



October 2002

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MARTIN LUTHER

(This is the second of two articles)

We shift now to Luther’s work in the following two to three years. It has already been mentioned that he was catapulted into the foreground and the next two or three years were both hard and rewarding to the Augustinian monk. I will only cover two of these most important events. The Leipzig Debate in July of 1519 and the famous Diet of Worms in 1521.

The Leipzig debate was held in the large hall of the Castle of Pleissenberg at Leipzig. The debate was between Johann Eck who represented the Roman church and Dr. Carlstadt and Dr. Martin Luther. It was a great intellectual battle that lasted three weeks. The major confrontation was between Eck and Luther. Luther was inferior to Eck in historical learning and flowing Latinity, but surpassed him in knowledge of the Bible, independent judgment, originality and depth of thought, and had the law of progress on his side. The chief interest in the disputation turned on the subject of the authority of the Pope and the infallibility of the church. Eck maintained that the Pope is the successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, by divine right; Luther said that this claim is contrary to the Scriptures, to the ancient church, to the Council of Nicea and rests only on the frigid decrees of the Roman pontiffs.

As the debate proceeded, Eck continually used the decrees of popes and councils as his proof where as Luther continually used the Scriptures. The debate grew more intense as Eck declared, “I see that you are following the damned and pestifer-

ous errors of John Wycliffe who said ‘It is not necessary for salvation to believe that the Roman Church is above all others.’ And you are espousing the pestilent errors of John Hus, who claimed that Peter neither was nor is the head of the Holy Catholic Church.”

This was dangerous ground for Luther to be on because John Hus had been burned as a heretic and if Luther could be forced into this stand, he could also be called a heretic. A lunch break was due and during this break Luther went to the library and quickly looked up what Hus had believed and found that it was exactly what he believed. In the afternoon session, Luther astonished the whole assembly by declaring in effect: “Ja, Ich bin ein Hussite” or “Yes, I am a Hussite.” It is from this debate that Luther developed his idea of Solo Scriptura (Scripture alone). Luther declared, “A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. For the sake of Scripture, we should reject pope and council.”

Now we move ahead to the next big event of Luther's life. The Diet of Worms, January 27, 1521. Prior to the Diet, Luther had written three of his most profound articles: Appeal to the German Nobility, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and The Freedom of a Christian Man and had also been condemned by Pope Leo X’s Exurge Domine.

This made the Diet of Worms a crucial point in the life of both the reformation and the reformer. There was some question whether Luther would or even should go. A hundred years earlier John Hus had been invited

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under a safe conduct promise; yet when he arrived, was declared a heretic, arrested and burned at the stake. Finally, Luther gave his reply, “I will reply to the emperor that if I am being invited simply to recant, I will not come. If to recant is all that is wanted, I can do that perfectly well right here. But if he has invited me to my death, then I will come. I hope none but the papist will stain their hands in my blood, Antichrist reigns. The Lord’s will be done.” The pope had appointed Jerome Alexander as one of his legates to the Diet. Alexander was, at the time, librarian at the Vatican and had a reputation as a Greek scholar. He endeavored to make the appearance of Luther as harmless as possible, and succeeded in preventing any discussion with him. The heretic was simply to recant, or in case of refusal, to suffer the penalties of excommunication.

When Luther entered the hall for his defense, he was given no opportunity to speak. He was confronted by a table with all his writings and asked to recant. To the surprise of many, Luther asked for time to think, and was given twenty-four hours.

The next day, he returned and was again asked to recant of all his writings. First, he apologized for his ignorance of Courtly manners. Then he divided his writings into categories: 1. Books which simply set forth evangelical truth, professed alike by friend and foe. These he could not retract. This would be contrary to the belief of all. 2. Books against the corruption and abuse of the papacy, which vexed and martyred the conscience, and denounced the prophets of the German nation; these he also could not retract. 3. Books against his papal opponents; here he confessed of being more violent than was proper, but even these he would not retract. He began to defend his statements and was interrupted and told to stop avoiding the issue, would he or would he not recant? Luther’s famous response was, “Unless I am refuted and corrected by testimonies of the Scripture or by clear arguments, (since I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone, it being evident that they have often

erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the Word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience.” A short dialogue takes place between Dr. Eck and Luther. Then Luther issues the last part of his famous statement, “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen.” On May 26, 1521, a ban was issued against Luther, it gave legal force to the Pope’s Exurge Domine, it denounced Luther as a devil in the dress of a monk. It commanded the burning of Luther’s books and banned the printing of others. The die is cast, there is no turning back. Luther is kidnapped by the soldiers of Duke Frederick the Wise and hidden in the Wartburg Castle for ten months.

This paper has covered two aspects of Dr. Luther, 1. His life, family and education, and 2. The major events of his life. Now we look at the writings, books and pamphlets by him and regarding him. I will cover six of these, some quickly, others in greater detail.

The first is the already mentioned, Exurge Domine, issued by Pope Leo X, June 15, 1520. Nearly three years had passed since the 95 theses of Luther and the Leipzig debates were over. Meanwhile, he had attacked with increasing violence the very foundations of the Roman Church, had denounced the Papacy as an Antichristian tyranny, and had dared to appeal to a general council, contrary to the decision of Pius II and Julius II, who declares such

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Our Purpose...

**The Purpose of
Reformed Discipleship Ministries
is to bring the truth
of the Reformation
to a discipling ministry...**

ON A PERSONAL NOTE...

As you can see, almost all of this issue deals with the life of Martin Luther. We had several people ask for some more details on the life of this great Reformer, so this issue gives more details of his life. He was indeed a powerful figure in his day and his work lives on five hundred years later.

