

Martin Luther's Later Years: Did You Know?

Little-known or remarkable facts about Martin Luther's later years

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When Martin Luther married, neither he nor his bride, Katherine von Bora, felt "in love." Katherine was still getting over a broken engagement to a man she truly loved. And Martin admitted, "I am not 'in love' or burning with desire." Yet their love for each other blossomed throughout their 20-year marriage.

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

Nearly everyone noticed Luther's remarkable eyes. One of his students described Martin Luther's "deep black eyes and brows, sparkling and burning like stars, so that one could hardly bear looking at them." One of Luther's enemies said his eyes were "unusually penetrating and unbelievably sparkling, as one finds them now and then in those that are possessed."

Luther's German translation of the Bible had more influence upon the German language than the King James Version had on English. Though almost 460 years old, Luther's translation is still sold and read widely.

Martin Luther has been called "one of the greatest preachers of all time," yet he became deeply discouraged with his congregation. Despite his admonitions and instruction, Luther felt, his people remained godless. "It annoys me to keep preaching to you," he said, and in 1530, he actually went on strike and refused to preach for a time.

In 1527, a terrible plague struck Wittenberg, and virtually all of Luther's students fled for their lives. The elector (prince) begged Luther to leave town also, but Luther felt pastors should stay and help the afflicted. Because he and Katherine took in so many sick and dying people, their house had to be quarantined even after the plague ended.

Luther was so generous he was sometimes taken advantage of. In 1541, a transient woman, allegedly a runaway nun, came to their home. Martin and Katherine fed and housed her, only to discover she had lied and stolen. Yet Luther believed no one would become poor by practicing charity. "God divided the hand into fingers so that money would slip through," he said.

Even on his wedding night, Luther couldn't refuse a person in need. At 11 p.m., after all the guests had left, radical reformer Andreas Karlstadt knocked at the door. Largely because Luther fiercely opposed him, Karlstadt had fled town. But now, when Karlstadt was fleeing the Peasants' War and needed shelter, Luther took him in.

Luther made singing a central part of Protestant worship. In his German Mass of 1526, he dispensed with the choir and assigned all singing to the congregation. He would often call congregational rehearsals during the week so the people could learn new hymns.

Luther was convinced he lived in the last days. In the foreword to his translation of Daniel, he identified the Antichrist of Daniel 11 as the papacy; the "small horn" of Daniel 7 was the invading Turks.

Luther enjoyed beer and wine as God's good gifts. He had a mug with three rings. The first, he said, represented the Ten Commandments, the second the Apostles' Creed, and the third the Lord's Prayer. Luther was amused he could drain the mug of wine through the Lord's Prayer though a friend could not get beyond the Ten Commandments. But Luther is never recorded to have gotten drunk.

Luther and his fellow reformers in Wittenberg took religious education seriously. Here, for example, are worship services and sermon texts during one week:

Sunday, 5 a.m.—Pauline Epistles

Sunday, 9 a.m.—The Gospels

Sunday afternoon—The Catechism

Monday and Tuesday—The Catechism

Wednesday—The Gospel of Matthew

Thursday and Friday—The Epistles

Saturday—The Gospel of John

Though the preaching load was shared, Luther often spoke at all Sunday services.

Luther said he would be glad for all his works to perish except "On the Bondage of the Will," which emphasizes people's inability to save themselves, and his "Small Catechism," which explains the faith to children.

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From the Editor: The Forgotten Years of Martin Luther

Martin Luther forgotten? The giant of the Protestant Reformation, the man who even in his day was called "The angel whom God has sent to mankind"? How could he be overlooked?

Actually, only half of Luther has been neglected: his later years.

One biography of Luther that crossed my desk devotes just one chapter (out of fourteen) to the final twenty-three years of his life. Another biography can muster only twenty-three pages to those busy years. That's one page per year.

In those years, apparently, not much was happening: Luther only married (and fathered six children), intervened in a massive peasants' war, translated the Old Testament, preached a couple thousand sermons, created a new approach to Christian worship, developed catechisms, settled political squabbles, wrote scores of influential treatises, and composed hymns we still sing today. That's all.

As one scholar has said, "The older Martin Luther was, if anything, even livelier than young man Luther." Yet we know hardly anything about him.

Why? I think it's because we prefer Luther as the young, bold revolutionary. We celebrate firebrands who ignite mass movements for change and reform. Only a few years ago, for example, Lech Walesa in Poland and Boris Yeltsin in Russia were hailed as heroes.

But once you touch off a revolution, then what? As Luther knew, and Walesa and Yeltsin have discovered, that's when the real work begins. It's one thing to call for change; it is another to make the changes stick. That usually involves quarreling with fellow leaders and building, brick by brick, a stable future.

Luther endured painful years of controversy as he fashioned a new church, especially as he had to defend his bedrock understanding of faith and grace against all comers. In the process, he made some mistakes—calling for Jews to be expelled, and even, in one complex case, advocating bigamy. That is probably the reason many biographies would like to forget the older Luther: he stands at his most human.

But as one historian said, "We learn from the titans even when their flaws are titanic." To understand Luther, we need to see him not only as young with limitless potential, but also as old, fully aware of his limitations. To Luther's credit, neither age nor illness could keep him from proclaiming and defending the gospel of grace.

P.S. This is the second of two issues Christian History has published on Martin Luther. Issue 34, covers "The Early Years."

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

After the Revolution

Martin Luther spent the early years of the Reformation battling the Roman Catholic establishment, defending his understanding of justification by faith alone. But 1524 and 1525 saw a major turning point in his life and career.

In the mid-1520s, Luther was forced to respond to the first major splits within the Protestant ranks. He faced a popular uprising known as the Peasants' War. At the peak of the uprising, expecting imminent death, Luther decided to defy Satan further: he married. Then Luther became increasingly involved in building what became the Lutheran church. And in his final years, convinced he was living in the last days of the world, he issued violent treatises against all the enemies of God as he saw them—Catholics, "fanatical" Protestants, Turks, and Jews.

Luther's later years may have been more difficult than his early ones. It is one thing to picture a new vision of the Christian faith. It is quite another thing to give this vision form so it may be passed to your children and your children's children.

Modeling a Marriage

Luther began by giving the Protestant parsonage its first model. In 1525, the 41-year-old former monk married a 26-year-old former nun, Katherina von Bora. He married not out of love or sexual desire, he said, but to please his father, who liked the idea of grandchildren; to spite the pope, who forbade clerical marriage; and to witness to his convictions before he was martyred!

The Luthers had six children, four of whom survived to adulthood. Kate Luther took over the management of the former Augustinian cloister, where Luther lived. The Luthers welcomed and boarded hundreds of people over the years—students, orphaned relatives, and frequent guests.

From their inauspicious beginning, Martin and Kate developed love and respect for each other. Luther's deep affection for his wife was aptly expressed when he called his favorite Pauline epistle, Galatians, "my Katherina von Bora."

Creating a Church

To define Lutheran beliefs Luther issued the *Small Catechism* and the *Large Catechism* in 1529. They taught the fundamentals of Lutheran Christianity to a population distressingly ignorant of even the basics of Christianity. A great lover of music, Luther also wrote numerous hymns, many of which are still sung today.

In 1530, Luther's colleague, Philipp Melancthon, penned an enduring summary of the Lutheran faith, the Augsburg Confession. The Confession was meant to approach the Roman Catholic position as closely as possible without surrendering any crucial issue. It summed up the Lutheran position in 21 articles and then listed Catholic abuses that needed to be corrected (for example, prohibiting clergy to marry, and withholding the Eucharistic cup from the laity). The Augsburg Confession still defines the Lutheran branch of Christianity.

As the institutional church developed, politicians gained increasing influence. In 1531, the League of Schmalkalden, an alliance of Protestant princes, was formed to defend the Protestant states against possible Roman Catholic attack. In 1536, the Lutherans and southern Germans reached a concord on the Lord's Supper. (The southern Germans acceded to the Lutheran insistence that Christ's body and blood were received in the Lord's Supper even by the "unworthy," and Lutherans let drop the question whether this also applied to the "godless.") Not incidentally, the agreement also regularized the military alliance between the northern and southern parties.

In 1539, Luther produced his masterwork, *On the Councils and the Church*. In it, he argued the church could not depend upon the fathers and the councils to establish its faith, but only upon Holy Scripture. Councils had no authority to introduce matters of faith or new works, but only to defend the faith and good works found in Scripture.

Meanwhile, in 1535 the papacy had announced a general council to settle the schism, though it took ten years before the council actually convened at Trent. This council was rejected by the Protestant princes for religious and political reasons, although their theologians, including Luther, argued that the princes should attend.

While Luther took part in these political and religious maneuverings, he continued his theological and pastoral labors. In 1534, he and his colleagues completed their German translation of the Bible, which has greatly influenced the development of German language and literature. Luther also lectured on both Old and New Testament books, helping the University of Wittenberg prepare the hundreds of new pastors needed to bring the Reformation to the grass roots.

Ordering Obedience

By his own admission, Luther was an angry man. Anger was his special sin. But when directed against the enemies of God, anger helped him, he said, to write well, to pray, and to preach: "Anger refreshes all my blood, sharpens my mind, and drives away temptations."

Luther knew some were offended by his harshness and anger, but he explained, "I was born to war with fanatics and devils. Thus my books are very stormy and bellicose. I must root out the stumps and trunks, hew away the thorns and briar, fill in the puddles. I am the rough woodsman, who must pioneer and hew a path."

The angry attacks of the older Luther began with the Peasants' War of 1525. In 1524, some German peasants rebelled. Little by little, their uprising spread among their weary and oppressed comrades.

Luther was listed by the peasants as an acceptable arbiter of their demands. He attempted to mediate between the peasants and their rulers.

In his *Admonition to Peace*, Luther blamed the unrest on the rulers, who persecuted the gospel and mistreated their subjects. Many of the peasants' demands were just, he said, and for the sake of peace, the rulers should accommodate them.

On the other hand, Luther warned the peasants they were blaspheming Christ by quoting the gospel to justify their secular demands. In fact, the gospel taught obedience to secular authorities and the humble suffering of injustice.

To Luther's regret, the treatise calmed little. The unrest spread, and events swung Luther over to the side of the princes. In May 1525, he wrote *Against the Robbing and Murdering Horde of Peasants*, in which he urged the princes to "smite, strangle, and stab [the peasants], secretly or openly, for nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do

not strike him, he will strike you and a whole land with you.”

Luther had his way. The peasants were brutally suppressed, and Luther’s advocacy of their violent repression has remained controversial to this day.

Contending over Communion

Next, Luther used his angry pen in a controversy over the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. Other reformers—Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich, John Oecolampadius of Basel, and Martin Bucer of Strasbourg—denied Christ’s physical presence in the bread and wine. They acknowledged Christ was truly present, but this spiritual presence was not tied to the bread and wine; it depended upon the faith of the communicants.

Luther believed Christ’s words “This is my body ... This is my blood ... ” meant the Christian received the body and blood of Christ “in, with, and under” the bread and wine. For Luther, to call Christ’s words into question was to deny the promise of Christ and undercut the Incarnation. The essence of the gospel was at stake.

Luther and the other reformers gathered in Marburg in 1529 to hammer out an agreement. But no agreement was reached. Luther angrily denounced his opponents; he could no more accept their position than deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Fighting for the Faith

In his concluding years, Luther issued several ferocious (and for admirers both then and now, embarrassing) treatises against his opponents. Why were they so fierce?

Luther’s reading of the Bible convinced him that practically from the beginning of the world, there had been a perpetual struggle between the true and false church. What happened to the prophets and apostles could and would happen to the church of his day. Thus, Luther concluded the papacy was the Antichrist. Protestant opponents were “false brethren,” like those who had plagued the true prophets and apostles. The Turks, who threatened Europe from the east, were a clear sign of the end times: they were Gog and the little horn in the Book of Daniel. Jews were a rejected people suffering God’s wrath for rejecting the true Messiah.

Behind all these members of the false church loomed the Devil, the father of lies. Often Luther directed his attacks not at his human opponents but at the Devil, whom he saw as their master. Of course, no language was too harsh when attacking the Devil.

It would be tempting to dismiss these writings as aberrations, as “medieval remnants,” or as the simple products of old age or ill health. But we cannot do this. These “last testaments” accurately express Luther’s views and are integral to his theology. Luther’s poor health and old age may have exacerbated his anger, but these attacks are consistent, in content and passion, with his earlier writings.

Declining in Health

In Luther’s later years, the emaciated monk gave way to the fat doctor. His health, delicate even as a monk, gradually declined. He suffered from constipation, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, dizziness, ringing in his ears, an ulcer on his leg, kidney stones, and heart problems. He also suffered from bouts of depression (battles with the Devil, he called them), and he was often gnawed by the question, “Are you alone wise?”

But his many maladies hardly slowed his productivity. Excluding Bible translations, Luther produced some 360 published works from 1516 to 1530. From 1531 to his death in 1546, he added another 184

publications to this incredible total. At the same time, he lectured regularly at the university, preached for long stretches in the parish church, wrote hundreds of letters, advised his princes in numerous memoranda, and closely followed the events of his day.

