

500 YEARS

BY GREG ALBRECHT

& STILL SEARCHING

Spiritual Transformation —Then and Now

iven the religious animosity that is fueling terrorism, violence and warfare around this world, many are beginning to realize the bleak and dismal life religion produces and are consequently joining a spiritual transformation that transcends religious agendas.

In these early years of the 21st century the institution of “the” church, as it has been traditionally experienced and practiced, is being shaken by seismic tremors. Former churchgoers have quit “going to church” because they believe many, if not most established ecclesiastical organizations are either abusive or irrelevant. Many now believe that the classic denominational framework and structure of church is on the edge of extinction. The foundational goals and purposes of church as it has been known is under careful scrutiny.

Reacting to this earthquake-like upheaval, some within Christendom perceive their role to be *protectors* of historic faith and practice. Threatened by questions and criticisms, protectors often respond by raising their spiritual drawbridges, retreating within castle walls heavily fortified by theology and creeds, defending the status quo.

By contrast, *transformers* welcome challenges and changes directed toward religious institutions and observances as a much-needed wave of transformation. Like pioneers and explorers spiritual transformers see themselves as sailors hoisting their sails to catch refreshing winds of the Spirit, as they venture into a brave

new dimension of their relationship with God.

As Solomon wisely observed, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The more contemporary philosopher George Santayana noted that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” As we live in the midst of this herculean upheaval/reformation of Christendom we can gain insight and perspective from another great shake-up—“the” Great Reformation. A critique and overview of the historic Reformation of some 500 years ago may help you to gain perspective about the spiritual transformation taking place right now.



“Here I Stand”

Martin Luther’s act of defiance against the religious establishment, nailing his 95 grievances to the church door at Wittenberg (1517) is widely acknowledged as the watershed of the Reformation. His courageous act was precipitated by his objections to official Catholic teaching, based on his own faith experience and intensive biblical reflection. In addition to his misgivings about doctrine, Luther was further convinced that God was being horribly misrepresented by the shameless sales of indulgences. Exposure of this not-so-thinly disguised, greed-induced fund-raising perversion blew the lid off the festering, endemic corruption within what was widely accepted within Europe as the true church.

Luther posted his 95 theses on All Saints Eve, October 31, 1517, apparently both on the door of the Wittenburg Church, as well as in writing to his superiors. Within three months Luther’s 95 *Theses* were translated from Latin into German, effectively

using the printing press as a tool of social media, inviting the public to join the revolution.

Luther’s bold challenges eventually made their way to Rome, where they were determined to be heresy. Rome’s opposition only hardened Luther’s resolve, culminating with the Pope’s threatening Luther with excommunication unless he recanted. On April 18, 1521, Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms—a general

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Johann Tetzel, 1465 – 1519

Many forces were at work, from the Hussite uprising to the invention of the Guttenberg press, helping to lay the groundwork for the reforms which Luther and others pioneered.

While Martin Luther

is often given the title of the Greatest Reformer, given other dynamics at work the Reformation would have happened even if religious corruption and decay had not existed to the same degree or had ever become as widely known.

Contributing Forces and Facets

Far from being generated by a single cause or event, the Reformation was a wave of reform with political, economic and cultural components—as well as religious. In a similar way, the groundswell of spiritual awakening that many are experiencing in these early years of the 21st century is caused by many distinctive tides that are combining to form one great transformation of hearts and souls.

Many historians feel that the Reformation was the natural result of forces such as the Renaissance (14th through the 17th centuries), the rise of a merchant class, and the increasing tension caused by irreconcilable



Pope Leo X, 1475 - 1521

differences in the Germanic vs. Latin cultures in Europe. Some believe the much discussed doctrinal distinctions of the Reformation were prompted by a tsunami of humanism. Even the atrocities and violence seemingly

caused by religious differences during the Reformation may better be understood as ongoing and growing hostilities spawned by the first Christian holy war, the First Crusade (1095-1099). It was the First Crusade that first employed (and justified) warfare and violence as the means toward a morally virtuous end.

As it was then, so it is today—a re-discovery of God's grace is causing seismic tremors throughout the world of Christendom and its religious institutions:

The Reformation was a time when men went blind, staggering drunk because they had discovered, in the dusty basement of medievalism, a whole cellar of 1500-year-old, 200-proof grace—bottle after bottle of pure distillate of Scripture, one sip of which would convince anyone that God saves us single-handedly. The word of the gospel—after all these centuries of trying to lift yourself into heaven by worrying about the perfection of your own bootstrap—suddenly turned out to be a flat announcement that the saved were home-free before they started. Grace was to be drunk neat: no water, no ice, and certainly no ginger ale.—Robert Farrar Capon

