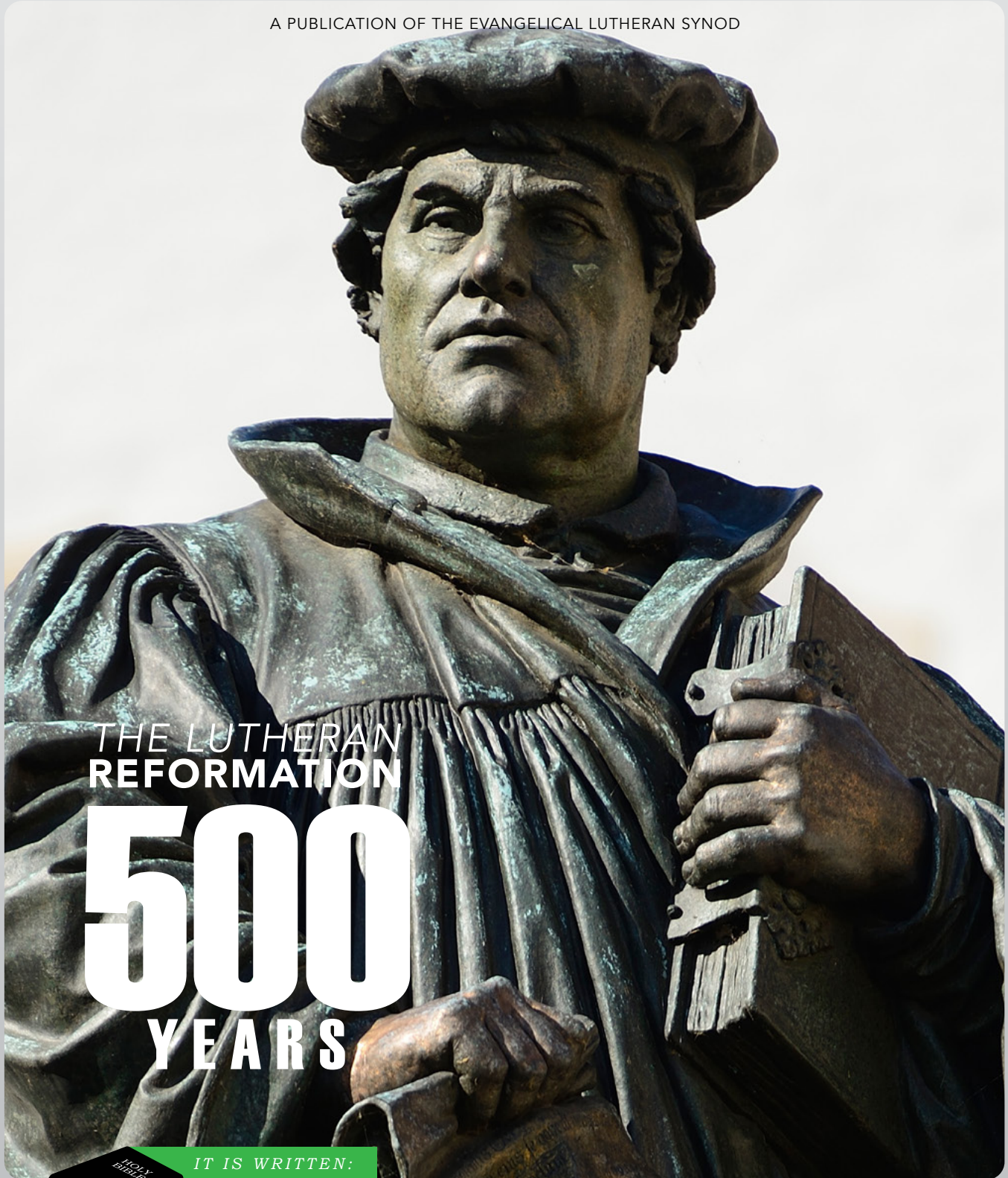


The LUTHERAN REFORMATION: 500 YEAR COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

MAY-JUNE, 2017

LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



THE LUTHERAN
REFORMATION

500
YEARS



IT IS WRITTEN:

"The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

“God is in the Balance”

Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:

This special edition of our synod’s *Lutheran Sentinel* is dedicated to commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. We rejoice that, by God’s grace and only by that grace, we today enjoy in our homes, in our congregations, in our synod, and in our larger worldwide fellowship so many spiritual blessings.

One of those blessings has been Luther’s frequent use of expressive illustrations to convey doctrinal truths from God’s Word. Consider, for example, his memorable description of the inter-related teachings regarding the incarnation of our Lord and regarding the benefits of our Savior’s death at Calvary. We find it in his treatise, *Concerning the Councils of the Church* (1539). The citation also is included in the *Formula of Concord* (VIII, 44):

We Christians must know that, unless God is in the balance and throws in weight as the counterbalance, we shall sink to the bottom with our scale. I mean that this way: If it is not true that God died for us, but only a man died, we are lost. But if God’s death and God dead lie in the opposite scale, then his side goes down and we go upward like a light and empty pan. But he could never have sat in the pan unless he had become a man like us, so that it could be said: God dead, God’s passion, God’s blood, God’s death. According to his nature God cannot die, but since God and man are united in one person, it is correct to talk about God’s death when that man dies who is one thing or one person with God.

May each of us sinners firmly know and believe that, through the death and resurrection of the God-Man, we have the certainty of the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of everlasting life!

The central teaching of sinners being justified fully by God’s grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ is what ignited and drove the engine of the Lutheran Reformation.



REVEREND
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LUTHERAN SENTINEL

MAY-JUNE 2017

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QUESTION:**Q****Was Luther a rebel out to bring the Roman Catholic Church down?****ANSWER:****A**

During the year of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, many things will be written about Dr. Luther. Luther made the top ten in *Time* magazine's list of influential men of the last millennium. He was third behind Johann Gutenberg and Isaac Newton. He also made the list of most influential men in human history.

Because of his many accomplishments and writings, he will be remembered from countless viewpoints. We remember him for what he accomplished as a great theologian of the Holy Christian Church. We do not remember him as a rebel.

On October 31, 1517, Luther responded to a threat endangering the souls under his care. To repay a huge debt to German bankers, Pope Leo X authorized the sale of indulgences in Germany. The indulgences granted full and perfect remission of sins to those who purchased them and could be purchased on behalf of those who were already in purgatory. Those who purchased indulgences on behalf of the dead did not need to repent or confess their sins.

Frederick the Wise did not permit them to be sold in Wittenberg, but they could be purchased nearby, so Luther's flock was tempted. This writer remembers an illustration in a biography of Luther showing Luther confronting a drunken parishioner who held an indulgence to excuse his behavior.

Luther's Reformation action was an invitation to debate. The theses were written in Latin. Roland Bainton (*Here I Stand*) wrote, "Luther took no steps to spread his theses among the people. He was merely inviting scholars to dispute and dignitaries to define, but other surreptitiously translated the theses into God and gave them to the press." He addressed theologians and leaders, asking them to consider the issues and the dangers to souls.

St. Paul wrote: *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified* (I Corinthians 2:2). The Holy God

promises forgiveness only in the redemption purchased for all people by the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus Himself called people to repentance and faith in the salvation He earned. There is no forgiveness in anything we do or purchase.

Before he began to understand, Luther struggled with his conscience. He sought relief from guilt, by strictly following the teachings of his church. Finding no relief, his confessor suggested he look to Jesus for mercy.

A great threat to believing souls is distraction. Satan tempts us to look away from Jesus, who was given over to death for our sins and raised for our justification.

Dr. Luther rediscovered this good news and worked to restore it to prominence in the Holy Christian Church. He fought those in the church who would distract God's people from Jesus' sacrifice. Luther and Lutheran theologians defended the Gospel by citing Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers and Church Councils. Luther was a Roman Catholic priest and professor of Theology. He hoped to restore the authority of God's Word to His church. Other reformers of his day rejected anything that looked Roman Catholic. Luther rejected teachings that were contrary to the teachings of the Bible. His church rejected him.

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An Unlikely Oasis: Johann Von Staupitz

Whether watching a movie, reading a novel, or even studying history, we like to classify people as either good guys or bad guys. Rarely, though, does history make it that easy. The details surrounding historical figures, wars, and politics often get a bit messy. Johann von Staupitz, the influential mentor and superior to Martin Luther in his early monastic days, also defies such simple categorization. He was critical in Luther's formative years, emphasizing forgiveness through Christ. Yet in the end, he remained in the camp opposite from Luther.

