

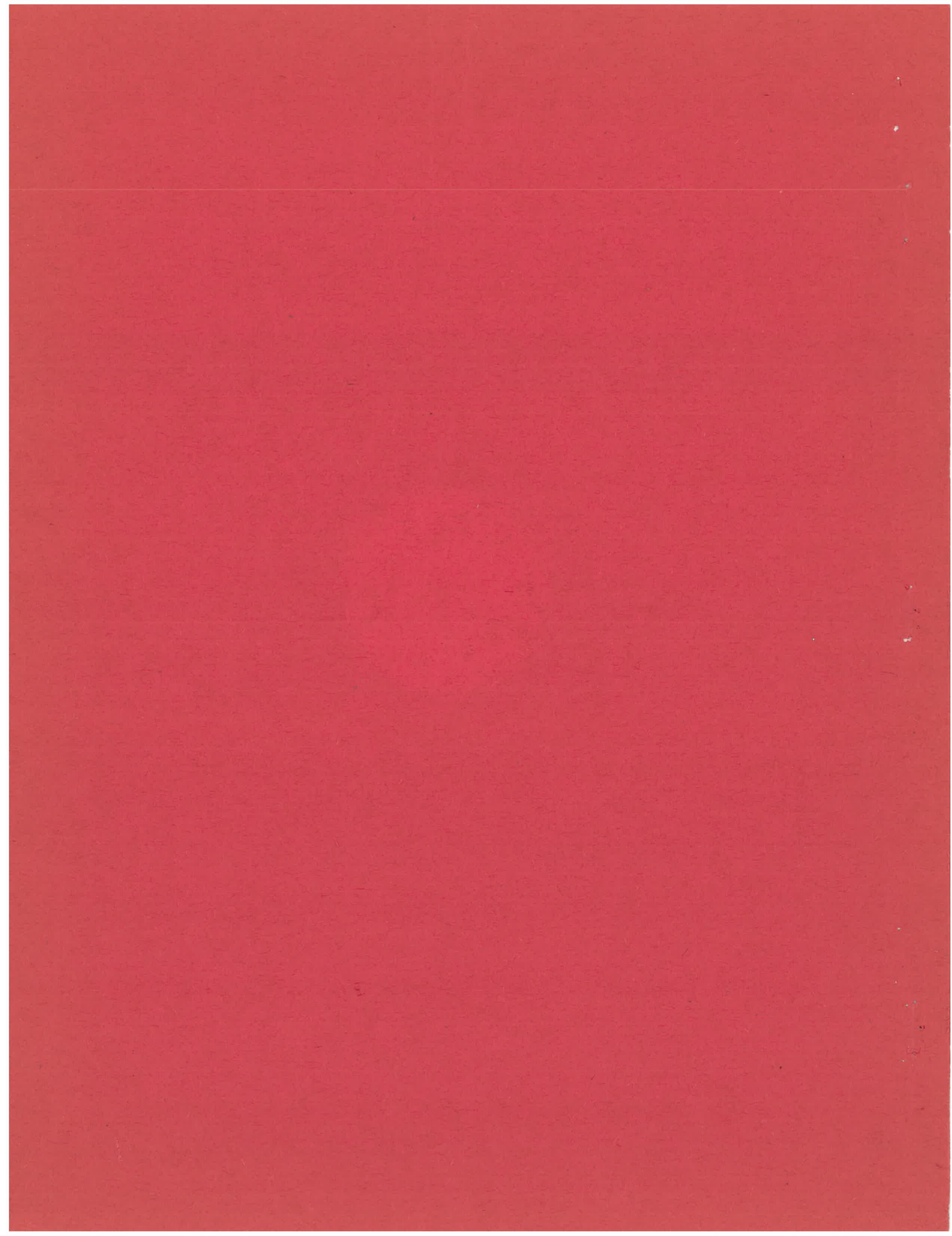
**A GOD-WROUGHT  
REFORMATION  
450TH ANNIVERSARY  
1517 - 1967**



**ESSAYS — SERMONS**

**Northern California Churches**

**Wisconsin EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN Synod**



## 450TH ANNIVERSARY OF A GOD-WROUGHT REFORMATION

### Introduction

This Anniversary Booklet represents a seven-week observance of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation by the churches of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in northern California begun Sept. 17 and ending Oct. 29, 1967. It includes six essays delivered by the pastors of these churches (with the Rev. Joel W. Prange standing by) over a six-week period; and two sermons delivered by officers of the Arizona-California District on the final, Reformation Sunday.

### Aim

The intent of this observance has been to teach the dramatic facts and to extend the spiritual blessings of the Reformation to our people, and to lead the unchurched and fallen-away to the Reformation-restored Scriptures and to their Savior.

### Origin

The idea for this program originated with the Rev. E. Arnold Sitz, Honorary President of our District. At the 1966 state Pastoral Conference, he suggested that the Reformation Anniversary might be observed with a series of lectures as did some of our mid-west churches at the 425th Anniversary. Last January, our Pastor Study Conference considered this proposal and recommended it to our congregations, which endorsed the venture and elected men to the Committee.

### Committee

Members of the Anniversary Committee were: from Bethany Church, Mr. Carl R. L. Schwertfeger of Brentwood, Chairman; from Apostles Church, Mr. John L. Hendrickson of San Jose, Secretary; from Gloria Dei Church, Mr. Oliver G. Sasse of San Francisco and Mr. Dale Imsland of San Carlos; from Peace Church, Mr. Herbert R. Miller of Cupertino; from Christ Church, Mr. Dan L. Pechin of Lodi; from St. Mark's, Mr. Don W. Schramm of Sacramento. Pastor A. Keibel served as advisor. Pastor D. Valleskey and Mr. Schramm arranged the liturgy and the choir music for the final Festival Services.

### Festival Services

The climax of our program was the joint services on Sunday Oct. 29 at 4 p.m. at Gloria Dei Church in Belmont with District President Immanuel G. Frey of Phoenix speaking on "Teaching with Authority" (Matthew 7:28,29); and at St. Mark's Church in Citrus Heights with District First Vice President Joel C. Gerlach of Garden Grove speaking on "Reviewing Reformation Principles and platitudes" (Jude 3&4). Adult and children choirs from our churches participated in the services. The offerings were designated for speaker travel costs and the Synod's Church Extension Fund.

### Booklet

This Anniversary Booklet is available for 50¢ at our area churches or from the Reformation Committee, 509 Roanoke Dr., Martinez, CA 94553.

## SUMMARIES OF ESSAYS

### 1. Trigger of the Reformation: The Ninety-Five Theses by G. Zimmermann

The Reformation was touched off on Oct. 31, 1517, when Dr. Martin Luther posted 95 statements on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. These exposed the error that forgiveness of sins can be purchased through indulgence certificates. Reaction was unexpectedly explosive. Within a month the Theses spread throughout Europe. The Pope refused correction from Scripture and excommunicated Luther. God led Luther to expose all the other teachings opposed to His Word (Romans 16:17).

### 2. Key Figure of the Reformation: Martin Luther by R. Hochmuth

The Reformer placed all his gifts in God's service. He used his scholarship to translate the Bible, and his teaching ability to transmit its Gospel-dominated truths (Jude 3). Outstanding was his God-guided statesmanship in making decisions in critical areas, such as: whether to recant Bible-based theology (at Worms), whether to base belief on subjective feeling (Wittenberg), whether to elevate reason above Scripture (Marburg), whether to compromise doctrine for church union (Augsburg).

### 3. Principle of the Reformation: Salvation by Faith by T. Franzmann

Martin Luther discovered in Romans 1:17 that "the just shall live by faith." This clashed with the Catholic program of earning forgiveness by good works. The Reformation restored the Bible-centered, material principle of By Faith Alone (Sola Fide): that the sinner is saved solely through faith. Works in no way enter in, except as a result of faith. This justification by faith is based on the Grace of God Alone (Sola Gratia), due to Christ's redemption (Eph. 2:8,9).

### 4. Standard of the Reformation: The Bible Alone by D. Valleskey

"Unless you can prove from the Bible that I made wrong statements and have spoken contrary to God's Word, I refuse to recant. My conscience is bound in the Word of God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen." So declared Martin Luther. The Bible and its Gospel had been shelved. The Reformation restored the formal principle of The Bible Alone (Sola Scriptura): that the Bible is the only basis for judging all matters of faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16).

### 5. Creed of the Reformation: The Augsburg Confession by R. Waldschmidt

At the request of Emperor Charles V in 1530 for a statement of belief, the Reformers published the Augsburg Confession (Romans 10:10). All who signed it were lay people. Its 28 articles re-emphasize the doctrines which the true Church had taught through the ages. Its central theme is identical with that of the Bible: salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Faithful Lutherans accept this confession as it stands because it agrees with the Bible.

### 6. Consequence of the Reformation: Restoration of the Church by A. Keibel

When Martin Luther realized that the established church refused to reform, he obeyed God's Word to separate from it. The Reformation spread widely but was bitterly attacked by the Roman church under the Jesuit Order. Confessional Christianity emerged with the Book of Concord in 1580. In the form of the true Evangelical (Gospel-teaching) Lutheran Church, it weathered the pietism, rationalism, modernism and false ecumenism of the subsequent centuries (John 8:31).

TRIGGER OF THE REFORMATION: THE NINETY-FIVE THESES

By Pastor Gotthold F. Zimmermann  
of Christ Lutheran Church, Lodi

"The Shot Heard 'Round the World," fired at Lexington, Mass., in 1775, is famous in the history of our country as the beginning of our war for independence. So the posting of the 95 Theses by Dr. Martin Luther on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany, 450 years ago, marks the beginning of the great Reformation of the Christian Church.

Just as the immediate results of the "Battle of Lexington" were something less than serious for the opposing force, so the 95 Theses seemed at first to contain no special threat to the erring leaders of the Church.

But as was the case at Lexington, so at Wittenberg the effect of the 95 Theses was electrifying for many in the Church, whose hearts had been groaning for deliverance from man-made teachings and practices.

From the mild effort in the 95 Theses to correct one abuse in the Church, God led Dr. Luther to grow in clarity and completeness of knowledge of His revelation for man's salvation, and in the faithful confession of these truths, until all the teachings and practices contrary to the Bible had been exposed. For this, uncounted souls have thanked God and honored Luther since then.

A. The Need of Reformation in the Church

After the time of the apostles, Satan tried to undo what God had accomplished in spreading the Gospel. First, during 300 years, the Church was scourged through ten great persecutions by the heathen Roman rulers. This did not destroy the Church. Instead, the faithful confession of the great majority of Christians and their choice of martyrdom, rather than denying their Lord who had redeemed them, became "the seed of the Church."

What Satan could not accomplish by physical force from without, he then tried to accomplish by enemies from within. False teachers arose who robbed large portions of the Church of the truth of God. He propagated Gnosticism, a mixture of Biblical truth and human philosophy; Arminianism, a denial of the divinity of Christ; Pelagianism, a denial of original sin, and the claim that man can convert and save himself. Though these faith-destroying errors were combatted and officially rejected, especially the latter left a seed later to sprout and grow into a fatal plant in the Church. This was semi-pelagianism, the teaching that man can help in some way to attain his salvation.

The third great device employed by Satan to destroy the true Church first appears about 400 A. D. The bishops of Rome wanted authority over all bishops in the Church. This ungodly desire Jesus had taken great pains to root out when it cropped up among His disciples (Matt. 18:1; 23:9-12; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 22:24-30). This desire eventually changed the Church of Christ into the Roman Catholic Church. In pursuing their goal of supreme rule in the Church, the bishops of Rome sacrificed the truth of God as clearly revealed in Holy Scripture; introduced human tradition into the Church as having equal authority with Holy Scripture, whereby they gave a cloak of respectability to many false doctrines; invented the primacy of Peter among the disciples, claimed that he was the first bishop of Rome, and that he passed his authority on to succeeding bishops of Rome; forged documents; bound the consciences of men to themselves and their hierarchy by the doctrine that only they could forgive sins and had the Keys of the Kingdom; yes, that the pope, as the bishop of Rome

called himself, was sovereign also over all temporal rulers. They played power politics, invented purgatory and innumerable so-called good works by which men supposedly help themselves to be saved and by which the coffers of the church were kept well supplied. (These are but a few of the claims and practices of the Roman Catholic Church contrary to Holy Scripture. A useful summary of these together with the teaching of Scripture on these points is found in "The Split Between Roman Catholicism and Christ," American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.)

The church, having more and more departed from God's Word, lay open to secularism, living for the enjoyment of the flesh and even the greatest immorality. This was the case with the popes and the clergy as well as with the common people.

Satan seemed to have won the battle and to have destroyed the Church which the Savior founded and built through His Spirit-filled apostles. But the Lord has promised: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Christian Church, which in essence is the Communion of Saints and not a visible church body, declared holy by God on the basis of the Savior's merits and through faith which He creates in the heart, shall endure to the end of time. Also in the dark Middle Ages, the Lord created and preserved His saints through the Sacraments and that small part of His Word which was still in use.

#### B. Reform Attempts before Luther

Again and again there arose in the Church individuals and groups which recognized in some respect the woeful conditions of the Church and tried to bring about reforms. Sometimes it was a church council (Pisa, 1409; Constance, 1414; Pavia, 1423; Basel, 1431). Sometimes it was a monastic order or even an individual priest or layman. Five individuals should be mentioned whose work influenced larger groups and who rejected some of the false doctrines and practices current in the Church. They are Peter Waldo in France, 1173; John Wycliff in England, 1314-1384; John Huss in Bohemia, 1369-1415; Hieronymus Savonarola in Italy, 1452-1498; and John Wessel in the Netherlands, died 1498. It may be noted in passing that Luther, though he did not learn the truth of Scripture from them, gratefully acknowledged what truths they had discovered.

Why, we may ask, did not these reform attempts succeed? Why did not one of these five become a Luther? Fundamentally, because it was not God's time for a complete reform of the Church. But we should also note that these reform movements largely remained on the surface. They attacked the symptoms rather than the cause of the evil. Men saw the evil moral conditions and the disunity in the church, but failed to see that a God-pleasing reform requires a change of heart, based on a return to the Scripture in all its doctrines. Only when the full light of Gospel truth frees the conscience of its burden of sin and assures the person of God's forgiveness and love, can he effectively resist the false claims of the pope and his hierarchy. Only when a person accepts the claim of Holy Scripture that it alone is the inspired Word of God and inerrant, that it is the gracious God's complete and sufficient revelation for man's salvation, that it teaches in many passages every truth needed for salvation -- only then can a person realize how deep-rooted is the perversion of the way to heaven which the Roman Catholic Church taught and still teaches.

#### C. Other Things Used by God to Prepare for the Reformation

The centuries before Luther were a time of change in all directions. The Renaissance, a re-awakening after the stagnation of the Dark Ages, was sweeping away the old order. The Crusades, seven military expeditions to recover the Holy Land from the Moslems, 1096-1270, were urged by the popes, who claimed that remission of sins and penalties for sins were thereby earned. These Crusades had brought people of

Europe in contact with the Middle East. The classical writings of Greece as well as the culture of the Moslems created interest in scholarship of all kinds, such as philosophy, geography, poetry, architecture, medicine, astronomy, and the study of the Bible in the original languages. Universities were founded. Marco Polo, after traveling and living in China and other Asian countries, 1271-1294, brought back reports of fabulous wealth and a high state of civilization to Europe. The compass and gunpowder were introduced, probably from China. The printing press with movable type was invented, opening up the era of quick publication of books. The great voyages of exploration were made, around Africa, to India, and to America. New foods, spices for the monotonous diets of Europe, and other products were introduced from the East. Money became the common medium of exchange. Commerce and trade grew. Handicrafts of all kinds became a profession. These last developments drew people into the cities. Wealth was amassed, which resulted in luxurious living. This in turn led to the cultivation of the arts, poetry, architecture, and especially painting and sculpture. The many small lords with their serfs who worked their lands and were in turn protected by the lord and his knights, were replaced by larger principalities (in Germany) and by kingdoms (in France, Spain, Portugal, England). While many people remained desperately poor, both in material things and in learning, there was a great change from the stagnation in the depths of the Dark Ages. And all these things, tending to make men independent in outward life, had a profound effect on their attitudes toward the authority of the Church.

Accompanying this activity, and in a large measure causing it, was a human spirit, called Humanism, which began to question the old way of things. While the Church was still able to impose its legalistic rule, many doctrines and practices were questioned, especially in the universities. Important names in this movement are Petrarch, born 1304; the Medici in Florence, 15th century; and in Germany, Reuchlin, Ulrich von Hutten, Erasmus, who lived into the 16th century.

This will give us some idea of the life and times in Europe, both in the Church and outside, at the close of the 15th century. God, who directs the affairs of all men, and who uses even the wrongs which men do, for the benefit of His Kingdom of grace, was preparing to give the world a wonderful new opportunity to know Him and the salvation He has prepared for men. He was about to bring forth the Reformation of the Church.

#### D. God Prepares Luther to be His Instrument

Luther was born Nov. 10th, 1483 (nine years before Columbus discovered America), in Eisleben, Germany. He was the oldest son of Hans and Margareta Luther, parents who were pious, industrious, frugal, and rather stern.

Luther's father, though coming from a long line of farmers, had become a miner in Mansfeld. By his industry and frugality he was able to acquire several small mines, and making more than a bare living, determined to send Martin to various schools. Poor as these were as teaching institutions, Martin learned more than most children. He had a good mind and a fine memory. He was also gifted with a fine singing voice. He enjoyed being out in the fields and woods at play with his younger brothers and sisters.

It was Hans Luther's wish that Martin take up the study of law. In preparation for this, he was sent first to a school with a good reputation in Magdeburg; the next year to an even better one in Eisenach. It was here that Luther was rescued from having to spend much time singing in the streets and begging for food, by a devout woman of means, Mrs. Ursula Cotta. Her home became his second home. Under good teachers, Luther made fine progress in his studies. The three years spent in Eisenach seem to have been the most pleasant in Luther's youth.

This is noteworthy because there was much in Luther's life to cause him fear and to make him suffer. In his home the training was very strict. Even the slightest disobedience or wrongdoing brought quick reproof and often sharp punishment. The apple was usually forgotten with the stick. Luther knew that his parents loved him, but there seems to have been little outward demonstration of this love. In his early school years, Luther was often unmercifully punished, according to the custom of teaching in those times. We have already heard that when he came to Eisenach he had to sing and beg for food. The reason was that the relatives who were expected to help him were too poor to do so. But the main reason for Luther's fear and suffering was the religious teachings of the Church, relayed by the schools and his home. These did not teach Christ as a loving Savior from sin, but as an angry judge, who must be appeased by doing "good works." The world was superstitiously thought to be full of evil spirits, ever ready to destroy men. Mary and innumerable other saints must be asked to intercede with Christ. Many prayers must be recited. All the rules of the Church must be obeyed. And even then only the monks and nuns and other clerics could be sure of salvation. The ordinary people had to depend on the priests for forgiveness and for bringing them safely into heaven. The result was that Luther was often troubled with the thought, whether he had really done enough to be forgiven, to be saved. He wondered if, by entering the secular profession of lawyer, rather than becoming a monk, he would not be forfeiting his salvation.

Luther's father, however, insisted that he become a lawyer. And in 1501, at the age of 18, Luther went to Erfurt to enter the university. Here he became thoroughly acquainted with the wisdom of that day, Scholasticism and Humanism. He also read avidly the classical Roman writers. Here he also for the first time saw a Bible, and was surprised that it contained much more than the Scripture lessons that were read in the church services.

The Lord, though letting Luther be trained in the wisdom of his times, did not intend that he become a lawyer. In his third year at the university, Luther accidentally wounded himself severely with his student sabre and only with difficulty stanching the flow of blood. Facing death, more persistent fears for his salvation arose. The following year, having been deeply moved by the sudden death of a close friend, while returning from a visit to his home, Luther was caught in a heavy thunderstorm. In fear for his life he called out: "St. Ann, help me. I will become a monk!"

Luther kept his promise. He said farewell to his beloved books, his companions, and happy student life. He gave away his books and other possessions, and entered the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt. But neither here was he to find peace concerning his sins. He faithfully performed every task and drudgery laid upon him. Beyond this he voluntarily fasted and prayed, and even beat himself, on one occasion till he was unconscious. The fear of not doing enough to appease the thrice-holy God continued to plague him. He was driven to the verge of despair.

In the meantime, Luther was directed to study the writings of the church fathers, the canon law of the Church, and the Scriptures. After two years he was ordained a priest. In 1508 he was appointed to teach philosophy and religion at the university in Wittenberg. He also preached. Returning to the cloister, he studied especially Greek and Hebrew to be able to read the Bible in the original languages, instead of merely in the inaccurate Latin translation.

During this time (1510), an event occurred which greatly influenced Luther's development. This was a journey to Rome on behalf of his order. Let us remember that he was a most faithful son of the Church. He was most pleased at the prospect of being able to see the "holy city," the residence of the "Holy Father," the capital of the world for him. He was astounded at the magnificent churches, the ancient ruins, the paintings and statuary. But he was highly distressed at the levity with which the



priests performed their offices. He was incensed at the proud display of the pope in receiving the mass and in processions. He was horrified at the reports of simony (buying of church offices) and immorality rampant among the clergy in Rome. In spite of these revelations, he still excused the pope with the thought that he did not realize what was going on.