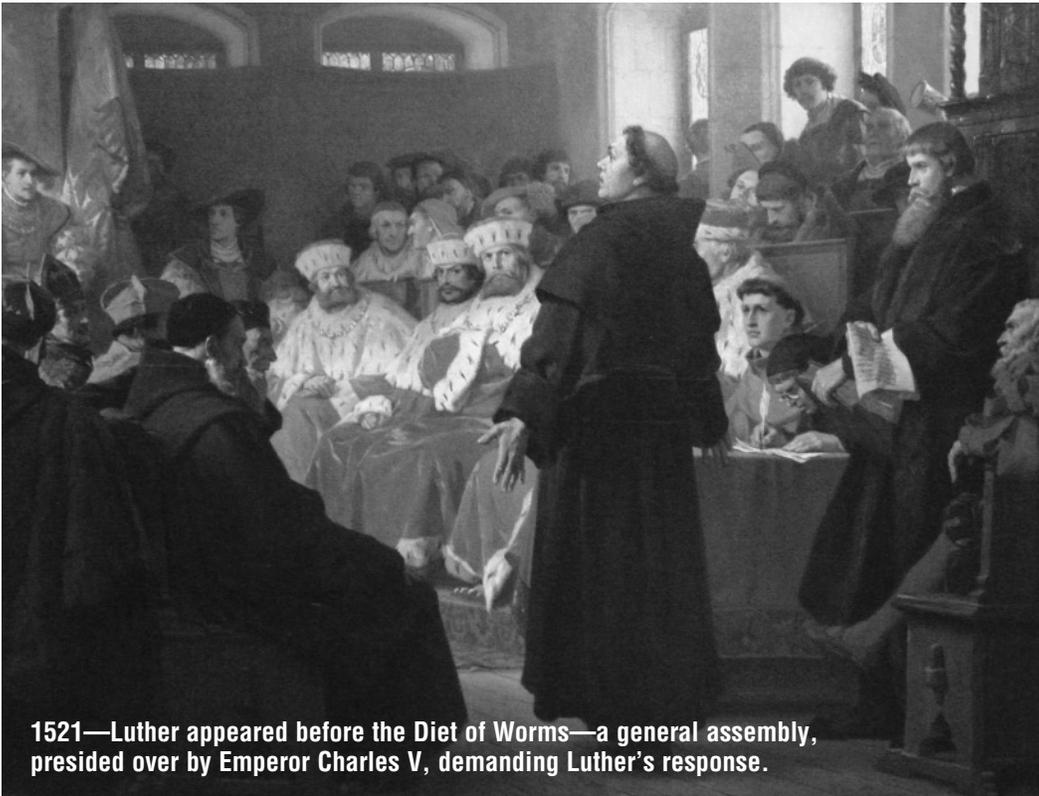
The Fireworks Failed to Produce Peace

The Reformation, a reaction to corruption and abuse, actually produced

assembly, presided over by Emperor Charles V, demanding Luther's response. His writings were displayed on a table—Luther was asked if he was the author and if he continued to believe the "heretical" statements they contained.

Luther's documented response was, in part: "I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me." This uncompromising retort has been popularly summarized, in words Luther may or may not have precisely uttered on that occasion as: "Here I stand. I can do no other."

While there is no doubt about Luther's leading role, it may be too simplistic to attribute the Reformation to the actions of Martin Luther alone. The Reformation didn't erupt out of a vacuum. Martin Luther didn't just wake up one morning and decide to protest biblically untenable and corrupt teachings and practices.



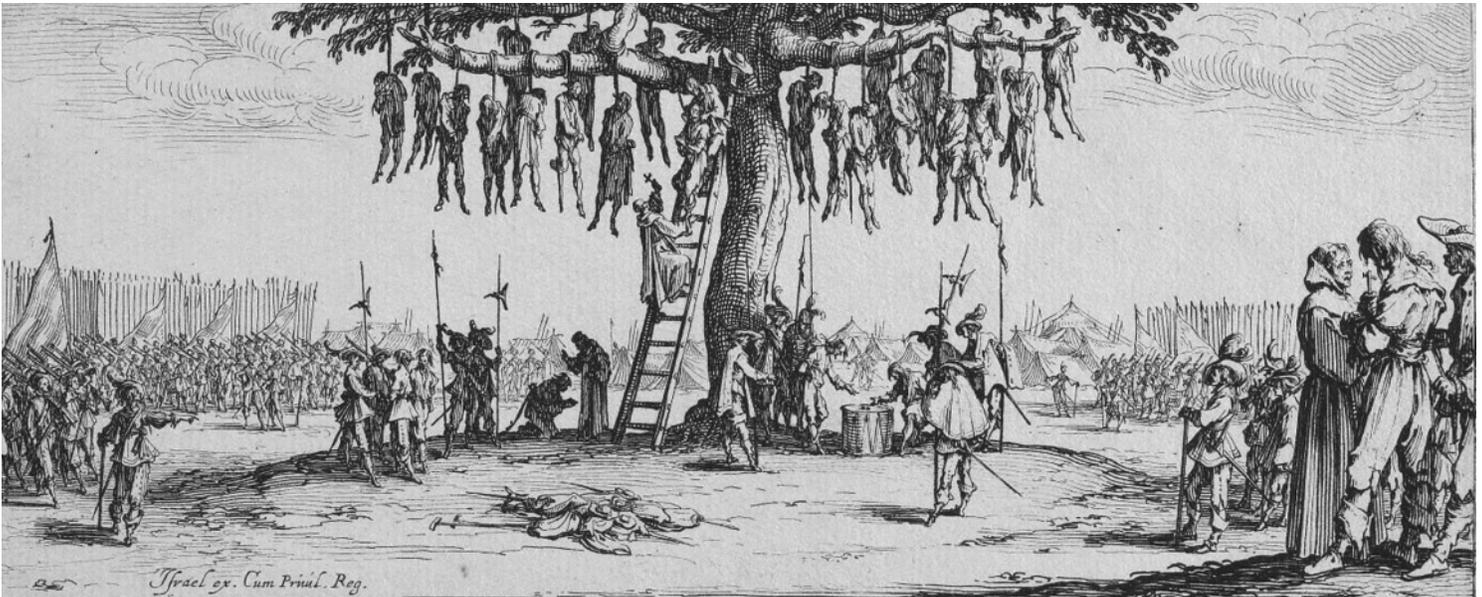
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an enormous increase in religious violence and warfare. In what was officially seen as an attempt to save souls who had lost their way—the Magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin and Zwingli) employed brutal forms of torture, drowning and burning at the stake. During an era when the notion of eternal torment in hell fire as a punishment for sinners gained wider acceptance, the Catholic and Protes-

tant Inquisitors alike introduced their own hell on earth for those who disagreed with official church teaching and practice. Inquisitions were not limited to one country or one era, but lasted for almost 700 years—beginning in 1231, continuing through the 18th century. The Medieval Inquisition was the first major phase, followed by the Spanish Inquisition and then the Roman Inquisition, that

dark underbelly of the Catholic counter-reformation. The Roman Inquisition was considered so important that work was diverted from the unfinished St. Peter’s Basilica so that a new Inquisition headquarters building could be constructed at the Vatican. In his recently published, groundbreaking book on the Inquisition (*God’s Jury—The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World*) Calvin Murphy points out that religion and politics alike, as they are permitted by law, continue their own inquisitions to this very day.