Staupitz's impact on Luther's spiritual development can hardly be overestimated. He was Luther's counselor and confessor. He comforted the young Luther when he was afflicted by doubts and fears of God's judgment and eternal election. Such fears would have seemed unusual for someone with his exemplary conduct in the monastic order's way of life. Staupitz comforted Luther by pointing him to the sufferings of Christ and the cross for forgiveness. Also unusual at the time but vital for Luther's development was Staupitz's renewed emphasis on studying the Bible in monasteries under his supervision.

In spite of Luther's objections, it was Staupitz who gave him the eventual platform for his Reformation by insisting Luther should become a doctor of theology and replace him at the University of Wittenberg. When Luther entered the indulgence controversy by posting the 95 Theses on October 31, 1517, he later implied that Staupitz had told him to pursue the issue when they met on August 6 of that same year. After all, Staupitz had been skeptical of such indulgences already at the beginning of 1517.

He supported Luther when he was being formally questioned in Augsburg in front of Cardinal Cajetan. Afterwards, he released Luther from his membership in the Augustinian order. He probably did this to free Luther up to pursue his concerns and to avoid being ordered by his superiors to turn against Luther. Perhaps expressing

both encouragement and concern, Staupitz told Luther, "Remember, Friar, you began this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." These words would stick with Luther.

Yet history doesn't end there. As Western Christianity divided, Staupitz remained in the opposite camp as Luther. In his letters to Luther, he expressed concerns as to where the Reformation movement was going—how it was shaking the church and troubling weak souls. On the other hand, Luther wanted Staupitz to stick up for the truth more. Interestingly, some of Staupitz's relatives were involved on the Reformation's side, such as Staupitz's nephew, Nicholas von Amsdorf, and his sister, who was in the same group of nuns fleeing monastic life as Luther's wife, Katherina von Bora.

Though submitting to the papacy, it appears Staupitz tried to avoid situations calling him to directly renounce or attack Luther's theology. Meanwhile,

his career had been crippled by his former association with Luther. He had even resigned from his high position in the Augustinian order. In his last letter to Luther before his death in 1524, he still expressed his love to Luther and that his faith in Christ was unchanged.

The life of Staupitz isn't so easy to categorize, but it's certainly one we can learn from. His positive influence on Luther is a bright spot showing how the Gospel was still around before the Reformation, though at times obscured. His enduring relationship with Luther is an example of mutual love and respect, even for those of a different viewpoint. Yes, history can often be knotty and messy, but somehow God always finds a way for his Gospel to come through—and that makes history all the more interesting!

"His positive influence on Luther is a bright spot showing how the Gospel was still around before the Reformation, though at times obscured."

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We say the Reformation began on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. But actually, Luther himself still needed to “get there.” The reformation of Luther himself hadn’t been completed yet.

The 95 Theses were the result of the “indulgence controversy,” which had been going on for several years. Even in 1514, Luther complained that people were trying to make the way to heaven easy with indulgences. As a preacher in the Augustinian monastery, he included in some of his sermons criticism of indulgences. But

a treatise on indulgences that he wrote during this time shows that he still was uncertain about purgatory and did not yet reject the false teaching that the merits of Christ were dispensed by the pope. The 95 Theses actually belong to Luther’s pre-reformation theology. He was “not there” yet.

But he was getting there. Arriving at the truth does not happen all at once, but it does happen through the Word. Luther’s “Reformation discovery” came through spiritual attacks from the devil, both outwardly and inwardly. But only his meditation on God’s Word – driven there by these outward and inward struggles – brought Luther true faith in Christ. We learn from his example that outward conflict in this world, inward struggles of conscience, and even the need to help others in their struggles of faith all serve to drive us to the comfort of Christ revealed in God’s Word.

In 1509, Luther’s superior in the monastery, Johann Staupitz, had directed Luther to pursue a theology degree that qualified him to be a professor of the Bible.

As Luther lectured in the monastery on the Psalms in 1515, on Romans in 1515-16, on Galatians in 1516-17, and on Hebrews in 1517-18, he spent hours immersed in the Scriptures. Not

FORGED -

The Making of Luther *the Reformer*

REVEREND

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until 1518 or 1519 did he arrive at a consistent faith in justification by grace alone.

His intensive study of the Bible in preparation for teaching helped Luther in his inward struggles. Ever since he was a young man, Luther had been bothered by the term righteousness. He knew Christ not as his Savior, but as the judge of a person's works. Everywhere in Scripture that Luther encountered the term righteousness (for example, Psalm 31:1: "Deliver me in Your righteousness"), he was filled with anxiety. He believed God's righteousness only condemned him.

Through the effects of the indulgence controversy and the 95 Theses – the outward conflict and also the inward doubts – his study of God's Word was sharpened and blessed by the Holy Spirit. Luther wrote about this and published it near the end of his life (1545):

"I hated the term 'righteousness of God' because I had been taught that means that God is righteous in Himself and does good, and He punishes all sinners and the unrighteous. I discovered that, in the sight of God, I was a great sinner. My conscience was troubled and distressed. I also did not trust my ability to ease the anger of God with my satisfaction and merit. For this reason I did not at all love this righteous and angry God who punishes sinners. Rather I hated Him and was full of secret anger toward Him."

Luther said that the Holy Spirit led him to see (in Romans 1:17 and 3:21 especially) that the term "righteousness of God" is not a threatening word of God (Law), but a promise (Gospel): "the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed ... as it is written: The just shall live by faith."

So, Luther said, "I realized that this is what the apostle means: The Gospel reveals the righteousness that is valid in the sight of God and through which God – out of grace and pure mercy – justifies us by faith. I learned that the righteousness of God is His mercy, through which he regards us and keeps us righteous.

"At that point I immediately felt that I had been born again and had found a door wide open, leading straight to Paradise. As much as I had hated the term 'righteousness of God' before, I now loved and treasured it. This passage of Paul became for me a gate to heaven. If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God. This is what it means to behold God in faith: that you should look upon His fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger."

Luther arrived at this correct faith not only through his own inward struggle or the outward controversies, but also through the task of pastoral care. While in the monastery, he was given the position of district vicar of his Augustinian order; this meant he was responsible for giving spiritual counsel to others (as Staupitz had given him).

In 1516, Luther wrote a letter of comfort to George Spenlein, who had served in the Wittenberg monastery with Luther for four years but was recently transferred. Luther knew of Spenlein's struggle with despair and a burdened conscience. Luther wrote:

"I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ." Luther then speaks of the temptation for people to be righteous by their own works "without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible."

Then Luther's letter gives us a window into the state of his own soul in these years. He was moving away from this false view toward the right faith, but daily struggling to believe it: "While you were here, you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I, and I am still fighting against the error without having conquered it yet."

Finally, Luther gives a beautiful summary of the true faith in Christ:

"Therefore, my dear friar, learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to praise Him and, despairing of yourself, say, 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine and have given me what is Yours. You have taken upon Yourself what You were not and have given to me what I was not.' Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one.

"For Christ dwells only in sinners. For this reason He came down from heaven, where He dwelt among the righteous, to dwell among sinners. Meditate on this love of His. For if our consciences could find peace when we struggle and suffer on our own, then why was it necessary for Him to die? You will find peace only in Him and only when you despair of yourself and your own works."

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Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses:

“Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following theses will be publicly discussed at Wittenberg under the chairmanship of the reverend father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology and regularly appointed Lecturer on these subjects at that place. He requests that those who cannot be present to debate orally with us will do so by letter.”

In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Selected Theses & Outline: pgs. 10 & 11

When Money Clicks in the Chest: pgs. 12-14



Selected Theses

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh.

4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.

6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.

21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.

23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.

28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.

36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.

37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.

38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said [Thesis 6], the proclamation of the divine remission.

53. They are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.

54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.

58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.

60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure;

67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.

68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.

78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I Cor. 12[:28].

An Outline of the Ninety-Five Theses

80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.

81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned men to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity,

82. Such as: “Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial.”

87. Again, “What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?”

88. Again, “What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?”

89. “Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?”

92. Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Peace, peace,” and there is no peace! [Jer. 6:14].

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, “Cross, cross,” and there is no cross!

94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell;

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22].

1-6 Introduction and theme (§6 “The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God....”)

7-19 The dying are freed from all penalties

20-28 Concerning Plenary Indulgences

29-37 Indulgences have to do only with penalties, not guilt.

38-59 What Christians should be taught about Indulgences.

60-66 The true office of the keys are the gospel of the glory and grace of God;

67-80 The Impropriety of the Indulgence Preachers— the pope “has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc. as it is written in I Cor. 12[:28]” – the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

81-90 Questions which destroy indulgences, e.g. “Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love?”

91-95 Conclusion: §91 “If indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved. Indeed they would not exist.”



