

## **The Legacy of the Reformation**

- I. Heroic – History is the story of great men, influential people.
  - A. Today in America many people see the greatness of America in the genius of the Founders. At the same time, many trace the ills of our society to the weaknesses of the Fathers.

Illustration: Statue of Thomas Jefferson at a university covered in post-it notes calling him a racist, rapist, slaveowner.
  - B. Emphasis is placed on the personality, the figure of the significant person. In our case, the significance and ongoing importance of the Reformation is built upon Luther the man. This is often accompanied by a particular emphasis on Luther at a particular time in his life.
  - C. Luther’s own rebuttal of this idea:

“How should I, poor, stinking carcass that I am, come to have the children of Christ call themselves by my dreadful name? Not so, dear friends; let us do away with party names and call ourselves Christians after him whose teachings we have.”

“God is able to speak through Balaam as well as through Isaiah, through Caiaphas as well as through Peter; nay, He is able to speak through an ass. I, too, hold with such; for I myself do not know this Luther, nor do I care to know him. I preach nothing about him either, but I preach about Christ. The devil take Luther hence—if he is able to do so! But he should allow Christ to remain in peace. Then I dare say we, too, shall remain.”

We don’t need a reliable picture of Luther’s development into a Reformer to have the teachings of the Reformation.

- II. Cultural-Historical
  - A. The Reformation is understood chiefly as the major turning point in European culture, the dawn of a new epoch of history. The Reformation is the great act of emancipation of the individual from the tyranny of a backwards, oppressive hierarchy.

Illustration: Luther as the German Hercules defeating the Romish monks
  - B. Luther as the father of the modern era: free speech, rights of the individual, standing up to authority, working to build a just world and society.

C. The church as “always Reforming,” always changing, hearing a new word of God (UCC: “God is still speaking”).

### III. Nationalistic

A. Luther as the father of the modern German nation

1. No longer bound to Rome
2. German identity: standardization of the German language through his translation of the Bible

B. What of the divisions in Protestantism? A weakness that needed to be overcome for the sake of German unity. This was the goal of Frederick William III’s Prussian Union of 1817

1. Which entailed the forced union of Lutherans and Reformed, Lutheran doctrine and practice forbidden by law, faithful pastors threatened and jailed, congregations forced, sometimes at the point of a bayonet to receive unionist pastors
2. Thus, what was the largest Lutheran church in Germany was forced by the government to “de-lutheranize.”
3. This prompted mass emigration of “Old Lutherans” to Australia, South Africa, and the United States

Illustration: Luther statue in Wittenberg – donated by FW III!

C. Luther and the Jews

1. *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543):

“Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing and blasphemy. ...First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools ...[for] we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of [God’s] Son and of His Christians....

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues....

Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them....

Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth.... They wantonly employ the poor people’s obedience contrary to the law of the Lord and infuse them with this poison, cursing, and blasphemy. In the same way the pope also held us captive with the declaration in Matthew 16:18, "You are Peter," etc., inducing us to believe all the lies and deceptions that issued from his devilish mind. He did not teach in accord with the word of God, and therefore he forfeited the right to teach....

Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home....

Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them...

Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews...

In brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule: if my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews. Lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, the blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dear mother, all Christians, all authority, and ourselves.... It is impossible to force anyone to believe. However, we must avoid confirming them in their wanton lying, slandering, cursing, and defaming.

2. Luther was used by the Nazis to further their agenda. In 1960, William Shirer argued that there was a logical progression in German history from Luther to Hitler. This thesis, though repeated throughout popular literature and media, has been thoroughly debunked. We still hear and read things like "Luther was anti-Semitic."

3. *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523)

"If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and mockery...If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles ...

When we are inclined to boast of our position [as Christians] we should remember that we are but Gentiles, while the Jews are of the lineage of Christ. We are aliens and in-laws; they are blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord. Therefore, if one is to boast of flesh and blood the Jews are actually nearer to Christ than we are...If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either."

