in the habit of treating subjects or issues, but doctrines. But when he did so, he invariably followed a prescribed Scripture passage step by step. He considered one of the major qualifications of the preacher to be familiarity with the Word."<sup>3</sup>

Luther taught clearly the centrality of the Word. Faith is nothing else but adherence to the Word. It is the Word which breaks down the sinner by the law and which raises up the believer in the gospel.

His high esteem for the Word of God explains why Luther also attempted to preach systematically through the Scriptures, preaching series of sermons from both Old and New Testaments.

Because of that biblical emphasis on the primacy of the Word and the centrality of preaching, Luther had no place for the false mysticism that sets aside the Word of God for inner feelings. "Away with our schismatics, who spurn the Word while they sit in corners waiting for the Spirit's revelation, but apart from the voice of the Word!"

It must be noted in this connection that Luther spoke of preaching in terms of "the voice." He said, "Take note: The beginning of all spiritual knowledge is this voice of one crying, as also Paul says,

Romans 10:14: 'How are they to believe...without a preacher?'"

### Preaching with Authority

Luther taught clearly that preaching that is faithful and true comes with the authority of "the voice."

This thought reflected Luther's high view of the office. The minister is sent by God, and enters the office of God. "Thus St. Paul is confident (2 Cor. 13:3) that he is speaking not his own word, but the Word of the Lord Christ. Thus we, too, can say that He has put it into our mouth."

That truth was important to Luther, too, in the face of all the opposition that darkened his pathway. It was a truth he consistently proclaimed.

In his treatment of Psalm 2, in speaking of the office of Christ as Teacher who declares God's decree, Luther explained that the Holy Spirit so teaches us "that God does everything through the Son. For when the Son preaches the Law, the Father Himself, who is in the Son or one with the Son, preaches. And when we preach about this same decree, Christ Himself preaches, as He says: 'He who hears you hears Me' (Luke 10:16)."

Elsewhere he writes of preachers as "the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the instrument whereby He openly preacheth the Word"; and since Christ the Word is the utterance of God's own heart, "when thou hearest the Word," Luther says, "then thou hearest God." Commenting on John 10:14, Luther writes, "It is not we who

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1 Except as noted, this and all other quotes come from many different volumes of Luther's *Works*. References can be provided upon request to this author, but are not included for lack of space.

2 T.H.L. Parker, *The Oracles of God, An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, p. 20.

3 A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p. 89.

are speaking; it is Christ and God Himself. Hence when you hear this sermon, you are hearing God Himself. On the other hand, if you despise this sermon, you are despising not us but God Himself."

### **Preaching and the Work of the Spirit**

It is because Christ speaks by the preaching of the gospel that preaching is powerful and effective in accomplishing the purpose whereunto God sends it.

So Dr. Luther calls attention in his writings to the place of the Holy Spirit in preaching. Christ works this powerful Word by His Holy Spirit. It is through the words of preachers that the Holy Spirit works, convicting the world of sin, and establishing the faith of God's elect through the effectual and irresistible call.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives the preaching its power. Christ draws men to Himself through the Word alone, rescuing His people from the power of sin and death and giving them freedom, righteousness, and life.

This great and marvelous thing is accomplished entirely through the office of preaching the Gospel. Viewed superficially, this looks like a trifling thing, without any power, like any ordinary man's speech and word. But when such preaching is heard, His invisible, divine power is at work in the hearts of men through the Holy Spirit. Therefore St. Paul calls the Gospel "a power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16).

Clearly, preachers are but instruments in God's hands. "What shall we do? We can deplore the blindness and obstinacy of people, but we cannot bring about a change for the better." Only when Christ Himself speaks by His Holy Spirit is the preaching powerful to change and bring salvation.

"Neither I nor anyone else can ever preach the Word adequately;

the Holy Spirit alone must utter and preach it." For it is the Spirit who works by the Word. When through the outward preaching of the Word and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, faith is created, that which is promised in the gospel becomes effective for the believer.

"Accordingly, it is a Word of power and grace when it infuses the Spirit at the same time that it strikes the ears. But if it does not infuse the Spirit, then he who hears does not differ at all from one who is deaf."

### **Hearing the Preaching**

Not overlooked by Luther was the calling of all who hear the preaching to examine that preaching, to see whether it be faithful to the Holy Scriptures. "Hence this is the touchstone by which all doctrine is to be judged. One must take care and see whether it is the same doctrine that was published in Zion through the apostles." It is such preaching that is used by God as the powerful, saving voice of Christ. "For this alone, as has been said, is the true doctrine, bestowing upon men a right and certain understanding, comfort of heart, and salvation."