We have also had people ask for more information regarding the Black Death and in future issues I will deal more with this topic. It is a frightful subject but helps us to understand more of the reasons for the Reformation that took place one hundred fifty years later.

Kay and I got a great response from our financial appeal and we are deeply gratified. You as a people responded lovingly to our needs and we thank you very much.

This summer has been a summer of sickness and surgeries and we look forward to getting the fall Bible studies started.

Kay's mother was diagnosed with cancer and Kay spent over three weeks in Georgia helping her mother recuperate from the necessary surgeries. The doctor's report is that the surgery removed all the cancer and no radiation or chemotherapy is necessary. If the Holy Spirit should bring her to mind will you please pray for her total recovery and adjustment? Her name is Ruth Culpepper. I know she will be thankful for your prayers.

I do hope you enjoy reading about Luther, the next articles will get back to the normal format.

Talk to you soon,
Louis

*If you will contact me with your questions at:
louishill@rdm.org
I will attempt to respond to them in future newsletters.*

TRUTH*matters*



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MINISTRY *update:*

Three years ago our lives were about to go through a transformation. Teri was a single mom with two young children and we were engaged to be married. I had no parenting experience as I faced the adoption of Jacob and Hannah. Louis and Kay Hill have helped us face our greatest challenges while helping us to grow and mature in our faith. We thank and praise God for bringing us to Reformed Discipleship Ministries. RDM has enriched our lives by proclaiming the truths of scripture, helping us to grow together as a family and most importantly, grow closer to God. We are forever grateful for their friendship and ministry.

Walter and Teri Kruger

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Martin Luther (cont.)

an appeal to be heresy. Rome could not tolerate Lutheranism any longer without ceasing to be that the Lord's supper is not something we do for God, but something that He does for us. He takes up Baptism and to the dismay of Protestants declares a belief in Baptismal regeneration, "once we have been baptized, we are saved." There is quite a lengthy discussion of this and Luther finally moves to his last point, the Sacraments. He declares that there are only three sacraments: Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Penance. He proceeds to explain his beliefs and why the others are not sacraments and for no apparent reasons ends his article by declaring that there are only two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The third article written in 1520 by Luther was, On the Freedom of the Christian Man. Here he lays down two propositions concerning spiritual liberty and servitude. A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none, a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone. In the first area he is discussing the believer's relationship to God. He declares that Christians are not bound to a Pope for guidance but to God, then he declares that although we are free in Christ, we are to be servants to our brothers in Christ.

We now move to the last two of Luther's works: The Bondage of the Will, and his German translation of the Bible. We take Bondage of the Will first. Luther, considered the Bondage of the Will to be his best theological book, and the only one in that class worthy of publication.

This book was written in response to a book that was written by the Prince of the Humanists, Erasmus of Rotterdam. The book by Erasmus, written in 1524 was Freedom of the Will. This idea was perfectly in line with the view of the humanist of the Renaissance when they considered man as the measure of all things. Erasmus declared that man was not without the ability to make decisions and that Luther should not discuss or make such a big issue over something that was not clear. The book was undoubtedly written under pressure. Luther's reply, after some delay was caustic and tightly reasoned from the standpoint of his position. Dillenberger declares, "While the terms of the debate are no longer acceptable, the issues posed are still real in the life of the church." Prior to this book, the humanists were looking to Luther to take up their banner, but Luther's vitriolic attack on Erasmus who was one of their leaders caused them to reject Luther. The Bondage of the Will, is a classic for those needing to learn about concepts of predestination.

We now look at the last of the writings and this is Luther's interpretation of the Bible into German. To keep the time perspective we must return to the Diet of Worms in 1521. When the Diet was concluded, Luther was kidnapped by the Soldiers of Frederick the Wise and taken to Wartburg Castle in the Thuringian Forest. Here he spent almost a year and during this time he adopted the name Junker George. It was here that Luther undertook the task of translating the Bible so that the German citizen could read it. He said, "I endeavored to make Moses so German that no one would suspect that he was a Jew." Some of the translation was pretty easy for him, other times it was quite difficult. When he came to describe the sacrifices of Leviticus and needed terms for the inward parts of goats and bullocks, he made repeated trips to the slaughterhouse and inquired of the butcher.

He wrote to his dear friend, Spalatian, "I am all right on the birds of the night -owl, raven, horned owl, the tawny owl, screech owl, and the birds of prey, vulture, kite, hawk and sparrow hawk. I can handle the stag, roebuck and chamois, but what in the devil am I to do with the taragelaphus, pygargus, oryx and camelopard." He apparently had not lost his sense of humor.

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There were many issues that related to translation but there is the famous example where

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There were many issues that related to translation but there is the famous example where Luther rendered “justification by faith,” in Romans 3:28 as “justification by faith alone.” When taken to task for this liberty, he replied that he was not translating words, but ideas and that the extra word was necessary in German in order to bring out the force of the original.

These are the major areas of Luther's life that I have chosen to cover. There are many more, such as his marriage to the nun, Katherine Von Bora, his children, the death of his daughter, his attack on the Jews, etc.

In the beginning we saw Philip Melanchthon shaken at the news of Luther's death. The day before, February 18, 1546, at 3:00 a.m., we hear these words, “Reverend Father will you die steadfast in Christ and the doctrine you have preached?” Yes, replied the clear voice and a little later the Great Reformer was issued into the presence of God and I feel sure heard a hearty, “Well done, thy good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord.”

SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

Q. 28. Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?

A. Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up to heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

Q. 29. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.

Q. 30. How dost the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Q. 31. What is effectual calling?

A. The effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.