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FOREWORD

Why Luther Matters

Five hundred years ago the world experienced one of its great turning points. On October 31, 1517, an unknown Augustinian monk in an obscure university posted ninety-five propositions to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. His ideas challenged Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. The action itself was not remarkable. To the contrary, it was a common academic practice of the time for scholars to publicly post their positions as an invitation to debate. That was all Luther expected to happen. But Luther's Ninety-Five Theses soon jumped the fence separating the academic world from that of personal Christian piety and politics, and they ignited a revolution—a Reformation. They transformed not only the Western world but eventually affected the entire planet through worldwide mission.

Luther risked almost certain death for his challenge to the medieval establishment. But he was a man under conviction and moved forward in spite of the religious and civil powers arrayed against him. Yet, as strange as it may seem, some who carry the name *Lutheran* five centuries later no longer seem to appreciate the significance of Luther's ideals or beliefs that led not only to his attack on papal authority but also to his separation from the Roman Church. In the spirit of ecumenism, many in the church Luther founded (in harmony with several other denominations that grew out of the sixteenth-century Reformation) are tending back toward Rome.

That reality forces upon us the question of whether Luther and his teachings are still important. Is there anything in Luther that matters in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

The short answer is an emphatic Yes! Luther and his message matter today because he was propelled by those teachings that form the very heart of biblical Christianity. First among those teachings is the issue of religious authority. Heiko Oberman put his finger on the importance of that topic when he wrote, “What is new in Luther is the notion of absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils.”¹ From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, *The Great Controversy* highlights that understanding repeatedly and carries it from Luther right through to the end of earthly history. “In our time,” we read, “there is a wide departure from their [the Scriptures’] doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty. . . . The same unswerving adherence to the word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today.”² That is essential truth for our day. Adventist history has witnessed episodes when the denomination has sought to solve its theological issues through ecclesiastical legislation guided by what Ellen G. White referred to as “kingly power.”³ One only has to think of the denomination’s 1888 experience.⁴

A second teaching at the heart of why Luther still matters is Luther’s understanding of justification, or righteousness by faith. His teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone has stood at the center of Christian history from Paul’s time up to the present. Throughout its history, Christianity has had “evangelists” who add something that humans must do to be justified. And here we, creative Adventists, have not been a whit behind those who would propose “a different gospel,” which in effect is “no gospel at all” (Galatians 1:6, 7, RSV). Luther speaks to all such gospel innovators in Adventism; a denomination that has the “eternal gospel” as the foundation of its message (Revelation 14:6, RSV).

A third sample of Luther’s relevance for our day is his teaching on the priesthood of all believers. Luther uplifted the fact that every individual can come before the throne of grace without the aid of an earthly priest or other human intercessor. His understanding and emphasis on the priesthood of all believers continues to form the basis of personal spirituality. And it is especially dear to Adventists, with our emphasis on the book of Hebrews and the heavenly ministry of Jesus as our High Priest.

Does Luther matter in our day? Of course, he does! And we Adventists need to study and understand his life and message. A good place to begin is the chapters on Luther in *The Great Controversy*.⁵ Beyond those pages are the many excellent one-volume biographies of the great Reformer. And, of course, there are the insightful and focused chapters of the present book.

As Adventist believers who follow in the heritage of Luther the Reformer, we can be thankful that Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer have had the vision to develop, with the help of a cadre of scholars, a five hundredth anniversary reminder. The book shows the significance of Luther but,

more particularly, highlights the intersection of Luther's thought with the ideas and themes that have not only made Seventh-day Adventists Protestants but Protestants with a very distinctive biblical flavor. A survey of the volume's table of contents indicates many themes in Luther's works that have informed the Adventist faith.

There is nothing like this book in Adventist literature. Perhaps the closest is W. L. Emmerson's *The Reformation and the Advent Movement* (1983) and some of the historical work of LeRoy Froom. But neither come anywhere near the scope and depth of the essays in this collection, which focus on more than two dozen areas where Luther and Adventism share common interests. As a denomination, we are indebted to the editors and authors for an insightful treatment of topics important for our day.

George R. Knight
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1. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Image Books, 1992), 204.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1939), 204, 205.

3. A. Leroy Moore, "Kingly Power," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Jerry Moon and Denis Fortin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 2013), Kindle edition, loc. 32128.

4. The 1888 General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is one of the most controversial and significant episodes in denominational history. For an overview, see George R. Knight, "General Conference Session of 1888," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 835–839.

