

With the end of the Exodus series, I have decided to do a short church history series, a brief summer diversion. My thought is to take significant figures from our heritage as Christians and highlight one each week, men and women who have very much shaped our present understanding of the teachings of the Bible (both negatively and positively). My thought is to survey their lives, tell their stories, and then explain how they have shaped Christian understanding.

Martin Luther
(10 November 1483- 18 February 1546)



Martin Luther
(1483-1546)

“The Reformation was born deep within a single individual but emerged to become a public matter and a powerful historical force”
(Spitz, *The Reformation*, 69).

I. The Outline of Luther’s Life

1483: He was born in Eisleben of Hans and Margaret Luder (Luther) into a family that would comprise nine children. Margaret appears educated, musical, and imaginative; Hans a manual laborer (copper miner). The family

saint was St Anne, the mother of Mary, the protector of miners and preserver in thunderstorms.

Hans desired his first son to become a lawyer so sacrificed for his education. He attended preparatory school at St. George School, Eisenach (his mother having relatives in the town), sang in St. George Church choir, and played the lute.

1501-1505: Luther entered the University of Erfurt obtaining his bachelor's and master's degrees.

1505 (July 2): The great thunderstorm incident, a promise to St. Anne, and a change of career.

1505 (July 17): Luther entered the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt to prepared for holy office. Johannes Staupitz become his mentor. "I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I."

1507 (April 2): He was ordained at St Mary's Church and a month later (2 May) conducted his first mass in the monastery chapel, the delay caused by his family's arrival.

1510-11: He made a disillusioning trip to Rome to deliver letters for his order; it took nine months.

1511: He was sent to the University of Wittenberg to teach moral philosophy, to train younger member of his order, and to work on his doctorate.

1512 (19 October): He was appointed to teach of biblical theology in a ceremony at the Castle Church, a chair held by Staupitz from the establishment of the university in 1502. He prepared lectures on the Psalms (1512–15), Romans (1515–16), Galatians (1516–17), and Hebrews (1517–18).

1515: He was elected district vicar of ten monasteries in Saxony and Thuringia.

1517 (31 October): the Ninety-Five Theses

- In 1510, Julius II announced a jubilee indulgence with proceeds going for the construction of the new St. Peter's cathedral in Rome.
- In 1516, Leo X made archbishop Albert of Brandenburg the commissioner of indulgences in Mainz and Magdeburg. Jacob Fugger of Augsburg financed the project.
- Luther's complaint:

"He has grace and power from the Pope to offer forgiveness even if someone has slept with the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, as long as a contribution would be put into the coffer."

"Furthermore, he would not want to trade places in heaven with St. Peter, for he had redeemed more souls with his indulgences than Peter with his sermons."

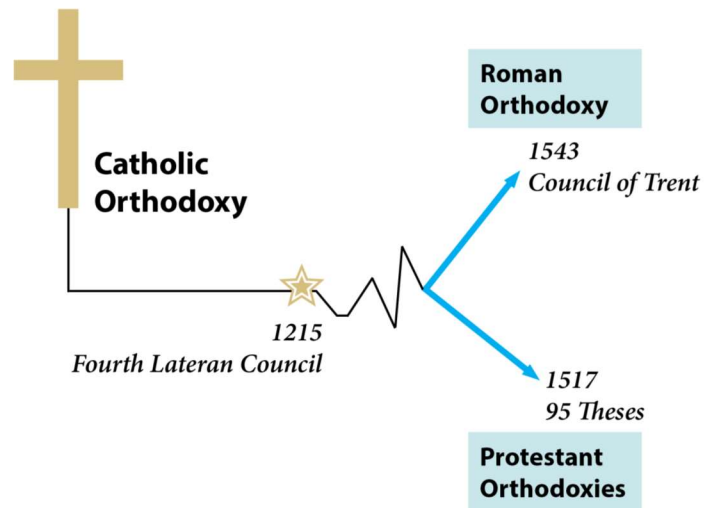
"Furthermore, if anyone put money into the coffer for a soul in purgatory, the soul would leave purgatory for heaven in the moment one could hear the penny hit the bottom."

"Furthermore, it is not necessary to show remorse or sorrow or do penance for sins when purchasing indulgences or a letter of indulgence. He even sold indulgences for future sins. Such abominable things he did abundantly. He was merely interested in money."

1518: Through Melanchthon's help in understanding Romans, Luther came to understand the gospel more fully.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by 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...."