In a letter of January 1546, Luther described himself as "old, decrepit, sluggish, inactive, and now one-eyed," hoping for a "well-deserved, rest" but still overloaded with writing, speaking, acting, and doing. A week later, Luther was off on "business" once again, making his third trip to Mansfeld to mediate a dispute between Mansfeld's two rulers. On February 18, on this trip, he died in Eisleben. In his pocket were the beginning pages of a projected manuscript against Roman Catholics. To his last breath, the "rough woodsman" was resisting "Satan's monsters."

In another pocket, though, was found a slip of paper. Perhaps Luther carried it to remind himself of his limitations. The paper's sentiments express the central conviction of Martin Luther's life:

No one can understand Virgil in his Bucolics unless he has been a herdsman for five years.

No one can understand Virgil in his Georgics unless he has been a farmer for five years.

No one can fully understand Cicero in his letters unless he has spent twenty-five years in a great commonwealth.

Let no one think that he has sufficiently tasted Holy Scripture, unless he has governed the churches with the prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles, for a hundred years.

Touch not this divine Aeneid.

Rather, fall on your knees and worship at its footsteps.

We are beggars, that's the truth.

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Martin Luther's Later Years: A Gallery - Family Album

Katherine Von Bora (1499–1552)

Runaway nun who became Luther's "lord"

When Martin Luther heard that the monks joining in his reformation had begun getting married, he rejected the idea for himself: "Good heavens! They won't give me a wife!"

But time would prove otherwise. In 1523, Katherine von Bora and eleven (some say eight) other nuns wanted to escape their cloister, and they wrote to Luther, whose radical new ideas had filtered into their convent. Though liberating nuns was a capital offense, Luther devised an ingenious plan with Leonhard Koppe, who regularly delivered herring to the cloister. On Koppe's next delivery, twelve nuns were smuggled out—inside empty herring barrels. As a man in Wittenberg put it, "A wagon load of vestal virgins has just come to town, all more eager for marriage than for life."

Luther found husbands for most, but he struggled to find a suitable match for Katherine, a feisty redhead in her mid-20s, far beyond the usual age for marriage. He proposed one older man, but she refused him, adding that if Luther himself were willing, she would say yes.

Luther was not interested. "I am not now inclined to take a wife," he wrote to a friend. "Not that I lack the feelings of a man (for I am neither wood nor stone), but my mind is averse to marriage because I daily expect the death decreed to the heretic."

Bolstered by his parents' encouragement to wed, however, Luther married in the summer of 1525, "quickly and secretly." He knew his best friends would not have approved of his choice: "All my best friends exclaimed, 'For heaven's sake, not this one,'" he admitted.

The marriage brought even more scorn from his Catholic opponents, such as Henry VIII, who considered the union "a crime." One pamphlet called Katherine a "poor, fallen woman" who had passed "from the cloistered holy religion into a damnable, shameful life."

But Luther's friend Philipp Melanchthon had "hopes that this state of life may sober him down, so that he will discard the low buffoonery that we have often censured." Kate indeed set about bringing order to Martin's chaotic personal affairs. He had been a bachelor for many years, and he noted, "Before I was married, the bed was not made for a whole year and became foul with sweat."

Martin suffered at various times from gout, insomnia, catarrh, hemorrhoids, constipation, stones, dizziness, and ringing in the ears. So Kate became a master of herbal medicines, poultices, and massage. She brewed her own beer, which also served as a medicine for his insomnia and stones.

Finances were a perpetual worry, in part because Martin was always giving away what few funds and belongings they had. Katherine, whom Martin wryly dubbed "my Lord Kate," often had to take matters into her own hands. Martin once wrote a friend, "I am sending you a vase as a wedding present. P.S. Katie's hid it."

The Luther home usually overflowed with, in one observer's words, "a motley crowd of boys, students, girls, widows, old women, and youngsters. For this reason there is much disturbance in the place." Kate supervised the whole with skill and patience. She also planted the fields, cared for an orchard, harvested a fish pond, looked after the barnyard, and slaughtered the livestock.

Though Martin denied having any "burning" passion for his wife, his writings reflect his twenty-year devotion to her. He once chided himself for giving "more credit to Katherine than to Christ, who has done so much for me." And he declared, "I would not give my Katie for France and Venice together."

Upon Martin's death in 1546, Katie grieved: "For who would not be sad and afflicted at the loss of such a precious man as my dear lord was? He did great things not just for a city or a single land, but for the whole world. Therefore I am truly so deeply grieved that I cannot ... eat or drink, nor can I sleep. And if

I had a principality or an empire and lost it, it would not have been as painful as it is now that the dear Lord God has taken from me this precious and beloved man, and not from me alone, but from the whole world."

Luther's Children **Six "little heathen" from God**

Only four months after Martin and Kate were married, he told a friend: "My Katherine is fulfilling Genesis 1:28." On June 7, 1526, the Luthers were "fruitful," and Johannes, known as Hans, was born. Martin quipped: "Kick, little fellow. That's what the pope did to me, but I got loose."

His parents knew the superstition that if a monk and nun had a child together, it would be a two-headed monster. Instead they received a healthy boy, a source of great happiness. "Hans is cutting his teeth and beginning to make a joyous nuisance of himself," Martin later wrote. "These are the joys of marriage, of which the pope is not worthy."

The next year, 1527, came a daughter, Elizabeth. Her father wrote to a prospective godmother: "Dear Lady, God has produced from me and my wife, Katie, a little heathen. We hope you will be willing to become her spiritual mother and help make her a Christian."

Next came Magdalena (1529), Martin (1531), Paul (1533), and Margaretha (1534). Such a large brood kept both mother and father busy. Luther sometimes had to wash diapers, but he declared defiantly that even if neighbors should snicker at such "unmanly" labor, "Let them laugh. God and the angels are smiling in heaven."

Hans became a lawyer and later a government official. Paul grew up to be a famous doctor. Martin studied theology but never became a pastor, dying young, at age 33. Margaretha married a nobleman.

The Luthers' hearts were broken twice, when they lost Elizabeth at only 8 months and Magdalena at 13 years.

Martin asked Magdalena as she lay upon her deathbed: "Magdalena, my little girl, you would like to stay with your father here, and you would be glad to go to your Father in heaven?"

"Yes, dear Father," she said, "as God wills." Then she died in his arms.

"Beloved little Magdalena," Luther said as she was buried, "you will rise and shine like the stars and sun."

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Changing the Tempo of Worship

For a thousand years of Christian worship, lay people had rarely sung. Then came Luther.

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"Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise," Luther declared. He thus stood in sharp contrast to other reformers of his era.

Ulrich Zwingli, leader of the new church in Zurich, was a trained musician. Yet under his influence, Zurich's magistrates banned all playing of organs, and some of Zwingli's followers went about smashing organs in their churches. Though Zwingli later permitted some vocal music, he rejected instrumental music.

John Calvin, though he considered music a gift of God, saw it as a gift only in the worldly domain. Thus, its role in the church was severely limited. He considered instrumental music "senseless and absurd" and disallowed harmonies. Only unison singing of the Psalms was permitted.

Not so for Martin Luther. "I am not of the opinion," he wrote, "that all arts are to be cast down and destroyed on account of the gospel, as some fanatics protest; on the other hand, I would gladly see all arts, especially music, in the service of him who has given and created them."

Music in congregational worship remains one of Luther's most enduring legacies. "Who doubts," he said, "that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating?"

In fact, Luther's hymns—especially "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"—are the only direct contact many people have with Luther. Modern Lutheran hymnals may contain twenty or more of his hymns, and many non-Lutheran hymnals include several.

What were Luther's beliefs about music? What role did it play in worship? And what did Luther himself contribute musically to the church?

In Praise of Music

By the sixteenth century, musical composition had developed into a high art, and Luther himself was a well-trained musician. He possessed a fine voice, played the lute, and even tried his hand at advanced composition. He was acquainted with the works of the day's leading composers, like Josquin des Prez: "God has preached the gospel through music, as may be seen in Josquin des Prez, all of whose compositions flow freely, gently, and cheerfully, are not forced or cramped by rules, and are like the song of the finch."

Luther observed that only humans have been given the gift of language and the gift of song. This shows we are to "praise God with both word and music." Furthermore, music is a vehicle for proclaiming the Word of God. Luther loved to cite examples like Moses, who praised God in song following the crossing of the Red Sea, and David, who composed many of the psalms.

He said, "I always loved music; whoso has skill in this art, is of a good temperament, fitted for all things.

We must teach music in schools; a schoolmaster ought to have skill in music, or I would not regard him; neither should we ordain young men as preachers, unless they have been well exercised in music."

Conservative Reformer

Luther's high regard for music was matched by a cautious attitude when it came to reforming worship practices. "It is not now, nor has it ever been, in our mind to abolish entirely the whole formal cultus [worship] of God," he once wrote, "but to cleanse that which is in use, which has been vitiated by most abominable additions, and to point out a pious use."

He had no desire simply to throw out the liturgy of the church. The cry for mercy in the Kyrie, the praise of Christ in the Gloria in Excelsis, the witness to the apostolic faith in the Credo, the proclamation of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world in the Agnus Dei—these were vital ingredients for the faithful proclamation of justification by grace alone.

Still, Luther sought reform. One of his concerns was the predominant use of Latin in the service. The common people needed to hear and sing the Word of God in their own tongue—German—so they might be edified. In one of his earliest liturgical writings, Luther said, "Let everything be done so that the Word [of God] may have free course "

Luther also sought to rid the service of every trace of false teaching, which for him centered in the Canon of the Mass, a collection of prayers and responses surrounding Christ's words of institution. Luther rejected the implicit teaching that the Mass was a sacrifice the priest offered to God. For the Canon, he reserved some of his choicest criticism, calling it, "that abominable concoction drawn from everyone's sewer and cesspool."

Luther nonetheless understood that hasty reform would only make matters worse. In his first revised liturgy of 1523 (***An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg***), Luther said, "I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one." Indeed, the six-year gap between the start of the Reformation and his first liturgical reforms demonstrates Luther's caution.

Luther's ***Order of Mass*** was itself a conservative reform effort. Certainly, the Canon of the Mass was out, replaced with instructions that Christ's words of institution be chanted loudly. And all communicants would receive not only the body but also the blood of Christ in the sacrament. Still, though the singing of German hymns was encouraged, Latin remained the principal language.

The shift from Latin to German was also delayed because not many hymns or portions of the liturgy had been translated into German. Luther sounded the call for qualified poets and musicians to produce German hymns and liturgies that faithfully proclaimed God's Word. Near the end of 1523, Luther wrote to Georg Spalatin, pastor to the prince of Saxony, urging him to write German hymns based on the Psalms. His straightforward advice: use the simplest and most common words, preserve the pure teaching of God's Word, and keep the meaning as close to the psalm as possible.

By 1526, enough materials had been produced to enable Luther to prepare a service entirely in German. This ***German Mass*** followed the historic structure of the liturgy. Though Luther inserted German hymns to replace Latin, he insisted that Latin services continue to be offered on occasion. In fact, his ideal would have been to conduct services not only in German and Latin, but also in the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew!

Hymn Writer

Between the publication of his 1523 and 1526 services, Luther began writing hymns. Though he had

expressed doubts about his ability, he was not one to wait around indefinitely. Besides, Thomas Munzer, the radical German reformer, was already producing German services and hymns. In order to protect his people from Munzer's teachings, Luther decided to provide hymns of his own.

During the final months of 1523 and the beginning of 1524, Luther produced more than twenty hymns—more than half his total output. Four of these appeared in January 1524 in the first Lutheran hymnal (known as the "Hymnal of Eight," since it contained eight hymns).

By the summer of 1524, two other hymnals appeared in the neighboring town of Erfurt; each contained about two dozen hymns, eighteen of them by Luther. In 1524, the first hymnal prepared under Luther's auspices also went to press. Unlike modern hymnals, it was actually a choir book with multivoice settings. Of its thirty-eight hymns, twenty-four were by Luther.

Hymnals proliferated so rapidly that many of them published hymns by Luther without permission. Though Luther did not have the modern-day concern of copyright infringement, he didn't want others making "improvements" to his hymns, lest the pure teaching of God's Word be adulterated.

Luther wrote a variety of hymns. His first, more of a ballad, came following the deaths of the first two Lutheran martyrs (in Brussels on July 1, 1523). Luther used this hymn to counter rumors that the two men had recanted before they died. Luther sings that though enemies can spread their lies, "We thank our God therefore, his Word has reappeared."

Luther's other hymns were intended for church services and for devotions at home. In 1524, Luther wrote six of his seven hymns based on psalms. His final psalm hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," was written about three years later, when Luther was undergoing severe trials. This hymn exhibits a much freer style and is only loosely connected to the text of Psalm 46. Yet "A Mighty Fortress" reflects both Luther's struggles and his utter confidence in God: "Though devils all the world should fill, / All eager to devour us, / We tremble not, we fear no ill, / They shall not overpower us."

