LUTHER AS LEADER

BRIAN HARRIS
Principal, Vose Seminary[1]

Relatively little has been written on Luther as leader.[2] Given that it is reasonable to argue that Luther impacted the world more than anyone bar Jesus and the Apostle Paul, this is surprising. After all, you don't change the world without having at least a bit of a flair for leadership, which suggests that this topic is worth exploring.

But is the claim of Luther's importance valid? Cite any of the big topics of twenty-first century life—politics, economics, media, family, education, religion, individualism, human rights—and if you track the discussion back, you will find that each has taken a different course as a result of the Reformation, and thus, in some way, must be attributed back to Luther.[3] On this 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, there are many things we can learn from the man who sparked the Reformation—but in this paper I plan to focus on Luther as leader, and the leadership insights we can gain from him.

Let me make it clear that this is not an attempt to demonstrate that Luther is your typical twenty-first century hero or charismatic leader, larger-than-life, and driven to constantly achieve more—the sort of person you would always predict would do incredible things. To the contrary, James Kittleson calls Luther an "accidental revolutionary", one who initially simply wanted to settle certain theological truths for his own benefit and the benefit of the academic community in Wittenberg of which he was part.[4] The unanticipated spread of his ideas compelled him to broadened his vision and led him to hope that the reform of the church might be possible, but in the end it sparked the Protestant Reformation—a decisive divide in the life of the church, and one which went on to impact almost every area of life. It is quite something to be an "accidental revolutionary"—finding that each step of your journey has consequences more dramatic than envisioned, and yet not backing away from the path as a result. Perhaps Luther's greatest leadership attribute was his sheer tenacity. Though he never set out for a fight, he did not back away when one arose, for he was a convictional leader, certain that the truths he upheld mattered, and should the need arise, that they mattered enough to die for.

---

[1] Vose Seminary is an affiliate institution of the Australian College of Theology. This essay was originally an oral address and much of the orality of that presentation has been kept in this published form.

[2] My Google search "Luther as leader" produced many suggestions for leadership lessons from the life of Martin Luther King Jnr., but virtually nothing on Martin Luther.

[3] Though contested, one example of this is found in Max Weber's allegation of the close link between Protestantism and the rise of Capitalism. Comparable claims can be made for each of the areas cited. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Classics edition; Abingdon: Routledge, 2001 [1904]).

[4] James M. Kittelson, "The Accidental Revolutionary," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 14–20.

A fair amount of my research into leadership has been in the area of quiet leadership, where people you would not automatically pick for their leadership nous surprise you by their contribution.[5] Most commonly their achievements are a result of strongly held convictions, which flow from powerful ideas, carefully thought through, and tenaciously and resiliently held. The changes that Luther brought flow from this kind of leadership. It is my conviction that this is the kind of leadership that is needed. Today we are often dazzled by a shallow cult of personality, where towering and idiosyncratic individuals spring to prominence as a result of the sheer force of their personality. It is that same personality that after a while appears jaded and leaves us bored and disappointed. Personality without substance eventually fails. Important though Luther was, the Reformation was not primarily about Luther, but about the ideas he and the later Reformers proposed, and their flow-on effects over the centuries.

Not that Luther should be painted in pastel shades. His *Tabletalk* simply will not allow it. This was a man who was willing to provide sex tips to a recently married friend, and who would enthusiastically update you on his endless struggle with constipation. He could be funny, compassionate, and caring, but also cantankerous, emotive, crude, sarcastic, and vulgar—this other side of his public persona reflecting all too closely the polemical style of his era. Take, for example, his oft cited description of the Jews as "a defiled bride, yes an incorrigible whore and an evil slut", or as a "whoring and murderous people". Luther was no tame academic, content to quietly score the occasional clever point.[6] He lived at a forceful time, and was a forceful figure.