Along these lines, Luther faces squarely the question of whether or not Christ speaks through a preacher just because the man occupies the office.

To begin with, we must know that those who are sent speak the Word of God provided that they adhere to their office and administer it as they received it. In that event, they surely speak the Word of God.... A king's ambassador or emissary discharges his duty when he abides by his master's order and instruction. If he fails in this, the king has him beheaded.

When a minister, therefore, faithfully preaches the Word of God, Christ is pleased to speak through him by His Holy Spirit; if not, then the words apply to that preacher: "Beware of false prophets!" We

must neither speak nor hear anything but the Word of God.

For that reason the *gospel* must be heard and preached. Preaching not only has substance, but very specific content.

Luther insisted on the following: "The preacher's first message is to teach penitence, removing offenses, proclaim the Law, humiliate and terrify the sinners." Our sin must be exposed by the preaching of the gospel.

In preaching through Romans, he said, "The sum and substance of this letter is: to pull down, to pluck up, and to destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh..., no matter how heartily and sincerely they may be practiced, and to implant, establish, and make large the reality of sin.... For God does not want to save us by our own but by an extraneous righteousness which does not originate in ourselves but comes to us from heaven."

The necessity of preaching man's depravity is found in the fact that grace is given to the humble. Christ came not to save the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance. So Luther said, "They cannot be humble who do not recognize that they are damnable whose sin smells to high heaven.... Yearning for grace wells up when recognition of sin has arisen. A sick person seeks the physician when he recognizes the seriousness of his illness."

And because God's people have a continual struggle with their sinful flesh, preaching must be antithetical. It must be preaching that not only sounds the silver trumpet of salvation, but that sounds the horn which exposes and reproves the old man and calls to repentance.

As Luther recognized and experienced, it takes boldness in preaching to serve as Christ's ambassador. But the preacher cannot stop with merely preaching sin, for that would amount to wounding and not binding up,



smiting and not healing. "Therefore we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness by which faith is taught and aroused."

The focus of all preaching must be Christ. The only content of its message is about Him. "This is the gist of your preaching: *Behold your God!* 'Promote God alone, His mercy and grace. Preach Me alone.'"

*Soli Deo Gloria* was the motto of Luther, therefore, no less than of Calvin. The sovereignty of God occupied a prominent place in all Luther's preaching, for his was indeed gospel preaching. From him also came forth the cry of the Reformation, "Let God be God!" In his words, "the gospel proclaims nothing else but salvation by grace, given to man without any works and merits whatsoever. Natural

man cannot abide, hear, or see the gospel. Nor does it enter into the hypocrites, for it casts out their works, declaring that they are nothing and not pleasing to God."

God alone works His wonderwork of grace in saving us! For in Christ alone rests all our salvation. The gospel is preached with the purpose of consoling with grace those who are contrite of heart.


Martin Luther also viewed the importance of preaching in the light of its positive fruits. In opposition to the errors of legalism, He recognized that the Christian life must be a life of thankfulness to God, and therefore a conscious laying hold of the gospel of a gracious salvation. Thankful lives follow from faithful preaching.

Luther's approach to preaching, therefore, is the approach that

would later be outlined in the Heidelberg Catechism. This is the way of true comfort, wrought by the Spirit through the preaching.

"Thus it is not the stones, the construction, and the gorgeous silver and gold that make a church beautiful and holy; it is the Word of God and sound preaching." And this is preaching in which God is glorified.

Such preaching is God's greatest blessing for His church. "Therefore let those who have the pure Word learn to receive it and to give thanks to the Lord for it, and let them seek the Lord while He may be found." May we, the children of the Reformation, humble ourselves and thank God for faithful preaching!

For God will surely require that we give an account of our preaching and hearing. 

Prof. Russell Dykstra

## Luther, Erasmus, and the Bondage of the Will (1)

**C**ertainly the single best-known work of Martin Luther is *The Bondage of the Will*. This masterpiece deserves the honorable position it holds not only in the body of Luther's works, but also in the writings of all the Reformers. It sets forth the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation, and eliminates any possibility that man contributed to his own salvation. This is the heart of Luther's theology. This is the heart of the great Reformation. And this is the heart of the Reformed truth still today.