Luther also wrote hymns for portions of the liturgy and for all the seasons of the church year. To teach the catechism, he wrote two hymns on the Ten Commandments, a hymn for the Apostles' Creed, one for the Lord's Prayer, and others for baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these hymns, Luther demonstrated his ongoing desire to teach the faith, especially to children.

Martin Luther forged a new hymnody and church music that continues to express the message he proclaimed.

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The Weak Man Behind a Mighty Fortress

In intense turmoil, Luther wrote his greatest hymn.

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It was the worst of times—1527—one of the most trying years of Luther's life. It's hard to imagine he had the energy or spirit to compose one of Christendom's most memorable hymns.

On April 22, a dizzy spell forced Luther to stop preaching in the middle of his sermon. For ten years, since publishing his **95 Theses** against the abuse of indulgences, Luther had been buffeted by political and theological storms; at times his life had been in danger. Now he was battling other reformers over the meaning of the Lord's Supper. To Luther, their errors were as great as those of Rome—the very gospel was at stake—and Luther was deeply disturbed and angry. He suffered severe depression.

Then, on July 6, as friends arrived for dinner, Luther felt an intense buzzing in his left ear. He went to lie down, when suddenly he called, "Water ... or I'll die!" He became cold, and he was convinced he had seen his last night. In a loud prayer, he surrendered himself to God's will.

With a doctor's help, Luther partially regained his strength. But this depression and illness overcame him again in August, September and late December. Looking back on one of his bouts, he wrote his friend Melancthon, "I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints [his friends], God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below."

Meanwhile, in August, the plague had erupted in Wittenberg. As fear spread, so did many of the townspeople. But Luther considered it his duty to remain and care for the sick. Even though his wife was pregnant, Luther's house was transformed into a hospital, and he watched many friends die. Then his son became ill. Not until late November did the epidemic abate and the ill begin to recover.

During that horrific year, Luther took time to remember the tenth anniversary of his publication against indulgences, noting the deeper meaning of his trials: "The only comfort against raging Satan is that we have God's Word to save the souls of believers." Sometime that year, Luther expanded that thought into the hymn he is most famous for: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." This verse, translated by Frederick Hedge in 1853, comes from one of more than sixty English versions:

And though this world with devils filled
should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim? We tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure.
One little Word shall fell him.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Reinventing Family Life

For a thousand years, the single, celibate life had been upheld as the Christian ideal. Sex, though grudgingly permitted inside marriage, was not to be enjoyed. As Jerome declared in the fourth century, "Anyone who is too passionate a lover with his own wife is himself an adulterer."

Then came Luther.

Luther elevated marriage and family life; in one scholar's words, he "placed the home at the center of the universe." His teaching and practice were so radical, so long-lasting, some scholars have argued that other than the church "the home was the only sphere of life which the Reformation profoundly affected."

In this excerpt from Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution (Doubleday, 1992), Dr. Steven Ozment introduces Luther's views on women, sex, marriage, divorce, and children. If Luther's ideas seem tame today, it is only because so many people have accepted them.

When we think of Martin Luther, we understandably think first of the monk and theologian who wanted to reform the church, a great man of God seemingly obsessed with sin and the Devil and lost in otherworldly pursuits. But the monk and the theologian who wrote the **95 Theses** was also a husband and the father of six children.

While still a celibate priest, Luther wrote extensively on marriage. He portrayed marriage as an institution as much in crisis as the church and no less in need of reform. He described marriage as "universally in awful disrepute," with peddlers everywhere selling "pagan books that treat of nothing but the depravity of womankind and the unhappiness of the estate of marriage."

Luther was a leading defender of the dignity of women and the goodness of marriage. He is well-known for his jesting comments, "Women have narrow shoulders and wide hips. Therefore they ought to be domestic; their very physique is a sign from their Creator that he intended for them to limit their activity to the home." Luther, however, also deserves to be known as the century's leading critic of Aristotle's depiction of women as botched males. Luther also criticized the church fathers (Jerome, Cyprian, Augustine, and Gregory) for "never having written anything good about marriage."

Chastising Chastity

Like the church fathers, the clergy of the Middle Ages were obsessed with chastity and sexual purity. Augustine portrayed sexual intercourse in Paradise as occurring without lust and emotion. A vernacular catechism from 1494 elaborates the third deadly sin (impurity) under the title, "How the Laity Sins in the Marital Duty." According to the catechism, the laity sin sexually in marriage by, among other things, having sex for the sheer joy of it rather than for the reasons God has commanded, namely, to escape the sin of concupiscence and to populate the earth.

Luther and the first generation of Protestant clerics rejected the tradition of ascetic sexuality in both their theology and their lives. This rejection was as great a revolution in traditional church teaching and

practice as their challenge of the church's dogmas on faith, works, and the sacraments. They literally transferred the accolades Christian tradition heaped on the religious in monasteries and nunneries to marriage and the home. When Jerome, writing in the fourth century, compared virginity, widowhood, and marriage, he gave virginity a numerical value of 100, widowhood, 60, and marriage 30. "Faith, not virginity, fills paradise," the Wittenberg pastor Johannes Bugenhagen retorted in the 1520s.

When Protestant towns and territories dissolved cloisters and nunneries, they believed they were freeing women from sexual repression, cultural deprivation, and domination by male clergy and religious. Among the leaders of the Reformation, it was widely believed that in most cases women had been placed in cloisters against their will.

Luther actively encouraged fathers to remove their daughters from convents. In 1523, for example, he praised Leonhard Koppe, who successfully plotted the escape of his daughter and eleven other nuns, among them Katherine von Bora, Luther's future wife. Koppe regularly delivered herring to the cloister and apparently smuggled the sisters out in empty herring barrels. Luther published a pamphlet account of the deed, comparing Koppe's freeing of the sisters with Moses' deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. Where the Reformation succeeded, new laws prohibited boys and girls from entering cloisters, and monks and nuns wishing to marry received permission immediately to do so.

Luther liked to turn traditional criticisms of women and marriage back onto the clerical critics. He once described marriage, for example, as the only institution where a chaste life could be maintained, and he insisted that "one cannot be unmarried without sin," arguments that baffled the defenders of celibacy. Nothing seemed to Luther to be a more natural and necessary part of life than marriage. "Marriage pervades the whole of nature," he disarmingly pointed out, "for all creatures are divided into male and female; even trees marry; likewise, budding plants; there is also marriage between rocks and stones."

Finding a Companion

Luther had a high regard for the ability of women to shape society by molding its youth and civilizing its men through the institution of marriage. "A companionable woman brings joy to life," he told his table companions one evening. "Women attend to and rear the young, administer the household, and are inclined to compassion; God has made them compassionate by nature so that by their example men may be moved to compassion also."

Once Luther told a visiting Englishman that he should learn German from Luther's wife, Katie, because she was the more fluent, indeed, "the most eloquent speaker of the German language." On more than one public occasion, Luther described Katie as his "lord." "I am an inferior lord," he would say, "she the superior; I am Aaron, she is my Moses." He bore her outspoken criticism of his poor business instincts with respect and good humor. Once he concluded, "If I can survive the wrath of the Devil in my sinful conscience, I can withstand the anger of Katherine von Bora."

Luther also acknowledged his respect for Katie's abilities in his last will and testament. Ignoring the German practice of appointing a male trustee to administer a deceased husband's estate for his widow and children, he directly designated her "heir to everything."

Katie earned such respect from her husband, whom she excelled in virtually all worldly matters. She became a model housewife and an accomplished businesswoman. To increase their income, she remodeled the old cloister in which she and Martin lived so that it would accommodate up to thirty students and guests. She also expanded the cloister garden and repaired the cloister brewery. She became locally famous as a herbalist, and her beer was so renowned that Luther once took samples to the electoral court. He dubbed her "the morning star of Wittenberg," as her day began at 4:00.

Luther obviously meant it when he said "there is no bond on earth so sweet nor any separation so bitter

as that which occurs in a good marriage." His comments on marriage leave the impression of an experienced husband who had given the matter a lot of thought. Take, for example, the following analysis: "In the beginning of a relationship love is glowing hot; it intoxicates and blinds us, and we rush forth and embrace one another." But once married, we tend to grow tired of one another, confirming the saying of Ovid: "We hate the things that are near us, and we love those that are far away."

"A wife is easily taken," he added, "but to have abiding love, that is the challenge. One who finds it in his marriage should thank the Lord God for it. Therefore, approach marriage earnestly and ask God to give you a good, pious girl, with whom you spend your life in mutual love. For sex [alone] establishes nothing in this regard; there must also be agreement in values and character."

According to Luther, both he and Katie had "begged God earnestly for grace and guidance" before they married. They had in fact had a long association with each other in Wittenberg between 1523 and 1525. (This engendered much gossip, as Luther was a constant visitor at the home of Lucas Cranach, where Katie, a renegade nun under Luther's supervision, lodged. According to Catholic pamphleteers, he and Katie "lived together" in Wittenberg before they married.)

Permitting Divorce

Because of the importance attached to companionship in marriage, the reformers endorsed for the first time in Western Christendom genuine divorce and remarriage. Although they viewed marriage as a spiritual bond transcending all other human relationships, a marriage could definitively end this side of eternity and a new one begin for separated spouses. In his earliest writing on such matters, Luther expressed "great wonder" that the church forbade people irreconcilably separated and living apart because of adultery to remarry. "Christ," he pointed out, "permits divorce for adultery and compels none to remain unmarried [thereafter], and St. Paul would rather have us [re]marry than burn [now with lust and later in hell]."

In the medieval church, divorce had meant only the separation of a couple from a common bed and table, not the dissolution of the marriage bond and a right to marry again. So long as both lived, a divorced couple remained man and wife in the eyes of the church and were so treated by law where the church prevailed. In practice, this meant that the turmoil of a failed marriage might never end for a couple.

Protestants, by contrast, generally permitted divorce and remarriage on five grounds: adultery, willful abandonment, chronic impotence, life-threatening hostility, and willful deceit (such as when a presumed virgin is discovered after marriage to have given birth previously to an illegitimate child). Most Protestant writers sympathized with the position of the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer, who declared no proper marriage to exist where affection was not regularly shared and all conversation had ceased.

Protestant marriage courts did not permit divorce and remarriage to occur without first making every effort to reunite an estranged couple and revive the dead marriage. All concerned deemed reconciliation preferable to divorce in every case.

When a table companion once expressed to Luther the belief that adulterers should be summarily executed, Luther rebuked him with a local example of how harsh punishment had done more harm than good to a couple. A pious wife, who had borne her husband four children and had never been unfaithful, one day committed adultery. For the transgression, her enraged husband had her publicly flogged.

Afterward, Luther, Pastor Bugenhagen, and Philipp Melancthon tried to persuade the couple to reconcile. The husband was willing to take her back and let bygones be bygones, but the wife had been so humiliated by the flogging and the resulting scandal that she abandoned her husband and children, wandered away, and was never seen again. "Here," Luther comments, "one should have pursued

reconciliation before punishment." Chronic and willful public adultery, however, was treated harshly and without regret.

Both spiritually and socially, Lutheran theology held the community formed by a husband and a wife to be society's most fundamental. The marriage bond was too important to be allowed to stand when all conversation, affection, and respect between a husband and a wife had irretrievably broken down. The same bond was also too important to allow a marriage to die without a fight to save it.

Raising Children

Luther had six children (Hans, Elizabeth, Magdalene, Martin, Paul, and Margaretha), whom he subjected to high moral standards and strict discipline. "My greatest wish," he once confided at table, "is that none of my children become lawyers," a sentiment that expressed his association of lawyers, along with Jews and papists, with a legalistic frame of mind that knew nothing of charity toward others or salvation by faith.

Luther could be a stern father. Once he punished Hans, his eldest, for an unspecified but serious moral lapse by forbidding him to be in his father's presence for three days. At the end of this period, he required the boy to write a letter begging his father's forgiveness, to which letter Luther replied that he would sooner have his son dead than ill-bred.

Nevertheless, Luther urged parents always to discipline their children with forethought and caution, taking into account the unique personality of each. Once he explained his entrance into the monastery as a cowardly act that had resulted from his parents' too strict discipline, which he believed had rendered him timid. He did not think the discipline wrong or the punishment undeserved. But he accused his parents of not taking sufficiently into consideration the effect of their punishment on him.

If a parent's reaction to the death of a child may be taken as a commentary on parental character, Luther was a deeply loving father. When Elizabeth died at 8 months, he commented "I so lamented her death that I was exquisitely sick, my heart rendered soft and weak; never had I thought that a father's heart could be so broken for his children's sake." Magdalene's death in 1542 at age 13 overwhelmed him. He wrote to his friend Justus Jonas, pointing out that while he and his wife should be thanking God that Magdalene was now "free of the flesh and the Devil," neither could do so. "The force of our natural love is so great that we are unable to do this without crying and grieving in our hearts ... [and] experiencing death ourselves ... The features, the words, and the movement of our living and dying daughter, who was so very obedient and respectful, remain engraved in our hearts; even the death of Christ ... is unable to take all this away as it should. You, therefore, please give thanks to God in our stead."

