

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

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Editorial Introduction

Major Stephen Court, Editor
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Greetings in Jesus' name.

Welcome to the 111th issue of Journal of Aggressive Christianity. JAC111 is a special 500th Anniversary REFORMATION issue featuring guest editor Colonel Richard Munn. Colonel Munn, holding the D.Min designation (Gordon Conwell; and MDiv, Asbury) is The Salvation Army USA Eastern Territory's Secretary for Theology and Christian Ethics, having most recently served as Chief Secretary in Australia Eastern Territory, and Principal of the International College for Officers.

We're blessed to have him partner with JAC, and with the great line-up of contributors and topics he has arranged. They include the following articles:

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Enjoy the contents of JAC111 - may they help us all to be righteous, to live by faith - acting on our convictions toward world conquest.

Tour de Force

by Colonel Richard Munn

Reformation 500: Here We Stand

“The Kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing, and the forceful lay hold of it.”

Matthew 11:12



Jesus, without flinching, it seems, joins the forceful advance of the Kingdom of God with the forceful personality of his cousin, John the Baptist. Anyone who calls the religious leaders of the day a ‘brood of vipers’ and criticizes the local despot for an incestuous marriage might well indeed be considered a forceful character.

In our army, engaged in a real war with real casualties we resonate with this imagery, this is not for the effete or faint of heart.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this robust description from Jesus surely applies to bull-necked Martin Luther, a *tour de force* if ever there was one.

While wrestling with his studies he reputedly threw an inkwell at the devil. When formally excommunicated from the Catholic church he arranged for the document, and a few other papal decrees for good measure to be publicly burned at the city gate.

Today we might say he had ‘an excess of personality.’ And yet, it is precisely this dogged chutzpah and forceful courage that God needed to forcefully advance His kingdom through medieval religious corruptions.

What Kingdom principles from Luther’s life can we learn and apply?

Promise Made: Promise Kept

It all began in a violent storm when young Martin, stranded from shelter, promised God that if he survived he would become a monk instead of a lawyer

Martin did survive, and followed through on his vow. An early indication of integrity and character.

In answer to the question ‘Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? Psalm 15 answers this way: ‘Those who keep their oaths, even when it hurts.’ (15:4)

Made any promises you need to follow up?

Blunt Honesty

In the monastery, Martin took confession so literally, so seriously, that he drove his superiors to despair with hour upon hour of daily detailed, meticulous confession. No stone left unturned.

'If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I' he later wrote. This was not some abstract, hypothetical game Luther was playing. Hell was real, and heaven was unreachable. The gift of God's grace by faith were soon to be in sight for this troubled, gut-level honest monk.

Hear God's good word on the matter: 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (1 JN 1:8,9)

Got any sins you think you're hiding? Got any forgiveness you're needing?

Principled Stand

On public trial for his rejection of papal authority and assertion of scriptural authority, standing before religious hierarchy, university scholars and regional royalty Luther was given one final chance to recant.

He asked for an evening respite to ponder his response.

Knowing the consequences, he is reported to have said these immortal words: 'Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.'

'Stand for something or you'll fall for everything' said Alexander Hamilton and Malcom X.

Hear the word of the Lord: 'Blessed are those who fear the Lord ... surely, they will never be shaken ... their heart is secure, they have no fear, in the end, they look in triumph on their foes.' (PS 112)

Ready to take a stand?

Let's keep our promises and honestly stand before the Lord.

Now, there's a *tour de force*.

Richard Munn, Colonel
October, 2017

Priesthood, Inc.

by Cadet Scott Swires

Once upon a time there was a local gardening coop. A wise investor saw their potential and not only supplied the land, but also supplied everything else needed for a thriving local produce spot. It took off. A rival investor was jealous of their success. They decided to woo and win over the coop to capture control of the market. The two models were clearly opposed to each other. One seeking success by giving power, while the other focusing on consolidating power. God giving Adam and Eve authority in the Garden seems risky. Even today, God's strategy of directly empowering His people makes leaders nervous.

God's management strategy was lost in the church as it grew older. A system of orthodoxy slowly took power and responsibility from members of local fellowships and began to give it to a select few deemed priests. This could even be seen in the physical layouts of the churches, an architectural separation that is still seen today. As we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, we celebrate Martin Luther's reforming of this system by declaring the priesthood of all believers. As Luther encountered verses such as 1 Peter 2:9, he began to flatten the ladder of undivine ascent and eliminated the priestly middle man, declaring all could access God's grace directly. The emphasis that everyone has a ministry is not about guaranteeing everyone a participation trophy — it is a strategy for growing God's kingdom in the world today by sowing grace. Jesus, Himself, flattened the hierarchical structure of the day by empowering twelve unappealing men that looked at times more like a Monty Python skit than world changers. The world is a big place and everyone is needed if we are to tend our garden of influence.