“When Money Clinks in the Money Chest”

This year, focused on October 31, 1517, Lutherans and others are observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It might come as a surprise to learn that the first time the day was celebrated anywhere as a commonly acknowledged “Reformation Day” was in 1617, fully one hundred years later, and even then it did not become an event noted yearly.

In Wittenberg itself, the event was hardly noticed that day in 1517. In the fifteen-year-old university, Professor Luther had some years before demanded that students had to defend a set of theses for their graduation – it was common to do so in the medieval universities. These theses and notice of their public defense had to be made publicly. The place to do that was on the university bulletin board, which in Wittenberg had by custom become the door of the *Schlosskirche* (the “Castle church”), which was connected to the castle and to the university. It served for academic occasions and was the chapel for the university.

In early September 1517, Luther had written a set of theses dealing with the free will and the doctrine of grace (*Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*) to be defended by one of his students. A few years later, in his book *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther said that this issue was the one that penetrated to the heart of the biblical doctrine of salvation. These theses were sent to professors at other universities, but there was no great reaction to them even though they were attacking the foundations of medieval theology. But in a month, things changed.

The Ninety-five Theses of October 31, 1517, were

prepared not for a student, but for Luther himself to defend, and he invited his fellow academics and the public. The theses, which had been written well before October 31, were printed in Latin on “broadsheets,” large paper about the size of a small newspaper, printed on one side. According to Philip Melanchthon, Luther tacked the broadsheet to the door at “12 noon,” so Luther was certainly not on a secretive mission under the cover of darkness.

News of the theses spread rapidly and, as we know now, had a very far-reaching effect. Their spread was certainly helped by Justus Jonas’ German translation soon after October 31, making them accessible to a wider audience.

Luther may have expected considerable interest to be aroused by his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, but instead the greater interest was provoked by the theses on indulgences. If anything was going for the jugular of medieval theology, it was the *Scholastic Disputation* and not the October 31 theses. The difference was that the sale of indulgences was a very live issue, which today would have been widely “tweeted.” Furthermore, while the question of free will and grace did not directly affect anyone’s pocketbook, the issue of indulgences did. Yet the matter of indulgences ultimately touched on the Gospel because while indulgences didn’t claim to provide forgiveness, many did in fact believe that they provided forgiveness, as Luther shows in the theses.

What were indulgences? By Luther’s time, the Roman Catholic teaching about repentance and forgiveness had taken a form very different from that of the early church. The sinner must first feel contrition, sorrow for sin; then confess it to a priest; and finally perform some act of penance to demonstrate true sorrow and suffer any temporal punishment imposed by God Himself. If these were not completed in this life, they would have to be completed in purgatory. Indulgences were releases or reductions from the acts of penance or temporal punishment due because of one’s sin, both in the here and now and in the time after death.

This medieval three-part repentance – contrition, confession, satisfaction – was challenged by the Lutherans in their Augsburg Confession and Apology with a two-part repentance – contrition and faith. True repentance could not be conditioned on any human act, but solely on God’s grace and Christ’s substitutionary atonement.

There were also *plenary* (“full” or “complete”) indulgences for all penalties, past and future. These plenary indulgences had been granted for participation in the Crusades in the eleventh century. In 1513, a Jubilee Indulgence was instituted by Pope Julius II and renewed by Pope Leo X which would remit *all* satisfactions and temporal punishments owed by the sinner. The proceeds of this sale of indulgences would be used for building St. Peter’s basilica in Rome, replacing an earlier St. Peter’s church (said to be built on St. Peter’s grave).

The German Archbishop who promoted the use of indulgences in Germany was Albrecht of Mainz, who was granted the privilege of distributing plenary indulgences in exchange for repayment of a loan. It was not the position of the Roman church that indulgences could be sold, but were simply granted, also in exchange for a contribution. However, in the hands of Albrecht’s chief indulgence preacher, Johann Tetzel, it became a “sale of indulgences.” Few could see a difference between “in exchange for contributing to the building fund” and selling a “get out of jail (purgatory) free card.” That provoked not only theological objections from a wide circle of German Catholics, but also great economic objections because large amounts of money were thereby being sucked out of Germany to Rome.

A phrase often attributed (but not proven) to John Tetzel, the foremost indulgence preacher working for Albrecht, was “When a coin into the coffer clinks, another soul out of purgatory springs.” Luther alludes to it in Thesis 28: “It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.”

The Ninety-five Theses are a sharply worded, systematic refutation of the doctrine and practice of indulgences in Luther’s century. They are not at all quickly-dashed-off observations. We have reprinted here just a selection, but they clearly show why, on the one hand, Luther’s theses found immediate agreement from many in Germany and on the other such fierce opposition from the Roman Church.

The first thesis establishes Luther’s central point: “1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Everything else in the Christian life flows from that “life of

repentance.” The repentance taught by Scripture is not something that can be dismissed as a simple act of going to the priest and reciting a list of wrongdoings, though the sacramental repentance is not to be rejected (see Augsburg Confession, Article XI), nor is one to rely merely on a casual feeling of regret (as in “Oops – sorry”).

Furthermore, the only real power the pope has over sin is what is given to all believers and to the whole church: “The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God....”

Thesis 13 summarizes the argument of Theses 13–19: “13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon [church] laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.” That is followed by the argument against the idea of plenary (full) indulgences. The indulgence preachers were accused of confusing penalties and guilt: “21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences,” and “23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few” (which is Luther’s way of saying “nobody”).

A further emphasis on the wrongness of the confusion between penalty and guilt is asserted in the next section: “36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.”

In a longer section, Theses 38–59, Luther shows that indulgences are in fact dangerous to true contrition and repentance. He points out a number of dangers: “The true remission of sins proclaimed by the pope is the God’s forgiveness (38) – insofar as the pope proclaims the forgiveness of sins, he truly remits sins; it is impossible to point people to the bounty of the indulgences and at the same time the need for true contrition (40); indulgence preachers lead people to think that indulgences are preferable to other good works.”

Luther’s most affirmative argument, even in negative theses, points to the office of the keys as the place the treasure of the church is to be found: “60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure,” and “62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.” And “68. They are

nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.”

By contrast, Luther points to one of the worst absurdities of the indulgence preachers: “67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.” Perhaps most shocking was the statement that “papal indulgences [are] so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God” (75).

Luther’s final argument offers some questions raised by shrewd laymen that actually demolish the sale of indulgences: “82. ‘Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial.’” Again, “87. ‘What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?’ Again, “88. ‘What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?’”

As a theologian of the cross, Luther’s final theses are: “94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; 95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace [Acts 14:22].”

Though Luther had not yet come to complete clarity on some things in the Ninety-five Theses – he had not yet rejected purgatory – he was a theologian of the cross and knew that only there had the Lord Christ already suffered fully for all the world’s guilt and paid the penalty and the satisfaction due for sin. The doctrine and practice of indulgences simply obscured the cross and thus the full forgiveness won by the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



For further study, the complete 95 theses can be found @ luther.de/en/95thesen.html

Notes on Sources: Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* appears in *Luther’s Works*, (Muhlenberg Press, 1957), Vol. 31, 25-33. Nearly all histories of the reformation deal with ninety-five theses, but the following sources are especially helpful: Luther published an explanation of the 95 theses, found in the same volume as the Ninety-five theses, p. 77 ff. A collection of background material is found in Kurt Aland, *Martin Luther’s 95 Theses*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), and includes the same translation of the Theses found in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31. A good commentary and historical sketch is found in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 176 ff.

For a Roman Catholic account of indulgences and the indulgence controversy, see the *Catholic Encyclopedia* @ newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm.

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REDISCOVERING *the Royal Calling* of EVERY CHRISTIAN

Society was very different 500 years ago. Royals weren't just ceremonial back then. They had real power and they worked closely with the clergy, many of whom were very well-to-do. Many "commoners" had little control over their own lives. Before the Reformation, people were grouped into three estates—clergy, nobility, and the common people. (This, by extension, is where we get the term fourth estate for the media, who in theory keep the others in check.) In medieval Roman Catholicism, these three estates were not just secular designations. In fact, nothing was considered particularly secular back then. Church and state overlapped, and everyone in every territory was under their rule. The clergy were considered closest to God (and most likely to get through purgatory to heaven faster). The nobility were also higher up the ladder of closeness to God. The ordinary folks, well, you get the picture.

While there were plenty of corrupt people ruling in church and state, the ultimate goal of both rulers and commoners, at least outwardly, was to get to heaven after this short life. Before the Reformation, most believed this involved getting an infusion of grace from God and then working hard to attain paradise. Since justification and salvation weren't God's free gifts but rather required our own earned merits, clergy, including monks and nuns, were considered to be doing

more of the things that could add to the basket of credits God expected people to produce to pay off demerits assigned for sins. Kings, knights, mayors, electors, and emperors were ruling by "divine right," serving in God's stead. This was believed to make them closer to God also.

