The Significance of the Reformation

This week's lesson involves more reading, so we have divided it up over four days instead of the usual three. Please begin your study early in the week.

On Sunday, Pastor Bret will close out the Elders' *The Five Solas of the Reformation* series with a sermon on "The Significance of the Reformation." During the month of October, *Desiring God* has been posting short biographical sketches on several of the key individuals involved in the Reformation. For this week's homework, we will be considering the example of some of the reformers highlighted so far in their "Here We Stand" website posts.

We have provided the biographical sketches for this homework at the end of this packet. You can find the full series of biographical sketches at *www.desiringgod.org/series/here-we-stand*. We encourage you to read the rest of the biographies in the coming days, but our class discussions will focus on the ones listed below.

❖ Homework Structure

Names like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli quickly come to mind when thinking about the origins of the Protestant Reformation, but these men were not alone in their convictions. In reading through the brief biographical sketches of some of the other men and women engaged in the leading the Reformation, some consistent themes emerge.

Several of these themes are listed on the following pages. As you read the biographical sketches listed for each day (provided at the end of the homework packet), record how you see these people living out these themes, and come to class prepared to discuss your observations.

❖ Day 1

Review the themes on pages 2-5. Read the biographical sketches of John Wycliffe, Peter Waldo, Jan Hus, and William Tyndale, then record your observations under each theme.

❖ Day 2

Review the themes on pages 2-5. Read the biographical sketches of Philip Melanchthon, Menno Simons, Marie Dentière, and Ulrich Zwingli, then record your observations under each theme.

❖ Day 3

Review the themes on pages 2-5. Read the biographical sketches of Johannes Oecolampadius, Wolfgang Capito, Martin Bucer, and Wibrandis Rosenblatt, then record your observations under each theme.

❖ Day 4

Review the themes on pages 2-5. Read the biographical sketches of Peter Martyr Vermigli, Thomas Becon, Thomas Cranmer, and Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, then record your observations under each theme.

❖ Reformation Themes

THE BIBLE FOR ALL: a conviction that the Bible should be accessible to all people in the common languages, and the amazing things that happened when people began to study the Scriptures

THE TRUE GOSPEL: recovering the true gospel from the Scriptures that sinful men are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone

LOYALTY TO CHRIST: the determination to remain loyal to Christ over all other potential loyalties (family, country, etc.) even at the cost of comfort, stability, and life itself

TRANSLATING DOCTRINE INTO DAILY LIFE: seeking to live out the implications of biblical teachings in real daily life

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS: the necessity of believers supporting and encouraging each other

COOPERATION AND DISAGREEMENT: working together in areas of common interpretation, seeking to instruct in areas of differing interpretations, and navigating the conflicts that emerge

GOD'S GRACE IN THE MIDST OF MAN'S IMPERFECTIONS: God using these faithful ones in spite of their failings, missteps, and errors

GOD'S SOVEREIGN AND POWERFUL HAND: God using their seemingly small faithful actions to reach beyond all expectation

In preparation for Sunday, pray that by God's grace we will be taught by the Scriptures, will live in accordance with them, and will be loyal to Christ above all else.

❖ Biographical Sketches

John Wycliffe, c. 1330–1384

The Morning Star of the Reformation, by Stephen Nichols

John Wycliffe has been called "The Morning Star of the Reformation." The morning star is not actually a star, but the planet Venus, which appears before the sun rises and while darkness still dominates the horizon. The morning star is unmistakably visible.

Darkness dominated the horizon in the fourteenth century, the century of Wycliffe, who was born in 1330 and died in 1384, almost exactly one hundred years before Luther was born. By his teenage years, Wycliffe was at Oxford. Thomas Bradwardine (known as "Doctor Profundus") taught theology and William of Ockham (famous for "Ockham's Razor") taught philosophy. Before long, Wycliffe took his own place among the faculty. Appointed the Master of Balliol College, Wycliffe lectured and wrote in the field of philosophy. But the tug of biblical studies pulled on him. He applied himself rigorously to the study of theology and Scripture. As he did, he realized how much the church had veered off in so many wrong directions.

Setting the Stage

In the 1370s, he produced three significant works as countermeasures to the church's corruption. The first one, *On Divine Dominion* (1373–1374), took aim at papal authority. Wycliffe was at a loss to find biblical warrant for the papacy. In fact, he argued that the papacy conflicts with and obscures the church's true authority, Scripture. The second major work was *On Civil Dominion* (1375–1376). Here Wycliffe targeted the Roman Catholic Church's assertion of authority over the English crown and English nobility. He saw no reason for England to be obliged to support a corrupt church. In his third major work, *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture* (1378), he further developed the doctrine of the authority of Scripture.

These three works were crucial to setting the stage for the Reformation. Two faculty members visiting at Oxford returned with Wycliffe's writings to their home city of Prague, which in turn influenced Jan Hus. He would consequently go on to be a second "Morning Star" of the Reformation. Martin Luther's early writings reveal the fingerprints of John Wycliffe. Yet, as important as these works are, they pale in comparison to his most important contribution, the Wycliffe Bible.

Reformation Began with Translation

In *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*, Wycliffe called for the Bible to be translated into English. According to Roman Catholic law, translating the Bible into a vulgar, common language was a heresy punishable by death. It is almost impossible to imagine why a church would want to keep God's word from people, unless that church wanted to hold power over the people. Wycliffe was more convinced of the power of the word of God than the power wielded by the papal office. Consequently, he and a group of colleagues committed themselves to making the word of God available.

Not only did the Bible need to be translated; it also had to be copied and distributed. This was before the printing press (invented in 1440), so copies had to be made painstakingly by hand. Despite the challenges, hundreds of the Bibles were produced and distributed to Wycliffe's troop of pastors, who preached across England as the word of God made its way to the people. Wycliffe's followers came to be called Lollards. They were enclaves of reform not only in England, but across Europe.

These efforts in translating, copying, and proclaiming the Bible in English were driven by a singular motive, expressed by Wycliffe this way: "It helps Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue which they know best." In his final years, Wycliffe endured falling out of favor with the church and nobility in England. Of course, he had long ago fallen out of favor with the pope. Yet, Wycliffe declared, "I am ready to defend my convictions even unto death." He remained convinced of the authority and centrality of Scripture and devoted to his life's calling to help Christians study the Bible. Having suffered two strokes, John Wycliffe died on December 30, 1384.

"Heretic" and Hero

In 1415, the Council of Constance, which condemned Jan Hus to death, declared Wycliffe a heretic. His bones were exhumed and burned and the ashes were put into the River Swift.
But the reforming efforts of Wycliffe could not be quenched by the flames or stopped by a council's declarations. This Morning Star shone brightly against the horizon, signaling the soon coming of daylight.

Peter Waldo, died by 1218

The First Tremor, by Jon Bloom

More than three hundred years before Martin Luther was born, an unlikely reformer suddenly appeared in the city of Lyon in southeast France. His protests against doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church were strong tremors foretelling the coming spiritual earthquake called the Reformation. And the movement he launched survived to join the great Reformation. He is known to history as Peter Waldo.

Many details about Waldo are not known, including his name. We don't know if *Peter* was his real first name, since it doesn't appear in any document until 150 years after his death. His last name was most likely something like *Valdès* or *Vaudès* — *Valdo* (Waldo) was the Italian adaptation. We also don't know the year Peter was born or the precise year he died — historians disagree over whether he died between 1205 and 1207 or between 1215 and 1218. But we do know a few earthshaking things.

A Rich Ruler Repents

In 1170, Waldo was a very wealthy, well-known merchant in the city of Lyon. He had a wife, two daughters, and lots of property. But something happened — some say he witnessed the sudden death of a friend, others say he heard a spiritual song of a traveling minstrel — and Waldo became deeply troubled over the spiritual state of his soul and desperate to know how he could be saved.

The first thing he resolved was to read the Bible. But since it only existed in the Latin Vulgate, and his Latin was poor, he hired two scholars to translate it into the vernacular so he could study it.