The Great Miseries of War by Jacques Callot, 1632—a series of engravings depicts events from the Thirty Years War, just one of many wars resulting from the upheaval of the Reformation. The Thirty Years War devastated seventeenth-century Europe, killing nearly a quarter of all Germans and laying waste to towns and countryside alike.

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repudiated Rome from within and without. Encouraged by fresh winds of intellectual thought and progress the Bible was made available in the language of the marketplace, providing much-needed spiritual nourishment and renewal for the Reformation.

We believe that this focus on spiritual transformation—then and now—will help you conclude, with us, that the institution of the church, as we know it, must be saved by Jesus. We can only be transformed from our institutional navel-gazing and performance-based religion by a Christ-centered focus. As Michael Green comments, in *Who is This Jesus?*:

The society Jesus founded has been so unlike Jesus. Think of the

blood-thirsty Crusades, the cruel Inquisition, and the history of religious persecution. The church is still so unlike Jesus, and we may well have been scarred by its hypocrisy or bored by its blandness. We recall, maybe, that dreary local church to which we were dragged, protesting, when we were

Martin Luther didn't just wake up one morning and decide to protest biblically untenable and corrupt teachings and practices. Many forces were at work, from the Hussite uprising to the invention of the Gutenberg press, helping to lay the groundwork for the reforms which Luther and others pioneered.



Anabaptists were equally unpopular with both Protestant reformers and Catholics—both of whom strongly reacted against any suggestion that infant baptism was not valid.

So join us as we look back some 500 years, in search of insight and illumination via Christ-centered, grace-based hindsight. We will consider innovators, artists, explorers and pioneers who set the social and cultural stage for key personalities of the Reformation, those who challenged and

young. Or we reflect on divisions in the church, the failures of its leadership, and the small difference it seems to make in the lives of its members. Is that why we don't want to know about Jesus? □

The Age of Discovery: Innovators, Artists and Explorers

1) Christopher Columbus 1451-1506 Italian explorer and navigator widely credited with discovering the Americas.

2) Leonardo daVinci 1452-1519 Italian painter, sculptor, architect and engineer.

3) Michelangelo 1475-1564 Italian

sculptor, painter, architect and poet.

4) Nicola Copernicus 1473-1543 Polish astronomer.

5) Francis Drake 1540-1596 English explorer, navigator and admiral.

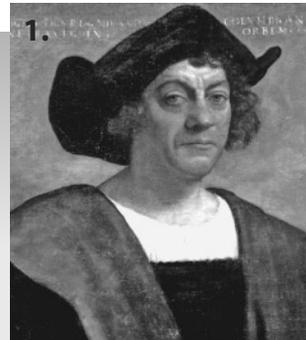
6) Galileo Galilei 1564-1642 Italian astronomer

and physicist.

7) William Shakespeare 1564-1616 English dramatist and poet



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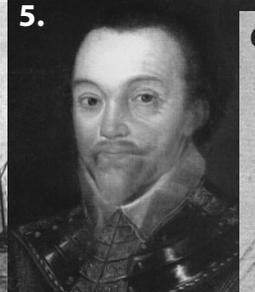
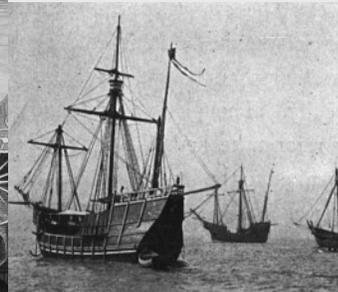
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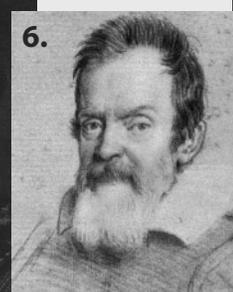
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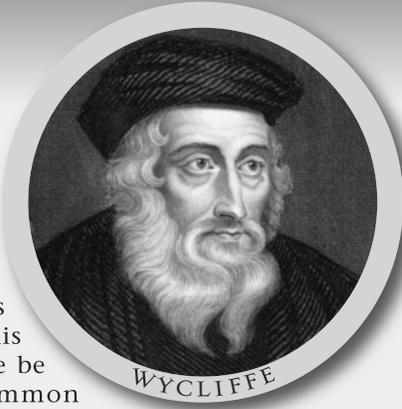
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Who's Who in the Reformation?

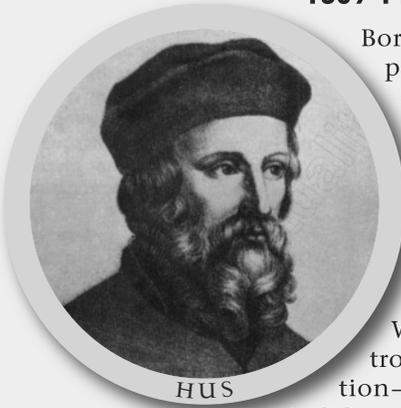
THEY CHALLENGED AND REPUDIATED ROME

John Wycliffe (England) 1328-1384

Wycliffe was perhaps the first well-known Roman Catholic dissident, an early opponent of papal authority influencing national leaders and policies. He is most remembered for his insistence that the Bible be translated into the common language, and in the face of enormous opposition Wycliffe's Bible was completed in 1384.



