



Reforming and Training

THE HEIDELBRIEF

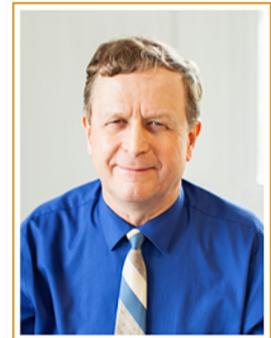
News from Heidelberg Theological Seminary

November, 2019

Luther's Final Answer at the Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521

Dr. Mark Larson, Professor of Systematic Theology

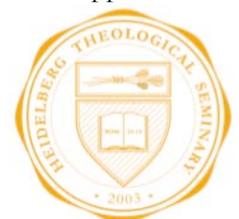
In the year 1520, Luther published three reforming treatises. His first work *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* rejected the claim that only the pope may interpret Scripture—every Christian has this right! In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther assaulted the sacramental system and rejected five of the Roman sacraments (confirmation, penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage). He accepted baptism and the Lord's Supper. In his *Treatise on Christian Liberty*, Luther described the liberating effect of faith upon the Christian man. True faith frees him from spiritual slavery and moves him to a life of love and service to God and humanity.



Pope Leo X responded in 1520 with a bull (a decree authenticated by the stamp of the pope's own *bullo*, or seal) ordering Luther to recant within sixty days or face excommunication and the ban (under which nobody would be allowed to shelter or sustain him, but were to hand him over). When the sixty days had passed Luther threw the bull into a fire outside the city of Wittenberg. Luther was now technically excommunicated and under the ban.

Luther had become a heretic in the eyes of the church and an outlaw in the eyes of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles who in 1521 summoned Luther to appear

before the Diet of Worms, the imperial assembly of ecclesiastical and secular lords. Charles was anxious to enhance his prestige by obtaining a recantation from Luther. Luther saw the summons to Worms as providing a forum in which he could expound the gospel, but the emperor would not allow that. When Luther appeared at the city of Worms, it is clear that he was already quite a celebrity. Once he settled into his quarters, Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, who would become a renowned Protestant prince, visited him. (continued on next page)



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Luther was ushered into the Diet at about 4:00 PM on April 17. Emperor Charles V was seated on a raised dais along with his advisers and the representatives of Rome. The room was filled with Spanish troops and the politically powerful of Germany. In the midst of this impressive assembly was a table, piled high with Luther's books. Johann von Eck, associate of the Archbishop of Trier, who served as the interrogator, asked Luther to acknowledge the writings as his own, which Luther did. Eck asked Luther if he would retract his "heresies." Luther asked for time to compose a formal reply. He was granted twenty-four hours.

Luther returned on the next evening to give his reply. The date was April 18, 1521. Night had fallen, and the room was lit by candlelight. Eck asked these questions: "Do you wish to defend the books which are recognized as your work? Or to retract anything contained in them?" Luther at thirty-seven years of age rose to the challenge with probably the greatest speech of his entire career.

His speech is presented in the volume edited by Henry Bettenson entitled *Documents of the Christian Church*. Luther is courteous in his address to the assembly, but he pulls no punches when it comes to his statements regarding the papacy and the doctrines that were foisted upon the church. He refers to "their wicked doctrines" that brought "harm to the souls and bodies of men." He brings this charge: "Through the Pope's laws and through man-made teachings the consciences of the faithful have been most pitifully ensnared, troubled, and racked in torments, and . . . their goods and possessions have been devoured (especially amongst this famous German nation) by unbelievable tyranny."



Luther with the help of God demonstrated incredible strength in his speech and an unyielding commitment to biblical truth. There was also a winsome humility in the address. He quotes from Jesus' statement before Annas and applies it to himself: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil." "I am willing," Luther says, "scum that I am . . . to seek and to wait for any who may wish to bear witness against my teaching."

The Orator of the Empire on this momentous occasion appealed to decisions made by Church Councils as having binding authority when it came to matters of faith: "There should be no calling into question of matters on which condemnations and decisions had before been passed by Councils." Luther responded by asserting that decisions of church councils per se should not be given unqualified allegiance. He noted, "It is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves." Luther objected to the "unsupported authority" of councils—that is, conciliar decisions that did not rest on biblical support. He along with the other Protestant reformers accepted the authority of the first four Ecumenical Councils—Nicaea (325); Constantinople (381); Ephesus (431); and Chalcedon (451)—due to the fact that the doctrinal positions that were articulated were based upon biblical exegesis.

In his speech before the Diet of Worms, Luther affirmed that his conscience was going to be bound by Scripture alone. He famously said, "My conscience is taken captive by God's word." There was an implication that followed from this: "Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scriptures . . . I cannot and will not recant anything."

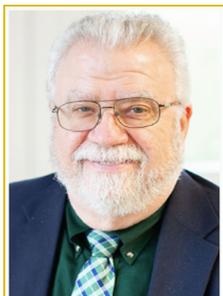
Luther's commitment to the Scripture was based upon his belief that it is the Word of God. It alone has ultimate authority because it is divine revelation. He announced that this was his deepest commitment: "On this I take my stand. I can do no other."

On this point, Luther stood with Jesus Christ who was committed to the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Jesus rejected the tradition of the elders, even while he ever maintained the binding authority of the Old Testament. He addressed his opponents in Matthew 15:3 with this question: "Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" Biblical inspiration in the view of Jesus included the smallest letters and pen strokes of the Hebrew alphabet: "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). The declaration of Luther at the Diet of Worms will never be forgotten. His position regarding the absolute authority of Holy Scripture reverberates through the centuries: "On this I take my stand." Do you stand with Luther on this point? More importantly, do you stand with Jesus Christ the Son of God who placed his stamp of approval on the doctrine of Scripture Alone? Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

The Ground and Pillar of the Truth

Dr. Maynard Koerner, HTS President and Director of Doctorate Program

The purpose for which we pursue our work at HTS is training men for the gospel ministry. While we carry out this labor academically, our focus is decidedly vocational. We desire to fill pulpits with men who are grounded in God's Word and are passionate about proclaiming the truth to the hungry sheep.



