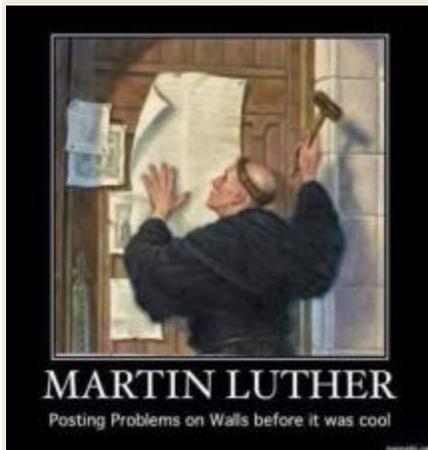


# The Goose & The Swan

by Pastor Fran Pultro

Halloween is also the anniversary of the Reformation, also called the Protestant Reformation.

When we think of the Reformation the name Martin Luther is prominent. He is credited with having started the Reformation and dividing the world. The 16th century world in which he lived was also divided about Martin Luther.



One Catholic thought Martin Luther was a “demon in the appearance of a man.”

Another who first questioned Luther’s theology later declared, “He alone is right!”

But today as we celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation, the verdict is almost unanimous to the good. Protestants, along with many Catholics, affirm that Martin Luther was not only right about much, but that his work changed the course of Western history for the better.

There are usually two greatly opposing opinions about the Protestant Reformation. These two opposing viewpoints underscore how little many today understand of the reason for, or the impact of the Reformation. Even among historians the Reformation is one of those things everybody’s heard of but nobody really quite understands.

Was it...

- the culmination of centuries of Catholic corruption, or a bit of a fluke?
- the consequence of a European power vacuum, or grand theological debate?
- a reasonable quest for a son & heir, or simply a result of Henry VIII’s lustful nature?

All of these things were present. They were all necessary for the changes which took place in European Christianity & Western Culture. But the Reformation was not as simple as the presence of any or all of these factors. If it was, there would be little mystery as to how and why it changed Christian practice around the globe.

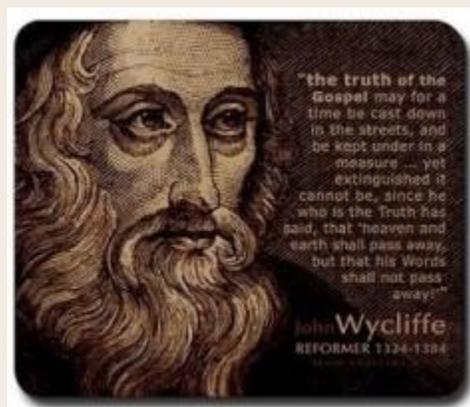
Even among Christians today few understand what the Reformation actually was and what it meant to the spread of the Gospel. This is sad because sharing the Gospel is the primary mission Christ gave to the Church before He ascended back into Heaven.

## Beginnings

The story of the Reformation really began over 100 years before Martin Luther. At that time the Papacy began to suffer the effects of hundreds of years of compromise. The Great Schism saw two and even three individuals claiming to be the Pope. The Council of Constance in the early 15th century saw a power struggle between bishops & Pope. This led early 16th century popes to resist reform & strengthen their political positions by using spiritual power combined with the force of war, to become territorial princes in Italy.

Into this corrupt atmosphere, our loving God placed & called certain men who would set the stage for what Martin Luther would one day ignite.

There were many great reformers during the Renaissance in Europe. They compared the scriptures to their church's teachings and discovered significant problems. When the movement began most of them were in the clergy of the Catholic Church, which was the only large & organized Christian denomination there at that time. Nearly every one of them wanted only to "reform" the church – to get it back to the original principles found in the Word of God. But when that effort met incredible resistance, the many Protestant churches began to form.



## John Wycliffe

Wycliffe, translated some of first versions of Bible into English. He was an early critic of the Papacy & the power of the clergy. He placed greater emphasis on scripture, advocating Bible-centered Christianity.



**Jan Hus**

Hus was a Czech theologian, born in Bohemia. He agreed with what were seen as the radical reforms of Wycliffe. Hus also criticized many teachings of the Catholic of Church. He was burned at the stake for heresy. But his teachings and martyrdom spread throughout Czech lands creating a strong reformation movement.



**Desiderius Erasmus**

Erasmus was a Catholic priest and respected scholar. Although he remained a Catholic all his life, he wanted to see the Church reform. His ideas were influential to the Reformation.



**Martin Luther**

Luther worked to reform the Roman Catholic Church. He believed it had been corrupted and had lost its original focus.



**Huldrych / Ulrich Zwingli**

Zwingli figured prominently in the Reformation in Switzerland and Europe. He proposed many reforms to the Catholic church based on the primacy of the Bible. He was very influenced by his Renaissance education and by the works of Erasmus.



