Curriculum lies close to the heart of every culture; the execution of the plan for educating the common people and its leadership shapes the daily lives of all. Changes in the social, economic, political, ideological, and religious perceptions of both leadership and the general population effect changes in the plan for formal and informal learning in every society. One example of this is found in the redefinition of what it means to be Christian instituted in Wittenberg as Martin Luther’s insights into Scripture grew in the course of his personal engagement with the biblical texts on which he was lecturing at the university there in the 1520s.

Luther had grown up with an expression of Christianity which relied on human performance of good works, chiefly the sacred works prescribed in the rituals of worship and daily life, to maintain the relationship between the sinner and God. Through his engagement with Scripture as monk and as academic theologian, on the basis of personal experience and of presuppositions bequeathed him by his Ockhamist instructors, the young Wittenberg professor came to define Christianity as God’s approach to human beings, as a God of conversation and community. God came to sinners with his Word, framed partly in terms of his expectations for their performance of his will, to be sure, but centered in his promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This refocusing of the nature of the Christian faith demanded the refocusing of requirements for pastoral ministry and the preparation for pastoral service. In Wittenberg a new curriculum developed to serve this redefined church. That promise, Luther believed, was made effective through the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word Jesus of Nazareth, the second person of the Trinity. The Wittenberg professor came to view the Christian life as grounded in trust in Christ. Because of the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of God’s chosen people, their lives must be constantly listening to his expectations, which drive them to repentance, and to his promise, which renews their life through their trust in Christ. Luther labeled God’s expectations, in a specifically focused, technical sense, “law” and his

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promise “gospel.” (He recognized broader uses of both terms in Scripture, of course.) In the distinction of law and gospel, God’s expectations for his human creatures, and God’s re-creative promise of new life through Christ, Luther saw and taught the fundamental rule for understanding God’s Word addressed to his people in the Bible.

Philip Melanchthon joined Luther on the Wittenberg faculty in the midst of the senior colleague’s development of his new definition of being Christian. In his opening address at the university in 1518 Melanchthon not only issued his famous call for general curricular reform in the arts or humanities. He also called specifically for reform of the curriculum in theology since “theology really demands the highest possible capacity for thinking, for intensive concentration, and for precision in analysis.” Because the basis of theology lies in texts in Hebrew and Greek, the mastering of these languages was absolutely necessary for future study on the theological faculty, he asserted. Melanchthon’s vision for the educational reforms of biblical humanism merged with and grew from Luther’s vision for reform in church and theological faculty.

His achievement of the degree of “Doctor in Biblia” in 1512 had imposed upon Luther the obligation of lecturing on Scripture. Methods of biblical interpretation in the Late Middle Ages varied significantly; university and monastery often presented different approaches to the treatment of the text. Luther announced in the published version of his first lectures on Galatians (delivered 1516–1517, published 1519) that readers would find there a different kind of commentary: a “testimony” of his faith rather than a traditional scholastic analysis of the text. His narrative approach paved the way for and influenced the style of the homiletical commentaries of some of his disciples. It did not determine the more general form in