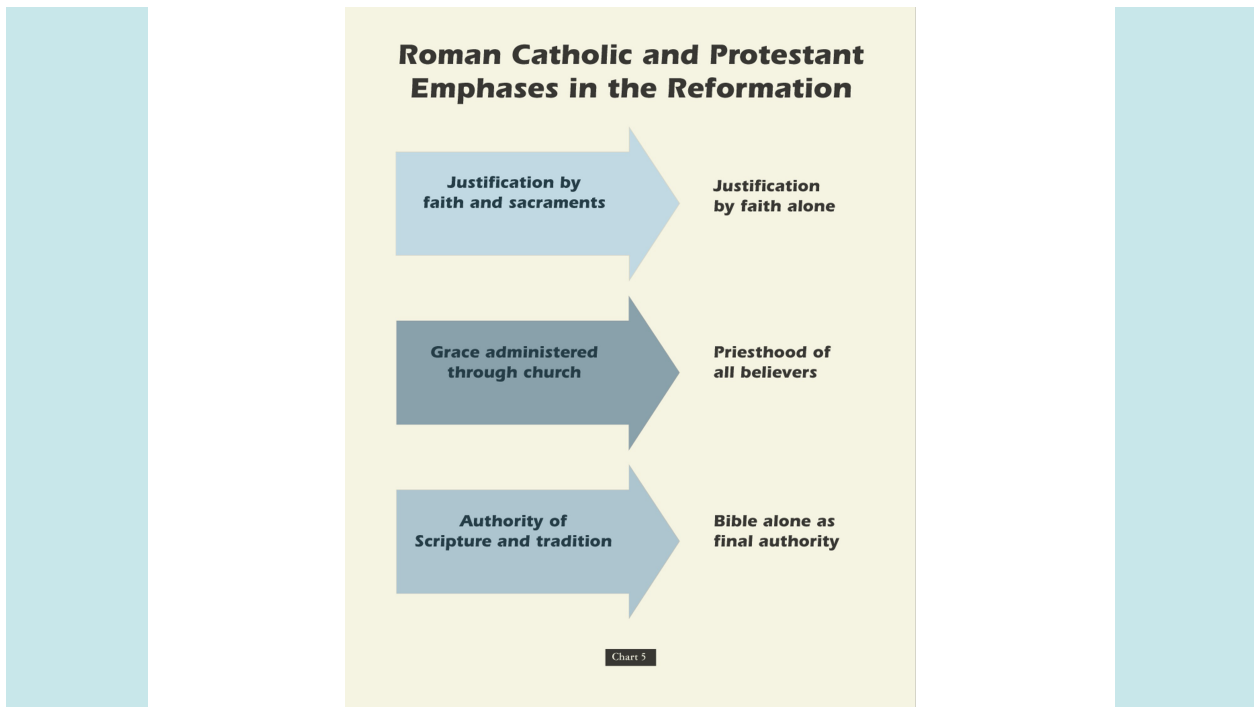
A Protestant View of Church History



The Three Fundamentals of Protestant Reformation Teaching

Sola Scriptura	Sola Gratia	Sola Fide
The Content of Salvation	The Means of Salvation	The Appropriation of Salvation
Authority only in the Bible, not Pope or church	Gift from God, not from human effort to please God	Salvation from sin by faith alone, not by human works

Chart 3



1520 (8 July): Luther received “Exsurge Domine,” the decree of excommunication if he did not repent in sixty days. Luther burned the decree at the famous Luther Oak in Wittenberg

1521 (April): Luther is called before his emperor, Charles V, at Worms. Excluded from the church, he is declared a criminal of state as well.

1521-22: Luther’s protector Frederick the Wise hides Luther in the Wartburg Castle. He translated the New Testament into German in eleven weeks.

1522: Luther returned to Wittenberg to lead the reformist movement.

1546 (February) Luther preached his final sermon at St Andrew’s Church in Eisleben, his birthplace, and died there three days later. He was carried back to Wittenberg and buried in the Castle Church.

II. The Contribution of Luther to Protestant Understanding.

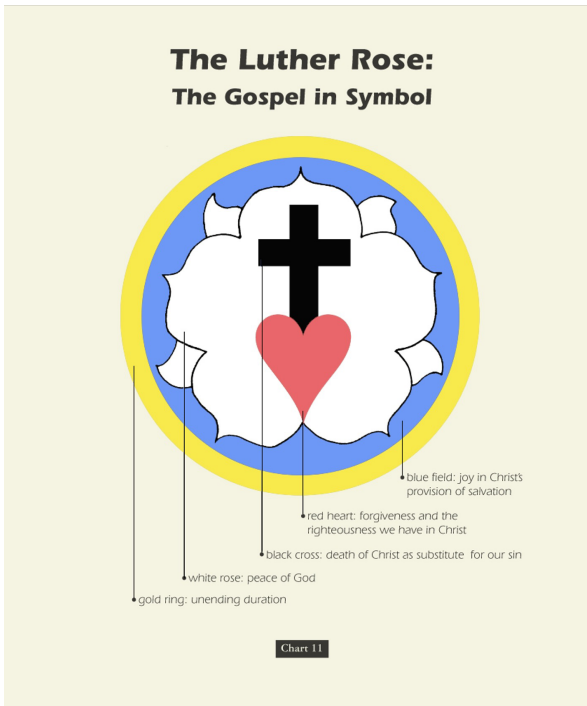
“Luther was professionally an exegete, not a systematician; a biblical theologian, not a philosopher (Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation*, 2001, 85).