5. White, *The Great Controversy*, 120–210.

INTRODUCTION

Although separated in time by centuries, Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as heirs of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther five hundred years ago. Where does one begin with Martin Luther, described by biographer Paul Althaus as an “ocean” and whom Timothy George calls a “volcano of a personality”?¹ This volume explores the various facets and contours of Luther and compares them with Seventh-day Adventism.

Seventh-day Adventists, beginning as a revivalist reform movement that arose during the final pangs of the Second Great Awakening, saw themselves as restorationists. They viewed themselves as returning to the authority of Scripture and, based on biblical prophecy, proclaimed the literal return of Jesus Christ. In this way, Adventism is much closer to Luther, who also expected Christ’s return. In this sense, early Adventists saw themselves as reliving and returning to the purity and simplicity of the early Christians. Even Ellen G. White connected and strongly featured the early Christian church and later Martin Luther as key highlights in the spiritual struggle between Christ and Satan. She devoted more space in her book *The Great Controversy* to his life than any other historical figure after the first Christians.²

Luther waged war during his time on scholastic theology. He revealed a deep-seated skepticism concerning the value of philosophy for the theological enterprise. Historian Timothy George observes, “Luther did not become a reformer because he attacked indulgences. He attacked indulgences because the Word had already taken deep root in his heart.”³ Thus, his phrase *fides ex auditu* (faith out of hearing) represents one of the best summaries of his Reformation discovery.

The basis of the Ninety-Five Theses was an appeal to Scripture. It was Luther’s appeal to *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) that caused his view of justification by

faith to fall “like a bombshell on the theological landscape of medieval Catholicism.”⁴ He went on to argue that all creeds, sayings of the early church fathers, and even conciliar decisions must be judged by the sure word of Scripture.

This book is a journey both across time as well as space. Today Seventh-day Adventists have some twenty million church members across a large portion of the globe. After more than 150 years of proclaiming Christ’s soon return, and now 500 years after Luther protested against indulgences, the editors of this volume hope that the essays in this book will lead toward a better understanding of both Luther and Adventism. In some instances, the volume reveals strong areas of alignment and affinity, and upon other points, it showcases areas of critique to the extent that Adventists continue to base our authority upon the Word of God.

We express our deep appreciation to the diverse group of contributors. While they focused on the theme of the book, each one gives their own perspective on the topic. Some have revisited themes that have been discussed previously, while others are exploring new areas. Several of the writers had the privilege of making presentations in May 2016 at Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. We believe our readers will also enjoy the book from that symposium: Rolf J. Pöhler, ed., *Perceptions of the Protestant Reformation in Seventh-day Adventism* (Friedensau, Germany: Friedensau Adventist University, 2017).

We are grateful to Sheryl Beck and Ruth I. Satelmajer for their input and editing. They focused on important details, and their input makes the book more valuable. We express appreciation to the administration of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, that provided time and support for Michael W. Campbell to participate in this project. A special thanks to Dale E. Galusha, president, Jerry D. Thomas, vice president for product development, and Douglas Church, vice president for sales and marketing, of Pacific Press, who have enthusiastically supported the project. We thank them for their encouragement and support.

Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer

1. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1966), vi; Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 182.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1950).

3. George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 55, 56.

4. Ibid., 72.



HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS



What Happened? An Overview of the Beginnings of Luther's Reformation

Timothy J. Wengert

What happened in October 1517 began fifteen years earlier in the city of Erfurt.¹ Two people, whose theologies—unbeknownst to them—were set on a collision course, crossed paths. One was a nineteen-year-old student at the university: Martin Ludher (as he was then spelling his name), who that year (1502) would receive his bachelor of arts degree in preparation to continue on for his master's (1505). In that same year, Raimund Peraudi,² the papal legate originally from France, also visited Erfurt to help organize and preach the jubilee indulgences of 1500.

One of the preachers under Peraudi's administration was Johann von Paltz, an Augustinian friar from the same Erfurt cloister where, in a surprising change of vocational direction, Martin Luther entered in 1505.³ For the 1476 indulgence, Pope Sixtus IV, builder of the Sistine Chapel that

For the 1476 indulgence, Pope Sixtus IV, builder of the Sistine Chapel that bears his name, decreed for the first time that letters of indulgence purchased by the faithful could apply not only to the living but also to the dead souls in purgatory.

bears his name, decreed for the first time that letters of indulgence purchased by the faithful could apply not only to the living but also to the dead souls in purgatory. When Luther questioned the theological basis for that very practice in 1517, he was directly contradicting both Peraudi and von Paltz.