Upon his return, Luther was appointed to teach religion at the university in Wittenberg. And two years later he was induced by his superior, Staupitz, to accept, against his will, the title of Dr. Of Theology and become the head of the department of religion at the university. Not having sought the position, and having made the promise faithfully to teach and to defend the Word of God publicly, this was a source of comfort and strength in later years when his study of the Bible led him to realize that God's Word says something different in many instances from what the Church taught and practiced, and when he was thrown into opposition to his Church.

In Luther's troubled state of mind, his confessor and superior of the order, who knew more about Christianity than the Church taught, tried to help him by telling him to think of the merciful Christ. It was through the study of Scripture, however (he was lecturing on the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians), that God gradually brought Luther to the realization that when the Bible speaks of God's righteousness, it is not speaking of a righteousness which God demands of us. This view is what had caused Luther so much inner grief. His conscience told him this was utterly impossible. His experience confirmed that fact. And the result had been fear and despair, at other times even anger against God, rather than peace with God. Now he realized that God is speaking of a righteousness which the Savior earned for man. This righteousness God gives to man by imputing it to him, a free gift, perfect and complete in every respect. This substitutionary righteousness and God's imputation to man is what God asks man to trust. Luther finally understood St. Paul in Romans 1: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth...For therein is revealed the righteousness of God...as it is written (Hab. 2:4): 'The just shall live by faith!'" Yes, by faith. Not by torturous confession, not by uncounted acts of penance, not by buying indulgences, not by keeping the Commandments, not by obeying the Church and its rules; but simply by depending on what God's Savior has done for us -- that was the way to assurance that God accepted him as a dear child. Suddenly the burden of doubt and fear was gone. He says it was as if heaven had opened for him. This personal realization, based on what the Scriptures actually say, made Luther the "man of the Book." Now God was ready to lead him into ever deeper understanding of His truths, and to make him a messenger of that truth and salvation for countless souls.

#### E. The 95 Theses

In spite of the realization of this central truth, the key to Scripture, Luther had no idea then, how far it in essence separated him from the position of his Church. He considered himself a loyal member and had not the slightest thought of starting a revolution.

In his lecturing at the university Luther influenced his students. He also won some of the faculty for the truth of Scripture. Because he was preacher in the local church, the newly-discovered Gospel thoughts reached most of the people of Wittenberg. Sometimes even his ruler, Frederick the Wise, influenced favorably toward Luther by his court preacher and secretary, Spalatin, attended where Luther preached.

Thus the Gospel might have continued quietly to find entrance in the hearts of a few. But God willed to bring His blessed truth into the open. This He did through Luther's 95 Theses, against the abuses connected with the sale of indulgences.

To understand the 95 Theses, we must be aware of what the Roman Catholic Church taught about penance and indulgences. In order for a person to receive forgiveness of sins after his Baptism, he must use the Church's Sacrament of Penance, that is, he must with sorrow confess all mortal sins to the priest orally, with their circumstances, must receive forgiveness from the priest (which is not merely the announcement of the Gospel, but a power reserved to the priest to forgive sins), and he must do works of penance. The priest lays on him certain penalties, such as praying the rosary a number of times, fasting, giving alms; in more severe cases, making a pilgrimage to some shrine or holy place, long fasts, severe abstinences and other mortifications for a period extending from a few days to five or ten years, or even to a lifetime. (See "Faith of Our Fathers," p.377, a Catholic book). This writer explains the need for acts of penance: "It should be borne in mind that even after the guilt is removed, there often remains some temporal punishment to be undergone, either in this life or in the next (purgatory), as an expiation of Divine sanctity and justice."

The true elements in the teaching of the Sacrament of Penance are that God wants us to confess that we are sinners, and that the Gospel message of forgiveness is spoken to such who confess. But the many perversions it contains condemn it. Particularly does Scripture make it clear that by the suffering and death of the Savior, all sins are paid for, once and for all. Hebrews 9:12 states: "By His own blood He (Christ) entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;" and Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." There is no such thing as "Divine sanctity and justice" which still requires a payment of some kind.

It was also a teaching of the church that these penances laid upon a person by the priest might be avoided by buying indulgences. "Faith of Our Fathers" says on page 375: "An indulgence is simply a remission in whole or in part, through the super abundant merits of Christ and His saints, of a temporal punishment due to God on account of a sin after the guilt and eternal punishment have been remitted." Some indulgences specified a certain length of time for which a person had remission of penalties. So-called plenary indulgences promised complete remission for a person's whole life, or, if bought for one who had died and was supposedly in purgatory, for all penalties he owed in life, so that he could leave purgatory and go to heaven. The minimum "donation" accepted for an indulgence was a quarter gulden, whose present dollar value is hard to estimate, but may have been as much as five dollars.

It was a common practice of the popes to authorize the sale of indulgences to raise money. In 1513 the pope needed money for the repair and building of St. Peter's Church in Rome and authorized such a sale. He sold the privilege to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, who also was in need of money to repay a loan he was arranging to buy another income-producing office in the church. The arrangement was that the pope and the creditors of the archbishop were each to receive half of the income after paying the expenses of the collection. A monk by the name of Tetzel was the best-known vendor engaged to sell the indulgences in the archbishop's domain.

Luther's ruler had forbidden the sale in his territory. But people could always go across the nearby border and buy. When such people returned to Wittenberg and told Luther that they need not repent, but could continue in their sins because they had bought an indulgence, he was much disturbed. He realized that false claims had been in the sale. He was concerned for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, who were trusting a false promise of remission of guilt as well as penalties, without true sorrow for sins, by merely paying the price of the indulgences. In 1516 and early in 1517 Luther preached against this misuse. He also wrote to the archbishop.

Finally Luther made use of the customary weekly public debate in the university to help stem the harm that the sale of indulgences was causing. He drafted 95 Theses against their misuse and on October 31, 1517, invited everyone interested to debate the matter by tacking them to the door of the Castle Church, commonly used as a bulletin board for public announcements. They were written in Latin, the commonly used language of all scholars at that time.

At the same time Luther sent a copy of the Theses to the archbishop. In the accompanying letter he wrote: "I do not particularly accuse the sales pitch of the sellers of indulgences - for I have not heard it - but I deplore the totally wrong understanding which the people receive from it; for this they praise openly about the indulgences everywhere and this the poor souls believe, that they, when they have bought the indulgences, can be sure of their salvation." The archbishop, not knowing how to answer Luther, forwarded the Theses to the pope. Thus the monk of Wittenberg became known in Rome also.

Let us now hear some of the Theses to get their flavor:

1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent" (Matt. 4:17), He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence.
5. The pope has neither the will nor the power to remit any penalties beyond those imposed either at his own discretion or by canon law.
8. The penitential canons apply only to men who are still alive, and, according to the canons themselves, none applies to the dead.
20. Therefore the pope, in speaking of the plenary remission of all penalties, does not mean "all" in the strict sense, but only those imposed by himself.
27. There is no divine authority for the preaching that the soul flies out of purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest.
32. All those who believe themselves certain of their own salvation by means of letters of indulgence, will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
33. We should be most carefully on our guard against those who say that the papal indulgences are an inestimable divine gift and that a man is reconciled to God by them.
35. It is not in accordance with Christian doctrine to preach and teach that those who buy off souls, or purchase confessional licenses, have no need to repent of their own sins.
67. The indulgences, which the merchants extol as the greatest favors, are seen, in fact, a favorite means for money making.

Note how these speak against the abuse of indulgences, particularly this that they are thought of as paying for sins without the need for repentance and faith in the merits of Christ for salvation.

38. Yet the pope's remission and dispensation are in no way to be despised, for, as already said, they proclaim the divine remission.
42. Christians should be taught that the pope does not at all intend that the purchase of indulgences should be understood as at all comparable with works of mercy.
48. Christians should be taught that, in granting indulgences, the pope has more need and more desire for devout prayer on his own behalf than for ready money.

69. Bishops and curates, in duty bound, must receive the commissaries of the papal indulgences with all reverence.
71. Let him be anathema and accursed who denies the apostolic character of the indulgences.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult for learned men to guard the respect due to the pope against false accusations, or at least from the keen criticism of the laity. (There follow seven such criticisms.)
91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached in accordance with the spirit and mind of the pope, all these difficulties would be easily overcome and indeed cease to exist.

Here Luther imputes only the best of intentions to the pope. As a dutiful son of the Church, Luther is trying only to help her by pointing out where indulgence teachers have erred against the pope's will and given men harmful ideas.

55. The pope cannot help taking the view that if indulgences (very small matters) are celebrated by one bell, one pageant, or one ceremony, the Gospel (a very small matter) should be preached to the accompaniment of a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
62. The true treasure of the church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
94. Christians should be exhorted to be zealous to follow Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hells.
95. And let them thus be more confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than through a false assurance of peace.

These are some of the places in which Luther speaks of the importance of the Gospel message, whose benefits men receive through true repentance for sins and dependence on the merits of Christ which the Gospel declares are theirs. This daily humbling of one's self before God is the "penalties," the cross which the Christian bears through life on the way to heaven.

Surely, there was nothing revolutionary about these Theses. To Luther's great surprise, however, their effect was explosive. In less than a month they had been spread throughout Europe. The reason was that God's time for publicly revealing His truth in the world had come. All the various forces of unrest and criticism of various aspects of the Church, its life, its doctrine, and its practice, which had gone before, had prepared the ground. Luther was far from clear at this time about the Scriptural truth. The many wrong Roman ideas he expressed in the Theses later caused Luther real regret. And of course, he had no idea of the consequences his reliance on scripture and the grace of God in Christ would have for his relation to the Church. This fuller knowledge was to come in his study and defense of Scripture against the foil of opposition. This opposition was only gradually aroused. The whole affair was called a monk's squabble. When measures of repression were finally begun, they were in God's providence toned down by political considerations. When the axe of condemnation was felled by the emperor and the church-controlled Diet of Worms, and the pope's excommunication, Luther had spiritually come of age.

KEY FIGURE OF THE REFORMATION: MARTIN LUTHER

By Pastor R. Hochmuth of  
Peace Lutheran Church, Santa Clara

Standing beside Martin's casket in the Wittenberg church, his coworker Philip remarked: "He was of such keen understanding that he alone in confused, obscure, and difficult disputes could see quickly what was to be advised and done." It is this characteristic of Luther to which we give our attention tonight - his ability to reach a decision on the basis of God's Word and stick with it.

Our enthusiasm for this subject is not hero worship; it is gratitude to God who prepared and guided a man, a miner's son, to do great things for us. We are the beneficiaries of a God-wrought Reformer. In his early activities and writings he was coming out of the woods, so to say; there were many things that were not yet clear to him because he had not yet absorbed all that the Scriptures say to sinners. We do not endorse everything that Luther said and did. He himself changed his position on some questions as he grew in clarity. For instance, at one time he considered the number of Sacraments to be three, including penance. Where the Scriptures speak, and where he has helped us to understand the Scriptures, there we can stand with him.

Where do I stand with God? This is the question that haunted him all through his youth. He had devout, religious parents; he went to a church school, a church college, but he didn't have God's Truth; he didn't peace with God through the pardon in Jesus. But God knew him and His hand was in his life, not only in Baptism, but as he is gaining his education. For instance, by bringing him into the care of the Cotta family, God gave him a preparation for dealing with more cultured and noble people than he had known in his miners' village.

The lightning bolt drives him to the monastery. He makes the ultimate act of total self-denial, giving up career, family, and his will. He experiences the utter emptiness of self-denial as a way to gain right standing with God. But his superiors become God's instruments deciding for him that he shall become a priest and a professor, a doctor of theology. He is brought to the situation where he finds Truth and Grace for himself and he is made responsible to proclaim to others. God intended to give this man the answer to the haunting question in his life and to use him to bring the Truth to countless thousands of others.

It was decided that he should lecture on the writings of Paul and the Psalms. All along he heard about forgiveness, but he knew he didn't deserve forgiveness. The thought of God's justice terrifies him. He is restless: "Where do I stand with God?"

Little by little as he prepared his lectures to the students, the answer became clear to him. God speaks to him from the Scriptures. He realizes the Truth; he sees the light: The lightning of God's justice that ought to strike me for my sins has been directed against the Holy Son of God as my Substitute. He obeyed in my place; He served in my place; He died in my place and for the sins of all. God is just; He deals with sin; He hates sin. And still He has a place for sinners in His family! What a marvelous discovery for Martin. Grace is really grace - pardon free and total. Free to me the sinner, because my Lord has paid the tremendous price.

It was a discovery for him; you and I have had it ever since we have been in the Lutheran church. We need to realize how radical this sounded in Luther's day when for centuries religion was based on man's efforts to merit a place with God by his own sacrifice, work, deed, self-denial, indulgence, almsgiving, devotion, etc., etc. Here comes a monk saying: "The more unworthy I see myself, the more sure I can be of a place with God - because I have been led to cling to Christ's righteousness. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned sinner, purchased and won me from all sins. Martin is convinced by God, and decisively proclaimed: "Only believe."

He found out how marvelous is the mercy of God. That in His justice which He does not dilute, He doesn't sweep it aside. God is not like a Grandfather who says, "Now children you ought not to do that, but we will let it go this time." That's not God. God's justice will be carried out, but Martin was privileged to find out through the pages of Holy Scripture: It is carried out against His Son as a Substitute for me. I am redeemed. Unworthy me. I am a child of God. And when he came to realize this certainty he began to pass it on to his students. Now during these years it also came about that he was appointed priest in the village parish. You see, not every priest was a monk and not every monk was a priest. But it happened in his case. And now he is concerned about advising the people with their consciences, their yearning for forgiveness, where do they stand with God. And then comes the issue about the indulgences and then the Theses. I am sure Pastor Zimmermann has carried that out very well. When Martin is trying to advise people, he finds out they are going over on the other side of the river, dropping some money in a box and coming back and saying, "Our sins are all taken care of." You know this led him to nail the Theses to the door. What about this business of dropping money in a box to get right with God? The Theses very soon involved him in discussion, debate, and controversy. It became more and more critical, coming to a head with Martin debating with the learned Dr. Eck in Leipzig.

Posting of the theses was a decision prompted by people's spiritual welfare and backed by Martin's growing certainty regarding the Gospel. This decisiveness really stands out in the Leipzig debate. Here we might compare Martin to a quarterback who doesn't have a coach on the bench to send in the signals. Today we so often help to resolve questions that come up by inquiring: "What did Walther say?" "What was Hoenecke's or Stoeckhardt's position." "What does the faculty teach?" Luther did not have people like that to turn to. But now he was turning to the Scriptures, and when he saw what God had to say, he was ready to stand up and say the same thing. This is the quality we should be celebrating in this anniversary season.

The authority of the Papacy had been established partly on decretals supposedly issued in the early centuries after the Apostles. During the debate Luther made a point new for his day. He studied through the matter and was forced to the conclusion that the decretals were spurious, and he said so at Leipzig. Since that time it has been conceded that he was right. What was beginning to happen was this: Luther's conviction, being based on the Word of God, put him at odds with the authorities, the councils, the popes. He had to go out on a limb and he was not afraid to do so, for by now he knew where he stood with God: I know I am unworthy; I know that I am redeemed; I belong to Him. I am not afraid to take a position and stand up for it when I can demonstrate: Thus saith the Lord.

Another evidence of this God-employed decisiveness is in this: The voices of his superiors said, "Martin, you must acknowledge the authority of the Pope and the church council that have authorized indulgences. Luther took exactly the opposite tack. He demonstrated that the councils had contradicted themselves and were not infallible. As far as having to recognize the authority of the pope is concerned he raised a novel objection: "What about all those Christians of early centuries who never even heard that there was a bishop at Rome?" He went on: "I believe that a layman armed with Scripture has more authority than the pope!" This was revolutionary. Luther's purpose was not sensationalism, but the presentation of the saving Gospel. No matter who authorized it, the selling of indulgences was robbing people, not merely of their silver, but of their souls, depriving them of the sinner's true Treasure in Christ.

Another development at Leipzig came about in regard to the church's nature. The whole world saw the church as an organization under the Pope. From the Bible Luther saw the church is not really an organization; it is a living body, the total number of those who belong to Christ, irrespective of hierarchy. For thousands of years now, no one had even dreamed of a church without a Pope. Then here comes this

monk, this man's son who is challenging all those centuries of history. Dr. Eck confronts him, "Martin; trying to make him look foolish, "Are you the only one who knows anything?" Here is Martin's reply: "I answer that God once spoke through the mouth of a donkey, and I will tell you straight what I think. I am a Christian theologian and am bound, not only to assert, but to defend the truth with my blood and death. I want to believe freely and be a slave to the authority of no one, whether council, university, or pope. I will confidently confess what appears to me to be true, be it asserted by a Catholic or a heretic." The one who has found his certainty with God wants to hold it out for others to grasp, and becomes the key-figure of reform.

After Leipzig Luther's position was like that of a housewife who comes back from summer vacation and sees a mountain of wash and ironing; it's canning time and all the hems have to be altered for starting school. Some would give up. God had trained a man who takes decisive action; he gets busy, tackling a mountain of ills and errors in men's faith and lives. He begins to write and to publish, spreading the ideas God has given him through the Scriptures.

These are years of significant and basic writings. Tonight we will name just three of them, and try to demonstrate the decisive position Luther was taking. We mention first "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church." Luther makes the point that Christians are being enslaved by being deprived of the Gospel by the church's administration of the Sacraments. Penance was, of course, regarded as a Sacrament, and the people were taught to believe that you can not obtain forgiveness unless a priest pronounces it over you. Luther writes: "Absolution is only a declaration by man of what God has decreed in heaven. It is not a ratification by God of what man has ruled on earth." He is opening the door that God had opened to him through Christ. He talked about the principle that the priesthood is really every baptized Christian, not just an ordained few, for every Christian has the right to come before God with prayer and the privilege of hearing God speak to him in His Word.

In particular he wrote about the Mass. The Sacrament of the Altar is not a work or deed that man performs and offers to God. It is a pollution of the Sacrament to make of it a means whereby one may gain merit in the eyes of God. It is Jesus setting the table for sinners and inviting, "Come, this is given for you." It is a sad error that the priests went through a quota of masses every day as tho they were offering sacrifices to God. He was touching the sensitive nerve core. Salvation is not by merit, but by grace, grace alone. This was the writing that Rome hated most.

The style of Luther's writing fits the characteristics we have been outlining. It has been pointed out "he united popular, intelligible style, downright, homely good sense to originality." He is forthright, outspoken, concerned about what needs to be said and then saying plainly and directly.

"To the Nobility of the German Nation" is the second major work of these hectic years that we note tonight. He was seeking to stir the leaders of society to action in regard to all that was not in harmony with the Gospel in the life and organization of the church. He was trying to tell laymen that they have rights and responsibilities in the church. All Christians have the right to use the Scriptures and judge what is true. Luther now advanced a series of reformatory suggestions to curb the tyranny of the pope, the abuses of monasticism, the demand of celibacy for priests. He also launched into the areas of education and social questions, bringing all under the glow of the Gospel of salvation.

The third of the writings of this period that we refer to is "On the Freedom of a Christian Man." Here again we have the Key Figure of the Reformation putting the truth in a striking way: The believer, redeemed by Christ, is God's son and heir; he is free lord over all things and is slave to none; he is released from all commands and demands. The Christian is free lord over all things - comma; and a Christian is in all things an obedient servant and subordinate to all. He saved, not by

works, but he is saved for works, to serve God and his neighbor freely, out of love.

Many souls found encouragement and peace with God through Luther's writings, but Rome gave him sixty days to retract or be regarded as a heretic. In December 1520, Professor Luther approached the students' bonfire and took the irretraceable step. He burned the Pope's bull of ban. Not long after he wrote to a friend: "The matter becomes dead earnest. If God does not accomplish this, it can never be accomplished." A God-wrought reformation it was to be; and Martin, the decisive key figure.

After the Pope has excommunicated Martin, you can see God's hand in the events again. The political situation unfolded in such a way that the new emperor, Charles, was not in a position to follow up the Pope's ban with an imperial condemnation of Luther without giving him a hearing. This was to take place at the Imperial Diet at Worms.

In the months preceding Luther was contacted with the idea of working out a compromise. Luther was deeply moved by the thought that he was becoming responsible for splitting the church. He had to choose between loyalty to the organization and faithfulness to the whole Scripture message. He decided. No compromise of the Word. It is the means of grace, not the organization. Remembering "Whoso shall confess Me before men...", he sets out for Worms. His life is at stake. But the monk who once trembled before God is now ready to appear before the Emperor.

Here is a description of the scene in the words of Roland Bainton in his biography; "Here I Stand:" Here was Charles, heir of a long line of Catholic sovereigns--of Maximilian the romantic, of Ferdinand the Catholic, of Isabella the orthodox--scion of the house of Hapsburg, lord of Austria, Burgundy, the Low Countries, Spain, and Naples, Holy Roman Emperor, ruling over a vaster domain than any save Charlemagne, symbol of the medieval unities, incarnation of a glorious if vanishing heritage; and here before him a simple monk, a miner's son, with nothing to sustain him save his own faith in the Word of God. Here the past and the future were met. Some would see at this point the beginning of modern times. The contrast is real enough. Luther himself was sensible of it in a measure. He was well aware that he had not been reared as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but what overpowered him was not so much that he stood in the presence of the emperor as this, that he and the emperor alike were called upon to answer before Almighty God.