Jan Hus (Czech Republic – then known as Bohemia) 1369-1415

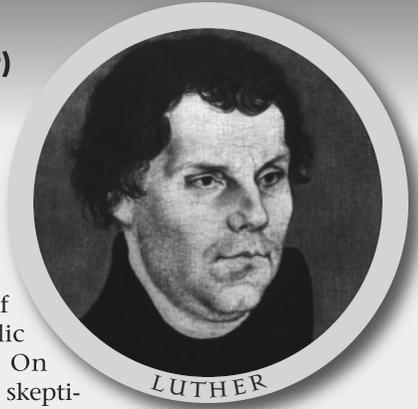


Born into an impoverished peasant family, Hus was ordained a Catholic priest in 1401. He rose quickly through the clerical ranks to become rector of Charles University in Prague. He was influenced by the issues raised by Wycliffe and especially troubled by church corruption—specifically the sale of indulgences. Hus claimed that the

pope was exploiting the Czech people “through ignorance and the love of money.” He openly questioned the Pope’s authority, explaining that Christ was the true leader of the church, not the Pope. Hus fomented a religious revolution, with many Czechs supporting him. The Pope excommunicated him and in 1414 ordered him to appear at the Council of Constance. After being guaranteed safety, Hus was captured, imprisoned and burned at the stake. After his death, Hussites continued their refusal to submit to Rome, defeating five papal crusades against them in what became known as the Hussite Wars. Within 100 years 90 percent of Czechs had left the church of Rome. Inspired by Wycliffe, Jan Hus is regarded as the first reformer, followed by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli.

Martin Luther (Germany) 1483-1546

Luther was ordained a Catholic priest in 1507. As a professor at the University of Wittenberg his studies caused him to become critical of many aspects of Catholic teaching and practice. On the heels of his growing skepticism with official church teaching/doctrine (orthodoxy), he was infuriated with the church-sanctioned practice (orthopraxy) of the sale of indulgences for the express purpose of invigorating the coffers of the papal treasury. Having squandered the fortune left to him by Pope Julius II, Pope Leo X (1475-1521) employed Johann Tetzel (1465-1519) to sell indulgences—popularly understood as free passes from purgatory. Tetzel’s manipulative fund-raising techniques were popularized by the jingle, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.” Incensed at the corruption in the church Luther invited theological debate by posting 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg church.



Luther’s insistence that relationship (justification) with God is by grace through faith, rather than the works-based salvation against which he protested, is a timeless Christ-centered critique by which individual faith and corporate faith must be measured. Surely, as God used Luther once, he has used and continues to use others to remind us, in the words of Paul, “For it is by faith you

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have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Excommunicated by the Catholic church because of his views, Luther responded with impassioned preaching and writing, fanning the flames of reformation. Far from the stereotypical quiet and mousy church pastor, Luther was a tempestuous and fiery larger-than-life powerful personality. Like so many other giants of history who have left a powerful footprint, Luther was not without his flaws.

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While God's amazing grace, the primary theme of his ministry, has positively influenced the body of Christ for almost 500 years, other not-so-endearing examples of Luther's life endure. Luther was no shrinking violet—he lived large and often expressed his thoughts and opinions in nothing less than blunt and coarse terminology, inciting and invoking violence against a peasant movement he had in part instigated. Luther's group discussions about theology were often filled with anti-Catholic rants, lubricated with and stimulated by good German brew.

Along with many others of his day, both those who became Protestants and those who remained Catholics, Luther's anti-Semitism is deplorable. His hate-filled work *On the Jews and Their Lies* is commonly seen as a central root of Germanic prejudice, laying the foundation for justifications for Hitler's 20th century Holocaust. In terms of his personal life, historian Ruth Tucker notes that when the once-celibate monk consummated his marriage with his wife Katie the "spectacle" was open to "the gaze of others" (*Parade of Faith—A Biographical History of the Christian Church*, Ruth Tucker, page 230).

In spite of the character flaws in his humanity, we thank God for Luther's courageous ministry, in leaving what he felt to be the only true church, blazing trails for then and now. Luther's enduring work and legacy enables us to be constantly reminded that we can be renewed by *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.*

John Calvin (France/Switzerland) 1509-1564

Martin Luther and John Calvin are traditionally accorded the title of the Two Great(est) Reformers. Calvin was born in France to a wealthy family and received the best education available. His father insisted that John terminate his studies in theology in favor of pursuing the study of law. When mass imprisonments and executions were ordered for those (including heretical Protestants) who failed to hew to

the Catholic party line Calvin was forced to leave Paris. It was at that time of exile that Calvin wrote and completed his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1535)—a work that combined his expertise in theology and law.

After his father died Calvin moved to Switzerland where he followed in the footsteps of Ulrich Zwingli (in Zurich)—Calvin joining in an attempt to turn the city of Geneva into the kingdom of God on earth. Calvin's Geneva became the scene of religious violence, in the name of God, where heretics, non-conformists and "Libertines" were burned at the stake.

Of all the religious violence in Calvin's Geneva, the ex-

ecution of Michael Servetus is best known. Servetus was a brilliant Spanish physician—he is credited as being the first European to discover the cardiovascular system. Servetus opposed the Trinitarian beliefs of both Protestants and Catholics, and

in *Errors About the Trinity* he defended his views with biblical citations.

Not one to run from controversy, Servetus arrived in Calvin's Geneva with a death sentence already pronounced on him by Catholic officials. At his subsequent trial, Servetus was denied an attorney, being told that he had already proven he could lie well enough without one. Believing that Servetus should not simply be beheaded, Calvin's Geneva burned him at the stake over green wood, so that it took three hours for him to die. Using language evocative of the notorious "honor killings" within Islam, Calvin later defended his order to burn Servetus at the stake by saying that he was defending God's honor.

Calvin was timid, a far from imposing personality, who, nonetheless, was oppressively strict and relentlessly authoritarian in the legalistic demands he placed on others, in the name of God.

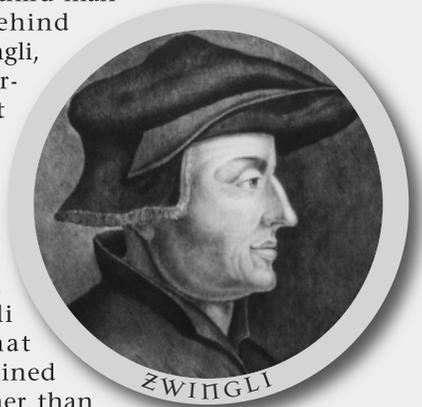
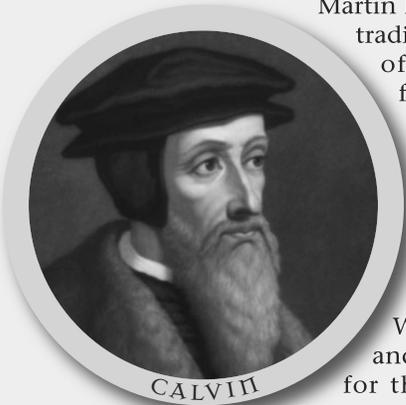
Ulrich Zwingli (Switzerland) 1484-1531

Often referred to as the third man of the Reformation (behind Luther and Calvin) Zwingli, like Luther, was an ordained Catholic priest whose study of the New Testament led him away from traditional beliefs and practices. During a slow spiritual transformation over a period of years Zwingli became convinced that faith should be determined solely by Scripture, rather than

by the authority of the Pope or by historic church traditions and interpretations. Like Luther, Zwingli authored his own set of sixty-seven theses, denouncing many of the excesses and practices of Catholicism, including prayers to saints, monasticism, celibacy and indulgences.

Within the course of a few years Zwingli helped turn the religious climate of Zurich upside down, terminating celibacy for the clergy, removing images from churches, dissolving monasteries and simplifying formerly elaborate worship services. Zwingli presided over a virtual theocracy in Zurich, somewhat like the government Calvin later presided over in Geneva.

Zwingli's zeal in overthrowing Catholicism was matched by his brutal opposition to the Radical Reformers—the Anabaptists, who opposed the rite of infant baptism. Zwingli effectively silenced Anabaptists by drowning them—who had been forewarned by Zwingli's officials that "he who is dipped shall be dipped." This ironic "death by baptism" for Anabaptists who believed that baptism should be by immersion for adults only has been



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called one of the cruel jokes of the Reformation. Zwingli's passionate crusade against Anabaptists was not unlike Luther's tirades against the Jews and the peasants, and Zwingli's personal life was marred by at least three known scandals with women to whom he was not married.

Meno Simons (Holland) 1496-1561



Like Hus, Luther and Zwingli, Simons was also ordained as a Catholic priest. His studies initially led him to question official church teaching about transubstantiation (the Catholic teaching that the bread and wine of mass/communion literally become the body and blood of Jesus). Further, he became

convicted of the need for a transforming conversion experience, marked by a commitment to nonviolence. His studies led him to believe that the Bible teaches adult baptism (believer's baptism) rather than the then universally accepted practice (by other Protestants, Catholics and Eastern Orthodox) of infant baptism. Simons was not by any means the first Anabaptist (from the Greek for "again/twice" and "baptize"—thus "re-baptizers") but his influence in consolidating the scattered Anabaptist movement led his followers to self-identify as Mennonites. Despite being hunted by authorities who wished to silence his preaching once and for all, and though his wife and children died, Menno Simons continued to preach and write, dying a natural death at the age of 65.

John Knox (Scotland) 1514-1572

Orphaned when he was young, Knox eventually determined to study for the ministry. Enrolling at St. Andrews University in Scotland he was soon engulfed by debates responding to news of the Reformation underway in Europe. Early in his ministry Knox and other Protestant reformers were captured, taken captive and incarcerated as galley slaves. After his rescue, he left his native Scotland and moved to England—only to find that he was no longer welcome when Queen Mary

("Bloody Mary") came to the throne in 1553. Knox fled to France and then Geneva, where he studied with John Calvin.

Knox became a prolific author of vitriolic tracts, attacking the English monarchy (Queen Mary) who bowed the knee to Rome. From the safety of Protestant Europe Knox compared Queen Mary to the biblical Jezebel, calling her the "wicked English Jezebel." When Queen Mary of

England died Knox returned to a Scotland ruled by a French Catholic also named Mary—Mary Queen of Scots, the nearly six-foot tall regent of Scotland (1542). During her reign (1542-1567) Mary attempted to force Scotland to accept Rome's authority, encouraging compliance with her cruel and systematic persecution of Protestants. Following civil war in Scotland (1559) Mary was forced to abdicate (1567) and Knox continued his foundational work which eventually turned Scotland into the most devoutly Calvinist country in the world.

Henry VIII (England) reigned as monarch from 1509-1547



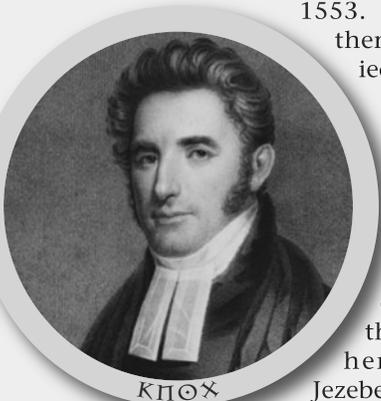
The life and times of Henry VIII makes Luther's life seem tame by comparison. In addition to his six wives, he is best known for his role in the separation of the Church of England from Rome. While he was charismatic and accomplished—a gifted author and composer—he is remembered as a harsh, ruthless, sensual and lascivious king. Those who opposed him were often executed.

While Henry removed England from Rome's authority, he never formally repudiated Catholic teaching—his reasons for separating from Rome were more personal and political than they were theological. At the age of seventeen Henry married the widow of his brother Arthur, who had died only four months after his marriage to Catherine, daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Henry's subsequent marriage to Catherine did not produce a male heir who survived infancy, so to solve that problem, and in order to give legitimacy to his desires for Anne Boleyn, Catherine's lady-in-waiting, Henry replaced the Pope as the ultimate religious authority (the Act of Supremacy-1533), and then had his own religious authorities give him a divorce.

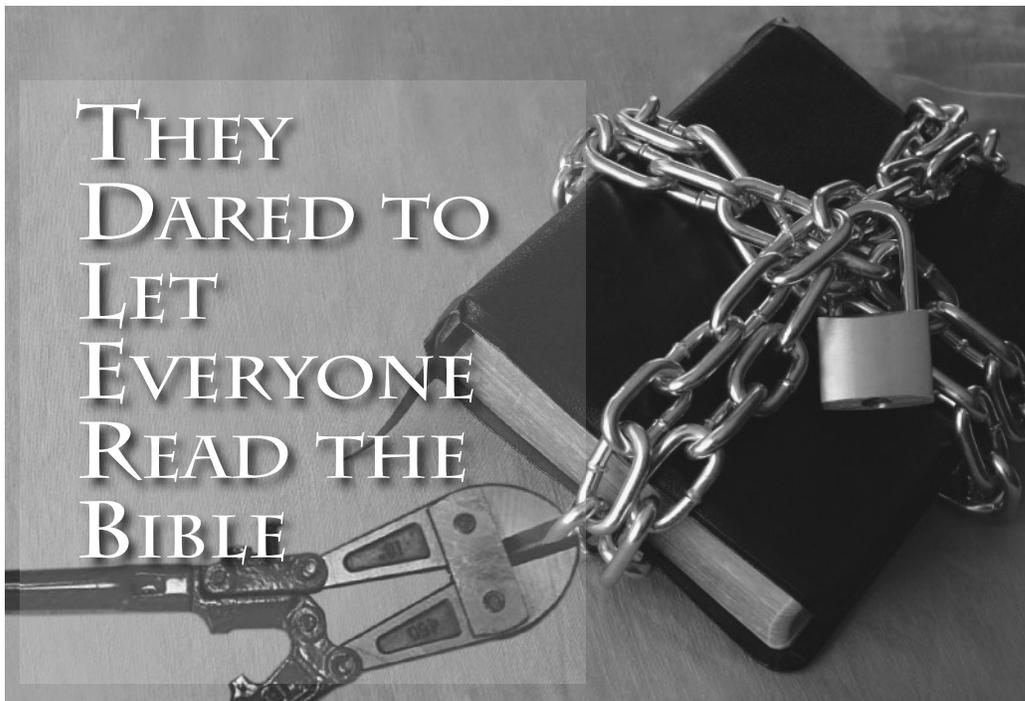
Following Henry's death his son Edward, by his third marriage (Jane Seymour), sat on the throne for six years. Edward died in his teens, without an heir, so the throne passed to his older half-sister, Mary, also known as Mary Tudor, and perhaps most of all known and remembered as "Bloody Mary."

Mary never forgave her father for divorcing her mother, Catherine, so when she assumed the throne her mission was to return all of England to the authority of Rome. She temporarily reversed the English Reformation, having no less than 300 of her subjects burned at the stake—most notably, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mary's reign lasted only five years—when she died of natural causes she was succeeded by Elizabeth I, the daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn.

Elizabeth was a devout Anglican, an astute and intelligent politician, who, during her forty-five year reign restored stability to the English throne and confirmed the separation from Rome. □



THEY DARED TO LET EVERYONE READ THE BIBLE



burned in Belgium by the collaboration of church and government authorities.

5) **Miles Coverdale (1488-1569).** Coverdale was a colleague in exile with Tyndale in Antwerp. In 1535, the year Tyndale was arrested, Coverdale arranged for the publication of the first complete English Bible which was essentially Tyndale's translation.

6) **Geneva Bible.** Exiles from the tyranny of "Bloody Mary" in England gathered in Geneva with John Calvin and prepared a "reformed" English Bible, first printed in 1560. It was the first bible with numbered verses, Roman font, and extensive marginal commentary notes.

6) **Douay-Rheims.** The Roman Church finally consented to allow the Bible to be translated into the English language. Translated from the Latin Vulgate, the Rheims New Testament was printed in 1582, and the Old Testament followed in 1609-1610.

7) **King James Bible.** In 1604 Anglican bishops persuaded King James I to authorize a new English translation. The King James Bible was first printed in 1611 and quickly became the standard for the Protestant world for several centuries, until scholarship combined with publishing houses to translate and print improved, "modern" translations. □

The invention of the movable type press in the 15th century coincided with the Reformation of the 16th century. Here are seven watershed events and individuals who made the truth of the gospel available to people in their own languages.

1) **John Wycliffe (1328-1384).**

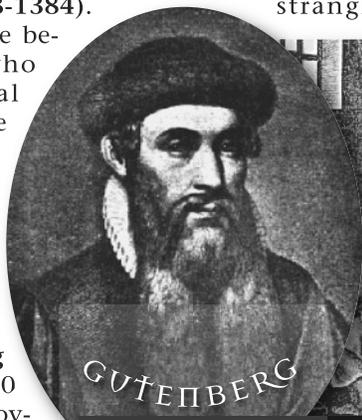
Wycliffe believed the Bible belonged to the people, who comprised the universal church, rather than to the institutional church. In 1382 and 1388 two versions of hand-written Bibles in English were made available—hundreds of these manuscripts remain to this day.

2) **Johann Gutenberg (1398-1468).** In c. 1450 Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press. In the years following he began to print the first book, the Latin Vulgate Bible, which is now often referred to as the "Gutenberg Bible," completed c. 1455.

3) **Martin Luther (1483-1546).** There were previous German Bibles, but Luther's German translation of the New Testament was published in

1522, and his translation of the complete German Bible was printed in 1534.

4) **William Tyndale 1494-1536.** Known as the "father of the English Bible" Tyndale's translation of the New Testament was the first complete English New Testament printed (1526) with movable type. Tyndale was forced to leave his native England for fear of his life, and thus completed much of his work during his European exile. In 1536, after one year of imprisonment, Tyndale was strangled and his body



What's What *in the* Reform

FOUR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Calvinism—John Calvin (France and Switzerland) 1509-1564

Calvinism is normally thought of as five points of doctrine, enumerated and recalled with the acronym TULIP.

- *Total depravity* (human faculties are rendered corrupt, depraved and defective by Adam's disobedience, thus causing all humans to be incapable of responding to God),
- *Unconditional election* (God chooses to elect and redeem certain individuals, and not others, a choice independent of a virtuous response on their part),
- *Limited atonement* (Christ's death on the cross was only for those God predestined to be

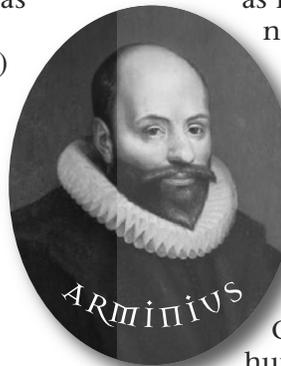
saved. The atonement is, therefore, not for everyone, but is limited to those predestined by God's will),

- *Irresistible Grace* (those whom God has already chosen for eternal life will inevitably accept Christ's atoning work as God's grace works irresistibly upon them) and

- *Perseverance of the Saints* (those who are elected to be believers will endure in their God-given faith as God preserves them in their saved condition).

Calvin's teachings heavily influenced the Pilgrims and the

Puritans. Calvinism is reflected today in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and partially, through devotion to the "P" in TULIP (or, "once saved, always saved"), in Baptist churches, the United Church of Christ, as well as many evangelical and nondenominational churches, groups and ministries.



Arminianism—Jacobus Arminius (Holland) 1560-1609

Arminianism opposes the predestination of Calvinism by insisting that human dignity requires freedom of the will—freedom of human decision and choice.

According to Arminianism this freedom of choice is actually what God has foreordained, based on his foreknowledge of those who will accept his invitation to believe in the gospel. Arminianism believes that apart from human cooperation with grace salvation can be lost—many see this teaching as paving the way for an emphasis on salvation by works and performance-based religion. John Wesley, founder of what became known as Methodism, was the most well-known preacher of Arminianism.

In practice, many



ation?

evangelicals are Arminian, with the exception of their support of the “P” in TULIP, as are many non-denominational believers. Arminianism is denominationally reflected today in Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Congregational and Unitarian churches and ministries.

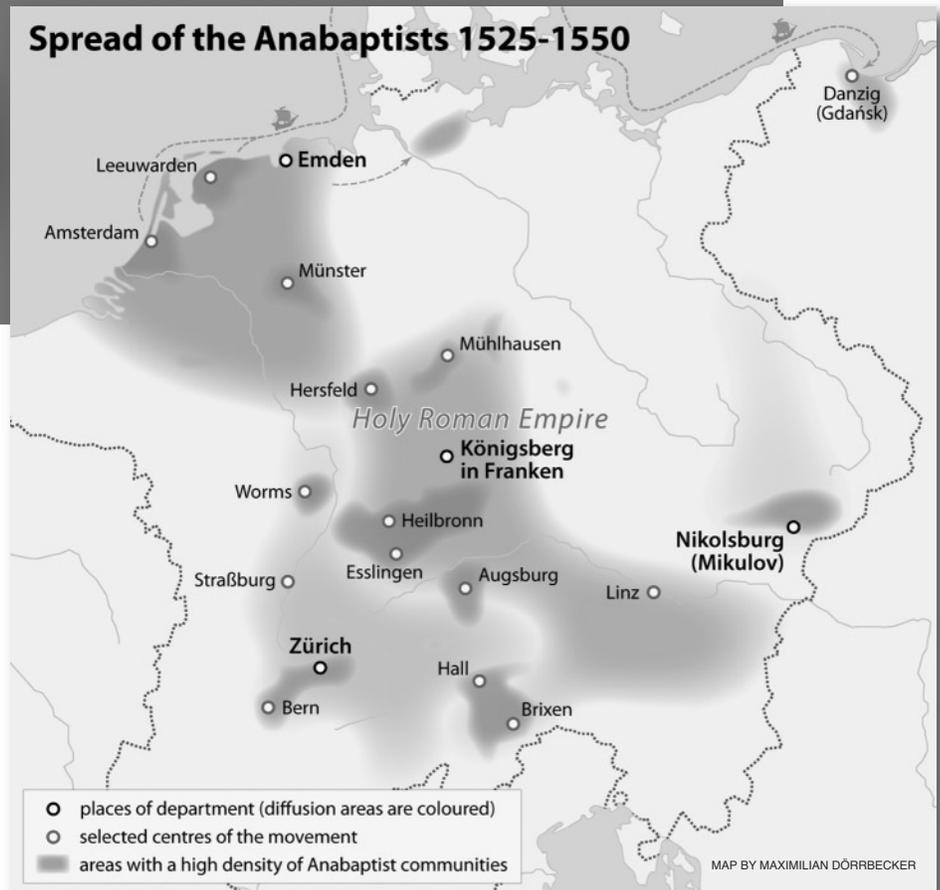
Lutheranism—Martin Luther 1483-1546

For Calvinists the “sovereignty of God” means that the way to know God is to recognize him as the supreme monarch. For Lutherans, the way to know God is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lutherans perceive that Catholic and Orthodox churches ask what the individual must do to secure their salvation and that Calvinists ask what the individual must do in order to glorify the sovereign God. Lutherans, on the other hand, claim their teachings are based on God’s grace, so that they ask how Christ has already secured salvation.

From a Lutheran perspective, Calvinists insist that humans must fear and glorify God, while Lutherans believe humans are blessed to trust and serve a gracious and forgiving God. While Calvinism uses the word “grace” its theology tilts toward law and individual performance, placing a premium on the obedience owed to the sovereign God.

That being said, traditional Lutheran theology maintains many similarities with Catholic teaching—not the least of which is infant baptism and

Spread of the Anabaptists 1525-1550



transubstantiation (called consubstantiation by Lutherans, a term which only provides a small semantic distinction, according to some critics). Luther also identified with much of Calvin’s doctrine of sin and election, regarding the human will being in hopeless bondage, believing that apart from God’s grace we will be dead in our transgressions.

Anabaptists—Meno Simons 1496-1561

The Anabaptists found themselves caught in the crossfire between Protestant reformers and Catholics—both of whom strongly reacted against any suggestion that infant baptism was not valid. The Anabaptists insisted that one is saved by responding to the invitation of Christ to follow him, not by birth in a Christian nation where infant baptism was conflated with citizenship at birth. They argued that the just truly are

saved by faith, not by baptism or birthright. While Catholics and Protestants generally retreated to geographical boundaries drawn by national borders, and even areas within countries themselves (as in Germany) Anabaptists were people without a country, and thus were somewhat widely dispersed, eventually finding North America and its promise of religious freedom to be a safe haven. Anabaptists, committed to literally practicing the Sermon on the Mount, opposed any allegiance other than the Kingdom of Christ. Thus, they believed in the separation of church and state and were opposed to joining any national churches, whether Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. In accord with this view, they believed in a radical commitment to peace, avoiding individual and national conflict and participation in war. Anabaptists today include Mennonites, Amish and several other groups called Brethren. □

BLACK SHEEP

of the Reformation

B Y J I M F O W L E R

One of the best-kept secrets of the sixteenth century reformation is the history and teaching of the astute German reformer, Andreas Osiander. Born near Nürnberg in 1498 and educated in Leipzig, Altenburg and Ingolstadt, he was ordained as an Augustinian priest in 1520. Just two years later, in 1522, he joined the Lutheran movement, wherein he was a participant in the Marburg Collo-

quy in 1529, attended the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, and was one of the signatories of the Schmalkalden Articles in 1537. There was even a link with the English Reformation when his niece, Margaret, became the wife of Thomas Cranmer in 1532, and at the urging of Cranmer he wrote and published a *Harmony of the Gospels* (*Harmonia Evangelica*) in 1537. Also interested in medicine and astronomy, he provided a preface to Copernicus' book on the *Revolutions of the Heavenly Orbs* in 1543.



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His book *On Justification* (*De Justificatione*) published in 1549 clarified his theological position that was adjudged to be unacceptable and

heretical by the later reformers such as Melancthon, Flacius, and Calvin. Osiander rejected the idea that justification was only a legal and forensic declaration and imputation of Christ's alien righteousness to a be-

Osiander was thus ostracized and blacklisted because of his teaching that Christians could actually participate in Christ and his righteousness—that the saving work of Christ produces a genuine internal change in the believer's soul.

liever. Instead, he argued that righteousness comes from "Christ dwelling in us by faith." "God finds one righteous because Christ is in that person" was the foundation of his Christocentric doctrine of salvation.

Although Martin Luther had linked "union with Christ" (*unio cum Christo*) and justification in his earlier writings, his later thinking was influenced by the legal thought of Melancthon and others who insisted on the forensic ascription of Christ's righteousness to believers. After Luther died (1546), the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577) explicitly rejected any notion of Christ's indwelling in relation to justification. John Calvin had previously repudiated the teaching of Osiander in favor of a legally declared righteous condition or status before God.

Osiander was thus ostracized and blacklisted because of his teaching that Christians could actually participate in Christ and his righteousness—that the saving work of Christ produces a genuine internal change in the believer's soul.

It should be noted that Andreas Osiander was outspoken and "in-your-face" about his interpretations, and his "prickly" personality often created offense, but his biblical and theological conclusions were a necessary antidote to some of the basic formulations of the Protestant reformation that have persisted to this day (almost 500 years later). Subsequent ecclesiastical assessment of Osiander's contribution to the Reformation has

relegated him to the footnotes of Protestant theology, with an almost inevitable ascription of heretical heterodoxy.

Most Protestant leaders still have an aversion to any mention of Christians' subjective participation with the living Lord Jesus. Often when Christians come to a personal realization that the reality of Christian faith is the life of the indwelling Christ (see Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5), they often excitedly share their newfound awareness with the teachers or preachers of their

religious denominations, only to be cautioned or even chastised concerning the "questionable" nature of their assertions.

Let us not be hesitant to declare with Osiander, "God finds one righteous because Christ is in that person." □

Jim Fowler is a husband, father, grandfather, theologian, author and former pastor whose Christ in You ministry can be found at www.christinyou.com. Jim serves as PTM's theological consultant.

For Further Reading:

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