Returning home from her funeral, he tried to console himself by declaring that he had always been more merciful to girls than to boys, because girls needed more care and protection than boys, and that he now gladly gave Magdalene to God because he knew that God would provide her all the care and protection she needed, adding pitiably: "but in my human heart, I would gladly have kept her here with me."

The theologian and man of faith was also a husband and a father who taught that "no power on earth is so noble and so great as that of parents." The success of his Reformation was, arguably, most unambiguous in the domestic sphere.

A Monk Marries

Luther's wit and wisdom about his new estate

- There's a lot to get used to in the first year of marriage. One wakes up in the morning and finds a pair of pigtales on the pillow that were not there before.
- If I should ever marry again, I would hew myself an obedient wife out of stone.
- I have been very happy in my marriage, thank God. I have a faithful wife, according to Solomon: "The heart of a her husband doth safely trust in here" (Prov. 31:11). She spoils nothing for me.
- When one looks back upon it, marriage isn't so bad as when one looks forward to it.
- Married folk are not to act as they now usually do. The men are almost lions in their homes, hard toward their wives and servants. The women, too, everywhere want to domineer and have their husbands as servants.
- Of course, the Christian should love his wife. He is supposed to love his neighbor, and since his wife is his nearest neighbor, she should be his deepest love.
- When that wise harlot, natural reason, looks at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Ah, should I rock the baby, wash the diapers, make the bed, smell foul odors, watch through the night, wait upon the bawling youngster and heal its infected sores, then take care of the wife, support her by working, tend to this, tend to that, do this, do that, suffer this, suffer that, and put up with whatever additional displeasure and trouble married life brings? Should I be so imprisoned?"
- The Devil cannot bear to see married people agree well with each other.
- It is impossible to keep peace between man and woman in family life if they do not condone and overlook each other's faults but watch everything to the smallest point. For who does not at times offend?
- Some marriages were motivated by mere lust, but mere lust is felt even by fleas and lice. Love begins when we wish to serve others.
- The purpose of marriage is not pleasure and ease but the procreation and education of children and the support of a family ... People who do not like children are swine, dunces, and blockheads, not worthy to be called men and women, because they despise the blessing of God, the Creator and Author of marriage.
- To have peace and love in a marriage is a gift that is next to the knowledge of the gospel.
- In domestic affairs I defer to Katie. Otherwise, I am led by the Holy Ghost.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Powerful Preaching

A sample of how Luther could bring Bible characters to life

Martin Luther preached an estimated 4,000 sermons (some 2,300 have survived). He also lectured and wrote commentaries on numerous books of the Bible. As historian Roland Bainton put it, "He was always teaching, whether in the classroom or the pulpit; and he was always preaching, whether in the pulpit or the classrooms." Here, in Bainton's translation, is Luther's exposition of Genesis 22—the ultimate test of Abraham's faith.

"I Am Afraid Every Time I have to preach," Luther confessed. Though he preached often—once he gave 195 sermons in just 145 days—for him, preaching never ceased to be an awesome endeavor before a holy God. One scholar has called Luther's preaching "the best and principal work of his variously busy life."

Abraham was told by God that he must sacrifice the son of his old age by a miracle, the seed through whom he was to become the father of kings and of a great nation. Abraham turned pale. Not only would he lose his son, but God appeared to be a liar. He had said, "In Isaac shall be thy seed," but now he said, "Kill Isaac." Who would not hate a God so cruel and contradictory?

How Abraham longed to talk it over with someone! Could he not tell Sarah? But he well knew that if he mentioned it to anyone, he would be dissuaded and prevented from carrying out the behest.

The spot designated for the sacrifice, Mount Moriah, was some distance away; "and Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering." Abraham did not leave the saddling of the ass to others. He himself laid on the beast the wood for the burnt offering. He was thinking all the time that these logs would consume his son, his hope of seed. With these very sticks that he was picking up the boy would be burned.

In such a terrible case should he not take time to think it over? Could he not tell Sarah? With what inner tears he suffered! He girt the ass and was so absorbed he scarcely knew what he was doing.

He took two servants and Isaac his son. In that moment everything died in him; Sarah, his family, his home, Isaac. This is what it is to sit in sackcloth and ashes. If he had known that this was only a trial, he would not have been tried. Such is the nature of our trials that while they last we cannot see to the end.

"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw the place afar off." What a battle he had endured in those three days! There Abraham left the servants and the ass, and he laid the wood upon Isaac and himself took the torch and sacrificial knife. All the time he was thinking, "Isaac, if you knew, if your mother knew, that you are to be sacrificed."

"And they went both of them together." The whole world does not know what here took place. They two walked together. Who? The father and the dearest son—the one not knowing what was in store but ready to obey, the other certain that he must leave his son in ashes

Then said Isaac, "My father." And he said, "Yes, my son." And Isaac said, "Father, here is the fire and here the wood, but where is the lamb?" He called him father and was solicitous lest he had overlooked

something, and Abraham said, "God will himself provide a lamb, my son."

When they were come to the mount, Abraham built the altar and laid on the wood, and then he was forced to tell Isaac. The boy was stupefied. He must have protested, "Have you forgotten: I am the son of Sarah by a miracle in her old age, that I was promised and that through me you are to be the father of a great nation?" And Abraham must have answered that God would fulfill his promise even out of ashes.

Then Abraham bound him and laid him upon the wood. The father raised the knife. The boy bared his throat. If God had slept an instant, the lad would have been dead. I could not have watched. I am not able in my thoughts to follow. The lad was as a sheep for the slaughter. Never in history was there such obedience, save only in Christ. But God was watching, and all the angels. The father raised his knife; the boy did not wince. The angel cried, "Abraham, Abraham!"

See how divine majesty is at hand in the hour of death. We say, "In the midst of life we die." God answers, "Nay, in the midst of death we live."

Historian Bainton adds: "Luther once read this story for family devotions. When he had finished, Katie said, 'I do not believe it. God would not have treated his son like that.' "

" 'But, Katie,' answered Luther, 'he did.' "

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Martin Luther's Later Years: Christian History Timeline

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Martin Luther

1483 Born at Eisleben, November 10

1484 Parents, Hans and Margaretha Luder, move family to Mansfeld, where Hans works in copper mines

1492 Attends school in Mansfeld

1497 Attends school in Magdeburg

1498 Attends school in Eisenach

1501 Enters University of Erfurt

1502 Receives B.A. at Erfurt

1505 Earns M.A. at Erfurt; begins law studies; in thunderstorm on July 2, vows to become a monk; enters Order of Augustinian Hermits

1507 Ordained and celebrates first Mass

1509 Becomes bachelor of Bible

1510 Visits Rome

1511 Transferred to Augustinian house at Wittenberg

1512 Becomes doctor of theology

1513 Begins lecturing on *The Psalms*

1515 Lectures on *Romans*; appointed district vicar over ten monasteries

1516 Begins lecturing on *Galatians*

1517 Begins lecturing on *Hebrews*; on October 31, posts "**95 Theses**" on indulgences

1518 At meeting of Augustinians in Heidelberg, defends his theology; in October, appears before Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg, but refuses to recant; in December, Frederick the Wise protects Luther from being handed over to Rome.

- 1519** Understands the "righteousness of God" as "passive righteousness with which God justifies us by faith"; in July, debates Professor John Eck at Leipzig and denies supreme authority of popes and councils
- 1520** Papal bull "***Exsurge Domine***" gives Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated; writes 3 seminal documents: ***To the Christian Nobility***, ***On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church***, and ***The Freedom of a Christian***; burns papal bull and canon law
- 1521** Excommunicated by the papal bull ***Decet Romanum Pontificem***; at Diet of Worms in April, he refuses to recant writings, and edict (in May) condemns him as heretic and outlaw; he is "kidnapped" and hidden at Wartburg Castle; begins translating the New Testament
- 1522** In March, comes out of hiding and returns to Wittenberg
- 1523** Writes ***On Temporal Authority***
- 1524** Debates Karlstadt on the Lord's Supper; Luther's former superior, Staupitz, dies
- 1525** Writes ***Against the Heavenly Prophets***; writes ***Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes***, criticizing the Peasants' Revolt; marries Katherine von Bora; writes ***Bondage of the Will*** (against Erasmus).
- 1526** Writes ***German Mass***; becomes a father (son Hans)
- 1527** Fights sickness and intense depression; writes "A Mighty Fortress"; daughter Elizabeth born; writes against Zwingli's views on the Lord's Supper
- 1528** Writes ***Great Confession Concerning Christ's Supper***; grieves over Elizabeth's death; visits churches
- 1529** Attends Marburg Colloquy with Zwingli, but no agreement reached on the Lord's Supper; publishes ***Large Catechism*** and ***Small Catechism***; daughter Magdalena born
- 1530** Luther's Father, Hans, dies; Luther, as outlaw, cannot attend the Diet of Augsburg, held in attempt to end religious division in the empire; Melancthon presents Augsburg Confession, a statement of Lutheran beliefs
- 1531** Begins lecturing on ***Galatians***; son Martin born; mother, Margaretha, dies
- 1532** Writes ***On Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers***; is given the Augustinian cloister in Wittenberg for his home
- 1533** Son Paul born
- 1534** Publishes German Bible; daughter Margaret born
- 1536** Agrees to Wittenberg Concord on the Lord's Supper, in attempt to resolve differences with other reformers, but Zwinglians do not accept it
- 1537** Draws up Schmalkaldic Articles as his "theological last will and testament"
- 1538** Writes against the Jews in ***Against the Sabbatarians***

1539 Writes *On the Councils and the Church*

1541 Writes *Admonition to Prayer against the Turks*

1542 Drafts his will; daughter Magdalena dies

1543 Writes *On the Jews and Their Lies*

1544 Writes against Schwenckfeld's interpretation of the Lord's Supper

1545 Writes *Against the Papacy at Rome, an Institution of the Devil*

1546 Dies in Eisleben, February 18

1552 Katherine von Bora dies

Other Reformers

1469 (probably) Erasmus born

1484 Ulrich Zwingli born

1491 Henry VIII born

1496 Menno Simons born

1497 Melancthon born

1498 Savonarola burned at the stake in Florence

1505 John Knox born

1509 John Calvin born; Henry VIII of England begins reign and marries Catherine of Aragon

1516 Erasmus publishes Greek New Testament

1518 Melancthon becomes professor of Greek at Wittenburg

1519 Zwingli begins New Testament sermons; Swiss reformation is born

1521 Religious unrest in Wittenberg: private masses abolished, Karlstadt serves Communion in both elements, religious statues destroyed; Melancthon writes *Loci Communes*; Pope titles Henry VIII "Defender of the Faith" for attacking Luther's views of the sacraments; "Zwickau prophets," early Anabaptists, arrive in Wittenberg

1522 Zwingli's first Reformation debates; Ignatius Loyola begins work on *Spiritual Exercises*

1523 First two Reformation martyrs burned at the stake in Belgium

1524 Erasmus's ***On Freedom of the Will***

1525 Anabaptist movement begins in Zurich, spreads to Germany

1526 Reformation spreads to Sweden and Denmark

1527 First Protestant university (Marburg) founded

1528 Bern, Switzerland, becomes Protestant

1529 Name ***Protestant*** first used

1531 Zwingli killed in battle

1534 Henry VIII becomes supreme head of Church of England

1535 Anabaptist uprising at Münster put down, and Anabaptists executed

1536 First edition of Calvin's ***Institutes***; William Tyndale, Bible translator, burned at stake; Denmark and Norway become Lutheran; Erasmus dies

1538 Calvin expelled from Geneva

1540 Society of Jesus (Jesuits) formed

1541 Calvin returns to Geneva from exile

1547 Henry VIII dies

World Events

1452 Leonardo da Vinci born

1453 Turks capture Constantinople

1455 Gutenberg completes printing the Bible using movable type

1469 Lorenzo de' Medici rules Florence;
Ferdinand and Isabella marry

1470 Portuguese explorers discover Gold Coast of Africa

1471 Thomas á Kempis, author of ***The Imitation of Christ***, dies

1473 Copernicus born

1478 Spanish Inquisition set up

1485 Treaty of Leipzig divides Saxony

1492 Spanish forces conquer city of Granada, expelling Islamic Moors from Iberian peninsula; Columbus's first voyage to the Americas

1493 The pope divides the New World between Spain and Portugal

1495 Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper"

1497 John Cabot reaches coast of Newfoundland; Vasco de Gama discovers west coast of India

1498 Albrecht Durer paints *Apocalypse*

1499 Swiss gain independence

1500 Future Charles V born

1502 Frederick, elector of Saxony, founds Wittenberg University

1506 Pope Julius orders work on St. Peter's in Rome; Da Vinci's "*Mona Lisa*"

1508 Michelangelo begins painting Sistine Chapel ceiling

1509 Erasmus writes *In Praise of Folly*

1510 First shipload of African slaves arrives in Hispaniola (Haiti)

1513 Leo X (Giovanni Medici) pope; Balboa discovers the Pacific Ocean

1514 Albert of Brandenburg becomes elector and archbishop of Mainz

1516 Thomas More publishes *Utopia*; Concordat of Bologna assures French Catholic autonomy

1517 Tetzl hired by Albert of Mainz to sell indulgences

1519 Charles I of Spain is elected Holy Roman Emperor Charles V; Cortes enters Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan

