“On The Reform Of Our Own Christian Estate”

A Historical Review of Luther and the Reformation

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Introduction to the Conference on a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium

Dr. Martin Luther began his 1520 letter *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* with these words:

> The time for silence is past, and the time to speak has come, as Ecclesiastes says [3:7]. I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of the reform of the Christian estate, to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, in the hope that God may help His church through the laity, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite indifferent. I am sending the whole thing to you, reverend sir, [that you may give] an opinion on it and, where necessary, improve it.[1]

With this essay, the vocational work of reforming the German Church began. The 1520 letter *To The Christian Nobility Of The German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* marked a change for Luther, the territories of the German estates (and beyond), and for the Church. It also marked a change from Martin Luther the Defendant and Dissenter, the monk professor upon whom the forces of the Church of Rome were now acting to the Luther who became the chief architect of a reformation that changed the history of the Church and the western world.

Today I would like to take the liberty of modifying the quote above for our present context.

> The time for silence is past, and the time to speak has come, as Ecclesiastes says [3:7]. I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of the reform of our Christian estate, to be laid before you, [the faithful few] in the hope that God may help His church through you, since so many of our pastors and even more of our laymen have grown quite indifferent and are ignorant of true evangelical [Lutheran] doctrine, and since so many clergy and synodical officials no longer possess the clarity of mind and will to resist heterodoxy, I am sending the whole

[1]. Luther, M. (1999, c1966). Luther's works, Vol. 44 : The Christian in Society I (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 123.

> thing to you, reverend sirs, [that you may give] an opinion on it and, where necessary, improve it.

This is a free conference on an idea - - a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium. This conference is not, at least in my mind, a conference about the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. While the Monday (Oct. 25th) evening presentation is dedicated to the actions of the July 2004 LC-MS convention for the purpose of educating laity as to the state of the LC-MS, the organizers of and participants in this conference generally believe that the time has come to rethink how Lutherans in America should go about the business of preserving the rich biblical/theological truths and heritage, restored to the church through His blessed instrument Dr. Martin Luther, and that our primary focus ought to be directed toward the support and protection of the preaching office and the men who have served and will serve in this divinely instituted office, the stewardship of the Gospel, and the souls in the congregations and schools to which the faithful pastor has been called.

Speaking for myself, I believe Lutherans ought to devote themselves anew to the work of reforming the evangelical Lutheran church in America.[2] Before continuing, let me say, that I do not believe that we can manufacture a reformation under our own power or through any human effort. I am not offering a contemporary "new measures" program toward a spiritual renewal or awakening. The Lutheran church has become so profoundly infected by the philosophies of our day, that a true reformation will only come by God's will and through His work. What I am advocating is akin to that which is written in the *Small Catechism* in the explanation to the Third Petition, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

> What does this mean? Answer: To be sure, the good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also be done by us.
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> How is this done? Answer: When God curbs and destroys every evil counsel and purpose of the devil, of the world, and of our flesh which would hinder us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his kingdom, and when he strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his Word and in faith even to the end. This is his good and gracious will.

As Luther rightly advised, we should pray as if everything depends upon God, but work as if everything depends upon us. Lutherans know that God works through His means of grace and through masks to accomplish His will in the Church and in the world. May we once again serve as our Lord's masks in the reform of our own estate.

It is becoming obvious to many that if genuine Lutheranism (true evangelicalism) is going to survive and if the next two generations of Lutherans are going to have the opportunity to worship and serve in confessional Lutheran congregations wherein the Word of God is rightly preached and taught, worship is conducted in spirit, truth, and reverence, and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's instructions, it will not be the result of any action undertaken by a synod or the synodical officials that control them (conservative or liberal). A genuine reform

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[2]. The phrase "evangelical Lutheran church in America" is not a reference to a particular synod, but a reference to all congregations (consisting of pastors and laymen) that remain committed to the authority and clarity of the holy Scripture, the quia subscription to the Lutheran Symbols and Lutheran liturgical worship.

will be the work of God alone, through the preaching and teaching (pastoral) office of the church as the ministry is carried out among Christ's people. ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*** (NASB - 2 Timothy 4:3-5)

Finally, this is a free conference in the fullest sense of the phrase. It is not connected to or directed in any way by a synod. It is also a free conference in this sense, the speakers have been given the freedom to speak their minds as long as that speaking does not contradict the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. As you will also see, this conference has not convened with a scripted outcome. There will likely be honest differences of opinions. The speakers and participants share a common concern, namely, the desire to support, protect, and provide for the office of holy ministry in the hope that a faithful Lutheran Church will, by God's grace, survive in America. Here we will begin to ask questions about the best way to go about preserving or reforming Lutheranism in America. This we do for the sake of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and for the spiritual well-being of the members of our respective and future congregations.

But when it comes to what a ministerium is, what it ought to be, and what it can and ought to do, we look forward to a healthy exchange of ideas. While this conference will look to the past for the purpose of examining our own actions that we may learn from our mistakes, this conference is for those interested in an exploration of alternative and new possibilities. The creation of a ministerium consisting of Lutheran pastors, solely dedicated and committed to the practice of confessional Lutheran doctrine (derived solely from holy Scripture), if in fact one comes into being, marks the start of a different way of thinking about how to meet the challenges facing the authentic Lutheran Church and the best way to support, train, and send pastors to the sheep of Christ's flock.

II. Introduction To This Paper:

Martin Brecht wrote of Luther and his reformation:

> In these years [1518-1521] he [Luther] was not merely defendant, but also professor, theologian, preacher, pastor (Seelsorger), publicist, and writer. During the conflict he developed alternative and far-reaching, but realizable, proposals for reforming, for example, theology and theological education; the church's administrative and judicial structure, the mediation of salvation, worship, and the sacraments; the political, social, and economic order; and Christian ethics and the ordering of life. . . Luther was calling the norms and authorities of the Christianity of the day more and more into question in a revolutionary way. Not only did he dispute them, however, but he also proposed reasoned alternatives in their place, and to that extent he did not content himself with protest, but offered new constructive possibilities.[3]

So it should be among us. This conference, paper, and, I hope, any subsequent

[3]. Martin Brecht, Martin Luther, *His Road to Reformation*, 1483-1521, Fortress Press, 1985, 239-240.

publications and actions begun here, will keep Luther's two-front approach (dissent and realizable alternatives) in mind, not merely because it was or may now hold the possibility of being productive, but rather because it is what true Christian faith does. Faith holds steadfastly to Christ and His words and produces love and good deeds, true worship, and support for one another. ***"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."*** (NASB - Hebrews 10:23-25)

As people who seek to remain faithful to the Word and Sacrament ministry and to the full work of the Church, we too ought to be about the business of *calling the norms and authorities of the Christianity of our day more and more into question in a revolutionary way. We ought not only dispute them, but we should also propose reasoned alternatives in their place, and to that extent not be content with mere protest and dissent, but we ought to offer new constructive possibilities in the hope that our Lord will bring about a reform in the hearts and minds of our own people.* To this end, this conference is revisiting and will be redefining the concept of a Lutheran ministerium as a forum for new, constructive, and realizable possibilities.

The next section of this paper will be dedicated to a historical survey under two headings of "Luther the Dissenter" and "Luther the Reformer." As we face historic and monumental challenges to the historic and authentic evangelical faith (the Lutheran faith), I look back to learn from Luther. In particular, I want to see how Luther's evangelical theology governed his relationship with the Church of Rome and guided him as the Reformer of the Church. This survey is offered to contrast the way in which Luther and his allies approached the challenges of their day, with the way in which we (conservative and confessional Lutherans) have approached the challenges of our day.

This historical survey has been undertaken to see what, if anything, is applicable to our own situation. In particular, I will examine Luther's relationship with and efforts toward the Romanist Church, or lack thereof, and his constructive proposals for the reform of the Christian estate within the spheres of his influence (some German territories).

In Part II of this paper I will take up the task of offering a series of proposals, loosely patterned (and I stress loosely) after the constructive proposals set forth in the reformation documents written by Dr. Luther and others of his time. As will become clear in this presentation, I am arguing for and proposing something revolutionary in nature - - a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium, not a new synod, that would operate in effect as a personification of Dr. Martin Luther. This group would be headed by pastor/theologians who would mimic the kind of work Luther and his friends undertook in those early years of the reformation.