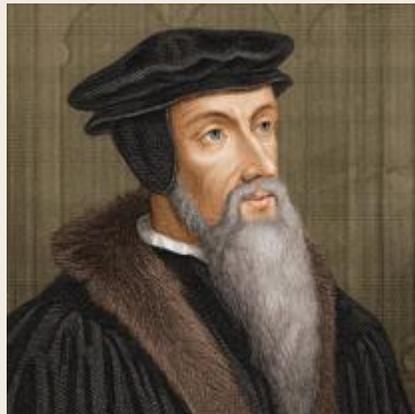
**Thomas Cranmer**

Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury during reign of Henry VIII, Edward VI & Mary I. He was a major figure in the English Reformation, reducing the influence of the Papacy and writing an English Common Book of Prayer.



**William Tyndale**

Tyndale was one of the first people to print the Bible in English. He worked at translating the Bible into English even when it was illegal to do so. Henry VIII was the king when Tyndale was executed. Ironically, Henry VIII took up Tyndale's English Bible when he broke from the Roman Catholic church.



**John Calvin**

Calvin was a French Protestant reformer. He broke from the Roman Catholic Church in 1530, writing influential Christian works which supported the Protestant reformation.



**Johannes Gutenberg**

Gutenberg invented the printing press around 1440. Do not underestimate it's importance to the religious materials printed in support of the Reformation.

So where we attribute the Reformation mainly to Martin Luther, we see that the Lord had been working among believers for centuries as He raised men to set the stage for what Luther would one day cause to explode throughout the world.

Like building a fire before lighting the match, the Lord built the foundation then used Luther to ignite what would purge the practice of corrupt Christianity, as He began bringing His Bride back to her roots.

Old wineskins would not be used. Instead new wineskins would contain the work of Christ as human history marched forward.

Mark 2:22 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost as well as the skins. No, new wine is put into fresh wineskins."

## **Imperfect Vessels**

None of these men were perfect. They had strong biases – “issues” as we’d say today. Luther’s anti-Semitism is well known. But the Church doesn’t have any perfect people. It is filled with repentant and forgiven sinners.

These men were no different. Yet the very things that made up their lives and characters were used by God to move the Church towards a more pure worship and understanding of Him.

## **Indulgences**

The proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” for Martin Luther, was the sale of indulgences. It wasn’t the only problem Luther saw. But it was what rubbed his “fur” so far in the wrong direction that it was the catalyst used by God to move him to action.

The unrestricted sale of indulgences by pardoners was a widespread abuse during the later Middle Ages.

What is an indulgence? For those not raised in the Roman Catholic Church, an indulgence is a grant by the Pope of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution.

“Purgatory” is a place or state of punishment where, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the souls of those who die in God’s grace may make payment for past sins and so become fit for heaven. Sort of a “painful rest stop” on the highway to heaven.

Of course this flies in opposition to the clear teaching of the Bible - that Jesus’ payment on the cross for the sin of mankind was sufficient for the sins of all of mankind.

Without writing an entire blog about this topic, when Jesus Who was God in the flesh said, “It is finished,” He meant “It is finished” – the payment to redeem the world back to God was paid in full. There is no need for another payment to be made, especially by those who are not able to make the payments.

## **Luther’s 95 Theses**

So what did Martin Luther do on Oct 31, 1517? He posted 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenburg Cathedral. These 95 items were things he believed to be at odds with God’s will as expressed in God’s Word.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.

95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (Acts 14:22).

Note that Luther began with repentance and ended with confidence of heaven.

***without the knowledge of sin the good news of the Gospel is weak and ineffective***

This is critical for believers living in any age, especially in an age where people hate to be informed that they are sinners in need of repentance. But without the knowledge of sin the good news of the Gospel is weak and ineffective.

***If no one believes they are in need of a Savior they won't repent of their sins.***

The very word "gospel" means good news. But it's only good news if there is bad news with which to compare it. If no one believes they are in need of a Savior they won't see a need to repent of their sins.

If we were to post these same 95 Theses on door of churches today - whether Catholic of any other church that has wandered from the truths of Scripture - we'd be labeled as bigots and accused of hate crimes.

Luther's era wasn't any different than our own - and he knew it. So he addressed the hatred part in his 4th Thesis:

4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Not repenting is hatred of self. Non repentance prevents you from entering Heaven.

He quickly got to the area of indulgences in Thesis #8.

8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.

## **Indulgences**

Many of Luther's theses have to do with the sale of indulgences.

11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (Mt 13:25).

I love that Luther always brought the Scriptures to bear on his beliefs. He lived what he taught – sola scriptura! (Latin for 'by Scripture alone')

The result? Martin Luther "went viral" before "going viral" was invented!

## **Questions for Today**

Questions arise today in our age as the world pushes for tolerance of all religious beliefs.

Is Christianity too narrow & intolerant of other religions? (Yet no one asks the same question of the other religions which feel just as strongly about the narrowness of their beliefs.)

Was the Reformation truly of God, since it supports the narrow beliefs that Christ alone is the way to Heaven and the Bible alone is the Word of God?

## **God's Hand?**

Are there any "fingerprints of the Holy Spirit" on the Reformation, or was it merely the revolt of discontented men?

I believe there are many touches of God the Holy Spirit evident in the Reformation.