1520 Suleiman I becomes sultan of the Ottoman Empire (Turks)

1521 Pope Leo X dies, succeeded by Hadrian VI

1522 Magellan's expedition completes circumnavigation of globe; German knights organize against the emperor; France attacks Charles V; Diet of Nuremberg defers action on Edict of Worms

1523 Clement VII becomes pope

1524 Peasant Wars begin; Diet of Nuremberg fails to enforce Edict of Worms condemning Luther

1525 Charles V defeats Francis I; Elector Frederick the Wise dies; France makes pact with Suleiman I

- 1526** League of Torgau formed; First Diet of Speyer postpones enforcement of Edict of Worms
- 1527** Imperial troops sack Rome; plague strikes Wittenberg
- 1529** Second Diet of Speyer decides to enforce Edict of Worms; Turks lay siege to Vienna
- 1531** Schmalkaldic League, a body of German Protestant groups, forms in self-defense against Charles V
- 1532** Elector John the Steadfast dies; Diet of Regensburg and Peace of Nuremberg guarantee religious toleration in face of Turkish threat
- 1533** Pizarro conquers Peru; Ivan "the Terrible" (age 3) ascends Russian throne
- 1534** Paul III becomes pope
- 1535** Emperor forms Catholic Defense League; France makes pact with Suleiman I; Thomas More beheaded for opposing Henry VIII
- 1539** Catholic Duke George of Saxony dies;
Frankfurt Truce declared between Catholic and Protestant territories
- 1540** Philip of Hesse, German prince, enters bigamous marriage with consent of Luther; conferences at Hagenau and Worms fail to reconcile Protestants and Catholics
- 1541** At Conference of Regensburg, Melanchthon and Bucer reach agreement with Catholics on most doctrines, but Luther and Rome reject their work; Karlstadt dies
- 1543** Copernicus writes that earth revolves around sun; John Eck dies
- 1545** Ferdinand I and Suleiman I agree to truce; Council of Trent, for reform of Catholic Church, opens
- 1555** Peace of Augsburg allows rulers to determine religion of their region

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Christianity for Common Folk

Nearly 500 years after Martin Luther wrote his Small Catechism, Lutherans continue to study and memorize it, because it expresses the gospel so simply and clearly. An excerpt:

The deplorable condition in which I found religious affairs during a recent visitation of the congregations has impelled me to publish this Catechism, or statement of the Christian doctrine, in this brief and simple form.

Alas! what misery I beheld! The common folk, especially those who live in the villages, seem to have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are ignorant and incompetent teachers. And, nevertheless, they are all supposed to be Christians; they have been baptized and receive the Lord's Supper. Yet they cannot recite the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live as if they were mere brutes, and now that the gospel has come to them, they grossly abuse their Christian liberty.

[Luther then explains each phrase of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. For example:]

The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

What does this mean? Answer: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

What does this mean? Answer: We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, conjure, lie, or deceive by his name, but call upon him in every time of need, and worship him with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving....

The Apostles' Creed

The First Article of Creation: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given and still preserves to me my body and soul, my eyes and ears, and all my members, my reason and all the power of my soul, together with food and raiment, home and family, and all my property; that he daily provides abundantly for all the needs of my life, protects me from all danger, and guards and keeps me from all evil; and that he does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true....

The Lord's Prayer

The Fourth Petition: Give us this day our daily bread.

What does this mean? Answer: God indeed gives daily bread to all men, even to the wicked, without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that he would lead us to acknowledge our daily bread as his gift, and to receive it with thanksgiving.

What is meant by daily bread? Answer: Everything that is required to satisfy our bodily needs; such as food and raiment, house and home, fields and flocks, money and goods; pious parents, children, and servants; godly and faithful rulers, good government; seasonable weather, peace and health; order and honor; true friends, good neighbors, and the like.

[Luther then explains baptism and the Lord's Supper. He concludes with prayer for evening:]

I give thanks unto thee, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ thy dear Son, that thou hast this day so graciously protected me, and I beseech thee to forgive me all my sins, and the wrong which I have done, and by thy great mercy defend me from all the perils and dangers of this night. Into thy hands I commend my body and soul, and all that is mine. Let thy holy angel have charge concerning me, that the wicked one have no power over me. Amen. **And then lie down in peace and sleep.**

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Martin Luther's Later Years: Recommended Resources

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Scholars have given the mature Luther more attention in recent years. The following books help trace Luther's actions and thoughts from the time he emerged from Wartburg Castle in 1522 until his death in 1546.

- Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, 1975); *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546* (Cornell, 1983). Two of the finest books about the later Luther. Interestingly written and based solidly on the sources.
- Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532- 1546* translated by James L. Schaaf (Fortress, 1993). The third and final volume of what will likely become the standard multi-volume biography of Luther in English.
- H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Doubleday, 1980; Princeton, 1983). A colorful, well-written biography of the mature and aging reformer.
- Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* and *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, both translated by Robert C. Schultz (Fortress; 1966, 1972). Althaus systematically covers Luther's doctrinal and social teachings.
- Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought*, translated by Martin H. Bertram (Concordia, 1958). The book presents Luther's teachings on a wide variety of issues.
- Walter G. Tillmans, *The World and Men around Luther* (Augsburg, 1959). Interesting thumbnail sketches of the people, both friends and foes, who interacted with Luther.
- Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Interpreters of Luther* (Fortress, 1968). Eleven essays on how Luther has been interpreted from the sixteenth century through the twentieth century.

By Luther

Luther wrote some 60,000 pages, much of it later in life. For the range of those writings, see the largest English collection—*Luther's Works: The American Edition*, 55 vols. (Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.). Helpful short anthologies include *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, edited by John Dillenberger (Anchor, 1961) and *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy F. Lull (Augsburg Fortress, 1989). Here are several key writings from the mature Luther.

- *Eight Sermons at Wittenberg* [Amer. Ed. 51, (67) 70–100]. Luther preached these in 1522 to restore peace and order following Karlstadt's excesses.
- *Seven Penitential Psalms* [AE 14, (137) 139–205] and *The Four Psalms of Comfort* [AE 14, (207) 209–277] express the great reformer's pastoral concerns.

- ***The Bondage of the Will*** [AE 33, (3) 15–295] stands as one of Luther’s most influential writings. He responds to Erasmus and declares that humans are saved not by their own merit or works but solely by the unmerited grace of God.

- Luther wrote three main treatises on the Peasants’ Revolt: ***Admonition to Peace*** [AE 46, (3) 17–43], ***Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*** [AE 46 (45) 49–55], and ***An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants*** [AE 46, (57) 63–85].

- ***In That These Words of Christ “This Is My Body, ” Etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics*** [AE 37, (3) 13–147], Luther deals with the position of Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bucer, and others on the Lord’s Supper.

- Two of Luther’s most distinctive commentaries on the Bible are ***Lectures on Galatians*** (1535) [AE 26, (1) 3–461; 27, (1) 3–149] and ***Lectures on Genesis*** [AK, vols.1–8]. Written during the last ten years of his life, these commentaries contain Luther’s final statements of his theology.

- ***On the Councils and the Church*** [AE 41, (3) 9–178] presents what has been called Luther’s “final judgment concerning the medieval church as well as the first broad foundation for a new doctrine of the church.”

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

The Unrefined Reformer

By his own admission, Martin Luther was unkind to those who opposed his reforms. "I cannot deny that I am more vehement than I should be...." he wrote. "But they assail me and God's Word so atrociously and criminally that ... these monsters are carrying me beyond the bounds of moderation."

Thus, Luther demanded that "We should take him—the pope, the cardinals, and whatever riffraff belongs to His Idolatrous and Papal Holiness—and (as blasphemers) tear out their tongues from the back, and nail them on the gallows." On another occasion, he asked, "Why should we hesitate to use arms against these teachers of perdition, the cardinals, popes, and the whole Roman Sodom, which corrupts the Church of God without end, and wash our hands in their blood?"

Luther also admitted he could be rude. He considered foul language an appropriate weapon to combat evil. For example, he dismissed the Jewish rabbis' interpretations of Scripture as "Jewish piss and sh—."

By anyone's standards, Luther was bull-headed, coarse-tongued, and intemperate, at times. In many ways, Luther behaved like other people of his time. But his speech and actions were always more intense. No matter how high or low the cause, he seemed to rise or sink to any occasion. How can we understand this person who has been called "a man of grand contradictions"?

Fighting Flesh, World, and Devil

Luther's life can be read like an open book, for he spoke freely and unguardedly about himself and others.

Luther's view of himself was shaped by his life as a monk, priest, and professor; by his environment and by historical events; and also by his physical problems. As a monk he developed digestive difficulties, probably from the ascetic lifestyle of the rigorous Augustinian Hermits. He suffered from kidney and gall stone attacks, for which there were no effective treatments, not even aspirin. He complained of headaches, insomnia, and what he called "night wars"—nightmares, anxiety attacks, and **Anfechtung**, meaning "inner turmoil" or "temptation." An open sore on one of his legs refused to heal, and physicians decided to drain the wound with an arrangement of bandages, uncomfortable and quite visible. At age 62, Luther was nearly blind in one eye, hard of hearing, and subject to attacks of angina pectoris, from which he died in 1546.

Luther took all of this as the Devil's way of plaguing him and tempting him to give up. The Devil made a good theologian out of him, he mused. But, as he grew older, Luther also became convinced his suffering was increasing because he lived near the end of the world. He told his wife, Katie, in the winter of 1542–43, "I am fed up with the world, and it is fed up with me.... I am like a ripe stool, and the world is like a gigantic anus, and so we're about to let go of each other."

By 1545, Wittenberg had become for him like Sodom. Under the influence of Italian Renaissance fashion, women were wearing dresses that revealed more of their bodies. Dances had become "immoral." After visiting friends outside Wittenberg, Luther decided not to return home to such a secular city. He wrote to Katie to sell all their possessions and join him. It took the Saxon court and physicians much effort to change his mind. When he finally returned, Luther was an angry old man still fuming about the changes occurring.

As he grew older, Luther became increasingly convinced that Satan had rallied many forces against him and the gospel's cause. Papists, Turks, other Protestants (whom he called **Schwaermer** because they were like swarming bees), and Jews were to him Satan's agents attacking the gospel he had rediscovered.

Luther refused to negotiate with Rome, which to him was the headquarters of the Antichrist. The Turks were monotheists seeking to destroy followers of the true Trinitarian God. Radical Protestants had given up externals like the sacraments, in order to bypass God's incarnation in Jesus Christ and claim an internal experience of the Holy Spirit. Jews were particularly offensive, because they refused to accept Christ, so Luther attacked them. In 1543, he called for Jews to be expelled from Christendom.

With such evil all around, for Luther there was only one course of action one modeled by Christ himself. "What do you think of Christ?" he asked rhetorically of those who thought he abused his opponents. "Was he abusive when he called the Jews an adulterous and perverse generation, an offspring of vipers, hypocrites, and children of the Devil?... The truth, which one is conscious of possessing, cannot be patient against its obstinate and intractable enemies."

On the Psychiatrist's Couch

Because of these intense conflicts, Martin Luther has been psychoanalyzed ever since Sigmund Freud introduced psychoanalysis. Roman Catholic scholar Hartmann Grisar used Freudian psychology to portray Luther as a monk obsessed with the lust of the flesh. In his treatment, Luther became a pathological, manic-depressive personality. Danish psychiatrist Paul J. Reiter concluded that Luther suffered from a disturbed childhood, a peculiar environment, and workaholicism.

The most popular psycho-historical study is Erik H. Erikson's "Young Man Luther" (1958). Erikson portrayed Luther as a severely mentally handicapped young man, stemming from brutal treatment by his teachers and a love/hate relationship with his parents. According to Erikson, Luther mastered his identity crisis because he trusted totally in God the Father rather than in his biological father. For Erikson, Luther became a good example of adolescent psychological development who had revolted against mother, against father, and against the church.

But it is difficult, if not impossible, to psychoanalyze the dead, and Erikson's analysis suffers from a serious lack of historical evidence. Of Luther's more than 5,000 "table talks," only three hint at problems with parents or bad treatment from teachers. Luther corresponded often with his parents, visited them frequently, and referred to them positively.

God's Jester

The tension between image and reality has always been great in Luther research, and the real Luther may never stand up. But an image Luther gave himself—God's court jester—may help us understand the complexities of his thoughts, words, and deeds.

The court jester was a familiar figure in medieval Germany. Dressed outrageously, often vulgar in speech, he would ride a donkey into the court and analyze burning political situations. The jester walked a fine line between satire and prophecy, just as the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah or Ezekiel sometimes did. Listeners never knew whether court jesters were wise or insane.

In 1520, Luther wrote that he had been destined to appear in the guise of a monk, ringing his bells and tapping his shoes. The melody originated in the mind of God and was heard through Holy Scripture and the best of Christian tradition. Not everyone, he said, would be able to understand what the jester said or did, for it had to be ambiguous, often offensive.