III - Historical Review

A. Luther The Dissenter:

It is often said within our own circles that Dr. Martin Luther did not leave the Roman Church, but instead remained within it and sought to reform it. The problem with the statement is that it tries to make analogous that which is not analogous. First of all our situation at the start of the 21st century, the situation in which we now find ourselves in regard to the American culture and the

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the situation in which Luther found himself in 16th century Germany and in regard to the Church of Rome are not analogous (although there are some common elements beginning to emerge[4]). Yet, while the situations are not analogous, many of Luther's proposals for addressing the reform of the church can serve as a prescription for our day. But even more than this, the fundamental theological convictions of Luther that led him to undertake such a wide range and ambitious undertaking should compel us to do the same.

On October 31, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of Castle Church of Wittenberg. The *Ninety-Five Theses* was a mixture of Luther's emerging evangelical theology and the Roman system of penitence, papal authority, purgatory, and indulgences. While the *Ninety-Five Theses* planted the seeds that would eventually undermine the Roman system of justification, such as it was, it is also true that Luther left enough Roman theology embedded in the *Ninety-Five Theses* to undo the evangelical assertions that run throughout the document.[5] In the weeks that followed, the *Ninety-Five Theses* was widely circulated, helped along by Luther himself, resulting in the events that would soon precede the coming of the Reformation.

While Luther struggled with the question of the salvation of his own soul on a personal level, he also began to struggle publicly with the place and function of indulgences. This is reflected in his lectures on the Psalms in 1514 where Luther complains that the people were trying to make their way to heaven by the purchase of indulgences and were making grace cheap.[6]

> The anxiety of Luther, despite all his suspicions upon the subject of indulgences, yet to remain in accord with the Church finds expression in the very introduction to his remarks on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity. He then acknowledges that indulgences are the merits of Christ and His saints, and must therefore be accepted with all reverence; yet, at the present time, he laments, they are horribly perverted to the service of avarice. He then further grants that all the works and merits of Christ and of the Church are in the hand of the Pope.[7]

From the very start, Luther had two primary concerns. As a professor of theology he had pledged himself to the discovery and defense of the truth. At the same time, he wanted to be regarded as an obedient son of the Church of Rome, which also meant obedience to the papal authority. In the weeks immediately following the publications of the *Ninety-Five Theses*, there was little mention of them. But Luther's understanding of them begins to sharpen.[8]

On 3 February 1518 Pope Leo X

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[4]. *The Three Walls* essay, which can be found at Reformationtoday.tripod.net, shows that there are aspects of the situation Luther faced that are not dissimilar to the walls faced now by the members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

[5]. Luther held out the possibility that the pope could have influence over the status of the dead through intercessions, the existence of purgatory, and the use of indulgences.

[6]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 185.

[7]. Dr. Julius Kostlin, translated by, Charles E. Hay, A.M. *The Theology of Luther*, Lutheran Publication Society, 1897, Reprinted Concordia Publishing House, 1986, p.220. Comment on a sermon by Luther for St. Matthias's Day, February 24, 1517.

[8]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 203.

> asked Gabriel Venetus, the protomagister and at that time the head of the Augustinian Hermits, to dissuade that priest of his order who was spreading new things in Germany and informing the people of a new doctrine, This was to be done in writing or by learned and dependable intermediaries who should attempt to appease the man (Luther).[9]

Tetzel, the seller of the indulgence that had ignited the debate, and a theologian in Frankfurt prepared a response to and attack against Luther's theses. Luther in turn replied. While the indulgence controversy and the *Ninety-Five Theses* began to work its way toward the adjudicatory process in Rome, Luther's theology continued to evolve.

On April 26, 1518, Luther was in Heidelberg. A debate on indulgences was not on the agenda in Heidelberg and "Staupitz asked him [Luther] not to debate controversial subjects but to prepare theses concerning sin, free will, and grace-topics which had been debated in the *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*."[10] While Luther stayed away from the indulgence question, he did give voice to a radically different way of looking at theology and the events that were beginning to unfold. At Heidelberg Luther gives voice to the biblical theology of the cross. Those astute enough were immediately impressed with or offended by the radical nature of Luther's newly emerging theological "world view." There are, according to Luther, only two kinds of theologians in the church. There is the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross.

> The theologian of glory does not know the principle of God's action hidden under the cross. He prefers works instead of suffering, glory instead of the cross, strength instead of weakness, wisdom instead of folly. These theologians are enemies of the cross of Christ. They believe that the good of the cross is an evil. But God allows Himself to be found only in the cross and suffering. The friends of Christ's cross call the cross good and works bad; they crucify the Old Adam.[11]

This fundamental insight would help prepare Luther for the difficult days to come and would distinguish Luther's theology from that of his opponents.[12] "For example, Luther accused Eck of understanding nothing of the theology of the cross because of his claim that the souls in purgatory were certain of their salvation."[13]

But Luther's theological presentation at Heidelberg had a more immediate and an unexpected, "but one very important in the long run, was the impression that it made on a number of theology students there."[14] Martin Bucer and Johann Brenz were among the young theology students who heard Luther. "In Heidelberg itself, Luther noticed

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[9]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 203.

[10]. Luther, M., Luther's Works, Vol. 31: The Career of the Reformer (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 37.

[11]. Martin Brecht, Martin Luther, *His Road to Reformation*, 1483-1521, Fortress Press, 1985, p. 233.

[12]. The fact that so many Lutherans do not know the difference between these two theological approaches, perhaps explains, at least in part, why so many have forsaken Lutheran liturgy and practice and why they have embraced so many reformed evangelism and stewardship programs.

[13]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 233.

[14]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 216.

that the young were no longer following the elders, but rather him. He pinned his hopes upon the fact that the gospel would pass from the old, who with their fantasies had rejected it, to the young, and thus he would be vindicated. Luther was able to win the younger generation much more strongly for himself than the older generation or those of his own age group."[15]

Heidelberg did little to advance the debate on indulgences and the papacy. It did nothing to elevate the conflict. The older theologians who heard Luther in Heidelberg were confirmed in their belief that Luther was indeed a heretic and those who were dealing with the indulgence controversy on behalf of the Roman Church had received nothing from Luther to change their judgment either.

"Already, in June 1518, Leo X had empowered a court consisting of Auditor General Jerome Ghinucci, a jurist, and Master of the Sacred Palace Sylvester Prierias, a theologian, to begin proceedings against Luther. This court, on the basis of Prierias' examination of the *Ninety-Five Theses* and his report in his *Dialogue*, cited Luther to Rome."[16] Yet, Prierias's reply to the *Ninety-Five Theses* was so poorly done, that he was strongly criticized by Leo X and his *Dialogue Against the 95 Theses* was easily dealt with by Luther himself. Although, in Luther's reply, he went to great lengths to try to persuade the pope that he remained an obedient son of the Church of Rome.

Prierias had rightly identified a source of contention between Luther and the theology of the day. "According to Prierias the pope is the highest authority and foundation of the universal Church. He is infallible 'when he makes a decision in his capacity as pope.' His doctrine is 'the infallibility of the rule of faith, from which the holy Scriptures too draw their strength and authority....It was this papal doctrine that would determine Luther's 'no' to Rome."[17]

"In his conclusion Prierias draws the ultimate consequence: "Whoever says that the Church of Rome may not do what it is actually doing in the matter of indulgences is a heretic."[18] Prierias had now proclaimed not only the doctrine but also the deeds of the Church, here the sale of indulgences, to be infallible."[19]

Heidelberg Theses

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.
22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.
23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15].
24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.
25. He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.
26. The law says, "do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and everything is already done.
27. Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work and our work an accomplished work, and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.
28. The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

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[15]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 216.

[16]. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol, p 255.

[17]. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther, Man Between God and the Devil*, Image Books, 1989, p. 196.

[18] Heiko A. Oberman, p.196.

[19]. Heiko A. Oberman, Ibid, p. 197

The chasm between Luther and the Church of Rome was widening, but it was widening at the point of authority. From here onward the debate would shift toward the authority question and to the question of just how the salvation of the soul was accomplished.[20]

Having failed in the first attempt to secure a recantation on the part of Luther, Leo X assigned Cardinal Cajetan the task of interviewing and soliciting from Luther his recantation. This meeting would take place in Augsburg in October of 1518, nearly one year after the posting of the *Ninety-Five Theses*. During this period Luther played the defendant and apologist for his new doctrines and the issues were becoming clearer to those educated enough to know the difference. This point will be taken up later in this paper, but it is important to note three things at this juncture. First, Luther sought a theological discussion/debate for the purpose of clarifying the doctrine of justification and the relationship of indulgences to it. Second, in order to bring clarity to the first point, Luther must deal with the question of Scriptural authority verses the claims made for papal authority.