The idea of empowering everyone in an organization is recognized by noteworthy businesses today. Pixar is one example. Its leaders have intentionally cultivated an atmosphere where every opinion is seen as critical to success. Ed Catmull explains in *Creativity Inc.* how they strive to maintain their emphasis on hearing everyone's voice and admits that it has its risks. Employees need to be taught how to give feedback, matured in candor, and given the opportunity to make mistakes. Catmull is very clear that mistakes are an aspect of healthy growth. Many groups fear the very thing Pixar finds essential — its people.

It makes sense that the Reformers would lead to the empowering of everyone. The Booths embraced what the priesthood of all believers meant by placing ministries in the hands of drunks and prostitutes. William and Catherine worked their garden. The testimonies of Lawley, Joe the Turk, Brengle, Shirley, and many soldiers in that day confirm that people are a wise investment. If the calling of the church is not just about the church, every person on earth, or stewarding nations, but the entire cosmos, then everyone's ministry of grace is vital to the salvation war.

Sola Fide

by Lieut-Colonel Wendy Swan

As Luther never tired of saying, only experience makes a theologian. “I did not learn my theology all at once” he said, “but I had to search deeper for it, where my temptations took me...not understanding, reading or speculation, but living – nay dying and being damned – make a theologian”.

Medieval theologians considered faith one of the three theological virtues, along with hope and love. They emphasized faith’s cognitive content and saw it as a virtue formed by love. But to Luther, such faith is not sufficient for salvation. As he saw it, the Reformers did not choose the term *credentia* (assent, belief) but *fides* understood as *fiducia* (faith, trust). *Credentia* tends to be an impersonal belief; the authority speaks and we submit our minds and reason to it. But *fiducia*, ‘trust’ is a term that applies properly only within a personal context. *Fides* implies both trust and love. An intellectual, static and dogmatic adherence to a set of doctrines might be seen as a form of faith, but for Luther it lacks the most important component of faith, a relationship with a person. For Christians (including Salvationists), that is the person of Christ. We have faith in Christ and it is therefore Christ who is the center of *sola fide*.

Early Romanists alleged that Luther frivolously added the word ‘alone’ to Romans 3:28 in his German translation of the New Testament (1522) so as to read ‘justified by faith alone’ instead of ‘justified by faith’. In reply, Luther in his *Open Letter of Translating* (1522) lashed out at his accusers -

“I know very well that in Romans 3 the letters S-O-L-A are not in the Greek or Latin text – the papists did not have to teach me that... these blockheads stare at them like a cow at a new gate, while at the same time they do not recognize that it conveys the sense of the text – if the translation is to be clear and vigorous... it belongs there... furthermore, I am not the only one, nor the first, to say that faith alone makes one righteous. There was Ambrose, Augustine and many others who said it before me.”

Paradoxically some Catholic versions of the New Testament also translated Romans 3:28 the same way Luther did. The Nuremberg *Bible* (1483), *Allein Durich Den Glauben* and the Italian Bibles of Geneva (1476) and Venice (1538) say ‘*per sola fede*’.

Some facts are indeed stranger than fiction.

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My comforter, my all in all –
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
(Keith Getty & Stuart Townsend, 200

Fruit of the Reformation: The Centrality of Sally Preaching

by Captain Marion Platt

In a recent article, General Shaw Clifton (R) reminded readers that we "owe much to Luther's emphasis on the authority and authenticity of the scriptures". Indeed, the Army's doctrine and heritage of preaching is deeply tied to the reformer's emphasis on both the sufficiency of Scripture and primacy of preaching. On this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it's worth our time to reflect on Martin Luther's apparent belief that:

Preaching should be primary. There were many reasons for preaching's decline in the medieval church, most notably its capitulation to earthly authority (namely, the office of the pope) and its emphases on mass and sacramental observance as the primary means of grace. Luther's theses state that "the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel"; he later asserted that what makes the "church beautiful and holy... is the Word of God and sound preaching".

Catherine Booth would later add the warfare of her own words: "I have to preach the truth - the beautiful, whole, round, diamond, luminous with Divine light [truth], and not a base, muddy, paste imitation". When properties, pennies, programs, or anything-else-at-all becomes primary for the Army, the pulpit fades from its saliency and soldiers lose proficiency in wielding their principal weapon: *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17b)

Preaching should be pragmatic. Pre-Reformation sermons were often delivered "in Latin, which most people could not even understand." A superior theologian, Luther granted that his preaching was tailored "to the circumstances of the common people," and he trained Wittenberg theology students to "preach for the sake of plain people". Booth challenged Army officers similarly: "Explain the truth you present in the simplest language you can find". Early church fathers described the gospel as both shallow enough that a child could splash, and deep enough that a theologian could drown. Pragmatic preaching reaches both the *simple splasher* and the *strong swimmer*.