Luther was certainly complex, contradictory, ambiguous, and often offensive. He chided his Catholic opponents, "How often must I cry out to you coarse, stupid papists to quote Scripture sometime? Scripture! Scripture! Scripture! Do you not hear, you deaf goat and coarse ass?" He refused to shake hands with Ulrich Zwingli, because the Swiss reformer disagreed with his interpretation of the Eucharist. On another occasion, when he was being publicly criticized, Luther declared, "I am a tough Saxon, a peasant. I've grown a thick skin for this kind of —." But for Luther, "to curse for the sake of God's Word is just."

Luther's words and actions drew heated response. Pope Leo X called him "the boar in the vineyard" for destroying the Roman church. Cocclaeus, a Dominican monk and Luther's first biographer, called him the incarnation of Satan, not fit to be tolerated alive. In 1521, the Edict of Worms declared that the Wittenberg professor was a seditious perverter of society. Swiss Protestants asserted Luther was as bad as a swineherd because of how he condemned the Jews. Luther admitted he had "sharply inveighed against ungodly doctrines," but "What good does salt do if it does not bite? What good does the edge of the sword do if it does not cut?"

The Reformer did sometimes regret his outbursts. He explained to his wife, Katie: "Wrath just won't turn me loose. Why, I sometimes rage about a piddling thing not worthy of mention. Whoever crosses my path has to suffer for it—I won't say a kind word to anyone. Isn't that a shameful thing?"

And Luther could laugh at himself. Luther was often relaxed, cheerful, and witty when everyone around him was desperate. When his Wittenberg congregation admired him for his bold stance against pope and emperor in 1521, he told them that it was while he and Philipp Melanchthon were having a beer that the Word of God reformed the church. Another time Luther explained of a treatise, "I wrote it after dining—but a Christian can speak better inebriated than a papist can sober."

Still, Martin Luther's intention was merely to be a doctor of Holy Scripture, a biblical theologian who, like St. Paul, fulfilled his oath in the guise of a fool (1 Cor. 3:18). As one of God's jesters at the court of history, Luther made quite an impression. Indeed, he changed the course of history. He did so because he renewed faith in the gracious God who reserves final judgment—including final judgment of Luther.

Was Luther Anti-Semitic?

"Set fire to their synagogues or schools," Martin Luther recommended in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Jewish houses should "be razed and destroyed," and Jewish "prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, [should] be taken from them." In addition, "their rabbis [should] be forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb." Still, this wasn't enough.

Luther also urged that "safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews," and that "all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them." What Jews *could* do was to have "a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade" put into their hands so "young, strong Jews and Jewesses" could "earn their bread in the sweat of their brow."

These fierce comments have puzzled and embarrassed Christians who otherwise admire the Reformer. And they have led to charges that Luther was "one of the 'church fathers' of anti-Semitism." More seriously, Luther's attacks have been seen as paving the way for Hitler.

Was Luther anti-Semitic? How should we understand his words?

"Receive Jews Cordially"

In 1523, Luther accused Catholics of being unfair to Jews and treating them "as if they were dogs," thus making it difficult for Jews to convert. "I would request and advise that one deal gently with them [the Jews]," he wrote. "... If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either."

Why God Deserted Them

Fifteen years later, however, rumors of Jewish efforts to convert Christians upset him, and he wrote a treatise venting his frustration. In it, Luther concluded that converting Jews had become hopeless.

It seemed to him that God had deserted the Jews, leaving them to wander homeless without a land or temple of their own. And if this was God's attitude, then one might with good conscience ignore the Jews. Why would God desert his own people if he did not despair of them? He had rejected them and turned his attention to the "new Israel," the Christian church. Luther thus accepted the existing notion that the promise given to Jews was now transferred to Christians.

Measures of "Sharp Mercy"

By 1543, Luther was ready to go one step further. He had become utterly frustrated by the Jews' refusal to convert to Christianity: "A Jewish heart is as hard as a stick, as a stone, as iron, as a devil."

Luther did not, however, hold Jews responsible for the death of Christ. As he wrote in a hymn, "We dare not blame ... the band of Jews; ours is the shame." And he felt that at least a few Jews might be won for Christ.

Yet rabbinic teaching was madness and blindness that blasphemed Christ, Mary, and the Holy Trinity. Luther could not "have any fellowship or patience with obstinate [Jewish] blasphemers and those who defame this dear Savior." Blasphemy was a civil crime. To allow it to continue, Luther feared, meant Christians would share in the guilt for it.

Thus, Luther now proposed seven measures of "sharp mercy" that German princes could take against Jews: (1) burn their schools and synagogues; (2) transfer Jews to community settlements; (3) confiscate all Jewish literature, which was blasphemous; (4) prohibit rabbis to teach, on pain of death; (5) deny Jews safe-conduct, so as to prevent the spread of Judaism; (6) appropriate their wealth and use it to support converts and to prevent the lewd practice of usury; (7) assign Jews to manual labor as a form of penance.

Luther advised clergy, their congregations, and all government officials to help carry out these measures. Since most Jews had been expelled from Germany before 1536, Luther's counsel was implemented by few officials. Yet a harsh anti-Jewish measure in 1543 mentioned Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

Both Luther's friends and his foes criticized him for proposing these measures. His best friends begged him to stop his anti-Jewish raving, but Luther continued his attacks in other treatises. He repeated as true the worst anti-Semitic charges from medieval literature. Jews killed Christian babies; they murdered Christ over and over again by stabbing Eucharistic hosts; they poisoned wells.

Luther now thought what he had accused Catholics of thinking in 1523: Jews were dogs. "We are at fault for not slaying them," he fumed shortly before his death.

Violating His Own Method

As a biblical theologian, Martin Luther struggled with the relationship between Jewish (Old Testament) and Christian (New Testament) Scriptures—a struggle not yet resolved. But when Luther concluded that God had rejected the people of Israel, he violated his own theological method.

The Wittenberg professor had taught his students that one cannot and should not speculate about the will of the hidden God, for what God has not revealed cannot be known. A student once asked Luther, "What did God do before he created the world?" Luther responded, "He created hell for people who ask this question." Yet when the question was "Why do Jews refuse to convert to Christianity?" Luther's response was, "Because God hardened their hearts and deserted them because of their stubbornness."

Luther was not an anti-Semite in the racist sense. His arguments against Jews were theological, not biological. Not until a French cultural anthropologist in the nineteenth century held that humankind consisted of "Semites" and "Aryans," were Semites considered inferior.

Alfonse de Gobineau's views were quickly adopted by European intellectuals and politicians, and Jews became the scapegoats of a snobbish colonialist society in England, France, and Germany. The rest is history—including the Jewish holocaust perpetrated by Adolf Hitler and his regime. National Socialists used Luther to support their racist anti-Semitism, calling him a genuine German who had hated non-Nordic races.

Luther was but a frustrated biblical scholar who fell victim to what his friend Philipp Melancthon called the "rabies of theologians": drawing conclusions based on speculations about the hidden will of God. Luther erred because he presumed to know God's will.

Allies or Enemies?

As the Protestant reformers began to construct their new order, it became apparent there were significant differences among them.

Martin Luther, founder of the new order, soon saw, in addition to his papal opponents on his right, a serious threat on his left: "false brethren." These "fanatics," as he also labeled them, held evangelical beliefs similar to Luther's. But they differed with him on crucial issues, usually on the interpretation of the Lord's Supper. To Luther, this group threatened the true reformation of the church.

The Reformers understood themselves to be, first and foremost, pastors and theologians; this was certainly true of Luther. What mattered to him most was doctrine, especially the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone.

Thus the key to unity and harmony among the various Reformers was not politics, social concern, or ethics, but sound doctrine. As Luther once wrote of radical reformer Thomas Munzer, "I am not so much offended by the unfruitfulness of the spirit of Munzer, as I am by his lying and his attempt to establish other doctrines."

Luther fought like a tiger to preserve doctrine as he believed God had revealed it to him. This led him to clash with a number of Protestant reformers with whom seemingly he had much in common.

In, With, and Under

The sharpest clash came over the meaning of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer of Zurich, interpreted the scriptural phrase "This is my body" to mean "This represents my body." He believed Christ was present—"according to his divine nature." Zwingli agreed with Luther that the communicant received Christ's blood, but only by faith.

Luther, however, insisted these words be taken literally. The body and blood of Christ were really present "in, with, and under the bread and wine." He declared that the communicant received Christ's true body and blood. Christ explicitly promised he would be present in this sacrament.

Many historians today regard the issue behind this "Sacramentarian Controversy" as trivial, or they simply cannot understand it. However, one's beliefs about the Lord's Supper had enormous practical consequences in the 1500s. Luther believed that Zwingli's understanding of the Supper led to his followers' violent rapid, changes in worship practices—acts of sedition. This controversy created the first great schism in the evangelical camp of the Reformation era.

Violent Visionaries

Behind the Sacramentarian Controversy lay the Karlstadt affair.

Andreas Karlstadt was Luther's senior in both age and tenure as a professor at the University of Wittenberg. He promoted Luther to the doctorate in 1512 and later collaborated with Luther and Philipp Melancthon in reforming Wittenberg's curriculum.

Luther, however, soon overshadowed Karlstadt as a reformer. In 1522, Luther returned from seclusion in the Wartburg and repudiated what he charged were Karlstadt's radical and ill-timed reforms. In 1523, the older man left town under pressure, and he soon resigned his academic and ecclesiastical appointments at Wittenberg.

On August 22, 1524, after a heated exchange at the Black Bear Tavern, Luther tossed a guilder at Karlstadt as a sign of open feud and dared him to publish his works on the Lord's Supper. Karlstadt accepted the challenge, even after authorities expelled him from his pulpit for disturbing the peace. A pamphlet war between the two men followed. Luther, in *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525), mocked Karlstadt. Karlstadt ultimately published thirteen treatises on his difficulties with Luther, and the meaning of Christ's words of institution ("This is my body," etc.) figured prominently in those pages.

Karlstadt anticipated many Anabaptist and Baptist ideas of the 1500s and 1600s. He rejected infant baptism, stressed the need for an adult conversion experience, declared the parity of laity and clergy, embraced congregational church polity, and viewed the Lord's Supper as a memorial service. He wanted to return to the beliefs and practices of primitive Christianity.

Events in Wittenberg in 1521–1525 led Luther to regard Karlstadt, and all those who held radical views, as threats to an orderly reformation of the church. During those years the visionary "Zwickau Prophets" appeared, and revolutionary Thomas Münzer stirred up insurgent peasants in their war against landlords. Thus, Luther began to link Karlstadt, and those who held a memorial view of the Supper, with radical sectarians.

In the end, Münzer discredited himself and was hunted down like a dog and executed. The Zwickau Prophets were driven from Wittenberg, and they receded into historical oblivion. After 1525 (and especially after the ill-fated Munster uprising in 1534–1535), the Anabaptists were persecuted and killed. Karlstadt was hounded from place to place by the authorities, finally settling in Basel, where he died of the plague in 1541.

But in Luther's mind, Karlstadt's views of the Lord's Supper were picked up by Zwingli and ultimately stimulated the Sacramentarian Controversy. (In later years, Luther would link Karlstadt and Zwingli as willful liars, "sect leaders," and "novices in the sacred Scriptures.")

In November 1524 Luther read a copy of a letter in which Zwingli said he admired Karlstadt's boldness on the subject of the Eucharist. Zwingli agreed with Karlstadt that the bread and wine were symbols, and in March 1525, he published a *Commentary on True and False Religion*, declaring that Christ was not physically present in the bread and wine.

The Lutheran reformers soon responded, and the battle was joined.

"This Is My Body!"

The verbal missiles fired between the Lutherans and Zwinglians concerned the German lay leaders of Protestantism, especially prince Philip of Hesse. He invited the leaders of the German and Swiss factions to meet in the beautiful city of Marburg in the autumn of 1529 to resolve their differences. He wanted the Protestants to present a united front against the Catholics and against possible military action by the emperor. On October 1, 1529, most of the principal reformers of Germany and Switzerland met—Luther, Melancthon, and Zwingli, as well as Martin Bucer and Johannes Oecolampadius.

This evangelical summit conference on doctrine lasted three days and made astonishing progress. Agreement was reached on fourteen of fifteen points proposed for discussion. But on the fifteenth and final

question, the real bodily presence of Christ in the sacrament, the colloquy foundered.

When Ulrich Zwingli put forth his symbolic interpretation, Luther emphatically quoted from the Bible:

"Hoc est corpus meum!" ("This is my body!") and wrote the words with chalk on the table top. He refused to accept any deviation from the literal meaning of these words.

Oecolampadius's counter-text, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing" (John 6:63), made no impression on Luther. After further discussion, Luther declared in exasperation; "Again and again the body of Christ is eaten, for he himself commands us so. If he ordered me to eat dung, I would do it, since I would altogether know that it would be to my salvation." Later, to Bucer he snapped, in words intended also for Zwingli: "It is evident that we do not have the same spirit."

The fifteenth point of the Marburg Confession was worded carefully. Both sides denied the sacrificial nature of the Roman Mass, and both agreed communicants should receive both bread and wine. On the question of the real presence, the reformers agreed to disagree, but they asserted the sacrament was a divine gift of grace with a "spiritual benefit." Each theologian present signed the Confession.