Next, he sought spiritual counsel from a priest, who pointed him to the rich young ruler in the Gospels and quoted Jesus: "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Jesus's words pierced Waldo's heart. Like the rich young ruler, Waldo suddenly realized he had been serving Mammon, not God. But unlike the rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus, Waldo repented and did exactly what Jesus said: he gave away all he had to the poor (after making adequate provision for his wife and daughters). From that point on, he determined to live in complete dependence on God for his provision.

A Movement Is Born

Waldo immediately began to preach from his Bible in the streets of Lyon, especially to the poor. Many were converted, and by 1175 a sizable group of men and women had become Waldo's disciples. They too gave away their possessions and were preaching (women as well as men). The people started calling them the "Poor of Lyons." Later, as the group grew into a movement and spread throughout France and other parts of Europe, they became known as "The Waldensians."

The more Waldo studied Scripture, the more troubled he became over certain doctrines, practices, and governing structures of the Catholic Church — not to mention its wealth. And he boldly spoke out against these things. But since the Church officially prohibited lay preaching, Waldo and his ragtag band drew opposition from church leaders.

A Sign to Be Opposed

The Archbishop of Lyons was particularly irked by this uneducated, self-appointed reform movement and moved to squash it. But in 1179, Waldo appealed directly to Pope Alexander III and received his approval. However, only five years later the new pope, Lucius III, sided with the archbishop and excommunicated Waldo and his followers. In the earlier years, the Waldensian movement was a reform movement. Waldo never intended to leave the church, and he held to numerous traditional Catholic doctrines. But after the

excommunication, and continuing beyond Waldo's death, the Waldensian's Protestant-like convictions increased and solidified.

- They rejected all claims to authority besides Scripture.
- They rejected all mediators between God and man, except the man Christ Jesus (though Mary was venerated for quite a while).
- They rejected the doctrine that only a priest could hear confession, and argued that all believers were qualified.
- They rejected purgatory, and thus rejected indulgences and prayers for the dead.
- They believed the only Scripture-sanctioned sacraments were baptism and communion.
- They rejected the Church's emphasis on fast and feast days and eating restrictions.
- They rejected the priestly and monastic caste system.
- They rejected the veneration of relics, pilgrimages, and the use of holy water.
- They rejected the pope's claim to authority over earthly rulers.
- They eventually rejected the apostolic succession of the pope.

The Pre-Reformation Joins the Reformation

Despite the excommunication and Waldo's death, the Waldensian movement continued to grow for quite a while. It spread into northern Italy and regions of Spain, Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Poland. But the Roman Catholic persecution also continued and grew in severity, till by the fifteenth century, the Waldensian ranks had shrunk into small, obscure communities in the alpine valleys of France and Italy. But when the Protestant Reformation burst on the scene in the sixteenth century, most Waldensians became Protestants.

Peter Waldo was proto-Protestant, though he didn't know it. He was a merchant turned prophet who simply believed in the word of God with all his heart, which he demonstrated with all his life. And in taking God at his word, Waldo turned his world upside down.

Jan Hus, c. 1369–1415

The Goosefather, by Greg Morse

On December 17, 1999, the pope issued the ceremonial equivalent of a modern apology: "Our bad." John Paul II addressed a crowd in the Czech Republic, expressing "deep regret for the cruel death" inflicted upon their hero. "Deep regrets" were the very least the Catholic Church could offer.

Sealed with Blood

Lured to the Council of Constance under the promise of safety, Jan Hus was immediately thrown into prison for six months, given a mock trial, and ordered to recant — which he refused. In July 1415, he was stripped naked, adorned with a dunce hat painted with devils and labeled "Arch-Heretic" — all as he prayed for his enemies.

They then led him past a burning pile of his books and chained him to the stake. In response to being chained up like a dog, he said, "My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this one for my sake, so why should I be ashamed of this rusty chain?" They told him once more to recant, but he refused, proclaiming, "What I taught with my lips I will now seal with my blood." And that he did.

As the flames climbed higher, he sang. The secretary of the council pronounced, "O curse'd Judas, because thou hast abandoned the pathways of peace, and hast counselled with the Jews, we take away from thee the cup of redemption." Thankfully, the Catholic Church did not have the authority to take the cup of redemption that day.

After his death, outrage filled Bohemia. In his name, followers revolted against Rome in violent protest that lasted for over a decade. Jan Hus was a preacher, a political figure, a prophet, a proto-Reformer, and a martyr of the first class.

Wycliffe's Bulldog

Around 1369, a goose was born in gooseland. Jan Hus (Czech for *goose*) was born in Hussinec (Czech for *gooseland*) in the Kingdom of Bohemia. Born into a poor family, the goose left the gaggle for the priesthood

in search of a better living and prestige. He came to be a renowned preacher at Bethlehem Chapel, but spent much of his time serving in academia as the dean of the philosophical faculty in Prague. Living in a time of social unrest between German speakers and Czech citizens, Hus became a key figure for Czech nationalism.

Hus lived in a time when immorality infected the priesthood of the Catholic Church. He soon began preaching "violent sermons" against the rampant iniquity of the clergy until they reported him to the archbishop and had him banned from preaching. As Hus read Scripture and watched the popes of his day abuse their power, he concluded that papal authority was not ultimate. He needed a sturdier foundation than was built from the straw and sticks of men's opinion — no matter how highly regarded those men were. He built his life and ministry on the word of God.

His views about Scripture's ultimate authority were set ablaze as he began to read the condemned works of John Wycliffe. Wycliffe found a loyal disciple in Hus. Hus defended his works with such tenacity that one historian called Hus "Wycliffe's bulldog" (*The Unquenchable Flame*, 30). He staunchly argued against indulgences, advocated for both the bread and the wine to be served in communion, and preached in the common language (as opposed to the untranslated Latin of the day).

Although still in agreement with the Catholic Church on matters such as the Mass, his allegiance to the teachings of Wycliffe got him excommunicated, tried for heresy, and burned alive.

The Geese Are Not Silent

After Hus was finally condemned to death, he proclaimed, "You may roast the goose, but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence." Exactly 102 years later, a sprightly monk nailed ninety-five theses to Wittenberg's door.

He too, seeing the discrepancy between Roman doctrine and Scripture, sought to reform the Catholic Church. He too was led to challenge the pope. And he too was condemned as a heretic. During the Leipzig Debate, Luther was disparagingly condemned as a "Hussite." He rejected the title in the moment, but took time to read his works during an intermission, returned, and commended the teaching of the condemned Hus. Luther was Hus's swan, and would later own the association. He's often painted with swans to this day.

The Goosefather, a prominent forerunner to the Reformers, stood his ground and was martyred. The Swan followed the Goose, and Rome still has not silenced him.

William Tyndale, c. 1494–1536

The Underground Translator, by John Piper

In the early 1530s, an English merchant named Stephen Vaughan was commissioned to find William Tyndale and inform him that King Henry VIII desired him to return from hiding on the Continent. In a letter dated June 19, 1531, Vaughan wrote about Tyndale (1494–1536) these simple words: "I find him always singing one note."

That one note was this: Will the King of England give his official endorsement to a vernacular Bible for all his English subjects? If not, Tyndale would not come. If so, Tyndale would give himself up to the king and never write another book.

The king refused. And Tyndale never went to his homeland again. Instead, if the king and the Roman Catholic Church would not provide a printed Bible in English for the common man to read, Tyndale would, even if it cost him his life. Which it did.

Plowboys Will Know Their Bible

When Tyndale was 28 years old in 1522, he was serving as a tutor in the home of John Walsh in Gloucestershire, England, spending most of his time studying Erasmus's Greek New Testament, which had been printed just six years before in 1516.

Increasingly, as Tyndale saw Reformation truths more clearly in the Greek New Testament, he made himself suspect in the Catholic house of John Walsh. John Foxe tells us that one day an exasperated Catholic scholar at dinner with Tyndale said, "We were better be without God's law than the pope's."

In response, Tyndale spoke his famous words, "I defy the Pope and all his laws. . . . If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

One-Note Crescendo

Four years later, Tyndale finished the English translation of the Greek New Testament in Worms, Germany, and began to smuggle it into England in bales of cloth. By October 1526, Bishop Tunstall had banned the book in London, but the print run had been at least three thousand. And the books were getting to the people. Over the next eight years, five pirated editions were printed as well.