Luther was examined. He was confronted with a pile of his books and asked whether they were his. His answer: "This touches God and His Word. This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ says 'He who denies me before men him will I deny before my Father.' To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over." Some people thought he was weakening. He was given until 4 P.M. the next day. He was awake all night, praying. God strengthened him, God who answers prayer.

At 6 the next evening they called him in. They asked him again, "Are these your books? Will you recant them?" Luther responded, "Most serene Emperor, Illustrious Princes, Most Clement Lords, if I have not given some of you your proper titles I beg you to forgive me. I am not a courtier, but a monk. You asked me yesterday whether I would repudiate them. They are all mine, but as for the second question, they are not all of one sort."

Then Luther described how some of his writings were pure Christian Gospel and advice and everybody would accept them. He said, "I can't recant them. It would be denying the truth of God, and you yourselves would have to accept that."

As he spoke of the second category, the Emperor broke in and objected. God kept Luther calm. He didn't get flustered. This man was on the spot, but God



was employing him for your benefit and mine. He went on to the third category. They were impatient by this time and the inquisitor demanded: "Do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?" Then his decisive reply: "Since your Majesty and your Lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have often contradicted each other, my conscience is captive to the Word of God; I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

After several days the decision was announced: Luther is an outlaw. This meant that it would be no crime to take his life. A sympathetic Elector Frederick intervened to harbor the heretic at Wartburg Castle. He lets his hair and beard grow, as Knight George, but the key figure of the Reformation does not let grass grow under his feet.

He sets out to give the Bible to the people in their own language. To him the Bible was the message of God's love for sinners. He wanted villagers and children to experience first hand what God said for their peace and joy. He didn't merely produce a Bible in German, he labored to give his people a German message from God. He was concerned about meaning and had his translation printed in paragraphs, not disjointed verses. God equipped him with a gift for languages, a facility for expression - and above all, the realization that Scripture is to reveal salvation by grace for Jesus' sake. He was willing to revise his translation from one edition to the next, in order that God's message might be brought home all the more clearly.

While Luther was in seclusion, people in Germany were saying, "If something has happened to him, may his spirit and his zeal be granted to somebody else. We need someone like this." It was God's will that Martin should continue to be the key figure; through his activity, the translating of the Bible most especially, was a God-wrought Reformation brought about.

Up to this point we have seen how it was in hours of crisis that the decisiveness of Luther stood out most dramatically. This same quality was to appear also in the succeeding years as the matter of building an evangelical church and edifying its people became a matter for systematic consideration. While Luther had been at the Wartburg things in Wittenberg had gotten out of hand. Leadership of the Reformation had fallen into the hands of the radical Carlstadt, and word came to Luther that things were in a mess. The students were running roughshod over the sensitivity of the people and something had to be done. Luther decided to leave the sanctuary of the Wartburg and return to the city. Now we see how this decisive leader for God dealt with others when time for decision was called for on their part. The radicals in Wittenberg had forced many issues; for instance, in the matter of the people receiving the cup in the Lord's Supper, they had poured wine into a mug and passed it around in the service of the mass. Obviously many were not ready for such changes. Now Luther stepped in. While he agreed there were many abuses which had to be corrected he was not in favor of correcting abuses by further abuses. He lectured to the students: Preaching and praying is the way to change things, not by violence; by the Word not by force. It is very striking to note that the one who was so decisive, was himself very patient in dealing with those slow to follow. He points out to the students that no one can believe for someone else. Neither can he force his convictions on somebody else; it must be by persuasion. In this connection we note that Luther also exhibited unusual patience in the classroom allowing students to disagree so long as they had sound basis for their ideas. This is just one of the factors which led to his renown as a professor and to the growth of the University of Wittenberg.

After due instruction changes were made. Specifically we can refer again to the celebration of the Sacrament, with the people receiving the bread and the cup. It was also time for other changes to be made. When Luther could no longer withstand the requests that he suggest an order of service, he proceeded to do so. His reluctance was due to the fact that he did not want to impose a certain form of service upon every congregation. He saw the advisability of adapting the order of service according to various local situations. He outlined one service in Latin and later on he outlined another in German intending it particularly for the outlying villages and cities. He was constantly interested in bringing more of the vernacular into use so that the service could be of greater benefit to all the people, and this was the key word: The service was to edify, to benefit God's people through the Word and through the presentation of the Sacrament as the gift of Christ, offering personal pledge of pardon and peace. With this in mind Luther led the way in showing that many external things are of secondary importance such as vestments, candles, etc. Luther once commented that if the Pope would have allowed him to present the truth, he would have been willing to wear another pair of pants around his neck. To see Luther's position regarding these externals note that during the week with his brothers he celebrated the Lord's Supper in what was the equivalent of street clothes, but in public on Sundays he celebrated it in the customary robes and vestments because he saw no purpose in disturbing the uninformed people in such secondary matters. More basic was his interest and emphasis on the fact that the service ought to give expression to two basic elements-- God's people coming together to speak to Him in prayer and to hear Him speak from His Word and through the Sacrament. He did not throw out everything that had developed through the centuries. He was interested in keeping and using that which was of benefit and changing that which could be made of greater benefit. The liturgy and the order of service were to serve God's people, not be their master. The greater participation of the congregation was his interest and especially through more and more German Language hymns. He asked his friends to provide such; some cooperated with him, but when still more were necessary, he was a key figure in the Reformation in this respect too, hymn writing. Since this is an area quite familiar to us we do not go into it at any greater length here.

Decisiveness is also the key word when it came to what was to be done about edifying, the building up in faith, of the people in Saxony. The decision was reached that a visitation should be held. What it produced was close to consternation, the realization how woefully the people had been brought up in spiritual darkness under Papacy. The key figure of the Reformation again takes steps that something should be done of a basic nature in a hurry, and the Small Catechism is the result. Luther's ability to hit the nail on the head is well known to everyone who is familiar with the Catechism and the spirit that it breathes. He considered it later on in his life to have been one of his two most significant writings.

The other is that writing known as, On the Bondage of the Will, that writing in which Luther sets down in unmistakable clarity what the Scriptures have to say about man's inability to come to God by his own power. It is seen within the framework of our theme. It was written at a time when it would have been to Luther's advantage to gain the favor of the humanistic scholars and others with intellectual disagreements versus Rome. He could have lined up impressive adherents by being willing to compromise some of his views. But God used him to reflect the truth, not to build a party. Luther's clear statements here alienated some, especially Erasmus, the renowned scholar. Again we mark the fact that Luther took a position on the basis of the Scriptures and let the chips fall where they might. God was bringing about a reformation, restoring the truth for our benefit.

Particular interest in our day is the position that Luther took in respect to the Peasants' Revolt which was the headline-making event of the middle twenties of the Sixteenth Century. The dire straits of the peasants was a national calamity. There was social ferment; some had taken up Luther's words about evangelical free-

dom, misusing them to prop arguments for revolt. The storm of anger and brutality broke in 1525. Luther felt that he was called upon to state his case - God's case - clearly, and therefore he spoke courageously. He spoke out frankly to both sides without respect to persons and states the problem truthfully. He tells the nobility, "You do nothing but exploit and tax your inferiors so that you can continue in your pomp and haughty superiority until the poor common man neither can nor will tolerate it further. We have you princes and lords to thank for this disturbance and uprising." He advised the peasants against revolt; when violence erupted furiously, he spoke out. It almost takes one's breath to hear Luther's severe condemnation, "The peasants have bad consciences and an unworthy cause. The peasant who is killed in this cause is lost in body and soul, eternally possessed by the Devil. The authorities shall then intervene with force." Revolt is intolerable. This is the point of Luther's position. Societies instituted by God must not be disrupted. When Luther uses strong language against the peasants, it is because they would destroy society. The author Jorgensen points out that as definitely as Luther rejected an order of society in which the church rules over the state and family, so also did he reject the destruction of society. Luther was not steering a course to be popular; he was steering a course to be right, standing with God and willing to take the consequences from either side.

Every facet of life took on a new hue under the sunshine of the Gospel and many things called for revision. Luther was called upon to speak out on common sense about marriage matters, about family and children. He had to lead people to a Biblical view of serving in the military. He outlined welfare programs for Wittenberg and other places. He especially brought home to people that there is no distinction before God between laity and clergy; everyone who is baptized is a priest before God, and whatever any man has to do is to be carried out as a responsibility under God. The woman washing diapers renders greater service to her God than the nun in the convent. To marry is no less holy than to be a priest. He had been preaching these ideas for many years. In 1525 at the age of forty-two the time came to practice what he preached, and again he takes the decisive step and marries - a former nun!

As the years wore on, the evangelical group in northern Germany became more and more aware that there was no longer any hope that Rome would change. It had become a fact of life that there could no longer be one organized church. The pressure for a united front of those who had left Rome's errors, to draw together for united action, was mounting almost daily. Luther was subjected to the pressure, and again and again he had to maintain the principle, especially crucial at Marburg, that loyalty to God's Word does not permit the Christian to compromise the truth of God even in one point, even for the sake of organized effort. Organization is not a means of grace; the Word is. God works through the Word. With might of ours can naught be done. This position of Luther's, made under very trying circumstances, fits him as the key figure of the Reformation. God brought him to this conviction through the Word by which Martin the sinner was led to see redemption in Christ and see himself as Martin the redeemed, the justified, the sanctified - by God. Thus it is that we can look upon him as a key figure in a God-wrought Reformation.

+

+

+

"Luther, entranced by the song of angels, stunned by the wrath of God, speechless before the wonder of creation, lyrical over the divine mercy, a man aflame with God. For such a person there was no question which mattered much save this: How do I stand before God? ... For this reason political and social forms were to him a matter of comparative indifference.... it is futile to inquire whether Luther was a democrat, aristocrat, autocrat, or anything else. Religion was for him the chief end of man, and all else peripheral." Roland Bainton

GOD'S WORD IS OUR GREAT HERITAGE.

don, attacking them to prop arguments for revolt. The story of anger and brutality broke in 1525. Luther left that he was called upon to state his case - God's case - clearly, and before he spoke contemptuously. He spoke out firmly to both sides without respect to persons and states the problem. He tells the nobility "You do nothing but exploit and tax your subjects so that you can contain in your pomp and haughty superiority until the poor peasant man neither can nor will tolerate it further. We have you praying and tithing to thank for this discipline and up-thing." He advised the peasants against revolt; when violence erupted brutally, he spoke out. It almost takes one's breath to hear Luther's severe condemnation. "The peasants have had consciousness and an unworthy cause. The peasant who is killed in this cause is lost in body and soul, eternally possessed by the Devil. The authorities shall then intervene with force." Revolt is intolerable. This is the point of Luther's position. Socialists frustrated by God must not be disrupted. Luther uses strong language against the peasants. It is because they would destroy society. The author Johnson points out that as definitely as Luther re-jected an order of society in which the church rules over the state and family, so also did he reject the destruction of society. Luther was not steering a course to be popular; he was steering a course to be right, standing with God and willing to take the consequences from either side.

Every facet of life took on a new hue under the aegis of the Gospel and many things called for revision. Luther was called upon to speak out on common sense about marriage matters, about family and children. He had to lead people to a Biblical view of serving in the military. He outlined welfare programs for widows, orphans and other places. He especially brought home to people that there is no distinction before God between laity and clergy; everyone who is baptized is a priest before God, and whatever any man has to do is to be carried out as a responsibility under God. The woman washing diapers renders greater service to her God than the man in the convent. To marry is no less holy than to be a priest. He had been preaching these things for many years. In 1525 at the age of forty-two the time came to practice what he preached, and again he takes the decisive step and writes a former man.

As the years wore on, the evangelical group in northern Germany became more and more aware that there was no longer any hope that Rome would change. It had become a fact of life that there could no longer be one organized church. The pressure for a united front of those who had left Rome's errors, to draw together for united ac-tion, was mounting almost daily. Luther was subjected to the pressure, and again and again he had to maintain the principle, especially at Marburg, that joy-fully to God's Word does not permit the Christian to compromise the truth of God even in one point, even for the sake of organized effort. Organization is not a means of grace; the Word is. God works through the Word. With a light of grace and insight he done. The position of Luther's, made under very trying circumstances, fits him as the key figure of the Reformation. God brought him to this conviction through the Word which leads to see redemption in Christ and see him- self as being justified by God. Thus it is that we can look upon him as a key figure in a God-wrought Restoration.

Luther, entrusted by the song of angels, stunned by the wrath of God, speech-less before the wonder of creation, lyrical over the divine mercy, a man at one with God. For each a person there was no question which mattered such save that how do I stand before God? ... For this reason political and social forms were to him a matter of comparative indifference. ... It is futile to inquire whether Luther was a democrat, aristocrat, autocrat, or anything else. Religion was for him the chief end of man, and all else peripheral." Roland Bainton

## THE PRINCIPLE OF THE REFORMATION: SALVATION BY FAITH

Whole libraries have been written on Luther. He has been examined from all angles and by all types of scholars - friendly, hostile, neutral. They have hailed him as a hero of Christendom and condemned him as a disrupter of the church. Some have made him a saint, some have despised his occasionally vulgar language and boisterous manner. He has been exalted as a German patriot and denounced as a rabble-rouser. Each age has judged him according to its standards and used or abused him according as he could be fitted into contemporary programs. He has suffered the fate of many historical figures who find their purposes distorted by their own times and their achievements turned toward selfish gains by their own followers.

But what the public thinks of the man is of little importance except to those of us who hold him dear to our hearts. The Reformation was not wrought because of the man, but through the man. We are not here to praise the man, but to praise God for what was done through the man. Our purpose here is to look into the teachings of the man, and especially the teaching which he considered to be the very heart of the Bible and all religion. Our purpose here is to examine the Principle of the Reformation: Salvation by Faith.

Dr. Martin Luther's discovery of the Biblical teaching of Salvation by Faith was a very momentous event in the history of the true Christian Church on earth. It fired him to be the courageous reformer that he was. It has fired the church ever since. We will want to take a good look at this subject tonight. To aid us in understanding the reformers thoughts and thus to ground us more firmly on the Biblical truth of Salvation by Faith alone, we have on this tape recorder a number of quotations which have been taken directly from Luther's own writings.

## I. WHAT IS SALVATION?

How do we approach the teaching of Salvation by Faith? Perhaps we can best start by asking, "What is salvation?" Though it seems that many do not take the time to ask themselves that very question, yet it ought to take top priority in our lives. Dr. Luther said it very briefly:

"We should let nothing in heaven or on earth keep us from saving our soul and conscience." (WLS 4010)

Salvation, then, is something that is of utmost importance and has to do with a person's soul and his conscience. The average person in Luther's day might have considered himself to be free of evils and ills if he could get into the good graces of either the conquering Turks or the powerful Emperor. To be free from tyranny and unfair treatment could easily be considered as salvation. But, Dr. Luther had this to say about that:

"What good does it do the Turk and our Emperor to be mighty lords if they remain under the power of the devil and die and perish eternally? Therefore if one is redeemed only from the ills of this life, it is a childish affair. For how long do we live? What good would it do us if this ill were not remedied: That is, if we were not redeemed from

sin and death? All crowns and money are mere rubbish if I do not know how I am to live and be holy before God. (WLS, 4011)

In another sermon he developed the thought a little further:

"It would be a great error to estimate God's goodness and grace only by your lot here on earth. It is true, of course, that money and possessions, a sound body, and the like are God's gifts and blessings. But these things do not last forever, for in the end we must leave behind money possessions and everything we have. Moreover, there is the additional misfortune that unless we take special care to walk in the fear of God and pay close attention to the Word, the blessing of God actually gives occasion for many sins because of our sinful nature." (WLS, 4012)

Getting into a right relationship with the Creator who made us, put us on this earth, and gave us all that we have - that is salvation. Establishing that right relationship and preserving it through death into eternal life is the goal of all religion. It must be the goal of religion if religion is to have any claim at all to being religion.

The young Martin Luther was not nearly as concerned about salvation, about being right with God, as he was by the time he spoke the words we have heard. He had been brought up to believe that God was an angry judge, but that one could appease His anger through sacrifices, good works, prayers to the saints, and other forms of penance. If your conscience bothered you, you could perform your penance, go home, and feel relatively assured that you were once again in God's good graces - if you did not think too much. But young Martin Luther was a thinking man. As he stood unworthily before the Almighty he felt guilty. Even when he had done his good works he felt guilty.

In an all out effort to quiet the guilt feeling, and to attain peace from his accusing conscience, he entered the monastery. That was a natural decision for him - where else could one go to flee the temptations of the world? Where else would one go to find himself and find God?

But the peace he was seeking was not there, but not because he was not a good monk. He fasted. He laid on himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets which were permitted him and well-nigh froze to death. At times he was proud of his sanctity and would say, "I have done nothing wrong today." Then misgivings would arise. "Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough?" He believed in later life that his rigorous life in the monastery had done permanent damage to his digestion. He was a good monk. Listen:

"I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of the order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, readings, and other work." (HIS, 45)

Luther was selected for the priesthood by his superior. When it came time to say his first mass; he took his place before the altar and began to recite the introductory portion of the mass. He came to the words, "We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God. He related afterward:

"At these words I was utterly stupified and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, "With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up my eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say 'I want this, I ask for that?' For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God." (HIS, 41)

He had become a priest, but he had still not found salvation. He did not find the right relationship with his Maker, which he so dearly sought. By this time He had become quite a student of the Bible. There was a big Bible in the monastery in the dining hall. He often read to the other monks from it. He found comfort in the portions of Scripture that speak about God's love, though he could not understand how the Holy, the High, the Mighty, could love such a miserable creature, such an unworthy creature as Martin Luther. He could not understand how God, the God of justice and fairness, could overlook the faults, the failings, the imperfections, the transgressions of his rebellious people.

One of Martin's superior's, Dr. Staupitz, took an interest in him. He saw the young priest's sincerity, his obvious gifts, his knowledge of the Bible. Dr. Staupitz tried to offer comfort to the struggling young man. He said, "Martin, you are making religion altogether too complicated. All that is really necessary is that you love God." But the intended comfort pierced like an arrow. How can one love a God who is a consuming fire against sin? Who can love a Christ who is pictured as sitting on a rainbow consigning the unrighteous to the flames of hell? Luther was honest with himself. He considered himself unrighteous, unholy, unworthy of God's mercy. He was to love God? Hear what he said:

"Is it not against all natural reason that God out of his mere whim deserts men, hardens them, damns them, as if he delights in sins and in such torments of the wretched for eternity, he who is said to be of such mercy and goodness? This appears unfair, cruel, and intolerable in God, by which very many have been offended in all ages. And who would not be? I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!" (HIS, 59)

After all his good works, after all his self-denial, after all his prayers, after all his honest attempts to love God and see Him as a loving God in return; Luther still could not say that he had found salvation. He did not have the right relationship with God.

## II. WHAT IS FAITH?

Dr. Staupitz, in an effort to keep Martin occupied enough to stop him from thinking about his guilt, saw to it that Luther was called to Whittenburg, to teach Bible Courses at the University. Luther dived into the work. One of his first courses was on the Psalms. In the Psalms he discovered that God speaks about a righteousness which He gives to sinners. The thought excited Martin! "Could it be, he thought, that the righteousness, the uprightness, the goodness which I cannot earn for myself, but which I so need to stand before the righteous judge might be given to me as a gift from the Lord? Is it possible that God, when he looks at me, might see me as a righteous man in spite of the fact that I am unrighteous? Is such a gift possible? and if possible, how do I get it? Where do I get this righteousness by which God declares me good, even though I am far from good?"

The excitement of the prospect drove him further into the Bible. Then he came to Romans, Romans 1, 16 and 17, which read: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Such a little difference in a few words! But as Luther sat in his study in a tower, it began to dawn on him that his discovery was going to mean a tremendous change in his thinking over against what he had been taught. He had been taught that the righteousness of God is something that a man earns. It is his lifetime of good works and noble thoughts and unselfish notions which he presents before the Almighty as his credential for salvation. But now Luther had discovered a passage of the Scripture which indicates that the righteousness of God is a gift which God bestows upon the sinner. Now he discovered Salvation by Faith. Listen to him tell about his discovery:

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although a spotless monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would appease him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "The just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven." (HIS, 65)



So people are saved by faith. What is faith? We can ask that question of Dr. Luther:

"Faith is the peculiar nature to deal with, and to believe, that which is not yet present. For what is present need not to be believed; one feels and sees it. When a rich man, who has money and possessions in great plenty, believes that he will not die of hunger during the year, this is not called faith. But that man is really a believer who, without anything on hand, is convinced that God will supply him." (WLS, 1373)

That people are saved by faith is not a conclusion to which people come by accident. It is God's plan. It is God who makes it known to men. In fact, people who try to find the way of salvation by making conclusions with their reason are opposing salvation by faith. Dr. Luther put it this way:

"He who would go right must say: I believe; not: I conclude, or judge, that the matter is right or not right. For if you want to sit in judgement on the matter, what need is there of faith for you? He who believes does not pass judgement but permits judgement to be passed for him. He surrenders himself to the judgement of another and says in effect: I am foolish in this matter and do not understand it, for I have not seen, heard, or experienced anything of it." (WLS, 1439)

That is the way faith accepts what God has said, namely, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Faith, which is the one thing necessary for salvation, for standing right in the eyes of God, is a gift of God. It is not a work on the part of men. This is not to say that good works are not an important part of a Christian's life. They are. Even Luther emphasized with the Holy Writers of Scripture that a faith without works is dead. But he was very careful to point out that works do not save. They are a result of faith which saves.

