

A History of the Life and Actions of the Very Reverend Dr. Martin Luther - Part 1

by Philip Melancthon

This sermon provides a biographical account of Martin Luther's life and actions, highlighting his intellectual development, theological contributions, and impact on the Protestant Reformation.

Scripture: Psalm 85:10, Psalm 122:6, Proverbs 3:3, Isaiah 8:16, John 17:17, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Corinthians 14:40, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Timothy 4:16

Topics: "Church History", "Reformation Theology"

Description

Philip Melancthon recounts the life and actions of the very reverend Dr. Martin Luther, highlighting his upbringing, education, entry into monastic life, and his pivotal role in the Reformation. Luther's journey from a diligent student to a reformer who challenged the errors and superstitions of the church is detailed, emphasizing his commitment to sound doctrine, faith, and prayer. Melancthon praises Luther's devotion to God, his efforts to restore the purity of Gospel truth, and his impact on the church. The sermon concludes with Luther's prayer for God's continued work in the church and the importance of upholding Christian doctrines.

Transcript

A HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND ACTIONS
OF THE VERY REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER,
FAITHFULLY WRITTEN BY PHILIP MELANCTHON.

WITTEMBURG. 1549. (sic)

DR. MARTIN LUTHER.

That venerable man, Martin

Luther, whilst he was yet with us, gave us reason to hope that he might

himself, narrate the story of his life, with the circumstances of' conflict

attending it; and this he would undoubtedly have accomplished, had he not been

so soon called out of this mortal existence, onto the eternal fellowship of God, and of his children in heaven.

Profitable indeed, would have been the contemplation of his private life, clearly set forth, for it was full of examples calculated to confirm in after times. the piety of the wise-hearted; and profitable also would have been the recital of events which might tend largely to the information of posterity.

Such a work would also have refuted the calumnies of those who profess that Luther, incited by the principal men of the day, or possibly by others, to seek the downfall of episcopal power and dignity, or inflamed by personal ambition, had become the instrument in loosing the bands of monastic thralldom. Much advantage would have been derived from a copious and complete notice of these incidents, illustrated and recorded by himself; and although malevolent persons may object, that self-praise is an unworthy theme for a man to choose, yet we well know the character of Luther to have been of such solidity, that he would have written, even his own history, with the utmost good faith. We may also assert, that many excellent and intelligent men are yet living, to whom he could not but be aware, that the series of these events was well known; it would then have been great folly, if as is sometimes done in works of imagination, he had fabricated any other narrative; but since his lamented death has deprived the world of his autobiography, we shall now, with fidelity, relate those things connected with it which we have heard from his own lips, and those to which we have ourselves been eyewitnesses.

The name of Luther is widely spread throughout the ramifications of an ancient family within the Lordship of the illustrious Counts of Mansfield, but the parents of Martin Luther originally resided in the town of Eisleben, where he was born, subsequently they removed to Mansfield, where his father, John Luther, filled the office of magistrate, and for his integrity of character,

was valued and beloved by all good men. In his mother, Margaret Luther, was found a fair assemblage of domestic virtues; and a peculiar delicacy of mind was conspicuous in her character, accompanied by the fear of God and the spirit of prayer, so that many excellent women found in her a bright example of Christian virtues. Her reply to questions which I have occasionally put to her, respecting the time of her son's birth, was, that she clearly remembered the day and the hour, but that she was doubtful as to the year; she said, however, that he was born on the 10th of November, after eleven o'clock at night; and that the name of Martin was given to the infant, because the following day on which, by baptism, he was initiated into the church of God, was dedicated to Saint Martin. But his brother James, a man of uprightness and integrity, was accustomed to say, that the opinion of the family, respecting Luther's age was, that he was born in the year of our Lord 1483. When he had attained an age at which he was capable of receiving instruction, his parents diligently accustomed their son Martin to the service and fear of God, in connection with the performance of social and family duties; and, as is usual with good persons, they took care that he should receive literary instruction, so that whilst yet quite young his education was entrusted to the care of the father of George Emilius, who, as he is still living, can bear witness to the truth of this relation. At that time the grammar-schools of Saxony were not in a flourishing condition, and on this account, when Martin had entered his fourteenth year, he was sent to Magdeburg, accompanied by John Reinecke, whose character was afterwards of a shining order, and the influence which he obtained in that neighbourhood consequently great. The affection which subsisted between Luther and Reinecke, whether arising from a natural accordance of mind, or from their companionship in youthful studies, was both ardent and lasting. Luther, however, did not remain at Magdeburg longer than

twelve months.