Luther as preacher of indulgences

Luther and Peraudi were intertwined a second time. In January 1503, Peraudi took a side trip to Wittenberg, the capital of the Electorate of Saxony, where Frederick, the proud elector, had just started a university the previous fall. On January 17, 1503, Peraudi not only dedicated the Castle Church and its All Saints' Foundation—the backbone of the new university—but he decreed, on behalf of Pope Julius II, the nephew of Sixtus, that anyone worshiping in that church on the anniversary of its dedication would receive an indulgence of two hundred days. Each year, unless he was detained by business elsewhere, Elector Frederick would attend, surrounded by the graves of his predecessors, his massive collection of relics, and the courtiers and the learned teachers of his university.

Fast-forward fourteen years to January 1517, when the Saxon court decided to ask their up-and-coming Augustinian professor of theology, Martin Luther, to deliver the sermon. Depending on which of the two sources for that sermon one chooses, either on the eve of the celebration or on the day itself, Luther climbed into the unfamiliar pulpit of the Castle Church (his call as professor included regular preaching at the city church, St. Mary's) and delivered a sermon on the appointed text for such anniversaries—the story of Zacchaeus.⁴ Not only did Luther question the motives of people who give money to found churches without changing their hearts, but he also talked, for the first time in such a public place, about indulgences.

Indulgences were a medieval way of lessening the burden of punishment for sin that the flesh of believers undergoes either in this life or in purgatory—a place of purgation intended to purify the soul for its vision of God in heaven (“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” and no one else [Matthew 5:8]). The church, through the keys given to Peter and his successors by Christ in Matthew 16, could open the kingdom of heaven by forgiving guilt and reducing that punishment. Baptism, a stronger sacrament, removed all guilt and punishment for original sin and any sins committed before baptism. Becoming a monk or a nun could serve as a kind of second baptism by removing all guilt and punishment. But for everyday sinners, the church offered the sacrament of Penance, which consisted of sorrow for sin (contrition), confession (privately to a priest), and “satisfaction.” In Penance, guilt was removed, but the punishment, or discipline, of the flesh was only reduced from an eternal one (mortal sins earned a person a one-way ticket to hell) to temporal disciplines of the flesh. A person, now moved from a state of sin to a state of grace, could satisfy

(hence the name of the third part), usually through fasting, almsgiving, and prayer (as in the Sermon on the Mount). But the church could be indulgent and reduce this penalty either partially (e.g., by attending Mass on the anniversary of a church's dedication) or fully. Full, or plenary, indulgences, as they were called, had not been around for more than four hundred years and were the sole prerogative of the pope. The most regular were the so-called jubilee indulgences, such as the one Peraudi preached in 1502 and which Pope Leo X had expressly issued in 1516 to raise funds to construct anew the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome—the results of which still dominate the Vatican's skyline.

In January 1517, this new plenary indulgence was about to be preached in towns adjacent to electoral Saxony. Elector Frederick banned the sale in his territory for fear of a drain of gold and to avoid undermining his own burgeoning collection of relics. While not offering a plenary indulgence, his relics did offer well over one hundred thousand years of indulgence to those lucky enough to view them when on display, either on November 1 or May 1. And Luther, in his sermon preached for the much smaller anniversary indulgence of two hundred days, made some comments. He wondered aloud how one could preach this (or any other) indulgence on the one hand and still lead people to true sorrow for their sin on the other. He does not seem to know a way out of this dilemma: "You see, therefore, how dangerous a thing the preaching of indulgences is, which teaches a mutilated grace, namely, to flee satisfaction and punishment. . . . For how easily can true contrition and so lax and bountiful an indulgence be preached at one and the same time, when true contrition desires a rigid exaction [of punishment] and such an indulgence relaxes it too much?"⁵

According to Luther's later recollection, the elector was incensed with such an attack on his religious foundation and its indulgences. Without a doubt, that anger forced Luther to do his homework; therefore, throughout the coming months, he poured over church law, the latest New Testament commentary (annotations on the Greek text just published the previous year by Erasmus of Rotterdam), and even the defense of indulgences penned by the Augustinian preacher Johann von Paltz.⁶ At the same time, the preaching of Johann Tetzel, the latest indulgence salesman, and the booklet defining this preaching, which was published by the archbishop of Mainz and in whose territories Tetzel was preaching, had come to Luther's attention. As a result, Luther became even more worried that something was wrong with the preaching and teaching surrounding this indulgence. His examination of church law convinced him that originally indulgences did not apply to God's discipline and penalties for sin at all but only to ecclesiastical penalties for flagrant sins that were hurtful to the community—penalties that, of course, a priest, a bishop, or a pope could relax for the sake of the sinner. His reading of the Bible convinced him of what he had already come to cherish; namely, that the entire life of the Christian is to be one of penitence.