For all that, Luther is a refreshing reminder that the most significant changes are not brought about by overgrown personalities, but by individuals captured by meaningful ideas—ideas with sufficient substance to stand up in different historical eras and cultural settings. In the end, the Reformation was not about a handful of intelligent and powerful personalities, but about a cluster of simple but revolutionary theological concepts which resonated with their time, and have continued to resonate to this day.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Martin Luder (he later changed his surname to Luther) was born in Eisleben, Saxony on 10 November 1483, the eldest son of Hans and Margarethe (sometimes known as Hannah) Luder. Birth order theorists note that first born sons are the most likely family member to rise to leadership—the sheer weight of family expectations willing them forward to high achievement.[7] His parents, who started as domestic servants but climbed in their social status, were indeed ambitious for him, and Hans was determined that his son Martin should become a lawyer. It was an era of strict discipline, and Luther was not exempt from it, his family believing it would help him to reach his potential. He recalls his father whipping him so badly that he ran

---

[5] See Brian Harris, *The Tortoise Usually Wins: Biblical Reflections on Quiet Leadership for Reluctant Leaders* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013).

[6] Christopher Probst, "Martin Luther and 'The Jews': A Reappraisal," *The Theologian*. See: http://www.theologian.org.uk/churchhistory/lutherandthejews.html [accessed 25 October, 2017]

[7] Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was the first to do work in this area. See Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean to You: The Psychology of Personal Development* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009 [1931]).

away and that his mother caned him so severely that he bled. However, this was common in his day, and in its own strange way simply demonstrates that his parents wanted him to succeed. Luther was one of 9 children, only 5 of whom survived to adulthood, a statistic not uncommon for that time, and a reminder that Luther's was a world where death and tragedy were never far from anyone's mind or experience.

The Big Blocks of Luther's Life

In 1505 when walking back to law school, he was trapped by a ferocious thunderstorm and fearing death promised St Anna that if she spared him from the storm he would become a monk. His life was spared, and he kept his vow, joining the order of Augustinian Hermits that same year in spite of his father urging him to see his vow as non-binding in the light of the emotional circumstances. He became the most conscientious of monks, driving himself on relentlessly, willing to subject his body to the severest of treatment to attain the discipline and merit he desired.

A trip to Rome in 1510 proved a major disappointment. At the time it was noted that the closer one got to Rome, the less spiritual and more corrupt the clergy became. Though unimpressed with what he saw, Luther, who in 1511 was transferred to the Augustinian house in Wittenberg and became a doctor of theology in 1512, threw himself into his role as a theological and Bible teacher at Wittenberg. Surrounded by academically impressive peers, this was an enormously productive period and saw his knowledge of scripture deepen dramatically. Though he said he had never seen a Bible until he was 20, this changed quickly as he conscientiously lectured from the Psalms in 1513, Romans in 1515, Galatians in 1516, and Hebrews in 1517.

Deeply discontent at his spiritual state and unsure that his life was genuinely pleasing to God, his spiritual angst at times perplexed his mentor Johann von Staupitz, who was dean of the theological faculty at the University of Wittenberg. Staupitz had to regularly reassure Luther that his perpetual confessions were not required, once exclaiming to Luther, "Man, God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don't you know that God commands you to hope?"[8] This telling quote reflects Luther's early belief in an angry God whom he needed to, but could not, appease. Parsons notes that Luther "knew, only too well, about God's holiness and majesty, and this terrified him. What he didn't know in his own experience was God's grace and mercy."[9] The turning point is often cited—the breakthrough moment when Romans 1:17 spoke to him of a passive righteousness not earned by endless effort, but imputed by Christ. In truth, the realization is more likely to have dawned on Luther progressively—a growing conviction that saw him start to read scripture with a very different lens to the one he had previously used.

It was only a matter of time until this led to a growing discontent and questioning of the practices of the church of his day—especially over the sale of indulgences. Today we remember his 31 October 1517 nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. To twenty-first century ears it sounds

[8] Cited in Paul Thigpen, "Friends and Enemies," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 39.
[9] Michael Parsons, *Praying the Bible with Luther: A Simple Approach to Everyday Prayer* (Abingdon: BRF, 2017), 15.

wonderfully dramatic, but in his time it was simply seen as an invitation from an academic to debate and explore some new ideas, outlined in the document that followed. It seems as though this was all that Luther initially intended, a debate amongst the academic community at Wittenberg, in part to sharpen and test his own thinking. He did not factor in the impact of the relatively new printing press and its ability to disseminate ideas quickly and widely. Matters escalated rapidly and are well documented, so I will stick to only the briefest of details. 1521 saw him excommunicated by a papal bull. In April at the Diet of Worms he refused to recant his writings, this was followed by an edict in May condemning him as a heretic and an imperial outlaw. Kidnapped for his own protection and kept in seclusion at Wartburg Castle from mid-1521 to March 1522, Luther set about translating the Bible into German and writing two significant works; *Monastic Vows* and *Postil*, as well as mobilizing his supporters.

