

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

November 1, 2021 • Volume 98 • No. 3

Special Reformation issue: Martin Luther and the Diet of Worms (1521) “Here I Stand” after 500 Years

“The Word did it all”

Martin Luther

What is the Diet of Worms?

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Prelude to the Diet of Worms: Rome’s response to Luther

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

“Here I stand” in the fear of the LORD

Rev. Jacob Maatman

The swan’s triumphant song: From Worms to the Wartburg

Mr. Karl Dykstra

The Edict of Worms

Rev. Dennis Lee



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

Postmaster

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

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 600 words, be written in a brotherly fashion, and be in response only to published articles (not to published letters). More extensive exchanges on a significant topic of broad interest may be included as guest contributions at the editors' discretion. Letters and contributions will be published at the editor's discretion and may be edited for publication.

All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$30.00 per year in the US, \$42.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$20.00
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRCA: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

Prof. Barry Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Contents

Meditation

- 51 "The Word did it all"
The power of God's Word in church reformation
Martin Luther
- 52 Editor's notes
- 53 What is the Diet of Worms?
Prof. Russell Dykstra
- 55 Prelude to the Diet of Worms:
Rome's response to Luther
Prof. Douglas Kuiper
- 57 "Here I stand" in the fear of the LORD
Rev. Jacob Maatman
- 60 The swan's triumphal song:
From Worms to the Wartburg
Mr. Karl Dykstra
- 63 The Edict of Worms
Rev. Dennis Lee
- 65 Frederick the Wise:
Protector of Luther
Rev. Nathan Decker
- 68 Johannes Eck and Johannes von Eck:
Enemies of the Reformation
Rev. John Marcus

Reports

- 70 Classis East
- 71 News report of Classis West of the PRCA



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

Martin Luther

“The Word did it all”

The power of God’s Word in church reformation*

Dear Friends:

You heard yesterday the characteristics of a Christian man, how his whole life is faith and love. Faith is directed toward God, love toward man and one’s neighbor, and consists in such love and service for him as we have received from God without our work and merit.

Thus there are two things: the one, which is the most needful, and which must be done in one way and no other; the other, which is a matter of choice and not of necessity, which may be kept or not, without endangering faith or incurring hell. In both, love must deal with our neighbor in the same manner as God has dealt with us; it must walk the straight road, straying neither to the left nor to the right. In the things which are “musts” and are matters of necessity, such as believing in Christ, love nevertheless never uses force or undue constraint.

Thus the mass is an evil thing, and God is displeased with it, because it is performed as a sacrifice and work of merit. Therefore it must be abolished. Here there is no room for question, just as little as if you should ask whether you should pray to God. Here we are entirely agreed: the private mass must be abolished, as I have said in my writings. And I heartily wish it would be abolished everywhere and only the evangelical mass for all the people be retained.

Yet Christian love should not employ harshness here nor force the matter. It should be preached and taught with tongue and pen, that to hold mass in such a manner is a sin, but no one should be dragged away from it by force. The matter should be left to God; His word should do the work alone, without our work. Why? Because it is not in my power to fashion the hearts of men as the potter molds the clay, and to do with them

as I please. I can get no farther than to men’s ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force any one to have faith. That is God’s work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore, we should give free course to the Word, and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi*, but not the *executio*; we should preach the Word, but the consequences must be left to God’s own good pleasure.¹

Now if I should rush in and abolish the mass by force, there are many who would be compelled to consent to it and yet not know their own minds, but say: “I do not know if it is right or wrong, I do not know where I stand, I was compelled by force to submit to the majority.” And this forcing and commanding results in a mere mockery, an external show, a fool’s play, man-made ordinances, sham-saints, and hypocrites. For where the heart is not good, I care nothing at all for the work. We must first win the hearts of the people. And that is done when I teach only the Word of God, preach the Gospel and say: “Dear lords or pastors, desist from holding the mass, it is not right, you are sinning when you do it; I cannot refrain from telling you this.”

But I would not make it an ordinance for them, nor urge a general law; he who would follow me could do so, and he who refused would remain without. In the latter case the Word would sink into the heart and perform its work. Thus he would become convinced and acknowledge his error, and fall away from the mass; tomorrow another would do the same, and thus God would accomplish more with His Word than if you and I would forge into one all power and authority. For if you have won the heart, you have won the whole man—and the mass must finally fall of its own weight and come to an end. And if the hearts and minds of all men are united in the purpose—abolish the mass; but if all are not heart and soul for its abolishment—leave it in God’s hands, I beseech you, otherwise the result will not be

*This is the second of eight sermons that Dr. Martin Luther preached at Wittenberg during Lent 1522. They may be found at this link (<https://www.checkluther.com/wp-content/uploads/1522-Eight-Sermons-by-Dr.-Martin-Luther-Predicated-at-Wittenberg-in-Lent-1522-Invocavit-Sermons.pdf>) as well as in Luther’s Works, Vol. 51 - Sermons I, American Ed. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959, pp. 75-78.

¹ A paraphrase of Luther’s expression would be: “We have the right to address this matter with the Word, but we do not have the power to carry it out.”

good. Not, indeed, that I would again set up the mass; I let it lie in God's name.

Faith must not be chained and imprisoned, nor bound by an ordinance to any work. This is the principle by which you must be governed. For I am sure you will not be able to carry out your plans, and if you should carry them out with such general laws, then I will recant all the things that I have written and preached, and I will not support you, and therefore I ask you plainly: What harm can the mass do to you? You have your faith, pure and strong, toward God, and the mass cannot hurt you.

Love, therefore, demands that you have compassion on the weak, as all the apostles had. Once, when Paul came to Athens, a mighty city, he found in the temple many altars, and he went from one to the other and looked at them all, but did not touch any one of them even with his foot. But he stood in the midst of the market-place and said they were all idolatrous works, and begged the people to forsake them; yet he did not destroy one of them by force. When the word took hold of their hearts, they forsook their idols of their own accord, and in consequence idolatry fell of itself.

Now, if I had seen that they held mass, I would have preached and admonished them concerning it. Had they heeded my admonition, they would have been won; if not, I would nevertheless not have torn them from it by the hair or employed any force, but simply allowed the Word to act, while I prayed for them. For the Word created heaven and earth and all things; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners.

In conclusion: I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip [Melancton] and with [Nikolaus von] Amsdorf, the Word so greatly

weakened the papacy, that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the Word did it all.

Had I desired to foment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany. Yea, I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? A fool's play. I did nothing; I left it to the Word. What do you suppose is Satan's thought, when an effort is made to do things by violence? He sits back in hell and thinks: How fine a game these fools will make for me! But it brings him distress when we only spread the Word, and let it alone do the work. For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and if the hearts are captured the evil work will fall of itself.

Let me cite an instance. Aforetime there were sects, too, Jewish and Gentile Christians, differing on the law of Moses in respect to circumcision. The former would keep it, the latter not. Then came Paul and preached that it might be kept or not, it mattered not one way or the other; they should make no "must" of it, but leave it to the choice of the individual; to keep it or not, was immaterial. Later came Jerome, who would have made a "must" out of it, and wanted laws and ordinances to prohibit it. Then came St. Augustine, who held to the opinion of St. Paul: it might be kept or not, as one wished; St. Jerome had missed the meaning of St. Paul by a hundred miles. The two doctors bumped heads rather hard over the proposition. But when St. Augustine died, St. Jerome accomplished his purpose. After that came the popes; they would add something of their own, and they, too, made laws. Thus out of the making of one law grew a thousand laws, until they have completely buried us under laws. And so it will be here; one law will soon make two, two will increase to three, and so forth.

Let this be enough at this time concerning the things that are necessary, and let us beware lest we lead astray those of weak conscience.

Editor's notes

Welcome to the annual Reformation issue of the *Standard Bearer*! As has often been done in the past, we have highlighted the anniversary of a significant event of the great sixteenth century Reformation. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther stood before the rulers of Germany, before the elite of the Church of Rome, and before the new Emperor Charles V, and boldly confessed that he would not recant, would not give up all his writings, would not cast away the reformation that God was working. His concluding words ring through

the ages as a powerful encouragement to the church to stand fast for God's truth in the face of all opposition. "I am bound by the Scriptures.... Here I stand. So help me God."

We trust you will enjoy the periscope into that moment in Luther's life, that defining moment for the Reformation. And be encouraged also to stand on the Word—*solely* on God's Word.



Prof. Russell Dykstra, pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan

What is the Diet of Worms?

The Diet of Worms was an imperial assembly of the Holy Roman Empire convoked by Emperor Charles V. It was held in the city of Worms located not far from Heidelberg. An imperial ‘diet’ was a deliberative assembly of the whole empire. This diet was conducted from January 28 to May 25 of 1521, with Emperor Charles V presiding. Other imperial diets took place at Worms in different years (829, 926, 1076, 1122, 1495, and 1545), but the diet in 1521 is the best known.

In that day, the city of Worms had a population of about 7,000. It is estimated that twice that number of visitors filled the city from the first of the year. Summoned by the emperor Charles V, to this city came churchmen from all over Europe including faraway Rome, political rulers high and low from all regions of Germany, and Martin Luther with a large, wildly supportive following.

The diet was first and foremost a political gathering called by the new Emperor Charles V. Charles was born in 1500 in present-day Belgium and spent much of his early life in the Lowlands. Through various alliances and marriages of his grandparents and parents, by age 16 he was the ruler in such varied places as Spain, Austria, and the Lowlands. Three years later, in June 1519, he was selected to be ruler over the German provinces and given the title “Holy Roman Emperor.”

How did this come about? The area of Germany that still considered itself “the Empire” was composed of many independent provinces. Within these provinces were seven electors, three of whom were high church officials and four who were rulers in their provinces. When their previous emperor (Maximilian I, grandfather of Charles) died in January of 1519, the electors looked about for a replacement. The three leading candidates were Frederick the Wise, one of the prominent electors, Francis I, King of France, and Charles. Due largely to Frederick’s influence, the electors chose Charles. He was 19 years old. On the one hand, he was well schooled in the business of ruling because of his upbringing in a royal family. On the other hand, he was unfamiliar with the political landscape of the German provinces that still called themselves collectively the Holy Roman Empire.