In regard to the second point, Heiko Oberman asserts that "the exclusive authority of the Holy Scripture was not part of his Reformation discovery - a fact that gave rise to tensions in the sixteenth century and has caused misunderstanding to this present day. In his early works, which according to Luther himself belong to his 'papist' phase, he already presupposed Scripture to be the obvious sole source of faith."[21] The author of this paper shares this view.

Third, while Luther's protectors used the political and legal system, such as it was, to protect Luther, Luther showed no interest in this first year toward church "politics." In fact, he feels somewhat guilty that his actions had caused such a stir. He sought peace.

Luther was summoned to Augsburg to be interviewed and ultimately reconciled to the Roman Church. As is often the case today, Luther was rarely short advisors. Frederick the Wise had provided Luther with a lawyer for the meeting to help advise Luther on what ought to be done to help facilitate a reconciliation. As expected the lawyer, Serralonga, advised Luther to avoid explaining his prior statements and do what was necessary to bring the controversy to an end. While Luther shared Serralonga's and Frederick's desire for peace, Luther would not recant unless shown to be in error. But there were irreconcilable differences between Luther and Cajetan.

Cajetan laid three demands before Luther. "The most reverend cardinal Cajetan," Luther wrote, "by command of the pope has asserted, proposed, and urged that with respect to the above disputation which I held on indulgences I do these three things: first, to come to my senses and retract my error, second, to pledge not to repeat it in the future, and third, to promise to abstain from all things which might disturb the church."[22] Over the course of the three day interview, several points of disagreement were discussed. The chasm widened even more however, despite the efforts of all parties to bridge the gap. For his part "Luther then apologized for his abruptness and lack of respect. . . in the future he would no longer deal with the subject of indulgences, and would keep silent about them, if his

[20]. In July 1518 a forged set of theses on the papal ban was published and circulated under Luther's name. Emperor Maximilian received a copy of this forgery and thinking it had actually been written by Luther and appealed to Leo X to take immediate action against Luther.

[21]. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther, Man Between God and the Devil*, Image Books, 1989, p. 223

[22]. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, p. 263.

opponents would do the same."[23] Luther in effect, offers to treat indulgences and purgatory as open questions. He is not willing however, to agree to the principle that the pope is above holy Scripture. If the pope contradicts Scripture, the Christian is to obey the Scripture and disobey the pope. In a letter to Cajetan, Luther summarized his positions on the disputed doctrines saying, "For the pope is not above but under the word of God, according to Gal. 1:8."[24] Cajetan rejected the offer because it did not contain a recantation.

Yet, the first true debate had taken place on the place of indulgences, the authority of the pope, cannon law, the article of justification, and the soul's certainty of justification. "Cajetan had thus made an important contribution to the clarification of Luther's position. Up to that point, Luther had cited not only Scripture and reason in his defense, but also the Church Fathers and canon law. Now, however, it became clear to him that tradition and law could be ambiguous."[25]

As a result of the impasse and Luther's refusal to recant, his Father Confessor, Staupitz, released Luther from his Augustinian vows and Cajetan pushed for Luther's excommunication. But there would be yet another attempt to bring about some kind of reconciliation between Luther and the Roman Church, but on the Roman Church's terms.

The next attempt to entice Luther to recant was given to Karl Von Miltitz, a low level church bureaucrat who had ties to Frederick the Wise. Karl Von Miltitz took a more gentle approach than did Cajetan. "The chief point in the discussions was Luther's attack on the papal dignity. Thereupon Luther made the following proposals. In the future he would keep silent if his opponents would also keep silent . . .He would publish a leaflet admonishing everyone to follow the Roman church, whose honor even Luther had upheld with his hotheaded approach."[26]

> Miltitz informed Frederick the Wise on 5 February [1519] that he had reported to Rome as instructed. As long as Luther would be silent, there were favorable prospects for a good conclusion of the matter. Luther, for his part, published the promised leaflet at the end of February under the title of *Doctor Martin Luther's Instruction on the Several Articles which are Ascribed and Assigned to Him by His Detractors,* along with the admonition to follow the Roman church and not to regard his writings as an affront to it. He recommended the veneration and invocation of the saints. . . Luther was convinced that poor souls were suffering in purgatory and that one could come to their aid by praying, fasting, and giving alms. He confessed that he did not know the purpose of purgatory, though, and he recommended that it be left up to God.[27]

But as with all things written by Luther in this period, this leaflet too was a mixture between evangelical theology and accommodations to Romanist theology. This mixture was not lost on Luther's critics and the effort earned him little. Luther stood condemned under Cajetan, the order that Luther be arrested and turned over for trial stood as well, and Luther's critics would not let the matter rest.

Throughout this period, Luther held steadfast

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[23]. Martin Brecht, Martin Luther, *His Road to Reformation*, 1483-1521, Fortress Press, 1985, p. 259.
[24]. Luther, M. Luther's Works. Vol. 31, p. 266-267.
[25]. Heiko A. Oberman, p.197.
[26]. Martin Brecht, p. 268.
[27]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 271.

to the fundamental Scriptural truths that the authority of holy Scripture superceded the authority of the pope, popes and councils can and have erred but the holy Scripture cannot and does not, the work of Christ and the grace of God, not human works effect salvation, grace is to be taught first and the good works flow from grace, and the keys belong to the whole Church. Under the interrogation of the Roman Church, Luther was forced to clarify his thinking and to examine more carefully the implications of these doctrines.

Amidst the debates and arguments over papal authority and jurisdiction, purgatory, penance, the place of canon law, the use and abuse of indulgences, the bank of merits, veneration and invocation of the saints, and the interpretation of holy Scripture, there was always one superceding question for Luther: "how does a person become righteous before God?" "To Luther the centrality of the doctrine of justification is essential to the work of the theologian, to his basic approach to theology and to God, to his carrying out the theological task, and to his own personal life of faith."[28] The problem for Luther then, and for the contemporary reader now, is that in the system of the Roman Church this question was (and continues to be) tied up with all the other points of doctrine in dispute.

But no one would prove more helpful to the process of clarifying the relationship between the central question of justification than Johann Eck, Rome's premier German apologist for papal authority. And it would be at the University of Leipzig that Luther would meet his greatest intellectual challenge. The significance of this conflict would be hard to overestimate. The debate, and the debate over the debate, would serve Luther and the Reformation well on several levels. "The Leipzig debate's epochal significance lies in the conflict over the primacy of the pope, which never before in the history of Christianity had occurred in this magnitude." The debate would push Luther to think more thoroughly and consistently about the Gospel. Not even Luther himself knew that the pressure of preparing for Leipzig was causing him to reconsider the entire issue of authority in the church. Eck would force Luther to come to grips with some of Luther's inconsistencies and push him past the point of no return.

The debate itself was divided in three sections and would last seventeen days. Karlstadt and Eck debated from June 27th to July 3rd with a break on June 29th. Eck and Luther debated from July 4th to July 13th. Karlstadt and Eck finished the debate on July 14th and 15th. Eck and Karlstadt debated the doctrine of free will. As a Thomast (a follower of St. Thomas Aquinas, the 14th century theologian who synthesized Aristotlean philosophy and Christian theology), Eck defended the doctrine of free will. Karlstadt argued that human beings have no free will. While this was and continues to be a divisive issue within Christianity, and would be taken up by Luther in his debate with Eramus in his essay *On the Bondage of the Will*, the main event at the Leipzig Debate was the debate over the primacy of the pope. Here Eck and Luther clashed.

Eck argued that Luther had taken up the Hussite heresy and defended the Roman axiom that the papal office was supreme, even over Scripture, and that councils and popes could not err. Luther continued to insist that he was not a Hussite and that he was a loyal son of the church. Later, Luther would write, "Huss's doctrine I have already taught, without knowing it; so has Staupitz. We have all been unconsciously Hussites,

[28]. Robert Preus, Justification and Rome, Concordia Academic Press, 1997, p. 17.

as are also Paul and Augustine."[29] The debate gave Luther an opportunity to sharpen this thinking and to set forth the evangelical understanding of the church and to demonstrate that Scripture is the supreme authority for the Church. "By the middle of March, 1520, the condemnation of Luther's position at Leipzig by the faculties of Louvain and Cologne reached Saxony. The elector urged Luther to address a proposal of peace to his opponents, but he refused on the ground that to withdraw from a controversy would be to deny God's Word."[30]

The debate over the debate that followed was as important as the debate itself. Who won? Who was right? These were the questions that were taken up by partisans on both sides of the issue. "Numerous accounts of the debate were published by eye-witnesses, or by those to whom they wrote. Eck, also, who, in his elation, had remained at Leipzig nine days after the adjournment, boasting much that he had triumphed, was determined to carry the controversy to a still greater length."[31]

Philip Melanchthon was among the first to give a report of the debate. Luther had won, Melanchthon argued and his argument was well received among the humanists. Theologians throughout Germany and Europe were taking sides. In the months that followed, Luther found new allies. So would Eck and he would push the matter to its ultimate conclusion in Rome. In the months that followed, Luther began to apply his emerging evangelical theology to every aspect of private and public life. Luther the Dissenter was now and also becoming Luther the Reformer.