It is to the Church that our Lord gave the Commission to call the lost and to teach them His Word that they might know and serve Him. Sadly, the church over time deformed and the mandate became teaching the sheep to serve and revere the clergy.

In God's providence, He raised men to reform the Church so that those called to take ecclesiastic office would be trained to return to the task of the Great Commission. At HTS, we train men to serve humbly and faithfully the Church. We live in an age when social media is all about the "selfie." This has impacted even the Church, where men who are ordained desire to be heard, seen, and celebrated through their blogs, podcasts, and websites.

The ministry in some quarters has become "look at me" and "like" and "follow" my captivating production because it's not just about the Word, but it's about me presenting the Word. If the Reformation has taught us anything, it's Christ alone. We who proclaim, we who teach, we who pastor are mere instruments to that which God has entrusted us to impart.

The danger becomes when men attempt to supplement the Word with their ability to speak, with their wit, and with their interpretation that it no longer is the Word attesting to the Word, but men validating biblical truths as if they are now the final arbiters of all things.

The Reformation was very clear: it begins with God and it ends with God, and every thought, word, and deed in between are to be consecrated unto God. And so we train our men to be servants with a shepherd's heart, knowing that the call to spread the good news

History Bites

with Rev. Jay Fluck, Professor of Church History

Keeping accurate church records has always been a part of the Reformed Church in the United States' desire to have good and necessary order. Already back in October 1734, church father John Philip Boem filed these "True and desired statistics of the German Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania, showing how many communicants were found at the last Lord's Supper in each congregation: at Falkner Swamp were found, September 22, 1734 (63); at Skippack were found, September 22, 1734 (41); at Whitmarsh were found, October 6, 1734 (22); at Philadelphia were found, September 15, 173 (88); at Germantown were found, (according to statement of two elders named Minek and Bentzel) September, 1734 (30); at Conestoga were found, May 31, 1734 (75); at Tulpehocken were found, June 28, 1734 (37); at Goshenhoppen (according to statement of some members) about (40) [for a total of 386]." Humble beginnings indeed, but oh how God increased the RCUS over the years, then decreased, and then (through a different reformation) have it grow again to what we are today.



HTS in the Philippines

Report on the Pearl of the Orient Covenant Reformed Church and HTS Study Centers
By Rev. Nap Narag

- 1. APAYAO**
 - Mataguisi Ministry: Native Tribes Mission
Pastor: Oseas Andres
 - Salvacion Minity
Pastor: Oseas Andres
 - HTS - No Existing Center
- 2. PANGASINAN**
 - Pearl of the Orient Covenant Reformed Church of San Carlos City
Visiting Pastor: Pastor Nap Narag
1 possible outreach
1 possible Church affiliation
 - Dagupan City Covenant Reformed Church
Visiting Pastor: Pastor Nap Narag
 - HTS Center Existing – Dagupan City CRC
Soon to be restored with 8 Possible Students
- 3. CABANATUAN**
 - Sovereign Grace Covenant Reformed Church
Pastor: Filip Cruz
 - HTS Center Existing
Number of Students - 5
- 4. BULACAN**
 - God is Faithful Covenant Reformed Church of Malolos City
Pastor: Edmund Delos Reyes
 - San Ildefonso
Pastor: Pastor Cris Santos
 - Outreach – Meycauayan Bulacan Under the care of God is Faithful Covenant Reformed Church, Malolos City
 - HTS Center Existing - Malolos City, Bulacan
 - Number of Students - 9
- 5. LAGUNA**
 - Providence Covenant Reformed Church
Pastor: Pastor Nap Narag
 - Outreach – San Pedro, Laguna
 - HTS Existing – No place to meet
 - Number of Students 3
- 6. BAYBAY LEYTE**
 - Christ Prototokos Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rex Loreto
 - HTS Center soon to be established
 - Number of Students – about 16
- 7. DAVAO**
 - Davao Covenant Reformed Church
Pastor: Pastor Vic Bernales
 - HTS Center will soon be established
- 8. CAGAYAN DE ORO**
 - Erel Tacondong
 - HTS Center Existing – Church rented Place
 - Number of Students - 3
- 9. AGUSAN DEL SUR**
 - Rocky Simbajon
 - HTS Center Existing - Church Worship Center
 - Number of students 5 or more



“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. . .”
(Eccl. 3:1)

We have enjoyed the season of Reformation, and now we come upon the season of giving thanks. As we are called to reform always (Semper Reformanda), we are also called to provide training in orthodoxy towards that growth in reforming. We are thankful to God for the provisions He has given us to provide a quality theological education that truly seeks to train men as servant-pastors. We are thankful to you who provide the financial means for us to continue this great kingdom work.

HTS is a relatively small theological school with a modest budget, but with a big mission. We are seeking to add a second full-time professor after over 15 years of opening our doors. Waiting that long to add to the faculty demonstrates that we have been fiscally conservative with the gifts given. We have been able to do mighty things by the grace and strength of God. Here in the States and in our learning centers in the Philippines, faithful men have gathered and desired to be trained at Heidelberg. We need your help in this season of giving, and we covet your prayers as we continue in this joint labor to equip men for the ministry.

–Kevin Te Slaa, Executive Administrator

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