The Gates of Hell
Confessing Christ in a Hostile World

Edited by Scott R. Murray
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**Abbreviations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Augsburg Confession</td>
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<td>Ap</td>
<td>Apology of the Augsburg Confession</td>
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<td>Ep</td>
<td>Epitome of the Formula of Concord</td>
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<td>FC</td>
<td>Formula of Concord</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Large Catechism</td>
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<td>LW</td>
<td>Luther's Works, American Edition</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>Smalcald Articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Small Catechism</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord</td>
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<td>Tr</td>
<td>Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Weimar Edition of Luther's Works</td>
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The status of the Church is changing. She is not the darling of the culture. The Church is no longer perceived to be a supporter of the cultural goods such as stability, honor, honesty, hard work, and marriage. Many of those goods have been precipitously abandoned on account of the elites’ assault on what, until less than a generation ago, were considered truths vital to the ongoing success of our nation and its people. Now those who have the courage to confess the Bible’s truths about sex, marriage, the value of human life, and so on are labeled as haters, enemies of culture, and hurtful to the state.

The changed status of the Church from being a cultural darling to being a cultural enemy is causing increasing anxiety for those who still confess the truth of the Christian faith. For example, the court cases mounted against pious believers who make a stand against moral depravity causes us all to shiver, because we are committed to the same faith that incites such rage against these courageous believers. What can we do and how should we live in the face of these fraying verities? How will we respond to these attacks on our faith and fellow believers?

It is helpful to learn that the Bible was written in a cultural situation far worse (at least for now) than the one we face in our day. Institutional depravity led to vicious persecution of believers during the first three centuries of our era. The Letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were afraid of approaching persecution. We are no different, both in the sense that the adversarial relationship with culture is not unlike the one faced by the Fathers in the earliest days

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1 Victor Davis Hanson of the Hoover Institution provides a helpful definition of the word elite as it is used here: “An elite is also defined by education (preferably Ivy League and its coastal counterparts), residence (primarily between Boston and Washington on the East Coast, and from San Diego to Berkeley on the Pacific), profession (executive positions in government, media, law, foundations, the arts, and academia), celebrity (name recognition from television, Hollywood, network news, finance, etc.), and ideology, such as those prominent in the progressive movement” (“Who Are Those Darned ‘Elites’?” Defining Ideas: A Hoover Institution Journal, September 8, 2016, http://www.hoover.org/research/who-are-those-darned-elites). In keeping with the progressive agenda, an elite is usually overtly or covertly anti-Christian, anti-life, and, of course, has a pro-homosexual agenda.
of the Church and also in the sense that the sexual/moral devolution of culture looks much like the situation in the first three centuries of our era. We are afraid for many of the same reasons those past heroes of the faith were afraid. Jesus’ response to them is the same as it is to us. Just when we begin to fear that Satan is having his way with us, we must hear our Lord tell us that He will build His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). So even though it seems like Satan is winning, Christ promises that he will not prevail.

The essays and sermons in this book will testify to the power of Christ’s promise to defend His Church. This is not a time to despair of God’s help. In the midst of suffering, Christ promises to be with us. How could it be any different? Hasn’t Christ offered Himself into suffering and death for our sake? Why wouldn’t He be with those who suffer for His sake? Of course He will!

The authors who have collaborated on this book are writing to confess their confident hope for the future of the Church under God. These seven men are the elected leaders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), serving together as the president and vice presidents of the church body: Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, president of the LCMS; and Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller Jr.; Rev. Nabil S. Nour; Rev. Dr. John C. Wohlrabe Jr.; Rev. Dr. Daniel O. S. Preus; Rev. Christopher S. Esget; and the undersigned; who are the vice presidents of the LCMS. They have an abundance of experience serving the church, having served, or now serving, as parish pastors, teachers, and leaders of church auxiliary institutions. The volume also includes sermons full of hope and encouragement in Christ that were preached by the president and vice presidents at the 2016 convention of the LCMS in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Luther tells us that Satan hates nothing more than to have the Word of God preached, and that he therefore flees from it. The essays and sermons definitely belong together as a way of beating back the kingdom of our enemy. The Word of God does what it says and the gates of hell will never prevail against the kingdom of Christ, the Church. Christ promises.

Rev. Scott R. Murray, PhD

Houston, Texas

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost 2017
He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:15–19)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear brothers on the council, brother pastors, church workers, friends: What a joy to look out upon you and see so many, many familiar faces. And this week we will see many, many more who will become familiar faces.

Martin Luther had been into the controversy four years, almost five hundred years ago, when he was called to confess at Worms. On April 17, 1521, imperial marshal (Erbmarschall) Ulrich von Pappenheim knocked on Luther’s door and told him that the diet was waiting—the German meeting of all the emperor’s people, the emperor, the kings, the princes, the nobles, they were all waiting to hear from him. They brought him over to the building next door and told him
they would hear from him at 4:00 p.m. Four p.m. came. He was called to wait below for a few minutes, and then he was called upstairs.

There on a table before him was a pile of twenty-five books that he had written. One of the books, *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, said, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (AE 31:344). He is subject to all out of love.

Johann Eck pointed to the pile. “Luther, are you ready to admit that you wrote these books, and that they contain heresy?”

“Yes, they are mine,” Luther said. “But as to whether they contain heresy, that is a matter of faith and salvation of the soul and it cannot be affirmed or rejected without affecting the Word of God.”

Luther asked for more time. He was granted a day. We still have the very notes he scribbled that night as he got ready for the next day.

He was brought back at 4:00 p.m., left waiting until 6:00 p.m., and then called in front of the emperor and the whole crowd again. And they told him, “We want to hear one word from you, Luther: revoco.” Revoco. I recant.