### III. HOW CAN FAITH SAVE?

Here we must pause to ask, "How can faith save?" If good works cannot save, then how can faith save? Luther once told a story to illustrate the problem raised by this question:

"A doctor of theology once met a collier, a coal-miner, on the bridge at Prague and, moved to compassion by the fact that the fellow was a poor layman, asked: My good man, what do you believe? The collier answered: I believe what the church believes. The Doctor: But what does the church believe?" The collier: "The church believes what I believe." Later, when the doctor was about to die, the devil so severely troubled him concerning his faith that he did not know which way to turn and found no rest until he said: I believe what the collier believes. God grant us very little of that sort of faith; for if they had no other faith than this, both the doctor and the collier believed themselves into the abyss of hell." (WLS, 1384)

So, on the one hand we may be tempted to feel that mere faith cannot possibly save us, though God clearly says it can. On the other hand we might be tempted to say that any kind of faith can save us. In his teachings Luther always firmly emphasized that there is something very definite which faith must believe. He would never have accepted as valid a statement to the effect that it makes no difference what you believe as long as you are sincere. Faith must have a definite object. That object is Christ in whom God bestowed His grace upon mankind. The grace of God in Christ, Luther considered to be the very heart of the teaching of Salvation by Faith. This is so because God sent His Son by grace to take our place under the law. Christ suffered in our place. He shed the blood we should have shed. He was hung on the cross where we should have hung.

In other words, the grace of God in Christ answered the question, "How can a God of perfect justice simply overlook sins?" The answer is: "He doesn't." Not a single sin is overlooked by Him. Every sin was heaped upon His Son. He bore the guilt, the shame, and the punishment of every sin. Luther loved to preach on the fact that Christ is our substitute. In one sermon this is the way he expressed it:

"Because Christ has become a King and Priest for you and has bestowed this great blessing on you, you dare not imagine that it was done for nothing or cost little or comes to you because of your merit. Sin and death were overcome for you in Him and through Him. Grace and life were given you; but it meant bitter work for Him. It cost Him much. He earned it at the greatest expense with His own blood, body, and life. For to put down God's wrath, judgement, conscience, hell, death, and everything evil and to gain everything good could not be done without satisfying divine justice, paying for sin, and really overcoming death." (WLS, 1844)

This whole concept opened the Scriptures for Luther. The words of Christ on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" suddenly were very clear. Before Luther could not understand why the Son Of God could feel forsaken, forgotten, rejected by His Heavenly Father. But when Christ on the cross is viewed as man's substitute, bearing all the corruption and iniquity and evil and sin of all men, what is He but something to be forsaken by the holiness of God? When the heavenly Father looked upon His Son, He did not see His Son's holiness and righteousness but saw instead the sin of all mankind. And when He looked upon mankind, He declared all men righteous, just, because Christ had born their sins. Because Christ was forsaken by God the Father in man's place, Luther suddenly realized that he no longer had to fear being forsaken by God.

Was Luther saying then, that because God has declared all men justified for Christ's sake, therefore all men will be saved? No, that is where faith enters in. The treasure which Jesus has earned must still be appropriated to the individual. It must still be grasped by the individual and taken to heart as one's own. Faith does that. Faith, though not understanding why God should find it in His grace to offer such a treasure to man, reaches out and lays hold of the treasure of Christ's merits. Luther once spoke about the way faith reaches out:

"Here, therefore, the chief article of our doctrine must come to our help, namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent into the world by the Father, suffered and died for us and thereby reconciled and moved the Father to grace, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, pleading our cause as our Savior and as our constant Mediator and Intercessor interceding for us who cannot of ourselves have or obtain this perfect purity and good conscience. Therefore through him we can say before God: Although I am not pure and cannot have a good conscience, yet I cleave to him who possesses perfect purity and good conscience and offers them for me, indeed, gives them to me." (Sermons I, 277)

Luther bent every effort, writing and preaching tirelessly, to bring this message to people. He thought it the highest tragedy that God should have gone to such cost to redeem all of mankind only to have so many miss the treasure because they did not lay hold on it in faith.

"Christ did indeed suffer for the whol world: but how many are there who believe and cherish this fact? Therefore, although the work of redemption itself has been accomplished, it cannot help and benefit a man unless he believes it and experiences its saving power in his heart." (WLS, 2203)

In answer, then, to the question, "How can faith save?" This is the way Luther would answer:

"Not for the sake of our faith but for Christ's sake faith and salvation are given to us. Faith does not reconcile us of itself, but it grasps and obtains the reconciliation which Christ has wrought for us." (WLS, 1456, 1457)

Whether a faith is strong or weak does not affect the surity of the salvation which Christ has worked out. His work is done, finished, completed. He has earned the precious treasure for us. Luther compared St. Peter's strong faith with what he called his own weak faith.

"It is, of course, true that I and you do not hold and believe the saving truth so firmly as St. Peter does. Yet we have one and the same treasure. Two persons my hold glasses of wine in their hands: the hand of the one trembles, the hand of the other does not. Two persons may hold a purse full of money: One with a weak hand, the other with a strong hand. Whether the hand is strong or weak, please God, it neither increases or decreases the contents of the purse. So the only difference between me and St. Peter is the fact that he holds this treasure more firmly." (WLS, 1447)

Luther like St. Paul in the New Testament, compared the Christian's relationship with Christ to the relationship between a bride and groom. He carried the picture a little further than does Paul:

"Faith is the wedding ring with which we have pledged ourselves to Christ. So we ascend in Christ and are swept away through the Word and the Holy Spirit and cling to Him, by faith becoming one body with Him and He with us."  
(WLS, 1488)

In this light it is not difficult to see why the doctrine of salvation by faith became the principle of the reformation. This teaching, so long hidden by the errors of men, opened the doors to the reformation students of the Scriptures. It put a marvelous clarity into the whole of Scripture which had been lost for many centuries. Once again the average layman became interested in His Bible. Once again people by the thousands could view God as a God of grace and mercy, not as an angry revenger. People who before found only various shades of grey in their understanding of God's Holy Book now, armed with God's own key to the Scriptures, Salvation by Faith, saw error and truth in black and white. They found God as their Father and themselves as His dear children, and they found an unshakable assurance of their salvation. The teaching of Salvation by Faith alone must occupy the central part of all religion, for on it everything depends. Luther put it clearly:

"Either sin is with you, lying on your shoulders, or it is lying on Christ, the Lamb of God. Now if it is lying on your back, you are lost; but if it is resting on Christ, you are free, and you will be saved. Now choose what you want. According to law and justice, your sins should no doubt remain on you; but grace has cast them upon Christ, the Lamb. If God were minded to reason with us on other terms, we would be done for." (WLS, 1854)

But God has chosen to reveal to us the blessed truth of salvation by faith in Christ. We Lutherans believe that God has given the world a great gift in Martin Luther, not because Luther himself was great or more worthy than others, but because through him God brought back to light the key to the Scriptures and put Salvation by Faith back in its rightful place on the throne of Christian doctrine.

Notes: WLS = Refers to "What Luther Says", with paragraph numbers.  
HIS = Refers to "Here I Stand", with page numbers.

STANDARD OF THE REFORMATION: THE BIBLE ALONE

By Pastor David J. Valleskey  
of Apostles Lutheran Church, San Jose

It was one of history's dramatic moments. A lone monk stands before the imperial diet or meeting assembled at the city of Worms by decree of the emperor, Charles V. It is the year 1521, April 18. A stack of books, pamphlets, and tracts sits on a table before him. The monk recognizes these works. He's written them. And now he's being asked to retract them, to say he's sorry he has written them, to acknowledge that they contain heretical teachings.

He tries to defend himself by explaining that since there are several kinds of books before him, he couldn't possibly agree to a blanket condemnation of them all. "There are some," he says, "in which I have dealt with piety in faith and morals with such simplicity and so agreeably with the Gospels that my adversaries themselves are compelled to admit them useful, harmless, and clearly worth reading by a Christian. . . . The second kind consists in those writings levelled against the papacy and the doctrine of the papists. . . . If...I recant these, the only effect will be to add strength to such tyranny. . . . The third kind consists of those books which I have written against...those...who have exerted themselves in defense of the Roman tyranny and to the overthrow of that piety which I have taught. . . . It is not my power to recant them, because that recantation would give that tyranny...on occasion...to rage against God's people more violently than ever."<sup>1</sup>

But he readily admits that he is not infallible. He could err. "If the Lord Himself," he says, "who knew that He could not err, did not refuse to listen to witness against His teaching, ...how much more ought I, scum that I am, capable of naught but error, to seek and to wait for any who may bear witness against my teaching. And so through the mercy of God, I ask your Imperial Majesty, and your Illustrious Lordships, or anyone of any degree, to bear witness, to overthrow my errors, to defeat them by the writings of the Prophets or by the Gospels; for I shall be most ready, if I be better instructed, to recant any error, and I shall be the first in casting my writings into the fire."<sup>2</sup>

But he's not going to be given this opportunity. He has not been summoned to determine whether his writings are right or wrong. He has only one of two choices--to recant, that is, to take back his writings, or to refuse to recant.

Here is his reply: "Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scripture or (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Popes or of councils, since it is plain they have often erred and often contradicted themselves) by manifest reasoning I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's Word; I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."<sup>3</sup>

The die was cast once and for all. Now there could be no turning back. With these words this courageous man, Martin Luther, had defied the greatest power in the world at that time--the authority of the church--and the world would never be the same again.

We took some time in describing this historical moment, letting Luther himself speak to us, because here we see the standard by which Luther judged

everything that he did, and wrote, and said. "Overthrow my errors," he said, "by the writings of the Prophets or by the Gospels." Or, convict me of error "by the testimony of Scripture." And again, "I stand convicted by the Scriptures...and my conscience is taken captive by God's Word." In other words, if Luther was wrong, you had to prove it to him from the Bible. If you couldn't do that, then he'd stand up for his teachings even if he was the only one in the world who held to them.

Luther brought many reforms to the church of his day, foremost among them being a rediscovery and a reemphasis of the teaching of salvation solely by God's grace through faith. Our purpose in this essay isn't to talk about these reforms, but to lead us to recognize that they all had but one source: the Holy Scriptures. In his commentary on Galatians written ten years after the meeting at Worms, Luther reiterates his stand on the Scriptures. Echoing Paul in Galatians 1, he writes: "I am not to be believed, nor is the Church to be believed, or the fathers, or the apostles, or an angel from heaven, if they teach anything contrary to the Word of God."<sup>4</sup>

I'm sure that this doesn't sound at all unreasonable to us today. What other standard could Luther have used? What was wrong with his use of the Bible as the standard of all his efforts at reforming the church of his day? Why was he excommunicated from the church as a heretic rather than given a chance to defend his writings with the truths of the Scriptures?

It wasn't that the church of Luther's day, the church of Rome, had no respect for the Bible. There were very few at Luther's time who doubted that the Bible is God's Word, "given by inspiration" (2 Tim. 3, 16) as "holy men of God spake so they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1, 21). There are no articles in our Lutheran Confessions which were written specifically to defend the teaching that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, true and trustworthy in all its parts, because this was not a point of contention with the church of Rome. Both Luther and his opponents at Worms and elsewhere would agree on this point: that the Bible is the Word of God.

But with this statement of Luther the church of his day would not agree: "God's Word alone is the true, abiding rock on which a person can depend with certainty."<sup>5</sup> Luther believed in the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, for all that a man needs for his Christian faith and life.

#### A. The Teaching of Christ and His Apostles

This was no new and radical theory which he was promulgating. It was rather a return to the teaching of Christ and His apostles.

The entire life of Christ here on earth exemplified the necessity of bowing in all respects to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. As true and complete man, Christ submitted in every way to the Scriptures. His entire Messianic activity was bound by the O.T. Scriptures. He tells His disciples, for example, "The Son of Man must go up to Jerusalem." Why? The Scriptures have so declared and "the Scriptures cannot be broken."

He speaks to His Father in prayer: "Thy Word is truth," He says, not just true, but "truth," the truth. Nothing more is needed.

He tells the parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus. The rich man in hell wants father Abraham to allow Lazarus to leave heaven and go and tell the rich man's surviving brothers, "There is a hell." Abraham replies, "They have Moses

and the prophets. Let them hear them." The Word of God proclaimed by Moses and the prophets in the Scriptures is sufficient. If they can't believe its message, they won't believe even if one returns from the dead.

In the Gospels Christ refers to no fewer than 29 of the O.T. books. In every case Scripture settles the matter for Him. The Gospels abound with the statement of Jesus, "Have you not heard?" or "Have you not read?" For example, in Luke 24, He directs the grieving Emmaus disciples to the Scriptures to see why the Christ had to die and then rise. "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." His implication is clear. If these men had known and believed the Scriptures, there would have been not tears, but laughter at this time; for they would have known that the Christ who had died was the Victor over death.

Christ's apostles followed the example of their Master, as they in their preaching and teaching also emphasized the sufficiency of Scripture alone. The apostle Paul in his letters frequently refers to the O.T. Scriptures and their promises. "Christ died for our sins," he writes the Corinthians, "according to the Scriptures... He was buried and...rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15, 3-4). He quotes O.T. passages much as a minister quotes Scripture passages today, as if to tell his readers, "You see, I'm not making up anything new. What I'm saying is what the Scriptures say."

Paul's preaching was centered in the Scriptures, as Acts 17, 2-3 informs us. He enters the city of Thessalonica, finds a synagog, and, "as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Note the approach Paul uses. As did Jesus, he goes into the Scriptures, and lets the Scriptures alone lead his hearers to the conviction that the promised Messiah had to suffer and die and that this promised Messiah was Jesus.

Paul's fellow tentmaker, Apollos, is described in Acts 18 as a man "mighty in the Scriptures" who "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

Another of Jesus' apostles, Peter, was privileged to be present on the day when Christ was transfigured on the mountain top in the presence of Moses and Elijah. It must have been a tremendous experience, to see for a brief moment Jesus in His full glory as the Son of God. Peter tells his readers about this experience, as if to say, "You may be sure that what I have to tell you is true. I was an eyewitness of all these things." But he doesn't stop here. He goes on to say: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." More sure than that of an eyewitness? "Yes!" says Peter, "Let me take you back to what God has written in the Scriptures through His holy men, the prophets. Take heed to that and the night of sin in your hearts will give way to the dawn of salvation."

The respect that Christ and His Apostles had for the Old Testament Scriptures we have also for the New Testament Scriptures, since they too were written by inspiration of God by those whom Christ had chosen to be His spokesmen. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," we read in 2 Tim. 3, 16, "and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." And these Scriptures are able to make men "wise unto salvation,"

i.e., to show them the way to salvation in Christ and enable them to accept Him in faith. The Scriptures are profitable for "doctrine and reproof," that is, for distinguishing truth and falsehood in teaching. The Scriptures are profitable also "for correction and instruction in righteousness," for showing wrong and right paths of living. In short, the Scriptures completely and perfectly equip one to become a Christian by offering salvation through faith in Christ (v. 15), to remain a Christian by directing one constantly to the truth, and to live as a Christian by pointing out a God-pleasing path of conduct. And it is only of the Scriptures that we can reach such a conclusion. Only the Scriptures completely equip one for Christian faith and life because only the Scriptures are the product of God's inspiration.

There need be no doubt in our minds, then, that when Luther said, "God's Word alone," he was not alone. He stood in the mighty company of Christ and His apostles who, too, bowed to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in every respect.

### B. The Teaching of the Church in Luther's Day

But Luther did stand alone, or nearly alone, in the year 1521. Something had happened in the course of time in the church of Rome which had erased the little word "alone" from the phrase "sola Scriptura," Scripture alone. By Luther's day the position of the church of Rome was not that the Scriptures alone are sufficient to lead us to Christ and salvation, to enable us to distinguish truth from error, and to show us the path of Christlike living.

The church of Rome believed and taught at Luther's time that "sacred Scripture" and "sacred tradition" stand side by side as the Word of God. By "sacred Scripture" is meant basically the same thing Luther meant, the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. "Sacred tradition" can briefly be defined as the oral teaching which Christ passed down to His apostles, which was never recorded in the Scriptures, but rather was passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, by Christ's apostles to their successors, who passed the message down to their successors, and so on, down to our present age.

To this teaching that the Word of God comes to men both through the Scriptures and tradition we must add a third element to understand what Luther was up against at Worms. It was the firmly held belief then that the exclusive right to interpret the Scriptures belonged to the church, which under the Pope, was supposed to represent an unbroken chain all the way back to Christ. The Church alone, then, was able to understand the Word (Scripture and tradition) aright, and interpret it properly.

Luther, though, correctly saw the Scriptures' teaching that the interpreter of the Scriptures dare not be any man or organization, but rather the Holy Spirit Himself, the One who is responsible for the writing of the Word in the first place. Jesus told His disciples, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16, 23). In agreement with this, in 1520, one year before the meeting at Worms, Luther wrote as a part of his explanation of Mary's Magnificat, "No one can correctly understand God or His Word unless he has received such understanding directly from the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup> And, as he writes elsewhere, "Whenever a man reads the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is speaking to him."<sup>7</sup>

So while Luther, in agreement with Christ and His apostles, looked on the Word as a single strand to be equated with the Holy Scriptures, the church of Rome considered the Word to be a double strand (Scripture and tradition) running



parallel to each other down through history. And while Luther was convinced that every Christian has the ability to understand the Scriptures for himself through the Spirit's enlightening, the church of Rome taught that it alone has this authority and ability to interpret the Scriptures. This teaching was so firmly imbedded in the life and thought of the church by Luther's time that his stand on Scripture alone, and the ability of each Christian, with the Spirit's guidance, to understand it, was altogether unthinkable. You didn't even debate such a ridiculous notion. You just condemned it.

Just a brief look at church history shows why this theory of revelation and interpretation had such a stranglehold on the church by the time of Luther. Way back in the year 200 A.D. the Bishop Irenaeus of Asia Minor claimed, "The apostolic tradition...has come down to us through the succession of bishops." And concerning the church at Rome he writes, "With this church...must needs agree every church...; for in her the apostolic tradition has been preserved by the faithful."<sup>8</sup>

By the year 400 A.D. the Bishop at Rome, Innocent I, proclaimed, "Nothing which is done even in the remote and distant provinces should be taken as finally settled unless it come to the notice of this See...Other churches might from thence gather what they should teach."<sup>9</sup>

And in the mid-400's a monk in Gaul (S. France), Vincent of Lerin, was maintaining that the way to avoid false teachings was "to fortify our faith in a two-fold manner, firstly...by the authority of God's law (Scriptures), then by the tradition of the Catholic Church." He then goes on to say that there is "great need for the laying down of a rule for the exposition of <sup>the</sup> Prophets and Apostles in accordance with the standard of the interpretation of the Catholic Church."<sup>10</sup>

Pope Nicholas I (858-867) declared, "The judgments of the Apostolic See... cannot be handled by any other tribunal, nor is it permissible for any to sit in judgment upon its decisions."<sup>11</sup>

Any by 1302 the authority of the church at Rome, both spiritually and temporally, had become so great, that the Pope Boniface could say, "We are obliged by the faith to believe...that there is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and that outside of this Church there is no remission of sins...Furthermore, we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff."<sup>12</sup> This extreme stance has since been modified somewhat by Vatican II's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" which states, "Whosoever, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her <sup>or</sup> to remain in her could not be saved."<sup>13</sup> This allows a little more leeway.

Before Luther's time there had been attempts to restore to the church the apostolic teaching that the Scriptures alone are authoritative and sufficient and that each individual believer has the right to read and the ability to understand the Scriptures without the aid of the church's teaching authority. In the early 1200's Peter Waldo of France became the leader of a religious group which translated parts of the Bible into the French language, and then spread the Gospel to the common man, encouraging individual Bible reading.

About 150 years later John Wyclif of England, a teacher and parish priest, translated the Bible into the English language, and trained and sent out among the people Bible preachers. For his efforts he was excommunicated after his death.

John Hus of Bohemia, who lived at the end of the 1300's, also proclaimed the supreme and only authority of the Scriptures. He died as a heretic, burned at the stake.

