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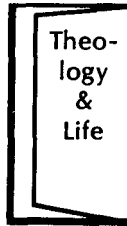
# Luther and His Spiritual Legacy

by

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# CONTENTS

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Jared Wicks, S.J., teaches at the Gregorian University in Rome. He began study of Luther during his doctoral studies at Munster in Germany in the 1960s. His articles and reviews have appeared in *Chicago Studies*, *Theological Studies*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, *Archive-for Reformation History*, *Catholic Historical Review*, and the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*.

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Foreword .....	7
Abbreviations.....	9
1. Images of Luther .....	11
<i>Lutheran and Protestant Images</i> .....	11
<i>Catholic Images of Luther</i> .....	15
<i>Recent Catholic Interpretations</i> .....	22
<i>Toward a Perspective on Luther</i> .....	26
<i>Select Bibliography</i> .....	32
2. The Eve of the Reformation .....	35
<i>An Era of Recovery</i> .....	35
<i>Tensions in Intellectual Life</i> .....	38
<i>Church and Papacy</i> .....	42
<i>The Religion of the People</i> .....	46
<i>Select Bibliography</i> .....	50
3. Luther's Life and Career to 1512 .....	55
<i>Select Bibliography</i> .....	59
4. Luther's Theology of the Cross, 1513-18 .....	61
<i>Lectures on the Psalter</i> .....	62
<i>Lectures on Romans</i> .....	66
<i>Lectures on Hebrews</i> .....	72
<i>Indulgences and Disputations 1517-18</i> .....	76
<i>Select Bibliography</i> .....	80
5. Luther's Reformation Decisions, 1518-25 .....	84
<i>Conflicts over Basic Norms</i> .....	85
<i>Catechesis on Sacraments</i> .....	89

*The Year of Decision, 1520* . . . . . 90  
*Worms and the Wartburg* . . . . . 96  
*Social Order and Radicalism, 1523-25* . . . . . 99  
*Conflict with Erasmus* . . . . . 101  
*Select Bibliography* . . . . . 104

6. Luther's Later Life and Works, 1526-46 . . . . . 109  
*Select Bibliography* . . . . . 117

7. Luther's Mature Spiritual Teaching . . . . . 120  
*The "clothed" God* . . . . . 121  
*By law, conscious awareness of sin* . . . . . 124  
*Remembering Christ* . . . . . 125  
*Passivity* . . . . . 127  
*Laying hold of Christ by faith* . . . . . 129  
*The Mediated Promise* . . . . . 132  
*Joyous Certainty* . . . . . 135  
*Exchange with Christ outside myself* . . . . . 137  
*Eruptive spontaneity in doing good* . . . . . 141  
*Daily expulsion of sin* . . . . . 144  
*Loving Service in Vocation* . . . . . 148

General Bibliography . . . . . 154  
*Luther's Writings* . . . . . 154  
*History of Research and Interpretations* . . . . . 155  
*On Luther as Autobiographer* . . . . . 158  
*Biographies* . . . . . 159  
*Studies of Luther's Thought and Teaching* . . . . . 162

*Index* . . . . . 175

## FOREWORD

While writing the article on Martin Luther for the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, I became convinced that Luther has much to say to us today about living the Christian life. Hence this study in which I show how Luther's teaching on conversion, on trust in Christ and his word, and on life-long healing from ineradicable sinfulness can lead us to fuller Christian authenticity.

Because of this conviction I offer the reader generous helpings of texts in Luther's own words, especially in Chapter 7 on his mature account of the Christian life. To give Luther himself due prominence, there is little discussion in these pages of the many topics which scholars treat in their work of ferreting out the influences affecting Luther's development. Before we can rightly assess such influences, we must delve deeply into Luther himself. He was a creative religious genius who quickly outstripped those who formed him. An encounter with him must begin with his own interpretation of our "being Christian" and with his own witness to the power of Christ working in the midst of our common experience.

I hope that this book can serve to introduce people to further reading both of Luther's works and of studies of his life and thought. The bibliographies given with each chapter point the way to such further work. For us in the English-speaking world, the recently completed 54 volumes of translation, *Luther's Works, American Edition*, have eased

considerably our way of access to Luther's many-sided witness and teaching.

In his day, Luther clashed with representatives of the Catholic Church, and central points of his message, for example, on doctrinal authority and the Lord's Supper, were rejected on the Catholic side. Calvinists and Anabaptists also had their sharp differences with Luther over the church and the sacraments. Our narrative of Luther's career in our Chapters 5 and 6 touches on these divisive issues in their historical context. Our emphasis, however, falls on Luther's teachings on the Christian life, which we present in Chapter 4, on his early "theology of the cross," and in Chapter 7 on his mature teaching on conversion. To defend these views, Luther was convinced he had to attack traditional Catholic structures and to reject other views proposed by the Swiss reformers. But in these controversies, the supreme value for Luther was his own perception of the central dynamic of personal conversion. Therefore, we highlight the latter in this introductory presentation.

As a Catholic expositor, the author is very aware of Luther's quite traditional instincts, which became clear in his controversies with Andreas Carlstadt and Huldreich Zwingli. In significant areas, especially concerning the mediation of God's grace, Luther is quite Catholic. We in the late 20th century are also aware of the remarkable degree of consensus achieved by Lutheran and Roman Catholic participants in bilateral dialogues (see page 34, below). These discussions are leading to rapprochement on key divisive issues, such as Eucharistic sacrifice, the ministry, and the papal primacy. This welcome development encourages us to search out more diligently the central cluster of convictions Luther held about our Christian existence. In this book, we present these in an atmosphere of calm expectation that Luther can contribute fresh vigor to the life and prayer of all Christians.

Pontifical Gregorian University  
Rome  
December 1, 1982

### *Abbreviations in References*

- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* The Weimar Edition (1883ff.). References give the volume, page, and line number.
- WABr The Weimar Edition, *Briefwechsel.* References give volume, number of the letter, and line, followed by the page on which the passage is found.
- LW *Luther's Works. The American Edition,* published in fifty-four volumes by Concordia Publishing House of St. Louis and Fortress Press of Philadelphia, 1955ff. References give volume and page number. Translations have on occasion been slightly altered through use of more inclusive pronominal forms.