

EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

In the early 1500s, Europe was caught in a web of religious and political confusion. The French historian, J. H. Merle D’Aubigné wrote this was especially true in Germany. Dominican monk, John Tetzl, had become well-known for selling “indulgences” for the church to any German who wanted deliverance from a fiery purgatory. He carried a large red cross, under which he sold the indulgences, and boasted, “This cross has as much efficacy as the very cross of Jesus Christ.” In fact, he claimed, “I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons.” Such godless language stirred Martin Luther to nail his *95 Theses* to the Castle Chapel door calling for genuine repentance. Luther’s message ought to be ours as well: Unless we repent of our sin and ask God for his mercy, we will all perish!



Doctor of Ministry Program

In the fall of 2020, our first cohort of resident students (two more joined in 2021) enrolled in Virginia Beach Theological Seminary’s doctoral program (pictured above): the Doctor of Ministry in Expository Preaching. Four of these students are current pastors from Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and two are serving in cross-cultural ministries (Egypt and Spain). Several of these students are now working on their final project in preparation for graduation. As these students have voiced to us on many occasions, the last three years of intensive study in each literary genre of the Scriptures has been invaluable to their ministry. They have taken classes on preaching narrative, epistolary, poetic, prophetic, and doctrinal sections of both the Old and New Testaments. In addition, each has taken a class on the history of preaching as well as a practical course to help lead the church through their expository preaching. Our faculty was assisted by several seasoned pastors and professors from sister seminaries, and the classroom atmosphere was greatly blessed by God. VBTS is committed to this specialized program of helping qualified pastors and missionaries strengthen their preaching and teaching skills. We believe that well-trained communicators of God’s word will produce godly disciples. Are you interested in our D.Min. program? If so, we invite you to call our Registrar (Scott Rosen) or view our program online.

The Faith and Martyrdom of Michael Sattler

Michael H. Windsor | VBTS Librarian & Professor of Church History

Imagine going from the comfortable position of a Roman Catholic monk to a Bible preaching pastor to a Christian martyr. Such was the course of life for Michael Sattler during the era of the Reformation. Little is known of Sattler's youth. We do know that he joined a Benedictine monastery near Freiburg, Germany, and rose over time to become the prior of the abbey (second in rank in the administration of the monastery).

The Reformation commenced in the autumn of 1517. Martin Luther, a theology professor at Whittenburg University in Germany, argued from the teachings of Scripture—especially Galatians and Romans (*sola Scriptura*), that justification is a matter of personal faith in the Savior, our risen Christ (*sola fide*). This work is accomplished in the repentant sinner by the grace of God (*sola gratia*).

In an endeavor to refute Luther's "new" theology, Sattler, the Catholic monk, set about a personal study of Paul's epistles in the New Testament. As has happened to others, an honest study of the Word of God led Sattler to a conversion experience. The grace of God disrupted his monastic career.

While Sattler was wrestling with the demands of the Gospel, the Peasants' Revolt erupted (1524-1525). Luther wanted a change from the medieval theology of justification by works to the biblical understanding of justification by faith. At this time, German peasants wanted social change to their impoverished condition. Sattler identified with both causes. Because of his newfound sympathy to the biblical appeals of Luther, and the social needs of the peasants, Sattler forsook his life as a monk.

Leaving the monastery in order to proclaim the Gospel, Michael Sattler identified with the Anabaptists in southern Germany. The Anabaptists had gone beyond Luther's appeal for the proclamation of justification by faith. The Anabaptists also taught that *only* believers form a true church. Additionally, infant baptism had no biblical support, and the practice of infant baptism did nothing but fill the church with unsaved members. Therefore, the practice of infant baptism needed to be rejected. To the Anabaptists, the biblical model was clear: justified (regenerated) members baptized upon their profession of faith could become members of the church.

Because of his maturity and ministry experience, Michael Sattler quickly became a leader among the Anabaptist community in southern Germany. While the Anabaptists were committed to biblical authority, the question remained: what does the Bible teach? This question led the Anabaptists to meet in Schleithem in February of 1527. Here Sattler led the attendees in the preparation of the *Schleithem Confession*. Among other principles, these sixteenth century believers insisted upon believer's baptism, participation in the Lord's Supper as a memorial (in contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation), and the perseverance of godly lives for both church leaders and members. While these points of theology may seem obvious to Christians today, these articles challenged both the authority and the doctrines of the state churches.

One month after the Schleithem conference Sattler was arrested by Catholic authorities and condemned as a heretic. He was taken from a jail and had his tongue cut out so he could not preach during the brief time he was taken to the site of his execution. Seven times his executioners stopped, heated tongs over coals, and tore pieces of flesh from his body, before they finally burned him at the stake.

Sattler was condemned to death because of his commitment to the Scripture and his love for the Lord. His faithfulness is a challenge to modern Christians and causes our minds to reflect on Heb. 12:4 (ESV): "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."