

MARTIN LUTHER

THE GREAT REFORMER

SECOND EDITION



JOHN ARCH MORRISON

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The Rallying Cry of the Great Reformers

Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solo Christo, Sola Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria!

- 1. Sola Gratia** “By grace alone”: This indicates that salvation is by grace alone. It is not by “works” but is solely by the unmerited favor of God.
- 2. Sola Fide** “By faith alone”: This indicates that saving grace is gifted to believers by God through faith alone, and this itself is the gift of God by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
- 3. Solo Christo** “Through Christ alone”: This indicates that salvation, which is by grace, is through a faith in the Person and “finished work” of Christ in redemption.
- 4. Sola Scriptura** “By Scripture alone”: This indicates that the believer’s faith is grounded in the Holy Scriptures—the revealed Word of God in the Bible. It is not based on Christian tradition or any other authority, nor on any mixture of such.
- 5. Soli Deo Gloria** “Glory of God alone”: This indicates that all that we are and all that we do as believers is to be for God’s glory alone—and that this was and is His sovereign purpose in Creation and Redemption.



Calvin held Luther in the deepest reverence, and gladly called himself his disciple. He called him “that illustrious apostle of Christ, through whose labors the purity of the gospel has been restored to this age.”

Benjamin B. Warfield

Introduction

Great heroes are inspiring examples that help spur us on to noble endeavor. While we do not want to follow men so blindly that we lose sight of the Christ of God, yet there is room for conforming to the injunction of the great apostle, who says, “Follow me as I follow Christ.”

Luther followed Christ. He was not humanly perfect by any means—who of us is? But he did the right as God gave him to see the right, and it mattered not whether it was prince or pauper who tried to divert him from his path of duty. He kept right on battling for the truth. His own indomitable character is reflected in that hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

This biography presents the leading aspects of the life of Luther, and the Appendices contain choice examples of some of Luther’s writings. We trust this material will inspire our noble young people to follow Luther as he followed Christ. To this task it is committed.

Michael J. McHugh
Arlington Heights, Illinois
2003



Chapter One

A Poor Boy

When Hans and Margarethe Luther laid glad eyes upon the face of their newborn son, they little thought or even dreamed that they were looking into the face of one who would not only change the destinies of nations, but who would change the aspect of human history for all time to come. It is said that every child is an unlocked chest of possibilities. On the memorable date of November 10, 1483, God presented these humble German peasant parents with a gifted soul that had a God-ordained destiny, the extent and value of which will not be known fully until all human achievements will be brought to account.

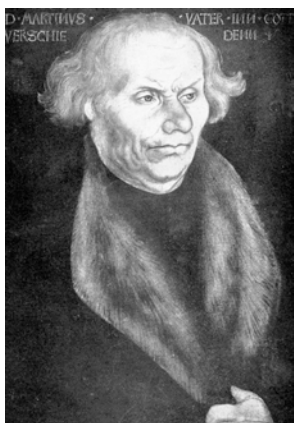
When a boy who has poverty for his companion is inclined to find fault with the company that he is forced to keep, he should comfort himself by reading about the boyhood days of Martin Luther—a son of poverty who, by the strength of God and the grace of Christ, stamped his name on every page of history written subsequently to his day. Martin Luther did not inherit from his parents luxuries that money can buy, but he did inherit those sterling qualities of character that came into such good play when he was brought face to face with those battles that proved him a great victor. He inherited sturdiness of character, strong willpower, steadfastness of purpose, honesty of heart, and a



Luther's birthplace

religious disposition. He who falls heir to such should consider himself blessed of God and happy.

The Luthers were Germans. They lived in the Thuringian Mountains. If you look at a map of Germany, you will find that these mountains are located near the central part of that country.



Luther's father

Nestled among these steep and beautiful mountains is the little town of Eisleben. In it Martin Luther was born and there he died. The very next day after Martin was born, he was taken to the church and baptized, for his parents were very religious people and they had been taught by their church that it was their duty as parents to have their children baptized as soon as possible.