The diet, therefore, was necessary for Charles to set his political house in order. He wished to meet with the various rulers and begin charting the course for his domain. He faced significant issues. To begin, the Turks were pressing on the eastern borders of the empire, and he wanted the German princes to agree to join forces to battle the Turks. He was concerned about possible threats from France. Charles was also considering a possible alliance with England, where his aunt Catherine was married to King Henry VIII. The empire needed a council of regency set up for governing the empire when the emperor was absent. Finally, the finances of the empire needed to be arranged on a solid footing.

These were some of the issues that the diet would face. To this assembly the German princes came by the hundreds—the electors, the governors, and rulers at all levels attended. Some of the more notable included Frederick the Wise, ruler of the province of Saxony (which included Wittenberg); Duke George of Saxony, an early supporter of Luther who had become a bitter foe; and Dietrich von Clemm, master of the Teutonic Knights. Besides the rulers, many doctors of theology from various universities came to Worms.

In addition to Charles’ ambitious political agenda and all the issues he faced, there was also the “German problem.” This was a reference to Martin Luther, his attacks on the Romish church, and the storm of political protest arising out of Martin Luther’s writings. Charles had already made plain what was in his heart. He was a faithful son of the Church of Rome and would defend Rome to the end. But how to deal with Luther in his new position, that was the question.

The high officials of the Roman Catholic Church were present in force to exert all the influence they could on Charles. Many cardinals and archbishops attended. Two specially appointed papal legates were present, commissioned by Pope Leo X. The leader of the church officials was the legate Hieronymous Aleander. Aleander had formerly held the significant positions of rector of the renowned university of Paris and then the Vatican librarian. Pope Leo had selected him to be the

special papal advisor to Charles V on the Luther matter. Aleander's goal was to obtain Charles' condemnation of Luther, thus supporting the papal bull condemning Luther. He hoped to gain this while at the same time not giving Luther any opportunity for a public hearing.

And finally, attending the diet was Martin Luther himself. His appearance at the Diet of Worms occurred only two and a half years after he had posted his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg. Luther's life since that day had been a whirlwind of activity as he was driven by the controversy. Many monks, priests, bishops, university professors, and special papal delegates had attacked Luther. The printing press spread his replies and his teachings far and wide.

And then there were the public debates. In April of 1518, he debated John Eck on the topic of sin, free will, and grace (Heidelberg Disputation). As a result of this, Luther came to reject the notion that works merit with God and that fallen man has a free will. God was leading Luther step by step into a deeper understanding of the issues of the great battle for sovereign grace in salvation.

Rome took serious notice of Luther after Heidelberg, recognizing the real threat to papal power. On August 7, Luther received a papal letter instructing him to report to Rome in 60 days. On August 23, the pope demanded of Frederick the Wise that he deliver up this "child of the devil." Frederick rather arranged for a meeting with Cardinal Cajetan at the upcoming Diet of Augsburg in October. Luther and Cardinal Cajetan debated the issues. Cajetan ordered Luther to renounce his views. Luther refused. We should notice that Frederick's refusal to hand over Luther is significant: it is the first instance of a ruler protecting one of the Reformation figures.

The pope tried diplomacy once more, sending Karl von Miltitz in January 1519. He did everything in his power to persuade Luther to renounce his views and submit to Rome. He did obtain from Luther a promise to write a letter of apology to the pope asking for pardon, which Luther did in March.

Next came the Leipzig Disputation in the summer of 1519, sanctioned by Duke George of Saxony. Once again Luther faced the capable debater John Eck. In preparation for this debate, Luther had studied the issue of papal authority, its history and claims. Eck and Luther faced off. Eck charged Luther with the errors of Jon Hus on the doctrine of the church. Luther first denied it, but after reading some of the Council of Constantine's judgments against Hus, he concluded that Hus was correct in many respects, and that the Council of Constance had wrongly condemned Hus. The significance is that Luther became convinced that councils and popes are not infallible. And, especially important,

his conviction was confirmed that Scripture is the only authority!

The year 1520 was a watershed year. On June 15, 1520 the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* gave Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated. Luther's full condemnation was not far behind. (See the following article for details.)

In the meantime, Luther continued to study and write. He wrote three especially important works in 1520. The first was *To the Christian Nobility*. In this address to the German nobles, Luther set forth the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The Spirit is given to all believers and guides them into the truth. He also appealed to the nobles to provide education for the people. The second was *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In this work, Luther examined all seven sacraments of Rome, and took the position that there are but three sacraments, not seven (Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Penance). He also destroyed the bedrock of the whole sacerdotal system of worship by rejecting transubstantiation. When Erasmus read this work, he is reported to have said that this made the rift between Luther and Rome permanent. The third significant work was *The Freedom of a Christian*, which developed the truth of Christian liberty. Luther sent this to Pope Leo X.

God was using Luther to reform His church. Luther was also the darling of the German people, long oppressed and robbed by the Romish church. When Luther came to Worms, he was accompanied by a crowd of enthusiastic supporters including knights and peasants. His arrival led to as much excitement as the coming of the emperor. Aleander reported the mood of the city, even of Germany. "All Germany is in revolution. Nine tenths shout 'Luther!' as their war cry; and the other tenth cares nothing about Luther, and cries: 'Death to the court of Rome!'"¹

This was the highly charged atmosphere in which the Diet of Worms was held. The rulers of Germany were likewise very divided on their view of Luther, though for many rulers their support for Luther was not out of religious conviction but political motivations. Nonetheless, the Diet of Worms would be a most significant moment, even a defining moment for Luther and the Reformation. And God providentially ensured that His chosen Reformer would not be put to death and that the Reformation would not be squelched. On the contrary, the stand of Luther would be the clearest and boldest public confession of his convictions grounded on the holy Scriptures.

1 A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 70.



Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

Prelude to the Diet of Worms: Rome's response to Luther

Several factors made it prudent for Emperor Charles V to call the Diet of Worms. Two of them were Rome's attempt to quiet Martin Luther and Luther's response to these attempts.

Background

On October 31, 1517, ten days shy of his thirty-fourth birthday, a monk named Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. In them Luther questioned Rome's view of penance—that one's sins were forgiven when one verbally confessed one's sins to a priest, carried out the prescribed works that supposedly showed sorrow for sin, and heard the priest declare one to be forgiven.

Even more, Luther undermined Rome's teaching that buying indulgences was one of those works that showed sorrow for sin. Indulgences were pieces of paper in which the pope declared that one's time in purgatory was shortened by so many years. These indulgences could be bought (as if silver and gold could accomplish something that the blood of the Lamb did not do!), and the money raised from their sale helped finance the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

To this Luther objected. By nailing the Ninety-five Theses to the church door, he was asking for a willing volunteer to debate him on the matter. No one accepted the challenge.

Six months later, Luther represented his monastery at a conference for members of the Augustinian Convents. Which topics should be discussed at this conference? The man planning the conference knew that Luther was outspoken, and decided to avoid the topics of penance and indulgences. Certainly the topics of sin, grace, and free will were neutral; Luther could not stir up trouble in these areas. Also in this, God directed the thoughts of a man to accomplish His higher purpose. As Luther pondered these issues, he saw even more problems with Rome's doctrine than he had previously seen. In the theses of his Heidelberg Disputation, Luther taught that obedience to God's law, and any human work, cannot contribute to man's righteousness; that free will is a miser, and fallen man always chooses to sin; and that

grace alone, and the work of Christ alone, saves fallen man.

Increasingly alarmed by Luther's ideas, Pope Leo X asked one man after another to reason with Luther. At the Diet of Augsburg (1518), Cardinal Thomas Cajetan warned Luther and threatened him with excommunication. At the Leipzig Disputation (1519), John Eck accused Luther of being a Hussite, that is, of having a heretical view of the pope and church. After studying the matter, Luther decided that John Hus had been wrongly condemned, and that popes and councils could in fact err.

The first papal bull

On June 15, 1520, the pope issued a bull, or decree, condemning Luther's errors. Papal bulls are always named after their opening words in Latin. This first bull directed against Luther was called *Exsurge Domine*,¹ for it began: "Arise, O Lord, and judge your own cause." In it Pope Leo X informed the Lord that foxes, wild boars, and wild beasts were destroying Christ's vineyard. He called on *Peter* to rise and act in defense of the church that *Peter had consecrated by his own blood*, as if Peter and the Lord had both shed their blood to establish the church! And he called on *Paul* to rise up in defense of his own teachings. This Luther, the pope alleged, was putting aside the proper interpretation of Scripture (that is, the interpretation that the church gave), and teaching errors that the church had already condemned when it condemned John Wycliffe and John Hus.

In this bull Leo itemized forty-one "heretical" teachings of Martin Luther, including his teachings on penance, confession to a priest, indulgences, purgatory, the pope, and good works. Concluding this list, the pope declared,

No one of sound mind is ignorant how destructive, pernicious, scandalous, and seductive to pious and simple minds these various errors are, how opposed they are to all charity and reverence for the holy Roman Church who is the mother of all the faithful and teacher

¹ This bull can be found online at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo10/l10exdom.htm>.

of the faith; how destructive they are of the vigor of ecclesiastical discipline, namely, obedience. This virtue is the font and origin of all virtues and without it anyone is readily convicted of being unfaithful.

The pope assured his faithful that he has “held a careful inquiry, scrutiny, discussion, strict examination and mature deliberation” of these matters, and found the teachings to be “against the doctrine and tradition of the Catholic Church, and against the true interpretation of the sacred Scriptures received from the church.” Therefore, “by the authority of the almighty God, the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and our own authority, we condemn, reprobate, and reject completely each of these theses or errors as either heretical, scandalous, false, offensive to pious ears or seductive of simple minds, and against Catholic truth.”