During four succeeding years, passed in the school of Eisenach, he had an opportunity of hearing a preceptor who illustrated grammatical studies with greater accuracy and ability than he could have met with elsewhere; for I remember to have heard his talents commended by Luther, who was sent to this town from the circumstance of his mother's descent from an ancient and honorable family in those parts.. Here he completed his grammatical studies.

The powers of his intellect being of a gigantic order and peculiarly adapted to the science of eloquence, he speedily surpassed his contemporaries, both in the copiousness of his language as a public speaker, and in prose composition; whilst in poetry, he with ease excelled his competitors in the course of learning.

Having thus tasted the sweets of literature, the soul of Luther ardently thirsted for deeper draughts; and with this feeling he sought the University, as being the fountain head of learning. The scope of so great a mind might easily have embraced all the arts in succession, had it found teachers competent to the work; and it is indeed possible that the calmer pursuits of philosophy combined with oratory, would have proved advantageous in moderating the impetuosity of his natural temperament. But at Erfurt, he was subjected to the subtle dialectics prevalent at that time; these he readily embraced, since by the acuteness of his understanding, he perceived with more facility than other men, the causes and designs of those studies.

His spirit thus thirsting for knowledge, continually sought a more abundant and better supply. He read many of the works of the ancient Latin authors, as Cicero, Virgil, Livy and others; these he perused, not as schoolboys commonly do, merely by gathering together a vocabulary of words, but for solid instruction, and as mirrors of human life, by which means he gained a full

perception of the views and opinions of these writers, and as his memory was both accurate and tenacious, much of what he read and heard was clearly placed before his mental vision. Hence it was remarkable that even in his youth, the talents of Luther were the admiration of the whole University.

Having attained the degree of Master in Philosophy, Luther now in his twentieth year applied himself to the study of the law; and this he did by the advice of his friends, who deemed that a mind of such large endowment, and of such fertility in thought and diction ought by no means to be kept in the shade, but to be called out for the benefit of the state. Soon afterwards however, and when he had entered his one and twentieth year, suddenly, and in a manner unexpected by his parents and other relatives, he went to the College of Augustine monks, at Erfurt, and requested to be received into it. On his entrance there, he not only applied with the closest diligence to ecclesiastical studies; but also, with the greatest severity of discipline, he exercised the government of himself, and far surpassed all others in the comprehensive range of reading and disputation with a zealous observance of fasting and prayer. He possessed a constitution at which I have often marvelled, being of no small bodily stature, nor of a weekly (sic) habit though very abstemious; I have seen him during four days successively, when in perfect health, literally abstain from both meat and drink; at other times for many days together, he has been satisfied with a small allowance of bread and herring.

But the occasion of his entering on this course of life which he considered more particularly adapted to the attainment of piety and the knowledge of God, as he himself has related, and as many are already aware, was the following; often when contemplating the wrath of God, as exhibited in striking instances of His avenging hand, suddenly such terrors have overwhelmed his mind, as

almost to deprive him of consciousness; and I myself have seen him whilst engaged in some doctrinal discussion, involuntarily affected in this manner, when he has thrown himself on a bed in an adjoining room, and repeatedly mingled with his prayers the following passage "God has concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." These terrors he experienced either for the first time, or in the most acute manner, during the year in which he was deprived of a favorite friend, who lost his life by some accident of which I am ignorant.