In 1534, Tyndale published a revised New Testament, having learned Hebrew in the meantime, probably in Germany, which helped him better understand the connections between the Old and New Testaments. Biographer David Daniell calls this 1534 New Testament "the glory of his life's work" (*William Tyndale*, 316). If Tyndale was "always singing one note," this was the crescendo of the song of his life — the finished and refined New Testament in English.

For the first time ever in history, the Greek New Testament was translated into English. Before his martyrdom in 1536, Tyndale would go on to translate into clear, common English not only the New Testament but also the Pentateuch, Joshua to 2 Chronicles, and Jonah. All this material became the basis of the *Great Bible* issued by Miles Coverdale in England in 1539 and the basis for the *Geneva Bible* published in 1557 — "the Bible of the nation," which sold over a million copies between 1560 and 1640.

Bible Translation, Gospel Truth

What drove Tyndale to sing one note all his life? It was the rock-solid conviction that all humans were in bondage to sin, blind, dead, damned, and helpless, and that God had acted in Christ to provide salvation by grace through faith. This is what lay hidden in the Latin Scriptures and the church system of penance and merit. This is why the Bible had to be translated, and ultimately this is why Tyndale was martyred. He wrote,

> Faith the mother of all good works justifieth us, before we can bring forth any good work: as the husband marryeth his wife before he can have any lawful children by her. (*William Tyndale*, 156–57)

Man is lost, spiritually dead, condemned. God is sovereign, Christ is sufficient, faith is all. Bible translation and Bible truth were inseparable for Tyndale, and in the end it was the truth — especially the truth of justification by faith alone — that ignited Britain with Reformed fire and then brought the death sentence to this Bible translator.

In October 1536, at only 42 years of age, Tyndale's one-note voice was silenced as he was tied to the stake, strangled by the executioner, and then consumed in the fire. But because of his vernacular English translation, the song itself swelled into a mighty British chorus of chambermaids, cobblers, and, yes, even plowboys.

Philip Melanchthon, 1497–1560

The Gentle Lutheran, by David Mathis

He was not the kind who started revolutions, but the kind who brought order to the ensuing chaos. His mentor, Martin Luther, was brash, impulsive, and forceful. But Philip Melanchthon was a timid, sober-minded unifier. Luther, by his own admission, was "substance without words," while his brilliant young disciple was "substance and words."

Luther had little concern for precision or guarding against misconception; Melanchthon made nuance his forte. Luther said he used a spear, while Melanchthon used pins and needles. Luther was a pioneer, hacking his way through centuries of superstitious brush with an apostolic machete. But Melanchthon, like Bullinger in Zurich and Calvin in Geneva, played the part of the calm, collected systematic, grading the Protestant path for generations to come.

He was "the quiet reformer" — and a fitting complement to the loud, boisterous Luther. But not only was Melanchthon known as quiet and peaceful, but on occasion he demonstrated an explosive temper. And not only was he relentlessly curious, and a master of many subjects, but he also was strangely superstitious. Like every sinner, he was his own inconsistent blend of virtue and vice, and God was willing to work with that.

Prodigy, Professor, Copilot

Born in 1497 in southwest Germany, Melanchthon was nephew to renowned humanist Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), who suggested, in the humanist tradition, that young Philip change his last name from Schwartzerdt ("black earth") to the Hellenized *Melanchthon*.

A child prodigy, Melanchthon studied the classics in Heidelberg and Tubingen, and arrived in Wittenberg in 1519, at age 22, just as the Reformation was heating up. That same year, he accompanied Luther as an aid to the Leipzig Disputation. By 1521, he published the first edition of his *Loci Communes*("basic concepts") which started as a commentary on Romans and sought to tie Christian theology, inspired by Luther, to the biblical text, rather than the philosophical categories of medieval scholarship.

As the fires of reform raged, Melanchthon was there at Luther's side in 1529 at Marburg, and there in Luther's stead in 1530 at Augsburg, where he represented the Lutheran cause — and even drafted the Augsburg Confession — since Luther was an outlaw and unable to attend.

Independent Mind

Melanchthon's close association with Luther, however, did not mean that all Lutherans embraced him. Even while Luther was still living, some impugned Melanchthon as a corruptor, that he was hijacking Luther's bold movement for something more docile. Meanwhile, many others greatly appreciated Melanchthon's nuance, level head, and theological acumen and thought he was doing his pioneering friend an invaluable service. Melanchthon was too careful a thinker to agree with Luther on everything. But even as differences emerged, he always thought of himself as Luther's disciple. He was helping his mentor, not rebelling against him, in maturing his theological insights.

His two key divergences with Luther, for which some detractors would relentlessly take him to task, pertained to the bondage of the will and the Lord's Supper. As early as 1540, a decade after Augsburg, and six years before Luther's death, Melanchthon went public, in an updated version of the confession, with an iterated view of the Table. His opponents accused him of being a crypto-Calvinist on the Eucharist; however, in the other key divergence, he clearly moved away from Geneva. Melanchthon rejected double predestination, which he thought a necessary entailment of Luther's view of the will, and suspected that at least some of Luther's followers were going too far in their sense of the will's bondage.

Leader of the Lutherans

As the years passed, even after Melanchthon's death in Wittenberg in 1560, "the quiet reformer" carried the day in one of his major disagreements and lost the other. With the 1577 Formula of Concord, and the 1580 Book of Concord, "Lutheran orthodoxy emerged as playing down the doctrine of predestination (with Melanchthon) and affirming the real presence in the Eucharist (against Melanchthon)" (*The Reformation*, 353). From a Reformed perspective, both decisions went in the wrong direction, and account for key differences with Lutherans today. We'd say Concord would have been better off to hear Melanchthon on the Table and listen to Luther on the will.

In the final tally, Melanchthon became the intellectual leader of the Lutherans. Not only was he the first systematic theologian of the Reformation, and one of its most significant figures, but he designed educational systems that gave Lutheranism staying power not just in his unstable days but in the even more turbulent times to come. God put Melanchthon's gifts, quirks, and even inconsistencies to good use to reinforce Reformation theology as a world-changing force.

Menno Simons, 1496–1561

The Fearless Pacifist, by Ryan Griffith

If you are familiar with the contemporary Mennonites, you may be surprised to learn that the group's founder started as a Catholic priest who had never read the Bible.

A Priest Without the Bible

In 1524, at the age of 28, Menno Simons was ordained a priest of the Catholic Church in Utrecht, Netherlands. Although familiar with Greek and Latin and studied in Catholic doctrine, Simons had *never* read

the Scriptures themselves. “I had not touched them during my life,” he later wrote, “for I feared if I should read them they would mislead me.”

In 1526, he began to question the truthfulness of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (the idea that the bread and wine transform into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist). Simons thought this doubt might be the devil deluding him, so he reluctantly began to study the Bible. While he could nowhere find the doctrine of transubstantiation, he discovered the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ! He began sharing his discoveries with others from the pulpit, propelling him to a place of regional prominence as an evangelical preacher.

Smoke but No Flame

Simons’s study convinced him of the Bible’s unrivaled authority, leading him to examine Catholic doctrine in Scripture’s light. He also rejected the practice of infant baptism as unbiblical and began to encourage congregants to be baptized in accordance with their confession of faith in Christ. Despite his embrace of evangelical doctrine, he remained a priest in the Catholic Church and worked for its reform. All the while, however, his fascination with biblical teaching was merely intellectual. He relished the sweet smell of his newfound fame but lacked the pure flame of true affection for Christ.

The execution of three hundred Anabaptists at Old Cloister near Bolsward in April 1535 brought him to the point of crisis:

> I reflected upon my unclean, carnal life, also the hypocritical doctrine and idolatry which I still practiced daily in appearance of godliness, but without relish. My heart trembled within me. I prayed to God with sighs and tears that he would give to me, a sorrowing sinner, the gift of his grace, create within me a clean heart, and graciously through the merits of the crimson blood of Christ, forgive my unclean walk and frivolous easy life.

Overcome by his sins of pride, timidity, and love of comfort, Simons decisively renounced his “worldly reputation, name and fame.” “In my weakness,” he wrote, “I feared God; I sought out the pious and though they were few in number, I found some who were zealous and maintained the truth.”