Everyone else was further from God. If you were married, unlike clergy and monastics, you were devoted to your spouse and children instead of fully to God (Demerit). If you were a merchant selling goods in a store, a miner or mine owner like Luther's father, or worked sowing and harvesting grain out in the fields of some knight, you were considered to be devoted to unspiritual things (Demerit).

So it was a completely radical idea—one that forever changed the western world—when Luther rediscovered the doctrine of vocation, the teaching of the priesthood of all believers. St. Peter wrote, *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV). Peter spoke those encouraging words to each and every person who believes in Jesus as his or her Savior, no matter what "estate" they were in. This newly rediscovered idea changed the world by telling lowly commoners how important they were in God's eyes.

Today, we take it for granted that “all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Yet those words from the Declaration of Independence would likely never have been penned had not the Reformation succeeded 250 years earlier.

More importantly, the doctrine of vocation—the priesthood of all believers—forever changes each of us. Through a proper understanding of justification, we know that we are declared completely righteous in God’s sight through faith in Jesus’ perfect life and merits in our place. We understand by faith that we are completely washed clean of our sins through our baptism into Jesus’ death on our behalf. Therefore, no matter what station or role we occupy in this life, there are no more merits left to earn to get into heaven. Thus, we understand that through faith, we are all close to God. God loves us all equally as His dear children for Jesus’ sake. After all, we are Jesus’ own brothers and sisters, and God is our dear Father in heaven. Now, as royal priests, we give thanks to God with our lives and our words. We “proclaim the praises of Him who called” us.

And here was perhaps the most radical part of Luther’s rediscovery: Everyone has a vocation—a calling from God—not just priests and monks. That means that the cobbler, the seamstress, the stonemason, and the miner—each of them is doing God’s work by bringing to their neighbor the gifts of God, such as shoes, clothing, housing, and heating fuel. In Luther’s explanation of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, we confess that these things all come from God. But God gives them to us through our fellow men and women. Therefore, Luther taught that God is hiding behind the mask of our neighbor to give them to us. They are serving God by going about their daily tasks. Even more radical, but Biblical, Luther pointed out that they were doing more godly work than those ensconced behind monastery walls. Mothers nursing their babies, fathers changing diapers, daughters studying their lessons to grow up into useful citizens are all serving God, fulfilling their calling in life by doing God’s work for others.

This Scripture doctrine led monks and nuns to abandon their monasteries and convents. It led Katie von Bora to Wittenberg, asking Luther to find husbands for her fellow nuns who had, like her, escaped, smuggled out of their convent in herring barrels. The newfound doctrine of vocation finally resulted in Katie finding her own husband, Martin Luther, and doing the godly work

of bringing children into the world, raising them, managing the garden and farm animals and household expenses, chiding Luther when he was a bit too generous, and brewing beer in the cellar for Luther and his table talks—all to the glory of God! What a glorious vocation she had!

Sadly, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, the devil raises his hackles and rushes in. The newfound insight into the value of everyman led to the Peasants’ Revolt and ultimately to false propagandists of the former German Democratic Republic (communist East Germany) claiming Luther was the forefather of communism.

Luther’s doctrine of vocation ought to bring great joy into our lives today by reminding each of us that it is God who called us into the various roles and stations we occupy. Just as clergy can rest assured that God has called them to the people they serve, whether in a big city or a town that hasn’t yet been charted on Google Maps, so also every individual Christian can rejoice in the knowledge that they are serving Jesus right where God placed them by serving their neighbor as father, mother, son or daughter, farmer, educator, policeman, or store clerk. As we gather around God’s good gifts, offered us weekly in Word and Sacrament, God fuels us up to be His hands and feet to our neighbor for yet another week.

Do you remember Jesus’ description of the Last Judgment? “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.*’ Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:34–36, 40 NKJV).

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THE REFORMATION'S INFLUENCE:

Music and the CHURCH

...for the Mass is retained by us and celebrated with the highest reverence. All the usual ceremonies are also preserved, except that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people.

(Augsburg Confession, 1530, ELH, p. 16)

Martin Luther grew up with a church service that was rich in music.

The old Mass form was a service of song. The music of the service was one of the most important ways that those who knew Latin could put the words safely into the libraries of their hearts. The sad part of that story is that there were those who attended those services who did not know Latin. Not even the beautiful melodies could make the liturgy an open book for them.

Luther did not want the churches that confessed the evangelical teachings to squander music. The beauty of music with its emotional twists and turns of mode and meter could plant the Good News of Jesus in the hearts and minds of those who heard it. It could, even more powerfully, be a tool to plant the eternal word into the hearts, minds, and mouths of those who *sang* it. The renewed song of the church in the Lutheran congregation fulfilled the commands of the apostle Paul when he wrote: *Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God* (Ephesians 5:18-21).

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And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:15-16).

Luther knew that there were some profoundly disturbing and incorrect customs and texts associated with the old Latin liturgy, the “service he grew up with.” He knew that those things needed to be cast into the rubbish heap. But he also loved many of the good things that were a part of that service which were worthy of preservation, not just because they were old, but because they were vehicles that Christians could use to teach and admonish one another. We still sing texts and tunes that he would have known as a child: *We Now Implore God, the Holy Ghost* (ELH 33), *O Lord, We Praise Thee* (ELH 327), *Now Hail the Day So Rich in Cheer* (ELH 131). Those texts and tunes set a pattern for Luther. He built on the musical traditions and practices of the church of his youth. By the time the Lutheran confession of faith was presented in Augsburg in 1530, the Lutheran services still sounded (and looked) like the services of the Roman Church. The old liturgical blueprints of the Word and Sacrament service (the Mass), Matins and Vespers (the Daily Office), and the special services of preaching held at various times through the year (Prone) were all adapted by the Lutherans, and they were all services that were rich in music. More and more, the Lutheran services expected active participation by the people. They were invited, and expected, to participate as the use of the common language increased in the service. German and Latin were used side by side to communicate the Gospel. German (the language of the people) became the language of the liturgy in those places where Latin was not a commonly used language for education and commerce. Along with that, the Lutherans expected that the people would be able to take the place of the choir where necessary to provide for a full and rich musical liturgy. Many chorales (vernacular hymns) were written by Luther and others.

Luther used the religious tunes and texts he had learned from his youth and education to create new songs for the congregation. *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast* (589), *Savior of the Nations, Come* (90), and *Grant Peace, We Pray* (584) are all based on a Latin chant melody. He also borrowed from the

world of courtly art to create new melodies and texts in the poetic and melodic patterns used by the Minnesingers and Meistersingers through many generations for song in the service of the Gospel: *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice* (378), *To Jordan Came Our Lord, the Christ* (247). Probably without knowing it, Luther created a new art form for use in the liturgy. We see his grasp of the church’s ancient traditions of song along with an understanding of the poetic and musical art of his present day in the genius of the chorale, a form unique to the Lutheran church.

There was a breadth to this music. On the one hand, it was chronologically diverse. The chorale looks to the past, sometimes the far-away past, in its melody and text. Some of the choral melodies used in 1530 were as strange-sounding to those singers as they are to us. Others represented the diversity of the international European scene of that time. This use of material from the past and brand new texts and tunes encouraged Lutheran poets and musicians, especially for two and a half centuries, to adopt methods that encouraged both chronological and cultural diversity.

Our church respected Luther’s work through the generations, but that respect never dulled the desire of poets and composers in their imitation of Luther’s hymns. Our hymnal has 26 of Luther’s texts and hundreds of other chorale texts that were inspired by his example. Thousands of chorale texts and tunes were composed in the first two centuries of Lutheranism, and that creativity continued for many years in those places that understood the teaching role of music in the liturgy, the school, and the home.

The Lutheran chorale fostered the growth of some of the greatest musicians of our culture, including the master Johann Sebastian Bach, who revered and recreated the chorales for his generation in his organ works, cantatas, oratorios, and motets. Luther could not have imagined the musical majesty that would someday be dedicated to the tunes and texts that he had created “to teach the people.”

Those texts continue to teach us when we learn them and put them on the bookshelves of our hearts and minds.

“Glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing!” (ELH 123)

THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

Finds New Real Estate

Martin Luther was nine years old when Christopher Columbus made his famous voyage of discovery in 1492. The Reformation – in both its Lutheran and Calvinist manifestations – was therefore still a fresh and lively influence in the hearts and minds of many of those who began to migrate to North America in the early seventeenth century. In one sense, the North American colonies became “incubators” for Reformation ideas. Those ideas could bloom and grow in the colonies and there assume their own natural ecclesiastical shape, unhampered by the medieval political and institutional restraints that still lingered in Europe.