It was not therefore poverty, but religious zeal that led him to this kind of monastic life, in which although he daily made himself acquainted with the doctrine then taught in the schools, read "the Sententiaries," and in public disputations, ably elucidated to admiring audiences, labyrinths of science, inexplicable to others: yet, as in this course of life he sought, not the fame of intellect, but an accession to his piety, he pursued these studies as a recreation, and thus mastered with ease the systems of the schools. Meanwhile he drank with avidity from those fountains of celestial wisdom, the prophetic and apostolic scriptures, that he might acquaint himself with the will of God, and that he might by the surest testimonies, increase his filial fear and confirm his faith whilst the force of his mental anguish impelled him to pursue with greater intensity, these devotional exercises.

He has often said that he was strengthened about this time by the discourses of a certain aged man, in the college of Augustines at Erfurth, who, when he disclosed to him the conflicts of his spirit, introduced his mind to new views on the subject of faith; and he has told me that he led him to that article in the creed, in which it is said " I believe in the remission of sins," which he thus interpreted, "that it is necessary not only to believe in general terms, that sins are remitted to some, as the devils also believe that they were

remitted to David or to Peter in particular, but that it is the command of God that each individual man should realize the behest that his sins are forgiven him.(") Luther said that this interpretation of his friend was confirmed by the testimony of Bernardus, and that a passage in the discourse on the Annunciation, has these words ; "but add, that then believe this also, that by Him thy sins are forgiven thee." Such is the testimony which the Holy Ghost speaketh in thine heart, saying, "thy sins are remitted unto thee;" and this is in accordance with apostolic writ, being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Luther was also established in these opinions, not only by the above conversations, but also by the whole tenor of the writings of the Apostle Paul, who uniformly inculcates the doctrine that we are justified by faith. And when afterwards, he placed the expositions of various authors on this subject, in comparison with the preceding conversations, and with his own consoling experience of the work of the Spirit, he evidently perceived the fallacy of the tenets supported by these writers; and as he read and compared the precepts and examples recorded by the Prophets and Apostles, and prayed daily for the establishment of his faith, a clearer light by degrees, shone upon his way.

He now first directed his attention to the pages of Augustine, where both in "The Interpretation of the Psalms," and in "The Treatise on the Letter and the Spirit," he found many perspicuous sentiments which confirmed this doctrine of faith, and fanned the flame of hope that had been kindled in his breast; nor did he altogether relinquish the "Sententiaries.(") He could recite Gabrielis and Cameracensis, almost verbatim; for a long time also, he applied closely to the writings of Occam, the acumen of which author, he preferred to Thomas and Scotus. He also read Gerson with diligence; but all the works of Augustine were frequently read by him, and well stored in his memory. This rigid course

of application he commenced at Erfurt, in which town, at the Augustine College, he remained four years.

At this time, in the year 1508 the Venerable Stupicius (sic) who had favored the opening of the University at Wittenburg, and who was desirous of promoting the study of Theology in that College, when he became acquainted with the talent and erudition of Luther, then in the twenty-sixth year of his age, invited him to that place, and there amid the daily literary exercises in the schools, his intellectual powers gained still increasing brilliancy.

Luther was attentively listened to by men of high attainments, Doctor Martin Mellerstadius and others; and Doctor M. has often said, that so great were the energies of his mind, as to give clear evidence that he would one day, effect the overthrow of the theories of learning which were then taught in the schools. He now first expounded the Physics and Dialectics of Aristotle; at the same time not forgetting his own favorite study, that of Theology.

After three years he went to Rome, on account of a monkish controversy, and returning within a year, he was according to the custom of the schools, presented to the Elector, Frederic, Grand Duke of Saxony, and dignified with the degree of Doctor; for the Elector had heard him speak in public, and much admired his lofty genius, his convincing eloquence, and the happy mode in which he illustrated subjects brought forward in the assembly: but to form a just estimate of his we should remember that the degree of Doctor was conferred on Luther when only in the thirtieth year of his age. He has himself told us, that when he strenuously declined accepting the degree, he received a charge from Stupicius not to reject the honour conferred on him, adding in pleasantry, that God had much work to be done in the church, for which purpose at some future time, his labours would be called into action ; this although uttered in jest, was realized in the event; as a host of presages often

indicates the approaching convulsions.

