

HEROES OF THE CHURCH: Martin Luther

I. Introduction: Why Study Church History?

- A. Church history is a sub-category of the providence of God. “This is God’s world, and this is God’s history, and it is God doing His will.”

“Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.” (Ps 135:6)

- B. Church history reveals God’s faithfulness to His Church

“...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt 16:18)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” (Heb 12:1)

II. Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- A. Was Luther Crazy?

- B. Luther did not plan the Reformation; it was an accident.

“I was utterly clumsy and incapable in the conduct of such high matters. I became embroiled in them by accident and not because I wanted or intended to do so.” – Luther

- C. Education: Law School then the Monastery - *“St. Anne, help me, and I will become a monk!”*

- D. Luther’s Terror of the Holy: At the Table and at Confession

“I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.” – Luther

IV. Luther’s Conversion

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Rom 1:16-17)

“I greatly longed to understand Paul’s epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the justice of God,” because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

...Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the “justice of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...” - Luther

A. Justification by Faith Alone

“Luther’s doctrine of the ‘alien righteousness of Christ (*iustitia Christi aliena*)’ made it clear that the righteousness which justified sinners was outside them. It was imputed, not imparted; eternal, not internal.” - Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 128.

“The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raise up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter death and darkness...If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time.”

- Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 2:703.

V. What Can We Learn?

A. Luther was committed to God’s Word

B. Luther elevated God’s Word above all else

“The writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that through them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. As it is, however, we read them only to be absorbed in them and never come to the Scriptures. We are like men who study that sign-posts and never travel the road. The dear fathers wished by their writings, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyards in which we ought all to work and toil.”

- Luther, *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, 13.