On June 24th, 1520, the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, Arise, Lord, was published in Rome. Luther was given 60 days to recant or be excommunicated. It was too late. The doctrine of justification and the doctrine of Scriptural authority were asserting themselves with greater clarity and force in Luther's mind. The papal bull reached Luther on October 10th, 1520. Luther wrote to Spalatin.

> This bull condemns Christ Himself. It summons me not to an audience but to recantation. I am going to act on the assumption that it is spurious, though I think it is genuine Would that Charles were a man and would fight for Christ against these Satans. But, I am not afraid. God's will be done.[32]

In May, prior to the publication of the papal bull, Luther had already "published a small book entitled *On the Papacy at Rome*, in which he declared that there were two churches in the world. One was external and visible and had the hierarchy and the pope at its head. The other 'we call a spiritual, inner Christendom' that acknowledges only Christ . . . The time for decision was indeed at hand. Even before he learned for certain that he had ben excommunicated."[33]

In the few short months that followed the debate with Eck, Luther had been transformed from the loyal son of the Roman Church who sought only to uphold the authority and jurisdiction of the pope to a faithful pastor and theologian in the Church of Jesus. By the time the bull arrived in Wittenberg, Luther had already come to the conclusion that the Church of Rome and the

[29]. Quoted by, Henry Easter Jacobs, Heroes of the Reformation, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1898, p. 146.
[30]. Martin Brecht, 1483, 1521, p.
[31]. Henry E. Jacobs, p. 145.
[32]. Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand A Life of Martin Luther, Abington Press, 1950-1978, p. 272.
[33]. James Kittleson, Luther the Reformer, Augsburg Publishing, 1986, p. 150.

Church of Jesus Christ were not one and the same.

> Go ahead, pope, burn and condemn books! God shall overthrow you and give you up to madness, and you will receive the reward which you have deserved for always resisting divine truth. Let him who feels like it doubt that the pope, who spreads all these errors throughout the world and receives in return the wealth of the nations, is the true, chief, and final Antichrist. Thank God, I know him.[34]

On December 10th 1520, while the students of Wittenberg were burning the books of canon law, Luther stepped forward and threw the papal bull into the fire. “As they excommunicate me according to their blasphemous heresy, so I excommunicate them according to the holy truth of God. Christ as the judge will see which excommunication he deems valid.”[35]

In regard to Luther’s personal appearances and direct public testimony, the “Luther Affair” came to a climax at the Diet of Worms.

> On April 17 [1521] Luther was ushered into the Diet at about 4:00 p.m. He was visibly awed by what he saw. There was Emperor Charles V himself, heir to a 1000-year-old empire. Near him on the raised dais were his advisers and the representatives of Rome. All around the Spanish troops decked out in their parade best. The rest of the hall was filled with the politically powerful of Germany-the seven electors, the bishops and princes of the church, the territorial princes, and representatives of the great cities. In the midst of this impressive assembly there was a table, piled high with books.
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> The chancellor of the archbishop of Trier gestured toward the pile and announced to Luther that he had been called to the Diet to answer two questions: Had he written these books? Was there a part of them he would now choose to recant? . . . [Luther replied] "The books are mine, and I have written more . . . This touches God and His Word. This affects the salvation of souls . . . I beg you give me time." He was given one day, and back in his quarters he wrote, "So long as Christ is merciful, I will not recant a single jot or tittle."
>
> The next day's business at the Diet delayed Luther's return until nightfall. So candlelight added a sense of sanctity to the crowd of dignitaries jammed into the episcopal hall next to the great Romanesque cathedral. Now that Luther knew what game his opponents were playing, he rose to the occasion. The questions were put to him...Luther replied in a short speech.
>
> Luther was trying to snare his examiner in a debate, but the man would have nothing of it. He countered that Luther had not spoken to the point. Surely a single individual could not call into doubt the tradition of the entire church. Now, the examiner declared, "You must give a simple, clear, and proper answer to the question, Will you recant or not?" Luther did answer, and it was an answer that in his words, was without "horns or teeth."

"*Unless I can be instructed and*

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[34]. Luther, M., Luther's Works, Vol. 32, p 47.

[35]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 411.

convinced with evidence from the Holy Scripture or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning-[for] my conscience is captive to the Word of God-then I cannot and will not because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen."[36]

B. Luther The Reformer:

It was Luther the Dissenter that first caught the attention of the German people then, and sadly, this remains the exclusive mark by which Luther is known in our day, even among the Lutherans. Today it is widely believed that Luther's dissent (like the ones voiced in the *Ninety-Five Theses* or in his bold stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521) is his greatest accomplishment. While these two brave acts of Christian faith must not be minimized (for they resulted in a death sentence), Luther is much, much more than a courageous protestor or the "poster child" for the autonomy of one's own conscience. By the middle of 1519, Luther the critic, the dissenter, and "heretic" had been well established. For Luther the Dissenter is also Luther the Reformer.

While the distinction between Luther the Dissenter and Luther the Reformer should be remembered and mimicked, Luther the Dissenter and Luther the Reformer cannot be separated one from the other. On the one hand, Luther's emerging confession and the circumstances in which he found himself compelled to challenge the widely held beliefs and errors, of his day. On the other hand, as Luther's emerging confession mirrored more and more of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and the full body of doctrine set forth in the events and teachings of God's Word, he could not content himself with mere criticism of the scholastic and erring doctrines of his day. Dissent is fundamental, but dissent is to be followed by a genuine reformation because this is what true Christian faith does.

Luther once commented that while he and Melanchthon drank beer in Wittenberg, God reformed Germany. Indeed, for a true reformation is the work of God. Yet, this statement should never be understood to mean that Luther and those who followed his lead were passive participants in this work. From the earliest days of the conflict, Luther and his allies in Wittenberg began to institute reforms of their own. They began replacing that which obstructed the true work of the church, with new programs that would allow the people to live a life in Christian freedom and service.

Martin Luther did not content himself with protest, dissent, and disputes. Luther also became the Reformer. He proposed reasoned, realizable, and constructive alternatives for reform that would eventually encompass the whole of Christian experience. Theology and theological education, liberal arts education; the church's administrative and judicial structures, the mediation of salvation, worship, and the sacraments; the political, social, and economic order; and Christian ethics and the ordering of life would all fall within the scope of Luther's reforms.

> The public had known Luther since 1517/1518 primarily as a critic of scholastic theology, the church's practice of indulgences, and the papacy. Despite all that however, he was not yet Reformer, even though closely associated with his criticism was a new understanding of norms and authorities, of salvation, of the piety of confession, and of the church

[36]. James Kittelson, pp. 160-161.

> . . . In them" [the acts of dissent], Luther directly accomplished very little because of the resistance offered by the church and theology.[37]

Had Luther simply restricted himself to the act of dissent, little would have been known of him and the Reformation would have to wait for another. But Luther the Reformer began his work slightly behind and along the side of his work of dissent. By 1519 these reforms began to take shape.

> Thus it happened that Luther step by step applied his new insight to wider and wider areas, transforming it into concrete proposals and solutions. This did not simply take place in his ivory tower, but it emerged for Luther as a professor, preacher, (Seelsoger) in a close connection between theory and practice. Only when his proposals for renewing piety and the life of the church, which soon took shape as an integrated and significant program, were presented and began to be realized did Luther become the reformer . . . The program was presented between 1519 and 1521, especially from the end of 1519 through 1520."[38]

The work of reform began shortly after Luther's initial dissent. The first area to see reform was in Luther's own preaching. In January of 1519, he took on the issue of marriage. Although still under the influence of Romanist doctrine, Luther departed from the convention of the day. Later in 1519 he addressed the issue of usury in a sermon and in a politico-economic essay, *On Trade and Usury*. In November and December of the same year he published three sermons on confession, baptism, and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in an attempt to fashion a new understanding of the sacraments in light of his emerging evangelical doctrine. As Luther's evangelical theology emerged, he revisited topics and reworked his sermons for publication. Luther the preacher and pastor produced sermons that mirrored his own theological development and were intended to bring about a more biblical understanding of the Christian life and church. Soon Luther would produce sermons to help instruct other preachers on how and what to preach.