The bull proceeded to threaten with excommunication any who would teach these things, to condemn and reject all writings and sermons of Martin Luther, and to pronounce a penalty on any who would “read, assert, preach, praise, print, publish, or defend” these writings. The pope then informed God of all the ways in which he had taken care of Luther, and of Luther’s refusal to listen: mind you, he even appealed to a council to address the matter! A true heretic he was; may God have mercy on his soul! But he must stop preaching and must stop disturbing “the peace, unity, and truth of the church for which the Savior prayed so earnestly to the Father.”

The bull was dated June 15, 1520—centuries before the era of instant communication. The bull needed to be translated, thousands of copies printed, and men had to distribute it throughout the papal realm, especially Germany. In September John Eck made the rounds of Luther’s native country, bringing copies of the bull. Eck was well received in some places, and the people cooperated. In other cities, however, the people tore up the bull or threw it into the water, and accosted Eck. At least two universities, Erfurt and Wittenberg, refused to publish the bull. Such defiance the papacy had not faced in many years.

Luther’s response was vintage Luther: he wrote “Against the Bull of Antichrist,” called the pope a heretic, and again called for a general council. And on December 10, at a public burning of Romish books at Wittenberg, he burned the papal bull. Afterward he wrote another treatise, “Why the Books of the Pope and his Disciples were burned by Dr. Martin Luther.”

The second papal bull

Pope Leo had no incentive now not to carry out his threat of excommunication. On January 3, 1521, he published

the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*.² With “grievous sorrow and complexity,” he admitted that his previous bull did not have the desired effect, but that Luther persisted in his wicked way. To honor the office of Peter, Leo declared Luther and his followers excommunicated, and branded them with the title “Lutherans,” a term by which they are known yet today. “On all these,” said the pope, “we decree the sentences of excommunication, of anathema, of our perpetual condemnation and interdict; of privation of dignities, honors, and property on them and their descendants, and of declared unfitness for such possessions; of the confiscation of their goods and of the crime of treason; and these and the other sentences, censures and punishments which are inflicted by canon law on heretics and are set out in our aforesaid missive, we decree to have fallen on all these men to their damnation.” But there was more: the towns and territories that these men visited or lived in were placed under the *interdict*! No faithful Christian was ever to visit those towns; and the holy sacraments were not to be administered in them!

In several ways the difference between Rome’s excommunication and the Reformed and biblical practice of Christian discipline becomes apparent. First, biblical excommunication declares *one* person to be outside the kingdom of heaven; this bull declared anyone who followed Luther to be. Second, biblical excommunication reminds the impenitent that in the way of repentance he or she can be again received as a member of the church; this bull lacked any such notice. Third, biblical excommunication says nothing about earthly consequences, about confiscation of goods or other civil penalties; this bull mentioned those. Finally, biblical excommunication says nothing about the interdict, about where the means of grace may or may not be administered; this bull did. Why would the church withhold the means of grace from other faithful? The answer is that Rome was putting pressure on the people around Luther, to try to convince Luther to recant or to destroy him with their own hands.

How harsh and authoritarian this bull was! And if anyone were to write or act contrary to it, “let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul.” Thus was Luther excommunicated.

So why the Diet of Worms?

The diet was not merely a conference between Luther

² This bull can be found online at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo10/110decet.htm>. The title is comprised of the first three words of the decree: “It pleases the Roman Pontiff.”

and the pope, or between Luther's followers and the pope's supporters. Neither pope nor Luther saw the need for such; the lines had been clearly drawn. The pope's representative at the Diet of Worms even insisted that the diet itself was not necessary; the only thing necessary was that the emperor enforce the pope's word of excommunication.

But Luther's excommunication had deepened the growing chasm in Germany, which was a part of the Holy Roman Empire. The empire was threatened from without by the Muslims, who were pressing in from the east, but also threatened from within by religious disunity. So Emperor Charles V, himself sympathetic to Rome, called the diet, with the goal of restoring unity in the empire. Would he enforce Luther's excommunication, as the pope asked him to do? At first Charles seemed so inclined, but his political advisors suggested

against it: Elector Frederick had helped Charles V be elected emperor in 1519, and Frederick defended Luther.

In the end, Charles declared against Luther in the Edict of Worms: "We forbid anyone from this time forward to dare, either by words or by deeds, to receive, defend, sustain, or favor the said Martin Luther." In this way, he ratified the pope's bulls. In the eyes of both church and state, Luther was a heretic, an infidel, an excommunicate, and a traitor.

But above emperors and kings is the Lord of lords and King of kings, whom they are to kiss (Ps. 2). And above popes and all church rulers sits the Head of the Church, to whom all answer. Christ's heavenly verdict is different from the pope's and the emperor's. As Luther himself could testify, it was the verdict pronounced on all who honor the Word of God above all: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."



Rev. Jacob Maatman, pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

"Here I stand" in the fear of the LORD

What happened at Worms in April of 1521 was decisive in the history of the Reformation, yea, in the history of God's church, the fruit of which reaches to the present and, by God's grace, will reach to the end of the world. Martin Luther risked his life and dared an appearance before the emperor that we might have the gospel that sets us free, the heavenly word that God kindled to light afresh through the labors of a monk who said, "Here I stand." This sacred, precious, life-giving deposit has been passed down to us, and we revisit Worms, not as disinterested historians, but as children of the Reformation.

This article intends to relate briefly the history of Luther's stand,¹ but with particular focus on aspects that, although perhaps lesser known, are no less significant

in discovering to us not only the heart of the man, but deeper, the power of God who had this man in His grip. As the psalmist says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Ps. 34:11).

Emperor Charles V cited Martin Luther to appear at the Diet of Worms within twenty-one days, promising safe conduct. But another emperor, about a hundred years before, had promised the same to Jan Hus, man of God, whose teachings Luther espoused. Hus was arrested and burned alive at the stake. This history Luther well knew. Nevertheless, the doctor headed to the old city many miles away. After an eventful journey, he entered Worms April 16, a hero in the eyes of many, a heretic in the eyes of others. His presence electrified the city to the chagrin of the papists. He was conducted to his lodging.

The next day he was summoned to appear at the diet. So great was the press of the crowd that the escort was compelled to take the back alleys. At last they arrived, and Luther stood before the council. "Never had man

¹ For a fuller treatment of this history, see Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1926. (Also available online at www.gutenberg.org). And, Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950. And, Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther*. New York: Viking, 2017.

appeared before so imposing an assembly,” says one,² at the head of which was the young emperor himself, whose eyes met those of the monk from Wittenberg. The spokesman on behalf of the emperor, John von Eck, asked him two questions: first, whether these books stacked on a nearby table were his; second, whether he wished to retract them. In a letter written after his departure from Worms, Luther summarizes the matter thus:

I thought His Imperial Majesty would have assembled one or fifty scholars and overcome this monk in a straightforward manner. But nothing else was done there than this: Are these your books? Yes. Do you want to renounce them or not? No. Then go away!³

Well, at this first appearing, Luther answered the first question by affirming the books were his. He asked for time to think and prepare an answer to the second. He had not known in advance how the proceedings were going to go; he wanted to make sure he answered rightly. The request was granted, and Luther was given one day. A letter he wrote shortly after he returned to his lodging tells us the course upon which he was already resolved: “With Christ’s help...I shall not in all eternity recant the least particle.”⁴

Between his first and final appearing, an event of great moment occurred, overheard and scribbled down by someone in the right place at the right time: Martin Luther prayed to His God and Father at a time that one author says “was to him a little garden of Gethsemane.”⁵ “This prayer,” says the same, “explains Luther and the Reformation.” And, “In our opinion, it is one of the most precious documents in all history.” In it, we see a Jacob wrestling with God—“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26); in it, we hear the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that avails much (James 5:16)—“O almighty and everlasting God, how terrible is this world! Behold, it openeth its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in thee.” Further on: “O my God, where art thou?... Come, come; I am ready...I am ready to lay down my life for thy truth.... For it is the cause of justice—it is thine.” And finally: “My soul belongs to thee. It shall abide for ever with thee.... Amen.... O God, help me!... Amen.”

And help him God did. When the time was up, Lu-

ther arrived at the appointed time for his second appearing. It was April 18. After a long wait in the foyer, the evening drawing on and the candles flickering, he was admitted into the packed hall. The same spokesmen who had addressed him the day before got right down to business, and put the second question to him again: “Do you wish to defend all your acknowledged books, or to retract some?”⁶

In his answer, Luther distinguished his books into three kinds. In some of them, he said, “I have discussed religious faith and morals simply and evangelically, so that even my enemies themselves are compelled to admit that these are useful, harmless, and clearly worthy to read by Christians.” How should he disavow these! “Another group of my books attacks the papacy and the affairs of the papists as those who both by their doctrines and very wicked examples have laid waste the Christian world with evil.” If he should retract these, it would add further fuel to the evil, and he would open “not only windows but doors to such great godlessness.” As for the third kind, written against individuals, Luther said, “I confess I have been more violent than my religion or profession demands,” but again, “It is not proper for me to retract these works, because by this retraction it would again happen that tyranny and godlessness would, with my patronage, rule and rage among the people of God more violently than ever before.”

He appealed to the example of the Lord: “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong” (John 18:23), and pleaded with the emperor or anyone to “bear witness, expose my errors, overthrowing them by the writings of the prophets and the evangelists. Once I have been taught I shall be quite ready to renounce every error, and I shall be the first to cast my books into the fire.” As for the “dissensions aroused in the world as a result of my teachings...this is the way, the opportunity, and the result of the Word of God, just as He said, ‘I have not come to bring peace, but a sword’” (Matt. 10:34). He concluded by warning the council against condemning God’s Word for the sake of “settling strifes,” for “it is he who takes the wise in their craftiness” (Job 5:13).

The spokesman was not interested in an answer like this. All he wanted to hear was, “*revoco*.”⁷ Yes or no, Martin Luther? Do you, or do you not, retract? And then the monk, before emperor, electors, lords, princes, and

2 D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, 253.

3 Martin Luther, “Letter 73 to Lucas Cranach,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 48 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 201-202.