1. The Gospel was recovered from superstition & error

2. The 5 core beliefs of Sola Scriptura (scripture alone), Sola Fide (by faith alone), Sola Gratia (by grace alone), Solus Christus (by Christ alone) & Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone) were recovered and placed before the people biblically, replacing works-based religion, the selling of relics, the selling of indulgences to get out of purgatory, praying to saints instead of to God, and no access to God's Word in their own language.

3. The Reformation literally changed the world.

**But are these things enough for even blvrs to understand that God's hand was behind the Reformation?**



### **The Swan & the Goose**

When you see paintings of Martin Luther, in some of the old paintings you will see a swan somewhere in the picture because he was known as the Swan. And if you look closely in the dark background you will see a Goose, his hero, John Hus.

What does this have to do with God's hand being on the Reformation?

In God's Word we see occasions where God used unbelievers to speak prophetically.

One that sticks out to us as Christians is the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas.

John 11:49-51 "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

Today the canon of Scripture is closed. The Bible is complete. Although Scripture is no longer being written down, we know that God continues to work in the lives of all men. Should we be surprised to see events happening which are similar to events seen in Scripture?

Here is a series of such events which today's believers should know about.

Earlier I mentioned John Hus (Jan Hus/John Huss). He was born in Husinec ("Goose Town"), Bohemia, from which he gets his surname (Hus means "Goose").

In 1394, Anne of Bohemia, the wife of King Richard II of England returned to Prague after her husband's death. She & her attendants had been influenced by John Wycliffe's Reformation in England.

In his early 20's, Hus read Wycliffe's works, caught the vision, and decided to reform the church in Bohemia. He became a scholar, receiving a master's degree in 1396. He was ordained to the priesthood and became rector of the Bethlehem Chapel in 1402. There he began teaching his ideas to reform the Catholic Church to follow the Bible. He wrote a tractate called "Six Errors" & tacked it to the church door of the Bethlehem Chapel. Tacking your thesis on the door of a church was standard academic practice in those days.

Sound familiar? 100 yrs later, Martin Luther, would expand these 6 to 95.

In 1405 Pope Innocent ordered Hus to stop teaching. Instead, God worked out events that caused Hus to be promoted to rector of the entire university! In that position he had great influence.

Some of Hus' writings were burned as the situation became more and more tense. Then the Pope ordered indulgences to be sold in Prague. Hus passionately denounced this practice. The attack on Hus by the Pope and Archbishop caused riots in parts of Bohemia. In spite of this the Bohemian government sided with Hus. Hus fled Prague in order to save the city from certain attack by the Pope's armies. But while in exile he wrote his most important work in which he claimed the Church was founded on Christ, not Peter.

He was excommunicated in 1412 for insubordination. But that didn't slow him down much. On 18 October 1412 he appealed to Jesus Christ as the supreme judge. By appealing directly to the highest Christian authority, Christ himself, Hus bypassed the laws and structures of the medieval Church.

In Oct 1414, he was summoned to trial at Constance, Germany on the charge of heresy.

At his trial, when asked to deny his published statements, he agreed to do so only if they could be proven wrong by the Bible. He was given many chances to recant but refused.

He was judged guilty of heresy and sentenced to be burned at the stake. As the fire was being lit on that day in July 1415, John Hus gave an inspired prophecy.

As the official executioner was about to light the wood at Hus' feet, the Bishop of Constance, said, "Now we will cook the goose" (remember, in Bohemian, Hus means 'goose').

“Yes”, replied Hus, “but there will come a swan in 100 years that you will not be able to silence.”

To which the Bishop of Constance replied, “Over my dead body.”

100 years later a monk by the name of Martin Luther was ordained. In those days the ordination required the candidate to lay prostrate on the floor and spread his arms out in the form of a cross...or a flying bird.

Luther did this, stretching his arms out as wide as he could while lying flat on his stomach on the floor in the position of ordination.

The place was a little church in Erfurt, Germany. Remember, it was to Germany where Hus had been summoned for his trial.

Like many churches at that time in history, this church contained the crypts of past priests and bishops. Luther was lying prostrate on one such crypt which happened to be the grave of the Bishop of Constance, who had sentenced John Hus to death 100 yrs earlier.

***The Swan had arrived and was ordained on the grave of the bishop who sentenced the Goose to be cooked. Luther was ordained literally “over his dead body” – just as that bishop had prophesied!***

Do not think these little things to be mere coincidences. Our God truly is awesome. He works in the lives of men whether they like it, whether they believe it or not. He also works in the lives of believers. Would that we would have willing hearts of passion that plead with Him to work through each of us regardless of the consequences of serving Him in this fallen world.

Today, just as in the times of the 1st century Church, we need to guard the faith, ‘once delivered to the Saints’ [Jude 1:3] and recovered by the Reformers 500 years ago.

Every Halloween, we have much more to give thanks for than simply large quantities of candy. The Reformation called mankind back to believing the Word of God over the words of man.

For that we have the Reformers to thank for restoring to us the Word of God.



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