

What was the Reformation?

This was a mighty movement of God in the 16th century to re-establish Biblical doctrine and secede from the corrupt church. It began in 1517 when an Augustinian monk called Martin Luther nailed 95 protestations ('theses') to the church door at Wittenberg drawing attention to the false practices and doctrines of the Roman Church. This was a common method of stimulating debate and, at first, Luther simply sought to reform the church as many others had done before, for which they were martyred. Despite terrible dangers, God kept Luther alive through various means, including the protection of the Elector (prince) of the Palatinate in Germany.

The movement began by Luther was called 'Protestantism' since it protested against the claims of the papacy and protested the truth of the Bible. In due course, several streams emerged: Lutheranism following Luther (although this soon strayed from some of his crucial teachings); Calvinism, or Reformed Theology, where Calvin's *Institutes* and other documents were the chief influence; and Anabaptism, the radical side of the Reformation. The chief leaders were Luther in Germany and thence Scandinavia, Calvin and Zwingli in Switzerland and John Knox in Scotland. The Reformation took hold in England under men like Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer. Proto-reformers included John Wycliffe in England, Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague in Bohemia and Savonarola in Florence. After 1550 Calvinism became the dominant stream affecting most of Europe, and subsequently America.

The chief tenets of Reformation teaching are summed in in what is called the *solas* (Latin for 'alone'). These are: *Sola Gratia* (Grace alone); *Sola Fide* (Faith alone); *Solos Christos* (Christ alone); *Sola scriptura* (Scripture alone); *Soli Deo gloria* (Glory to God alone). Together they teach that Salvation is by grace, through faith, is in Christ alone, is based upon the word of God and is to the glory of God alone.

Crucial tools of Reformation teaching were: powerful explanatory preaching; dedicated and gifted leaders and the recent invention of printing by moveable type by Gutenberg. This enabled cheap translations of the Bible, first into German by Luther and then other languages, enabling common men to see what the Bible really said for the first time in hundreds of years.

Under God's control there were many other social and political factors leading up to the Reformation, which is pivotal in world history and marks the beginning of the modern age after the Dark Ages and the Renaissance.

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