4 Martin Luther, “Letter 72 to John Cuspinian,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 48, p. 200.

5 D’Aubigne, 258. The quotations of the author’s words, and the portions from the prayer are taken from pages 258-260.

6 “Luther at the Diet of Worms,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 32, pp. 101ff. The document contains two accounts, one “prepared by the friends of the Reformation,” the other “the report of the papal nuncio Aleander” (103). The quotations that follow are taken from the former.

7 Latin for “I recall” or “I recant.”

bishops, a silence filling the hall, breathless anticipation, the eyes of all fixed upon him—then the monk spake those words that reverberated through that assembly, and have reverberated through the hundreds of years since:

Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner.... Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.⁸

Again an attempt was made to get him to budge, but Luther remained firm. The diet recessed, and he returned to his lodging.

Scripture—that was the refrain that continued to be heard the days following, when various persons and delegations tried to negotiate with him. “Then began the attempt to break Luther down through a committee.”⁹ But he was resolute: he could only agree to submit his case to the judgment of another, including a council’s, if Scripture would be the standard of judgment and the final authority. The negotiations fell flat. April 26, several days after his second appearing, Luther departed for home, the emperor honoring the promised safe conduct.

This history exemplifies that great Reformation principle—and one that grated upon the ears of Rome during Luther’s time at Worms—of *sola Scriptura*, of which the Belgic Confession speaks in the seventh article:

Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all.

Which is to say, God is above all.

Martin Luther stood in the fear of the LORD. Already at his first appearing, we see it. Why did he ask for time to prepare an answer? In his own words: “Because this is a question of faith and the salvation of souls, and because it concerns the divine Word...it

would be rash and at the same time dangerous for me to put forth anything without proper consideration.”¹⁰ He went on to quote Matthew 10:33, words that stood large before him. Here is a man neither headstrong nor cocksure, but one who feared God. He was confident, but not self-confident. Listen to his prayer; he felt his own weakness, but upon the LORD he relied. At the diet, many and great were the faces and the power they wielded, and what was he? But there was a witness that day (though you would not have seen him with your eyes), someone watching and listening who had more hold on Luther than anyone else: the living God, to whose Word Luther’s conscience was captive. “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25).

God was at work that day. His power brought forth Luther’s “I cannot.” Not, “I will not,” though true enough, but even more significantly, “I cannot,” because God would not let him do otherwise. In the words of Merle d’Aubigne:

Luther, constrained to obey his faith, led by his conscience to death, impelled by noblest necessity, the slave of his belief, and under this slavery still supremely free, like the ship tossed by a violent tempest, and which, to save that which is more precious than itself, runs and is dashed upon the rocks, thus uttered these sublime words, which still thrill our hearts at an interval of three [now five] centuries: thus spoke a monk before the emperor and the mighty ones of the nation; and this feeble and despised man, alone, but relying on the grace of the Most High, appeared greater and mightier than them all. His words contain a power against which all these mighty rulers can do nothing. This is the weakness of God, which is stronger than man. The empire and the church on the one hand, this obscure man on the other, had met. God had brought together these kings and these prelates publicly to confound their wisdom. The battle is lost, and the consequence of this defeat of the great ones of the earth will be felt among every nation and in every age to the end of time.¹¹

What was loss and defeat for “the great ones of the earth” was for the church of God, the cause of truth, the gospel of Christ, victory, the blessed consequence of which has since been so greatly felt, and continues to be felt, even by us.

Soli Deo gloria, “for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Rom. 11:36).

8 Regarding the last line there has been debate about both the order of words and whether or not Luther said more than “God help me.” For an analysis, see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 309-10.

9 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 188.

10 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 32, 107.

11 D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, 265-266.



Mr. Karl Dykstra teaches Church History at Covenant Christian High School (Grand Rapids) and is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

The swan's triumphant song: From Worms to the Wartburg

Martin Luther was not the first 'heretic' to stand before the collective might of church and state. He was just one of the few who lived to tell the tale.

Already some one hundred years earlier, the Bohemian pre-reformer Jan Hus, who endearingly referred to himself as "the goose" (the meaning of "Hus" in Czech), was similarly summoned to the Council of Constance in Germany and condemned. Just before his burning on July 6, 1415, Hus made a stirring declaration: "Today you cook a goose, but in one hundred years you will hear a *swan* sing—and him you will have to hear!"¹

Though he could not have known it, Hus was nearly a prophet. A century after the goose was cooked, a swan began to sing in the German town of Wittenberg. That swan's name was Martin Luther.

In Luther's day, the cooking of "the goose" Hus was well remembered. By it, the Holy Roman Church had set the precedent for what she did with heretics. In early 1521, and in Hus-like fashion, the excommunicated heretic Luther had been summoned to the imperial Diet of Worms.

Now it was the swan's turn to sing.

Already at the Leipzig Disputation in 1519, Luther had publicly identified himself with the Bohemian hero, Jan Hus. There at Leipzig the God of the Reformation used the skilled Catholic orator, John Eck, to back Luther into the corner of *sola Scriptura*. "A simple laymen armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it," argued Luther. "For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and councils!"²

But exactly that was the "Bohemian virus," maintained Eck, and he charged Luther with "espousing the pestilent errors" of Hus.³ Initially, Luther vehemently denied the charge. But having studied the works of Hus during a break in the afternoon session of the eighteen-day long debate, he came back and shocked

all in attendance by boldly proclaiming: *Ich bin ein Hussite!*⁴

With that proclamation in 1519, Luther stood exactly where God wanted him to stand: on the firm foundation of Scripture alone.

Next would come his stand at Worms.

The swan is summoned to Worms

Pope Leo X had officially excommunicated the swan of Wittenberg on January 3, 1521, declaring him to be a heretic outside of the "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." With that the "German problem" became the prerogative of the young, new emperor Charles V, who was under oath to remove all heresy from his vast realm.

The grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain was all too eager to deal with the heretic in Wittenberg. On March 26, 1521, a letter from Charles V arrived in Wittenberg announcing the imperial diet, including an invitation to Luther that was all too similar to what Hus had received. "Come to Worms *under safe conduct* to answer with regard to your books and teaching," the summoning read. And should Luther try to turn down the imperial invitation, Charles added the thinly veiled threat, "You have twenty-one days in which to arrive."⁵

The situation for Luther was heating up, condemnation and death the inevitable outcome. Yet none of these things moved Luther. He had set his face toward Worms, willing to offer himself in defense of the gospel before some of the most powerful men on earth.

On April 3, 1521, Luther, accompanied by several friends and imperial dignitaries, began the three-hundred-mile journey to the Diet of Worms confessing that "He who saved the three men in the furnace of the Babylonian king still lives and rules."⁶ Luther knew his outcome might mirror the fate of his fiery forerunner Hus.

¹ Stephen Nichols, "The Goose and the Swan" in *5 Minutes in Church History* (October 4, 2017). Ligonier Ministries: <https://www.5minutesinchurchhistory.com/the-geese-and-the-swan>.

² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 103.

³ Bainton, 102.

⁴ Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1999), 112.

⁵ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 201. Emphasis added.

⁶ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2017), 201.

Perhaps then Luther was spurred on by the confession of Hus: “It is better to die well than live badly.”⁷

The swan’s triumphant entry

Luther’s travel to Worms was not without high drama.

Everywhere Luther stopped on his way to the diet he was greeted by throngs of people who wanted to see the monk who defied the pope and would stand before the emperor. Luther had become the German hero. Not only had his writings “spread as on angel’s wings” throughout Europe, but his portrait did too, thanks to illustrations created by Lucas Cranach, the artist of Wittenberg. Luther’s *face* was as recognizable as his writings. The nation wanted to see their hero in the flesh. As Luther entered German towns and villages, he found the streets packed with admirers, many even scampering up on rooftops to get a look at their hero.

But Luther became convinced that his ancient foe was attempting to hinder him from reaching Worms. When Luther preached in Erfurt—the place where he had studied to become a monk—the church was so packed with throngs of people that the balcony creaked, threatening to collapse. Farther along, when Luther preached again, massive stones crumbled off the church tower crashing to the ground. Luther chalked these up as the devil’s attempt to hinder the gospel.

In Eisenach, Luther became so ill that his travel companions were concerned for his life. This too Luther credited to Satan: “I know your tricks, you bitter enemy!” Then adding, “But Christ lives and we shall enter Worms in spite of all the gates of hell and the powers of the air!”⁸

Luther was a man on a mission. And he was going to Worms, even if he were threatened by as many devils as shingles on a roof.⁹

Luther rode into Worms on the morning of April 16, 1521. If Luther received a hero’s welcome in the various German cities along the way, his entrance into Worms became a spectacle for the ages. Trumpets blared from the cathedral top as two thousand people thronged to greet Luther with praise and singing. Their hero had arrived. Luther, descending from his carriage, triumphantly assured the throng, “God will be with me!”

The reception Worms gave Luther dwarfed what she had given the emperor. The Roman curia were more than a little annoyed; it seemed the whole world had

gone after Luther. “I suspect he will soon be said to work miracles,” crankily commented one cardinal.¹⁰

The swan goes missing

By the time Luther stood before the Diet of Worms, the hype surrounding his triumphant entry had quieted. Just as the Council of Constance had ordered Hus to recant, the dignitaries of both church and state assembled at the Diet now demanded that Luther retract his writings. But with God’s help the swan of whom Hus prophesied boldly took his stand and could do no other.

Charles V was not impressed with Luther’s stand. As Luther was escorted out of the chamber, the emperor’s Spanish guards audibly chanted what everyone, including Luther, expected to be his imminent fate: “To the flames, to the flames.”¹¹ Later, one cardinal spitefully sneered, “When [Luther] left, he no longer seemed so cheerful.”¹² It seemed the swan would soon be cooked.