> The Reformation gave centrality to the sermon . . . The reformers at Wittenberg undertook an extensive campaign of religious instruction through the sermon. There were three public services on Sunday: from five to six in the morning on Pauline epistles, from nine to ten on the Gospels, and in the afternoon at a variable hour on a continuation of the theme of the morning or one the Catechism. The church was not locked during the week, but on Mondays and Tuesdays there were sermons on the catechism, Wednesdays on the Gospel of Matthew, Thursdays and Fridays on the apostolic letters, and Saturday evening on John's Gospel.[39]

At the same time, Luther the professor, initiated reforms at the University of Wittenberg. Frederick the Wise had always worked for the improvement of his young university. Reforms in line with the contemporary humanists were proposed, well received, and made it possible to bring Melanchthon to the University. Luther was a critic of the Aristotelean-based theology and an educational system based on a rigid Aristotelean model. Reforming the

[37]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 349.
[38]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 349.
[39]. Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand A Life of Martin Luther, Abington Press, 1950-1978, p. 272.

theological department at Wittenberg was easy, but Luther met resistance when he tried to affect the liberals arts education. "Luther's own interest in the reforms could not be limited only to the theological faculty. There was a close connection between the study of theology and that of liberal arts as the introduction and foundation for instruction in the higher faculties."[40] In time however, Luther would bring about a reform of the University and that reform was a foreshadow of what was to come.

With reforms underway in the pulpit and in the university, Luther set out to help reform the understanding of Christian ethics. At the urging of Spalatin, Luther wrote his *Treatise On Good Works* in early 1520. In this essay he placed all ethical decisions in the context of the First Commandment and showed that all works done apart from faith in Christ count for nothing. Everything that is done apart from faith in Christ is evil. It is faith that makes a good work good.

Luther the Dissenter and Luther the Reformer met in full force in his 1520 letter *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. In his preface to this reprint Luther wrote;

> And now farewell, unhappy, hopeless, blasphemous Rome! The wrath of God has come upon you in the end, as you deserved, and not for the many prayers which are made on your behalf, but because you have chosen to grow more evil from day to day! We have cared for Babylon and she is not healed. Let us then leave her that she may be the habitation of dragons, specters, ghosts, and witches, and true to her name of Babel, an everlasting confusion, an idol of avarice, perfidy, apostasy, of cynics, lechers, robbers, sorcerers, and endless other impudent monsters, a new pantheon of wickedness.[41]

In the months following the Leipzig debate, Luther had come to realize the Church of Rome was not the Church of Jesus Christ, but an imposter. The Church of Rome could not be reformed against its will, no more than one can reform the old sinful nature.[42] Unbelief acts according to its nature and since the Church of Rome would not yield to the Word of God and reform itself, it was up to certain secular leaders (Charles V and the German nobles) to take matters into their own hands.[43] In the introduction to this letter, the editors of Luther's Works (American Edition) summarized Luther's basic argument:

> In the three sections of this treatise Luther laid the ax to the whole complex of ideas upon which the social, political, legal, and religious thought of the Western world had been developing for nearly a thousand years. The first section exposes and refutes theologically the three walls behind which the papacy was entrenched. By demolishing the first wall, the concept of spiritual and secular classes, Luther removed [sic! rather "corrected"] the medieval distinction between clergy and laity

[40]. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 276.

[41]. Luther, M. Luther's Works, Vol. 44, p. 117.

[42]. Heidelberg Theses 28; The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

[43]. It is commonly believed today that the Lutheran Reformation was a people's movement, that it was carried along by the masses. But this is largely a myth. While the evangelical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, along with its counterpart, *vocatio,* had the potential for such a movement, that potential went largely unrealized. The work of the reformation fell most upon the ruling class working along the side of the Wittenberg faculty.

> and conferred upon the state, the rulers of which (as Luther saw it) were Christians and therefore priests, the right and duty to curb evil no matter where it appeared. In rapid succession he demolishes the remaining two walls: the papal claim that only the pope can interpret Scripture, and that because only the pope could summon a council the decisions of a council were invalid without papal sanction. Luther declares that there is no biblical ground for the papal claim of the sole right to interpret Scripture [!] and he asserts the necessity for Rome to listen to those who can. The third wall collapses under the barrage of Luther's attacks drawn from Scripture, church history, and the assertion that "when necessity demands it, and the pope is an offense to Christendom, the first man who is able should, as a true member of the whole body, do what he can to bring about a truly free council.[44]

In this address Luther "called on the secular authorities to legislate the reforms that the popes, cardinals, bishops, and the like refused to undertake. Taken together, his 27 proposals struck at each of the ways the church maintained its power in civil affairs. The 4000 copies in the first press run (an enormous number for that time) sold out in two weeks."[45] Lange characterized this essay as a "war trumpet.' Martin Bucer said, "It contains freedom." "When Luther turned to the nobility with his proposals, he doubtless expected them to be put into effect cautiously. But, after the program was presented, its realization was no longer in the hands of it author alone, who except for the common purchase ordinance, took no action of his own."[46] "Luther did not stop with advocating a program of reform of the papacy, but added important and far-reaching proposals for reforming the church."[47]

After describing how the Church of Rome had shielded itself against reform in this 1520 essay, Luther wrote,

> Now, although I am too insignificant a man to make propositions for the improvement of this dreadful state of affairs, nevertheless I shall sing my fool's song through to the end and say, so far as I am able, what could and should be done, either by the temporal authority or by a general council.[48]

His first piece of advice was hardly foolish. "Every prince, every noble, every city should henceforth forbid their subjects to pay annates to Rome and should abolish them entirely. The pope has broken the agreement and made the annates a robbery to the injury and shame of the whole German nation."[49] Notice Luther uses the strongest admonition possible here ('forbid,' 'abolish,' and 'entirely'). Luther's counsel to withdraw payment to Rome was not merely punitive, but prescriptive. The money was to be put in service of the Gospel and to help improve the lives of the German people. Luther went on to say that Rome's ability to interfere or control temporal affairs was to be cut off and that the German Church ought to be left to govern itself.

In this essay, Luther expanded his understanding of the priesthood of all believers. The Church of Rome had

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44. Luther, M. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, pp.120-121.
45. James Kittleson, p. 15.
46. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 376.
47. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 373.
48. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 156
49. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 156

abrogated its authority. It had become an enemy of the Gospel. Now the rulers of Germany, by virtue of their membership in the priesthood of all believers and their vocations, not only had the authority but also the duty to institute reforms. To this end, Luther recommends that a new judicial system ought to be created. He set forth a new understanding (a biblical one as well) of the relationship between churchly and secular authorities. He insists that the "institution" of begging be abolished, suggests that monasteries be turned into schools, charitable gifts should be collected and given to the poor, surplus wood and grain should be stockpiled for the poor, and recommends the abolition of "festivals," "celebrations," "indulgences," and all such religious observances designed to generate money for the Church of Rome and to manipulate society. In short, he argued that the nobles are to free the people "from that golden noose the canon law, by which the poor people are deceived and cheated of their money!"[50]

In regard to the Church of Rome's authority, Luther asserts "nobody in Christendom has authority to do injury or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the church except to promote good. Therefore, if the pope were to use his authority to prevent the calling of a free council, thereby preventing the improvement of the church, we should have regard neither for him nor for his authority . . . Let us therefore, hold fast to this: no Christian authority can do anything against Christ. As St. Paul says, 'We can do nothing against Christ, only for Christ' [II Cor. 13:8]."[51]
"Thus in the years 1519 and 1520 the Reformation's essential program came into existence, which attained significance for the history of the world and was absolutely revolutionary in every sector."[52] In 1519 and 1520 Luther the Reformer began his work in earnest. These reforms were so profound they required a radical shift in the thinking of the people.

Luther's reformatory program was not realized over night. Some reforms came quickly and others had to develop over time. In some places the Sacrifice of the Mass was removed and replaced with Luther's conservative liturgical reforms with little trouble. In other places, reforms took more time.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review all of Luther's reforms, but there are two areas of reform that should be of particular interest to contemporary Lutherans. The first deals with the use of money and the financial support of evangelical preachers. The second area of great interest have to do with Luther's sweeping educational reforms in both the church and the school. A survey of both areas should be helpful to us as we consider the future of Lutheranism in America.