That *The Bondage of the Will* should be written is obviously due

to the sovereign providence of God. Early on in the conflict Luther came to the conviction that Rome's teaching on man's will was wrong, and he set forth his views in brief. Already in 1518 in the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther affirmed that "since the fall of Adam, or after actual sin, free will exists only in name, and when it does what it can it commits sin." This was one of the forty-one articles condemned by Pope Leo X in 1520. In response, Luther wrote *An Assertion of all the Articles of Martin Luther Condemned by the Latest Bull of Leo X*.<sup>1</sup> In this work Luther is even stronger. He writes,

So it is necessary to retract this article. For I was wrong in saying that free choice before grace is a reality only in name. I should have

said simply: free choice is in reality a fiction, or a name without reality. For no one has it in his power to think a good or a bad thought, but everything (as Wycliffe's article condemned at Constance rightly teaches) happens by absolute necessity.

And so it might have remained, were it not for God sovereignly directing the events of the Reformation, and forcing Luther to develop this truth more fully and explicitly.

<sup>1</sup> This was written in Latin. A similar, though not identical, defense in German was published in 1521, with the title (translated) *The Defense and Explanation of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther which were Unjustly Condemned by the Roman Bull*. This is available in English in *Luther's Works*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press), vol. 32.

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The means God used to bring this about was primarily one man, namely, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus was an older contemporary of Luther who is sometimes wrongly associated with the Reformation. He was a world-renowned Renaissance scholar whom God used in various ways to serve the cause of the Reformation. Erasmus prepared a scholarly Greek text of the New Testament which was widely used by the Reformers. He was vociferous in his criticism of the immorality and ignorance of the clergy of his day. He was a man of high reputation, very much interested in the church being reformed morally, and to that end he promoted education and scholarship. When Luther's works spread like wildfire across Europe, the world watched intently to see whether Erasmus would throw his support to Luther's cause.

Luther and Erasmus were acquainted with each other before the conflict. A half a year before he posted the ninety-five theses in Wittenberg, Luther wrote in a personal letter:

I am at present reading our Erasmus, but my heart recoils more and more from him. But one thing I admire is, that he constantly and learnedly accuses not only the monks, but the priests, of a lazy, deep-rooted ignorance.

Only, I fear he does not spread Christ and God's grace sufficiently abroad, of which he knows very little. The human is to him of more importance than the divine....

And, in a portent of what was to come, he added, "Those who ascribe something to man's freedom of will regard those things differently from those who know only God's free grace."

Yet Luther coveted the support of Erasmus for his cause, and wrote a flattering letter to Erasmus in 1519, obviously hoping to establish some relationship with the elder scholar. Erasmus' reply to Luther was cordial. He began, "Best greet-

ings, most beloved brother in Christ. Your letter was most welcome to me, displaying a shrewd wit and breathing Christian spirit." However, if Luther was hoping that Erasmus would commit himself to Luther's cause, he would be disappointed. Erasmus stated to Luther that he kept himself "as far as possible neutral, the better to assist the flower of learning."

It would become increasingly evident that Erasmus and Luther were committed to two different, and even antagonistic, causes. The decisive issue would be the doctrine at the heart of the Reformation – the doctrine of sovereign grace. The debate arose in connection with Luther's rejection of a free will in fallen man. Erasmus reacted against that (in 1524) with a work entitled *A Diatribe or Discourse on Free Will* in which he defended the ability of fallen man to will the good, rejecting Luther's position. Luther's classic work, *The Bondage of the Will*, was written over against Erasmus. Erasmus, on his part, was furious, and turned against Luther and the Reformation completely.

There is value in examining the arguments that Erasmus used to defend the view of a free will in man. They are relevant because of the fact that *The Bondage of the Will* was a painstaking refutation of Erasmus' work. Secondly, Erasmus' work is a good representation of the theology of the Romish church against which Luther battled. Thirdly, Erasmus' arguments are significant because they have been pressed into service by Arminians of every stripe and are used even to the present day.

Even the tone of Erasmus' work on the free will of man is one adopted by enemies of sovereign grace throughout history. He wishes to "pursue the matter without recrimination"; he divulges that he has "an inner temperamental horror of fighting." In fact, he does not like to make "assertions" of what is correct, preferring rather

that merely a discussion be held on the topic.

Concerning Scripture, Erasmus maintains that "there are some secret places in the Holy Scriptures into which God has not wished us to penetrate more deeply...." In fact, he is convinced that we ought not "through irreverent inquisitiveness rush into those things which are hidden, not to say, superfluous," among which matters is "whether our will accomplishes anything in things pertaining to eternal salvation."

Erasmus uses every trick at his disposal. He avows his own commitment to Scripture, but notes that the real issue is the proper *interpretation* of Scripture. He condemns Luther by association, putting Luther's views in the same camp as those previously condemned by the church – the heretical Manichaeans and the pre-reformer Wyclif. He calls as witnesses nearly all the ancient church fathers, as well as the medieval scholars, because they had used the term free will. But he fails to distinguish between those fathers who were discussing freedom of choice in things natural (what to wear or eat) versus those who were discussing spiritual choices (to sin or do good).