With Luther out of the diet’s chamber, Charles V declared Luther a heretic and outlaw in every corner of his empire. Luther was granted 21 days of safe passage back to Wittenberg before the sentence fell. “When the time is up,” Charles declared, “no one is to harbor him. His followers also are to be condemned. His books are to be eradicated from the memory of man.”¹³ The hope was that Luther would soon be eradicated as well.

Luther left Worms as a man with a price on his head. As an enemy of the empire, many suspected he would never make it back to Wittenberg. The route was long and winding, and it would not take much for an assassin lying in wait to put an end to Luther. Several days into his journey, as Luther’s party passed through a ravine, an eerily stillness settled over the dark forest. Without warning, horsemen armed with fearsome crossbows surrounded Luther’s wagon. The horsemen dragged Luther to the ground, tied a sack over his head, and then hoisted him on to a horse. While Luther’s companions ran for their lives, Luther’s captors whisked him away—but not before he had grabbed his New Testament and Hebrew Bible.

News of Luther’s disappearance made waves throughout Europe. The anguished artist Albrecht Durer lamented, “I know not whether Luther lives or is murdered.... If Luther is dead, who will henceforth explain to us the gospel? What might have he written for

7 Steven Lawson, *Pillars of Grace* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 380.

8 Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 206.

9 Metaxas, 206.

10 Metaxas, 207.

11 W. Robert Godfrey, *A Survey of Church History*, DVD, episode 3, “Martin Luther and the German Reformation” (Ligonier Ministries, 2012).

12 Metaxas, 212.

13 Metaxas, 230.

us in the next ten or twenty years?”¹⁴

Luther, renegade monk, the “wild boar” of Wittenberg, the hero of the gospel, the so-called swan, was missing. And as much as anyone knew, the swan was dead.

The swan sings from the mountaintop

But Luther was not dead.

Perched high above a sea of sprawling German forest rests a mighty fortress known as the Wartburg Castle. This would be the hiding place of Luther, after the “kidnapping” orchestrated by Frederick the Wise and friends who feared for Luther’s life. In the Wartburg, Luther took on a new look and new identity, “Knight George.” No one must know he was the Reformer of Wittenberg. His very life depended on it.

In the “realm of the birds,” however, the swan was restless. Luther was a man of action, and being holed up in the Wartburg was maddening. Longing to be down in the heat of battle, he regarded the island in the sky as his “Patmos.” And had he even done the right thing, he wondered? “I have withdrawn from the public and thus obeyed the advice of friends,” he lamented. “I am uncertain whether with this action I have done something which is pleasing to God.”¹⁵

Though above the fray, Luther was not necessarily out of the thick of it. Writing to a friend, Luther admitted, “I am both very idle and very busy here; I am studying Hebrew and Greek and writing without interruption.”¹⁶ For the first seven months, Luther busied his quill hurling ink at the attacks of the devil on the Reformation. Assaults against the Reformation came from both *without* and *within*, and Luther determined to save the church from Catholicism on the one hand, and radicalism on the other.

But in December of 1521, the swan’s song rose to a crescendo as Luther took up a mighty work that symbolizes his work and stay at the Wartburg refuge. Lu-



Taken from *Martin Luther* by Simonetta Carr (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 4. Used by permission.

ther released the New Testament from its Latin prison. Though Luther himself was locked up behind a fortress, it did not mean the Word of God had to be. Opening his Greek New Testament that he had snatched from the wagon before being “kidnapped,” Luther translated all twenty-seven books of the New Testament into German in a shockingly short eleven weeks.¹⁷ Luther’s superb translation, simple and powerful in its literary style, still today is regarded as the principal German translation.

From the mountaintop, the swan trumpeted God’s Word to the hearts of God’s people, arming simple laymen with the triumphant song of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*.

Ten years after he descended from his mountaintop fortress, Luther reflected on the work of the Reformation. He saw himself as fulfillment of his fiery forerunner’s prophecy. “Jan Hus prophesied of me when he wrote from his prison in Bohemia: They will now roast a goose...but after a hundred years they will hear a swan sing; him they will have to tolerate. And so it shall continue, if it please God.”¹⁸

And so the swan’s triumphant song does continue 500 years after Worms and the Wartburg. For it pleases God that His Word stands forever.

14 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 188.

15 Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 251.

16 Metaxas, 247.

17 Upon his return to Wittenberg, Luther took up the sizable task of translating the Old Testament, completing the work in 1534.

18 Quoted in John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 11.



Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor-elect of Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

The Edict of Worms

Introduction

On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther stood for the second day before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms. There in that small town of Worms located in southwestern Germany by the Rhine River, with a population of about 7,000, an imperial diet had been convened that brought 10,000 visitors into town. At stake before the diet was the ultimate control and authority of Charles V and the peace of his empire, which was being threatened by Luther and his teachings.

The diet was waiting to hear Luther answer two questions that had been put to him the day before. Was he the author of the twenty-five works that had been shown to him there? And was he going to recant of the (allegedly) false teachings that were found in them? Luther readily acknowledged that he was the author of those twenty-five works. But while Luther tried to steer clear from giving a direct answer to the second question and instead tried to engage in a discussion of the identity of those false teachings, the diet would have none of that. Luther then delivered one of the most important speeches in church history. While we do not have a record of the full text of his speech, what we do know is this: With astounding courage before all the authorities gathered before him, Luther took a clear stand for all his teachings, boldly declaring that they all stood on the ground of Scripture, to which his conscience was bound. We also know that a majority of the rulers and dignitaries present, including Charles V, did not appreciate his bold stand and answer, because what brought the diet to its conclusion was the Edict of Worms.

Concisely, the Edict of Worms pronounced four main things in relation to Luther and his teachings: 1) it declared Luther “a limb cut off from the Church of God” and “manifest heretic”; 2) banned and ordered the destruction of all of Luther’s works; 3) prohibited anyone from giving him food or shelter; 4) and, finally, called for his arrest. Without a doubt, the clear and singular purpose of the edict was to crush the Reformation movement born in the heart of Luther four years earlier

when he nailed his Ninety-five Theses to a church door at Wittenberg.

What follows in the rest of this article is an overview of the Edict and an assessment of its effectiveness.

An overview of the edict

The Edict of Worms is a thirty-page document, originally written in Latin and German, approved by many and varied church leaders and rulers of the Holy Roman Empire participating at the diet, and finally endorsed by the young Holy Roman Emperor himself, Charles V. It brought the meeting at Worms, which spanned a period of about five months, to its conclusion.

From the outset, the purpose of the document, which was to stop the Reformation movement from spreading in Germany and other European nations within the Holy Roman Empire, is communicated clearly:

Certain heresies have sprung up in the German nation within the last three years, which were formerly condemned by the holy councils and papal decrees, with the consent of the whole Church, and are now drawn anew from hell.... Since now without doubt it is plain to you all how far these errors and heresies depart from the Christian way, which a certain Martin Luther, of the Augustinian order, has sought violently and virulently to introduce and disseminate within the Christian religion and its established order especially in the German nation, which is renowned as a perpetual destroyer of all unbelief and heresy; so that, unless it is speedily prevented, the whole German nation, and later all nations, will be infected by this same disorder, and mighty dissolution and pitiable downfall of good morals, and of the peace and of the Christian faith, will result....¹

In setting forth its purpose, note that the edict also, and very importantly, reveals the ground and authority it uses to determine what “the Christian religion” and

¹ All quotations of the Edict of Worms in English are taken from Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation in Its Own Words*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

the “Christian way” are and, therefore, also what “heresies” against this religion and way are. Notably, the sole ground and authority of the edict (and the church at the time of its writing) is “the holy councils and papal decrees,” not the inspired, infallible Word of God. Rome’s foundation was not the Bible, which was the sole ground and authority on which Luther stood.

The edict then proceeds to identify precisely the harmful heresies that Luther taught and defiantly maintained, and which were beginning to spread in Germany and beyond:

...he destroys, overturns and abuses the number, arrangement and use of the seven sacraments, received and held for so many centuries by the holy Church... shamefully pollutes the indissoluble bonds of holy matrimony...says also that holy unction is a mere invention...holds the priestly office and order in contempt...uses scurrilous and shameful words against the chief priest of our Christian faith, the successor of St. Peter and true vicar of Christ on earth, and pursues him with manifold and unprecedented attacks and invectives.... And he writes that the mass confers no benefit for whom it is celebrated. Moreover he overthrows the custom of fasting and prayer established by the holy Church and hitherto maintained...especially does he impugn the authority of the holy fathers [and] would destroy obedience and authority of every kind.... He does not blush to speak publicly against holy councils, and to abuse and insult them at will.

Here the edict not only spells out exactly the heresies that Luther taught, but also sets forth the boldness of Luther in opposing the teachings of the Romish church, which were based on the traditions of man and not the inspired Word of God.

Such boldness and opposition by Luther undoubtedly angered those who crafted and approved of the edict. Therefore, without surprise, the edict did not content itself with a mere identification of the harmful heresies that Luther taught; it also proceeded to destroy the very character of the Reformer. This the edict does in the strongest way imaginable:

He teaches a loose, self-willed life, severed from all laws, and wholly brutish and he is a loose, self-willed man, who condemns and rejects all laws.... And he has fallen into such madness of spirit as to boast that if Hus were a heretic, then he is ten times a heretic.... This fellow appears to be not so much a man as the wicked demon in the form of a man and under a monk’s cowl.

As a final point leading up to the decretal declarations of the edict against Luther, it stated that Luther was even given safe conduct to come to the Diet of

Worms, and there was given a fair examination and final opportunity to acknowledge what he had written and recant of all that he taught. However, “as soon as these books [bearing his teachings and being written by him] were enumerated, he [Luther] acknowledged them as his own, and moreover declared that he would never deny them.”