Enemy of the State — and the Devil

After being baptized, Simons immediately threw himself into preaching the gospel, explaining the Scriptures, and traveling extensively. Simons discovered that the devil had kept him from the Bible and true conversion, and now he was determined to be Satan’s sworn enemy. His preaching quickly drew the ire of Catholic officials. Emperor Charles V even issued an edict against Simons, offering a significant reward to anyone who might deliver him into the hands of authorities.

Nevertheless, Simons exhorted his fellow Anabaptist Reformers to reject violent means for accomplishing reform, advocating pacifism and separation from worldly power. His preaching and reforms were so successful that, eventually, north German and Dutch Anabaptists would be known as *Mennonites*. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his renunciation of Catholicism, Simons’s health rapidly declined, and he died the following day, January 31, 1561, at the age of 66.

Misled No Longer

As the devil misled young Menno, so our enemy would mislead us, too. He would keep us from Scripture, from fearing God, from confession of sin, and from humble faith. May we, instead, “with sighs and tears” plead for and joyfully receive the gift of grace in our promised Savior, Jesus Christ.

> Although I resisted in former times Thy precious Word and Thy holy will with all my powers . . . nevertheless, Thy fatherly grace did not forsake me, a miserable sinner, but in love, received me, . . . and taught me by the Holy Spirit until of my own choice I declared war upon the world, the flesh, and the devil . . . and willingly submitted to the heavy cross of my Lord Jesus Christ that I might inherit the promised kingdom. (Simons, *Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm*)

Marie Dentière, c. 1495–1561

The First Lady in France, by Adrien Segal

Born in 1495 to a noble family in Tournai, France, Marie Dentière was well educated, entered an Augustinian convent (which was Luther's order), and likely served as a prioress in the early 1520s. Captivated by Martin Luther's breakthrough theology, Marie left the convent by 1525 and moved to Strasbourg to officially join the highly charged Reformation movement. In that same year, she made a second radical move when she married a former priest, Simon Robert.

Renouncing clerical celibacy and extolling the joys of marriage from Scripture became strong themes in Marie's ministry, especially in her controversial attempts to convert nuns in Geneva. One Reformer writes that Marie and Simon Robert "were the first French married couple to accept a pastoral assignment for the Reformed Church." The couple had five children, but Robert died in 1533. By 1535, Marie had married Antoine Froment, another Reformed pastor, and the family moved to Geneva.

Live from Geneva

Most of what we know of Dentière, which is not a great deal, is gleaned from three documents attributed to her. The first of the written works recounts the events of 1532–1536 in Geneva from the point of view of the Reformers. Dentière may have been the first Protestant writer to give an eyewitness account of that tumultuous time, and she was among the first women, if not the first, to articulate and defend Reformed theology in French.

But far more than a historian, Marie Dentière was an articulate (if inflammatory) evangelist. She loved and revered the Bible, was distressed that the Catholic Church had withheld so much of it from the people, and preached that every person, including women, should be able to read God's precious and glorious words for themselves.

A Reformed Female Teacher?

Dentière's most famous and controversial work was a letter to the Queen of Navarre, entitled "A Most Beneficial Letter." The letter is a robust biblical defense of Reformed theology and an impassioned attack on the Catholic Church.

It is an energetic and engaging work that demonstrates extraordinary biblical knowledge and theological understanding. The public unrest it caused resulted in the arrest of the printer and the destruction of most of the printed copies of the work. Not only had her letter condemned Roman Catholicism, and not only was her letter written by a woman, but Dentière also defended women's equal right to be theologians and teachers. She writes,

> For what God has given you and revealed to us women, no more than men should we hide it and bury it in the earth. And even though we are not permitted to preach in public congregations and churches, we are not forbidden to write and admonish one another in all charity. (*Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre*, 53)

Calvin and Marie

Though Marie strongly supported and defended Reformed leaders, including John Calvin, Calvin was clearly annoyed, at least during the early years of her ministry, by her outspoken manner, theological ambitions, and open criticism of male clerical leadership.

However, by 1561, the year Marie died, tension between the two had subsided and Calvin's respect and appreciation for Marie had manifestly grown. He even asked her to write the preface for his printed sermon on female modesty from 1 Timothy 2:8–12. Perhaps ironically, one could argue that Calvin asked her to teach about a biblical passage that expressly forbade her to do so.

One Woman on the Wall

For Marie Dentière, the astonishing news of saving grace and the powerful message of equality before God were truths that had been suppressed by the Catholic Church and needed to be shouted from the housetops by anyone who had seen them for themselves in God's word.

There is no question she lacked what those of the time considered appropriate feminine modesty and humility, but because her passion was kindled by the pages of Scripture, her writing stirred and changed hearts not only in her own day, but in ours today, as well. In 2002, Marie Dentière became the only woman to have her name engraved on the famous Wall of Reformers in Geneva.

Ulrich Zwingli, 1484–1531

The Swiss Giant, by Travis Myers

Ulrich Zwingli's career as a Reformer was relatively brief, but his energetic and multifaceted leadership was crucial in the early days of the Protestant movement.

Born to the chief local magistrate of a small alpine village named Wildhaus in 1484, Zwingli attended the universities of Vienna and Basel before serving as priest in the Swiss town of Glarus from 1506 to 1516. While priest in the town of Einsiedeln the following two years (1517–1518), Zwingli broke with traditional Roman Catholic practice by preaching in clear expository fashion in the German vernacular of his people. Such preaching earned him a post in the free city or "canton" of Zurich by 1519.

In Einsiedeln, Zwingli had been an ardent student of the Greek New Testament recently compiled by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Now in Zurich, Zwingli spent six years preaching straight through the New Testament, mingling with the people of his parish, writing against unscriptural Catholic dogma and practices, and engaging in public debates with Catholic authorities before the town leaders. During that time, the town councils of both Zurich and the nearby canton of Bern voted to adopt Protestantism.

The Sixty-Seven Articles

For his public debates with Catholic authorities in early 1523, Zwingli composed "The Sixty-Seven Articles." The document's brief introduction and conclusion reveal Zwingli's deep respect for the authority of God's word and his firm belief in the Bible's unique status as the only revelation of the saving good news of Jesus Christ and of God's will for Christian people. The introduction reads,

> The articles and opinions below, I, Ulrich Zwingli, confess to have preached in the worthy city of Zurich as based upon the Scriptures which are called inspired of God . . . and where I have not now correctly understood said Scriptures I shall allow myself to be taught better, but only from said Scriptures.

Zwingli would expand on these articles in a book-length treatise in 1525 titled "The True and False Religion." In 1526, he composed "Ten Theses" for Bern, which served as a succinct summary of his Reformed perspective.

Away with the Pomp

Zwingli, the Swiss giant of the Reformation, was particularly indignant about the pomp, hypocrisy, and idolatry of man-made religion. His labors for the reformation of Zurich and other Swiss cantons can be best conceived of, perhaps, as an effort to free people from the burdens imposed by a religious system invented by men that can't deliver on its promise of eternal life.

Article 7 of "The Sixty-Seven Articles" states that Christ "is an eternal salvation and head of all believers, who are his body, but which is dead and can do nothing without him." Attending Mass, participating in the so-called sacraments of Roman Catholicism, or even being ordained as a priest did not make someone a spiritually alive member of the true "ecclesia catholica" (universal church). That only happens by the gospel and the Spirit.

Eat a Sausage, Find a Wife

Zwingli was an activist who not only aimed to teach and apply the Bible alone, but who lobbied both church and civil authorities to realign their laws and policies with God's word. During the Lenten season of 1522, Zwingli gave his tacit assent in the home of a parishioner, the printer Christoph Froschauer, as he and his guests ate sausage, prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church during Lent but a staple local food. Zwingli successfully lobbied the Zurich town authorities to release these men from jail, where they'd been put for breaking the Lenten fast.

Taking advantage of the town council's leniency, Zwingli and ten other priests wrote to the Bishop of Constance requesting the right of priests to be married, since the blanket requirement of clerical celibacy was unscriptural and unwise. Zwingli himself was already living with a widow, Anna Reinhart, whom he married soon after Zurich became a Protestant canton free from the bishop's authority.

