



# **Luther**

## **Servant of God**

**Teacher Guide**

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# About This Book

This Teacher Guide differs from others in that you will find few specific teaching procedures related to the individual lessons. Rather, this book attempts to supply you with related background reading to aid in orienting you more fully to the historical situation discussed in the Student Book.

Victor Paulos wrote the background material for chapters 3 to 9. The remaining readings come from a variety of sources that are cited in the appropriate chapters. Because these sources are so varied in their original purposes and sought to address various types of readers, they have been edited slightly to meet the needs of the teachers of middle school age students.

The year 2002 marked the 485th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Since the early days of the Reformation there have been many attempts, between various Lutheran groups, between Lutheran and other Protestant groups, and between the many Lutheran and Protestant groups and Roman Catholicism, to understand each other and to seek areas of agreement in doctrine and church practice and to remove differences. These efforts continue to this day. It is important, therefore, that all Christians be aware of the Reformation's historical basis so that the various groups can speak to their brothers of other traditions with intelligence as well as with love. A major purpose of this course is to equip students for such a dialogue.

The service *Great Days in the Life of Luther* incorporates many of the highlights of this course. It may be adapted or reproduced for use as a closing service for this course, to which the whole congregation may be invited. (*If reprinted, however, this material may be distributed locally only and may not be resold.*) When this course is taught in the fall of the year, the service is appropriate for use by schools, Sunday school or midweek classes, and/or groups of home schoolers and their parents to use to commemorate the Reformation near its Festival Day of October 31.

In addition to related readings for each lesson, each chapter in Part II of this Teacher Guide presents the central thought and purpose of the lesson, suggestions for a brief class worship period, possible answers to activities in the Student Book, and a brief discussion of the memory passage for the lesson.

The review section at the end of each lesson also has suggestions for student research projects. Most of these projects relate to the people and events of the Reformation, although some provide a stimulus for students to create their own essays, hymns, or other types of projects. Teachers may want to list these projects at the beginning of the course, have students choose one project for extended work, and provide a session near the end of the course during which students can present their projects to parents and other people interested in the Reformation. An extensive review test

# PART I

in reproducible format, with answers, follows the last chapter.

May the Lord bless your teaching and your students' study, and may the Holy Spirit deepen the faith of all through this study of *Luther, Servant of God*.

## Acknowledgments

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# The Paradox of Luther's Reformation

From Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), pp. 11–24. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

**M**artin Luther was the first Protestant, and yet he was more catholic than many of his Roman Catholic opponents. This paradox lies at the very center of Luther's Reformation. He claimed that his theology was derived from the Scriptures, as though the church fathers had never lived; still the theology that he claimed to derive from "Scripture alone" bore a striking family resemblance to the tradition of the church fathers. He spoke of "hating" the abstract theological terms in traditional dogmatic language about the Trinity and the person of Christ, but the traditional dogma of the Trinity was in fact basic to his entire theology. He could attack the distinction between clergy and laity as a distortion of the institution of Christ; nevertheless, he exalted the ministry of preaching as "the highest office in Christendom." He could sound utterly individualistic in his pronouncements on moral questions, asking Christians to be on their own when they made their ethical choices; at the same time he could also recognize that most Christians were not very heroic in their ethical choices and needed the moral support and discipline of both church and state. Sometimes he sounded like an iconoclast, sometimes he sounded like a traditionalist.

The most striking illustrations of the juxtaposition of Catholic substance and Protestant principle in Luther's Reformation are probably his doctrines of the eucharist and of the church.

## The Doctrine of the Church

From Luther's writings it is possible to construct an ultra-Protestant view of the church as the product of the believers who made it up, deriving its just powers from their individual priestly authority. Statements in support of this view were usually part of Luther's attack upon the entrenched authority of Rome, with its priesthood and its institutions. Faced by this array, Luther pointed men away from any trust in the church to the faith which the Holy Spirit had created in them personally through the Word of God. Simultaneously he spoke in Catholic tones and called the church his mother, the source of his spiritual life.

Moreover, the church was not a platonic republic, existing only in the mind of God and in the hope of the believers. The church was a reality for Luther, and he knew himself to be part of its continuing

life and tradition. And there were not two churches according to Luther, one visible and the other invisible, but one church which was both visible and invisible. Catholic substance and Protestant principle were inextricably combined in Luther's view of the church.

Hence Luther's Reformation sought to establish the church once more upon the foundation of the Gospel and so to root the unity of the church in the redemptive action of God rather than in human merit and human organizations. But an examination of the concrete results will reveal that the Reformation, which was intended to reform the church, issued instead in a divided Christendom, with dozens of separate groups and denominations. Not even the church that bore the name of Luther and claimed his message was united. Because of this situation it is urgent that Luther's Reformation be examined as a church movement, as an action which was performed in the name of the holy catholic and apostolic church.

## **The Break with Rome**

Only from this point of view does Luther's break with Rome come into proper perspective. The grounds for that break were churchly grounds, and Luther's break was basically a Catholic criticism of Roman Catholicism. Indeed, nothing else would have been possible in the light of Luther's doctrine of the church. According to Luther, the church's life is rooted in the Gospel. What calls the church into being is the Word of God in the Gospel. That Word, communicated through preaching and through the sacraments, is the "constitutive element" in the church's life. Where the Word is being proclaimed and the sacraments are being administered, there the church is present. Organizational and liturgical order are a good thing for the church, but they do not make the church, and it may be present where they are absent. But without the creative Word of the Gospel there is no church, regardless of what else may be present.

As long as the Gospel is being proclaimed through the spoken Word and the sacraments, the church continues. And it does so in spite of doctrinal and theological aberrations that may be present at a given time. These are not good for the church; in time they may even destroy the church—if they destroy the Gospel, but only then. For the presence of the church is not dependent upon purity of doctrine, important as that is. The presence of the church is dependent upon the Gospel, and the church can continue despite error. In fact, Luther knew from history that the church has never been without its error and its errorists, but that it had nevertheless continued wherever and whenever the Gospel was proclaimed and the sacraments were administered.

From this profound understanding of the basic nature of the church's life, Luther developed an equally profound interpretation of the meaning of the church's unity. The unity of the church is to be sought first of all in the Gospel and not in anything external or human. Not what a man thinks about the Gospel (theology) or what