His basic arguments for the free will of fallen man will sound very familiar to anyone familiar with the arguments of the enemies of sovereign grace. First, Erasmus insists that the fact that God commands implies that man has the ability to obey the commands. Since God commands men to repent, to turn to Him, man can will to do it. He treats promises that are in a conditional form in the same way.

Secondly, and related to the above, Erasmus maintains that God is unjust and cruel if He punishes sinners who could not will to love and obey God. So fallen man must have free will. In that connection, he teaches that God's predestination is based on foreknowledge – God foreknew who would rebel



and who would obey, and on that basis made His choice.

Thirdly, Erasmus denies that natural man can only do evil. Even the pagans, he avers, do good.

Fourthly, Erasmus maintains the (semi-Pelagian) position that natural man's will is weak, but not powerless. Man's will needs grace to accomplish the good. He distinguishes several kinds of grace supposedly given to man to assist him. According to Erasmus, the reason why Scripture sometimes speaks of the whole work of salvation belonging to God is not to teach that man actually does nothing, but only "to avoid a dangerous arrogance" in man.

Yet perhaps the most important element in Erasmus' apology for free will is that man must merit something with God. Repeatedly he returns to this. He writes, "How is it that we hear so much of reward if there is no such thing as merit?" That was the bedrock on which the whole Romish system was built – man can merit with God. And did Luther know it!


In his conclusion, Erasmus offers a compromise position to Luther. Erasmus is willing to reduce the contribution of man's will to the absolute minimum. He writes:

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....

On this more accommodating view, it is implied that a man owes all his salvation to divine grace, since the power of free choice is exceedingly trivial in this regard and this very thing which it can do is a work of the grace of God who first created free choice and then freed it and healed it.

So far Pelagius/Erasmus/Arminius.

How, then, did Luther answer this brilliant scholar and defender of free will? In a word, Luther devastated Erasmus' arguments. However, the details of Luther's powerful refutation will have to wait until the next issue. 

Rev. Nathan Brummel

## Luther on Scripture

**D**id you know that...

♦ By his death, Martin Luther had written more than 60,000 pages, yet he hoped that "all my books would disappear and the Holy Scriptures alone be read."

♦ Luther knew most of the New Testament and large sections of the Old Testament by heart.

♦ Luther said: "A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or cardinal without it."

Exploring Luther on Scripture is a rich field of study. Under Luther's leadership *Sola Scriptura* became a rallying cry of the Reformation. Under the theme of Luther

and Scripture we could look at a number of issues, including: 1) biblical authority, 2) biblical translation, or 3) doctrine of inspiration. We will concentrate on the latter issue. Our main purpose will be to answer the question: Did Martin Luther believe in verbal inspiration and the accompanying doctrine of inerrancy?

There are attempts to portray Luther as the father of Neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy is a term used to describe theologians who claim that the Bible errs with respect to mere historical, geographical, and scientific facts. The Neo-orthodox claim that the Bible is infallible only with respect to its "redemptive message." On the other hand, confessional Lutheran and Reformed believers claim that Luther believed in verbal inspiration (that the very words of Scripture were inspired) and that he therefore believed the Bible to be inerrant (without error on whatever topic it addresses).

### Luther: the Father of Neo-Orthodoxy?

Luther is being portrayed today as the father of Neo-orthodoxy with respect to his doctrine of inspiration. Was Luther a forerunner of the Higher Critics? A. Skevington Wood notes such attempts:

Some of the more extreme biblical critics and radical theologians are attempting to depict Luther as the precursor of modern liberalism (*Captive to the Word*, p. 129).

In 1947 the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church published a three-volume set entitled *The Abiding Word* to celebrate the centennial of their denomination. One theologian took issue with Neo-orthodox Lutherans:

Men who pretend to be confessional Lutherans call "all Scripture" the Word of God only in a restricted sense. The Bible is not really God's Word, but the Bible contains God's Word. The Bible is a human book in which God's

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Word lies buried for him who can find it and sort it out.... But due to the fact that Scripture after all is only a human representation of divine revelations experienced by the writers, their account cannot be inerrant, but must today be cleansed of many errors which have been discovered (Vol. 2, p. 8).

The Neo-orthodox emphasize a human element in the Scriptures. As a result they claim that the human writers were "time bound" and "culturally conditioned." What they wrote about creation, history, science, chronology, or homosexuality is culturally conditioned. Since the human writers were limited in their knowledge, it is not surprising that they would have made many errors with respect to matters of history, science, and geography.