Luther now began his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans; then, that on the Psalms; and he illustrated these writings in such a manner that, in the opinion of the wise and good, the light of truth first dawned upon them after a long night of darkness. He here shewed the distinction between the law and the gospel; he refuted the error then reigning in the schools and councils, which taught that men deserve the remission of their sins on account of their own works, and the dogma of the Pharisees, that men are in themselves just before God. In this manner Luther led the minds of men to the Saviour, and, like John the Baptist, he pointed out "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world".; he allowed that sins are freely remitted through the Son of God, and that we must all receive this blessing by faith; these, with other points of Christian doctrine, be set forth to them in a clear light.

A career of usefulness thus nobly begun, invested with no common authority, a teacher whose practice so beautifully harmonized with his precepts, that his appeals evidently arose, not from the lips only, but also from the heart. The charm of so admirable a character won the affections of his hearers, as according to the old proverb, "manner has more weight than words;" so that when he afterwards effected a change in some of the established modes of worship, men of rank who knew him well, were the less vehemently opposed to him, on account of the ascendancy which he had gained over the public mind by his elucidation of important theories, as well as by the sanctity of his life; and united with him in lamenting the prevalence of opinions by which they saw that the world was distracted.

Luther did not at this time make any alteration in the ceremonies of the church; on the contrary, he still maintained a severe course of discipline amongst his disciples, nor did he mingle therewith any of his own formidable

sentiments, but he explained to them, with renewed earnestness, the universal and all-important doctrines of repentance, of the remission of sins, of faith, and of the true consolation of the cross.

With so admirable a theology, the religious world was much captivated; and to the learned also, it was not unwelcome, for they beheld, as it were, Christ, the prophets and apostles brought out of darkness, the prison, and the prison house; they perceived the distinction between the law and the gospel, between the promises of the law and those of the gospel, and between philosophy and the gospel; distinctions which certainly are not recognized in Thomas, Scotus, and others of their school; he thus contrasted, spiritual Holiness with the moral law.

At this time, the attention of the pupils in the university was directed to the writings of Erasmus, as studies in the Latin and Greek languages; and thus a more genial philosophy being exhibited to them, many who possessed sound and liberal understandings, for the first time conceived a horror at the barbarous sophistry of the monks.

Luther now began to devote himself more particularly to the acquirement of Greek and Hebrew, in order that having made himself acquainted with the properties and peculiarities of languages, and having drunk at the well-springs of knowledge, he might attain a greater maturity of judgment.

When he entered on this course, venal indulgences were promulgated by Tetzel, a friar of the Dominican order and a most audacious sycophant; at the same time, Luther, who was ardent in the pursuit of holiness, being irritated by his impious and nefarious harangues, published his own propositions on the subject of indulgences, which are to be found in the first volume of his works; these he affixed to the church contiguous to the castle of Wittemburg, on the day before the festival of Allsaints, (sic) in the year 1517. Upon

this, Tetzal, acting by no means inconsistently with his character, and hoping to ingratiate himself with the Roman Pontiff, called together, as his council, certain monks and theologians imbued more or less with his own sophistry; these men he directed to compose something against Luther, in the mean time, that he might not appear to be silenced, he hurled not only declamations as before, but thundering accusations against Luther, and vociferated on all sides that this heretic would be destroyed by fire. His propositions also, and his protest, were publicly consigned to the flames. These ravings of Tetzal and his satellites, imposed on Luther the necessity of a more ample discussion of these subjects, and a further vindication of the truth.

Such was the origin of a controversy, in which Luther, not as yet suspecting or imagining the future overthrow of rites and ceremonies, forcibly enjoined moderation, for he did not at that time himself entirely reject the indulgences. He was, therefore, basely calumniated by those who said that he had made a plausible beginning with an intention eventually, to overturn the government, and this, by seeking power, either for himself or for others; so little truth was there in the accusation of his having been suborned or incited by courtiers, as the Duke of Brunswick expressed in writing, that even the Elector Frederic was grieved by the report of these contests, foreseeing as he did, that although they originated in a popular cause, yet that this flame would gradually spread far and wide, as is said of the strife in Homer,—"Soon grows the pigmy to gigantic size."