Soon after the colloquy, however, both sides were asserting that the other had yielded on the essential points. Luther proffered an olive branch in a definition describing Christ's body as "essentially and substantively" but not "qualitatively, quantitatively, or locally" present in the Supper. Zwingli rejected this formula as still too close to the Roman Catholic view. Luther insisted that no political alliance was possible without complete doctrinal agreement. At this point, Melancthon opposed any further concessions to the Zwinglians because it might prejudice discussions with the Catholics.

So the German and Swiss reformations continued their separate ways. Luther asserted, "One side in this controversy belongs to the Devil and is God's enemy"—and he did not mean his party. To Luther, his opponents, like Erasmus, allowed human reason to intrude on the plain words of Scripture. They required Christians to bring something of their own to salvation. Each brought to mind exactly the struggles he found in the monastery. Therefore, Luther could see no reason to be more charitable with "the false brethren" than he was with enemies from Rome.

Zwingli, in particular, resented Luther's condescending tone. He felt the Wittenberg reformer had treated him "like an ass." On the other side, thirteen years after Marburg, Luther was still complaining about Ulrich Zwingli's "Swiss dialect" and his pompous insistence on speaking Greek at every opportunity. Luther declared, "I've bitten into many a nut, believing it to be good, only to find it wormy. Zwingli and Erasmus are nothing but wormy nuts that taste like crap in one's mouth!"

The bad blood between the two reformers set a pattern for Protestant non-cooperation that has lasted to today.

Anglicans and Anabaptists

Generally, Luther was hostile toward non-Lutheran reformers. One seeming exception were the Protestant reformers from England.

Luther spoke approvingly of several Anglicans: Robert Barnes, who was burned at the stake and fondly called by Luther "St. Robert"; Bishop Hugh Latimer, who later became one of the most celebrated victims of Queen Mary's persecution; William Tyndale, whose theological works often roughly translated or paraphrased Luther's writings; and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who traveled to Germany in 1532 and there married the niece of Lutheran reformer Andreas Osiander. Cranmer shared many of Luther's views on the Supper.

The Anabaptists were a different story. Luther, like most Protestant leaders of the sixteenth century, lumped all left-wing radicals into one category. Luther could routinely denounce M nzer, a mentally disturbed radical who was not an Anabaptist; Karlstadt, who was closer to a later Baptist than anything else; Melchior Hoffmann, a millenarian fanatic; the leaders of the ill-fated Munsterite Kingdom (1534–1535); and then connect them all with the peaceful followers of Menno Simons.

Luther frequently castigated Anabaptists as spiritual know-it-alls. As he put it in 1532, "The fanatics suppose that because they have read only one little book they know everything." He added that "the Anabaptists have written nothing against me because they have no learned men nor any eminent men. They are only a seditious mob."

But Luther understood Anabaptist theology only imperfectly. In 1532 he commented, "The Anabaptists reject baptism almost entirely. The pope, who distorts it, at least allows baptism to remain." Linking them to the Catholics, he remarked, "The papists and the Anabaptists teach, 'If only you wish to know Christ, try to be alone, don't associate with men, become a separatist.' This is plainly diabolical advice."

How Luther felt the state should deal with Anabaptists changed over the years. In the beginning of the Reformation, Luther disapproved of Zwingli's persecution of the Zurich Anabaptists. However, the appearance of many radicals and the peasant uprising of 1524–1525 alarmed Luther. When the Diet of Speyer in 1529 decreed death for Anabaptists throughout the Holy Roman Empire, Luther made no comment. By 1531, he countenanced death for blasphemy (under which he included "false teaching").

In 1536, Melancthon drafted a memorandum on the treatment of Anabaptists. In it he distinguished the peaceful from the revolutionary Anabaptist and demanded death for both, and Luther signed. Luther still held that only blasphemy and sedition should be punished, but he now interpreted as blasphemy a rejection of the Apostles' Creed and as sedition a mere refusal to participate in war or to serve as a magistrate. Late in life, however, Luther returned to his earlier belief that banishment or imprisonment was sufficient penalty for these crimes.

Calvin's Special Niche

Reformer John Calvin was not of Luther's generation, and the two men never met, but they seemed to have respected each other. Calvin, though he did not fully agree with Luther, was deeply influenced by his theology.

Luther, for his part, was impressed with Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He once wrote to Martin Bucer, "Will you pay my respects to Johann Sturm and John Calvin? I have read their little books with singular enjoyment."

Shortly before his death, Luther made unusually cutting remarks about Protestants in Switzerland. But during the same period, he said he liked Calvin's *Brief Treatise on the Holy Supper*. "I might have entrusted the whole affair of this controversy to him from the beginning," Luther decided. "If my opponents had done the like, we should soon have been reconciled." Calvin apparently had won a special niche in Luther's heart.

Violent Physician

Luther's last years were marked by restless activity, prodigious labor, and increasing crankiness. In 1537 he fell ill with kidney stones. From that time forward, overwhelmed with responsibilities, constantly apprehensive about the danger of war, and often sick, he became short-tempered and even harsh.

Yet Luther had always been willing to do battle for what he considered the truth. Luther's opinion of the "false brethren" was more bitter than his view of Catholic opponents because he believed that, despite better knowledge, the "brethren" had betrayed the cause and undercut his prophetic role.

Thus, in the Sacramentarian Controversy, Luther charged that all of his opponents, ruled by the spirit of Satan, were bent on destroying the true church. With a monumental sense of certainty, he condemned as the devil's false apostles and hypocrites people who, to all appearances, were sincerely searching for biblical truth.

With few exceptions, Luther's evangelical opponents did not repay in the same coin. They acknowledged publicly that God had mightily used Luther to accomplish great things. They attacked his arguments, complained bitterly about his polemical style, and accused him of violating the canons of Christian charity, modesty, and decorum. But they still said they wished only to correct him where he had erred, not to reject his teaching entirely or to condemn his person outright.

Most of the other Reformers would have agreed with Calvinist Theodore Beza, who proclaimed in 1580 that Luther's work "resulted in the cleansing of God's sanctuary, delivering it from the clutches of the Antichrist at an opportune moment, and he used the Word of God as a means of returning it to the lordship of Christ ... He was a man with faults and with turbulent disciples, but still a great man."

Melanchthon, who took an occasional rebuke from the Saxon reformer, remained true to his leader. He delivered the great man's funeral oration in 1546, saying, "Some by no means evil-minded persons have complained that Luther displayed too much severity. I will not deny this. But I answer in the language of Erasmus 'Because of the magnitude of the disorders, God gave this age a violent physician.'"

Luther taught the heirs of the Protestant Reformation that doctrine is important—important enough to divide. Students of Christian history will have to look to the other Reformers for clues concerning how to maintain both sound doctrine and Christian unity. In the meantime, all genuine followers of Jesus Christ will sorrow for the chance for Protestant unity that was lost in the sixteenth century.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

How I Pray

How should I pray? What exactly should I say? How long should I go on? Such were the questions put to Luther by his barber and lifelong friend, Peter Beskendorf. In response, Luther composed A Simple Way to Pray, in which he showed how the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed can guide prayer. Here is an excerpt of the first two sections of Luther's 1535 booklet.

Dear Master Peter: I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.

When I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the Devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little Psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

It may well be that you may have some tasks which are as good or better than prayer, especially in an emergency. There is a saying ascribed to St. Jerome that everything a believer does is prayer, and a proverb, "He who works faithfully prays twice." Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The Devil, who besets us, is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.

When your heart has been warmed by such recitation to yourself (of the Ten Commandments, the words of Christ, etc.) and is intent upon the matter, kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes toward heaven and speak or think as briefly as you can,

"O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray. But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise. I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, together with all thy saints and Christians on earth as he has taught us: Our Father who art, etc.," through the whole prayer, word for word.

Expanding Each Petition

Luther then advises that Peter repeat and elaborate on each petition. For example, here is how the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," might be developed:

Say: "O dear Lord, God and Father, thou seest how worldly wisdom and reason not only profane thy

name and ascribe the honor due to thee, to lies and to the Devil, but how they also take the power, might, wealth and glory which thou hast given them on earth for ruling the world, and thus serving thee, and use it in their own ambition to oppose thy kingdom. They are many and mighty; they plague and hinder the tiny flock of thy kingdom who are weak, despised, and few."

"Convert them and defend us. Convert those who are still to become children and members of thy kingdom so that they with us and we with them may serve thee in thy kingdom in true faith and unfeigned love and that from thy kingdom which has begun, we may enter into thy eternal kingdom. Defend us against those who will not turn away their might and power from the destruction of thy kingdom, so that when they are cast down from their thrones and humbled, they will have to cease from their efforts. Amen."

Or as another example, take the sixth petition, "And lead us not into temptation." Say: "O dear Lord, Father and God, keep us fit and alert, eager and diligent in thy word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy, and slothful as though we had already achieved everything. In that way the fearful Devil cannot fall upon us, surprise us, and deprive us of thy precious word or stir up strife and factions among us and lead us into other sin and disgrace, both spiritually and physically; Rather grant us wisdom and strength through thy spirit that we may valiantly resist him and gain the victory. Amen."

Keeping the Heart Ready

Mark this, that you must always speak the **Amen** firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say "yes" to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone; rather, think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you, and you are standing among them in a common, united petition, which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, "Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth." That is what **Amen** means.

You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer.

I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay, however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forgo the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us, we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.

It is of great importance that the heart be made ready and eager for prayer. What else is it but tempting God when your mouth babbles and the mind wanders to other thoughts?

A good and attentive barber keeps his thoughts, attention, and eyes on the razor and hair and does not forget how far he has gotten with his shaving or cutting. If he wants to engage in too much conversation or let his mind wander or look somewhere else he is likely to cut his customer's mouth, nose, or even his throat. How much more does prayer call for concentration and singleness of heart!

This, in short, is the way I use the Lord's Prayer when I pray it. To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer, even better than the Psalter, which is so very dear to me. It is surely evident that a real Master composed and taught it.

Praying the Ten Commandments

If I have had time and opportunity to go through the Lord's Prayer, I do the same with the Ten Commandments.

I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.

Luther demonstrates his approach for the first commandment, "I am the Lord your God ... You shall have no other gods before me." Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God. I must think of him in this way at the risk of losing eternal salvation. My heart must not build upon anything else or trust in any other thing, be it wealth, prestige, wisdom, might, piety, or anything else.

Second, I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!

Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and ingratitude for having so shamefully despised such sublime teachings and such a precious gift throughout my whole life, and for having fearfully provoked his wrath by countless acts of idolatry. I repent of these and ask for his grace.

Fourth, I pray and say, "O my God and Lord, help me by thy grace to learn and understand thy commandments more fully every day and to live by them in sincere confidence. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again become forgetful and ungrateful, that I may never seek after other gods or other consolation on earth or in any creature, but cling truly and solely to thee, my only God. Amen, dear Lord and Father. Amen."

These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book. They are intended to help the heart come to itself and grow zealous in prayer.

Kindling the Flame

Take care, however, not to undertake all of this or so much that one becomes weary in spirit. Likewise, a good prayer should not be lengthy or drawn out, but frequent and ardent. It is enough to consider one section or half a section which kindles a fire in the heart. This the Spirit will grant us and continually instruct us in when, by God's word, our hearts have been cleared and freed of outside concerns.

Nothing can be said here about the part of faith and Holy Scriptures [in prayer] because there would be no end to what could be said. With practice one can take the Ten Commandments on one day, a psalm or chapter of Holy Scripture the next day, and use them as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Luther's Will and Testaments

He bequeathed statements of belief that guide millions of Christians today.

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Thomas Carlyle once described Martin Luther as “great, not as a hewn obelisk, but as an Alpine mountain, so simple, honest, spontaneous, not setting up to be great at all; there for another purpose than being great at all!” That “purpose” was, in Luther’s mind, to preserve and proclaim God-given doctrine.

The thought never nested in Luther’s mind that the doctrine for which he stood was his own. “It is not my doctrine, not my creation, but God’s gift,” he declared in a 1531 sermon. “Dear Lord God, it was not spun out of my head, nor grown in my garden. Nor did it flow out of my spring, nor was it born of me. It is God’s gift, not a human discovery.”

Confession of God-given doctrine has characterized the church bearing Luther’s name ever since. Nine documents, or “symbols,” define the Lutheran Church and its theology:

1. The Apostles’ Creed
2. The Nicene Creed
3. The Athanasian Creed
4. The unaltered Augsburg Confession
5. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession
6. The Schmalkald Articles (and Tractate)
7. Luther’s Large Catechism
8. Luther’s Small Catechism
9. The Formula of Concord.

Lutheran churches commonly include a plank in their constitutions tying them to these symbols. Some churches, like the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, commit themselves to these “confessions” without qualification. Other Lutheran bodies refer to some confessions as historically important but not binding.

All nine documents have a connection—some more, some less—with the mind and spirit of Luther. What role did he play in each one?

Commending the Creeds

Martin Luther, of course, did not write the ancient Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian Creeds. But at a time when some reformers wished to do away with all things traditional, Luther saw the value in these creeds and embraced them.