Preaching should be prophetic. Luther believed that "preaching is not the work of men," and that if God isn't speaking through the preacher, "it is time for him to be quiet." Ever a proponent of the preacher as forth-teller, Luther emphasized that sermons should always address "the issues which deal specifically with your time – [else] you are not preaching the gospel at all."

The Salvation Army's foundation is in the prophetic tradition, in fact Booth considered Isaiah 58:6-12 to be the "Salvation Army Charter." The Spiritual Life Commission's *Call to Our Life in the World* references the Army's prophetic witness. Consistent with God's purpose for raising up the Army, our preaching and practice is best when we, in the words of Booth, "encircle the world with our arms."

The Salvation Army's emphasis on preaching, then, has its roots in the Reformation, its shoots in a Quaker graveyard, and its fruits in our prophetic orthopraxy which, when we're at our best, "Seeks justice [and] encourages the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:17, NIV).

Luther and Marriage

by Major JoAnn Shade

In the second verse of “The Farmer in the Dell,” children heartily sing, “The farmer takes a wife.” Such was the case for Martin Luther, monk, reformer, and yes, also farmer. As a member of a religious order as well as a long-time theology chair at the University of Wittenberg, Luther and his fellow religious were expected to remain unmarried. After he was excommunicated, he did not hold his fellow reformers to their previous vows of celibacy, but he had no plans of his own to marry. Only six months before he “took his wife,” he had written to a friend, “I shall never take a wife, as I feel at present. Not that I am insensible to my flesh or sex (for I am neither wood nor stone), but my mind is averse to wedlock because I daily expect the death of a heretic.”

Yet eight years after he presented his ninety-five theses to his bishop, thus firing the first volley of the Protestant Reformation, the forty-six-year-old Martin Luther took one of the women he had helped liberate from the monastery of Marienthron as his bride. Katharina von Bora had lived within the convent walls since the age of five, and was one of twelve nuns smuggled out of the cloister in herring barrels. Assuming responsibility for their well-being, Luther had found husbands for the other women, but Katharina had been more difficult to settle. In fact, she had vowed to marry only Luther or his fellow reformer, Nikolaus von Amsdorf.

Like most marriages, the motives of Martin and Katharina were many, and some remain unknown, but Luther himself noted that “his marriage would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep.” By all reports, if not love at first sight, their union was a fruitful and satisfying one.

In the five centuries since Luther and his contemporaries began to marry, both marriage and the role of the clergy have changed. However, Dr. and Mrs. Luther clearly paved the way for Christians to enter into the vocations of ministry and marriage. In 1520, he wrote, “Priests should be free to marry and not to as they choose, because God has not bound them and no one else ought to bind them.” Thus, as Trevor O’Reggio suggests, “Luther saw no contradiction between the divine calling of God and marriage . . . thus overturning a well-established tradition within the Catholic church.”

Were Martin and Katy Luther alive today, they’d agree with Henri Nouwen: “The basis of marriage is not mutual affection or feelings, or emotions and passions that we associated with love, but a vocation, a being elected to build together a house for God, in this world.” Today’s married clergy are thankful that, in his “irascible and earthly style,” Luther brought reform through “the power of his pen and the courage of his life” (O’Reggio), so the sacred calling to build that holy house is open to all.

Missional Music

by Captain Olivia Munn-Shirsath

Congregational singing

There are countless Christian denominations. Within these denominations there are countless different styles of worship. Woven through it all, in everything from high liturgy to casual house churches, from organs to guitars to brass bands – music is a part of church. There's a reason why almost all church services around the globe include congregational singing.

Music has power. Listening to music can be powerful, but there is something even more mysteriously profound when you open your own mouth and sing. I can think back and recall the number of times that a song has touched my soul and, without exaggeration, changed my life.

Martin Luther is credited for the birth congregational singing. For thousands of years music in church was performed by choirs, in Latin, while the lay people sat and listened. Music was present, but it did not belong to the congregation. Luther began writing clear lyrics in the common language, with singable melodies that were hard to forget. Now the Church is known as a people who sing.

Protest style

Luther preferred songs that had straightforward, bold theology, rather than flowery language and soft imagery. His lyrics include themes such as the coming empire, fortresses, fire, pain, and the devil. He preferred the pronouns "us" and "we" over "I" and "me". These were songs written for the people.