A. Areas of recognized contribution

Luther had a wonderful grasp of the gospel: the blight of our natures, the inability of human efforts even in cooperation with God, and the grand truth of declarative justification. “The human heart does not understand, nor does it believe, that so great a treasure as the Holy Spirit is given simply for the hearing of faith....”

“Next: when Christ says in John 6: ‘No man can come to me, except My Father which hath sent me draw him’ (v. 44), what does he leave to ‘free-will’? He says man needs to hear and learn of the Father Himself, and that all must be taught of God. Here, indeed, he declares, not only that the works and efforts of ‘free-will’ are unavailing, but that even the very word of the gospel (of which He is here speaking) is heard in vain, unless the Father Himself speaks within, and teaches, and draws. ‘No man, no man can come,’ he says, and what he is talking about is your ‘power whereby man can make some endeavor towards Christ’. In things that pertain to salvation, He asserts that power to be null.”

LUTHER'S CONCEPT OF JUSTIFICATION			
	Personal Justification	Analytic Justification	Forensic Justification
	_____ 1513	_____ 1518	_____
Person	Punitive Judge	Enabler	Gratuitous Savior
Foundation of Forgiveness	Human Works	Christ's Work in Us (to make us righteous)	Christ's Work for Us (to declare righteous)
Source	Scholastic Nominalism	Staupitz <i>Medieval Catholicism</i>	Melanchthon <i>Normative Protestantism</i>