Some of Luther's statements about various books of the Bible seem to be evidence of a higher critical approach to Scripture. Willem Kooiman says:

About various authors of the Old and New Testament, Luther can say that they did not build solely of "gold, silver, and precious stones," but also of "wood, hay, and stubble." Therefore he adds that although the foundation will endure the combustible material will be destroyed by the fire of "the day" (*Luther and the Bible*, p. 227).

Apparently Luther never gave up his negative attitude towards the book of James. In 1540 he said: "Today or tomorrow I will set a bright fire with little Jim." In 1542 he said:

The Epistle of James is written by a Jew, who so far as Christianity is concerned has indeed heard the bell ring, but does not know where the clapper is. Here in Wittenberg we have cast James out of theology; indeed we have almost thrown him out of the Bible (p. 226).

In a lecture on Genesis he says, "James talks nonsense" (p. 226).

With respect to historical criticism, Luther was convinced that certain prophetic books were "not written by the men whose names were attached to them, but were rather assembled by redactors" (p. 227). When one of his table companions brought up that many theologians believed that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, Luther's response was: "What does it matter?"

Kooiman claims:

Disagreements in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles did not escape him and he regarded the historical reliability of the latter more highly than the former. When the prophets foretold events that would occur in the secular realm, they often made mistakes. This did not detract, he says, from the value of their spiritual witness, since faith does not make mistakes in men who prophesy concerning the truth of God in Christ (p. 228).

Heiko Oberman, in *Luther: Life between God and the Devil*, seems to present Luther as a Father of Neo-orthodoxy. He clearly wants to drive a wedge between Luther and fundamentalists who believe in inerrancy. Oberman does this in two different ways. First, he argues that it was post-Reformation Protestantism that promoted verbal inspiration. This issue arises when Oberman is discussing how the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura* did not bring the certainty that Luther anticipated. Rather it seemed to be "responsible for a multiplicity of explanations and interpretations that seem to render absurd any dependence on the clarity of the Scriptures" (p. 220). Oberman then denigrates post-Reformation Protestantism because it allegedly "tried out many variants of 'fundamentalism' to counter the trend, often declaring the letters of the Scriptures sacrosanct" (p. 220). By "declaring the letters of Scriptures sacrosanct," Oberman is ap-

parently referring to verbal inspiration. The doctrine of verbal inspiration says that the letters, words, and grammar of Scripture are inspired.

Secondly, Oberman presents a caricature of the doctrine of verbal inspiration—as if it reduces the Bible to mere propositional statements. He says:

The term *authority* as a description of Luther's understanding of the Bible could be misleading if—as happened before and after him—the Scriptures were taken for a collection of objective truths that had to be compared and rearranged in ever new systems, depending on the issue in question (p. 224).

Verbal inspiration implies that the very words of Scripture are inspired—and therefore God does communicate in terms of propositional statements that express objective truths. Oberman tries to connect a belief in verbal inspiration with scholasticism. The fact is that one can believe that the Bible is filled with many objective truths—and not be concerned only about arranging them logically.

### **Why Luther is not the Father of Neo-Orthodoxy**

There are at least four reasons why it is a mistake to depict Luther as the father of Neo-orthodoxy.

First, Luther's criticisms of the canon must not be interpreted as Higher Criticism of canonical books. We need to distinguish between being a critic of the canon and being a Higher Critic. Notice that Luther's criticisms of certain books in the canon had to do with the extent of the canon. For Luther the extent of the canon was an open question. He was not being a biblical critic—doubting what the Word of God said. For him the issue was only this: are certain books part of the canon? He used his Christ-centered criticism to analyze the various books in the canon. He analyzed whether certain "questionable" books were part of



the canon in terms of the clarity with which they presented Christ crucified. But questioning the extent of the canon is distinct from using Higher Criticism to rip apart biblical books. Carl F.H. Henry says:

Whatever Luther's questions may have been about the canonicity of certain books...he had no question whatever about the authority and inerrancy of the books viewed as canonical (Wood, p. 157).

Second, Luther made explicit claims about verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Listen to some statements by Luther that show his belief in verbal inspiration and inerrancy:

To put it briefly, believe everything or nothing.

We must regard every tittle and letter of the Bible as more important than the whole world and tremble before it as before God himself.

The Holy Scripture is God's Word, written, and so to say, "in-lettered."

The Scriptures have never erred.

The Bible is "God's Word written, presented in letters, as Christ is the eternal Word presented in human nature."

The Scriptures did not grow on earth.