What, then, can we learn about Luther as leader at this point? This "accidental revolutionary" quickly shows himself as someone of deep conviction and courage. Challenging the authority of the Pope was no small matter, but Luther did not back away. He had not initially set out to pick a fight with the Roman authorities, but nor was he willing to ignore his conscience. He was a convictional, rather than a directional leader. In other words, he did not start out with a clear plan in mind. Directional leaders have a clear sense of where they are going and why. They often have timelines of what they wish to achieve by when, and in the early stages usually see their task as recruiting followers to respond to their lead. By contrast, the early Luther simply stuck to his convictions and followed where they led. The path was unanticipated, dangerous, and challenging, but he never seriously contemplated backing away. Along the way, more and more followed his lead.

His convictions launched him into prominence. He might have started as a reluctant leader, but having weathered the storms faced from 1517-1522, he moved into a second stage. In this stage, his own theology was to take clearer shape and form, and at times the dispute moved to his own circle. A movement of reform was underway, but as more and more joined it, the contest of ideas as to just what form it might take, grew.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

The dominant leadership lessons we learn from Luther are of the importance of discipline, courage, and clear convictions, Luther once wrote "Faith is the 'yes' of the heart, a conviction on which one stakes one's life."[10] And he did. There are, however, many other insights about Luther and leadership that are worth noting.

[10] Mary Ann Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings of Colorful Luther," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 27.

Luther the Time Manager

After being declared a notorious heretic at the Diet of Worms, and with an order put out for his capture, Luther was hidden by Prince Frederick at Wartburg Castle. In poor health and in a room with little light, Luther used the time to translate Erasmus's Greek New Testament into German. It was perhaps his most important work and laid the cultural foundation for what later became a unified Germany. At the Wartburg he complained that he was "drunk with leisure", an astonishing comment given how productive this period was, and a reminder that pace of life is a matter of perspective.[11] Those used to a disciplined life find a slower pace a challenge, and in Luther's case we can delight that he filled it so constructively—even if he considered the pace leisurely.

Luther the Savvy Leader

As his popularity grew, Luther showed himself to be insightful about leadership—we could perhaps even call him a "savvy" or a strategic leader. An example is his ability to spot the importance, indeed the strategic value, of the press. The press in Luther's time meant the printing press, and its ability to spread ideas more quickly than had been possible in any earlier era.

Luther spoke of printing as "God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward." He also wrote: "God hath appointed the Press to preach, whose voice the Pope is never able to stop with all the puissance of his triple crown."[12]

Without printing, there might well not have been a Protestant Reformation. Brown has commented, "Martin Luther spoke to Europe from two pulpits – one in the church, and one in the print shop."[13] Though both John Wycliffe and John Hus wrote prolifically, the restricted technology available at the time meant their ideas could not be widely disseminated. Not so with Luther, and it was an advantage he was to grasp fully—though initially he did not realize the potential in the printing press. Indeed, the original printing and spread of his Ninety-Five Theses throughout Germany and later Europe, was without his permission—a point sometimes overlooked.[14] Luther truthfully said to Pope Leo X, "It is a mystery to me how my theses… were spread to so many places. They were meant exclusively for our academic circle here."[15] "Here" was Wittenberg, and it is a reminder that famous though the Ninety-Five Theses are, their initial intent was modest, and there was no intention to have them circulated. Had they not been, history might have taken a different turn.[16]

---

[11] Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 26.
[12] Perry Brown, "Preaching from the Print Shop," *Christian History* Issue 115, XI, no. 34 (1992): 33.
[13] Ibid., 34.
[14] Charlotte Methuen, *Luther and Calvin: Religious Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Lion, 2011), 28–29.
[15] Cited in Brown, "Preaching," 33.
[16] However, given the mood for change, it seems probable that something akin to the Reformation would still have taken place. Ideas are not accidentally born, but come in eras which are ripe for their growth.