Accordingly, it was deemed necessary that the edict declare Luther to be “a limb cut off from the Church of God, an obstinate schismatic and manifest heretic” and that the following draconian measures be decreed to punish Luther decisively and stop his teachings from spreading:

We strictly order [that] you shall refuse to give the aforesaid Martin Luther hospitality, lodging, food or drink; neither shall anyone by word or deed, secretly or openly, succour or assist him by counsel or help; but in whatever place you meet him, you shall proceed against him; if you have sufficient force, you shall take him prisoner and keep him in close custody; and you shall deliver him, or cause him to be delivered, to us or at least let us know where he may be captured.... And for such holy and pious work we will indemnify you for your trouble and expense.... In like manner you shall proceed against his friends, adherents, patrons, maintainers, abettors, sympathizers, emulators and followers.... Consequently we command you that henceforth no one shall dare to buy, sell, read, preserve, copy, print or cause to be copied or printed, any books of the aforesaid Martin Luther...neither shall any dare to approve his opinions, nor to proclaim, defend or assert them, in any other way that human ingenuity can invent, notwithstanding he may have put some good in them to deceive the simple man.

Thus, by document’s end, Luther’s teachings were roundly condemned as heresies, and Luther a heretic condemned to death by the diet and by the Holy Roman Emperor.

Assessing and analyzing the effectiveness of the edict

And yet, as we all know, Luther did not die as a result of the edict and his teachings did not stop spreading. Therefore, when assessing the effectiveness of the edict, we have to say that the edict was not successful. In fact, it failed miserably! Immediately after Luther departed from Worms, he was whisked away to a remote castle in Wartburg and given protection there by the Duke of Saxony, Frederick the Wise. There, Luther spent his time working on a very important work: a German translation of the Bible from the original languages.

Through Luther and many other Reformers, the fiery flames of the sixteenth-century Reformation continued to spread in Germany and well beyond Germany into Europe in its day. And five hundred years later, we and many throughout the world stand as grateful beneficiaries and confessors of the very same Reformation teachings of Luther's day.

What explains the failure of the Edict of Worms to stop the spread of the Reformation? First and foremost, four years had gone by since Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg. Since then, Luther's teachings had begun to spread and, very importantly, won support with influential and powerful men such as Frederick the Wise. Second, we would be remiss if we failed to recognize that the seeds for the Reformation, planted a hundred years earlier by pre-Reformers such as John Hus and John Wycliffe, were now beginning to bear significant fruit. Third, by Luther's time, the printing press had been invented and a new age and movement of learning, the Renaissance, had taken hold of Europe, making this

learning and the propagation of the Bible and its teachings easier than ever before. All these historic factors and conditions undoubtedly accounted for the edict's failure.

But most of all and at bottom, the explanation was God and His work. The sovereign God of grace who loves His people in Jesus Christ! The God who gave His holy, inspired Word as the sole and infallible authority for His people! The God who would not let His Word fall to the ground and His church on earth be destroyed! The triumph of Luther and his bold stand for the Bible over against the vain traditions of man represented at the Diet of Worms and its edict were the result of God at work in putting all of the diet's historic factors and conditions together. It was He who was pleased to raise up Luther and others, giving them faithfulness and astounding boldness in time of need, and equipping them for the weighty and necessary task of reforming His church on earth, and thereby thwarted the efforts of the enemy to stop the Reformation.

To Him alone be the glory!



Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

Frederick the Wise: Luther's protector

Let us begin by listening in on an eighth and ninth-grade Heidelberg Catechism class. The pastor, beginning the class as he often does with a time of review to drive deep in the students' minds important facts and main ideas, asks about the history of the Heidelberg Catechism. The pastor asks, "When was the Heidelberg Catechism written?" A student answers, "1563." The pastor asks, "By whom was the Heidelberg Catechism written?" A student answers, "Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus." Along this line of questions, the pastor asks: "Who was Frederick III?" And the answer given by the student would be, "The elector of the Palatinate who commissioned the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism." As heirs of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and confessors of the gospel of comfort contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, we know well the significance of Frederick III, the devoted Calvinistic elector who did

much to support and promulgate the Reformed faith in Germany.

But there is another Frederick III with whom we should be familiar as heirs of the Reformation, a Frederick III from the days of the great Reformer, Martin Luther. God used this other Frederick, albeit in a very different way, to serve the cause of the Reformation by being the man in power who protected Luther. While the two men share a name and number, Frederick III, they have distinct monikers. The Frederick III of the Heidelberg Catechism is known as "Frederick the Pious," a fitting description due to his devotion to the Lord and to the Reformed faith. The Frederick III of Luther's day is known as "Frederick the Wise."

The question arises: Was he truly wise? Does the name match the character and life of the man in the same way that "pious" most certainly characterized the

Frederick III of the Heidelberg Catechism? There is no doubt that the Frederick III of Luther's day possessed a natural ability to rule, mastering the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century political world when power continually ebbed and flowed between princes and emperors and popes. But a more pertinent question is: Did he possess the wisdom of Jesus Christ? Only the Lord knows the answer to that question, as it is challenging to understand what motivated Frederick III to protect Luther after the firestorm caused by Luther's Ninety-five Theses. Was it all about power and politics and prestige? At that time, such seemed to be the case. However, we cannot know if the Lord was at work in the heart of Frederick III, for at the end of his life, there were indications that he may have supported and confessed the teachings of the man whose life he protected for many years.

Nevertheless, this we know with certainty and this we confess from our hearts: God is wise. Studying this portion of church history wonderfully displays the wisdom of God. According to His wise providence, Jehovah guided and governed all events political and ecclesiastical during the time of the Reformation, including in particular the life and decisions of Frederick III. Without a doubt, God used Frederick III for the good of His church and the cause of the Reformation, especially in his protection of Luther from the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church who sought to silence him.

The hand of the Lord was guiding Frederick III with an eye on the Reformation that was to come, well before Luther appeared on the scene of European history. Frederick III inherited his position when Ernst, his father, died in 1486. An event just before his father's death in 1485 would have serious ramifications for the rule of Frederick III and the Reformation. For many years Ernst ruled Saxony with his brother Albrecht. That is, until they had a falling out, the result of which was the Leipzig Division of 1485, the official dividing

of Saxony into the two parts that became known as Ernestine and Albertine Saxony after the names of the two brothers. Albertine Saxony had in it the more important cities: Meissen, Dresden, and Leipzig with its university. Ernestine Saxony had neither powerful cities nor influential universities. Nevertheless, it retained influence that could not be measured in terms of money, population, or cities. The prince of Ernestine Saxony would continue to be, according to the Golden Bull of 1356, one of seven men to cast a vote to elect the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, the full title of the subject under discussion in this article is "Elector" Frederick III of Saxony.

For at least two reasons, God used Frederick III's zeal for Wittenberg for the good of the Reformation. In the first place, it inclined Frederick III to protect Luther. Frederick III was invested, of course, in his people and his land. Luther was a Saxon German, who brought recognition to the university, which would dispose Frederick III to protect Luther in the years after 1517. In the second place, Frederick III's development of Wittenberg contributed to the spread of Luther's writings and teachings. Luther was a professor in an up-and-coming university, which allowed the truth that came from his mouth and pen to spread. ...Partly due to Frederick III's focus on Wittenberg, the stage was set for the Reformation truth of the gospel to be disseminated throughout Europe, which is precisely what took place through Luther and the other Reformers.

These two facts—that Frederick III was an imperial elector and that he inherited an impoverished territory—would significantly influence his rule as it related to the Reformation.

Concerning the former, Frederick III's imperial electorship, coupled with his political know-how, allowed him to have tremendous influence with fellow electors, the emperor, and even the pope. When the time came, he could make demands and arrange circumstances to the favor of Luther.

Concerning the latter, Frederick III had a strong desire to make a name for himself and bring influence to the land under his rule. Furthermore, he could see the big picture to gain more

influence and prestige. This is noteworthy with regard to the Reformation and Luther because very early in his rule, Frederick III set his eye upon Wittenberg. When Frederick III began to rule, Wittenberg was little and poor and insignificant, a town more than a city. In the only biography of Frederick III in English, Sam Wellman writes regarding Wittenberg, "If a person had traveled out in the empire itself, Wittenberg was a sorry sight indeed, a mere east-west strip of wooden buildings and neglected stone edifices from forgotten times. A man on foot could stride along its inglorious main strip and rid himself of it in less than fifteen minutes; on a

fast horse, he could free himself of it in two minutes.”¹ Frederick III spent years and money making something of Wittenberg. He rebuilt the bridge over the River Elbe on which Wittenberg was situated. He hired renowned architects to design and build buildings and promising artists and woodworkers to beautify them. He amassed hundreds and, eventually, thousands of relics for the Castle Church, which would attract pilgrims from all over the empire. And most of all, he established the University of Wittenberg, the school that would attract students from all over Europe, and eventually its most famous and influential professor, Martin Luther himself.

For at least two reasons, God used Frederick III’s zeal for Wittenberg for the good of the Reformation. In the first place, it inclined Frederick III to protect Luther. Frederick III was invested, of course, in his people and his land. Luther was a Saxon German, who brought recognition to the university, which would dispose Frederick III to protect Luther in the years after 1517. In the second place, Frederick III’s development of Wittenberg contributed to the spread of Luther’s writings and teachings. Luther was a professor in an up-and-coming university, which allowed the truth that came from his mouth and pen to spread. It is fascinating to consider, understanding the era in which Luther lived, just how quickly and how far what he taught spread after 1517 and during his conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. Partly due to Frederick III’s focus on Wittenberg, the stage was set for the Reformation truth of the gospel to be disseminated throughout Europe, which is precisely what took place through Luther and the other Reformers.

Frederick III was well connected. He had eyes and ears everywhere. He knew very well what was going on among the authorities in Rome after Luther challenged publicly in writing the pope’s authority and exposed the corruption of indulgences. Through it all, he protected Luther. It is noteworthy that in the biography mentioned above, a book that treats the whole of Frederick’s life, the author chose the following as its subtitle: “Seen and Unseen Lives of Luther’s Protector.” This is Frederick’s mark on the history of the Reformation—he protected Luther.