This selection of statements from Luther shows that he did not distinguish between the inspiration of the message and the inspiration of the terms and words in which that message is communicated. A. Skevington Wood sums up Luther's view of inspiration:

So close is the connection between the actual words of the Bible and the instrumentality of the Spirit that it must be concluded that Luther believed not only in inspiration, but verbal inspiration (p. 141).

Luther never claimed that only a redemptive message in Scripture is inspired, and that other aspects of the Bible are not. In fact, if some of the Bible was of human origin

and other parts of it were divine, it would be impossible for mere humans to use their reason to distinguish between the two. According to Wood,

If only some of it comes from Him and some of it is no more than what man has said, by what means can we distinguish between the two? Luther would not be content with anything less than plenary inspiration (p. 142).

Luther's statements about inspiration show that he believed that everything that God says in the Bible is true—whether it is about geography or history or chronology. Wood states:

The Holy Spirit was concerned not merely with the inspiration of the writers or of their message. He descended to details and was responsible for the words and even the letters. "All the words of God are weighed, counted, and measured," Luther declared.... The prophets are those "into whose mouth the Holy Spirit has given the words" (p. 142).

It is unquestionable, as A. Skevington Wood has shown, that Luther believed in verbal inspiration. Luther as a biblical expositor cared about the minute details of grammar in the Scriptures. In fact, his Reformation discovery of justification by faith alone grew out of his careful analysis of the grammar and meaning of the Greek word for "righteousness" in Romans 1:17.

Third, it is anachronistic to read Higher Critical methods back upon Luther. In *The Schmalkald Articles: Luther's Theological Testament*, William Russel says:

Luther never wrote a treatise on the authority of the Bible. He did not express himself in terms of what recent generations might call the "inerrancy/errancy debate" (p. 70).

Luther did not live in the twentieth century. For that reason he does not use twentieth century ter-


minology. But from his writings we find him dealing with the same basic issues. Neo-orthodox theologians claim that it is anachronistic to apply the inerrancy/errancy debate back to Luther, but then they go on to argue that Luther supports their position! What is naïve about this approach is that the very idea that the Bible is filled with errors became popular in the modern era. At the time of the Reformation both the Roman Catholics and the Protestants assumed inerrancy.

Finally, Luther's whole approach to exegesis, preaching, and Bible study shows that he believed in verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Luther did not lose himself in a labyrinth of questions about original texts and editors. He does not come up with subtle questions that undercut the miracles plainly recorded.

In *The Abiding Word*, a Lutheran theologian defends inerrancy, but he is also very practical:

The Bible must be used with absolute reliance upon its divine authorship, with unquestioning acceptance of all of its statements, with unreserved assent to all its teachings. But it must be used! (Vol. 1, p. 80).

Certainly children of the Reformation must read their Bible. When Luther learned that his father had died, he took the Psalms with him into a room where he cried so hard he was not himself the next day. But the Scriptures were his strength and nourishment.

That is the last point that I want to leave with you who are children of the Reformation. If you believe that the Bible is God's very Word—read it, study it, meditate upon it, and obey it. What does it gain you if you believe that the Bible is God's Word and yet do not listen to God speak in His Word? 



September 5-6, 2001  
at Hull, Iowa

**T**he regular September meeting of Classis West was held at Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa. Classis met for two days, beginning on Wednesday, September 5 and concluding its work around 3:30 P.M. on Thursday, September 6.

An officebearers' conference was held on Tuesday, the day before classis. The theme of the conference was "The Covenant and Missions." Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma gave the keynote address entitled, "God's Covenantal Method of Gathering the Church." Several ministers also presented papers relating to the general theme of the conference. The conference was attended by the delegates to classis, by several members from our Doon, Hull, and Edgerton congregations, and by various visitors. These visitors included some men from our domestic mission field in Spokane, Washington. The speeches, discussion, and fellowship were enjoyed by all.

Classis began its work on Wednesday morning. Rev. Carl Haak chaired the meeting.

The main item on the agenda was the matter of the future of our Pella Protestant Reformed Church. At the last meeting of classis (March, 2001), Pella's consistory had asked for the advice of classis regarding their future viability. Classis at that time appointed a special committee to assist the consistory in considering this matter. This special committee labored in Pella on two different occasions after the March meeting of classis. The consistory considered the advice of the special committee and took a decision to disband as a congregation. The consistory came to classis, therefore, to ask for classis'

approval of their decision. Also coming to classis were eight appeals from members in Pella who were protesting the consistory's decision to disband.

After lengthy and careful deliberations, which included hearing the concerns of the appellants that were present, classis approved the advice presented by the special committee and also approved the decision of Pella's consistory to disband. The appeals that came to classis, therefore, were not upheld. The synodical deputies concurred with the decision of classis.