As Frederic, one of the greatest princes of our times, was particularly anxious for the preservation of public tranquility, he was accustomed to refer matters of debate which affected the common weal, to the States of the empire, so that by many evidences, it was clear that he neither instigated nor approved the proceedings of Luther, but he frequently manifested his regret at

the existing state of things, as he was apprehensive of stir greater disturbances.

Frederic being a wise prince, and uninfluenced by that worldly policy which hastens to extinguish every appearance of reform, and adhering in his councils to the divine law, which commands us to listen to the voice of the Gospel, which forbids us to resist acknowledged truth, and which calls that a blasphemy under the awful condemnation of God, which pertinaciously withstands it; he followed the course which many wise and learned men have done, he yielded up the cause to God. He also carefully read the polemic writings of the day, and those which appeared to be on the side of truth he was unwilling to reject.

I know, indeed, that Frederic often inquired the opinion of scholars concerning these matters, and, that in the convention held at Cologne, by the Emperor Charles the fifth, after his coronation, he asked Erasmus, of Rotterdam, in a friendly manner, whether he considered that Luther was in the wrong, in those controversies which then engaged so much of his attention; to this Erasmus candidly replied, that he was of opinion that Luther was in the right, but that he was wanting in gentleness of spirit; respecting which the Duke Frederic afterwards writing seriously to Luther, exhorted him to moderate the asperity of his style.

It appears also, that Luther made a promise to Cardinal Cajetan, that he would maintain silence if his opponents would enter into a similar agreement; from which we may clearly perceive, that at that time he had no intention of stirring up further commotions, but that he was desirous of peace: by degrees, however, his attention was drawn to other subjects, as he was attacked on every hand, by illiterate adversaries.

Then followed disputations on "The Distinction between Laws Human and Divine,"

and, on "the Disgraceful Profanation of the Lord's Supper, by making a common sale of it, and its perversion in other ways," herein the whole design of sacrifices was explained, and the use of sacraments set forth; and when, now, the pious in monasteries found that the worship of images was to be relinquished, they began to decline from such an unhallowed devotion, Luther added to his "Explications of the Doctrine of Repentance," of the Remission of Sins," of "Faith" and "Indulgences," these additional subjects, "The Distinction between laws Human and Divine," "The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," with other sacraments, and also that "of Vows;" these were the main points of the controversy. Eccius at this time instituted an inquiry into the extent of power possessed by the Bishop of Rome, for no other purpose than to excite the hatred of the Pope and of crowned heads against Luther.

Luther, however, retained unaltered the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanesian Creeds; but he explained in many of his writings to what extent, and on what grounds, a change must needs be effected in human rites and traditions; what form of doctrine he wished to retain, and what administration of the sacraments he most approved, were obvious from a confession which the Elector-John, Duke of Saxony, and Prince Philip Landgrave of Hesse, &c. presented to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, at an imperial diet, in the year 1530, and are apparent both from the rites of the church in that city, and from the doctrine with which our church now resounds, the chief of which is clearly comprehended in the confession.

I relate these circumstances, not only for the information of pious men as to the errors which Luther attacked and the idols which he removed, but to convince them that he embraced every important doctrine of the Church, restored purity to its ritual, and exhibited models of reform such as is desirable in Christian churches; and it is well that posterity should be made

acquainted with the views held by Luther.

I here feel reluctant to mention those who first administered the Lord's supper in both kinds, those who first omitted private masses, and also what monasteries were first deserted, for Luther disputed but little on these points before the convention which was held at Worms in the year 1521. He himself made no change in the ceremonies, but during his absence Carolostadius and others did; and as he and his party caused some disturbance, Luther on his return, by a plain declaration of his sentiments, testified what he approved and what he disapproved.

We know that statesmen are usually much prejudiced against innovations of all kinds, and must confess that discords often arise even in the discussion of important topics, as amid the sad confusion of human things some evil will ever intervene. But nevertheless, in the church, it is imperative that we esteem the commands of God before all worldly considerations. The eternal Father spake thus concerning His Son, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him." And he threatens with eternal wrath blasphemers, that is to say, those who endeavour to destroy acknowledged truth, for which reason it became the incumbent and Christian duty of Luther, to censure those pernicious errors which men of the Epicurean school. shamelessly augmented, and his auditors were necessarily compelled to agree with so correct a teacher.

