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## REFORMATION & REVIVAL JOURNAL

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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide,
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

## INFORMATION

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The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: WHY LUTHER?

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*John H. Armstrong*

**M**artin Luther was a man of great courage. He was also mortal and weak. He knew his own heart all too well. He had doubts and often needed assurance from God. He had no doubts quite so severe as the doubts he entertained about the whole effort of the Reformation.

Oh, with how great an effort and exertion, also with proof from Holy Scripture, did I barely succeed in justifying before my own conscience that I, a lone man, dared rise against the pope, consider him the Antichrist, the bishops his apostles, the schools of higher learning his houses of ill fame! How often my heart struggled, rebuked me, and threw up to me their one and strongest argument: You alone are wise? Can it be that all the others are erring and have been erring for so long a time? What if you are erring and leading into error so many people, all of whom will be eternally damned? Such questions continued until Christ strengthened and settled me by His own certain Word so that my heart no longer struggles . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Luther later added:

I hope that He will acknowledge that it [the Reformation] has been in His name, and, if any impure motives have crept in—since I am a sinful man of ordinary flesh and blood—will graciously forgive them and not deal severely with me in His judgment.<sup>2</sup>

Of one thing we can be absolutely sure. Luther is clearly one of the most significant figures in the history of Christianity. Generally speaking, most Christians have either

loved him or hated him, depending almost entirely upon how they understand the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and what ultimately happened to divide the visible church during the upheaval of those days. But what do modern evangelicals really know about Martin Luther? About his theology? About his sermons? About his understanding of important biblical doctrines?

In our previous issue (Volume 7, Number 4) we provided an overview of the life and thought of Martin Luther. Considering how much Luther wrote—there are 54 volumes of his works—and how much has been written about him—thousands of books and articles since the sixteenth century, it is a daunting task to get the measure of this Reformer and his massive thought. The difficulty of the task, for our staff at least, was underscored by the amount of good material submitted to our editorial office for the theme of Martin Luther. As a result of the quantity and quality of material provided we agreed to turn our Luther issue into two installments. Therefore, the issue you now read is the second part of the theme: Martin Luther.

In this particular issue we consider several of the doctrinal issues that Luther addressed in his own lifetime, e.g., predestination, worship, vocation, and especially his very distinctive theology of the cross. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Luther's voluminous work is this last concern—the theology of the cross. Modern preachers could not do better than to plunge into this kind of Lutheran thinking with a determination to "go and do likewise." For this reason part two of the work of my late friend, Robert Preus, is extremely important. In my own view, this material is crucial for modern theological reformation.

We also seek to gain a fuller measure of the man Luther by delving more deeply into his mind and thought. Articles by Robert Kolb, a long-time Luther scholar, and Michael Haykin, a Baptist historian with profound insight and great

appreciation for Luther, add their helpful contributions to this section.

Since Luther still casts an immense shadow over the church, it is also important to consider several issues related to his thought and raised by modern thinkers. To this end we have included a helpful overview of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In addition, Chuck Huckaby, a regular contributor to this publication, has written an important interaction with a modern thinker, Daniel P. Fuller. Several additional pieces, which engage contemporary thought and practice in the spirit of modern reformation, fill out this issue.

Finally, you will soon see that this issue contains a wonderfully annotated bibliography, written by Lutheran professor Rod Rosenblatt. Since we always include a bibliography with each theme, and one was not included with the previous number, we thought it best to finish our Luther subject with this valuable resource.

I find myself, after thirty years of reading Luther, as well as scores of works about Luther, still impressed with the sheer magnitude of his effort. He was enabled to understand the important issues and had the courage to speak out when few would lift their voices. Said Luther:

At the beginning of the evangelical cause a certain brother of our order said to me: "Brother, we shall be covered with shame, and it will be hard and difficult to confess what you are teaching, because by that very fact we shall confess that we have been in error. To recant what we have taught and believed for so many years will be a difficult matter." With great reverence and joy this good man loved and cherished the Word, but he nonetheless saw that few would confess their error, because this would involve them in a great difficulty. And we now see this happen.<sup>3</sup>

As I read these words I thought, "How much like our time." Many love and cherish the Word in our evangelical churches but few, it seems, are ready to admit their own errors and get involved in the great difficulties of a much-needed modern reformation. But Luther still stands, nearly five centuries after the beginning of his protest in 1517, as a giant. His thought summons us all to conform everything to the Word of God alone. His life urges us to take courage, to pursue the truth, and to put everything the church believes and practices to the test of Scripture alone.

#### *Notes*

1. *What Luther Says*, Ewald M. Plass, compiler (Concordia: St. Louis, 1959), 1175.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 1177-78.

#### *A Note of Special Appreciation*

The two issues of *Reformation & Revival Journal* with the theme "Luther" (Vol. 7, No. 4 and Vol. 8, No. 1) could not have been completed without the help and personal friendship of Dr. Steven A. Hein, now headmaster of Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran High School, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Steven, a historical theologian, gave his valuable time and frequently pointed me in the right direction.