Later however, Luther grasped the power of print in capturing grass-root support. Between March 1517 and the summer of 1520 thirty of his pamphlets ran through a total of 370 editions. Though most of the writing in his era was in Latin (in which Luther was fluent), it was the preserve of the scholarly elite. Wanting a wider audience, Luther also wrote many of his works in German, the result being, as Perry notes, that "shoemakers, tailors and peasants could read the Scriptures and Luther's writings in their own tongue."[17]

He not only spoke the common language, but used a common format, that of the pamphlet (which could be available at a very low cost), and ensured they were illustrated with the best woodcuts and engravings of the time, so that even those who were barely literate could follow the message. Luther also watched the quality of what was printed, often complaining about the poor job that certain unskilled printers did, and once writing; "I cannot say how disgusted I am with the printing… John the printer is always the same old Johnny. Please do not let him print any of my German homilies, but return them to me to send elsewhere…"[18] In short, he fired his printer for doing an inadequate job. His instincts went further. When working with what he dubbed his "Sanhedrin" in translating the Bible into German, Luther insisted that before any word or phrase could be put on paper, it had to pass the "ear test," and not merely the "eye test." Luther would not simply read what was being written, but would listen to it, insisting that it had to sound right. Zecher comments that "because it sounded natural when spoken as well as read, its cadence and readability have made it popular in Germany to this day."[19]

Luther the Popularist

In spite of his formidable intelligence, Luther understood ordinary people well. It was reflected in the way he championed congregational singing. In an era where congregations passively listened to complex musical arrangements professionally performed by choirs, Luther encouraged ordinary peasants to sing their faith—both to connect with it at a deep emotional level and to understand its teaching through singing the great truths of the faith. Luther wrote many fine hymns, "A Mighty Fortress is our God" usually considered to be his best. Christopher Brown has argued "that congregational singing, perhaps more than any other single factor, secured the survival of Protestantism in Europe."[20] Luther must receive a great deal of the credit for this as he argued not just for the priesthood of all believers but for the musical priesthood of all believers. In other words, he argued that if God's grace is for all, all should sing.[21]

Luther was down to earth and practical. Though as a younger man he disciplined his body ruthlessly, the later Luther was to reflect happily, "If our Lord is permitted to create nice large pike and good Rhine wine, presumably I may be allowed to eat and drink."[22] He had moved a long way from the young monk

[17] Brown, "Preaching," 34.
[18] Cited in Brown, "Preaching," 34.
[19] Henry Zecher, "The Bible Translation That Rocked the World," *Christian History* XI, no. 34 (1992): 37.
[20] Cited in Mark A. Noll, "Singing the Word of God," *Christian History and Biography*, No. 95 (2007): 16.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 28.

ever anxious to win God's approval by refusing all pleasures, and this common touch had great appeal for ordinary people.

He was also a pragmatic preacher, and though his advice is still often ignored, it remains wise: "It is not necessary for a preacher to express all his thoughts in one sermon. A preacher should have three principles: first, to make a good beginning, and not spend time with many words before coming to the point; second, to say that which belongs to the subject in chief, and avoid strange and foreign thoughts; thirdly, to stop at the proper time."[23] Most of Luther's sermons remain, and a warm pastoral heart able to connect with ordinary people is apparent. You see it in his sermon on Ephesians 3:14-21: "To believe inwardly with the heart and to demonstrate that faith outwardly are in essence one thing, the result of which is acting, not just talking and living, not just chattering."[24]

Luther was not a systematic theologian but was, as Hendrix has noted, an "occasional theologian." Of course, Luther did not engage in theology erratically, but pondered theological topics which related to specific situations he encountered or opponents he faced.[25] His was not a theoretical theology, divorced from reality. In itself this was refreshing, but it is an essential for those whose leadership makes a difference. His theology arose from his reforming agenda. Though his involvement was initially more by accident than design, from the time of his protective custody in the Wartburg a new purpose for the fledgling evangelical movement was birthed. He knew that deep changes in church life were required, and started to articulate what they were.

One dramatically significant breakthrough was Luther's decision that clergy could marry—a freedom Luther availed himself of in 1525 when he married Katherina von Bora. It was a natural result of his conviction that all believers are priests, and that while there is a role for clergy, they should not be viewed as otherworldly, devoid of the natural drives, needs, and hopes of ordinary people. The man was matter of fact and realistic. If the church was to reform, the clergy needed to be moral. This was far more likely to be achieved if they were allowed to marry.