Luther was nervous the day before, but he was very confident that day. He apologized. He said, “I’m sorry, I was not brought up in the court. If I used the wrong title for some of you, it is not meant to be rude.” You could hear a pin drop. He said, “Some of my books deal with simple Christian matters and simple morality based on the central teaching of the Gospel, and even my enemies would concede they are right. Some of my writings are against the pope.” Then Luther went on a rant against the pope, and it was so intense that the emperor told him to stop. A third part of his writings, Luther said, were against the enemies of the faith. Though he had overdone it sometimes in his invective, he would not say the word revoco.

The emperor and his advisers left the room for a few minutes. When they returned, they asked Luther one more time, “Are you prepared to answer without evasion and without horns, Luther? Say the word revoco.”

Luther responded with one sentence. And at this moment in the history of the Church, in the Western world particularly, it was a very consequential sentence. He said it both in Latin and German. “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is
Chapter 1: “Upon This Rock”

neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen” (AE 32:112–13).

To the great frustration of his opponents, he quickly left. He was taken outside, and he held up his arms in front of the crowd, saying, “I’m through. I’m through.” There were thousands waiting. And from that point on almost, he had a death sentence hanging over his head.

It was Luther’s moment. And it was the moment of the birth of our church, really. A great moment of confession. “You, who do you say that I am?” And Luther responded, “You are the Christ, the Christ of Holy Scripture. The Christ of the Gospel. You are the Christ who teaches aright about natural law and conscience. And a conscience bound by the Word of God.”

Luther refused to recant Christ’s teaching. Christ is the rock. If we lose the Rock, what do we have left? And he also asserted, and this is important for us today, that the conscience is free from external coercion by anything but the Word of God.

And Luther held forth, even though our culture today does not recognize the fact. Luther, in a big way, for the first time, held forth the idea that the government has no right to coerce the religious conscience. None. And that teaching is a teaching of the Lutheran Church.

“Who do you say that I am?” The first thing we do is confess, like John the Baptizer, “I am not the Christ.” Every one of us, from me to the last person in this hall, should get up right now and confess, “I am not the Christ.” It says that in John 1:20. John the Baptizer confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

How often in your life would you be the Christ, the know-it-all, the religious expert, the one who doesn’t need to repent? You are the redeemer; you’re the savior of your congregation—if it doesn’t do what you want it to do.

I’ve got news for you. You are not Jesus. And neither am I. And the Missouri Synod and the future of the Missouri Synod doesn’t depend on you or me or anybody else. It depends on Christ, the rock. As Luther would say, “I am a maggot sack. It’s the doctrine. It’s the doctrine.”

And we confess not only our sins, but we confess also the strong content of the faith. “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” This Jesus has died on the cross for your sins and the sins of the world. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Your sins are covered. Your sins are but a drop in the ocean. Your sins are covered by Christ’s blood. You are baptized and covered with His free, wonderful righteousness. No matter how
troubled your conscience is at times; no matter how terrified you are of your sins or past deeds; no matter if you are sluggish in the faith. Only believe. Christ is yours. He is all yours. You are forgiven. And your conscience is captive to the Word of God. Flesh and blood doesn’t reveal this. It’s your Father in heaven who has grabbed hold of you. And He’s not going to let you out of His hand.

And notice also what this text teaches us. All of us have the Keys. Now this text says the Keys are given to Peter on behalf of all the apostles. We note in Matthew 18:17 that the Keys belong to the whole Church, “Tell it to the church.” And we know from today’s epistle that you are all, all of us, spiritual priests, and all of us are called to proclaim and speak the Word of God as the royal priesthood.

And it is precisely this speaking, this message of Christ, that is the rock. That’s what the Smalcald Articles say. The rock here really means the ministry, this speaking of the rock of Christ. We are called to remind the world that it is Luther and the Lutheran Reformation that asserted the free religious conscience. It went from Luther to Magdeburg, to Beza of the Reformed, to Robinson of the Anglicans, to John Locke, and even to Thomas Jefferson.


We are at a point now where what the Bible calls good, the government calls evil, and what the Bible calls evil, the government calls good. “Revoca,” they all cry out. We must reject exclusivity, the message of Christ. “For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” “Revoca. There is no one truth. There are many truths.”

Here’s the truth. Whether you are L, G, B, T, Q, or just a common farmer from Nebraska or a guy who lives in a St. Louis suburb, this is true: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). And this Jesus Christ is for all, whether you are the shooter or the shot. Christ is for all. And so with Luther, we say, “I cannot. My conscience is held captive by the Word. I cannot, I will not, recant. God help me. Amen.”

“Who do you say that I am?” “You are the Christ.” And we will confess. And we will do it joyously. And the world will snarl at us. And they will hate us the more. They will belittle us and say we are a bunch of kooks and idiots and
antiquated fools. And we, like the apostles punished for speaking the name of
Jesus in Jerusalem, will suffer with joy, and we will shout it all the louder. “There
is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

And you know what? “The gates of hell shall not prevail.”

And we will say, “Revoco, sin. Recant, sin. Your penalty has been suffered,
in Christ. You are dead, sin. You are dead to me. I know only Christ and
His righteousness.”

And we shall say, “Revoco, death. Death, you are dead to me. Death, you have
died to me. My death is dead in Christ, and I am alive. Revoco, death. Revoco.
Recant.”

And I shall say, finally, “Revoco, devil. You have become a devil to yourself.
You are condemned. You have no more power over me. And I shall live eternally.”

“And the gates of hell shall not prevail.”

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.