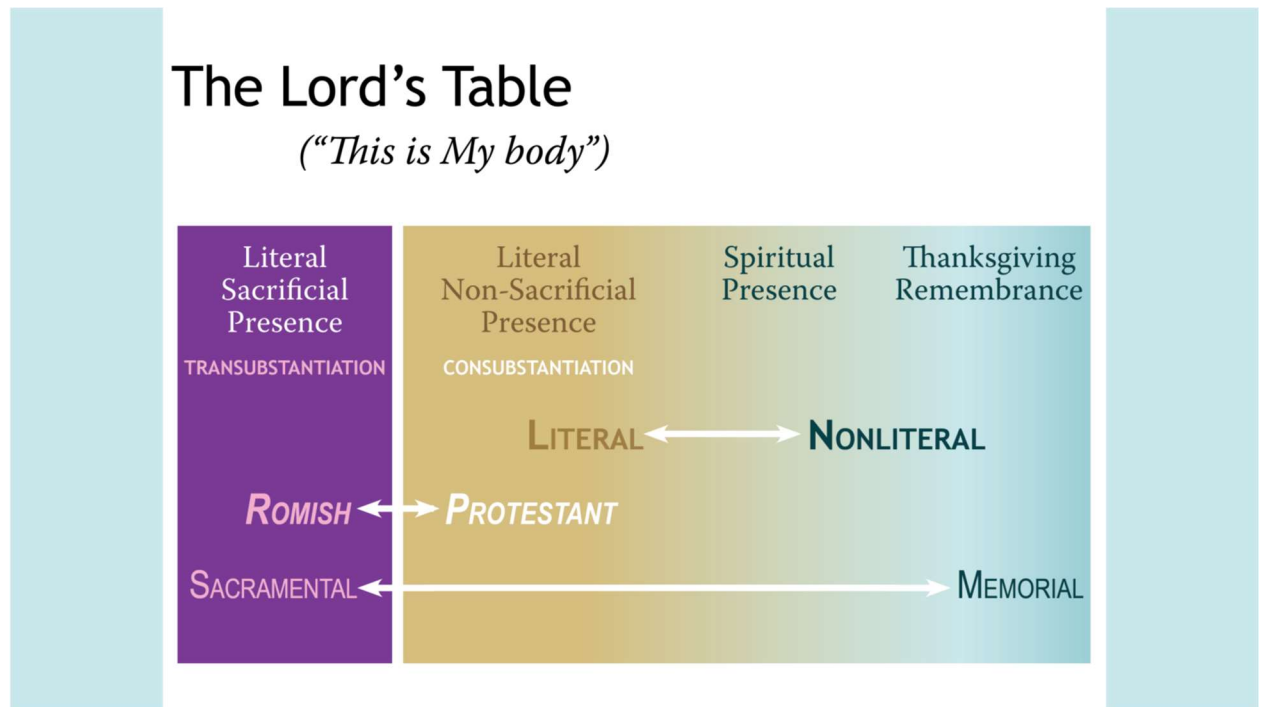


B. Areas of debated contribution

- Luther believed that the Law and the Gospel were antithetical. He viewed the condemnatory function of the Law primary as well as the revelation of the holiness of God (the so-called "two uses of the Law"). He only saw the law as the way to the gospel. "The Law and the Gospel are two doctrines that are absolutely contrary." However, many suggest that there is a "third use" of the Law; in a limited sense, it is to show us what it means to obey God as Christians. Clearly the writers of the NT saw the third use of the Law because they quote the OT to sustain their arguments for moral conduct. For example, "because it is written, 'you shall be Holy for I am Holy'... ' (Lev. 19:2, 20:7; quoted in I Pet. 1:16).
- Luther did not embrace the doctrine of the security of the believer in Christ.
- Luther believed that infants should be baptized because the Bible commands it. He did not believe that infant baptism saved the child ("How can water do such great things?"). To him only faith in Christ saves, what is

signified by the water, and an infant is incapable of belief. It does place the child in the believing community where they should never lack a teacher!

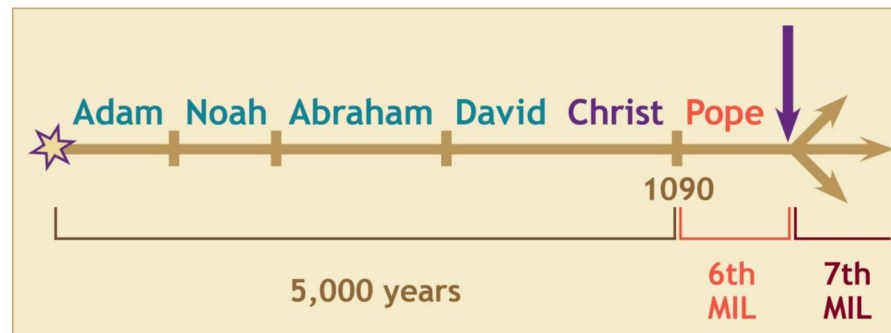
-Luther believed that Christ was truly, non-spiritually present in the celebration of the Lord's Table (Consubstantiation ["with, at, around"]), a very real bodily presence.



-Luther believed that what the Bible prohibits is to be avoided; what it affirms we should do; and when it is silent, we can do as we please. Some believe that when God is silent on an issue, we simply do not know His opinion and should not do it, being unsure.

-In eschatology Luther followed in the steps of Augustine embracing an out-of-time fulfillment only of God's promises (Amillennialism), but with his own twist reflective of his social experience.

The Eschatology of Martin Luther



-Luther believed that the state was not Christian but existed as a necessary evil to protect society from aggressors, the state being worldly. Each prince of a region, Roman or Protestant, would choose the clergy though each church was free to conduct its own affairs under the appointee.

C. Areas of failure

-Luther took at times a very strident, condemnatory view of the Jews, not unlike the medieval Christian view generally. In 1543, Luther wrote *Of Jews and Their Lives* (1543). He advocated the burning of synagogues and Jewish books, expulsion also. In his last sermon (15 February 1546) he evidenced a change of heart. He still held that they were enemies of Christ but argued that we should demonstrate Christian love to them. It was obviously used as Nazi justification later!

-In 1539 Luther advocated Phillip of Hesse's polygamy, a second simultaneous marriage, by the leader of the Lutheran, protective army. Philipp claimed Christina was sexually cold, smelly, and an alcoholic (she did have ten children to him, three after his second marriage). On March 4, 1540, Phillip married Margarethe von der Saale who had seven children to him. Christina was the daughter of Duke George of Saxony, brother of Frederick the Wise and a loyal Roman Catholic.

Applications:

1. Redemption does not cure human nature in this life entirely, though it, at least, tenderizes our conscience to our moral weaknesses. Luther was simply “pig-headed” and obstinate at times; he did not have a great deal of balance. For all of us, we bring a lot of our past experiences into our Christian experience. Let us pray that the presence of the Light will cast aside our dark, shadowed past!
2. People of great accomplishment and insights seemed to be equipped by God for the situation into which He places them. Luther could be very abrasive, not unusual for the times, but our personalities can be passed on to others.
3. We must applaud and be thankful for his great grasp of the meaning of the grace of God in salvation. Might we be as possessed of its significance as he!
4. Luther gave us two memorable songs: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” and “Away in the Manger.” It tells us the great faith of the man as well as the tender family side (Katie and Luther had four children and adopted at least two others). He has a great capacity to hate as well as love. He loved family and Christmas becoming like an overjoyed child. Do not we all!
5. We should always be grateful for those who have gone before us in any realm to perpetuate ideals and convictions that we hold dear. Luther was not perfect, nor are we. I would not want to hold him up as an ideal model, but he shaped our lives profoundly. You can at least say that he was a man that did not vacillate in his convictions. Nobody is squeaky-clean!