There was in Luther also the restlessness that usually goes with high levels of leadership. He once wrote, "Next to faith, this is the highest art: to be content in the calling in which God has placed you. I have not learned it yet."[26] It kept him pressing on, constantly learning and growing.

Leadership theorists note that most leaders have a guiding principle or motto for their life. While some would say for Luther it was Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith,'" I am inclined to agree with Hendrix that a better choice would be Luther's oft cited paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[27]

---

[23] Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 27.
[24] Hendrix, *Luther*, 39.
[25] Ibid., 4.
[26] Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 28.
[27] Hendrix, *Luther*, 6.

Certainly the later Luther lived in the light of these two colliding truths, and as is so often the case with colliding truths, they led to a rich and wonderfully nuanced understanding of life.[28]

Eight Formative Leadership Principles

Gayle Beebe's research into leadership has seen him conclude that there are eight formative principles of leadership, and he manages to get them all to start with C.[29] This paper has pointed to Luther meeting at least seven of them, namely:

1) Character
2) Competence
3) Culture and context in appropriate interplay
4) Compatibility and coherence between gifts, convictions and life setting
5) Convictions
6) Connections
7) Contribution

The one missing principle that Beebe sees as being essential is 8) Chemistry.[30] Those on the same side of a movement need to view each other as friends, and to work together closely. The Reformation turned out to be a fractious movement, with many conflicts and schisms. This continues to be reflected in Protestant churches to this day, and new denominations continue to be birthed with monotonous regularity.[31] It would be unfair to blame Luther for this. He simply unleashed a process whereby views about the Christian faith were to be tested against scripture. The method remains, but the conclusions are often strongly contested, and this has led to one split after another.

All leaders face opposition. Luther felt it perhaps most keenly when his mentor Johann von Staupitz, released Luther from his vow of obedience to his monastic order shortly after Luther was declared a heretic in Augsburg. It is unclear if Staupitz wanted to distance himself from Luther or set him free, but if it was the latter, it was not how Luther experienced it, and he felt abandoned by Staupitz, later writing, "I was excommunicated three times, first by Staupitz, second by the pope, and third by the emperor."[32] Allender in his powerful book, *Leading with a Limp*, notes that one of the inevitable prices of leadership is betrayal.[33] It is one that leaders often feel the most keenly, and Luther was no exception.

However, though Luther felt the pain of betrayal, it would be unrealistic to ignore the fact that Luther could himself be a ruthless opponent. Within a short while it seemed as though the Reformers were fighting

---

[28] For some of my own work on colliding truths see Brian Harris, "Colliding Truths: Embracing Paradox in Ministry," *Ministry Today* 38 (Winter 2006): 17–21.
[29] Gayle D. Beebe, *The Shaping of an Effective Leader: Eight Formative Principles of Leadership* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011).
[30] Beebe cites this as his third principle in Beebe, *Shaping*, 64–80.
[31] Wikipedia suggests that there are approximately 41,000 different denominations, but acknowledges that the actual number is impossible to establish with any certainty, and that much depends on how you define a denomination.
[32] Thigpen, "Friends and Enemies," 39.
[33] Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Turning Your Struggles into Strengths* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2006), 95-108.

as much amongst themselves as with Rome. Two of Luther's major conflicts were with Zwingli over the nature of the Lord's Supper and Erasmus over the freedom of will. There was nothing subtle about Luther's disagreement with Erasmus, Luther writing his book *Bondage of the Will* in direct opposition to Erasmus's *Freedom of the Will*. For Luther, this was undoubtedly a matter of strong theological conviction, but it did make for a movement that from its earliest days was fighting battles within as much as without.

Not that Luther could not be philosophical and accept that things would never be just as he would like. He could be pragmatically realistic, once writing; "Farewell to those who want an entirely pure and purified church. This is plainly wanting no church at all."[34] Part of this sentiment was against what Luther perceived to be the naïve idealism of the Anabaptists, who Luther viewed as a serious threat to peace and order.

LUTHER'S SHADOW SIDE

This leads us inevitably to something of the shadow side of Luther's legacy, the niggling questions that remain over Luther, and especially over some of his later work. All leaders make controversial decisions, and it is common for leaders to lament that only hindsight allows twenty-twenty vision. We will look briefly at two of Luther's more controversial reactions—to the Peasants' War in 1524-1525, and to the Jews.

