

An Introduction to Luther, Calvin, and Their Protestant Reformations

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Abstract

A comparison of Martin Luther and John Calvin shows that they stand in line with historic Christianity and share core Reformation principles. Abuses in the Catholic Church and indulgences are among the main reasons why Luther broke with the church in which he grew up. Luther gave the impetus for other Reformations and theological movements, in particular Zurich, represented by Heinrich Bullinger with his contribution to covenantal thought, and Geneva, where Calvin through his *Institutes* crystallized Reformed theology. While Luther showed some appreciation for Calvin, Calvin, without idealizing Luther, acknowledged his towering influence. Luther and Calvin left their mark in areas such as theology, the church and worship, society, and Western history and culture.

Protestants generally trace their origins to Martin Luther. Some can do so personally. John Wesley in his journal described how on May 24, 1738, at about 8:45 p.m., he was converted as his heart was “strangely warmed” while listening at Aldersgate Street to a reading of Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans.¹

¹ “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart

John Bunyan was impacted by reading Luther's commentary on Galatians, finding his own experience "largely and profoundly handled, as if [Luther's] book had been written out of my own heart."² Martin Luther King Jr. not only bore the name of the Reformer, but appealed to Luther the "extremist" in his epoch-making *Letter from Birmingham Jail*.³

Many Protestants also recognize a connection with John Calvin. Yet Calvin too affirmed his spiritual roots in the theology of Luther. In Calvin's estimation, Luther was "an eminent servant of God," as well as "a distinguished apostle of Christ by whose ministry the light of the gospel has shone."⁴ Calvin was greatly impacted by Luther's life and teaching. Brian Gerrish explains,

A glance at the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes*, already published in 1536, is sufficient to prove that he was deeply indebted to Luther. ... Quite apart from the fact ... that Calvin modeled the structure of his first edition on Luther's catechisms, he borrowed freely from the fund of Lutheran ideas, not least on the Lord's Supper. His basic understanding of what a sacrament is unmistakably echoed the classic treatment in Luther's *Babylonian Captivity*.⁵

Here we want to introduce Luther and Calvin and their Reformations at this five-hundredth anniversary of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, which inaugurated the Protestant faith. Historically the name Protestant came from the protest that followers of Luther raised at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 against an action of the court denying the legitimacy of the Lutheran cause, which had been previously permitted in various regions of the empire.⁶ The name has broadened in meaning to include the protest of all the abuses of Rome. The word is derived from the Latin word, *protestare*,

strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xvi.html>

² Cited by Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 18.

³ "But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. ... Was not Martin Luther an extremist: 'Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.'" Cf. Peter A. Lillback, *Annotations on a Letter That Changed the World from a Birmingham Jail* (King of Prussia, PA: Providence Forum, 2013), 69–70.

⁴ John Calvin, *Defensio adversus Pighium*, as cited in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1057, n. 4. See also Friederich Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 173–74.

⁵ Brian Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 31.

⁶ "Origin of the Word Protestant," About Education, <http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/reformation/p/proriginprot.htm>.



MARTIN LUTHER
1483-1546

meaning “to witness toward,” as in speaking about something that one has observed or believes to be true. It is here that the word Protestant finds its most noble significance.

1. Forty Comparisons of the Lives and Ministries of Luther and Calvin

To place Luther and Calvin in their historical contexts and to present some of the leading emphases of their theology, the following summary compares the lives and significant contributions of Luther and Calvin.⁷

Comparison	Martin Luther	John Calvin
1. Reformation Dates	1st Generation (1483-1546)	2nd Generation (1509-1564)
2. Birthplace	Eisleben, Germany	Noyon, France
3. Father's work	Operator of a mine	Notary in church
4. Father's plans for son	Law, but went to monastery	Submitted to study of law
5. Ministry city	Wittenberg, Germany	Geneva, Switzerland
6. Royal actions toward	Protected in Germany	Exiled from France
7. Political Conflict	Died before wars of religion	Saw wars of religion
8. Training of Children	Wrote catechisms	Catechisms and confessions
9. Schools	Started schools	Started schools/academy
10. Bible	Translated Bible	Aided Bible translation
11. Scholarly Training	Theology, Bible	Law, classical literature
12. Scholarship	Prolific writer	Prolific writer
13. Health	Physically healthy	Physically ill
14. What launched ministry	Indulgences debate	Wrote <i>Institutes</i>
15. Ministry stability	Ministered in one place	Three-year exile from Geneva
16. Confession	Augsburg Confession	Gallican Confession