Martin Luther was still a small baby when his parents moved from Eisleben to Mansfeld, where his father found work in the mines. The struggle to provide a living for their loved ones was hard for Martin's parents. When he grew to be a man, he had this to say concerning those struggles: "My father was a poor miner, and my mother carried the wood from the forests on her back; they both worked their flesh off their bones in order to bring up their children."¹



Luther's mother

And "bring" them up they did. Martin, his brothers, and his three sisters were not permitted to just "grow up" and do as they pleased.

The parents taught their children religion—in those days it was quite generally believed that religion could be most efficiently taught with the rod. Those were the days before the great religious Reformation, in which Luther was to have so large a part, had swept over the world. The then prevailing religion of Roman Catholicism was largely a religion based upon human traditions.

Luther's parents were devout Catholics, and their strenuous and even unmerciful discipline of their children, they believed, was the very best for the children's welfare. Because Martin stole a nut one time, his mother whipped him until the blood flowed. At another time, his father punished him so severely that Martin could stand it no longer and fled from home.

However, when Luther had grown to be a man, he did not harbor any bitterness in his heart against his parents. He remembered their awful grind of self-sacrificing toil and knew that they had toiled because they desired to give them proper food, clothing, and education. In speaking of the severe punishments that he received from the hands of his parents, he remarked, "They meant it well from the depths of their hearts, but they did not know how to distinguish the dispositions to which punishment is to be adapted."² In later life—when God had given him greater light regarding biblical truth and when, through him, this light had been shed over all Europe and even over all the world—he saw that the severity of his parents had only reflected the un-biblical extremes that had pervaded their generation.

As I have said, Luther was taught religion in his boyhood home at Mansfeld; but such a religion it was! It was a religion without balanced biblical truth, and such religion is always bondage most grievous. His mother gathered the children around her knees and told them of the Father and Christ. But what sort of ideas of God and

Christ did Luther get in those hours of early piety? Hear what he says in later life about it:

From early childhood I was accustomed to turn pale and tremble whenever I heard the name of Christ mentioned, for I was taught to look upon Him as a stern and wrathful Judge. We were taught that we ourselves had to atone for our sins, and since we could not make sufficient amends or do acceptable works, our teachers directed us to the saints in heaven, and made us to call upon Mary the mother of Christ and implore her to avert from us Christ's wrath, and make Him inclined to be merciful to us.³



The Roman Catholic mass

The Luthers, in accordance with the times in which they lived, believed in all sorts of supernatural influences. Luther says that in his childhood he had constant dread of witches and demons, which he believed always haunted his pathway

or hid in dark corners to seize upon him as he passed. The forests, which surrounded the town, were supposed to be teeming with evil spirits; and beneath the ground, in the mines where Luther's father worked, was a possible dwelling place of the devil himself. Superstitious fears thus fastened themselves upon his mind, and he had no liberty until he found it in a saner conception of the boundless love and limitless power of Christ.

Such was the religious atmosphere that young Luther breathed. Such were the gruesome thoughts that haunted him by night and taunted him by day. Is it any wonder that a merciful God poured the light of Truth into his soul, and that the light which could dispel the darkness of that soul could also lighten the path of millions of others who sat in darkness?

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein gute Wehr und Waffen.
 Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not, die uns heute hat betrogen.
 Und wenn die Feinde viel tausend sind, und stellt uns zuversichtlich.
 So spricht uns diese Strophe: so soll uns das gelingen.
 Der alte böse Feind mit zucht es nicht merkt, der feucht böse Feind -
 der seine so sehr stellt, that er uns und hilft.
 Von unsern Feinden uns ist, auf sich ist nicht sein.
 Und das macht, das macht es sehr deutlich, in welchem Land wir leben.

Martin Luther

Ein feste Burg aka "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

Written and composed by Martin Luther

sometime between 1527 and 1529