The Peasants' War

In the Peasants' War from 1524-1525 Luther, after initially supporting the peasants' cause and condemning the princes, changed his stance and exhorted the princes to crush the revolt. He sided with power and the status quo, and as a result is frequently accused of serving as a lackey of the princes. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms whereby God rules the worldly or left-handed kingdom through the secular authorities (whom he puts into power) and the heavenly right-handed kingdom through the gospel, has seen him accused of quietism in the political realm, thereby implicitly supporting those in power. Certainly, Paul Althaus used this argument to disallow resistance to the Nazi regime in the 1930s,[35] and first-hand I saw similar arguments used in the Apartheid South Africa in which I grew up, in which Romans 13 was quoted with tiresome regularity to justify non-criticism of the government. However, to suggest that Luther's belief that the secular authorities have been put in place by God, meant that they therefore can never be questioned, is to misunderstand Luther. Luther spoke of three estates in which people live out their baptism—ministry, household relationships, and the public realm. Luther taught that above each of these was the order of Christian love which was to determine the way one acted in each of these realms. Each was a sphere in which one could perform "good and holy works."[36] True, Luther did indeed side with power in the Peasants' War, but it was because he feared total chaos was the alternative, and that greater harm

[34] Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 28.
[35] Hendrix, *Luther*, 40.
[36] Ibid.

would result from this path. We may view him as misguided, but Luther himself saw his opposition as being a good and holy work.

The Jews

Even more tragic than Luther's support of the suppression of the Peasants' War is his 1543, sixty-five-thousand-word treatise *On the Jews and their Lies.*

Luther's attitude to the Jews went through various stages. The earlier Luther had been sympathetic to their plight, and hoped the reform of the church would lead to their conversion, but his attitude seemed to harden after 1537, and by this 1543 publication he is urging their persecution, a call that was later noted by Hitler and partially used as justification for the Nazis' ultimate solution. The Nazis went so far as to display *On the Jews and their Lies* during their Nuremberg rallies. Luther lived in a forceful time and mirrored it. Luther's use of vulgarity was typical of the polemical style of his era, and used for effect as much as anything else. The language Luther uses against the Jews is not fundamentally different from that he uses against the "Turks" (Muslims) and Roman Catholics. He urged that Jewish synagogues and schools be set on fire, prayer books be destroyed, rabbis forbidden to preach, and Jewish property be confiscated. If there is any defense of Luther, it is that in this he did not shape his time, but essentially reflected it.[37] What was the exception was the earlier Luther who in his 1523 essay *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* had condemned unfair treatment of Jews and argued that Christians must treat them kindly. Indeed, in this work he reminds Christians that when they want to boast of their position as Christians that they should remember that they are Gentiles, while Jews are of the same lineage as Jesus. If Luther had held that line, he would indeed have been a reformer in this area—but the later Luther, when it came to the Jewish question, reverted to the status quo. It is almost impossible to quantify the tragedy of this shift.

What does this say about Luther the leader? Though he lived at a time long before theories of leadership were being formulated, he instinctively embodied most of the qualities and attributes of the good leader. The very best leaders have a prophetic edge, where they are able to see the long term ethical implications of their decisions. Certainly, when it came to the Jewish question, Luther fails this test.

THE RELUCTANT LEADER

But let us not finish on a negative note. Luther, the "accidental revolutionary," in spite of starting as a reluctant leader, accomplished much, and reminds us of the importance of convictional leadership. Supplementing strong convictions with personal courage, he seized the opportunities afforded by a period of history in which the rapid spread of ideas had just become possible. Instinctively understanding ordinary people and their needs, he was often an unashamed populist. He used contemporary issues to develop his

[37] See Probst, "Martin Luther and the Jews" for an exploration of this and alternate explanations for Luther's views on the Jews.

theological framework, committed himself to hard work and the disciplined use of time, and birthed a movement that has helped shaped the modern world. He had his flaws, and was the first to acknowledge them, having noted wryly, "Nothing is easier than sinning."[38] In the deepest part of his being he knew that he was saved by grace, declared righteous not by his own works, but by the work of the Christ he loved, and attempted to faithfully serve.

[38] Jeffreys, "Colorful Sayings," 27.