### C. The Teaching of Luther

Luther, of course, knew what had happened to Hus and that a similar fate could well be the outcome of his struggle to maintain the supreme authority of the Scriptures alone without the addition of tradition or the church's interpretation. Why didn't this happen? Why wasn't he silenced? Why didn't he go down in history as another in a long series of struggling, but unsuccessful, reformers? The simplest and the most accurate answer would be that this was the work of the Lord, who, in love for His Church, was concerned that it should not lose its spiritual moorings completely. The time had come to restore the Scripture alone principle and Luther was the tool the Lord used. As He did at many times in history, God used natural means to see to it that His will was carried out. As at the time of the birth of His Son, God used a census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, so at the time of Luther, God used the newly-invented printing press to bring Luther's writings to the masses. This caused the people to rally around Luther as they saw that the "Bible alone principle" he was teaching was truly the Scriptural position. As at the time of Christ it was difficult for Jesus' enemies to condemn Him because of His popularity with the people, so the church had to tread lightly with Luther because of his popularity gained through the mass distribution of his pamphlets and tracts.

Other essays in this series have reviewed the main events in Luther's life for you. So we won't go into those details here. But we would like to give you a little flashback into the way the Lord developed Luther into His champion of the Scripture alone approach to theology.

Remember that Luther was brought up in a home and belonged to a church and went to schools which firmly believed and taught that the source and norm of the church's teaching must come from the twin strands of Scripture and tradition, both of which come down to people only via the church's official interpretation.

There was little stress on personal study of the Scriptures. In fact at one time the church had decreed that the laity should not read the Scriptures at all (Synod of Toulouse, 1229). As a result Luther was 20 years old before he ever even saw the whole Bible for the first time!<sup>14</sup> This was in the university library at Erfurt. He was amazed to discover that there was more to the Bible than just the standard Scripture readings he heard read every Sunday.

Once he entered the monastery to study for priesthood, he became an avid student of the Scriptures; so that only four years after seeing the whole Bible for the first time, he was a professor teaching the Bible to others at the University of Wittenberg. And, according to one church historian, by the year 1513, eight to nine years after he first started studying the Scriptures, he knew the Latin version almost by heart.<sup>15</sup>

He realized the danger of the feeling that one could ever reach a stage in Christian growth where he no longer needed to study the Scriptures: "When you get to the point of imagining that you know the Gospel, the Ten Commandments, and the Word of God outstandingly well," he writes, "then you are lost and the devil has won his game. For when one becomes tired of this teaching and it tastes like the dregs from the keg, then the heart wants something new; it is tired and more than tired of the old message. Then people usually say: Oh, I have heard that for a long time, tell me something different!...When the heart is tired of God's Word in this way, no longer regarding it as its great-

est treasure, then the door is open in front and in back, and the devil has free access and may introduce all sorts of errors."<sup>16</sup> Luther practiced what he preached. His custom was to read the Bible through twice every year.<sup>17</sup>

Since he was convinced that it was the Bible, and the Bible alone which led men to salvation through faith in Christ, and enabled men to detect truth from falsehood, and trained men in holiness of living, Luther was basically a student of one book. This Book of Books guided all his decisions throughout his career as the reformer of the church.

When Pope Leo X in 1520 issued a decree ordering the burning of all of Luther's books, Luther boldly staged a book-burning himself of books of the pope and his followers. Why did he do it? Because these books teach "that the pope makes his vain laws equal to the Gospels and Holy Scripture," and "that the pope has the power to expound and apply Holy Scripture in his own way, and to allow no one else to expound it in a sense contrary to his will."<sup>18</sup>

A year later when he was summoned to Worms, he responds with the words: "If I am not a prophet, I am at least sure of this, that the Word of God is with me, and not with them, for I have the Scriptures on my side while they have only their own teachings."<sup>19</sup> Thus equipped, he goes fearlessly to Worms.

And on the way home from Worms after his historic utterance there, he writes to the emperor, Charles V, "My books had been buttressed by me with plain and straightforward passages of Scripture. I could not, in honesty and fairness, run any risk of denying the Word of God....Since my conscience is held prisoner by all the passages of Holy Scripture which I have quoted in my books, it is impossible for me to revoke anything before being better taught....I am ready to submit my books and teachings freely for examination by all, and accept their judgment, with the sole condition that it should be by the plain, clear, and utterly free Word of God which...is superior to all else and remains the judge of all men."<sup>20</sup>

It is only consistent with Luther's stress on the Bible alone as the standard of Christian faith and life that he should be responsible for one of the great linguistic and literary efforts of all time--the translation of the entire Bible into the German language. Already by 1522, only nine months after beginning the work, he had completed the translation of the New Testament, and twelve years later, 1534, the Old Testament was completed. This German Bible the popular historian Will Durant labels "the greatest prose work in the national literature."<sup>21</sup> It was more than that. It was the fulfillment of Luther's desire that every German should have the opportunity of reading the Word in his own mother tongue. So many made use of this opportunity, that more than one million copies of the German Bible were sold in Luther's lifetime.<sup>22</sup>

#### D. The Teaching of the Church of Rome Today

Luther's struggle remains the struggle of every sincere Christian yet today: To hold to the Bible alone as the single sourcebook of Christian doctrine and practise, and to maintain the right and ability of every Christian, under the Spirit's direction, to read and to understand the message of the Scriptures.

We rejoice that in one respect the church of Rome has modified its position on the Scriptures--that now it is no longer forbidding, but urging its members to read the Bible. The document on divine revelation (i.e. how God reveals Himself to man) which came out of Vatican II, the ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church conducted in 1963-65, states: "Easy access to sacred

Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful."<sup>23</sup> And again, "This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful... to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phi. 3, 8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'"<sup>24</sup>

But the Roman church has not in any way modified its twin-strand theory of revelation. In this same document of Vatican II we read: "Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's Word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit....Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence. Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church."<sup>25</sup>

Nor has the Roman church altered her claim that she has an exclusive hold on correct Bible interpretation. The document on revelation states: "The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ....It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church ...are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the other, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."<sup>26</sup>

We today, who with Christ and His apostles and with Luther still hold to the Bible alone as the standard of faith and life, should realize that meaningful discussion and closer relations with Rome are impossible when Rome equates Scripture, tradition, and the church's teaching authority with the Word of God, and we believe that God's Word is to be equated with the Scriptures alone. Here there is no difference between our day and Luther's day.

#### E. Some Personal, Practical Applications

What can we do to help perpetuate this standard of the Reformation, that the Bible alone is God's inspired Word which leads us to Jesus and salvation, and that every Christian can, under the Spirit's direction, understand it aright? The chief thing we can do is, like Luther, become students of the Scriptures ourselves so that each of us individually becomes convinced from his own diligent study of the Bible that what he believes and confesses is true in all its parts.

We dare never be content with merely saying, "This is what we've always taught, or always believed," as our reason for holding to a particular teaching in our church. For by doing that we would be disavowing our Reformation heritage and setting up tradition once again as our authority rather than the Scriptures alone. We must always be able to say, "This is what we've always believed, and this is why I believe it still," and then go on to cite chapter and verse in the Scriptures as our authority.

Nor dare we be content with merely saying, "I believe this because that's what my church teaches." By doing this we, who believe with Luther that the interpretation of the Bible has not been entrusted to an organization but rather to each individual believer, would in practise be doing just the opposite. We'd

be submitting to the church's authority, rather than the Bible's authority. We need rather to say, "I believe what my church teaches because through my study of the Bible I am convinced that my church is teaching what the Bible teaches.

For all of this we need to search those Scriptures of ours regularly and faithfully and devoutly. If we believe that every Christian can understand the Scriptures, we should be putting this belief into practise. "Let us," as Luther once put it, "learn the art of letting the world boast of great wealth, honor, power, etc. After all, these are light, unstable, perishable commodities, which God throws away....As dear children and heirs of God, we should not boast of our wisdom, strength, or wealth; we should boast of the fact that we have the precious pearl, the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. This is our treasure and heritage; it is certain and eternal and better than the goods of all the world."<sup>27</sup>

- - - - -

### Bibliography

1. Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 283-284.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
4. Martin Luther, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 4th Ed.), p. 37.
5. Ewald Plass, What Luther Says, An Anthology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vol. III, par. 4740.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. III, par. 4757.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. III, par. 4720.
8. Bettenson, Op. cit., p. 98.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.
13. Walter M. Abbot, ed., The Documents of Vatican II (New York: America Press, 1966), pp. 32-33.
14. Heinrich Boehmer, Martin Luther: Road to Reformation (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 30-31.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
16. Plass, op. cit., Vol. III, par. 4806.
17. Bertram Lee Wolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), vol. II, p. 272.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
19. Boehmer, op. cit., p. 393.
20. Wolf, op. cit., pp. 178, 181.
21. Will Durant, The Reformation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 369.
22. Wolf, op. cit., p. 274.
23. Abbot, op. cit., p. 125.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
27. Plass, op. cit., vol. III, par. 4732.

of submitting to the church's authority, rather than the Bible's authority. We need rather to say, "I believe what my church teaches because through my study of the Bible I am convinced that my church is teaching what the Bible teaches."

All of this we need to know before we can say that we are faithfully and devoutly following the Bible. If we believe that every Christian can understand the Bible, we should be putting into effect the principle, "Let us, as brethren and sisters, learn the art of letting the world's best of great variety of power, and then, when we have learned, we should be able to teach God's own way. . . . The best of the Bible is not to be found in our own hearts, or in the hearts of our neighbors, or in the hearts of our fathers and mothers, but in the hearts of the people of the world." (1)

Bibliography

1. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

2. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

3. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

4. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

5. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

6. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

7. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

8. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

9. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

10. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

11. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

12. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

13. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

14. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

15. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

16. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

17. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

18. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

19. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

20. What Belongs to the Church? (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 287-288.

THE CREED OF THE REFORMATION - THE AUGSBURG CONFSSION

by Robert O. Waldschmidt, Pastor of  
Gloria Dei Ev. Lutheran Church, Belmont

While there never has been a period of peace and tranquility on this earth after the Fall into sin, there have been times in this world's history in which much less than quiet ruled. Two such times were the days of Luther and our present time. Even as there are constant attempts to solve the troublous days' problems in which we live, so were there valiant attempts then during the middle-fifteenth century. The great question, of course is HOW? Perhaps every age of war, riot, and bloodshed has its cynics who cry: What's the use? This is not, however, the response of responsible citizens nor, least of all, members of the church. The Church is the home and repository of peace. Even as God expects peace to be achieved and maintained between male and female in the home ( and provides the means for acquiring the same in His Word ) so he also expects peace between laity and clergy, between clergy and clergy and between laity and laity.

More specifically, there is great unrest between Protestant and Roman Catholic, between Protestant and Protestant, between Pope and his orders, between Lutheran and Lutheran, between Lutheran and Protestant. We hear so repeatedly: If the church, which is supposed to teach peace, cannot be at peace in itself, how can it ever teach peace to a disquieted world? We all recognize that peace cannot be achieved by sitting on our hands. Peace must be worked for, sacrificed for, sweated over, prayed for, labored over. Perhaps the history of the Augsburg Confession, the background of its origin, the purpose for its writing, its consequences, reactions to it - might provide not only a measure of historical understanding to a monumental document but also a program of effort toward *aggiornamento*.

Last week a radio commentator, in the name of an airline, urged us to accept the travel offer of the airline in order that "we might, too, be privileged to walk the cobblestones of Rome and breathe in the air which the Caesar's breathed." To me, this travel-offer sounds alluring. Even more so, however, ought my invitation to you be fascinating, since it deals with some of the elemental efforts toward peace, that is, to travel with me to the halls of bravery and courage in a remote but proud city of Germany where we hear the voices of those who proposed, necessitated and resolved the Augsburg Confession.

1 The occasion for the Creed's birth

In the year 1530, Jan. 21, faced with a divided empire, because of the Lutheran-Catholic schism, also hoping for a "united front" against the invading hordes of Turks from the East, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V called for a special diet of all representatives of Pope, Luther and other differing and recalcitrant religious forces in Europe, to be held at Augsburg, Germany on April 8th, 1530. The manifesto went forth from Bologna, Italy. A portion of the edict reads as follows: "The diet is to consider, furthermore, what might and ought to be done and resolved upon regarding the division and separation of the holy faith and the Christian religion... to allay divisions, to cease hostility, to surrender past errors to our Savior, and to display diligence in hearing, understanding, and considering with love and kindness the opinions and views of everybody, in order to reduce them to one single Christian truth and agreement...so that we may adopt and hold one single and true religion; and may all live in one communion, church and unity, even as we all live and do battle under one Christ."

The invitation to the Diet included a special appeal to the Lutherans of Saxony to appear early enough so as to eliminate "disgust, expenses and detrimental delay" on the part of those who arrive on time. History recalls that the Lutherans arrived on May 2 while the Emperor ( who had issued the reminder ) did not arrive until June 16

The manifest reached the Elector John Frederick of Saxony on March 11. Three days later, avoiding all delay, the University of Wittenberg Chancellor John Brueck advised the Elector to select a commission of men to draw up the opinion of the followers of the Truth in proper form, supported by Holy Scripture, concentrating on controverted points.

The same day the Elector chose Martin Luther, Justus Jonas, John Bugenhagen, and Philip Melancthon to prepare a document which treated those doctrines of faith and those ceremonies in the church which continued to cause division. ( Please note, doctrines and ceremonies not in controversy were not to be discussed. This Confession dare not be used by pseudo-Lutherans, therefore, in defense of subversions under the guise that they were approved by the Lutheran forefathers by virtue of their omission in the Confession ) These four men started to work immediately, intending to present such a document as would provide an apology ( a defense of ) the Lutheran position. However, Dr. John Eck, the noted Catholic scholar and student from Heidelberg and Tuebingen, directed 404 propositions to the Emperor on March 14 in which he severely attacked Luther as the harbinger of all heretics and heresies, one who had attacked all Christian teachings, including the doctrine of the Trinity and was worse of a scourge on the church than Arius of old. This slanderous attack caused the Reformers to change their plans as to the tenor and purpose of the document being written. They decided, instead of an apology to present a Confession of faith, stating publicly what they believed in controverted doctrines so that all the world would understand, rather than allow the world to be misled by Eck and fellows like him. Because Martin Luther was under the ban of the Emperor, subject to death at the hands of any enraged and emotional citizen without fear of punishment, the Elector ( a pious lord who took the responsibility for the welfare of his subjects seriously ) order his subject, Martin Luther, to remain at the fortress Ehrenburg during the Diet. Well might the Elector entertain doubts regarding the "safe passage" promises of the Emperor. In 1528 Balthazar Hubmaier, one of the forceful leaders of the Anabaptist movement, was burned at the stake in Vienna, only a geographical stone's throw from Augsburg. While Luther was in constant correspondence with his other three co-workers at Augsburg, he was not present.

## 2. The material forming the basis: Schwabach, Torgau, Marburg Articles

Luther's influence at Augsburg, however, was not absent. The material which formed the basis for the Confession to be presented at Augsburg had, for the most part, already been previously written and formulated. The Reformation truths which had been proclaimed since 1517 by Luther, together with the Schwabach Articles, the Marburg Articles and the Torgau Articles formed the basis for the Augsburg Confession which was presented in its final form by Melancthon at Augsburg. In the year 1529, about the middle of October, Luther, Melancthon, Jonas, Brenz and John Agricola composed 17 articles which were presented at Schwabach, which form the basic articles of the first part of the Augsburg Confession. Not Melancthon but Luther is the real author of the articles delivered at Augsburg. In 1536 Luther published the Schwabach articles with the comment: "It is true that I helped to draw up such articles; for they were not composed by me alone." As to the Torgau Articles the Elector directed from the City of Torgau that Luther and his assistants, Jonas, Melancthon and Bugenhagen compose such articles as covered abuses in the current church. Luther wrote to Justus Jonas on March 14 to place all local work into the hands of companions and be present immediately in order to begin work. On the 15th of March Melancthon also wrote to Jonas summoning him as soon as possible. These articles, drawn up by Luther and his co-workers which concerned themselves with the abuses rife in the visible church of their day, were again presented to the Elector at Torgau ( hence their name ). The Marburg Articles had been drawn up by Luther, 15 in number, which had served as the basis for discussion in the year 1529 for his famous discussion with Zwingli the Reformed theologian at Marburg. Thus, the 17 Schwabach Articles, which presented the faith of the Saxons; the Torgau Articles which concerned the abuses current in the church of Rome; and the Marburg Articles, which presented Lutheranism's position over against the Reformed - formed the basis for the Confession to be presented at Augsburg. Melancthon, the capable scholar and Luther's trusted friend, organized the three sets of articles ( Schwabach, Torgau and Marburg ) and served as Luther's spokesman at Augsburg.



### 3. The opposing parties approach Augsburg

With great confidence in the Emperor's fairness and justice, the Saxons entered Augsburg. On May 4th Melanchthon wrote to Luther "...as to the Elector John and his brother, they have ever been attached to Christianity, have proved faithful to the Emperor, and had constantly cultivated peace. Their present position was that commandments of men have been preached instead of faith in Christ. Not Luther, but Luther's opponents had begun the strife...Never has a reformation been undertaken without any violence as this in Saxony; for it is a public fact that our men have prevailed with such as were already in arms to make peace." The Lutherans were the first party to take the step toward reconciliation, preparing the Confession. It fully expected that the papal party would also present its views and opinions. "We are prepared to confer amicably concerning all possible ways and means, in order that we may come together, as far as this may honorably be done, and the matter between us on both sides being peacefully discussed without offensive strife; the dissensions, by God's grace, may be done away and brought back to one accordant faith and religion...for we all ought to confess the one Christ...and everything ought to be conducted according to the truth of God; and this is what, with most fervent prayers, we entreat of God" - thus spake the Lutherans in their preface to their Confession. The Lutherans did not believe that the manifesto of the Emperor could be construed in any other manner than that both parties would be treated as equals at the Diet. As honest Germans and good Christians they took the Emperor's words at face value, refused to believe otherwise and never doubted the good will and sincerity of the Emperor's promises. That the Emperor's words and actions, from the very beginning, belied the stated promises which he had made was put down as the sinister influence of such bitter, bating and unscrupulous theologians as Eck, Cochlaeus and Faber of the papal party who tried to poison the Emperor's mind. The Lutherans considered the heart of the Emperor as guileless. In a complete air and spirit of fairness and kindness, the Confession concludes: "Nor has anything been said here or adduced to the reproach of anyone".

History has something quite different to say regarding the attitude of the opponents of the Lutherans as they approached Augsburg. "Presupposing what they were summoned to prove at Augsburg, namely, that the doctrine of the Pope was identical with the old Christian faith, the Romanists declared that a presentation of their views was unnecessary. The Lutherans, they maintained, were convicted apostates and rebels against Pope and Church, against Emperor and realm; sentence was not first to be pronounced upon them, but had been pronounced long ago, the Diet's chief duty merely being to confirm and execute it; hence, there was nothing else to be done by the Emperor than to attend to his office as warden and protector of the Church, and, together with the princes and the estates, to proceed against the heretics with drastic measures. Also in the later discussions, conducted with a view of effecting a reconciliation, the Romanists refused to relinquish this position. From beginning to end they acted as the accusers, judges, and henchmen of the Lutherans. Nor was anything else to be expected, since, unlike the Lutherans, they considered not God's Word but the Pope the supreme arbiter in religious matters. Thus, from the very outset, the gulf between the two parties was such that it could not be bridged. Common ground was lacking. On the one side, conscience bound by the Word of God. On the other, blind subjection to human, papal authority."

Perhaps the closing statement of the Confession (quoted above) also sheds light on the man who served as compiler and spokesman at Augsburg, Philip Melanchthon. He would be considered the dove in modern parlance; Luther the hawk. When, on June 19 shortly before its presentation, a complete copy of the Confession was sent by Melanchthon to Luther for correction and approval, the latter wrote: "I have received your Aposlogy and cannot understand what you mean when you ask what and how much should be yielded to the papists...As far as I am concerned, too much has already been yielded...I cannot yield anything that militates against the Gospel." In another letter to Jonas, Luther states: "...The Devil still lives, and he has noticed that your Aposlogy steps softly, and that it has veiled the articles of purgatory, the adoration of the saints, and especially that of the Antichrist, the Pope."

John Brenz regarded the Confession as written very courteously and modestly. The delegates from Neurenberg received the impression that the Confession, while saying what was necessary, was very reserved and discreet. At Smalcaid, in 1537 the theologians were ordered by the civil rulers to prepare a document, another after the Augsburg Confession, which would include such matters as had been excluded from the Confession in "submissive deference" to his Imperial Majesty. The Augsburg Confession, therefore, while basically the outline, expressions, doctrines and teachings of Luther, the hawk, were in the language and couched in the fineness and the finesse of the dove, Melanchthon. Melanchthon admits this. In a letter to Camerarius, his closest friend, on June 26, the day after the presentation at Augsburg, he wrote: "Far from thinking that I have written milder than was proper, I rather strongly fear that some have taken offense at our freedom of language. For Valdes, the Emperor's Secretary, saw it before its presentation and gave it as his opinion that from beginning to end it was sharper than the opponents would be able to endure." When, after the presentation, Melanchthon thought of the angry papists, he trembled, fearing that he had written too severely. It would thus appear that the Lord of the Church, able to use the gifts He gives to men as He wills, offers us a vantage point in history in viewing the Augsburg Confession. As the Lord so often unites in marriage a forceful partner and a timid partner, making for a well-balanced home, so He used the firmness of a Luther and the gentleness of a Melanchthon to produce what history has regarded as a near perfect document. It has the clearness and the insight of conviction, but the soft touch of evangelical persuasion. John Dolan, in his book History of the Reformation states: "An examination of this most famous sixteenth-century document might dispel some of the prejudices of those who share the opinion of Grisar (an earlier Roman Catholic critic) and his disciples that it was the 'abatement of practical Christianity and fostered a religion without dogma'" "it is significant" Dolan concludes, "that Luther's last days were spent as his entire life in an endeavor to free the Church and religion from the evils of legalism."