If a total change be odious, if dissensions commonly prove injurious, as we now perceive with sorrow to be the case, then those who first propagated error, are as much in fault as those who now with diabolical pertinacity maintain it.

I have dwelt on these subjects not for the purpose of defending Luther, but that pious minds both now and in after generations, may comprehend what is, and ever will be the government of the true church: how from among this mass

of iniquity, that is, the abominations of mankind, God by the voice of His Gospel, "which shines as a light in a dark place," gathers the everlasting church unto Himself. For example in the times of the Pharisees, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary and many others, were guardians of the oracles of God: again, before that time, there were many who offered prayer acceptably unto Him; some with more, others with less clearness, holding the doctrines of the Gospel; and such was that aged man of whom I have spoken, as supporting Luther under his deep conflicts, and who was to him in some degree a preacher of the true faith.

Thus, that God may henceforward preserve this light in the hearts of many, let us ardently pray, as Isaiah did for his hearers, "Seal the law among my disciples." Finally, it appears by this recital, that vain superstitions are not enduring, but that they shall be rooted up by an Almighty hand: these being the origin of dissensions, care is necessary lest errors should be taught in the church.

But to return to Luther; as he first entered on this cause, uninfluenced by private ambition, so, although he was of an ardent and choleric temperament, yet, being ever mindful of his calling, he contended by argument alone, and forbade recourse to arms; thus he knew how to make a distinction between functions of opposite characters, between that of a bishop teaching in the church of God, and that of the magistrate who, in his proper office, restrains the people by the power of the sword.

And as Satan ever studies to distract the church by scandal, and to affix disgrace on the cause of God, whilst he rejoices in iniquity and delights in the transgressions and ruin of miserable man; so on that occasion, he excited the instigators of seditious tumults, as Monitarius and others of the same opinions; these Luther severely condemned, but he lent his own influence to

honor and confirm all the bonds of social life. When I reflect however, that high ecclesiastics have often been deceived on this question, I unhesitatingly conclude that a mind which so constantly abode within the bounds of its proper calling, must not only have been governed by human wisdom, but guided also by light from above.

Thus then he dissented widely from the seditious teachers of this age, Monitarius and the Anabaptists, also from those Romish Bishops who most audaciously and shamelessly affirmed that in connection with the gift of the ministry, committed to Peter by secret decrees, political power also was vested in him.

In fine, he exhorted all to "render unto God the things which be God's, and unto Caesar, the things which be, Caesar's;" that is, that in true repentance, in the acknowledgment and promulgation of sound doctrine, in sincere prayer and in the maintenance of a good conscience, they should worship God, and that every man should in the performance of his civil duties, submit himself unto Him. These were Luther's true principles, and to them he adhered, he rendered to God the things that be God's, he taught correctly, he prayed earnestly, and he possessed all the other graces essential in the man who is acceptable to God. Lastly, in political society he ever avoided seditious counsels; and these virtues I regard with the greater admiration, as they cannot in this life be surpassed.

Although the name of Luther is deservedly of good report, since he reverently occupied his talent, above all must we render thanks unto God for that by this his servant, He has restored to us the light of His Gospel; let us then retain the remembrance of his ministry, and spread his doctrines abroad. Unmoved as I am by the clamours of Epicureans and hypocrites who either deride or condemn the plain truth, it is my decided opinion, that the catholic church accords in

receiving the doctrine sounded forth in our temples, as the voice of God, and that it is incumbent on us, that a due recognition of it should pervade our devotions as well as our entire lives: in short, that this is the very doctrine, of which the Son of God says, "If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." I here speak of that profound doctrine as it is understood and explained in our churches by pious and learned men, for although some may expound it more aptly than others, or one may sometimes speak with greater asperity than another, yet on the whole there is a general agreement among the wise and good, on subjects of this character.