Let’s consider a few ways in which he did this. First, Frederick III refused to comply with *Exsurge Domine*, the papal bull issued in 1520 by Pope Leo X that condemned Luther as a heretic and demanded that Luther recant under the threat of excommunication. Frederick III understood full well what this bull meant for him

personally. Pope Leo X made sure he understood, writing him a personal letter exhorting him to deliver Luther to Rome. Nevertheless, Frederick III refused, insisting that Luther would receive a fair trial under favorable circumstances in Germany. Second, Frederick III always provided Luther safe passage as he traveled through Germany to and from disputations and diets. Most famously, Frederick III, through his advisors, arranged the “capture” of Luther after the Diet of Worms, bringing him in safety to the Wartburg Castle, the fascinating story of which is told in another article in this edition of the *Standard Bearer*. Third, Frederick III was instrumental in protecting Luther in another sense, namely, allowing him the freedom to preach and write. From the pulpit at the Castle Church and through his pen as a professor, Luther boldly defended his convictions about the pope, the church, and salvation. Though Frederick III never openly espoused Luther’s teaching in the years leading up to the Diet of Worms and thereafter, neither did Frederick III condemn his teaching nor silence his writing and preaching. It was that preaching and writing that God used to fan the flames of the gospel that would spread throughout Europe.

We conclude with a few fascinating details on the relationship between the prince and preacher. Though their lives were very much intertwined, there is no historical evidence that the two men ever communicated personally and directly with one another. In fact, the first time that Frederick III ever laid eyes on Luther was likely at the Diet of Worms itself in 1521. But yet, when Frederick III died on May 5, 1525, who was it that conducted his funeral? It was Luther himself, delivering two sermons. And what was sung at his funeral? It was nothing other than Luther’s funeral hymn on Psalm 130. And where was Frederick III buried? Fittingly, he was laid to rest in the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the church that he erected and the church in which Luther himself faithfully proclaimed the glorious gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.

Here We Stand:

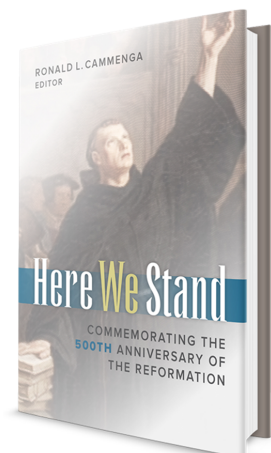
Commemorating the
500th Anniversary of
the Reformation

Edited by Ronald L.
Cammenga

Retail: \$14.25

Book Club: \$9.26

Place your order at
rfpa.org.



¹ Sam Wellman, *Frederick the Wise* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 33.



Rev. John Marcus, a minister of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Johannes Eck and Johannes von Eck: Enemies of the Reformation

Among the countless enemies of the Reformation, and therefore enemies of the gospel, two men hold a prominent place in the history of the Diet of Worms. One of them was used by God leading up to the Diet of Worms and the other used at the diet itself. Their names: Johannes Eck and Johannes von Eck. Johannes Eck was professor at Ingolstadt. He debated Luther at Leipzig, and actively opposed Luther's doctrine in written works published prior to and following the Diet of Worms. The other, Johannes von Eck, was secretary to the Archbishop of Trier, and is best known for interrogating Luther at the Diet of Worms.

The first Johannes Eck studied at various German universities and began his teaching career at the University of Freiburg. In 1510 he was invited to the University of Ingolstadt, where he became chair of the theology department, from which position he carried on most of his attacks against Luther and the Reformation.¹

When Eck and Luther were first introduced to one another, they were on somewhat good terms. In January of 1517, Eck received a letter from Christoph Scheurl, a professor of law at Wittenberg University, in which Scheurl praised Martin Luther for his explanation of Paul's epistles "with wonderful genius."² Luther in turn referred to Eck as "learned and thoughtful" in recognition of Eck's intellectual gifts.³

However, Eck's friendly attitude toward Luther did not last long. When Luther published his Ninety-five Theses against the traffic of indulgences in October of 1517, Eck responded by writing a series of footnotes in a work called "Obelisks" (referring to the typographical marks that point to footnotes), in which he accused Luther of being a Hussite. Associating Luther with that movement was deadly serious because Hus had been

burned at the stake a mere one hundred years earlier (AD 1415), in part for his condemnation of the church's sale of indulgences, the very thing Luther was attacking.

Luther could not possibly let Eck's attacks go unanswered. In keeping with the disputation culture of the day, he responded to Eck's footnotes by writing his own set of footnotes in a work called "Asterisks" (another reference to typographical marks). Already then, God was using Eck's attacks to bring Luther further along his path toward the truth.

No doubt this exchange contributed to Eck's animosity towards Luther and the doctrines of grace. But, even more than Luther's response, it seems that the harsh attacks from Luther's colleague, Andreas Carlstadt, finally provoked Eck to call for a public disputation. As the disputation approached, Luther realized that the twelve theses Eck had proposed for the debate were aimed not so much at Carlstadt's teachings as his own. Luther therefore obtained permission for himself to attend the debate to be held in Leipzig in 1519.

What had been a private academic matter was now about to become much more explosive. In addition to the dispute about indulgences, Eck introduced the topics of free will, penance, purgatory, and the papacy. By pursuing these other topics, Eck managed to induce Luther to declare publicly his own opposition to the absolute authority of popes and councils in favor of Scripture alone. Eck thought this would give him the victory over Luther; but instead of backing down, Luther defended and promoted the truth all the more boldly. Luther would later write to a fellow professor, "Eck...opened my eyes as to the Pope's sovereignty; for although at first I maintained his right to the human title, I now see that the Papacy is the kingdom of Babylon, and the tyranny of Nimrod, the mighty hunter."⁴ Once again, God used Eck to lead Luther and others to a greater understanding of the truth.

As Eck's enmity toward Luther intensified, he tried unsuccessfully to get Frederick III to burn Luther's

1 *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, "Eck, Johann," in Vol. 4, 64-66.

2 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 7, chap. 2, section 27 (Ages Digital Library).

3 "Letter to Christoph Scheurl" (September 11, 1517), in *The Letters of Martin Luther* (Ages Digital Library).

4 "Letter to Hermann Tulich, Professor in Wittenberg" (Oct. 6, 1520), in *The Letters of Martin Luther* (Ages Digital Library).

works. By the end of 1519, Eck had published eight manuscripts against Lutheran doctrine. He was able to get some of the universities to condemn Luther's writings, but the German princes were not convinced. In July of 1520, after he had made his case to the pope that Luther should be condemned, Eck delivered Pope Leo's pronouncement called *Exurge Domine*, which declared Luther's writings to be "heretical, or scandalous, or false, or offensive to pious ears, or seductive of simple minds, or repugnant to Catholic truth."⁵ The pronouncement condemned Luther's writings in no less than forty-one points and called for his works to be publicly burned. Eck was called upon to deliver the papal bull to southern Germany including the cities of Saxony. But the bull did not lead to the unmixed condemnation of Luther that Eck desired. Eck even found himself escaping Saxony in fear of his life. On December 10 of 1520, the very day he was supposed to present himself in Rome, Luther defiantly burned the bull. The more Eck attacked, the more Luther's eyes were opened. Not only did Eck fail to bring Luther back into the fold of the Roman church, he actually drove Luther away and at the same time caused the truth to spread like wild-fire.

Thus Eck's opposition set the stage for the Imperial Diet of Worms in 1521. One month into the meetings, on February 18, Eck wrote a letter to Charles V urging him to enforce the papal ban, which had been declared against Luther on January 3. Eck's letter together with other pressures induced Charles V to summon Luther to appear at the diet. Once Luther had obtained the promise of safe conduct, he made his way from Wittenberg and appeared at the diet on the afternoon of April 17.

Johannes Eck continued to manifest himself as Luther's implacable foe for years to come. He visited Rome to plan his attacks, wrote against Lutheran doctrines, and helped establish a court of inquisition against Luther's teachings. He worked with other Roman Catholic theologians to refute the Lutheran Augsburg Confession and generally opposed the doctrine of the Reformers. If we could trace Eck's opposition and its results, we would see that God sovereignly used this enemy of the truth to further the cause of His gospel.

Taking our leave from the first Eck, we come to the other Eck, Johannes von Eck. He obtained his doctorate in 1505 and became professor of law at the University of Trier about 1506. His general hostility to the truth can

be seen in his opposition to reformatory ideas in the Archdiocese of Trier.⁶ In keeping with this, the Roman Catholic Aleander reported that von Eck was "a learned, orthodox man who was extremely conscientious in executing the apostolic and imperial mandates, and who burned the heretical books so thoroughly in Trier that not one was left."⁷ After serving at the University of Trier, von Eck became an advisor to Archbishop Richard von Greiffenklau, the Archbishop of Trier and in this capacity was asked to attend the Diet of Worms and serve as Luther's interrogator.

At the diet, von Eck's central question was whether Luther was willing to retract: "Do you acknowledge yourself the author of the writings published in your name, and which are here before me? and will you consent to retract certain of the doctrines therein inculcated?"⁸

But, unless Luther was convicted of error by the testimony of the Scripture or by manifest evidence, he refused to retract anything contrary to his conscience.⁹ Thus we see how God used von Eck to bring Luther to stand on the sole authority of Scripture.

Von Eck tried meeting personally with Luther in the days after his appearance. But it was to no avail; Luther was more committed to the truth than ever before, and von Eck had been the unwilling instrument that helped Luther come to that conviction.

Johannes Eck and Johannes von Eck—both men were named 'Johannes,' which name has the meaning "Jehovah is gracious." But far from being proponents of grace, both were in fact enemies of the gospel of grace, as we have seen. On the other hand, both men were named 'Eck,' which literally means "corner." As enemies of the gospel of grace, both tried to bind the truth in a corner and keep it from spreading. But God was pleased to use them to the opposite effect, such that the gospel truth was in fact unleashed throughout the world. Thus they proved the truth of Psalm 76:10: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

To God be the glory!

6 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_von_Eck.

7 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_von_Eck.

8 W. Carlos Martyn, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* (The Ages Digital Library), 256.

9 Martyn, 261.

5 Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (140) quoted in Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther* (Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), 456.