Zwingli also held a deep respect for women and longed for them to experience authentic Christian discipleship. In 1522, he visited a convent to deliver a series of lectures titled "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," theological lessons on the doctrine of revelation and Bible interpretation.

Twelve Years of Reform

On October 11, 1531, at age 47, Zwingli died unarmed on a battlefield near Kappel, Switzerland, serving as a chaplain to the Protestant troops, carrying only a flag and a Bible.

At the time of his death, Zwingli was only a dozen years removed from his life as a priest in Einsiedeln — a short career compared to Luther's and Calvin's decades of reform. But there's a reason Zwingli is often the third name people mention when remembering the Reformation. By God's grace, this dynamic Reformer's dozen years brought countless Swiss men and women away from dead ceremony, and back to Jesus Christ.

Heinrich Bullinger succeeded Zwingli as pastor of Gross Münster church and head of Zurich's "School of the Prophets," which trained men in biblical languages, exegesis, and preaching. In the 1560s, Bullinger was the main author of the Second Helvetic Confession, adopted soon after by Reformed churches in Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, France, and Poland. It remains to this day one of the most influential and beloved doctrinal statements of various Reformed denominations the world over.

Johannes Oecolampadius, 1482–1531

The Monastery's Lost Houselamp, by Douglas Wilson

The first thing we should do is get the issue of the name out of the way. Let us not stumble over the name. If he lived among us today in North America, we would call him John Houselamp. His German surname was *Hussgen*, which John himself worked into the Greek form (as was customary at the time).
In this brief overview of this talented man's contribution to the great Reformation, perhaps we should just call him John.

"I Have Lost the Monk"

John was born in Germany in 1482, ten years before Columbus sailed the ocean blue. As Calvin is associated with Geneva, Bucer with Strasbourg, and Luther with Wittenberg, John Oecolampadius is associated with Basel. He was one of the rising tribe of humanist scholars, thoroughly trained in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. By 1515, John had attained the post of cathedral preacher in Basel.

While in Basel, he worked as an assistant to Erasmus — the project being Erasmus's first edition of the Greek New Testament, for which John wrote the epilogue. John was a humanist scholar who went over to the Reformation, while Erasmus was a humanist scholar who remained in the Roman communion. This was a time of spiritual turmoil for John, resulting in him becoming a monk. But he soon decided *that* was not right, saying, "I have lost the monk; I have found the Christian."

A German Choir

He left Basel for a time, but returned in 1522 when he assumed a post at the University of Basel. He was a scholarly and effective participant in various disputations — which was one of the ways that cities made their decisions — and as a result, the leaders of Basel decided to join forces with the Reformation. The Mass was abandoned in Basel by 1529.

This was a time of genuine spiritual quickening, as was demonstrated by the following incident:

> At about this time, God honored Oecolampadius and his church with something spectacular. Normally a choir gave short responses in Latin at various prescribed liturgical moments in the worship service. However, on Easter Sunday, the congregation in St. Martin's spontaneously broke out in German singing during the service. Nothing like this had happened anywhere. The Council immediately forbade such singing. The congregation responded by continuing to do it. (*Reformer of Basel*, 19–20)

Marriage and Controversy

One interesting detail relates to John's decision to marry in 1528. His wife was a widow named Wibrandis, who, after John passed away, married another Reformation leader, Wolfgang Capito. After *he* passed away, she married *another* Reformer, Martin Bucer. These things happen of course. But not that often.

On the matter of the Lord's Supper, the reformational world was divided between the respective views of the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Zwinglians. The Lutherans held to a physical presence of Christ in the Supper, the Calvinists held to a spiritual presence, and the Zwinglians held to a memorialist position.

Basel is only 54 miles from Zurich, where Zwingli was ministering. John grew close to Ulrich Zwingli, working together with him, and came to hold Zwingli's position on the Lord's Supper. In 1529, John participated in the Marburg Colloquy, together with Zwingli, Luther, Bucer, Melanchthon, and others, in an unsuccessful bid for Protestant unity on the Supper. When Zwingli was killed in battle, in 1531, John took the shocking news very hard, and died himself shortly after.

Wolfgang Capito, c. 1478–1541

The Protestant Peacemaker, by Rick Shenk

"What is God like? Whom should we follow?" Many people must have been asking these questions during the turbulent times that we now celebrate as the Reformation. Reformers, counter-Reformers, humanists, and Anabaptists argued (and sometimes fought) to define our understanding of God and his gospel. Nothing could be of greater importance.

Many of the people who struggled together (or against each other) during the Protestant Reformation are still well known in the twenty-first century. But the work God did through the Reformation included a cast of hundreds, even thousands, unknown to many of us today. Among this group is Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541), a Reformer who desired more of God and preached the gospel while promoting peace. And for that reason, he was often in trouble with his reforming friends.

Humanist Beginnings

Wolfgang Capito was born in France in 1478. Wolfgang's father, Hans, was a poor and frugal smithy. He valued education and sent his son to a Latin school and then for training as a doctor. When Hans died in 1500, his last words were a command, warning Wolfgang against rashly becoming a priest.

Rashly or not, Capito was already moving in that direction. Abandoning medicine, he studied theology. Specifically, he was trained as a Christian humanist, becoming a student and a close friend of Erasmus. As a humanist, he loved the biblical text and biblical languages, desired Christianity's reform (particularly the morals of its leaders and priests), and yearned for peace. Soon he was ordained for service in the Catholic Church.

Capito was sent to Basel in 1515. There, in Basel Minster, he was slowly drawn out of Catholicism, and mere humanism, into the Reformation. While in Basel he became friends with Zwingli and a correspondent of Luther. During this time, Luther's theology confused him. At first, he begged Luther to be less offensive, especially to the pope.

This counsel Luther did not heed! Even so, Capito eagerly published Luther's works in northern Europe in 1518. Yet, still a humanist, Capito truly did not understand. He continued to engage in a dialogue with Luther, and then in 1522 he visited Wittenberg. While disturbed by the tragic sin he witnessed there, yet he also discovered the heart of the Reformation in the gospel — God found his heart.

A Call for Peace

When God shifted him from a humanist to a theological Reformer, Capito explained it this way: "I have moved to the side of the pious Papists and Lutherans who seek only the soul's salvation and nothing temporal; and I admonish them to Christian unity, as much as God gives me grace" (*Wolfgang Capito*, 94). His heart was now God's. Yet his humanist training resonated deeply with the biblical call for peace.

During his lifetime, he wrote three hymns. One of them endured in German hymnals for centuries and is titled "Give Us Peace":

Give us that peace that we do lack,
Through misbelief, and in ill life.
Thy Word to offer Thou dost not slack,
Which we unkindly gainstrive.
With fire and sword, this healthful Word
Some persecute and oppress.
Some with the mouth confess the truth
Without sincere godliness.

Though God's word was powerfully being preached throughout Germany, France, and beyond, yet there was persecution and oppression *within* the Reformation which wearied Capito and sent him to his knees in prayer — and to his pen. He continued to call Luther and Zwingli to find common ground on the theology of the Lord's Supper, and he called for mercy to be shown to the Anabaptists.

Throughout his life as a Reformer, many interpreted his call for mercy to theological opponents to mean he agreed with those opponents. Yet, mercy is not agreement; his condemnation of violence, coercion, and even offensive language was a call to God's people not to interfere in the work of the Holy Spirit to discipline those who oppose.

The Lord's Servant

"What is God like? Whom should we follow?" Such questions still challenge the world today. As we seek to call many to delight in the God of Luther and Calvin, we would do well to follow Capito's example and God's command: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

We are called to gentle and peaceful engagement, even at the risk of being misunderstood.

Martin Bucer, 1491–1551

The Protestant Melting Pot, by Marshall Segal

Martin Bucer may be the most important Reformer you've never heard of. He led in the shadow of the other German giants Luther and Melanchthon, but he manned the helm of what became, at least for a time, the capital city of the Protestant world.

Bucer was born near Strasbourg on November 11, 1491. At fifteen, he joined the Dominican cloister, a monastic group of Roman Catholic preachers. Friars like Bucer carried out the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but unlike monks, they did so among the people, serving in community, not in isolation.