Whilst I have reflected much and frequently on the subject of doctrine, in times least, up to the days of the Apostles, I have plainly perceived that after the first reign of purity had passed away, four remarkable changes in doctrine, followed. During the age of Origen, although there were some who thought correctly, amongst whom I would place Methodius, for he discouraged the fantasies of Origen, yet in the minds of the people, he made the Gospel bend to Philosophy, that is to say, he encouraged the opinion that the just exercise of reason, merits the remission of sins, and, that this is the justice of which it is said, "The just shall live by faith." At this time the distinction between the law and the gospel, with the remembrance of apostolic truths, was entirely lost sight of; nor did the words Letter, Spirit, Justice and Faith retain their original signification. Thus the proper use of words which are the signs of ideas, being lost, it became necessary that something should be devised in their place. From these germs arose the Pelagian error, which was widely spread, so that although the Apostles had taught holy doctrine, drawn from the pure and salutary fountains of gospel truth, Origen mingled therewith much impurity.

That the errors of this age might be corrected, at least in some degree, God raised up Augustine; he partially cleansed the sources, nor do I doubt that if he could pass a judgment on the controversies of the present time, he would cast in his vote with us: certainly on the subjects of the Free Remission of Sins, Justification by Faith, the Use of the Sacraments, and other points of less importance, he does think with us. For although in some parts of his writings, he expresses himself more distinctly than in others, yet, if his reader will exercise reason and candour in judging him, he will perceive that his sentiments agree with our own; and, although our adversaries sometimes quote passages taken from his writings, against us, and appeal loudly to the Fathers, they do it not from any regard for truth or antiquity, but like sycophants, they invest images of the present day, with the authority of the ancients, to whom these images were unknown.

Nevertheless, the seeds of superstition appear to have existed even in the ages of the Fathers; thus Augustine established certain regulations respecting vows, although he treats the subject with less austerity than others have done. The contamination of their own times always in some degree, affects even good men, because as we naturally favour the existing customs of the country in which we have been nurtured; that expression of Euripedes is found to be true, "Every thing from the companion of our childhood is sweet." But I could desire that all who boast of being followers of Augustine, would revert to his standing, opinions to the very genius of his mind, if I may so speak, and not maliciously pervert mutilated expressions to their own views. And now light being revived through the writings of this author, he became a blessing to posterity, for after him, Prosper, Maximus, Hugo, and others of a similar class, who were leading men in the schools, down to the time of Bernardus, closely followed the institutes of Augustine. Meanwhile, however, the power

and wealth of the Bishops increasing, there followed, as it were, an age of giants ; unholy and unlearned men reigned in the Church, of whom, some were accomplished in forensic learning, and in the arts of the Vatican.

Then arose the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who, when they beheld the pomp and luxury of the Bishops, whose dissolute manners had become obnoxious to them, formed to themselves a more correct mode of life; and for the sake of discipline, they incarcerated themselves in Monasteries. Ignorance at first fostered superstition; but when they afterwards saw that the studies in the schools were directed only to forensic learning since in Rome, at this time, the practice of the law augmented the influence and wealth of many, they endeavoured to call public attention to the study of theology.

But their wisdom failed them in this attempt. Albertus and his followers, who had embraced the opinions of Aristotle, began to convert the doctrines of the Church into philosophy; and this fourth age was not only impure, but absolutely polluted; that is to say, it infused manifest idolatry into the fountains of Gospel Truth. And such labyrinths of false sentiment are to be found in Thomas, Scotus, and similar writers, that wiser theologians have always felt the need of ft more simple and a purer doctrine.

Nor can it be said without glaring effrontery, that such a reform was uncalled for; since it is evident that many of the sophisms contained in these disputations, were not intelligible even to those who were conversant with such arguments. Hence it is plainly proved, that they are blindly devoted to idolatry who teach the virtue of sacrifices as contained in works, who sanction the use of image worship, who deny the forgiveness of sin by grace through faith, and who in human ceremonies, make a sacrifice of conscience; and there are truly other things yet more degrading, which cannot be told, and at which the whole frame shudders.