As to the financial support of evangelical preachers, St. Paul wrote, ***"For each one shall bear his own load. And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches"*** (NASB - Gal. 6:5-6). About this there should be no question. The church has a duty to provide for those who preach the Gospel.

By the time Luther had appeared on the historical scene, the Church of Rome had developed a revenue system that served as the foundation of the economic world. But it is also true, that by the time Luther the Dissenter posted his *Ninety-Five Theses*, the Church of Rome was feeling the pressure of its debt and a rising sense of nationalism.

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50. Luther, M. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 182.
51. Luther, M. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 139.
52. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 388.

Much of the needed money needed to run the church and local governments was raised by the system of penance wherein pilgrimages, indulgences, festivals, celebrations, fees for private masses, institutional begging, foundations, trusts, and the sale of churchly and political offices generated a continual flow of revenue to both the Church of Rome and local governments. But these were the targets of Luther's reform. The very sources of revenue from which priests, professors, and church officials were paid were being dismantled in the territories under reform. In attacking the Roman understanding of penance, Luther was undermining the financial institutions from which preachers and professors were paid. This not only created crisis for the Church of Rome, it also created an enormous problem for the Reformers. How were the reforms going to be paid for? And how were evangelical preachers going to be compensated for their services?

By 1521, virtually every aspect of Wittenberg was in the process of being reformed. In quick order, other cities and territories in Germany took great interest in the reforms underway in Wittenberg. Luther and the Wittenberg faculty began to receive requests for aid and counsel. One of the first requests came from the city of Altenburg. Wanting to reform their own estate, they dismissed their Romanist priest and wanted Luther to recommend a suitable evangelical candidate for the office. They also wanted Luther to come to Altenburg to preach to put to rest fears over the reformation. Soon Luther had several similar requests. In April of 1522, Luther wrote to Spalatin: "everywhere people are thirsting for the gospel. On all sides they are asking us for evangelicals."[53] But with the foundations in decline (the primary financial source in some cities for paying priests and professors) and many still controlled by people sympathetic to Rome, how would the evangelical preacher be paid and who had the right to appoint him?

In the case of Altenburg (not an isolated case by any measure), the local foundation and the city council clashed. The council wanted an evangelical preacher. The foundation did not. Luther mediated the problem and did so in light of the foundation's failure to provide the congregation with a true evangelical preacher. If the foundation refused to provide such a preacher, the congregation had the right to insist on such a candidate. An agreed upon candidate, Zwilling, was named, but the elector objected. The matter went to court and was eventually settled to no one's satisfaction. A second candidate, Zink, was selected and installed. While Zink proved to be reformed minded, the called to Altenburg was settled by the court and not by the election of the congregation.

The problem rose again in the city if Leisnig. In May of 1523, Luther published his essay, *That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture*. In this essay Luther argued that the congregation has the right and duty to judge doctrine and that this right included the ability to reject the instructions of Roman bishops and abbots.

> The congregation needed a preacher to proclaim the word of God to it. Because the bishops had failed to do it, the congregation itself was to call and install authorized, qualified, enlightened, and gifted persons . . . In principle, cooperation between bishop and the congregation was thus not excluded, but it was unrealizable at

[53]. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, Shaping and Defining The Reformation 1521-1532*, Fortress Press, 1985, p. 68.

> the time. Luther's congregational principle can in itself no more be played off against the office of administration than can priesthood of all believers against the office of ministry (Predigtamt).[54]

Over the objections of the local abbot, the congregation elected its own evangelical preacher. The precedent had been established and with Luther's essay, *That a Christian Assembly* . . . cities around Germany followed suit. Where possible, councils (representing congregations) were to work with bishops and the established structures to elect evangelical preachers. But where this cooperation was impossible, the congregations ought to exercise the authority to elect their own preachers. In this matter too, Wittenberg became a center of activity as councils requested help in securing evangelical preachers.[55]

While the problem of electing a pastor was being addressed, the problem of paying them was another matter. It was not solved as "easily" as the question of electing. After all, what good did it do to call an evangelical pastor, if he had to leave the pulpit to provide for himself and his family?

> The medieval church required financing at the local level as well as at the top. Church buildings, once erected, had to be kept in repair; clerical and lay personnel connected with them needed to be furnished a livelihood. Funds were required too for the church's efforts to deal, however inadequately, with the problem of widespread poverty among the masses. Normally the bulk of the local revenue for these purposes came from income-producing foundations or properties, endowments of altars at which special masses were celebrated, compulsory tithes, and fees for ministerial acts, especially those performed for the souls of the departed.[56]

If the reformation was going to succeed, a complete reorganization of the financial system was necessary. The solution, at least in part, was the community chest. The community chest idea was already in place in Wittenberg, by the time the Leisnig city council proposed it. In Wittenberg "the chest was to provide for pastor, preacher and chaplain, sexton, schoolmaster, the infirm and elderly poor, poor orphans, occasionally also for poor strangers, and moreover, for maintaining the church building and storing foodstuffs."[57]

In theory the community chest idea was a good one. But these chests were often under funded and became a source of contention as properties and assets were fought over. Luther advised the electors and councils supportive of reforms to assume control of the foundations, sell the monasteries or convert them to schools, and use other institutions in such a way as to help support the community chest. But frequently fights over money and jurisdiction hindered this process. Even the community chest in Leisnig whose city ordinance Luther publically supported and is the most well known, failed. Nor did the peasants and commoners support the reformation to the degree that the money was needed. Luther

[54]. Martin Brecht, 1521-1532, pp. 69-70.

[55]. "To complete the picture, it must be noted that Luther could also have chosen other ways of filling the pastorates. He was not absolutely committed to election by congregation, as the occasional intervention of the elector shows." When electors and patrons wanted to fill pastorates with reform minded preachers, Luther considered this proper. (Brecht, 1521-1532 p. 72)

[56]. Luther, M. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45, p. 161.

[57]. Martin Brecht, 1521-1532, p. 70.

often lamented that religions of the law grew fat and wealthy, while preachers of the Gospel lived in want. When it came to the financial support of the preachers, Frederick the Wise and other electors were slow in addressing the need. But eventually, and under persistent pressure from Luther, the problem was addressed through levies and taxes.

Second only to the reforms undertaken to restore right preaching and the administration of the sacraments, Luther's educational reformers were the most significant of all reforms.

> During the early Middle Ages the principal means of obtaining an education was the monastic school. The growth of an urban society in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought a demand for a somewhat broader curriculum, a demand which was met by the cathedral schools. A third type, which developed during the later Middle Ages, was the chantry school. A fourth type was the guild school. It was a common practice for the merchant and craft guilds to support priests for the performance of all manner of religious services for the members. Often this included conducting a school for the children of guild members. As urban society grew more self-conscious and municipal governments became more firmly established, some of these guild schools, together with the parish schools, became burgher schools, largely supported and controlled by the secular authorities....All these schools were directly or indirectly under the domination of ecclesiastical authorities committed to the theological system of the Church.[58]

In his introduction to the Leisnig's Community Chest Ordinance, Luther restated his recommendation, which was first stated in his 1520 letter to the German nobility, that monasteries be turned into schools. Despite his intent to bring about a genuinely reformed school system, in Wittenberg educational reforms were off to a rocky start. Under Karlstadt, who had little use for academic learning and thought laity possessed the natural ability to judge doctrine, and as a result of the civil unrest during Luther's absence, the local school was closed. "The schoolmaster George Mohr was even said to have advocated taking the children out of school. The building, in fact, was turned into a bakery shop for a time. Not until 1523 was the school reopened under Pastor Bugenhagen."[59]

In the years leading up to the Reformation, a general apathy toward academic education was growing. Enrollment in universities was on the decline. "Education was generally held in contempt and derision by the masses during the early decades of the sixteenth century. To a large extent this negative attitude was fostered by a spirit of materialism which went hand-in-hand with the rapid expansion of trade and commerce . . . Indeed, the spirit of the age was so averse to formal education that the derisive saying was widespread in Germany, 'The learned are daft.'"[60]

When Luther criticized Roman doctrine, scholasticism, and the educational systems under the Church of Rome, many used Luther's arguments to justify removing their children from liberal arts schools in favor of learning trades or working at home. In his letter *To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain*

[58]. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45 p. 341.

[59]. Martin Brecht, 1521-1532, p. 70.

[60]. Luther, M., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 46, p 209.

Christian Schools, Luther states the problem.