Germany's Most Eligible Friar

Martin *Bucer* first heard Martin *Luther* in April of 1518 (Bucer was 26; Luther, 34). He was captivated by Luther, especially his conviction that we are justified by faith alone apart from any contribution or merit of our own. Three years later, he not only left the Dominican order in order to preach the gospel, but he also abandoned his monastic vows and decided to marry, suddenly making him, perhaps, Germany's most eligible (and radical) friar. He married a nun (no less) named Elizabeth.

While Luther had led Bucer into the Reformation, Bucer did not see eye to eye with his spiritual father on everything, in part because he had already been heavily influenced by Erasmus, whom he appreciated and admired despite their theological differences. Bucer's generally more inclusive and ecumenical bent providentially positioned him to play a significant role in the wider movement.

Reformation in Moderation

Strasbourg became the hub of Protestantism in large part *because* Bucer and other leaders remained openhanded on many of the most controversial and divisive issues. For instance, in 1529 Bucer brokered a historic, if hostile, meeting between Luther and Zwingli over the Lord's Supper. Being himself predictably sympathetic in both directions, he brought the two sides together hoping to achieve the kind of agreement that might catalyze the unification of the two main threads of the Reformation.

While the meeting failed to birth an accord over the Table, it illustrates the kind of role the former friar played — between Luther and Zwingli, between mainstream Protestants and the more radical Anabaptists, even between Reformers and Catholics. Instead of forming and leading a distinct movement of his own — the Bucerans, if you will — he strived to bring movements together under the clear teaching of Scripture into one great Christian melting pot. He realized and prized the precious power of solidarity.

First Small Groups

As the strange spiritual offspring of Luther and Erasmus, Bucer's Reformation took on a distinct and eclectic flavor. Initially, he simultaneously stressed that justification is by faith alone, while also zealously demanding Spirit-empowered discipline and good works in the Christian life. Good so far. However, later in life he spoke of a kind of "double justification" that was at least confusing, if it did not in effect blur the line of "faith alone."

One way or the other, Bucer cared about Christian conduct. As a result, he persistently pursued means of church discipline. First, he went to the officials in Strasbourg, pleading for stricter enforcement. When the government refused to impose more rigorous standards for obedience, he formed voluntary groups of believers within local churches for the purpose of regular accountability and church discipline. Thus, Bucer may very well be the unlikely (and reluctant) father of the modern small group.

After being exiled, John Calvin witnessed the kind of church discipline chartered in Strasbourg and built on the same principles when he returned to Geneva. Calvin spent some of his happiest years learning from Bucer in Strasbourg, while pastoring a congregation of fellow French refugees.

German Glue

Bucer's first wife, of twenty years, died from the plague in 1542. On her deathbed, she encouraged Martin to marry Wibrandis Rosenblatt. Wibrandis, later nicknamed "The Bride of the Reformation," had already married and buried three leading reforming men: Ludwig Keller, Johannes Oecolampadius, and Wolfgang Capito (also from Strasbourg). Just seven years later, she buried her fourth.

While the former friar helped pioneer the path to marriage for converted monks, he also opened a wider door for divorce, but only as "an absolute last resort and generally rare, rather like the death penalty for adultery" (*Reformation*, 660). His exceptions became a sharp edge carving out similar openness across Protestant Europe.

In 1549, as the Augsburg Interim forced Protestants in Strasbourg to readopt traditional Catholic beliefs and practices, Bucer accepted Thomas Cranmer's invitation to take refuge for a time in Cambridge, England, as Regius Professor of Divinity. He died just two years later, in 1551, before he could return to Strasbourg.

Many have overlooked the lesser-known Martin, probably because he lacked the timing of Luther and Zwingli and the nuanced precision of Melanchthon and Calvin, preferring instead to bridge the gap and facilitate unity among the Reformers. And that's precisely why we should remember him — the German glue of the Protestant Reformation.

Wibrandis Rosenblatt, 1504–1564

The Bride of the Reformation, by Noël Piper

In 1504, Wibrandis Rosenblatt was born in Säckingen, Germany. Over the next sixty years, she would marry and be widowed four times, inspiring one writer to describe her as the *Reformationfrau* — "the Bride of the Reformation."

Ludwig Keller

Her 1524 marriage to Ludwig Keller was short lived. In July 1526, Wibrandis, 22, was a widow with a daughter, also named Wibrandis.

Among the Reformation leaders, clerical marriage was becoming "a new way of serving the community of Jesus Christ." Johannes Oecolampadius had argued publicly for the freedom of pastors to marry, though he himself was still single (*Frau Wibrandis*, 15). Oecolampadius's friend Wolfgang Capito wrote to him, "If

a suitable person is pointed out to you, I think you should not decline. To have a mate of like zeal will be a glory to the Lord."

Johannes Oecolampadius

Someone must have pointed out Wibrandis. On March 15, 1528, she and Oecolampadius were married, raising some eyebrows at their age difference — 45 and 24 — but causing most friends to rejoice. He wrote in a letter, "The Lord has given me a sister and wife . . . a widow with several years experience in bearing the cross. I wish she were older, but I see in her no signs of youthful petulance. Pray the Lord to give us a long and happy marriage" (*Women of the Reformation*, 82).

At this point, pastors had not been marrying for several hundred years. Wibrandis and other wives of sixteenth-century Reformers became friends through letters, determining and shaping their new role as they lived it.

Soon, three children were added to their family — Eusebius, Aletheia, and Irene — before the death of Oecolampadius in November 1531 due to blood poisoning from an abscess. That same month, Capito's wife Agnes also died.

Wolfgang Capito

Martin Bucer's matchmaking propensities sprang into action. "My choice for Capito is the widow of Oecolampadius. . . . He writes me that he has been very touched by the sight of the widow Wibrandis and the orphaned children" (*Women of the Reformation*, 85). Wibrandis and Capito were married on August 11, 1532.

Capito was pastor of New St. Peter's Church in Strasbourg. Their household included Wibrandis's mother and the four children of her previous marriages. Five more were born — Agnes, Dorothea, Irene (after the death of Irene Oecolampadius), John Simon, and Wolfgang.

"Since she did curb his foibles, balance his budget, and keep his household sweet, her achievement belongs to the annals of unrecorded heroisms" (*Women of the Reformation*, 87). But plague in 1540 took the children Eusebius, Dorothea, Wolfgang, and also Capito himself.

Martin Bucer

News of Capito's death reached the Bucers when Elisabeth Bucer was close to death. Elisabeth pled with her husband and Wibrandis that they marry after she died, and they did in April 1542.

Bucer wrote, "There is nothing that I could desire in my new wife save that she is too attentive and solicitous. She is not as free in criticism as was my first wife. . . . I only hope I can be as kind to my new wife as she is to me. But oh, the pang for the one I have lost" (*Women of the Reformation*, 87–88).

One can imagine Wibrandis's similar grief for three husbands. For the fourth time, she adapted to a new husband, learning how they would love and support each other according to their particular needs, ministries, and preferences.

By 1548, new laws required Protestant churches to fulfill conditions that Bucer could not endorse. He fled into exile in England, and taught at Cambridge, while assisting in biblical translation and developing liturgy. After only a year, suffering a cold, damp winter and a long list of physical ailments, he urged Wibrandis to come. She came and eventually brought the family.

During Bucer's last months, Wibrandis nursed him almost constantly, doing also whatever was required for caring for the rest of her family, consisting of the children and her mother. After her husband's death in February 1551, Wibrandis wrote numerous articulate letters to sort out their finances and move the family back to Strasbourg. Some were in German, some in Latin, revealing her facility with language and languages.

Wibrandis the Woman

Lest we are tempted to see a passive woman swept up by circumstances and the decisions of imposing men, here is Wibrandis's forceful voice to her son Simon John Capito, away at university:

"I haven't heard from you for some time, but I well know that if I had, the news would not have been comforting. . . . If only I might live to the day when I have good news from you. Then would I die of joy. . . . If you would follow in the footsteps of your father, then Grandma, the sisters, and the in-laws would lay down

their very lives for you. . . . If you will behave yourself properly, come home. If you won't, then do as you will. I wish you a good year. Your faithful mother." (*Women of the Reformation*, 93–94)

In 1564, Basel lost 7,000 to plague, including Wibrandis Rosenblatt. She was buried beside Oecolampadius. Today in Bad Säckingen, her birthplace, is Wibrandis-Rosenblatt-Weg, a short street leading to the bank of the Rhine. Beside the street towers the steeple of the Evangelische Kirchengemeinde, a Protestant church.