Lutherans first began to settle in America in the 1630s in the New Netherland colony. One prominent Lutheran settler was the Dane Jacob Bronck, whose sprawling farm northeast of Manhattan Island is now the Borough of the Bronx. Ethnically and nationally, the Lutherans who settled in the Dutch colony were a very diverse group. Among them were people of Dutch, Frisian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, German, Prussian, and Silesian backgrounds.

In the Netherlands in Europe, the Reformed Church was the official religion of the state, but churches of other confessions – including Lutheran – were allowed to function. The Lutherans who went to the New Netherland colony in America probably expected the same kind of tolerance there, but Governor Peter Stuyvesant strictly forbade any public worship except that of the Reformed Church. The Lutherans were therefore forced to meet in homes in lay-led services until the English took over the colony in 1664, when they were finally allowed to organize and call pastors from Europe. The first Lutheran pastor to be ordained in America – Justus Falckner in 1703 – was ordained for service among the Lutherans of this Dutch heritage in what had then become the New York colony.

The Kingdom of Sweden planted an American colony in the region comprising the area where Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey now meet. New Sweden existed from 1638 to 1655, at which time it was conquered by the Dutch and became a part of New Netherland. Then, in 1664 when the English took over, it was absorbed into the English colonies. Lutheranism was the official religion of the New Sweden colony. Ministers from the Church of Sweden were sent to serve the congregations of that colony, not only during the time when Sweden controlled it, but all the way into the nineteenth century. Pastor Johannes Campanius, who served there from 1643 to 1648, translated Luther’s Small Catechism into the Algonquian language spoken by the Lenape Indians in the region, among whom he was doing mission work. This was the first book of any kind translated into a Native American language.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, tens of thousands of German-speaking people from what is now southwestern Germany migrated to the English colonies – chiefly to New York and Pennsylvania – as refugees from the frequent wars of the time and to make a better future for themselves and their children. Many of these

“Palatine” and “Pennsylvania Dutch” settlers were Lutheran. They had not left Europe to avoid religious persecution, but their faith was important to them, so they organized congregations and built churches in the communities where they settled. The most notable of the pastors who served among them was Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who was instrumental in organizing the first permanent Lutheran Synod in America in 1748 (the Pennsylvania Ministerium) and in putting together the first liturgy specifically prepared for use in the American Lutheran setting.

Over time, the “East Coast” Lutherans came under the influence of American Puritanism and Revivalism, so their Lutheran consciousness began to be significantly weakened by the first half of the nineteenth century. Their transition to the English language, accompanied by the reading of non-Lutheran English religious books and the singing of non-Lutheran English hymns, contributed toward this decline. One exception was the Tennessee Synod, which was organized in 1820 on the basis of a strict commitment to the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession. This synod was very active in publishing sound Lutheran materials in the English language.

A higher appreciation for the distinctive theology of Confessional Lutheranism began to reemerge among many of the East Coast Lutherans in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially with the publication of the first English translation of the Book of Concord in 1851 – issued under the auspices of the Tennessee Synod. Others, however, resisted such Confessional reforms. This led eventually to a split between those Eastern regional synods of the “General Synod” led by Samuel Simon Schmucker that wanted to stay with a more Americanized and ecumenical theology and those Eastern regional synods of the “General Council” led by Charles Porterfield Krauth that wanted to return to a more orthodox Lutheran position.

Meanwhile, also in the nineteenth century, a new wave of Lutheran immigrants began to arrive in America. Most of the Lutherans who came during this period – from Germany and Scandinavia – settled in the Midwest. Some of these Lutherans were Pietists who were interested in a type of spirituality that emphasized inner experience over sound doctrine. Others, however, had been influenced in Europe by the “Confessional Awakening” and were seeking an opportunity to live out, in their church life in America, a consistently orthodox form of Lutheranism. Many of the Lu-

theran immigrants came to America for economic opportunity, but some came to escape from the oppression of Rationalism within the state church hierarchies or to escape from the forced union of Lutherans and Reformed that had been demanded by the King of Prussia.

The more conservative element among the Lutheran immigrants of this century was sympathetic to the work of Krauth in the East, but they organized their own independent synods in the Midwestern states where they settled. At this time in history, the most prominent orthodox synod among the Germans was the Missouri Synod, led by C. F. W. Walther, with roots primarily in Saxony and Bavaria. The most prominent orthodox synod among the Scandinavians was the Norwegian Synod, led by U. V. Koren, H. A. Preus, and J. A. Ottesen. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a smaller number of Lutherans from Eastern Europe – especially Slovak Lutherans – also began arriving in the United States.

Some sad controversies took place between the orthodox synods and the more Pietistic and theologically lax synods on issues such as Church and Ministry, the Doctrine of the Call and Lay Preaching, Absolution and Justification, Conversion and Election, and Church Fellowship. But also during this time, there was much fruitful cooperation among the Confessional Lutherans, who worked with each other across cultural and linguistic boundaries while testifying to the common faith that they shared. This was especially so within the Synodical Conference, organized in 1877 by several conservative Lutheran bodies, at the time including the Missouri, the Norwegian, and the Wisconsin Synods. (At a later time, the Slovak Synod also belonged to this conference.) Important efforts were made by American Lutherans in this century in the areas of home and world missions, parish education and higher education, and works of compassion in human care agencies and institutions. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Lutheranism had become a well-established ecclesiastical presence in the larger American society.

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THE REFORMATION

A Lasting Influence on Education

Martin Luther may be best known for his theological reformation of the medieval church, which had strayed from the pure teaching of God’s Word. Luther did not, however, pursue his theological aims in isolation from other concerns; his writings touch upon politics, social life, and the arts. He also recognized the importance of education, both for the church and for the civil realm.

In 1520—after nailing the 95 Theses but before saying “Here I stand” at Worms—Luther published “An Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate.” Developing the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation, Luther wrote that “the Scripture alone is our vineyard in which we must all labor and toil.” Although he encouraged the universities to teach classical languages, to assign readings in the church fathers, and (cautiously) to glean insights from Aristotle and other pagan authors, Luther above all emphasized the value of the biblical languages, and he sternly warned: “I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme.”

In 1524, Luther wrote “A Letter to the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany,” urging the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools. From Psalm 78:5–7 and Deuteronomy 32:7, Luther argued that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. However, he also acknowledged that some parents are unable or unwilling and that the local government possesses the civic resources for operating schools. Luther presented schools as a win-win solution for training leaders in both church and state. History and literature prepare people for civil service while the Bible and biblical languages prepare people to serve in the church.

In 1530, the same year that his supporters presented the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V, Luther published an open letter entitled “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School.” Here Luther chastised parents who wished to channel their children at an early age into careers for the accumulation of material wealth. He then urged the clergy to impress upon their parishioners the value of learning, noting especially how important biblical literacy is for the advancement of the Gospel.

Although Luther’s reputation as an education reformer stems primarily from the three documents just summarized, his most widely read book, the Small Catechism (1529), also addressed the deficiencies of education in its preface: “The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach!” Luther hoped that pastors and parents would use the catechism in the church and in the home, respectively, to ensure that future generations of Christians would understand the chief doctrines of the Christian faith.

From Luther's writings on education, we may derive answers to the following questions:

What Should Be Taught?

Luther was simultaneously a biblicist and a Renaissance humanist. The Bible, the hymnal, and the catechism served as the foundation for Christian education while Luther also encouraged the study of history, literature, languages, music, and natural philosophy (called “science” today). Leading the educational reforms at the University of Wittenberg, Luther’s colleague Phillip Melancthon established the standard for Lutheran education in the liberal arts. When people promote “classical Christian education” today, they generally are seeking to revive this heritage of the Lutheran Reformation.

How Should It Be Taught?

In the preface to his Small Catechism, Luther insisted that lessons should be learned “according to the text, word for word ... [and] committed to memory.” Rote memorization has fallen out of fashion today, but Luther prized it for two reasons. First, when the text comes directly from Scripture or a doctrinal formula based on Scripture, then every word matters. Students should learn to recognize the importance of the details. Second, rote memorization involves repetition, which provides an occasion for the student to learn the meaning more fully each time the lesson is repeated. The word “catechism” means “echo back and forth,” and Luther hoped that a simple phrasing, repeated between instructor and pupil, would lead to lifelong mastery. Those of us who still retain much of the memory work from our youth bear living testimony to the success of Luther’s method.

To Whom Should It Be Taught?