> First of all, we are today experiencing in all the German lands how schools are everywhere being left to go to wrack and ruin. The universities are growing weak, and monasteries are declining. The grass withers and the flower fades, as Isaiah [40:7–8] says, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it through his word and shines upon it so hot through the gospel. For now it is becoming known through God's word how un-Christian these institutions are, and how they are devoted only to men's bellies . . . For this reason no one is any longer willing to have his children get an education.[61]

Here we find the evangelical doctrine of the two kingdoms at work. God preserves the world through the earthly governments. Earthly governments are maintained by God for the sake of the church. Through the state, as through masks, God holds evil at bay and enables people, especially Christians and the church, to live in peace. It is essential therefore, to provide the youth with a good Christian and liberal arts education for the welfare of both the church and the state are at stake.

> This neglect of education appeared to the Reformer as the work of the devil, who was thereby seeking the destruction of society and the Church. 'Therefore I beg you all,' says Luther, 'in the name of God and of our neglected youth, not to think of this subject lightly, as do many who do not see what the prince of the world intends. For the right instruction of youth is a matter in which Christ and all the world are concerned. Thereby are we all aided. And consider that great Christian zeal is needed to overcome the silent, secret, and artful machinations of the devil. If we must annually expend large sums on the muskets, roads, bridges, dams, and the like, in order that the city may have temporal peace and comfort, why should we not apply as much to our poor neglected youth, in order that they might have a skillful schoolmaster or two?"[62]

To stand against the proper Christian education of the youth is a great sin against Christ and the Church. In the preface to the *Small Catechism* Luther wrote, "You should also take pains to urge governing authorities and parents to rule wisely and educate their children. They must be shown that they are obliged to do so, and that they are guilty of damnable sin if they do not do so, for by such neglect they undermine and lay waste both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world and are the worst enemies of God and man."[63]

As far as religious instruction in the Articles of Faith, parents are responsible for educating themselves and their children under the direction of their pastor. But in regard to providing a full religious liberal arts education, Luther believed that most parents were unqualified to properly teach their children.

> For him, education was a community responsibility more important than storing supplies or defense, and without it a community would not long endure . . . It was self-evident that it was the Christian state, not the

[61]. *Luther, M., Luther's Works, Vol. 45, p. 348.*

[62]. F.V.N. Painter, A.M., *Luther On Education*, Concordia Publishing House, 1928, p. 129-130.

[63]. Book of Concord, Tapper Ed. Small Catechism, paragraph 19.

> church, that was responsible for establishing **Christian schools** [emphasis added] that would provide a new supply of leaders for the church, state, and community.[64]

The Reformation itself was dependent on the reform of the schools. Luther gave special attention to the teaching of languages.[65] Luther did not limit his advice to the philosophy of education. He offered his thoughts on specific educational reforms, including what parts of Aristotle ought to be kept and what would be discarded. He was the first major historic figure to call for the education of girls, offered his views on what methods ought to be employed, what subjects should be taught, and even on how long students ought to be in school in a day. Of all the reforms undertaken in this period, Luther regarded educational reforms among the most important and most valuable in preserving and spreading the Gospel. But changing the system was easier than changing the attitude of the common people. In 1530 the problem of parents neglecting the education of their children was still great enough that Luther took to the pulpit again to address the sin. Many of the same themes that marked the letter *To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* show up again.

Luther's concerns for educational reforms also included instruction in the chief articles of Christian religion. Here Luther made it abundantly clear that the failure of parents to tend to the religious instruction of their children made them enemies of the Gospel. In preface to the *Small Catechism* Luther's righteous anger over the state of affairs is clearly seen.

> The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty... If any refuse to receive your instructions, tell them that they deny Christ and are no Christians. They should not be admitted to the sacrament, be accepted as sponsors in Baptism, or be allowed to participate in any Christian privileges. On the contrary, they should be turned over to the pope and his officials, and even to the devil himself.

The parents' principle duty was to teach their children the Six Chief Parts of the Christian Religion. Once this was in place through the use of the *Small Catechism*, the parents were urged to expand their children's understanding of the Christian religion by teaching them the *Large Catechism*. The schools' chief responsibility was to build upon this basic understanding of the

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64. Martin Brecht, 1521-1532, p. 139.

65. "And let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and, as the gospel itself points out [Matt. 14:20], they are the baskets in which are kept these loaves and fishes and fragments." (LW. V. 45, p 360)

Christian religion and to combine it with a liberal arts education to produce learned and wise servants of the church and state. Luther was greatly concerned over parents' failure to take seriously their Christian duty. He was also concerned that many institutions of higher learning not only failed to teach the Word of God, but were in fact obstacles to Christian faith. "Where the holy Scripture does not rule, I certainly advise no one to send his children . . . I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach holy Scripture and impress them on young folks."[66] "In education, as in religion, Luther showed himself great, a seer in advance of his age, the founder of a new and higher culture."[67]

With this brief historical review on Luther the Dissenter and Luther the Reformer now complete, let's turn our attention to our contemporary crisis.

IV. The Contemporary Dissenter

In his concluding chapter titled, The Reformatory Program,[68] Martin Brecht wrote: "The Reformation church remained the *ecclesia semper reformanda* which needed constant renewal even in the future."[69] For the most part, "Lutherans" (those that sit in the pew, in synodical offices, and too of those who stand in the pulpit) have long ago forgotten this axiom. The church is in constant need of reformation and the confessional Lutheran must always act as the dissenter and reformer.

For those who remain within the LC-MS, they have a duty to play the role of the dissenters. This is nothing new and more recently we have seen efforts by confessional Lutheran pastors throughout the LC-MS to state clearly the issues at hand and to rightly divide that which is of God and His Word and that which is from sinful human reason.

In recent years, we have seen such declarations of dissent in the Zion Theses, produced at Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN, in 1990/1991. In the months and years following the Wichita Convention, many published articles of analysis and dissent. More recently, in the wake of District President's David Benke's participation in a syncretistic worship service at Yankee Stadium following the 9/11 attack, the Northern Illinois Confessional Lutherans authored a statement of dissent, *That They Might Be One*, which was eventually signed by thousands.

Dissenting, that is confessing the evangelical faith against that which pretends to be the evangelical faith, is part and parcel of the Christian life and there has been no shortage of theological dissent, as it should be. It belongs to the pastors and to the priesthood of all believers to confess Christ, and not only Christ, but Christ and all His words, whenever one is called upon to do so. ***"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*** (NASB - Mark 8:38)

But in our day, dissents, even though they are thoroughly Scriptural and can be shown to be consistent with the historic practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, are considered by our opponents to be mere opinions, an expression of our personal faith,

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66. Edward Plass, *What Luther Says*, Concordia Publishing House, 1959, p. 449.
67. F.V.N. Painter, A.M., *Luther On Education*, Concordia Publishing House, 1928, p. 145-146.
68. Martin Brecht, Martin Luther, *His Road to Reformation*, 1483-1521, Fortress Press, 1985.
69. Martin Brecht, 1483-1521, p. 388.

and the “concerns” with misguided piety. Heresy, “ours” or theirs, is an outdated concept. Theological debate for the purposes of establishing the truth against the falsehoods of this world, has been reduced to a “dialogue” over different “emphases.”

Not only do our dissents fail to produce the ire of our opponents, the laity have been so profoundly affected by modern philosophies (i.e., post-modernism), they regard the whole debate as a new scholasticism and dismiss it all as “church politics.” When laity run afoul of their faithful pastor, the whole matter is treated as a mere personality conflict and psychological counseling becomes the order of the day.

But as we have seen through Luther’s example, true Christian faith does not only give an answer for the hope that is within, but it also reforms whenever and wherever possible and in those places where it is possible.

Membership in the synod is voluntary. Members cannot be compelled to do anything contrary to Scripture or a pious Christian conscience, even in the face of appeals to the bylaws and membership rules (the modern canon law). Nor can they be forced to support any institution that acts contrary to the Word of God or harms our neighbor.

> Nobody in Christendom has authority to do injury or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the church except to promote good. Therefore, if the pope were to use his authority to prevent the calling of a free council, thereby preventing the improvement of the church, we should have regard neither for him nor for his authority . . . Let us therefore, hold fast to this: no Christian authority can do anything against Christ. As St. Paul says, ‘We can do nothing against Christ, only for Christ’ [II Cor. 13:8].[70]

The members of a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium, who seek to remain faithful to the Lutheran Symbols cannot help but dissent[71] and a ministerium devoted to the support and defense of its dissenting members must always be ready to assist its members in formulating that dissent and standing with those who dissent. For true faith is not separatistic. This is not the time to withdraw from the work that must be done or to keep silent. Pastors are watchmen. ***“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.***” (NASB Ezek. 3:17)

V. The Contemporary Reformer

This conference is largely about defining what a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium is. To that end, I will be offering my suggestions against the background set forth in the historical survey of this paper.