Peter Martyr Vermigli, 1499–1562

The Phoenix of Florence, by Chris Castaldo

From childhood, Peter Martyr Vermigli desired to teach God's word. At age fifteen, he entered the Augustinian order in the Italian town of Fiesole, near his native Florence. After eight years of theological training, Vermigli underwent priestly ordination and received a doctorate in theology.

The years following Vermigli's ordination opened new vocational horizons. He was elected to the office of public preacher, an illustrious position in his day. As his name grew famous in the largest Italian cities, Vermigli was promoted to the position of abbot in his order's monastery in Spoleto, before being moved southward to the great basilica San Pietro ad Aram in Naples. It was here that his life changed forever.

Righteousness Restored

During Vermigli's sojourn at San Pietro (1537–1540), according to his colleague and biographer, Josiah Simler, "the greater light of God's truth" began to shine upon him. This truth, in Vermigli's words, was that "Christ's righteousness imputed to us by God totally restores what was lacking in this weak and mutilated righteousness of ours" (*The Peter Martyr Reader*, 147). It was a gospel awakening that transformed his life and ministry.

With a new vision of Christ and the gospel, Vermigli moved north in May 1541 to become prior of the prestigious monastery of San Frediano in the Republic of Lucca. While there, he initiated a series of educational and ecclesiastical reforms that have been likened to Calvin's work in Geneva.

But after a mere fifteen months of such gospel renewal, Pope Paul III ensured its demise by reinstituting the Roman Inquisition. Recognizing discretion as the better part of valor, Vermigli renounced his vows and made the difficult decision to flee his homeland.

From Strasbourg to Oxford

It was Martin Bucer who arranged for Vermigli's academic appointment to the College of Saint Thomas in Strasbourg. The Italian exile was expected to teach sacred letters, which he proceeded to do from the Old Testament.

While in Strasbourg, Vermigli also married a former nun from Metz named Catherine Dammartin, "a lover of true religion" especially admired for her charity. After eight years of marriage, she died in February 1553, but Peter Martyr would marry again — another Katie — in May 1559.

Following five fruitful years of teaching in Strasbourg, Vermigli received an invitation in 1547 from Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer to fortify the newly independent Church of England with Reformed theology as Regius Chair of Divinity at Oxford. Among Vermigli's many accomplishments in this period, he lectured on Romans, produced various theological treatises, championed Protestantism at the famous Eucharistic Disputation of 1549, and assisted Cranmer in shaping a new Anglican liturgy.

Zurich Scholar

With the accession of the Catholic Queen Mary in 1553, Vermigli was forced to flee England. Returning to Strasbourg, he was immediately restored to his position at the Senior School, where, in addition to teaching and writing theological works, he gathered with Marian exiles in his home to study and pray. Eventually, he took a teaching post at the Academy of Zurich.

Despite numerous opportunities to lecture throughout Europe, including multiple invitations from Calvin to teach in Geneva and pastor the Genevan Italian congregation, Vermigli remained in Zurich. The only exception was his journey to the Colloquy of Poissy with Theodore Beza in 1561, where he debated Catholic leaders before the French Crown and witnessed to Queen Catherine de' Medici in their native Italian.

Teacher of the Book

Vermigli died in Zurich on November 12, 1562, in the presence of his wife and friends. This Florentine humanist and Reformed scholar, who was equal in stature to Calvin and Bullinger, would be remembered for his commitment to Scripture and passion for gospel renewal. In the words of Theodore Beza, he was a "phoenix born from the ashes of Savonarola." Even the painting of Vermigli hanging in the National Portrait Gallery in London testifies to his biblical conviction. In it, Vermigli's penetrating eyes look to the distance beyond the gilded frame as he points to a singular book in his hand: the Bible.

If we were to place an enduring statement on Vermigli's lips, it would perhaps be this exhortation: "Let us immerse ourselves constantly in the sacred Scriptures, let us work at reading them, and by the gift of Christ's Spirit the things that are necessary for salvation will be for us clear, direct, and completely open" (*Life, Letters, and Sermons*, 281).

Thomas Becon, c. 1512–1567

The Monday Morning Protestant, by Brian Hanson

Though almost entirely overlooked in church history, Thomas Becon was a prolific pamphleteer, popular bestseller, and godly cleric in sixteenth-century England during the Reformation. Living through the turbulent reigns of four Tudor monarchs, Becon served under the supervision of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and composed around fifty tracts with numerous subsequent editions that continued to be printed seventy years after his death.

His writings on godliness are relevant and helpful for all Christians, particularly for those who tend to partition their lives into categories of "sacred" and "secular." Becon, recognizing no such divisions, exhorted Christians in his day to pursue godliness in the rhythms of their daily routines.

Pastor in Hiding

Becon, born in Thetford, Norfolk, around 1512, was educated at St. John's College in Cambridge, where he was deeply moved by and possibly converted under the Lutheran-influenced teachings of one of his professors, Hugh Latimer. Upon his graduation with a degree in theology, Becon took two clerical posts in southern England, but following the ratification of the Six Articles of 1539, Henry VIII targeted evangelicals for non-compliance and "heresy." Consequently, Becon was arrested in 1541 for his "evil and false doctrine."

After his release, Becon kept a low profile in the forests of Kent, harbored by several evangelical men who were connected to the royal court. During this time, Becon produced numerous tracts under the pseudonym "Theodore Basil" in order to avoid detection from the local authorities. Under even heavier scrutiny and surveillance from the local magistrates at the order of Henry VIII, Becon fled to the Midlands of England, where he hid for four years in the mountains without publishing any works.

Exile and Homecoming

When the nine-year-old Edward VI, a friend and defender of the English Reformation, ascended the throne in 1547, Becon emerged from exile and returned to London, where he was appointed a chaplain in the royal court. Around the same time, he became rector of the prestigious parish in London, St. Stephen Walbrook.

With Mary I's accession to the throne in 1553, however, many evangelicals, including Becon, were arrested. He was eventually released, but taking no risks, he immediately escaped to Strasbourg, where he joined a community of other exiled English evangelicals. From there he relocated to Frankfurt, where he assisted in developing a new liturgy for the English congregation composed of exiles. When Becon returned from the Continent after Elizabeth I came to power, he went through a series of clerical appointments, mostly in London, until his death in 1567.

Everyday Godliness

One of Becon's primary foci in his pamphlets was how Christians were to attain godliness and how to integrate that godliness within their daily lives. First, the word of God, contended Becon, was sufficient for all Christians and was the catalyst to godliness. Becon envisioned an English commonwealth where "people maye

learn even from theyr cradles . . . to knowe God, to understand his worde, to honour hym aryght, and to walke in his holy pathwayes" (*New pollecye of warre*).

Second, Becon instructed Christians to view their lives as a continual stage of worship where godliness was on display, even in the mundane on Monday morning. For Becon, worship was not limited to Sunday gatherings. Nor was it confined to certain spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading or prayer. Worship, rather, was an incessant activity that was to weave its way through the liturgy of daily life: the eating of meals, laboring at one's place of employment, spending leisure time, and retiring to bed.

No "Secular" Work

Becon published two prayer manuals containing model prayers for specific activities of one's daily schedule. One of those manuals submitted model prayers for those in specific occupations, including magistrates, clergy, merchants, lawyers, mariners, soldiers, mothers, and children. Becon maintained that one occupation was not more essential than another. He argued that the work of the shoemaker and tailor was just as crucial in the kingdom of God as that of the lawyer and magistrate, because God was the one who called them to their vocations.

While many Christians subtly dismiss certain occupations as insignificant and view non-ministry work as "secular," Becon's assessment of all work as an activity *of* God and *for* God is a motivating corrective. We should embrace our calling and see the ultimate purpose of our work and vocation: godliness through employment blesses a society so that all "may [ac]knowledge thee, the gever of al[l] good things, and glorify thy holy name" (*Flour of godly praiers*).