Luther pioneered what later became known as the modern movement for universal compulsory education. He wanted schools built so that every child, whether rich or poor, could receive a basic education. He also specifically encouraged the education of girls as well as boys. By comparing regional data across Europe from the centuries following the Reformation, historians have discovered the success of Luther’s efforts. In those areas most deeply influenced by Lutheranism, illiteracy vanished and the educational “gender gap” narrowed. Luther’s theology was old-fashioned (he wanted nothing more than to preserve the apostles’ teachings), but his use of the printing press and his promotion of schools for all citizens was truly modern.

By Whom Should It Be Taught?

Luther’s educational reforms went hand in hand with his doctrine of vocation—the idea that each person has a “calling” (Latin: *vocatio*) from God to serve his neighbors in a particular sphere. Luther recognized that pastors have the vocation to publicly preach God’s Word and administer the sacraments. Teachers have the vocation to educate their students for the mutual benefit of church and state. Parents, however, have the most fundamental vocation with respect to children’s upbringing. Luther therefore urged each of these three groups to fulfill their cooperative responsibilities, and he called upon civic leaders to support them with the resources necessary to educate the younger generation.

How Shall We Honor Luther’s Legacy Today?

By “echoing” the Christian faith to one another through the use of the catechism in both the home and in the congregation, today’s Lutherans remain faithful to the most important aspect of Luther’s educational vision. By fostering learning not simply as a means toward a higher paying job, but more especially as a tool for serving one’s neighbors in whatever calling of life God assigns, today’s Lutherans continue to promote the ideals that the great reformer expressed in his three chief treatises on education. By cooperating vocationally as parents, pastors, and teachers, today’s Lutherans serve children’s needs to the glory of God. This is how Luther would have wanted it to be, and his desire deserves our appreciation still today because, like so much else from that reformer’s mind, it came from Scripture alone.

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VISUALIZING THE REFORMATION:

Confessing the Lutheran Faith *with Paint...*

Lucas Cranach the Elder's Wittenberg Altarpiece stands as the quintessential piece of Lutheran liturgical artwork. It is a bold proclamation of Lutheranism as it radically departed from the common themes and iconography normally found in altarpieces produced at this time and before.

This piece was not only distinctly Lutheran in its content, but also in the timing of its installation. It was erected above the altar of St. Mary's Church in 1547. This was a tumultuous time for the Lutherans. It was one year after Luther's death and the spires of St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg had been retrofitted as canon platforms in the midst of the Schmalkaldic War. This was a period of struggle between the Roman Catholic forces of Emperor Charles V and the Lutheran princes of the Schmalkaldic League, including Wittenberg's own John Frederick (a.k.a. "John the Steadfast") the Elector of Saxony.

Though John Frederick would lose his rule over Wittenberg and Saxony, this painting has proclaimed the distinct Lutheran faith, upholding the ideals of the Reformation, especially emphasizing the centrality of the Means of Grace—God's Word and Sacraments—as vital to the life of the church.

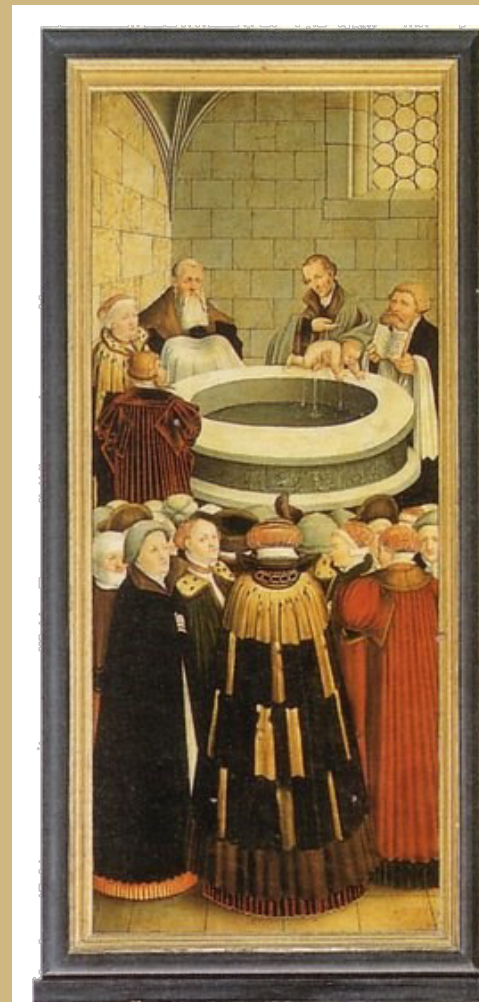
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The Wings: In the LEFT Panel, the entrance to the Christian faith is pictured with Baptism. Luther's friend and colleague Philip Melanchthon sprinkles water upon the infant. Melanchthon was not an ordained minister and would not have normally officiated at a baptism. Cranach, however, chose to include him to demonstrate the key role he played in the Reformation and as a confession of faith in the work and writings that Melanchthon produced—which are found in the Lutheran Confessions. This panel also clearly distinguished Lutherans from those who denied the efficacy of infant baptism, such as the Anabaptists. Also, the depiction of water being sprinkled upon the infant stands in opposition to those who demand baptism by immersion.

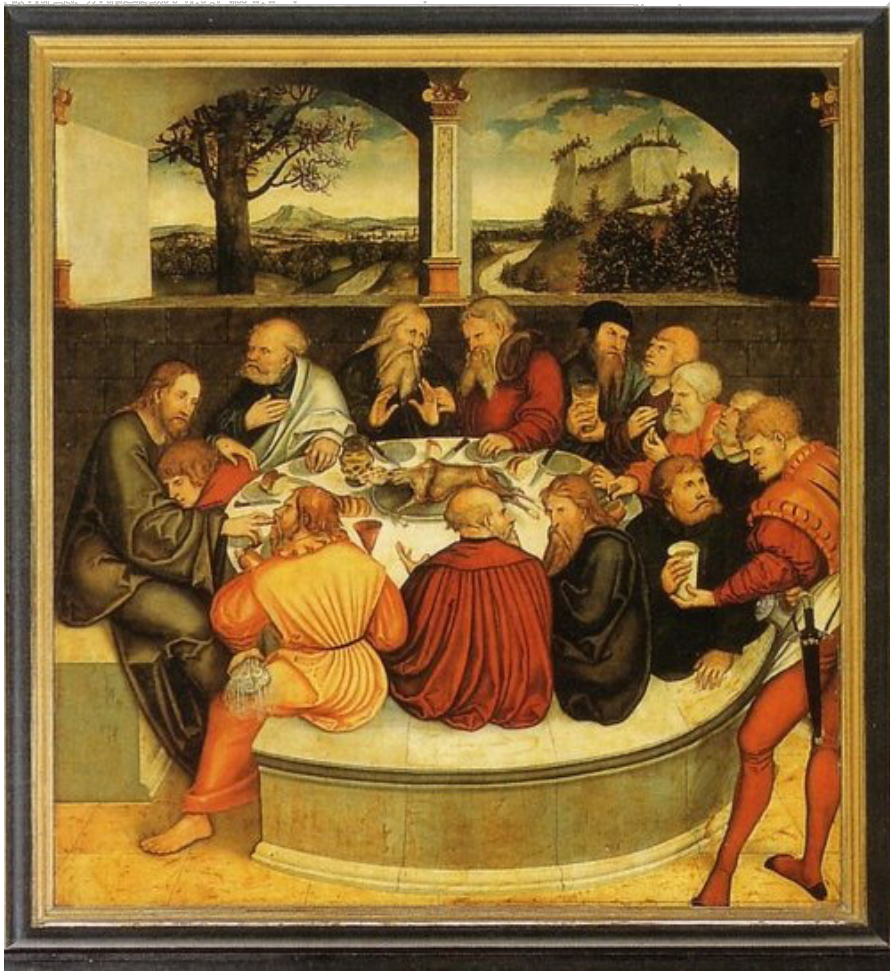
In the RIGHT Panel, another key Reformation figure is pictured. Johannes Bugenhagen, who was Luther's friend and Pastor, is publicly administering the Office of the Keys. In his left hand, he bears the key that closes heaven to the proud, impenitent man—whose hands are bound and is being pushed away. The loosing key is in his right hand, placed upon the penitent man's head as he is given absolution. This is distinctly Lutheran, depicting the parish Pastor—rather than the Pope or St. Peter—holding the Keys to the kingdom of Heaven.

The CENTER Panel: The Center Panel follows Luther's suggestion for what should be shown in an altarpiece—as Christ is sharing the Last Supper with His disciples. It seems that the disciples are in shock, questioning one another over who would betray Jesus. As the disciples seem distracted, Jesus was giving the piece of dipped bread to his betrayer Judas, who clenches the money pouch and has a foot already angled toward the door. It is believed that the disciple facing the standing servant, taking hold of the cup, was a depiction of Martin Luther in his Junker Georg disguise, which he assumed during his time at the Wartburg castle. The Wartburg castle and Luther's translation of the Bible into German is called to mind by the fortress upon the mountain in the background.