As early as 1524, Luther wrote a hymn based on the Apostles' creed: "We All Believe in One True God." In a sermon preached on Trinity Sunday, 1535, Luther stated trenchantly: "As the bee collects honey from many fair and beautiful flowers, so is this [Apostles'] Creed collected, in appropriate brevity from the books of the beloved prophets and apostles—from the entire Scriptures—for children and unlearned Christians. For brevity and clearness it could not have been better arranged, and it has remained in the church from ancient time."

Two years later, Luther wrote warmly on *The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith* (1537). From the first, then, followers of Luther shared his creed consciousness.

Arguing at Augsburg

Soon the Lutheran movement was compelled to write a statement of its own.

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V summoned the dissident Protestant princes and leaders to a meeting at Augsburg on April 6, 1530. When Charles and his imperial retinue rode into town with the papal legate, a month late, Protestant Elector John and his allies stood upright, refusing to bow to receive the papal blessing.

The Lutheran party had worked feverishly to ready an *apology*, a defense of their faith. They had met with Luther on their way to Augsburg, though Luther could not join them at the diet [meeting], because a condemned heretic had no rights.

Their resultant Augsburg Confession contained two parts. In the first, the Lutherans wrote in twenty-one articles the essentials of Christian doctrine. In the second part, the Lutherans addressed areas of conflict: withholding the Communion cup from the laity; forbidding marriage for clergy; the Mass as sacrifice; obligatory confession to the priest; required feasts and fasting; irrevocable monastic vows; and the secular power of bishops.

Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's gentler colleague, was the primary writer, but Luther guided the contents. Luther wrote, after receiving Melanchthon's draft, "I know nothing to improve or change it," though he admitted, "I cannot step so softly and quietly." Later, Luther could rightly declare, "The Catechism, the exposition of the Ten Commandments, and the Augsburg Confession are mine." As historian Philip Schaff concluded, "Luther was the primary author, Melanchthon the secondary author, of the contents."

When the Lutheran group presented this confession to Charles V, the emperor appeared to listen attentively, though Spanish, not German, was his mother tongue. He began to nod during the two-hour-long reading, but this was no disrespect; he also drowsed when his papal theologians presented a rebuttal known as the *Confutation*.

But the Augsburg Confession had already made its impression. According to Schaff, "the [Catholic] bishop of Augsburg is reported to have said privately that it contained nothing but the pure truth." The Augsburg Confession has become a standard for Lutheran theology, a document with the weight of a Declaration of Independence.

Augsburg's Addendum

The conflict at the Diet of Augsburg led to a second document, known as the Apology of the Augsburg

Confession.

Charles V had given the Protestant party until April 15, 1531 to accept the terms and the theology of the Confutation. This was unacceptable to the Lutherans, and Melanchthon wrote an Apology in response. (The Lutherans also saw the need for a defensive league in case the emperor brought military pressure against them.)

Luther had no direct hand in the Apology, which rebuts the Confutation and provides Melanchthon's commentary on the Augsburg Confession.

Melanchthon, ever meticulous, continued to fiddle with both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology in the ensuing years. Luther deplored this indecisiveness, and he gave the original versions his unqualified support. Thus, the 1531 "unaltered" versions were used in the Book of Concord years later.

Opposing the Papacy

The next key Lutheran document, Luther's Schmalkald Articles of 1537, set papal and Lutheran theology in sharp opposing positions.

Pope Paul III announced a church council for May 1537. The Lutheran princes and theologians decided they should be ready with a statement. Luther drafted initial articles, pointing to topics on which the Roman church had departed from the Word of God.

Lutheran leaders and theologians met in early 1537 at Schmalkald to discuss Luther's articles. Melanchthon approved of them, though he disliked Luther's sharpness about papal tyranny and his identification of the papacy as the Antichrist.

At the outset of the meeting, however, Luther became desperately ill. Then Melanchthon was able to maneuver the meeting to reconsider the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. Luther remained too ill to protest, and the result was that his articles were not publicly read.

The upshot of Melanchthon's tactics, ironically, was that the princes pressed him (and other theologians) to compose a document called ***Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope***, known also as the Tractate. If anything, it even more strongly denounced papal tyranny and identified the papacy as the Antichrist. Melanchthon's Tractate, which is spoken of as an appendix to Luther's Schmalkald Articles, was included with them in the Book of Concord.

Ultimately, neither document was used in public debate, for the council called for 1537 never took place. Not until 1545, at Trent, was a general church council held.

Crafting the Catechisms

After visiting Lutheran churches, Luther became concerned about the laity's ignorance of Christian doctrine. So he wrote, in 1529, his ***Large Catechism*** and ***Small Catechism***.

Both treat the faith's chief doctrines with uncomplicated clarity. The ***Large Catechism*** still stands as one of the finest summaries of Christian doctrine. The ***Small Catechism*** has been called "the gem of the Reformation" and "the layman's Bible." Thus, both were ultimately included in the Book of Concord as official confessions of the Lutheran church

Forming the Formula of Concord

The final Lutheran confession was born because difficult days followed Luther's death. Pope Paul III managed to convene the Council of Trent which, among other things, launched a strong Catholic "counter Reformation." Emperor Charles V defeated the Lutheran forces, even capturing Elector John Frederick and Philip of Hesse.

With Luther gone, the church that bore his name became torn by controversy. Disputes raged over the nature of original sin, the role of the human will in conversion, the place of faith and good works in a believer's life, the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, eternal election, church rites, and more.

In 1577 Elector August of Saxony gathered six theologians to settle the disputes and restore concord, or harmony, to the church. The resulting Formula of Concord is the most comprehensive of the Lutheran symbols, precise in definitions and careful in arrangement. Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae are usually mentioned as the chief writers, and historian Schaff admits that Luther probably would have "heartily endorsed" their work. Writer Charles Porterfield Krauth has even wondered whether without the Formula of Concord, "Protestantism could have been saved to the world."

Three years later, the Formula and other Lutheran documents were gathered in the Book of Concord, a work that continues to define Lutheran belief. For confessional Lutherans today, the Book of Concord was and is a bulwark for the faith.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 39: Martin Luther: The Later Years

Luther's Living Legacy

What has Luther left to us, 500 years later?

an interview with Martin E. Marty

Martin Luther has been called "the last medieval man and the first modern one." Though raised in the distant medieval world, he has profoundly shaped our own. To understand better Luther's impact on today's church and world, Christian History talked with Lutheran historian Martin E. Marty, Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, and member of the editorial advisory board of Christian History. Marty is author of numerous books, including, most recently, the multi-volume Modern American Religion (University of Chicago).

Christian History: If Luther were alive today, what would he be writing theses about?

Martin Marty: Every historian says we can't answer that kind of question, and then every historian answers it!

We have to remember that every historical figure is, in one sense, inaccessible to the modern world. Historian Heiko Oberman reminds us that Luther lived in a different world—a world of witches and unstoppable plagues. So it's not easy to grab somebody out of his or her context.

That said, we can have some fun hazarding guesses. There's no more consistent strand in Luther from 1513 [when he begins lecturing on the Bible] to 1546 [when he dies] than the gospel of forgiveness. That theme still isn't heeded well.

In our day, we emphasize the gospel of self-esteem, marketing the church based on people's needs, saying, "I found it!" and "I'm the little engine that could." Our culture promotes human ability and human will, as did the indulgence culture in Luther's day, as a way to bring salvation. So I have a hunch Luther would still feel compelled to speak his central message.

Would Luther quarrel with Roman Catholicism today?

The language of the sacrifice of the Mass, which disturbed Luther more than anything else, still remains. Yet there's a hint of a whisper that today's Catholic understanding isn't that much different from what we mean in most Protestant Communion services when we talk about offering ourselves in response to the Lord. Within Catholicism today, there is less accent on the Mass being a priestly act of good works.

Also, when I look at Catholic teachings on the Book of Romans and the Book of Galatians, most of which acknowledge the critical role of grace and faith, I have to say Luther has made his point. I don't know that he would be as disturbed with Catholicism today as he was in the 1500s.

At the Second Vatican Council, in our lifetime, the Roman Catholic church profoundly reshaped itself. If those changes had come at the Council of Trent, in Luther's lifetime, would there still be one church in the West?

No. There isn't ever going to be one church in the West. However much I may yearn for such unity, I don't believe it's possible in the modern world—a world of choice, diversity, rapid communication, and human autonomy. In the face of the many, many cultures in today's world, I have no way of picturing something called the Western Church.

Is there any place, then, for Protestant-Catholic dialogue?

I think the most important Protestant-Catholic dialogue is what happens in Decatur, Illinois, and Dover, Delaware. It happens when people work in homeless shelters or do joint Bible studies or canvas their neighborhoods or jointly sponsor refugees. It happens when Catholic and Protestant seminaries offer cooperative courses. That's when real dialogue occurs.

Where do you most see Luther's impact on our world?

I don't believe in the heroic concept of history, in which one person overshadows everything. I see Luther in the context of late medieval ferment: there is reform all over, and somehow a revolt in the junior faculty at Wittenberg is the one that catches on. Because Luther is a titanic character, he leaves his stamp on history.

In history, when there was a ferment of drama, out of it came Shakespeare. When there was an emphasis on the epic, out of it came Homer. When there was a stirring of democratic idealism, Jefferson emerged. Luther is one of those figures who summarizes an age.

Having said that, I have a hard time picturing several aspects of the modern world without Luther. Take, for example, the prominence of the gospel of forgiveness. Though others championed this doctrine as well, Luther was fiery hot. That emphasis (though maybe not with the same heat) still characterizes half a billion people called Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Evangelical, and the like. That is the longest shadow Luther casts today.

Also, Luther stands symbolically as the greatest single agent in increasing the value of the individual. What eventually emerges (although it took two more centuries and couldn't have happened without the Enlightenment) is a new kind of individual. That made democratic government possible.

"I have a hard time picturing several aspects of the modern world without Luther." —Martin E. Marty

What forces, if any, did Luther not intend to set in motion?

Luther would never have said he contributed to modern nationalism. Particularly in his later writings you find endless heapings on the German people: he saw them as loutish, selfish, drunk, self-centered, stupid.

Still, Luther politically and culturally coalesced the German people; he helped to unite in language and culture the two hundred to three hundred little Germanic states. Luther thus contributed to the breaking up of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of nationalism.

Nationalism, of course, is a mixed blessing. We're better off with it than we were with the Holy Roman Empire or with tribalism. But modern nationalism is often the rival of the Christian faith; it summons almost idolatrous assent. And Luther inadvertently contributed to this force.

Second, Luther contributed to anti-Semitism in Germany. Because Jews frustrated him by not accepting the gospel, he turned on them, writing, "Burn their synagogues and drive them out!" Not much happened with that sentiment for a couple of centuries, but beginning in the 1800s, anti-Semitism increased more and more. It's stupid to say Luther is Hitler's spiritual ancestor. But it's not stupid to say that in his rather blind striking out at Jews, Luther unintentionally provided the passion, vocabulary, and rationale for some horrible things that happened to Jews in our time.

Any positive, though unintended, legacies of Luther?

Luther contributed unintentionally to the rising status of women.

He was patriarchal, but I teach my students to judge people in the context of their time, and for his day, Luther was progressive. He assumed that girls, along with boys, should be taught the catechism, and in that he anticipated co-education. He insisted that marriage was just as important a vocation as monasticism, and in that he accorded greater status to a woman's role in marriage. And he was married to and proud of a woman who was, in effect, the treasurer, manager, and administrator of a rather complex business—the informal boarding house that the Luthers kept.

From Luther's day to ours, people have suggested the great reformer was somehow psychologically troubled. Is there any basis to those charges?

Luther often showed signs of being troubled, and at times he himself all but said that. But my hunch is that all geniuses are psychologically troubled in one way or another. Mozart, Michelangelo, Goethe, Dante, Milton—almost every creative genius except Bach—seemed somehow to be a misfit in the world. That leads such people to set the world right, and it leads them to create great works of beauty or agony. People who live in complete serenity with the world, who are completely balanced, make wonderful citizens and good Christians, but they probably don't leave works of genius behind them.

Is Luther a model for you?

Yes. First, in music. In the Protestant churches, we take for granted our singing tradition. We forget that singing used to belong only to monks and priests. But as a result of Luther, lay people erupt in song, and composers are inspired.

I never go through a day without listening to some Lutheran chorales or organ renditions of great Christian music. Luther wrote that music is next to theology, and I'm convinced he liked music better than theology.

Second, I get a great deal out of Luther's concept of vocation. I believe that if people could see the connection between the gospel of forgiveness and vocation, guilt and worry would be minimized. It's a message that each day is a new start: you're not held back by what has been, and you're not haunted by the future. I would like to see a therapy built of this great concept.

Third, Luther reminds me that one does not try to attain access to God on God's level, but on the human level. I'm not interested in contemplation or meditation or seeing the face of God directly. In the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther said we have to be content with the hind parts of God.

Consequently, I look to God as he has made himself plainly visible to us in the sacrifice of Christ, in the Bible, in the church, and in divine actions in history. Naturally, this inspires me very much as a historian.

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