Thomas Cranmer, 1489–1556

The Gospel Lobbyist, by Matthew Westerhom

As King Henry VIII lay dying in his bed, he wanted one man to come and hold his hand. Amazingly, that man was a major proponent of the Protestant Reformation.

Thomas Cranmer helped lead the English Reformation, but he is an unlikely hero alongside Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers. He did not write any major theological books or pastor any important churches. Indeed, Cranmer did not adopt the central truths of the Reformation until relatively late in his life. But during the years of the Protestant Reformation, he shaped English theology perhaps more than any other person who has ever lived.

The Seed of Separation

Born in 1489, in the small village of Aslockton, Thomas Cranmer grew up near the same Sherwood Forrest where Robin Hood hid out three centuries earlier. He was a slow reader, taking eight years to finish Cambridge's four-year undergraduate degree. He persevered in his studies, completed a masters degree, was ordained into ministry, and was elected by Cambridge to teach. He built a reputation for pushing his students to study the Bible for themselves.

While Cranmer spent his days peacefully serving on academic committees, England was in turmoil. King Henry VIII wanted to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Through a strange set of circumstances, Cranmer suggested to some of Henry's advisors that the King of England was not ultimately subject to the pope's rule (much to the king's delight). Cranmer's advice, then, inadvertently planted a seed that separated the English church from Roman Catholicism.

The Reformed Politician

Cranmer traded away Roman Catholicism for Reformed doctrine by the end of his life, a transformation that mirrored the turmoil and split of the English Reformation. While a student at Cambridge, he had read Martin Luther skeptically, but he warmed to Reformed thought after befriending Simon Grynaeus and Andreas Osiander. He eventually rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation after conversations with his friend Nicholas Ridley. Cranmer then clarified his liturgical reforms through conversations with the Italian Reformer Peter Martyr and the German Reformer Martin Bucer.

Cranmer's theology changed too dramatically for English Roman Catholics and too slowly for Reform-minded evangelicals. To some (even today), Cranmer's reforms seemed too personally and politically motivated. But he did not have the luxury of working out abstract beliefs among a company of disinterested academia. His theology was formed in a volatile pastoral and political cauldron of crises.

Father of the Anglican Church

Cranmer's greatest ministry accomplishments came during the rule of Edward VI, when he rewrote the public liturgies, pastoral sermons (or homilies), private prayers, and articles of faith. These writings defined the doctrinal framework and personal piety which later developed into the Anglican Church, for which he is most remembered.

Cranmer wanted everyone in English churches to embrace justification by faith alone. He wrote,

> This proposition — that we be justified by faith only, freely, and without works — is spoken in order to take away clearly all merit of our works, as being insufficient to deserve our justification at God's hands; and thereby most plainly to express the weakness of man and the goodness of God, the imperfectness of our own works and the most abundant grace of our Savior Christ; and thereby wholly to ascribe the merit and deserving of our justification unto Christ only and his most precious blood-shedding. (*The Works of Thomas Cranmer*, 131)

Double Recantation

When the Roman Catholic Queen Mary I took power, Cranmer's Reformed convictions cost him his life. During an agonizing three-year period, he was imprisoned, isolated, humiliated, interrogated, and tortured. He was forced to watch his friends, Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, burned alive.

Later, at his own execution, Cranmer nearly succumbed and recanted his beliefs, but this usually hesitant and quiet statesman powerfully demonstrated his faith in Christ while being burned at the stake.

The Thief on the Throne

But the moment that best illustrates Cranmer's enduring legacy was not the day of his own death, but a day nine years earlier, as he stood at the deathbed of King Henry VIII. On January 27, 1547, King Henry was dying. An attendant asked him whom he wished to have at his bedside. The king asked for Thomas.

By the time Cranmer arrived, King Henry was unable to speak. Foxe tells the story.

> Then the archbishop, exhorting him to put his trust in Christ, and to call upon his mercy, desired him though he could not speak, yet to give some token with his eyes or with his hand, that he trusted in the Lord. Then the king, holding him with his hand, did wring his hand in his as hard as he could. (*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, 748)

The scene sweetly punctuates the most important friendship in the English Reformation. Whatever King Henry believed when he squeezed Cranmer's hand that day, God used the bond between them to break England free from Roman Catholicism and to recover the one true gospel.

Hugh Latimer & Nicholas Ridley, Martyred in 1555

The British Candle, by Scott Hubbard

For those familiar with the English Reformation, the name *Latimer* sounds incomplete on its own. It demands a *Ridley*.

Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley are fastened together in history primarily because they were fastened to the same stake on October 16, 1555, on the north side of Oxford. But Latimer and Ridley share more than a martyrdom. The bishops also join each other on the list of England's most influential Reformers — men and women whose allegiance to Scripture and the glory of Christ transformed England from a Catholic kingdom to a lighthouse of Reformation.

Both Latimer and Ridley lived during the reigns of four English monarchs: Henry VII, Henry VIII (the one with all the wives), Edward VI, and Mary I (aka "Blood Mary"). Both witnessed the Reformation's tug and pull under Henry VIII's tentative acceptance, Edward VI's warm embrace, and Mary I's violent resistance to Reformed doctrine. But they were anything but casual observers.

Latimer the Preacher

Latimer, born around 1485, spent the first thirty years of his life a zealous Catholic — or, in his words, an "obstinate Papist." "I was as obstinate a Papist as any was in England," he wrote, "insomuch that when I should be made bachelor of divinity, my whole oration was against Philip Melanchthon [i.e., Luther's right-hand man]."

But soon after Latimer's anti-Reformation oration, a young Cambridge divine named Thomas Bilney approached him with a request. Would Latimer allow Bilney to privately explain his own Reformed faith? Latimer agreed, and from then on he "began to smell the Word of God, and forsook the school doctors and such fooleries." Latimer gathered up the arrows he had been shooting at the Reformation, and he started pointing the bow in the other direction. Throughout the next couple decades, he distinguished himself as a fervent Reformed preacher, at times enjoying Henry VIII's favor for it, and at other times fearing his persecution (depending on the king's mood).

Perhaps the most fruitful years of Latimer's ministry came under Edward VI's short reign, from 1547 to 1553. Despite his age, Latimer assisted Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer in reforming the English church, and he also preached like a man who just couldn't stop. According to J.C. Ryle, "No one of the Reformers probably sowed the seeds of Protestant doctrine so widely and effectually among the middle and lower classes as Latimer."

Then, in 1553, Queen Mary came to power, and Latimer was sent to a cell in the Tower of London.

Ridley the Scholar

Ridley, nearly twenty years Latimer's junior, was born around 1502 near the border of Scotland. Throughout the next five decades, he would become one of England's sharpest intellects, even going so far as to memorize all the New Testament letters — in Greek.

After attending Cambridge's Pembroke College in his teenage years, Ridley continued his studies in France, where he likely encountered Reformation teachings. Unlike Latimer, Ridley left no clear account of his passage from Catholic priest to Protestant preacher. But we do know that he signed the 1534 decree against the pope's supremacy, that he accepted the post of chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer three years later, and that he renounced the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation by 1545. When he became the bishop of London in 1550, he replaced the stone altars in London's churches with plain wooden tables. According to Ridley and the Reformers, communion was a spiritual feast, not a sacrifice.

Ridley's scholarly abilities launched him from one prestigious post to the next, even under Henry VIII's capricious reign. From Canterbury to Westminster to Soham to Rochester to London, Ridley studied, preached, and, once Edward VI took the throne, threw himself into Cranmer's reforms.

But then Queen Mary came to power, and Ridley joined Latimer in the Tower.

England's Candle

On October 16, 1555, after spending eighteen months in a tower cell, Latimer and Ridley met at an Oxford stake. With Latimer in a frock and cap, and Ridley in his bishop's gown, the two men talked and prayed together before a smith lashed them to the wood.

Ridley was the first to strengthen his friend. "Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it." As the bundle of sticks caught fire beneath them, Latimer had his turn. Raising his voice so Ridley could hear, he cried, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Three years later, Mary I died and passed the kingdom to her half-sister Elizabeth, a Protestant queen. And Latimer and Ridley's candle burst into a torch.