Let us therefore give thanks unto God, the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been pleased by the ministry of Martin Luther, again to purify the sources of Evangelic Truth, and to restore sound doctrine to the Church. Whilst contemplating this theme, it behooves all pious men the world over to mingle their prayers and their sighs, and to supplicate in fervency of spirit, that God will strengthen the work which He has begun in us, because of His Holy Temple.

"O Thou, the living and true God, the Eternal Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Author of all things and of Thy Church, Thine is the word and the promise, 'For my name's sake I will do it, that they may not blaspheme.' To Thee I pray with my whole heart, for the sake of Thine own glory and that of Thy Son, that by the voice of Thy Gospel, Thou wilt ever gather the Eternal Church unto Thyself; And for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us, and rose again, our Mediator and Intercessor, may it please Thee to reign in our hearts and minds by the Holy Ghost, that we may in sincerity offer up our prayers, and render service acceptable unto Thee. Deign also to bless the pursuits of Philosophy, and direct and support those principles and that discipline which are the guardians of wisdom and the protection of Thy Church. When Thou shalt have so built up the human race, that Thou shalt be universally acknowledged and adored; for which purpose Thou hast made Thyself known by such clear testimonies, oh, grant that this fold, in which Thy true doctrine is heard, may not be brought to desolation; and since Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to endure his agony, prayed for us, 'Father, sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth,' so, to the prayer of this our Great High Priest, we join our supplications, that the light of Thy truth may for ever shine in the sons of men, to guide and govern them."

In prayer for these blessings, we have heard Luther daily engaged, and amid

these devotions, his spirit was gently called from its mortal tenement, when he was in the sixty-third year of his age.

Posterity possesses many of Luther's works, doctrinal and devotional. He published [Greek] ((((((((((or dialectic writings, which contain doctrine wholesome and necessary to man, calculated also to enlighten sincere minds on the subjects of "Repentance," "Faith with its genuine fruits," (the use of the Sacraments," "the distinction between the Law and the Gospel," and "between the Gospel and Philosophy," "on the dignity of political rank," and lastly, "on the most important articles which are essential to the Church." He then added [Greek] ((((((((((in which he refuted many pernicious errors; he also published [Greek] ((((((((((; these are "enlarged illustrations of the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures," in which class even his enemies confess, that he has excelled all previous commentators.

The value of these writings is appreciated by the religious world; but certainly in usefulness and laborious research, they do not surpass another work of his, "the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments," the perspicuity of which is so great that his German version may serve as a commentary; nor is this publication a commentary only, for it has very learned annotations, with a synopsis of the several parts subjoined; both of which exhibit a summary of heavenly doctrine, and inform the reader on the subjects of the discourse so, that from these sources, the children of God may draw sure evidences of the truth.

Luther himself, wished that none should linger amid the products of his own mind, but was anxious to lead the attention of all, to the fountain-head of divine wisdom: he wished that we might hear the voice of God, that it might in the minds of many, awaken the true faith, and prayer, that God might be truly glorified, and that many might be made heirs of eternal life. .

And now it becomes us to acknowledge these desires and these more abundant labors, and to remember them as an example also, that each study according to his talents, how he may best adorn the Church of Christ; for to these two great ends, our whole life with all its purposes and designs, should be referred; in the first place, that we may show forth the glory of God, and in the next, that we may benefit His church: in allusion to the former, Paul says "Do all to the glory of God;" and the latter is referred to in Psalm cxxii. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;" with a sweet promise added in the same verse, "They shall prosper that love Thee." These heavenly commands and these promises invite all to an enlightened knowledge of Christian doctrines: they call upon us, to love the ministers of the Gospel, and those who teach it in its purity; whilst they direct our studies and our labors to the propagation of sound doctrine, and to the maintenance of harmony in the Church of Christ.

DAILY AND FREQUENT PRAYER OF LUTHER.

"Establish in us O God! that which "Thou hast wrought, and perfect the work "which Thou hast begun in us to Thy "glory, Amen."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/philip-melancthon/a-history-of-the-life-and-actions-of-the-very-reverend-dr-martin-luther-part-1/>

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