#### 4. The presentation of the Confession

But, who shall present the Confession and who shall sign it before presentation so that the Emperor hears, as well as all the delegates assembled? Melanchthon, Luther's personal representative, as well as composer of the Confession in the limited sense, desired that only theologians sign the document and make its presentation. However, the Emperor's proclamation had originally excluded this possibility by asking for an expression from the people, not the theologians. The theologians had written it. Now the princes and rulers chose to read it, make it their own and add prestige and splendor to the document by affixing their signatures. The original document presented was signed by eight princes and two free cities. However, many signatures were added subsequent to its reading. The four South-German cities of Strassburg, Constance, Memmingen and Lindau had their delegates present at Augsburg and presented Zwingli's Confession Tetrapolitana as its confessional document. In 1532 these cities, too, signed the Augsburg Confession. June 25, 1530, the day on which the Confession was read at Augsburg, can well be regarded as the birthday of the Lutheran Church. On this day the lone, courageous monk of Wittenberg was joined by a stately host of true Christian heroes who were not afraid to place their names under this Confession, although they knew that it might cost them goods and blood, life and limb. Really, this momentous event occurred not that long ago either, for each of us today to still be able to breathe in the same air of bravery and spine-steeling courage. Just the other day our San Mateo Times reported the finding of an old Spanish caravelle shipwreck off the coast of Yucatan. Four anchors, two-breech-loading cannon and cobbled ballast stone of the two-masted Spanish ship were found. The 150 foot ship probably sank in 1529 or 1530, perhaps just as the Augsburg Confession was being prepared. Relics of a by-gone day, yes, but events still recalled with regularity on TV and evidently still very much a part of our experience.

As the delegates, princes, prelates and notabilia entered the city of Augsburg, they were usually greeted by the personal emissary of the Pope, a man by the name of Campegius, before whom they knelt in order to receive the papal blessing. The Emperor, present in the city by June 18, demanded that the Lutherans be in silence during the stay in Augsburg, make no propaganda for their teachings and grant obedience. The Elector John, however, is reported as saying: "Rather than deny my God and suffer the Word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off." The Elector remained standing and declared: "To God alone shall knees be bowed." Finally, on a Saturday, June 25th at 3:00 P.M. in the large front room of the bishop's palace, where the Emperor was living, the two Saxon chancellors, Dr. Gregory Brueck and Dr. Christian Beyer, the one with the Latin copy and the other with the German copy, stepped into the middle of the hall. As many of the evangelically-minded confessors who had the courage publicly to espouse the evangelical cause arose from their seats. ( It ought be stated that Justus Jonas, whose acknowledged elegant Latin and German style eminently qualified him for such service, had prepared both texts.) The Emperor, to whom the Latin text was handed, desired to hear it. But the Elector John called attention to the fact that the meeting was being held on German soil and expressed the hope that the Emperor would permit the reading to proceed in German. This was granted. Dr. Beyer read with a voice so clear and plain that the multitude, which could not gain access to the hall, understood every word in the courtyard. The reading lasted two hours. Some report that the Emperor fell asleep. Others report that he listened very attentively. Duke William of Bavaria ( a Roman Catholic prince ) declared: "Never before have I heard this matter and doctrine so clearly presented." Dr. Eck assured him that he would undertake immediately to refute every point with the fathers. The Duke observed: "Then the Lutherans, I understand, sit in the Scriptures and we of the Pope's church besides the Scriptures." Bishop Stadion of Augsburg exclaimed: "What has been read to us is the truth, the pure truth, and we cannot deny it." The Archbishop of Salzburg declared that he, too, desired a reformation, but the unbearable thing about this all was that one lone monk wanted to reform them all." The Pope's emissary, Campegius, is reported to have said that he might well permit such teaching; but if such a precedent were set and all nations and kingdoms were permitted the same, a precedent of no small consequence would arise, and that could not be tolerated.

Now, just what was it that was contained in the Confession? Permit me to summarize each article and point with a few brief quotations from each article. I would urge, however, that each of you obtain a copy for yourself ( at 25c each ) and read its majestic contents yourself.

- Article 1 reaffirms the teaching of the Council of Nicea regarding the Triune God: three persons of the same essence and power. It also condemns all heresies through the ages which deny personality to the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Article 2 teaches that the disease in which all human beings are born is sin which brings eternal death without Baptism. It condemns all who deny the total depravity of all human beings.
- Article 3 repeats the thoughts of the Apostles Creed regarding Jesus, namely his possession of two natures, both used in behalf of man, He returning as Judge of all.
- Article 4 treats of justification, the truth concerning man's right state before God because alone of the merits of Christ.
- Article 5 deals with the means which God chooses, namely Word and Sacraments, through which He brings people to faith which saves. It condemns those who imagine that the Holy Ghost accomplishes His good outside of these means.
- Article 6 emphasizes the necessity of good works as fruits of faith, good works being the proof of faith; faith, however, being the only basis for salvation.
- Article 7 beautifully separates the unity of the communion of saints, the union of all true believers, from the unnecessary likeness in ceremonies.
- Article 8 comforts those who discover that the office of the ministry has been held by evil men; the Word and Sacrament being effective, nevertheless, because

of their divine origin. It condemns those who make the kind of man and the affect synonymous.

Article 9 dwells on the necessity of infant Baptism and the grace received by children in Baptism, condemning those who lightly regard infant Baptism.

Article 10 teaches the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Article 11 urges private confession and absolution, without enumeration of sins, such being utterly impossible.

Article 12 points out the two-fold part to repentance - the first which deals with terrors of conscience over wrong-doing; the second with total forgiveness promised in the Gospel and received through faith. 4 groups are condemned: those who imagine that faith cannot be lost; those who imagine perfect holiness in this life; those who refuse to absolve the penitent; and those who deny forgiveness through faith.

Article 13 stresses the need for faith to make proper use of the Sacraments, which are offered by God to awaken and strengthen faith, condemning those who look upon the Sacraments as being beneficial without faith.

Article 14 underlines an important Luther-taught truth, namely, that no one be allowed to teach in the church unless that person is rightly called.

Article 15 directly confronts those who initiate ceremonies and holy days in the church as divinely required; rather than being considered as good but not to conflict with the Gospel.

Article 16 urges the divine ordination of civil affairs, listing also the conducting of just wars, serving as soldiers as God-pleasing. It condemns those who imagine that being in government service is second-rate Christianity. This article underscores obedience to civil government.

Article 17 uses language of that day which would condemn millenialists of every variety in our day and those who deny an abode of eternal punishment., calling attention to both heaven and hell as Scriptural.

Article 18 distinguishes between the ability of the human being to make decisions in things of this life, but the inability to make decisions relating to pleasing God, trusting Him etc. Condemned are those who teach that man is able to please God by some innate and natural ability.

Article 19 places the blame for sin where it belongs, namely, on man and Satan, not on God.

Article 20 ( the lengthiest of the faith articles ) concerns good works. After pronouncing their customary habit of preaching good works as God's will, the Lutherans call attention to the foundation and basis for good works, namely, that faith which is grateful to God for His goodness in forgiveness. They quote such church fathers as Ambrose and Augustine in support. Without this faith, the human being is helpless in producing good works, as the lives of even the best of the philosophers attest.

Article 21 declares the Lutherans' recognition of the value of following the faith and example of departed Christians, but denying the correctness of either worshipping them or calling upon them in need.

The next seven articles concern abuses which existed in the church and in need of treatment: the withholding of the wine ( the blood of Christ ) from the people in the Lord's Supper; the violent ripping away of God's institution of marriage from the priests and the subsequent loading of the land with the adulteries of those unable to control themselves; the reading of masses for money, for the dead, and only for original sin and not daily sin; the requiring of the recalling and counting of daily sinning in confession before forgiveness is pronounced; the demanding of traditional keeping of certain laws regarding eating and drinking , rigorously insisted upon to the extent that conscientious people committed suicide because of the inability to keep them; the pernicious laying of the monastic yoke upon young and old as though this kind of life was God-pleasing and merited grace, while all along leading to public and wide-spread scandals; finally, the seizing of political and civil power by the clergy to the detriment of the Gospel.

In order to emphasize the positive, the Lutherans demonstrate that they: give both bread and wine in public communion ( not open communion ); urge their priests to marry and have families; celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently for the comfort of consciences; continue the practise of confession for the benefit of absolution; urge a temperate life in food and drink without making laws to regulate the same; allow young men to pursue the ministerial life upon good advice and counsel without legal requirements; and directing the clergy to keep to the work of the Gospel and avoid the area of politics which is reserved for others. The Lutherans conclude the presentation with the reminder that all has been stated and confessed in order to regain order and concord in the church, and not with rancor or hatred toward any.

### 5 Reactions and conclusions

The reaction to the reading of the Confession was mixed. One of the papal representatives remarked: "Now the Lutherans have their Koran." Luther, when he heard of the reading via the correspondence route, exclaimed ( quoting Psalm 119,46 which has become the motto of the Confession ): "I will speak of thy testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed." He regarded the Confession as a day of triumph. At the close of the Diet, on Sept. 15 Luther wrote to Melanchthon: "You have confessed Christ, offered peace, obeyed the Emperor, endured reproach, been sated with slander, and have not recompensed evil for evil; in sum, you have performed the holy work of God, as become saints, in a worthy manner...I shall canonize you as faithful members of Christ." The original texts of the Confession, in Latin and German, are lost to us. Romish rage and enmity may have played their part. Eck was permitted to examine the original German copy in 1540 and it was never returned to Mainz. The Latin original was deposited in the Imperial Archives in Brussels, where it was seen and read in 1562. On February 18, 1569 Philip II of Spain instructed the Duke of Alva to bring the manuscript to Spain "in order that such a damned work might forever be destroyed." The keeper of the Brussels archives testified that the manuscript was delivered to Alva. Up to the present time, however, no less than 39 copies of the originals have been found; 5 German and 4 Latin also containing the signatures, each copy closely resembling the other. About two-thirds of the German territories professed adherence to the Confession, the names of 8,000 theologians, preachers and teachers are affixed to the Formula of Concord, which contains the Augsburg Confession.

As early as 1533 the University of Wittenberg required that candidates for the degree of doctor of divinity pledge themselves to the Augsburg Confession as a correct teaching of Scripture. In 1535 all new members of the Smalcald League ( having nothing to do with the National or American, but rather an affiliation or federation of churches ) be required to subscribe to the Holy Scriptures and the Augsburg Confession. New candidates for ordination in 1540 took an oath to uphold the Sacred Scriptures and the Augsburg Confession and if found contradicting either asked that they be relieved of office, this in the name of God. When the Lutherans were attacked for this oath requirement, as being a relic of oath-binding popery, Melanchthon answered: "A doctrinal pledge is necessary in order correctly to acknowledge God and call upon Him to preserve harmony in the church, and to bridle the audacity of such as invent new doctrines." To this day candidates, as I once was, entering the Lutheran ministry, are required to give that kind of a vow and pledge to the Lutheran Confessions, including the Augsburg Confession, which regards the confessions as accurate expressions of the teachings of God's Word. No, the Lutheran symbols are not intended to supplant the Scriptures, nor do they. They do, however, set forth what has been at all times the unanimous understanding of the pure Christian doctrine adhered to by sincere and loyal Lutherans everywhere; and, at the same time, they show convincingly from the Scriptures that our forefathers did indeed manfully confess nothing but God's eternal truth, which every Christian is in duty bound to, and consistently always will, believe, confess, and teach.

No other Protestant Confession has been so honored as this one. Under the protection of this banner the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany had been built

up on firm and unassailable foundations. Under the same banner even the Reformed Church in Germany had found shelter. After 1555 and the Peace of Augsburg legal status was granted signatories to the Augsburg Confession. All Swedes, Danes; Norwegians and Prussians had sworn allegiance to it. The Esthonians, Latvians, Finns, as well as Lutherans in France, Russia and other lands recognized their in the palladium of their faith and rights. Not only the Lutheran Church, however, but all Protestant Christendom, aye, the entire world, has every reason to revere and hold sacred the memory of those heroes who boldly affixed their names to the Confession of 1530. Until recent years in America, there were still to be found Lutheran Churches which carried on their church tableaus the letters U.A.C. after their name. They were proud to be counted, to stand along side of the confessors Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Luther, Elector Frederick, Elector John and other notables as people of the U. Unaltered A. Augsburg C. Confession. The sad fact, however, that most Lutheran church members are not even acquainted with the Augsburg Confession casts a heavy pall and shroud over a church once vibrant and blessed. In either understanding or dealing with Vatican II or any other church council, ecumenical or otherwise, would to God we still made use of the Augsburg Confession as our basis and confession. For example, in the light of Article 21 of the Confession, how else can such statements as are to be found coming from the Constitution of the Church of Vatican II in its section of the Role of the Virgin Mary in the economy of salvation ( page 87-89 The Documents of Vatican II ) be understood than be firmly rejected? e.g. "Rightly therefore the Holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience." Also: "Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her 'the mother of the living' and still more often they say 'death through Eve, life through Mary.'" Also: "In an utterly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace."

May I conclude this presentation with a quotation from the Lutheran Spokesman which I feel pertinent: "Christianity in America has become a farce. Having cast out the Son it no longer can lay claim to be the only way of salvation. It has become another moral force along side of Judaism and all other religions. And how we must each tremble and shake. In this universal attitude of rebellion against God's authority how can we escape the spirit of the age? How can we remain submissive to the will and word of our Master? We realize that our sinful hearts are also filled with Satanic rebellion against the Word. With Luther we must despair of our strength, our loyalty, our purity, our faithfulness and cast ourselves upon God's mercy and strength. This is the way Luther teaches us to pray the 12th Psalm." Even so-called Lutheranism flounders with the rest of Protestantism and society in a morass of man-centered ideology and futile groping. May the Lord of heaven and earth be pleased, in mercy, to reform each of us as he saw fit to inject into history men who returned Bible-belief to our fathers and mothers years ago when the world then also was afire with superstition, misbelief and tyranny.

CONSEQUENCE OF THE REFORMATION: RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

By Pastor Armin K. E. Keibel  
of Bethany Lutheran Church, Concord

A. Deplorable Condition of the Church 450 Years Ago

Suppose you were living in the days of Columbus, around the year 1500. You would have no freedom of worship, no freedom of conscience, no freedom of speech. Instead of a free government, you would be under the dictatorial rule of an all-powerful church. You would likely not have a Bible to read. If somehow you managed to get one, your church would discourage you from studying it.

You would not be allowed to regard Jesus as your loving Savior but only as an angry Judge. Your pastor would tell you that your salvation depended on your own good works, on the intercession of saints, on the prayers of priests, on contributions to the church to get you out of purgatory - none of which is taught in the Bible. And, you could be put to death if you disagreed with the religious authorities over you.

The condition of the Church 450 years ago was deplorable.

B. Beautiful State of the Apostolic Church

This wretched state in the Church of the Middle Ages was a far cry from the beautiful condition of the Apostolic Church when it was founded and during the first centuries.

In the spring of 33 A.D., 40 days after salvation-cinching resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make Christian adherents of people from all nations in two ways: by baptizing in the name of the Trinity and by teaching all things He commanded (Matthew 28:19,20).

Thereupon He ascended, withdrawing His visible presence. But He would remain with His followers always, even unto the end of the world. Ten days later, on Pentecost, He sent the Holy Spirit, who filled the apostles with new and exceptional powers for use in spreading the Gospel, the Good News of redemption. Through this phenomenal event Jesus founded the Church, the Body of believers gathered about His Word and Sacraments. In establishing the Church, Jesus provided an agency to carry His Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. He intended that people everywhere might hear Him, believe in Him, and be saved.

Through the personal witness of scattered believers and the zealous preaching of the apostles, particularly St. Paul, the Gospel brought uncounted souls to Christ. It covered Jerusalem, swept through Palestine, and spread throughout the Roman Empire's Mediterranean world. Believers gathered as households, in local congregations and in district groups to hear the Word of God and to live according to it.

The Church of Jesus marched on, loyal and eager, and amassed uncounted recruits.

C. Assaults on the Church

But the Church was to encounter waves of bitter assaults. Satan tried desperately to halt the marvelous growth of Christianity. During the first two and a half centuries he stimulated heathen Rome to unleash ten bloody persecutions upon the Christians. This, however, only served to spread Christianity, so that the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church.

Unable to crush Christianity this way, the devil sponsored false teachers within the Church to lay seige to basic doctrines such as the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and original sin. These were met by godly defenders of the faith and councils.

Once Christianity became the accepted religion, Satan cultivated the lust for power among the clergy. This gave rise to the papacy and an accumulation of blasphemous man-made teachings. The Gospel became obscured. The Bible was shoved aside by tradition, decrees and papal pronouncements.

The Church became deformed. The Dark Ages settled about it.

#### D. Deliverance

But "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," the Lord had promised about His Church. He still had His "7000 in Israel...which have not bowed unto Baal" (1 Kings 19:18). And He heard their cry for deliverance. There were attempts to reform the Church which failed, because they attacked only external abuses. That by the Englishman Wycliff was branded heresy. The Bohemian Huss was burned in 1415, and the Italian Savonarola hanged in 1498.

But the enemies of the truth could not silence a little-known monk who on October 31, 1517 nailed a poster with 95 sentences to a church door. These statements were aimed at the source of corruption, the man-made, false teachings in the Church, and were intended to restore the truth of God's Word. The germ-laden, crippling doctrines were being driven out. The spiritual darkness began to lift. The Gospel began once more to shine through in all its saving splendor.

#### E. Hero of the Reformation

The hero of the Reformation was Martin Luther. For some 30 years he tried to find peace of heart in the teachings and practice of the Roman Catholic Church without success. In fear and desperation, he threw himself into the church's monastic system. He slaved over the duties imposed upon him - to no avail.

But he read the Scriptures. And he was urged by a believing supervisor to trust in Christ for his salvation. Then, in 1513, while working for his doctor of theology degree and studying the Bible intensively, he found it. He discovered in Romans 1:17 that "the just shall live by faith." This was the truth which made him free. "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law," explains Romans 3:28. And he found that this was the consistent teaching of St. Paul and of the entire Bible.

Thereupon Luther shouted out this long silent but now recovered truth of God's Word with a great shout. And the wall of good works built up and trusted in by churchmen of the Middle Ages fell down flat.

#### F. God-Required Separation

Luther had hoped to cleanse the Church of the mass of errors which had accumulated. But in 1521 the pope excommunicated him. And soon thereafter Luther was declared an outlaw by the Diet, the Parliament, at Worms. This is where he refused to recant unless shown from the Word of God that his teachings were false. Luther came to realize that a reform of the church of the Pope was impossible. This church persisted emphatically in its false doctrine.

When this is the case, God orders, "Avoid them...that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" (Romans 16:17). Luther obeyed. He separated from the Roman Catholic Church.



The Catholic Church's persistence in its unScriptural position was confirmed by the next five parliaments (between 1522 and 1530). Through these the Catholic Emperor tried to suppress the Reformation movement by force. This was especially the case with the Council of Trent (1546-1563), which would not tolerate doctrinal reform in the papal church. It declared allegiance to the unBiblical doctrines removed by Luther. And it added anathemas, curses, upon anyone who held to Bible teachings such as the essential one that man is saved alone by grace through faith in Christ without any works whatsoever.

The Roman Catholic church had separated itself from the Church of Christ. It made itself heterodox, a church unfaithful in doctrine.

#### G. Spread of the Reformation

The Reformation spread to many lands. It invaded every country of Europe: Germany, Switzerland (chiefly through the work of Zwingli) and France (mainly through Calvin); in Scandinavia - the countries of Denmark, Norway and Iceland, Sweden and Finland; in Eastern Europe - Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, somewhat in Austria, partly in Italy and Spain; in the Netherlands. And the Reformation reached Scotland and England.

#### H. Blessings of the Reformation

Luther's Reformation brought Christendom so many blessings. The first is the open Bible. Luther gave his people the first acceptable Bible version. Since then it has been translated into the major languages and dialects in the world. Today you can read it in your mother tongue. Through Luther's popular translation and its spread, the Good News of the Gospel was once more headlined and heralded. And it brought freedom of religion, so that you have the liberty to read the Bible without fear of persecution.

The Reformation also restored the vital teaching of justification by grace through faith in Christ. This had been buried for centuries under the Catholic untruth of salvation by works of the law and man-made works.

The third great gain was the important truth that the Bible is the only source and rule of faith and life. Contrary to the papal church's "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9), Luther constantly taught that God's Word alone establishes doctrine, not reason, no pope, no church council.

Other blessings are the teachings of the universal priesthood of all believers, their right of private judgment based on clear Scripture, their active part in public worship; also, the principle of general and Christian education, the Christian concept of marriage and the home, the restoration of the Sacrament of Communion, and religious and civil liberty.