Various grounds were given in support of approving Pella's disbanding. The two main grounds were that (1) "Pella's consistory has shown that it cannot function in its calling to exercise the spiritual care and faithful Christian discipline in the congregation that is necessary to lead that congregation out of the long-standing problems in the congregation," and that (2) "The Pella congregation does not at this time have qualified men for the office of elder." Classis also expressed agreement with the special committee and with Pella's consistory that it is in the best interest of the remaining members and families in Pella that they move and join one of our existing Protestant Reformed congregations where they will be able to experience the full-orbed church life that they have been missing and also where, if they have children, they can benefit from use of our Protestant Reformed schools. Classis appointed the consistory of South Holland PRC to assist Pella's consistory and congregation in the difficult matter of disbanding.

It was with sorrow and heaviness of heart that these decisions were taken. In doing so, the main concern of classis was the spiritual welfare of the families and mem-

bers in Pella. In that connection, classis stated the following: "Although we grieve with Pella over the disbanding of Pella, we believe that Pella is at the point where the best spiritual interest of her members is found in disbanding and joining another Protestant Reformed congregation. Let us find our comfort in the words of Psalm 89:33, 34, 'Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.'"

Classis West also bade farewell to two of its ministers, Rev. Wayne Bekkering and Rev. Arie denHartog. Rev. Bekkering has accepted the call to serve as a missionary in Ghana, and Rev. denHartog has accepted the call to serve as minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore. Classis thanked these men for their years of dedicated service in our churches and encouraged them in their future work.

Classical appointments were granted to three vacant churches, Lynden, Randolph, and Redlands. Classis West asked the churches in Classis East to help out with pulpit supply to Lynden for two Sundays a month, and as often as possible in Randolph and Redlands. Rev. G. Eriks was appointed as moderator of Redlands PRC.

The classical appointment schedule adopted for Lynden PRC is as follows: Rev. G. Eriks (October 7, 14), Rev. M. DeVries (November 4, 11), Rev. T. Miersma (December 2), Rev. R. Smit (December 23, 30), Rev. C. Haak (January 20, 27), Rev. T. Miersma (February 3), and Rev. R. Miersma (March 3, 10).

The schedule adopted for Randolph PRC is as follows: Rev. W. Bekkering (September 23, 30), Rev. A. Brummel (October 7, 14),



Rev. R. Smit (November 4, 11), Rev. D. Kleyn (December 2, 9), Rev. S. Houck (December 30, January 6), Rev. M. DeVries (January 27, February 3), and Rev. S. Key (March 3, 10).


The schedule adopted for Redlands PRC is as follows: Rev. R. Miersma (November 18, 25), Rev. S. Key (December 16, 23), Rev.

G. Eriks (January 13, 20), Rev. A. Brummel (February 10, 17), and Rev. C. Haak (March 3, 10).

Although classis had to deal with serious matters, with thanks to God we report that classis was united in its deliberations and decisions. We pray that God's blessing may rest upon these decisions and upon our churches. We espe-

cially remember our fellow believers in Pella. We pray that God may bless and guide them through these difficult times.

The Lord willing, the next meeting of Classis West will be held in Loveland PRC on Wednesday, March 6, 2002.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn,  
Stated Clerk 

## Report of Classis East

Mr. Jon Huiskens

September 12, 2001  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 12, 2001 at the Kalamazoo PRC. Noticeably absent due to the terrorist attacks on New York City on September 11<sup>th</sup> was the elder delegate from Covenant PRC, Wyckoff, NJ. The delegates from the newly-organized congregation of Trinity PRC were present at classis for the first time. Rev. M. VanderWal was the chair of this session.

According to Article 66 of the Church Order, classis decided to proclaim that Sunday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, would be a Day of Prayer in response to the calamities our nation experienced on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Classis heard the reports of the Stated Clerk and the Classical Committee as well as a report from the consistory of Hudsonville PRC on their work in organizing the Trinity PRC on behalf of the classis.


At the request of Classis West, classis approved classical appointments for Lynden, Randolph, and Redlands. Appointments for the

3:00 P.M. service for Trinity PRC were also approved.

An increase of subsidy for this year in the amount of \$4,200.00 for Covenant PRC was also approved and forwarded to the Finance Committee of synod for approval.

Classis dealt with one discipline case in closed session.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$531.67. Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 9, 2002 at Holland.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Congregation Activities

Words cannot adequately describe the events of September 11 in New York City and Washington D.C., and I certainly am not going to try to do that here. I will be content to leave that to the experts. After all, the events of that day have little to do with church news, except that because of those attacks the three congregations in the Hudsonville, MI area, Georgetown, Hudsonville, and Trinity, met together that night at Georgetown for an hour of prayer, the reading of God's Word, and the singing of appropriate Psalter numbers.