Some historians have highlighted that Martin Luther's songs were composed in the style of protest songs – catchy and punchy. This is true of both his lyrics and his melodies. Katie Schuermann says, "His melodies were provocative, utilizing unexpected intervals of fourths and fifths as well as syncopated rhythms which jolted and jarred the listener". These songs were not written to only be a comfort to the persecuted revolutionaries, but also to stir the crowds to rise up.

Education and intimacy

Luther himself said, "Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs!" This man was clearly passionate about music! Songwriting was not merely a hobby for him, but something he was deeply convicted about.

He knew the truth that songs are influential – more so than spoken text alone. They can convey fundamental Biblical insights to young people – even before they are able to read. In the year 1500 this was not just about children, as 85% of German population was illiterate – but they could still learn a song. The good news of grace through faith could be more effectively communicated through these new hymns than through hundreds of sermons. In fact, Luther's songs would buzz from town to town faster than he could, and faster than the Catholic authorities could shut down. In Magdeburg, Germany, traveling singers armed with Luther's anthems converted the entire town two months before he even arrived.

Secondly, Luther knew that singing is an act of intimacy. It is more than a method of learning the Bible in our brains, it also bares the soul. The singer exposes herself and her emotions and convictions before the Holy Spirit and before fellow human beings present. When you sing, there is nowhere to hide.

A Mighty Fortress

One of the most familiar examples of Luther's music is the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress." This hymn has been translated into more languages than any other hymn in history, including over 70 English translations. This rousing song is considered the battle hymn of the Reformation, inspired by Psalm 46. "The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him."

What strength we receive as we open our lips and confidently sing of the ultimate fate of Satan. Although we are opposed by our enemy daily, the people of Christ will always stand, and we will not fear. And as we stand, let us sing.

Luther in Contemporary Culture

by Envoy Steve Bussey

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree - The Fruit of Luther in Contemporary Culture

"First I shake the whole Apple tree, that the ripest might fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb, and then each branch and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf" - Martin Luther

When Martin Luther first applied his apple analogy, he was referring to how he studied the Bible. If one were to study contemporary culture, one could find an orchard of ripe ideas and practices which can be traced back to the seeds planted by this Reformer. Dubbed, "the last medieval man and the first modern one," it is hard find a corner of society not impacted by the epochal shift being commemorated by the Reformation 500 celebrations.

Luther was a historical switchman - an individual whose actions changed the direction of society, moving all people towards a new destiny. Historian and media ecologist Elizabeth Eisenstein identified Luther's ideas, mediated by Gutenberg's printing press, as revolutionary. These set in motion a belief that every person should have access to the Bible in their own language in order to personally know the beauty and freedom of grace straight from the source. Driven by a need to reform the abuses of a Church which had drifted from its founding vision, access to Scripture in the vernacular of the masses would give birth to Bible and missionary societies determined to reform society by translating Scripture into every language for people of every tribe and nation.

Access to Scripture meant that there was a need for individuals to learn how to read. The need for literacy ignited a revolution in education which would challenge the justice of many societal norms - including notions of laity, class, ethnicity, gender and age. Who should have access to Scripture? Where can people meet and who can share from Scripture? Who are we as individuals and groups in light of these actions? As time pressed on, the legacy of Luther's influence wove through most of the defining moments of history of western culture and more recently, global culture.

The study of Scripture, modelled by Luther fueled new forms of philosophical inquiry - centering the individual as one who could question, form opinions, debate and even protest. One wouldn't simply believe an idea because it was stated by a person of authority, this was to be evaluated in light of 'God's Word' as the Bereans did in Acts 17. For good or bad, this seed of self-identity would bear the fruit of Descartes' modern ratiocentric philosophy, captured in the phrase "I think therefore I am." which ushered in the age of "enlightenment." This spirit of inquiry and expression would fuel creativity and curiosity giving rise to a culture of experimentation in art, technology politics, business, education and culture.

Five hundred years later, we live in a similar era of dramatic epochal shifts. Rather than posting our protests on the Wittenberg Door, many 'post' their concerns on social media. While the methodology which Luther employed might remain the same, the most critical question is whether the source which fuels us is a fervent commitment to Scripture as our only authority (*sola scriptura*) or our own personal opinion (*ex mea sententia*). Ultimately, the success of Luther's reformation and its' continued impact on society was not the technological innovation of the printing press nor the audacity of his challenge, but rather this was found in the character of the content of the message posted.

The ground is fertile once again for a new reformation, but the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) will only blossom and ripen if our faith remains rooted in Christ and His grace alone (Col. 2:7). *Soli Deo Gloria.*