How richly the Lutheran Reformation restored the Church!

#### I. Counter Reformation

The Roman Church tried hard to counteract the Lutheran Reformation. To accomplish this, it refused to try to reform itself. It would not agree to a compromise or to a co-existence with the Protestants (so called in 1529 when the Lutherans protested the emperor's attempt to stop the preaching of the Gospel). In a counter-

reformation, the Catholic Church took steps to check Protestantism and to recover lost territory. It adopted a policy of severe repression of all so-called "heresy."

The Jesuits were the chief agents in restoring Catholic rule in various countries. Organized in 1534 as the Society of Jesus by the Spaniard Loyola, they vowed obedience to the Pope and pledged themselves to the greater glory of the Roman Catholic Church. They developed regulations which minimized sin and allowed leeway with regard to divine and human laws. They practiced the false principle that the end justifies the means.

The next year the Pope reorganized the Inquisition. This was a diabolical department which used extreme torture to eradicate Protestantism. It succeeded in purging it from Spain and Italy.

The Council of Trent, meeting in three sessions between 1546 and 1563, was less interested in reform than in the defense of the papal church. It resolved that not Scripture alone is the standard for doctrine and life, but Scripture and tradition. It approved all the medieval teaching of the church and condemned all Protestantism.

The leading trait of revived Catholicism was its attempt to recover by force the territory lost to the Protestants. The counterreformation brought on a series of religious wars which lasted over 100 years. There was injustice and cruelty on both sides. But there was this difference: the Catholics were always the aggressors. The Protestants were always on the defensive, looking for equal rights or at least toleration. The Catholics were always fighting for supremacy, sole rights and the elimination of every other faith. For example, in persecuting the French Protestants, they massacred some 22,000 Huguenots on St. Bartholemew's night in 1572. And the Pope commemorated the event.

There was a Thirty Year's War which started in 1618 in Germany and spread throughout Europe. The Catholics prevailed until "the Lion from the North" Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden turned the tide in 1631. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia was declared, providing religious toleration. Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics were to have equal religious and civil rights. Men everywhere realized that it was not right that religion be made a cause for war.

#### J. Protestant Division

There was, sad to say, division in the Protestant Church. This did not result from the Reformation. It occurred because certain leaders departed from the authoritative Word of God and followed their fallible reason or subjective opinions.

There were extremists like Carlstadt, who advocated a radical revolution, such as the abolition of all ceremonies of the old Church, destruction of pictures and altars. Men like Thomas Muenzer inflamed the Peasant's Revolt of 1525 under the argument of spiritual liberty. Luther denounced these unscriptural views in no uncertain terms.

The Swiss Zwingli favored rebellion against government to further his reform. Worse was his attitude toward the Bible. He explained different Bible teachings in a manner suited to his reason. For example, he would not accept the plain teaching of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper because it did not seem reasonable. Luther's faith, however, here bowed unquestioningly to the Word of God. So he could not give Zwingli the hand of fellowship.

Zwingli, together with the French Calvin, who systematized their theology, became the father of the many Reformed churches of today. Their error was perpetuated by Knox of Scotland in the Presbyterian church, by Cranmer of England in the Episcopalian church, by Wesley in the Methodist church.

#### K. Lutheran Consolidation

Besides these departures within Protestantism, the Lutheran Church itself was torn by doctrinal controversies. Questions arose over subjects such as the necessity of the Law in preaching, the place of good works and sanctification, the treatment of things neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible, the role of man in his justification. Lutheran theologians worked over these and drafted the Formula of Concord, which most of the Lutheran states adopted.

And at that time, the Book of Concord was prepared to incorporate this Formula and eight other Confessions adopted by the Lutheran Church: the three Ancient Creeds, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology (Defense), the Smalcald Articles and the Large and Small Catechism of Luther. This book was published in 1580 and signed by over 9000 theologians and lay leaders.

So orthodox, confessional Christianity emerged in the Church restored by the Reformation.

But it took a severe buffeting in the centuries ahead.

#### L. Emotional Instability - Pietism

Beginning in the late 1600's, for about 70 years, there was a period of emotional instability called Pietism.

Following the ravaging religious wars, church life lay in desolation. But Lutheran pastors, using the God-ordained means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, succeeded in reorganizing congregations throughout Germany within 25 years and in maintaining orthodoxy in doctrine. However, conditions in the churches left much to be desired, such as a lack of the fruits of faith and a dead formalism.

The leading attempt to hasten the restoration of order and a more evident devout life was pietism in Germany. It was started around 1670 by Philip Spener, who organized small groups within the congregations to serve as leaven by a more serious piety. Sanctification was emphasized to balance the orthodox doctrine of justification. But they swung to an extreme in despising the means of grace, disregarding doctrinal purity, and downgrading the ministry. They considered faith to be an emotional change of heart. They led Christians to base their faith on their own thoughts and feelings instead of on the truth of the Bible.

Spener's leading disciple, around 1700, was August Francke. He made conversion a more important requirement for theological leadership than the objective study of theology. The weakness of this is evident in the fact that the University of Halle, where he was administrator, eventually became rationalistic.

There was a related movement at this time under Nikolaus Zinzendorf. He stressed a personal love of Jesus as the supreme teaching of the Bible. And he formed a unionistic body of all shades of belief. The group was excluded from the Lutheran Church and organized under the name of United or Moravian Brethren.

Under Johann Dippel in Scandinavia in the early 1700's, a radical kind of Pietism was cultivated which believed that God's love made Christ's atonement unnecessary.

He charged that the Church was an obstacle to faith. And the movement stressed reliance on an "inner light."

Because of its unbalanced emphasis on Christian living at the expense of doctrine and believing, Pietism was rejected by faithful Lutherans. The restored Church survived Pietism.

#### M. Intellectual Instability - Rationalism

In the 1700's the pendulum swung the other way, for a period of intellectual instability called Rationalism. There was a great wave of new ideas about man and society. In the spheres of government, philosophy, science and theology there was a questioning of authority, of investigation and experiment to arrive at the truth. Man became the measure of all things. In religion, this spirit of inquiry went overboard. Rationalism, human reasoning, was employed to find the truth.

In England this system developed into Deism, which believes in the existence of a deity who is no longer directly active in the universe. It attacks the Bible and the Church, and stresses a religion of nature. In France it led to the worship of the goddess Reason. In Germany it came out as Enlightenment, a religion based on man's own virtue.

Luther correctly channeled the revived spirit of religious inquiry. To find the truth in religion, he pointed out, we must go back to the source of religious truth, the Bible. All truth is there revealed by God and cannot be found by experiment.

In the subsequent Age of Reason, the second half of the 1700's, the Church was at low ebb. It was swept along by the trend of the times - to judge Scripture according to man's estimate of what was reasonable.

There remained, however, a persistent current of orthodox reliance on the Word of God and devotion for the crucified, risen Son of God. God saw to the preservation of Biblical faith and true religion in spite of the overwhelming skepticism and worldliness spread by the Age of Reason.

The restored Church survived Rationalism.

#### N. Menace of Modernism

Life was revolutionized in the 1800's, with marvellous inventions produced, all phases of society internationalized, and the nations drawn together. In the life of the Church, there came a well-nigh universal religious tolerance, but also a materialistic world view hostile to true Christianity. There was opposition to cold, dead Rationalism and a general desire for religious union.

A strong reaction against Rationalism arose in a movement which made religion a matter of feeling. This was modern Protestant theology, called Modernism. Its founder was the German Schleiermacher. He taught that doctrine is to be developed from the inner consciousness of a person's heart instead of founding it upon the rock of Holy Scripture.

An offshoot of this liberal movement was one of speculation and historical criticism. Founded by Albrecht Ritschl, it claimed to be evangelical, whereas it really undermined Christianity. For example, it would not accept original sin or the deity and atonement of Christ.

Historical Criticism treated the Bible like all other books. It said that the

Bible developed from early myths and legends. And it considered the Christian religion to be like all other religions.

The faithful in the Christian Church repudiated this modern religious liberalism and its blasphemous offspring by holding up the Bible as it is in truth, the Word of God, and by drawing all theology from it alone.

The restored Church survived Modernism.

#### O. Mission Work Rekindled

After reprieve from centuries of affliction, one might expect the Church to withdraw and tend only to maintaining its orthodoxy at home. But no. Interest in mission work was rekindled. Numerous mission societies were founded. Many foreign fields were developed by zealous missionaries. And charitable institutions flourished.

#### P. Leaven of Unionism

The yen to unite began to take hold. During the last century there was a sizeable measure of church union by groups which were agreed in their confession. There was not as much uniting on a compromise basis. The 20th Century, however, became afflicted with spreading unionism.

The only basis for union and fellowship, according to the Bible, is through strict doctrinal agreement. It asks "that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Religious unionism is a union without doctrinal unity and in spite of doctrinal differences. Its essence is an agreement to disagree. In effect, it denies the clearness of Scripture. "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them!" requires God's Word (Romans 16:17).

#### Q. Ecumenism Mania

Unionists have long envisioned a world-wide union of all Christian churches on a compromise basis. Their program was refined and developed into the present Ecumenical Movement. This presumes that the Holy Christian Church, which Christ calls one, is outward and visible. Therefore it considers that all external division is wicked and must be stopped. It does not expect unification in doctrine, according to the Bible. It believes that doctrinal diversity has its wholesome features.

Latitude in doctrine is openly represented by such federations as the Lutheran Council in the United States of America - organized in place of the National Lutheran Council last January, the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches. An example of their leeway in theology is that none of them requires acceptance of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

#### R. True Ecumenicity

True ecumenicity before God, however, is one which continues in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). Faithful Evangelical Lutheran Churches (such as the Wisconsin and Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synods) and all others which accept the Reformation-recovered Bible as God's Word and its way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ - are truly one. And they sincerely express or seek to express this inner unity in God-pleasing external fellowship.

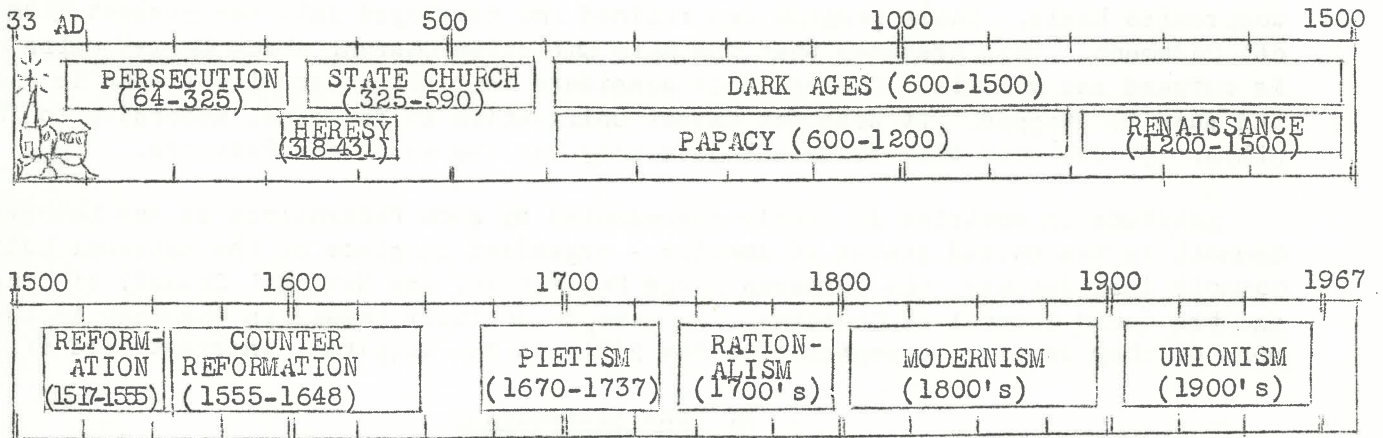
Thus the restored Church is weathering and will survive Ecumenism.

Finally, Jesus reminds His followers throughout all ages: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed!" (John 8:31). To be faithful Christians, we must remain steadfast in His Word. This means that we are to cherish all its truths, delight to study them and heartily exercise them lifelong. It means that we should earnestly contend for the faith against all error and indifference. And, to be Jesus' disciples indeed, we expect to assemble ourselves together with all with whom we are in doctrinal agreement, who believe and teach all things whatsoever He commanded (Matthew 28:20).

This is Biblical ecumenicity and a leading consequence of the Lutheran Reformation whereby God wrought the restoration of the Church of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

History of the Restoration of the Church

(All opposition a form of unbelief, a rejection of God's Word)



TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

By Pastor Immanuel G. Frey of Phoenix, Arizona  
President of the Arizona - California District

Next Tuesday it will be 450 years to the day since an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther posted a series of theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Most Lutherans can tell you why Luther wrote them and what their general import was. But the theses in their entirety are seldom studied, even in Lutheran churches. Luther was a Roman Catholic; and while his 95 theses set forth certain basic truths, they at the same time reflected some of the false beliefs which were taught in the church at that time and which Luther still held.

Within a remarkably short time, however, the beliefs of Luther and his colleagues took definite shape; and they never changed. They knew what they believed, and they were sure that what they believed was the truth. The result was a number of documents which in 1580 were incorporated in one book called the Book of Concord. All confirmed Lutherans are familiar with at least one of these documents -- The Small Catechism.

These writings are known as the Lutheran Confessions, and to this day the pastors ordained into the ministry of our churches are required to subscribe to them unconditionally.

One of the things that strikes you as you read these confessional writings contained in the Book of Concord is the positive conviction with which these doctrines are set forth. One of these confessional writings is called the Formula of Concord. The Formula of Concord treats the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Many of these doctrines were disputed by theologians of the church of Rome. Each article of the Formula of Concord begins by outlining the points at issue. Then it states the affirmative -- what the Lutherans believed, and then the negative -- what they rejected as false.

The affirmative statements begin with the words, "We believe, teach, and confess..." It is difficult to imagine how anything could be stated more positively than that. They were sure of what they were saying. There was no doubt in their minds about the point in question.

By subscribing to the Lutheran Confessions we today are saying the same positive things in the same positive way.

Now as we look at the text before us, we find that Jesus taught in the same positive way and with the same definite conviction. This text concludes the evangelist's record of Christ's famous Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount covers three whole chapters in the Bible. In this sermon Jesus made a lot of far-reaching statements on a wide variety of subjects. But one thing was characteristic of everything He said: "He taught them as one having authority."

This is what I should like to speak to you about on this occasion -- this thing which was noted in the teaching of Christ and which is so characteristic of the fathers of the Reformation --

TEACHING WITH AUTHORITYI. It is Possible to Teach with Authority

It is not surprising to Christians to hear that Jesus "Taught as one having authority." He was in a position to speak with authority. As St. John writes in the first chapter of his Gospel, Jesus "was in the beginning with God." He "was God." As Jesus Himself said, "Before Abraham was, I am." He existed as the eternal Son of God from eternity.

As God He knows everything. In the words of Peter: "Lord, thou knowest all things." He did not have to reason, speculate, or make assumptions. He knows all things, and He could therefore speak with authority.

But Luther was not God. None of the authors of our Lutheran Confessions was God. We who teach so positively in religious matters today are not gods. We do not even lay claim to superior intelligence or unusual perception in setting forth what we believe. In our own personal lives we make errors of judgment, and we encounter problems which baffle us.

Being merely human, how could the Lutheran fathers be so positive? How could they assert, "We believe, teach, and confess..." and reject everything that was contrary to what they asserted? How can we today with all our personal faults and failings and weaknesses presume to say what is true and what is not true?

It is because we do not confess and teach what we have developed with our faulty, finite minds. We believe, teach, and confess what God has made known to us.

In His Great Commission to the Christian Church Jesus commanded, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Thus the disciples of Jesus went out and taught what Jesus had taught them.

We, of course, have not walked and talked with Jesus on earth as those disciples did. But what He taught has come down to us. And it has not come down to us by tradition and word of mouth. It has come down to us in the Holy Scriptures -- Scriptures that were "given by inspiration of God," that were written by "holy men of God" who were chosen and inspired by God for this particular work. In the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, we "have received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God."

In setting forth what they believed, the writers of our Confessions did not appeal to reason or emotion or experience. They appealed to the Scriptures. They asked, "What saith the Scripture?" In setting forth what the Scriptures teach, they said, "Thus saith the Lord." They taught what they taught by authority of God's Holy Word.

It was noted that Jesus "spoke as one having authority." And we note that same authority in the apostles, who received the truth by inspiration of God. Paul could say, "I know...I am persuaded." He could say, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance..." He could speak with such authority because He taught what was revealed to Him.

For the same reason the writers of the Confessions could say with such conviction, "We believe, teach, and confess..." They could do that because they were not teaching by their own authority but by the authority of God in the inspired Scriptures.

And because we have those same Scriptures given by inspiration of God, we too can teach with authority.



## II. It is Necessary to Teach with Authority

In the verses immediately preceding our text Jesus concludes His Sermon on the Mount by telling us a story. He tells of two men, each of whom built a house. One man built his house on a rock. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock." The other man built his house on sand. And what happened was just what you would expect. In the wind and rain and flood which eventually came, it collapsed.

This illustrates the need for a solid foundation for faith and life. Men need authoritative answers. Unfounded and uncertain opinions won't serve the purpose.

The Jailor at Philippi was terrified when he came trembling to Paul and Silas at midnight and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He needed an authoritative answer. Paul needed an authoritative answer when he confessed that he had not done the good which he had intended to do and therefore cried out in despair, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Luther needed an authoritative answer regarding salvation after he had done everything he knew how to do in order to rid himself of his sins but found that he was a sinner still.

When a child asks questions about God, he wants an answer, an authoritative answer, not a guess. A dying man, passing into eternity, wants an answer that he can rely upon. As you go through life with all its griefs and problems and setbacks, and as you realize that you must some day face your Maker, you want an authoritative answer about God and His attitude toward you.

Tentative answers, unfounded assumptions, unverified opinions won't serve the purpose. You need to know.

Times change. Paul or Luther would be amazed at the discoveries and inventions that have been made and at the changes which have taken place since their time. But they would find that one thing has not changed one bit -- and that is man's need for authoritative answers about God and his relationship with God. Man is still a sinner. He still dies. He still needs to be reconciled with God.

They would find then also that the Gospel which they believed and taught is still applicable and still relevant. God is still the same -- the same yesterday and today and forever. The Word is still the same. "All flesh is as grass and the glory of man is as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the Word of the Lord endureth forever."

Man still needs authoritative answers. And the same authoritative answers are still given in God's unchanging Word.

## III. It is Unusual to Hear Men Teach with Authority

When Jesus had concluded His Sermon on the Mount, "The people," we are told, "were astonished at his doctrine." And the reason why they were astonished was that "He taught them as one having authority."

They weren't used to that kind of teaching. They were used to the teaching of the scribes. The scribes were learned men. They were religious professionals. Their work in interpreting the laws and traditions of the Jews was highly complex. But for all their learning and intellectual ability there was this notable difference between the scribes and Jesus: Jesus taught with authority, and the scribes did not. And it might be added, the scribes in general did not agree with Jesus, and they did not accept His teachings.

The scribes have their counterparts in the world today in many of the prominent religious leaders and theologians of our time. These are learned men, gifted men. They analyze the events recorded in the Scriptures from the standpoint of what is called science. They scrutinize it in the light of human scholarship. They judge it according to human reason. And what they come up with is doubts and questions. They have few definite teachings, almost no absolute answer.

It is a common misconception of our day that the scholarly critics, the debunkers of the Bible, have the answers. Nothing could be farther from the truth. They cast doubt, they question, they deny; but they have no authoritative answers about God, about eternity, about man's relationship with God. They scorn positive doctrines and absolute answers. Everything is left up in the air.

There is a passage in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy which aptly describes these scholarly deobblers: "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Men are learning more all the time. Their knowledge is increasing year by year. But all the accumulated knowledge arrived at by men through the centuries has not brought them one step nearer to God.

One famous philosopher centuries ago was honest about it. After years of thought and study he was forced in all honesty to confess his ignorance. He said, "I only know that I know nothing."

In this respect things have not changed. Agnosticism is the accepted attitude today among those who rely on human scholarship and learning to provide the answers. If you want to be in tune with the times, you have to say, "I don't know."

But the difference between Jesus and the learned men of His time was exactly this. His teaching was not characterized by doubt and inconclusive answers. "He taught as one having authority." This was the characteristic thing and the astonishing thing about His doctrine.

Luther and his colleagues did not develop the answers to the age-old questions either. And they did not claim to. They simply accepted the answers provided by God. This was their authority. And this is why they could state with such conviction: "We believe, teach, and confess..."

This is also our authority. It is the authority for our own personal faith in Jesus as our Savior, and it is the authority for the doctrine which we teach. This is why we can teach positive, absolute truths in a world where doubt and skepticism are the rule.

"He taught as one having authority." This, Matthew said, is the thing that distinguished the teachings of Jesus. This is the thing that distinguished the teachings of the Reformation. And this is the thing that distinguishes our teaching in a world where doubt and uncertainty are the rule.

We thank God for providing His Word as an infallible authority for our faith and doctrine, so that we also are able to teach as ones having authority, and not as the scribes.