The "PREDELLA" or LOWER Panel: Luther stands in the pulpit with one hand upon the Scriptures and with his other pointing to the crucified Christ. Christ upon the cross is placed directly below the Passover Lamb that sits in the center of the table in the panel above. As John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus, proclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), so too does Luther. Instead of picturing nobles and wealthy patrons that would normally be included in such paintings, Cranach paints in this scene (and in the wing panels) the common laity and townspeople. This emphasized the Lutheran understanding of vocation, where all are included and are vital in the body of Christ—the Church.



“Whoever is inclined to put pictures on the altar ought to have the Lord’s Supper of Christ painted....Since the altar is designated for the administration of the Sacrament, one could not find a better painting for it.” MARTIN LUTHER (LW, AE, vo.13, p.375)



Lucas Cranach the Elder. *Wittenberg Altarpiece*, 1547. Oil paint on wood panels. Wittenberg, St. Mary’s Church.

CATECHISM *in*



THE LORD'S PRAYER

“Science: *Because you don’t figure [stuff] out by praying.”*

I saw this quote (*with an added expletive*) on a meme recently. The implication, apart from the disjunctive association, was obvious: ***prayer doesn’t work.***

That seems to sum up a prevalent view of prayer in our world, a view even held by Christians as well as non-Christians. Prayer doesn’t get tangible results; therefore, it doesn’t work. And if the pragmatist demands results from his prayer, the pietist (the Pharisee) demands rewards because of who he is. Sometimes, we might manage to find ourselves in one or both of these camps.

The reasoning behind either one of these beliefs isn’t so farfetched. For instance, if you work faithfully at your job, it isn’t unreasonable to expect the result of a fair paycheck. If you are the head of a company, it isn’t unreasonable to expect the reward of honor and respect from your employees. But both have wedged their way into the way we think about prayer.

OUT OF CONTEXT

We either think that God must give us the results we want in prayer precisely *because* we pray or that God must reward when we pray *because* we are His followers. In fact, you can find dozens of books, blogs, articles, movies, and even sermons devoted to the topic of how to achieve results from prayer. Many of these will say that to truly achieve results in prayer, you have to pray in a special way, with a special feeling, or even in a special room.¹ Some will even claim that *because* you pray, God will give you the reward of heaven, as if your prayer itself is the thing that will save you.

¹ See the movie “War Room” (2015) for just one example of this type of thinking.

Some will even dismiss the Lord’s Prayer as something we should *avoid* praying because, they claim, God only listens to prayers from the heart, and a prayer already written down cannot be prayed from the heart. Even we Lutherans, who do pray the Lord’s Prayer at least once a week, if not every day, can view this prayer as a way to achieve results for ourselves or tell God how He should reward us. We want to bring God’s kingdom here (a slice of heaven on earth would be nice, wouldn’t it?), we want to gain our daily bread (or more of it), we want our sins to be forgiven (and maybe for God to forget about the other half of this petition), and we want God to keep us away from temptation and trouble (and if I get into temptation, well, God allowed me to get into it in the first place).

All of these views turn prayer into a means to an end, a petition of nothing more than *gimme* or *God, give me what I want*. God's love or even His very existence are then contingent on whether or not God follows through. If our prayer doesn't seem to produce results or rewards, that must either mean we didn't pray correctly or God simply didn't listen, maybe because He isn't actually real.

IN CONTEXT

This is why Prayer is the third part of the Catechism and why it follows both the Ten Commandments, which tell us we are unable to please or come to God on our own, and the Creed, which tells us that God has actually come to us. Prayer isn't a means to an end through which God will give us stuff. Rather, it's the response of faith worked through the Gospel because of everything God has already given us.

THE LORD'S PRAYER...HAS THIS EXCELLENT TESTIMONY, THAT GOD LOVES TO HEAR IT.

Luther actually said that God has given us prayer "so that we may see how heartily He pities us in our distress, and we may never doubt that such prayer is pleasing to Him and shall certainly be answered" (LC, III, 22).

While we may and do ask for things for ourselves and on behalf of others, Christian prayer doesn't focus on ourselves and others, but rather on Christ. Prayer is an act of worship which proclaims and points to Christ, His grace, His forgiveness, and His promises.

Luther continued speaking specifically about the Lord's Prayer. He said the Lord's Prayer is "a great advantage indeed above all other prayers that we might compose ourselves. For in our own prayers the conscience would ever be in doubt and say, 'I have prayed, but who knows if it pleases Him or if I have hit upon the right proportions and form?' Therefore, there is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth than the Lord's Prayer. We pray it daily because it has this excellent testimony, that God loves to hear it" (LC, III, 23).

Each petition in the Lord's Prayer directs us to where our thoughts should be. It guides us to see

what our most important needs are, and then, because we even fail at putting these needs first, the Lord's Prayer calls upon our heavenly Father to have mercy on us for Jesus' sake. And God does have mercy because Jesus, who taught us to pray this prayer, fulfilled it Himself.

Jesus hallowed God's name perfectly. He won the victory for us on the cross and brings His spiritual kingdom to us. He submitted His own desires to the Father's will when He gave up His life on the cross. Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, gives of Himself freely for our daily needs. Jesus forgave the sins of those who crucified Him and weren't even sorry for their sins; He forgave the sins of the whole world; He forgave *our* sins. Jesus never fell into temptation even though He was tempted in every point just as we are. Finally, Jesus delivered us from the Devil and all evil when He took this evil upon Himself on the cross. And then, as proof that all these things were true, that we now have eternal life, and that we have access to pray to God as our heavenly Father, Jesus rose from the dead. God the Father declared "Amen," "it is true."

The Lord's Prayer directs us to Christ who has accomplished everything for us.

Prayer works because of Jesus.

To that we say, "Amen, it is true, Christ is risen, indeed."

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“GO, THEREFORE...” (Matthew 28:19)

Reformation Mission from Resurrection Authority

My father and I were in the driveway working on a car. Two well-dressed men approached, each carrying a briefcase. They engaged us in conversation about our religious beliefs, concentrating especially on what was going to happen at the end of the world. The conversation eventually was between my father and one of the men, focusing on how one knows he will be saved. This man took a decidedly works-righteous approach, stating that he could get to heaven via his good life and what he did for God. My father told him that he knew he himself would be saved because of Jesus’ work in his place. “Why should I trade what I have for what you have?” my father asked the man. He had no good answer. After a few more attempts at trying to convince my father of the correctness of his position, the man was visibly frustrated. I finally took pity on the man and said, “We’re both Lutheran pastors.” A wave of relief swept over the man. “Oh,” he exhaled. “Are you happy with your beliefs?” After we assured him we were, he said, “OK. We’ll leave you alone. Have a good day.”

Why were these two men out going door-to-door and witnessing to their faith? It was fairly obvious that they were witnessing because they felt they had to. They may have thought they were obeying the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19-20. But were they?

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”
(Matthew 28:19-20; ESV).

A few words of these verses might jump out at us: “Go.” “Make disciples.” Of course, other commands follow: baptize and teach. But there is one word we may overlook: “therefore.” “*Therefore, go and make disciples....*”

“Therefore” means that what follows is based on something that was just stated. We have to look at the last part of verse 18 of Matthew 28 to see the basis for Jesus’ commands: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (ESV). That’s a powerful statement. How can Jesus say that?

You might think that Jesus had that authority anyway since He is God. But when Jesus came to this earth to serve as our Savior, he didn’t always make use of all His divine authority or power. When He speaks the words of the Great Commission, He is the *resurrected* Jesus. He is the Lord who is now in His state of exaltation instead of humiliation. Because He had completed all the work He was sent to do—accomplishing the salvation of all people—He had the right to make use of all His authority again. Our *exalted* Lord gives us the command to do mission work. By His authority, we tell others about Him.

It’s more precise to say, “By His authority we get to tell others about Him.” Lutherans do mission work because we are free to do mission work. We have been freed by our Savior from slavery to sin and been made His people, His people who want to tell others the true message of eternal salvation.

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“Teach Me Your Statutes”

(Psalm 119)

The Transmission of the Reformation through Higher Education

From the doors of the castle church in Wittenberg to the doors of your local church today, there are many ways to study the thread of our Reformation heritage. One of the more prominent ways God’s saving truths have reached us is through educational institutions. Dr. Martin Luther understood that education would be essential to sustain this Reformation. This became the primary focus of mission work in his day.

The transmission of God’s saving truth to the next generation is a delicate process. So much can be lost so suddenly. Early Norwegian settlers in the US recognized the need for seminary and college training. The forefathers of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod developed institutions of higher learning within a decade of their beginnings.

