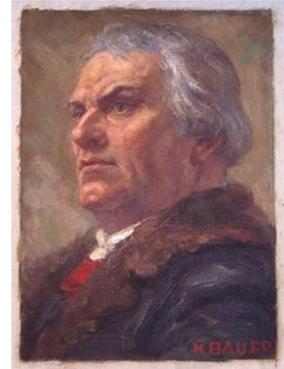


WHO IS MARTIN LUTHER? Good question!

Many people know that Luther was a religious man and church reformer. Some know he was a German monk excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church and declared an outlaw in his homeland. Yet Time Life Magazine selected him as one of the 100 most important persons in the past 1000 years. In fact, he is listed as #3 after Edison and Columbus. A Yale University professor once observed, “More has been written about Martin Luther than about anyone else in history—except one.” The one exception is Jesus of Nazareth.



Why has Martin Luther achieved such honors? As Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence: “Let facts be submitted to a candid world.”

Luther was a university professor in Wittenberg some 500 years ago. As Lecturer on the Bible, he wrote voluminously, and used the newly invented printing press as his social media. His translation of the Bible into German made a huge mark on civilization for a reason. That translation is credited with unifying the German tribal dialects into one national language.



Despite condemnation by church and state, Martin lived a full life and died a peaceful death. This former monk married a nun to honor marriage. A deep-seated interest in children led him to be a pioneer in modern education. Characteristically, the Reformer often used harsh language. Like the OT Prophets in Israel, he made scathing judgments to correct people’s attitudes and conduct. Yet he also wrote childlike hymns that go to people’s hearts.

These facts can miss the point in understanding the man. He was neither a bull-in-the china shop reformer nor an innovator in teaching Christian faith. Brilliant as he was, Luther did not invent what he taught. Martin speaks to us today for one simple reason. He placed God’s justice and love on the table of life. They are the desire of human hearts and the essence of God himself.



One’s own goodness was not to be the guide through life, but God’s promises. Luther firmly believed this. On trial before Emperor and Pope, he stated: “My conscience is bound by the Word of God.” God’s Word is able to carry us through fierce trials, each day’s troubles, and all sorts of temptations. From studying the Bible, Prof. Luther passed the

good news of God’s justice and love into his classroom and home activities, throughout his writings and by means of counseling to both prince and peasant.

Such certainty and stability in life—the secret is found hidden in the word and work of Jesus. The message is simple: We are sinners in the hands of a loving God!

Self-serving love, Luther observes, merely curves back upon itself by seeking power, wealth or fame. But forgiven, we forgive. In writing on “Christian Freedom,” Pastor Luther explains: “A Christian does not live in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor. He lives in Christ by faith and in his neighbor by love.”



We may sympathize with Luther’s wife Katherine, who said at her husband’s death, “Our dear Lord God has taken this precious man from me, and not just from me only, but from the whole world.”

Martin would be uncomfortable with such honor: “What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone. I am nobody’s master and do not want to be. I, and with me the whole Church, possess the doctrine of Christ—who alone is our Master.”

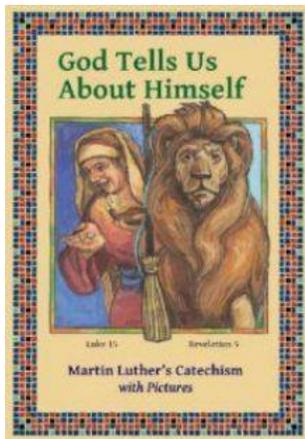


Martin Luther was quite a writer. It is no trouble at all to find more than 50 big hardcover volumes by him in the Martin Luther College library. The most famous of his writings? That just may have been a little pamphlet full of pictures.

*Kleine Katechismus* (The Little Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther) has survived 500 years and has won grateful fans all over the world, century after century. Every generation needs to make its acquaintance, now more than ever. It’s interesting that when the catechism came to the New World with immigrants, the pictures “fell out.” Maybe that’s understandable since life on the American frontier looked so very different from Europe. Two MLC professors, Theodore Hartwig and Arnold Koelpin, worked hard to prepare a new picture catechism for the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth. Prof. Koelpin discussed updating the 1983 booklet, since a number of those pictures had begun to look out-of-date (haircuts, leisure suits).

In 2017 the MLC Print Shop printed 1100 copies of an edited version with some new original art. This was quickly followed by a 2nd printing of 10,000. According to John

Ring, now 9500 of these booklets have gone out into the world. The “little cat” has been distributed on many MLC recruitment trips. It has been carried to India, Africa, and the Far East. That’s a lot of backpacks, pockets, purses, glove boxes, diaper bags, and hymnal racks!



This seems remarkable since the little paperback has not been advertised. It’s not that the booklet was printed for outreach or evangelism purposes. Apparently, many American homes have found that it has value as a daily devotional. It may have special value as your gift to someone who was once confirmed in the faith, but who has drifted away from the worship and work of God’s Church.

Luther’s catechism is a little gate into the Bible. As such it points to Christ. Jesus is a sinner’s holiness. The devil wants you to doubt that this day.

*God Tells Us About Himself* is available on the [MLC Bookstore site](#).

2017 was a mile-marker—500 years since Martin Luther ignited the Reformation of the Christian Church. Something he did then, which has somehow made it to the present day, was to write that little book of questions and answers called a catechism. It was Martin’s hope that Christians would page through his booklet every day.

May Martin Luther’s Catechism be used—and loved—by you.

*Living Hope Lutheran Church*