My sincere thanks goes out to both Rev. R. VanOverloop and Rev. B. Gritters who led the service, as well as to anyone else who was responsible for that meeting. As Rev. Gritters said to those in attendance that night, the hour he spent preparing for that service was the best hour of that day. The same could be said of those there that evening. It was the best hour of our day too. Both pastors spent time looking at three areas of concern for the Christian. How do we show concern for God's people who may have suffered directly from the tragedy? How do Christians put those events into the broad picture of our Lord's return? And how do we deal with the feelings of fear we see in ourselves as well as in our children? Inserted between

these thoughts, each pastor read from appropriate Scripture passages, followed by the audience lifting their voices to God in song. What a blessing that hour was for God's people. Indeed, it was the church responding to the needs of its members.

The membership of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI celebrated their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and history as a congregation on Friday, September 7. Friends of Southwest were invited to join them in festivities that included a church dinner, pictures, memorabilia, and a video highlighting the church's blessings over the years. The mission field in Pittsburgh, PA, with which Southwest continues to work, sent their greetings by way of their own video. After a

*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



# THE STANDARD BEARER

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few brief remarks from missionary Rev. J. Mahtani, the children and young people sang, and each family had an opportunity to introduce themselves and wish Southwest a happy anniversary. We echo the words of Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor at Southwest, when he said, "We are thankful to God that He has preserved us in the truth of His Word."

The trouble with giving building updates on a particular church is that by the time you read them they are hopelessly out of date. But regardless, we can report that the building addition-renovation at the Grace PRC in Standale, MI continues to move ahead. Their parking lot has been paved with one coat only, the second will come next spring after the whole project is finished. The cement floor has been poured and the walls are up. The Lord willing, the trusses will be up by mid-September.

## Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committees of Southeast and First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a weekend seminar September 14 and 15 at Southeast on the subject of "Biblical Worship in a Modern Era." Friday evening Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on "The Regulative Principle of Worship," followed the next morning by Rev. B. Gritters speaking on "Shall We Dance, Rock, or Play," and Rev. C. Terpstra speaking on "The Believer's Role in Worship (Passive Spectator or Active Participant)."

## Denomination Activities

In light of the terrorist acts of war against our nation on September 11, both Classis West and East of our churches declared a day of prayer in our churches in the light

of Article 66 of the Church Order. Accordingly, our various congregations were encouraged by messages from God's Word on Sunday, September 16 and were able to pray for grace to endure all that lies ahead of us as a result of this tragedy, both as Christians and as citizens.

## Minister Activities

The Lord willing, Rev. W. Bekkering will preach his farewell sermon in Pella, IA on October 7 and then be installed as missionary to Ghana on Friday, October 12 in Hull, IA. The Randolph, WI congregation has extended a call to Rev. Doug Kuiper. Rev. W.

Bruinsma declined the call he received from the Lynden, WA PRC. Lynden then formed a new trio: Revs. M. DeVries, B. Gritters, and J. Laning. Rev. Gritters was elected to receive the call. Hope PRC in Redlands, CA called Rev. Haak. Rev. R. Miersma declined the call he had received from the Doon, IA PRC to serve as our churches' missionary to the Philippines.

## Food For Thought

"We turn to God when our foundations are shaking, only to learn that it is God who is shaking them."

— C. J. West

## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

During the early hours of August 5, 2001, the Lord took unto Himself our brother and former member,

#### MR. GEORGE KAMPS.

His earthly pilgrimage completed, he is now at peace. May his wife, Grace, and family find peace and comfort in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Men's Society of the Hudsonville PRC  
Erv Kortering, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow member Ed Karsemeyer in the loss of his uncle,

#### JAMES KARSEMEYER.

May he and his family find comfort from Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ..."

Pastor Arie denHartog, Pres.  
Henry Meelker, Sec'y.

### REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

Sponsored by  
Loveland PRC  
Evangelism Committee  
October 31, 2001  
in Loveland PRC,  
Loveland, CO  
7:30 P.M.

Rev. Thomas Miersma  
will speak on  
*Jesus the Savior of All?*  
*What did He actually say?*  
*Do you really believe in Him?*

### TEACHER(S) NEEDED:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its first year of operation, teaching freshmen and sophomores. As we plan for the addition of a junior class for 2002-2003, we see our greatest faculty needs in the areas of math, science, business and technology, and foreign language courses. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [rmedema@earthlink.net] or Education Committee Chairman, Bill De Jong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com].