It is important to say, that our situation and the situation Martin Luther faced in his day are not analogous. They are worlds apart. The differences are obvious. Luther lived in a world that can be rightly called “Christendom” where upon the failure of the clergy, he could ask civil authorities to exercise their vocational offices as nobles and rulers to help bring about a churchly reform and relief for the people within their own respective jurisdictions. Parish pastors and congregations today, have no higher

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[70]. Luther, M. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 139.

[71]. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

authority to which they can appeal for true reformation. The matter of reform in our present system is left entirely in the hands of synodical officials, who thus far (conservative or liberal) have opposed all efforts at reform.

When Luther posted the *Ninety-Five Theses*, there was one visible church in Germany, the Church of Rome. The Church of Rome was politically powerful and had the ability to force compliance through a variety of means. The modern synodical system has no power or authority to hold anyone captive to it. Membership is voluntary. Its jurisdiction ends at membership and one's membership should be determined by theology and one's conscience.

Luther also lived in a world where religion permeated every aspect of human life and so the work of reform manifested itself in a multitude of ways and through a variety of ecclesiastical and civil agencies. This is not the case today. Religion and doctrine have long been separated from "ordinary and daily life." God has been confined to "His place," "the God box." The average Lutheran laymen looks at the world with a modern secular world view. Religion and morality have been sacrificed on the altar of relativism. The majority of the pastors serving Lutheran congregations are thoroughly modern in their understanding of Scripture and religion and/or labor under the influence of Methodism and American Evangelicalism. Whereas, liturgical and other reforms during the Reformation sent a clear message that a new reality more in line with the Word of God was underway, liturgical and other changes within the average Lutheran congregation are understood as the pastor's personal preferences.

Yet, while the situations are not analogous, there are spiritual and historical axioms that hold true in every time and in every generation. What was true of Luther's confession and activity (Dissenter and Reformer), should also be true of us.

In some ways, the seeds of a reform have been and continue to be planted within our confessional fellowship. Whether these seeds will produce the fruit of a contemporary reformation within the visible Lutheran Church, is up to our Lord. For our part, we are simply to fulfill the work that has been given to us.

When our Lord put Martin Luther into his service, he was the only one. He would not be alone for long, but he was the first truly evangelical preacher and theologian of his day. In this we have been blessed and enjoy a great advantage over Luther. Within Lutheranism today there are perhaps several hundred, or perhaps thousands of confessional Lutheran pastors/theologians actively serving the church. Our problem today is not one of theological ignorance among us. It is one of priority, organization, and cooperation.

This is due in large part to the late ✣Dr. Robert Preus✣. In the wake of the "Battle for the Bible" in the 1970s, Dr. Robert Preus assumed the presidency of Concordia Theological Seminary, in Springfield/Fort Wayne. He set out to make Concordia Theological Seminary the premier confessional Lutheran seminary in the world. While it is true that not every professor possessed the clarity of mind and scholarly discipline needed to address the pressing issues of our day, Dr. Preus was largely successful. The attacks that came against him in the 1980s by those seeking to "moderate Missouri" theology was evidence that he had realized his goal of producing graduates who themselves, like the young pastors of Luther day, would embrace confessional evangelical (Lutheran) theology with zeal and with clarity.

While the ELCA suffered from the ravages of the rationalism of the higher critical method and the LC-MS embraced the "Methodism," Church Growth Movement, American Evangelicalism, and now "neo-biblicism,"[72] Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, and, to a lesser degree, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, spent the 1980s and 1990s producing a steady supply of pastor/theologians who brought with them a scholarly and liturgical renewal.

Throughout this period, the LC-MS continued the process of undermining its own confessional moorings and altering its own historic polity. This trend did not go unchallenged. Confessional Lutherans once again began the work of dissenting and, when the synod failed to respond to contemporary needs in a timely and confessional manner, new agencies began to emerge.

When orphaned Lutherans in Eastern Europe needed confessional materials in their own language, Dr. Preus and "Fort Wayne types" led the way with the creation of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation. When the synod failed to provide confessional teachers to train pastors for the fledgling Lutheran synods in Eastern Europe, Concordia Theological Seminary filled the vacuum. More recently, after years of trying to influence the doctrine and decorum of the LC-MS's national youth gatherings, a group of confessional Lutheran pastors stepped forward and created a constructive alternative, Higher Things, to the spiritually dangerous and openly heterodox LC-MS national youth gathering and publications.

For nearly two decades, confessional Lutheran pastors have been dissenting from and creating Scriptural Confessional alternatives to the unscriptural programs of the LC-MS. A proposal, then for the creation of a Confessional Lutheran Ministerium, that has as its stated goal the support, protection, and maintenance of the pastoral office and the reform of American Lutheranism is yet another step in realizable and constructive alternatives to what the synod itself is doing.

In light of synod's efforts to undermine the only divinely instituted office in the church through a proliferation of "minister" categories and the "everyone a minister" philosophy, the increasing attacks from obstreperous and theologically ignorant laity, and from synodical officials (primarily district presidents), who sacrifice the divine call upon the altar of expediency and political pragmatism, the creation of a ministerium to counter these harmful innovations is yet another step in the quest to save American Lutheranism from the American culture.

The office of public ministry is under siege from the top down and from the bottom up. The result of this siege is not merely the personal destruction of a man's career, good name, economic well-being, and hardship for his family, it is nothing less than an attack upon Christ Jesus our Lord. ***"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'"*** (NASB - Matthew 25:40)

More than this, it is also an attack upon the sheep of Christ's flock. ***"Then Jesus said to***

[72]. Neo-biblicism is defined here as an adherence to the Bible's historicity, while at the same time embracing methodological doubt, skepticism, and relativism regarding the spiritual and ethical teachings of God's Word. This came about because of the LC-MS's failure to properly re-indoctrinate those who had been taught higher criticism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. While this generation of pastors rejected the conclusions of the higher critical method of Bible study (largely because of the professional risks of accepting them), they either knowingly or unwittingly accepted the philosophical foundations upon which the higher critical method rested.

them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" (NASB - Matthew 26:31) A Confessional Lutheran Ministerium then is unlike a labor union in this way. A union exists for the sole protection of its own members. But a ministerium does not exist for the sake of its members only, but rather its chief concern is to make sure that the sheep of Christ's flock will be provided with undershepherds who will feed the flock according to Christ's command in the Gospel of St. John 21.

It has become all too common that a faithful preacher of God's Word is duly elected and called to a congregation. He is almost always welcomed, at first. But in many places, those who are opposed to the doctrines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as rightly set forth from holy Scripture in the Book of Concord, soon rise up against the pastor God has sent to them. Wanting to have their ears tickled by false doctrine and fed the food that produces self- righteousness (very often in the worship service through non-Lutheran liturgies and hymns), they wage war against their pastor. Shortly thereafter, the district president or his assigned agent is at 'cross' purposes with the called and ordained servant of the Word in that place. Add to these circumstances the need of a father to feed his family, pay the bills, provide health coverage, and the desire to live in peace and the pastor finds himself in an 'unbearable' situation. It isn't long after this that the faithful few, who have tasted the pure Gospel and who desire their faithful undershepherd, find that their pastor has been driven away and now they are forced to return to their own Babylonian captivity.

Here, too, efforts to help those in such circumstances have sprung up. Appeals to help this pastor here or that struggling congregation there never cease, nor will they ever. Yet, congregations and laity, even confessional ones, continue to give money to districts and the synod, where the monies are used to pay the salaries of bureaucrats and lawyers (conservative and liberal) whose primary responsibility is the fiduciary protection of the corporation, rather than the brotherly support and protection of those who have been called to the office of public ministry and to the Gospel.

Conclusion

Faced with a church that would not repent and return to the pure Gospel, Luther turned his attention to the true Church and to the German Church. There he found the faithful few willing to reform. In so doing, a new paradigm for church life emerged. When C.F.W. Walther had to bring order out of the chaos in Perry County, again a new model would be put into the service of the Gospel. So too now, faithful Lutherans must look again and anew at our place in history and carve out a different way of organizing the work of the church. This is a journey of faith. Are we ready to take it?