At the first meeting to re-establish the synod in 1918, thoughts were expressed regarding a school for youth and for training pastors. By 1919, the synod established a professorship at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where pre-theological students would be trained. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker filled this post and worked with the eleven synod men enrolled. The first synod graduate from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, would come one year later.

By 1922, the synod established a professorship under Prof. Oscar Levenson at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, for the training of teachers. These connections also strengthened the bonds of the Synodical Conference church bodies. A report to the synod in the mid-1920s stated, “We are very thankful to our German brethren ... still we cannot expect that (they) shall bear our burdens forever.” When Bethany College was available for sale, one hundred lay-

men and pastors organized the Bethany Lutheran College Association to purchase the college on their own. In 1927, the synod voted to “take over” the college.

A committee was formed in 1931 to investigate starting a theological course at Bethany. Though it took a few years, in 1943 the Board of Regents recommended that the synod establish its own seminary. However, this was during World War II and the Selective Service Administration would not allow students to enter a newly established seminary. A few years later, the federal ruling changed, permitting plans to move ahead. In June of 1946, the synod resolved “to establish a full Theological Seminary course at Bethany... to begin in the fall of 1946.”

Rev. N. A. Madson was called as the Dean, and college theologians also served on the faculty. The opening service was held in September. Five students attended the first year. Madson, Ylvisaker, Rev. George Lillegard, and Prof. Christopher Faye formed the faculty in its formative years. Having gone through the synodical battles of retaining the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, these men instilled a love for this essential truth of the Reformation in their students. By 1966, the seminary had graduated forty-eight men into the ministry, including students from England, Norway, and Hong Kong. As of 2016, 230 have graduated our Bethany Seminary.

We are grateful to God that He used Dr. Luther and others to uncover the wonderful doctrine of grace alone. May the thread of Reformation blessings continue to reach the doors of our churches and schools through faithful pastors, professors, and administrators of the institutions of His Church so that the next generation can confess, “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage.”

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APOLOGETICS

"TO DEFEND A PERSON OR THING"

THIS ISSUE

PART 3: THE APOLOGETIC FOR A RESURRECTED JESUS

Dead or Alive?

The Apologetic for a Resurrected Jesus

We have just come through commemorating the day Jesus rose from the dead. In the previous article in this series, it was said that the resurrection is “the ultimate defense or apologetic” for the Christian. And well it should be. For St. Paul says, *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*¹ So the linchpin holding together our Christian faith—and our eternal salvation—is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection. No one has ever foretold his own death and resurrection and then done it—except Jesus. When we are mocked for believing such an outrageous thing, how do we defend what we believe? Three types of evidence defend our belief in Christ’s resurrection.

The empty tomb - The skeptic may counter that many times a grave has been opened only to discover that it is empty. But the empty tomb of Jesus was far different. It was a specific tomb, never used before, and its owner, Joseph of Arimathea, was not only well-known, but was also a member of the Sanhedrin.² No one got confused about the tomb. Special arrangements were made for a seal to be placed on the stone door of the tomb. Guards were posted.³ Normally, when a body goes missing from a tomb, an exten-

sive effort is made to find the body. Surely we would expect this to have happened in this case. The execution had been so public. Pilate had been worried about a rebellion if Jesus were not crucified. The leaders of the people would want to be sure Jesus was dead. They feared what the missing body might signify to Jesus’ followers. They could not neglect this “missing body” without further investigation. Nonetheless, the Gospel accounts make no mention of any follow-up to this story that the body was stolen. The empty tomb is a part of the reason we give for our belief in Jesus’ resurrection.

The testimony of the disciples - No human was present when the lifeless body of Jesus was restored to life. But the Gospels record numerous accounts of people who saw Jesus alive again.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17

² Matthew 27:57–60; John 19:40, 41

³ Matthew 27:64–66

His body had not been stolen. It had not simply disappeared without explanation. Jesus was alive again! And he appeared to his followers. He appeared to some women. Take note that the testimony of women was not highly regarded in Jewish courts of the time; perhaps it was even inadmissible. No one wanting to invent a story of a resurrection would begin by mentioning the appearance of Jesus to a woman, whose testimony would be unconvincing to many. He appeared to the disciples on Easter Sunday.⁴ These were people who had despaired and could not, would not, believe Jesus was alive. It was not as though they were experiencing a vision invented out of a desire to see Jesus. Their experience was real, not some vision of hopeful wishes. He walked with and talked to disciples while they traveled to Emmaus.⁵ He ate with them. This was no apparition. It was real. He appeared to Thomas, who touched the hands and side of Jesus—physically touched him!⁶ He appeared to 500 people at one time, people who could be contacted to see if their stories held together or if their testimony would break down as did the testimony of the false witnesses who testified against Jesus.⁷ They would testify to what they had seen and experienced. On the road to Damascus, he appeared to Saul (the apostle Paul), who saw Jesus as his enemy and then recognized him as the resurrected Jesus and his savior.⁸ Others with Saul heard the voice and saw, but did not comprehend what was happening. The eyewitness testimony of all these people is recorded for us in the Scriptures—testimony upon which we rely in defending our belief in Christ’s resurrection.

Its impact on the lives of Jesus’ followers -

Many followers of religious leaders will live and die for their leader. They simply believe what the leader tells the followers, *whether they have been given solid evidence from the leader or not*. But if Jesus did not rise from the dead, if his followers knew they were telling lies and he had not risen from the dead, would they give up everything, suffer what they suffered, and die for someone they knew to be dead while they preached a lie about his being alive? Not likely. Conversely, having seen him alive, having touched him, heard him, eaten with him, they would give up everything for him. And that is what we see. Their lives

were changed. Paul was no longer a persecutor, but rather the one persecuted. Peter was no longer the fear-filled denier, but rather the bold, ready-to-die confessor. Thomas the doubter, convinced that Christ rose from the dead, carried the message of the resurrected Christ to far reaches of the earth. One thing they knew: if Jesus had conquered death, their resurrection was as certain as his, whenever it might come. Drastic life changes like this could only happen not because of some conspiracy to which they agreed, but because the resurrection of Jesus was the truth.

The ultimate sign for the skeptic or unbeliever - There are some who will consider this evidence and want to learn more. There are some who will never believe. No miracle would be enough. God speaking to them would be dismissed with human “logic.” What will be the ultimate proof that Jesus will provide so people know he is who he says he is? To all of them, Jesus says;

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”⁹

The resurrection? It is the guarantee of Jesus’ victory over sin, death, and the devil. It is the guarantee of our resurrection, our restoration, our reception into heaven itself. Believe it. Cherish it. Defend it.

The *apologetic* of who Christ is and his resurrection from the dead – these are both based upon the testimony recorded in the Bible. That brings to the forefront the subject of next issue’s installment...

Part 4: *The Reliability of the Testaments, New and Old*

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⁴ Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36ff

⁵ Luke 24:13ff

⁶ John 20:24ff

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:6

⁸ Acts 9:1-7

⁹ Matthew 12:39, 40; see also Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29, 30

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The LUTHERAN REFORMATION: 500 YEAR COMMEMORATIVE EDITION
REFORMATION VOCABULARY

gospel | 'gäspəl |

Some words are so common to Bible language and Christian vocabulary that we rarely think twice about what they mean. We just use them and hear them used.

Gospel is one of those words. This word describes the first four books of the New Testament. For Lutherans and a few others keen on the Reformation, it's contrasted from Law. Sometimes we even use it in everyday conversation: "You can take that as 'gospel' truth." The church of Luther's day would certainly have been familiar with this word too. What had become very unfamiliar, however, was how God gives meaning to this critical word – Gospel – in His Word.

Consider a few examples:

1 When the angel calms the shepherds in the rural Bethlehem field, he tells them he has Gospel for them: "Today... a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). **The Gospel IS good news for its hearers.**

2 When Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, he wastes no time in asserting the function of this good news. He boldly ascribes to this good news (Gospel) the

power to save sinners (Romans 1:16). The Gospel is not potential energy – neutral news that will be good if the hearers donate their hearts and lives to it. Wherever and whenever the Gospel sounds off, it IS power – power that delivers salvation precisely where God wills.

3 Finally, when the Lord lets St. John see the continuation of the Christian Church in the future (The Revelation), John sees an angel (a messenger) "with the eternal Gospel to proclaim" (Revelation 14:6). The Gospel, God's good-news power to save, IS *eternal*. No people have ever needed or will ever need a new bit of "good news" to save from sin and death.

If you ask: 'What is the Gospel?'.... no better answer can be given than these words:

"Christ gave His body and shed His blood for us for the forgiveness of sins."

- Martin Luther -

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