Classis Reports

Classis East

September 8, 2021

The beginning of the meeting

Classis East convened at 8:00 A.M. at Grandville PRC. Rev. Joe Holstege presided as chairman. Two delegates represented each of the eighteen churches of Classis East. Eight elders were present as delegates at classis for the first time and signed the Formula of Subscription. Rev. M. McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC, also signed the Formula. Providence PRC reported that Rev. McGeown was installed on September 5, 2021 as their pastor and thanked Classis East for sixteen months of pulpit supply for their congregation.

The questions of Article 41 of the Church Order were asked of the representatives of each council and were satisfactorily answered. The report of the Stated Clerk was read and approved.

At its May meeting Classis East mandated that the church visitors who served in 2020 provide a report to further explain and clarify the appointment of a fifth church visitor, which took place in 2020. In response to this mandate the 2020 church visitor's provided a report, which was approved by classis. The chairman appointed six committees of pre-advice.

Pre-advice reports

Committee 1 presented information and recommendations regarding two requests for a Day of Prayer in accordance with Article 66 of the Church Order. One request, from an individual, was declared illegal on the ground that he did not bring his request by way of an overture through his consistory. The other request came from Trinity PRC's Consistory. This request was declared legal, and classis decided to approve the request and proclaimed a Day of Prayer in the churches of Classis East on November 2, 2021. The second ground for this decision is noteworthy and reads, "Our churches are experiencing great affliction at the present and it would be very fitting for a day of prayer. This great affliction is evidenced by the ongoing schism that has torn apart the body of Christ, the great need that we as a denomination have for ministers of the Word, and other ongoing afflictions as well." Classis also approved a motion to direct the Stated Clerk to inform Classis West of its decision, so that if Classis West decides at its upcoming meeting later in September to declare a Day of Prayer as well that it could be held on the same day.

Committee 2 presented information and advice regarding a protest of a decision of classis taken at its May meeting. In January of 2021 Classis East approved certain decisions of the Stated Clerk regarding the public distribution of the January Agenda. The protestant filed a protest against that decision in May, which protest was not sustained by classis. The protestant protested this decision not to sustain his May protest; classis declared his protest legal and determined not to sustain it. In its decision classis explains to the protestant that the rules of Classis East, which he contends the Stated Clerk violated, "do not give specifics regarding the public distribution of the agenda. In particular, the rules only specify publication of the agenda to officebearers." Classis also stated that its declaration in January that "the actions of the stated clerk were reasonable, wise, and in general accord with our current rules" is a judgment classis has the right to make and was proper "in light of the fact that clear rules for the public distribution of the agenda to non-officebearers do not exist." Classis also declared that, after answering two protests, this matter is finished between the protestant and Classis East.

Committee 3 presented information and advice regarding a request of members of the Wingham PRC to implement Article 38 of the Church Order to reconstitute a consistory and thereby to reorganize the congregation. Elder Rod Crich joined the meeting of classis for its deliberations on this request via FaceTime. Classis gave joyful approval of the request to reorganize. Since the implementation of Article 38 of the Church Order requires the concurrence of synodical deputies, Revs. E. Guichelaar, J. Laning, and S. Key attended the meeting of classis and concurred with the decision to reconstitute Wingham's consistory and reorganize the congregation. Classis appointed the consistory of Unity PRC to carry out the reorganization of the congregation and appointed Rev. G. Eriks to serve as moderator for the congregation once it is reorganized.

Committee 4 presented a pulpit supply schedule that was adopted by classis. From October through January classis will provide supply for the Hudsonville, Kalamazoo, and Wingham congregations.

Committee 5 presented a report on the expenses for the meeting of classis, which totaled \$2,044 to cover the costs of travel for the delegates and for the synodical deputies and to cover the costs incurred by the kitchen committee of Grandville PRC. Classis authorized payment for these expenses.

Other matters

Classis appointed Rev. M. DeVries and Rev. K. Koole as alternate church visitors to help the church visitors appointed in January with their work.

Rev. Holstege reported that he thanked the caterers for their work in serving the delegates of classis. A word of appreciation is also appropriate to express to the entire Grandville congregation for graciously and capably hosting the meeting of classis. Classis looks forward to its next meeting, which will be hosted by Providence PRC, convening at 8:00 A.M. on January 12, 2022.

The script minutes were read and approved. Classis voted to adjourn, and Rev. Holstege closed with prayer. The delegates began to travel home around 5:30 P.M.

We give thanks to God for the brotherly way in which all the work was done, and we pray for His blessing upon the decisions of classis and upon our churches.

In Christ's service,
Rev. Clayton Spronk,
Stated Clerk, Classis East

Classis West

September 29, 2021

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 29, 2021, in Crete PRC (Crete, IL). The day before the meeting, an officebearers' conference was held on the timely subject "The Doctrine of Sanctification: The Blessed Work of Christ's Spirit." There were three speeches: Rev. S. Key spoke on "The Spirit of Freedom," Rev. M. Kortus spoke on "Be Ye Holy: The Doctrine of Sanctification from Leviticus," and Rev. J. Engelsma spoke on "In the Way of Our Obedience." After the speeches there was a question and answer period. Besides the officebearers, a large group of visitors were in attendance, including the seminary professors and students. A very enjoyable day of instruction and fellowship was had by all!

The following day, Classis began with opening devotions led by the chairman of the previous meeting, Rev. J. Engelsma, who gave a meditation on I Timothy 4:16 on the urgency of the personal holiness of ministers. After Classis was legally constituted, Rev. E. Guichelaar assumed the chair.

Classis made a number of decisions throughout its meeting relating to the First PRC of Edmonton. Classis did not initially seat delegates from this congregation because it judged there to be sufficient question concerning the relationship between the men named on the credentials and our denomination that they should not be seated until determination is made concerning their status in Classis West and the PRCA. Classis did give advisory vote to the minister and elder so that they had a right to speak to matters on their case, and made arrangements for them to join the meeting via Zoom. After deliberation, Classis ruled that the group sending these men as delegates had set themselves outside of the PRCA by their decisions and actions, and therefore did not recognize these men as representatives of the lawful congregation nor seat them as delegates. Classis ap-

pealed to one of the By-Laws of the PRCA (X.A) which refer to the procedure to follow when there is "strife and division" in a congregation. Classis ruled that this was the case in this congregation, and the men delegated are representatives of that part of the congregation that has "revolt[ed] against the constitutional provisions of the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and repudiate[d] its obligations as a member church of the denomination." Therefore, the "adjudication" of Classis is required for the recognition of the "lawful congregation."

Classis declared a protest of the former consistory of First PRC of Edmonton against the work of the church visitors to be not legally before it, since Classis had ruled that the group sending this protest had set themselves outside of the denomination and therefore did not have the right to protest any longer. Classis then approved the work of the church visitors with respect to this congregation.

Two individuals submitted material related to the case in First PRC of Edmonton, but Classis did not enter into their contents because Classis already addressed the primary concerns in those letters and because they were judged to be merely letters of information.

With the concurrence of the synodical deputies from Classis East who were present, Classis West approved the request of the remaining members of the First PRC of Edmonton to reconstitute a consistory and thereby reorganize as a Protestant Reformed congregation according to Article 38 of the Church Order. The grounds for doing so were as follows: 1. Though relatively small, other churches organized recently for the first time with fewer families (Pittsburgh in 2016 with 7, Covenant of Grace in 2009 with 5). Furthermore there is potential for growth in light of the presence of young families with children and their location in a large metropolitan area. 2. Immanuel PRC has judged that there are sufficient number of men who are qualified to serve in the special offices in the church. 3. The desire and convic-

tion of these saints is to remain a Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton. 4. Maintaining a Protestant Reformed witness in this large metropolitan area will be more established and effective with an organized congregation there. Classis also made plain that by this decision it recognized the reconstituted congregation and consistory as the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, who alone legitimately have the rights to the name, property, archives, assets, etc. Classis appointed the consistory of Immanuel PRC to carry out the reorganization of First PRC of Edmonton according to Article 38 of the Church Order, and appointed Rev. H. Bleyenbergh to serve as moderator of the reorganized congregation.

Classis treated a request from an individual for Classis to declare a day of prayer in harmony with Article 66 of the Church Order. Classis ruled the request not legally before it, since the individual did not give ample proof that the way of submitting an overture could be

ignored. Classis also received for information a letter from Classis East giving information regarding its calling a special day of prayer.

In closed session, Classis treated an appeal of an individual regarding his discipline. Classis declared the appeal to be not legally before it. One consistory sought the advice of Classis regarding the increase of censure of a member under discipline. In closed session, Classis advised the consistory to proceed to the increase of censure.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply for the vacant congregations of Doon (IA) PRC, Covenant of Grace PRC (Spokane, WA), and First PRC of Edmonton. The expenses of this meeting totaled \$8,377.49. Classis will meet next in Hope PRC (Redlands, CA) on March 2, 2022, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma,
Stated Clerk, Classis West

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer, Marlin Feenstra, in the loss of his dear wife **Sarah Elizabeth Feenstra**. Sympathy is also expressed to their children Paul, Thys and Grace, Aaron, Wesley, Victoria, and Noelle and to his mother, Janice Feenstra. Sarah lovingly and bravely fought on with a smile for the extra ten years that the Lord gave her. Now she is healed and rejoicing in heaven with her Lord. II Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought a good fight, I finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

Rev. Matt Kortus, President
Peter Smit, Clerk

Teacher needed

Heritage Christian High School (Dyer, IN) is seeking three full-time teachers in the English, Mathematics, and Social Studies Departments for the 2022-2023 school year. Please contact our administrator, Ralph Medema, ralph.medema@heritagechs.org or 219.730.9876.

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. W. Bruinsma

November 7—By Faith Abraham Obeyes God's Call
Hebrews 11:8-10
November 14—By Faith Sarah Conceives
Hebrews 11:11, 12
November 21—Satisfied with Marrow and Fatness
Psalm 63:3-5
November 28—Desiring a Better Country
Hebrews 11:13-16