Amen.

REVIEWING REFORMATION PRINCIPLES AND PLATITUDES

By Pastor Joel C. Gerlach of Garden Grove, California  
Vice President of the Arizona - California District

Dear fellow-heirs of the everlasting Gospel,

"At this time I would like to introduce to you Father Harry McSorley, C.S.P., Professor of Patristics at St. Paul College, Washington, D.C., prominent advocate of ecumenism for the Roman Catholic Church in America." Probably with words similar to these the featured speaker will be introduced this evening at 8 o'clock at a Reformation festival service sponsored by the Columbus Lutheran Pastors' Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Theme of Father McSorley's message will be "The Reformation and Its Significance For Today." What a fantastically incredible way for Lutherans to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation, -with a Catholic priest delivering the address. But that will be the scene in Columbus tonight as members of the three major Lutheran Synods join in a Reformation observance.

The service in Columbus is by no means unique, however. Last week an equally incredible Reformation observance took place at Tolentine College, a Catholic Seminary near Chicago. At that service Catholics and Lutherans worshiped together with a Lutheran professor from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis as the principal speaker, with choir music provided by the combined choirs of local Lutheran and Catholic churches.

And here we are, all by our isolated, Wisconsin Synod selves, not even joining together with other Lutherans to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. What is the matter with us? Why are we so uncooperative? We are certainly out of step with the times, no question about that! But why? It is important that we answer that question and answer it Scripturally. We propose to do so by REVIEWING REFORMATION PRINCIPLES AND PLATITUDES. We shall first of all recall the principles of 1517 and then compare them with the platitudes of 1967. That comparison should make all who love God's truth keenly aware of the challenge which confronts God's Christians in this 450th anniversary year of the Reformation.

I Reviewing the principles of 1517 requires that we go back to the age of the Apostles, to the days of Peter, Paul, John, and Jude, the author of these words (text). For the teachings of the Apostles and the principles of the Reformation are identical. Jude lumps the Apostolic teachings all together in the term "the faith," urging his readers to "earnestly contend for the faith."

Jude tells us he undertook the task of writing a letter about a subject he had no intention of writing about at all. He says that he had originally intended to write a letter to the church about "the common salvation," or in other words a general letter about what God has done to salvage men's souls through Jesus Christ. Just what kind of a letter that might have been we do not know. Since Jude was a close relative of Jesus, it might have been another Gospel like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Or it might have been another Epistle like Paul's to the Romans setting forth Christian doctrine in a clear and systematic fashion.

But the Holy Spirit caused Jude to change his mind. So instead of extolling the true faith possessed by the saints, Jude was moved to write a letter urging the saints to contend, to fight, for the faith once delivered to them. The Christians already had enough books setting forth the principles of the Christian faith. They could well do without another one. Against the frontal attacks of an unbelieving world they already had all the ammunition they needed. The real foes of the faith, however, lurked right in their very midst, within the church. Jude explains, "For there are certain men crept in unawares . . . ungodly men turning the grace of our God into licentiousness, and denying the only Lord God and our

Lord Jesus Christ." These foes within were the ones against whom the Christians would have to put up a valiant fight to safeguard the faith. It was true then, it was true in Luther's day and it is true again today.

Now what basically is this faith? The heart of it is the simple, grand, truth that God has forgiven the whole world of sinners and declared them all righteous because of what His Son has done. Our salvation comes to us by God's grace alone. We apprehend it by faith alone, and we learn of it through the Scriptures alone. These were the teachings of the Apostles and they became in 1517 the principles with which Luther reformed the church.

These were also the principles which had been corrupted in the years after the Apostles by men who crept into the church unawares. They were men who denied the absolute authority of God's Word gradually substituting Papal authority in its place. They also corrupted God's salvation message making salvation dependent upon a cooperative effort between man and God. They refashioned God's grace into a kind of helping hand with which God encouragingly pats men on the back for sincere effort, and they made forgiveness dependent upon man's conduct rather than Christ's sacrifice.

Jude saw what was coming and pleaded with the Christians of his age to contend for the faith. Centuries later that's precisely what Luther did - fought for the faith. Now Jude's words are being addressed to us, the heirs of Apostolic teaching and of Reformation principles. Now it is our turn to show our true colors by our willingness and our readiness to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints. How necessary that is should be patently evident as we examine now the Reformation platitudes of 1967 which have been subtly substituted for the principles of 1517.

II The dictionary defines a platitude as a commonplace remark solemnly stated as if it were something new and important. The Reformation platitudes of 1967 bear little or no resemblance to the principles of 1517 or to Apostolic teachings. What those platitudes are should be evident to anyone who understands what the Reformation was about and who sees how it is being celebrated by Lutherans on this 450th anniversary.

It has been said by a prominent Lutheran leader that "since one does not celebrate a divorce, we should mourn rather than celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation because of the separation to which it led." Another Lutheran Seminary professor has said publicly that because of the reforms within Catholicism, there is no justification for the continuance of the Lutheran Church. Still another has said that if Luther were alive today, he would see no need to leave the Catholic Church. He would feel very much at home there. Those are some of the platitudes of 1967. They are symptoms of an incipient disease, a progressive deterioration which is disquieting, to say the least. When men begin to question the propriety of celebrating this Reformation anniversary, it is simply because they have lost sight of the principles of 1517.

The platitudes of 1967 are not oriented in the Reformation and its principles. Rather do they find their source and inspiration in modern ecumenism. It is the ecumenical spirit, certainly not the Reformation spirit, which brings Lutherans and Catholics together today to celebrate the Reformation. Ecumenism is a movement which substitutes love for the organization of the church for love for the truth of God's Word. That in one sense puts the advocates of ecumenism right back into the Roman camp, and indications are aplenty that this is precisely the direction in which Lutherans are headed. They are so intent on togetherness that they have forgotten that Rome's condemnation of the principles of the Reformation by the Council of Trent still stands.

But if Lutherans and Catholics can celebrate the Reformation together, if they can worship and pray together on one Sunday in the year, why not on all fifty two Sundays in the year? Why should they not commune together then also? As a matter of fact, one big step in that direction has already been taken. At a meeting earlier this month, twenty-one Lutheran and Catholic scholars announced that they had reached agreement concerning an element of sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. Lutherans have always regarded the Lord's Supper as a sacrament while Catholics regard the Mass as sacrifice. At the conclusion of the meeting in St. Louis, the same Father McSorley who is preaching tonight at the Reformation Festival service in Columbus said, "The big hang-up has always been that Roman Catholics were the only ones to call the Mass a sacrifice. Now as we explain precisely what we mean, we find that Lutherans too can call the Eucharist a sacrifice." The topic for the next meeting scheduled in March is, as you might well suppose, "The Theology of Intercommunion" between Lutherans and Catholics.

Nine of the twenty-one participants were Lutheran, but Luther's voice was not heard at the conference table. Had he been there he might have repeated what he said once in a sermon. "I really wish and would very gladly see and hear that everybody would recognize the difference between the two words Mass and Sacrament to be as great as the difference between darkness and light, nay, between the devil and God, since the mass as its performance and all their teachings and books prove, is nothing else than a perverted disorder and a marketing of the Holy Sacrament, even though it be celebrated in the most devotional manner . . . God grant all pious Christians such a heart that they are afraid as against an abomination of the devil when they hear the Word 'Mass'. On the other hand, may they leap for joy when they hear the word Sacrament."

Another of the platitudes of 1967 is represented by the theme and the symbol chosen by the Lutheran Council, U.S.A. for the 450th anniversary observance. "Life - New Life" is the theme. It is one that subtly switches the emphasis of the Reformation from justification to sanctification, from God's grace to man's response, an ecumenical emphasis indeed which neatly ignores the principles of 1517. One writer explaining the symbol says that it suggests that our new life shows in the fact that we are not afraid to change our way of doing things. It seems that some are not afraid to change their ways even if the new way violates the Word of God.

Now how shall we account for this almost unbelievable change which has swept over the Church of the Reformation? Jude can answer that one for us. "There are certain men crept in unawares . . . turning the grace of God into lasciviousness," that is, using the grace of God as a cover up for their insolence and then teaching and doing as they please. Jude warned about them, and today we can see them in action, wantonly casting aside the authority of the Word of God and the grace of God along with it. With their pious platitudes they numb the sensitivity of gullible people to the point that they can no longer distinguish between truth and error. And the convictions of some have gotten so soft that they feel called upon to apologize for the Reformation.

Jude warned his readers in his day that they had a fight on their hands. To say that the same is true for us today would be the understatement of the day. Satan is not sleeping. "The old evil foe now means deadly woe." He is all the more emboldened because of his ecumenical successes. And so we face a struggle, a fight for survival in an age of wholesale apostasy. The call of the Reformation in 1517 was to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints. The call of the hour is still the same. Heirs of Luther, see the principles! Renounce the platitudes! Night is falling again in the church. God is looking for new champions of the truth. On October 31, 1517 a man of God caught the vision of truth and was fired by it. The vision is here for us to catch too. One thing has not changed over these 450 years, - the Truth and the power it packs. That love-power, by the grace of God, has charged your heart. Now go out and discharge it to the world. Amen.

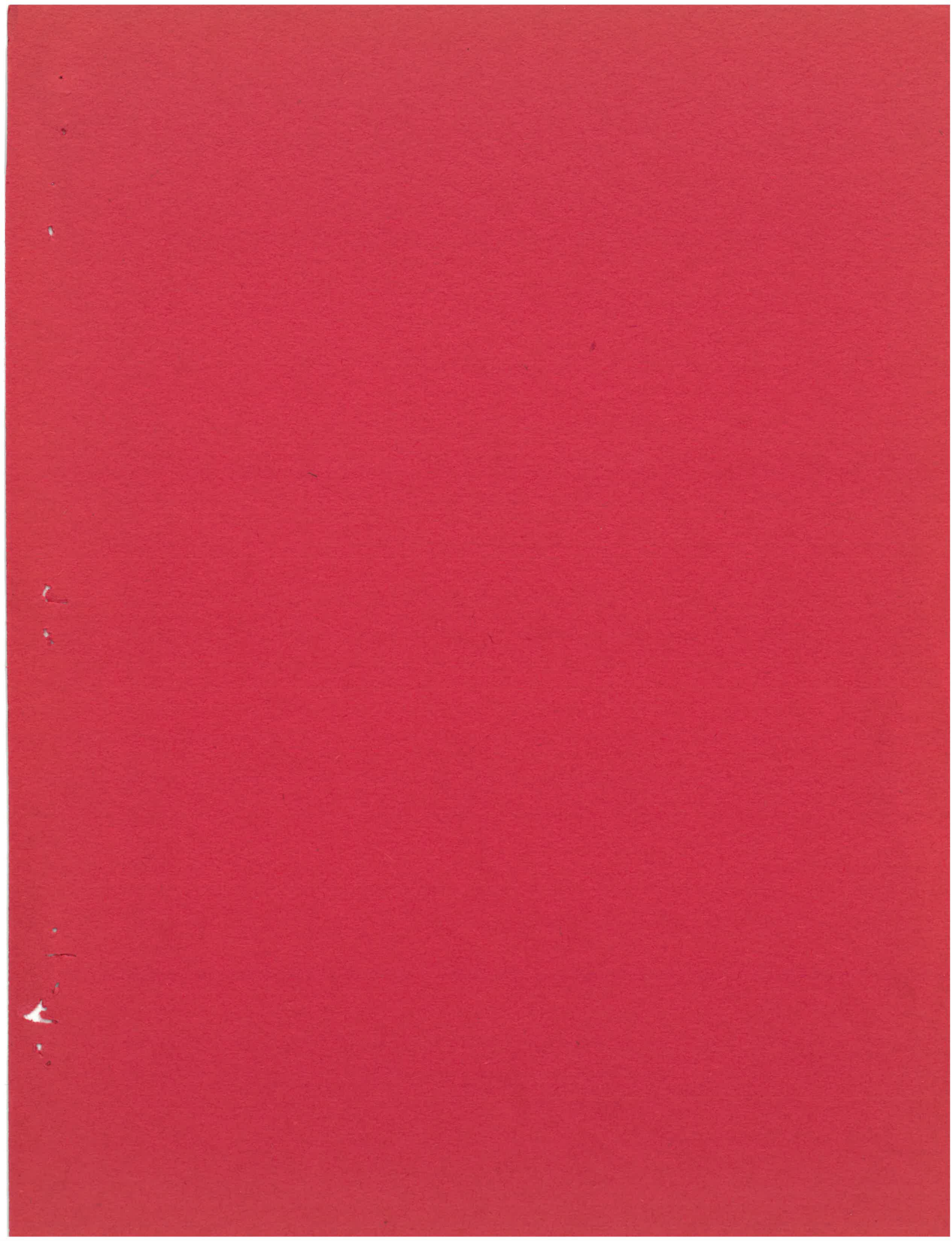
But if Lutherans and Catholics can celebrate the Reformation together, if they can worship and pray together on one Sunday in the year, why not on all fifty-two Sundays in the year? Why should they not come together then and there as a matter of fact, one big step in that direction has already been taken. At a meeting earlier this month, twenty-one Lutheran and Catholic scholars suggested that they had reached agreement concerning an element of sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. Lutherans have always regarded the Lord's Supper as a sacrament while Catholics regard the Mass as a sacrifice. At the conclusion of the meeting in St. Louis, the same Father Schulerer who is preaching tonight at the Reformation Festival service in Columbus said, "The big hang-up has always been that Roman Catholics were the only ones to call the Mass a sacrifice. Now as we explain precisely what we mean, we find that Lutherans too can call the Eucharist a sacrifice." The topic for the next meeting scheduled in March is, as you might well suppose, "The Theology of Intercommunion" between Lutherans and Catholics.

None of the twenty-one participants were Lutherans, but Luther's voice was not heard at the conference table. Had he been there he might have pointed out that said once in a season. "I really wish and would very gladly see and hear that everybody would recognize the difference between the two words Mass and Sacrament to be as great as the difference between darkness and light, day and night, heaven and hell, since the Mass as the performance of all their teachings and deeds gives us nothing else than a personal sacrifice and a marketing of the holy sacrament, even though it be celebrated in the most beautiful manner. . . . God grant all Christians such a heart that they are afraid to slight or despise the sacrament of the Lord's Supper when they hear the word Mass." On the other hand, say they less for joy when they hear the word Sacrament."

Another of the platitudes of 1957 is represented by the theme and the symbol chosen by the Lutheran Council. "New Life" is the theme. It is not only a phrase the essence of the Reformation from justification by faith alone, but also a phrase in Luther's writings. Luther's explanation of the word says that it signifies that the new life comes in the fact that we are afraid to share our way of doing things. It means that we are not afraid to change their way even if this way violates the word of God.

How new shall we account for this almost untranslatable phrase which has swept over the Church of the Reformation? Does it mean that we are to "live as if we were dead" . . . leaving the grace of God to our "flesh and blood" and that we are to do as they please. Does it mean about that, and today we can see that in action, randomly meeting with the contrary of the word of God and the grace of God along with it. With that given, Luther's explanation that the consistency of faith and the pervasiveness of grace have given us a new life called upon to recognize for the Reformation.

God's grace is evident in the way that Luther's light in his heart is to say that the new life for us today would be the substitution of the day. Luther is not wrong. "The new life is the new word, the new word." It is all the way emphasized because of his personal witness. And so we have a struggle a light for survival in an age of wholesale darkness. The call of the Reformation in 1517 was to recognize that the light was being hidden under the bushel. The call of the hour is still the same. Faith of Luther, see the symbolic Reformation the Reformation light is falling again in the church. God is looking for new champions of the truth. On October 31, 1517 a man of God caught the vision of truth and was fired by it. The vision is here for us to catch now. The thing has not changed over these 450 years - the Truth and the power is greater. That lives power, by the grace of God, has changed your heart. Now go out and live it.



DIRECTORY - NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHURCHES, WISCONSIN EV. LUTHERAN SYNOD

REDDING. Mt. Calvary 10:30 a.m.  
 Women's Club, West & Tehama  
 Rev. Joel W. Prange (916) 243-4235  
 2406 Butte St., 96001

CITRUS HEIGHTS. St. Mark's 10:00 a.m.  
 5747 Sunrise Blvd.  
 Rev. Thomas B. Franzmann (916) 967-1661  
 5453 primrose Dr., 95051

LODI. Christ German 9:00 a.m.  
 420 S. Central Ave. English 11:00 a.m.  
 Rev. Gotthold F. Zimmermann (209) 368-6250  
 334 Eden St., 95240

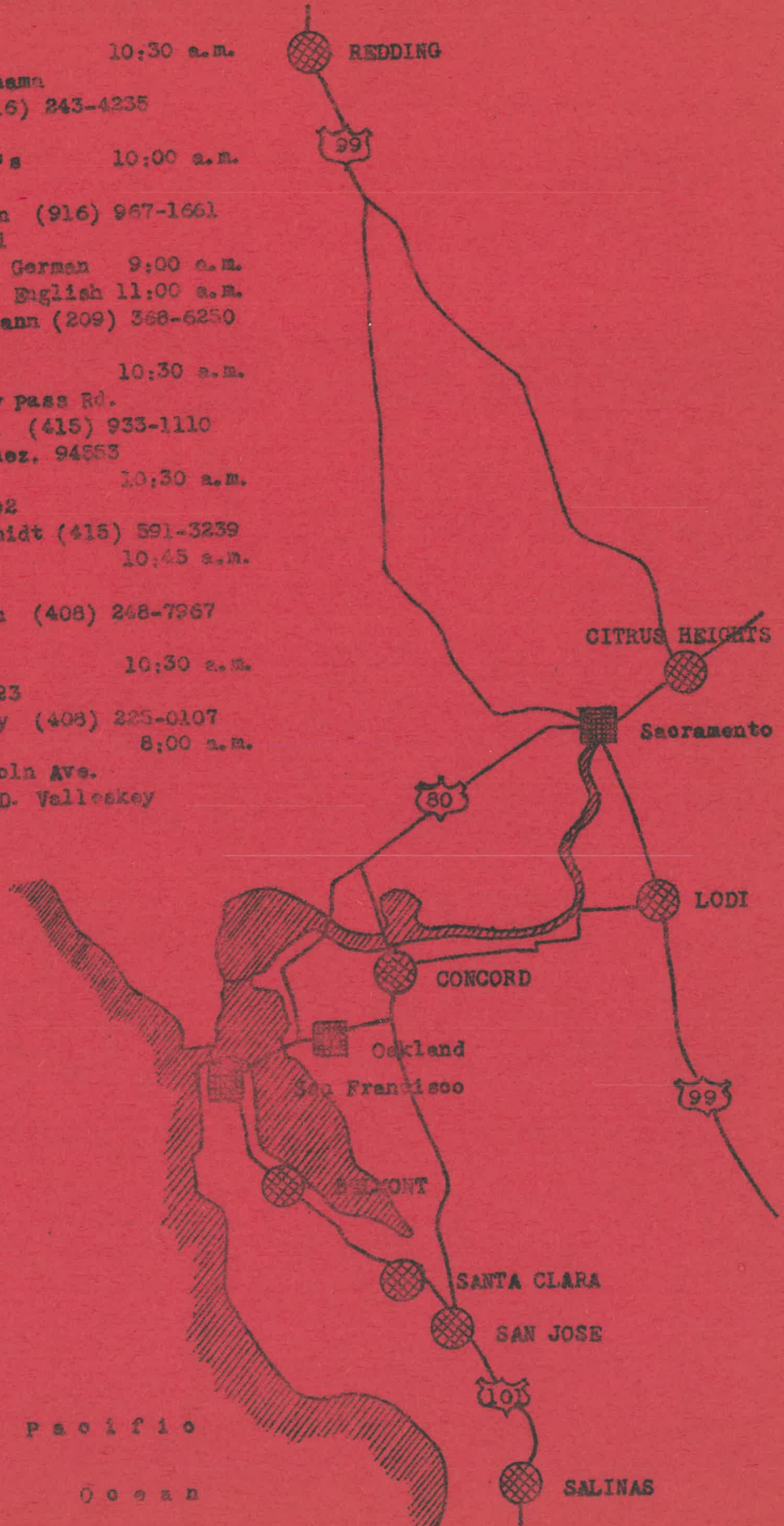
CONCORD. Bethany 10:30 a.m.  
 Vet. Bldg., 2290 Willow pass Rd.  
 Rev. Armin K. E. Keibel (415) 933-1110  
 509 Roanoke Dr., Martinez. 94563

BELMONT. Gloria Dei 10:30 a.m.  
 2600 Ralston Ave., 94002  
 Rev. Robert O. Waldschmidt (415) 591-3239

SANTA CLARA. Peace 10:45 a.m.  
 685 pomeroy Ave.  
 Rev. Robert H. Hochmuth (408) 248-7967  
 3451 Eden Dr., 95051

SAN JOSE. Apostles 10:30 a.m.  
 6001 Blossom Ave., 95123  
 Rev. David J. Valleskey (408) 225-0107

SALINAS. Grace 8:00 a.m.  
 Women's Club, 215 Lincoln Ave.  
 Revs. R. Hochmuth and D. Valleskey



Pacific  
 Ocean