4. How do we understand Luther's remarks on the Jews?

- a. What was his desire? That with the restoration of the pure preaching of the Gospel, the Jews would be converted to believe in their Messiah.
- b. Luther's motivation in his harsh statement was theological in nature, NOT racial. He knows nothing of racial theory or Jewish blood. The Nazis were not sitting around reading Luther and got their ideas from that. He is frustrated by:
  - i. Obstinate unbelief – a refusal to receive and believe the Gospel
  - ii. Blasphemies spoken against the Lord in Jewish writings. The Talmud, the commentary of the rabbis on the Torah and Jewish life calls Mary an adulteress, says Jesus was likely the result of her union with a Roman soldier. It says Jesus was a sorcerer and seduced Israel into idolatry. After being executed, his eternal punishment is being boiled in excrement.
- c. While we live in a society of free speech and freedom of religion, you have to remember Luther didn't. The duty of Christian rulers and magistrates also included to punish blasphemers. Luther certainly didn't advocate killing false teachers, but he had no tolerance for them being allowed to teach and preach falsely. If they did it anyways, they were to be thrown in jail.
- d. The other thing to bear in mind is that it's not all that unusual that Luther spoke this way about the Jews. What is surprising is that Luther had kind things to say at all.
- e. Finally, Luther's ire was not limited to the Jews, but was amply poured upon all his theological opponents.
  - i. Luther's graphic language about the pope
  - ii. It was returned in kind – Luther depicted often as a tool of the devil

#### IV. An Episode in the History of Christ's Church

A. The church of Christ, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, exists in this world. Always has:

“For with His mighty and miraculous power God preserved what still remained under the papacy: first, Holy Baptism; second, the reading of the text of Holy Scriptures from the pulpit in the vernacular; third, the blessed forgiveness of sins and absolution, both in the Confessional and publicly; fourth, the Holy Sacrament of the altar which, albeit the Christians were deprived of one kind, was offered to them at Easter and other times during the year; fifth, the call and ordination to the ministry, the office of preacher or pastor, for the binding

and loosing of sins and for the comfort of the dying and others (the custom of holding the crucifix before the dying and reminding them of the passion of Christ, in order that they might put their trust in Him, has been observed by many); and finally, prayer, such as the Psalter, the Our Father, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, along with many good hymns and songs, both Latin and German. Where such things have survived, the church and some saints have certainly remained. For all these things have been established by Christ, and are the fruits of Christ, except the withholding of the one kind. Therefore, Christ was certainly with them, with His Holy Spirit, and preserved the Christian faith among them.”

- B. The Reformation, then, was not the beginning of a new church. The frequent Roman Catholic critique: “Where was the Lutheran church before Luther?” is not a problem for us, since the Lutheran church, the faith we confess, has always existed. Its existence does not depend on Luther, but on the Gospel. Thus, the Lutheran Church is really older than the Roman Church
- C. It was not a revolution, not a scrapping of all that had gone before.
- D. The Reformation was a restoration of the church brought about by the rediscovery and renewed proclamation of the pure doctrine of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. It is anchored not in the man Luther, but in the Word of God, the Word of God which chiefly tells us about what Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, has done for us, namely, purchased and won forgiveness for us.
- V. So does this still matter today? Does God’s Word still matter? Does what God’s Word teaches still matter?
  - 1. This is increasingly denied. At least that is the implication. In 1999, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This was hailed as ending the debates of the Reformation, and bringing about reconciliation. Yet in that document there are fundamental differences that are resolved.
    - a. Justification:
      - i. The declaration of “not guilty” and “righteous” which God pronounces on a sinner because of Christ and His Work. This is received by faith
      - ii. The internal process by which a believer is transformed and “made” more and more righteous

- b. Grace:
  - i. God's undeserved favor for us in His Son
  - ii. The spiritual power that is poured or "infused" into the soul that enables us to love God and merit salvation
- 2. In spite of claims that we have moved beyond the concerns of the Lutheran Reformation, much has not changed.
  - a. See the recent article on *20 Ways to Pray for the Holy Souls in Purgatory*:

"The souls in purgatory died in the mercy of God, this is why they are called holy; however, because they still had attachment to sin at the time of their death, they must undergo a spiritual purification of their souls before they are able to fully love God with their whole heart, mind, and soul for all eternity.

The holy souls are "saved souls" – they will enjoy the reward of heaven – but during their lives they were not the perfect souls that Christ commanded them to be (Mat. 5:48), and for which he provided every grace and means for them to become (2 Pet. 1:3). We are meant to die after living as saints. Those who die in the love God but fall short of holiness due to habitual sinful clingings must be pure before being admitted to the beatific vision, that is, the vision of God that the saints in heaven enjoy for all eternity."

- b. These "poor souls" can be aided by:
  - i. Offer up your Holy Communion for the souls in purgatory
  - ii. Have Masses said for departed loved ones, especially on the anniversary of their death
  - iii. Obtain indulgences: "Indulgences reduce or cancel the temporal punishment that we incur through sin. There are many ways to obtain indulgences through pious actions, and we can apply their merits to the dead."
  - iv. Offer sacrifices of penance up for the poor souls
  - v. Prayers (our own, and to the saints)
- 3. More recently, representatives of Reformed Christianity also signed onto the *JDDJ* at St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg!