

The Reformation in Europe during the 16th century was one of the most important epochs in the history of the world. The Reformation gave us the Bible - now freely available in our own languages. The now almost universally acknowledged principles of religious freedom, liberty of conscience, the rule of law, separation of powers and constitutionally limited republics were unthinkable before the Reformation. The Reformers fought for the principles that Scripture alone is our final authority, Christ alone is the Head of the Church and Justification is by God's grace, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, received by faith alone.

Some influential developments which preceded the Reformation:

- The Black Death.** The Bubonic plague wiped out over one third of Europe's population.
- The invasion of Muslim Turks who swept over the Balkans and even reached the gates of Vienna.
- There was also a massive influx of pagan Greek humanistic writings (as a result of the fall of the Byzantine Empire). This led to a renaissance of pagan humanistic thinking.
- There was widespread corruption of the Roman Catholic system with superstitions and unBiblical doctrines taught and with positions in the church for sale - open to the highest bidder.
- People were also encouraged to "buy salvation" with the sale of Papal Indulgences.
- The invention of the printing press and the printing of the first book (a Bible) in 1456, by Johan Gutenberg, was one very positive development which made possible the rapid dissemination of Reformation doctrines.

Early Reformers

The Waldensians were a dynamic Gospel movement which was started in 1177. Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant, had the Gospels translated into French and organised a Society to present Biblical truth. The Waldensians desired to study the Scriptures and to be faithful to Biblical principles in all areas of life. They were eager for a more consistent walk following the example of Christ. These "poor men of Lyons" went out in two's and boldly proclaimed the Word of God throughout Southern France, Northern Italy and Switzerland. After the Bible was placed on **The Index of Forbidden Books** by the Council of Valencia in 1229, the Papacy began to viciously persecute the Waldensians. Many thousands were murdered.

The survivors fled to the southern Alps of western Piedmont and flourished there. Under relentless attack the Waldensians became resourceful soldiers and effectively resisted the tyranny. The persecution of the Waldensians only ended in the 17th Century when Oliver Cromwell of England intervened vigorously on their behalf. The Waldensians survive in Northern Italy to this day - the oldest Protestant church in the world.

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JOHN WYCLIFFE (1320-1384)

The plague led Wycliffe to search the Scriptures and find salvation in Christ. As a professor at Oxford University, Wycliffe represented England in a controversy with the Pope. Wycliffe championed the independence of England from Papal control and supported King Edward III's refusal to pay taxes to the Pope. (It was only one step away from denying the political supremacy of the Pope to questioning his spiritual supremacy).

The royal favour Wycliffe earned from this confrontation protected him later in life. Wycliffe then attacked the corruptions, superstitions and abuses of the friars and monks. He also declared the monasteries unbiblical and exposed their supposed powers to forgive sins as fraudulent. "Who can forgive sins?" Wycliffe taught: "God alone!" He also exposed indulgences, purgatory and transubstantiation as unbiblical heresies.

Wycliffe worked on translating the New Testament into English while a friend, Nicholas of Hereford, translated the Old Testament. Nicholas was excommunicated and imprisoned for his work. Then the divisions within the Roman Catholic Church and the election of two rival Popes distracted attention from Wycliffe's Reformation work.

Wycliffe mobilised lay preachers (Lollards) to travel throughout the land to read, preach and sing the Scriptures in English.

Summoned to appear before a council Wycliffe rebuked the bishops for being "priests of Baal," selling blasphemy and idolatry in the mass and indulgences. He then walked out of the assembly and refused a summons from the Pope.

(44 years after his death, Wycliffe's bones were dug up by order of the Pope and burned). Wycliffe's writings and example inspired Huss and Luther.

Wycliffe was the father of the Reformation ◆ its Morning Star

JOHN HUSS (1369-1415)

Scripture translations from persecuted Waldensian refugees entered Bohemia in the 13th Century. In 1382 when King Richard II of England married Anne of Bohemia (who had a great love for the Bible) she sent copies of Wycliffe's writings back to her homeland.

John Milic, archdeacon of the Cathedral in Prague, preached fearlessly against the abuses of the church and wrote "Antichrist has come" over a cardinal's doorway. He was imprisoned.

Conrad Stickna preached the Gospel in the open air to large crowds.

Matthew of Janov traveled throughout Bohemia preaching against the abuses of the church. His followers were imprisoned and burnt at the stake.

John Huss, was 34 when appointed Rector of Prague University. He also preached to the poor in the chapel of Bethlehem in Prague.

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12pt;">Huss translated Wycliffe's works into Czech, exposed superstitions, fraudulent "miracles" and the sale of indulgences. He was protected by the Emperor, Queen, University and nobility from the wrath of the Pope so the entire city was placed under an interdict (all churches closed, no marriages or burials allowed.)

A general church council was called at Constance (1414) to settle the issue of the rival Popes and Papal wars. Huss was summoned to answer charges of heresy and granted safe conduct.

Yet he was burned at the stake after a mockery of a trial. After Huss's martyrdom his followers organised military resistance to the Holy Roman Empire. Remarkably these vastly outnumbered Hussites repelled six crusades against them. These Hussites fought under Huss's motto: "truth conquers". They proved that one could take on the Holy Roman Empire - and survive!

JEROME SAVONAROLA (1452-1498)

Savonarola of Florence was a Dominican monk who boldly denounced the prevalent corruptions and immorality in the churches. He was burned at the stake. Savonarola was not a doctrinal Reformer but a social Reformer campaigning for moral standards and integrity.

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

Martin Luther was a distinguished law student who became an Augustinian monk and yearned for peace with God. He found it in studying the book of Romans. He received his doctorate in theology at age 28 and as a professor at the University of Wittenberg, he dealt with many primary issues:

- AUTHORITY** ♦ the **Bible alone** is our authority and not the councils or leaders of the church. Bible above tradition.
- SALVATION** ♦ is by the **grace** of God alone, accomplished by the **atonement** of Christ alone, received by **faith alone**. Grace before Sacraments.
- THE CHURCH** ♦ the true Church is composed of the **elect**, those **regenerated** by God's Holy Spirit. Regenerate Church membership.
- THE PRIESTHOOD** ♦ consists of **all true believers**. Priesthood of all believers.

The Protestant Reformation mobilised by Luther rallied around these battle cries:

- Sola Christus** ♦ Christ alone is the head of the Church.
- Sola Scriptura** ♦ Scripture alone is our authority.
- Sola Gratia** ♦ Salvation is by the Grace of God alone.
- Sola Fide** ♦

Justification is received by faith alone.

On 31 October 1517 ♦ Luther posted his [95 Theses](index.php/component/multicategories/article/255-the-95-theses) in Wittenberg, challenging the practice of indulgences. Soon printers were selling translations of his bold challenge to the papacy throughout Europe.

In 1520 ♦ Luther publicly burned the Papal bull threatening him with excommunication.

April 18, 1521 ♦ Luther stood firm before the Emperor, 6 Electors (Princes), 24 dukes, 30 archbishops and bishops and 7 ambassadors. His speech shook the world:

"Unless I am convinced by Scripture or clear reasoning that I am in error ♦ for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves ♦ I cannot recant, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen."

From this point for the rest of his life, Luther was an outlaw with a price on his head. He was protected in Saxony by Prince Frederick, but he was under sentence of death elsewhere.

Luther translated the Bible into German. (The New Testament was on sale for a weeks wages by 1522 and the Old Testament by 1534).

By the end of his life, Martin Luther had written over 60 000 pages of published works. Yet he said that he would rather "all my books would disappear and the Holy Scriptures alone be read!"

THE POWER OF PRINTING

The invention of the printing press played a key role in mobilising the Reformation. Without printing, it is questionable whether there would have even been a Protestant Reformation. A century earlier, Wycliffe and Huss had inspired dedicated movements for Bible study and Reform. But the absence of adequate printing technology severely limited the distribution of their writings. As a result, their ideas did not spread as rapidly or as far as they could have done.

Martin Luther recognised the power of printing to mobilise grass roots support for Reformation. Luther wrote prolifically ♦ more than 400 titles, including commentaries, sermons and pamphlets that attacked Catholic superstitions and abuses and which promoted Biblical doctrines. In the first three critical years after Luther posted his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, from 1517 to 1520, Luther published 30 pamphlets and flooded Germany with 400 000 copies. By 1523, half of all the printed works in Germany were Luther's works.

Luther understood that books and pamphlets speak long after the preacher has left the pulpit. Luther described printing as: "God's highest and extremist act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward."

John Foxe, the 16th century author of the "Book of Martyrs" wrote: "Although through might the pope stopped the mouth of John Huss, God has appointed the Press to preach,

whose voice the pope is never able to stop ♦" </p> <p>In 1517 there were about 24 printing centres in Europe. Wholesale booksellers had also developed distribution centres and hundreds of itinerant book salesmen criss-crossed the continent to make these publications available.</p> <p>Luther♦s writings dominated the market and were far and away the most popular. Martin Luther could be described as a pastor, preacher, teacher, theologian, professor, composer and Reformer. But perhaps his greatest achievement was the German Bible.</p> <p>When his New Testament in German was published in September 1522, it created a sensation. Five thousand copies were sold in the first 2 months alone! It was the first time a mass medium had ever impacted everyday life. And it was affordable ♦ even to the poor - for but a weeks wages! Almost everyone in Germany either read Luther♦s translation, or listened to it being read. It formed a linguistic rallying point for the formation of the modern German language. It♦s impact in restructuring literature, arts and culture was so awesome that King Frederick the Great later called Luther "the personification of the German national spirit". Even today, nearly half a millennium later, Luther is still considered "one of the most influential people who ever lived".</p> <p>Luther♦s Bible translation inspired and guided similar translations of the Bible into local languages in Holland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark and England. One of the many ways Luther left his mark was the order in which he placed the books of the Bible, to which we adhere to this day. Before Luther there had been no uniform arrangement. Luther♦s translations particularly guided William Tyndale in his translation of the Bible into English.</p> <p>Luther has sometimes been described as the world♦s first great journalist. Why did his writings succeed in changing history? Firstly, he wrote in the common language, instead of in the scholarly Latin ♦ which was only understood by the educated elite of society. Secondly, Luther mastered the use of broadside pamphlets, which were cheap and easy to read, and thirdly, he used some of the finest illustrations and woodcuts of the times to make his message understood even to the semi literate.</p> <p>Luther showed the way and other Reformers continued his work of using print technology to mass-produce Scriptures and Reformation publications. By God♦s grace, the Printing Press provided the spiritual weaponry needed to make the Reformation succeed</p> <p>
</p> <h3>ULRICH ZWINGLI (1484-1531) </h3> <p>As a young Catholic priest Zwingli began to study the Bible. He taught himself Hebrew and Greek and memorised Paul♦s epistles in the Greek New Testament. Zwingli was shocked to find that there was a world of difference between the teaching of the Bible and the teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic church. In 1519 Zwingli began to systematically preach through the New Testament - beginning with the Gospel of Matthew. He opposed indulgences and preached the Gospel. He also secretly married! Zwingli laid the foundations for the Reformation in Switzerland. In 1523 the City Council of Zurich voted to become Protestant by supporting Zwingli♦s reforms. He died fighting to defend Zurich from attack in the battle of Kappel in 1531. His last words were: "They can kill the body - but not the soul!"</p> <p></p>

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</p> <h3>JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)</h3>
<p>John Calvin was a distinguished law student, strict and severe in manner, who was forced to flee persecution in France. For years he lived under alias♦s and moved constantly to avoid arrest. He became the great Reformer of Geneva. Recruited by William Farel♦s forcefully insistance, he became the first to systematically expound Reformed theology through daily sermons and lectures which worked verse by verse through the whole Bible.</p> <p>Calvin taught "the whole counsel of God" including: the Sovereignty of God in predestination, the Grace of God in His irresistible call, and the Lordship of Christ in all areas of social, economic, judicial, political and moral life.</p> <p>His Institutes (which began as a letter to the King of France) developed into the most comprehensive and influential book on the Christian Faith ever published.</p> <p>Pope Pius iv, the Roman pontiff at the time of Calvin♦s death, provided a telling eulogy on his arch enemy: "The strength of that heretic (Calvin) consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants my dominian would extend from sea to sea."</p> <p>Theadore Beza, Calvin♦s successor, testified: "I have been a witness of him for sixteen years and I think that I am fully entitled to say that in this man (Calvin) there was exhibited to all an example of the life and death of the Christian, such as it will not be easy to depreciate, and it will be difficult to imitate."</p> <p>Calvin has been described as "one of the greatest and best of men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity." John Knox described Geneva under Calvin♦s influence as "the best school of Christ since the Apostles". Calvin♦s motto was "Promptly and sincerely in the work of God."</p> <p>
</p> <h3>WILLIAM FAREL (1489 - 1565)</h3> <p>An aggressive and bold man of extraordinary zeal, Farel as a missionary from Bern, won whole towns and cities in French speaking Switzerland over to the Reformed Faith, by public speaking and debate. Farel compelled Calvin to stay and work for Reformation in Geneva with threats that he would pray for God to curse his studies if he refused! Farel was probably Calvin♦s closest friend through the years.</p> <p>
</p> <h3>PIERRE VIRET (1511 - 1571)</h3> <p>Born in Switzerland, Pierre Viret with Farel and Calvin, formed the triumvirate who established the Reformed Church in French speaking Switzerland. Viret was a bold and effective debater who, with Farel, in the marathon debate of June 1535 routed the Catholic clergy and inspired the city council of Geneva to commit itself to the Protestant cause. Viret survived numerous attempts on his life, including poisoning. Under Viret, Lausanne was well grounded in the Protestant faith and flourished as a centre of Reformation and social concern. He undertook missionary tours to Catholic France, preaching to huge crowds of thousands. Riots frequently followed his preaching. At one point he was captured by Catholic forces and needed to be rescued by Protestant forces. Viret was considered the most popular French

preacher in 16th century France.

WILLIAM TYNDALE (1494 - 1536)

Tyndale was a gifted scholar and linguist who managed to translate the New Testament from the original Greek, and most of the Old Testament from Hebrew, into English. He had these (illegal) Scriptures printed in Germany and smuggled the contraband into England in bales of cotton. For this he was burned at the stake in 1536. Tyndale's Bible was the first Bible printed in English. His last words were: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." This prayer was answered in a most incredible way as Queen Anne was converted and studied Tyndale's book "The Obedience of the Christian Man" and his New Testament. Henry VIII later ordered English Bibles placed in every church in England. These Bibles were almost entirely the work of William Tyndale.

JOHN KNOX (1505-1572)

John Knox was imprisoned and made to serve as a galley slave for opposing Roman Catholicism. He boldly and regularly confronted Mary the Queen of Scotland and transformed Roman Catholic Scotland into a thoroughly Reformed nation. Queen Mary, trembling and in tears, declared: "I am more afraid of the prayers of John Knox than of an army of ten thousand." John Knox's famous prayer: "Give me Scotland or I die!" was thoroughly answered in his lifetime. Yet Knox considered the work of Reformation incomplete until the laws of the land were brought into conformity to the Word of God in the Bible.

The Huguenots

By 1562 there were approximately 2 million Protestants and 1250 Reformed churches in France. At one time, most of the nobles and about a third of the population in France were Protestants (or Huguenots.)

Vicious Persecution of Protestant Christians by the Roman Catholics (such as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 in France when over 22 000 were murdered and the slaughter of over 100 000 Protestants in the Low Countries between 1567-1573) shattered Protestantism in France, Belgium, Austria, Spain, Italy and other Catholic controlled nations. Many of the survivors fled to North America and South Africa - spreading the Reformed faith to those countries.

The Reformed Faith was firmly established and strengthened in Germany, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and later in the North American Colonies and South Africa.

The heritage of the Reformation includes: religious freedom, liberty of conscience, free enterprise, Lex Rex (the rule of law), separation of powers and constitutionally limited republics.

"The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:17

"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that

point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, then I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." Martin Luther</p> <p>
</p> <p>Dr. Peter Hammond</p>