⁷ For recent contributions, see Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015) and Herman Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). For a recent comparison between the two, see Jacques Blandenier, *Martin Luther et Jean Calvin: Contrastes et ressemblances* (Charols: Excelsis, 2016).

Comparison	Martin Luther	John Calvin
17. Augsburg Confession	Affirmed original	Subscribed to an altered version
18. National government	Germany: monarchical	Switzerland: republic
19. Assistant/successor	Philip Melanchthon	Theodore Beza
20. Melanchthon	Respected understudy	Beloved fellow scholar
21. Distinctive ministry	Prophetic preaching	Organized theology
22. Marriage	Married an ex-nun	Married widowed Anabaptist
23. Best-known work	Translated Bible and catechisms	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>
24. Family	Strong, healthy family	Children died in infancy
25. Intellectual method	Theology-philosophy	Humanistic-legal training
26. Hermeneutic	Law/gospel distinction	Unity/diversity of covenant
27. Theological emphasis	Stressed justification	Stressed biblical theology
28. Justification teaching	Justification by faith alone	Justification in covenant
29. Predestination	Affirmed but not primary	Integral to his theology
30. Lord's Supper theory	Consubstantiation	Spiritual presence
31. Ecumenical spirit	Narrow theologically	Reformed but ecumenical
32. Relationship to Zurich	Refused fellowship	Established consensus
33. Liturgical freedom	Normative principle	Regulative principle
34. Denominationalism	Church named for him	No church named for him
35. Ecclesiology	Bishop/episcopal	Elder/presbyterian
36. Church discipline	Left to magistrate	Duty of elders/consistory
37. Burial	Grave in church known	Grave site unknown
38. Theological tradition	Lutheranism	Reformed/Presbyterian
39. Theological students	Called Lutherans	Called Calvinists
40. Growth and mission work	Global	Global

Luther's and Calvin's Reformation teachings embraced the theological commitments of the historic ancient church. The theologies of both Luther⁸ and Calvin⁹ as evidenced by their creeds were emphatically

- monotheistic: there is only one God, in accordance with Judaism;
- theistic: God is personally involved in the world through creation, revelation, incarnation, and providence;
- Trinitarian: although God is one, he subsists in three distinct persons in agreement with the Council of Nicea, 325;
- christologically orthodox: the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior is one person, fully God and fully man, as held by the creeds of the ecumenical councils; and
- Augustinian: Adam's fall impacted all mankind so that all are in need of God's grace for salvation from sin and death through faith in Christ.

Moreover, specific foundational theological concepts, known as the mottos of the Reformation, form the core of the Protestantism confessed by Luther and Calvin. Five primary slogans, developed after the Reformation, summarize the theological commitments of the Protestant Reformations led by Luther and Calvin: *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *solī Deo gloria*.¹⁰ A sixth basic Reformation principle may be added: the priesthood of the believer.¹¹

⁸ See articles I–III, XVIII–XIX in the 1530 Lutheran Augsburg Confession written by Philip Melancthon, which not only defended Luther's teaching, but was also greatly praised by Luther; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 36–39, 50–53. Calvin too during his early ministry had subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. See Peter A. Lillback, "Calvin's Final Verdict on the Augsburg Confession," in *Aspects of Reforming: Theology and Practice in Sixteenth Century Europe*, ed. Michael Parsons (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 98–117.

⁹ See articles I–II, VII–XII in the Gallican or French Confession written by Calvin and others, <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/frconf.htm>. Cf. also articles I, III, VIII, IX–XV in the Reformed and Calvinistic Belgic Confession, see Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3:359–60, 363–67, 383–85, 390–96.

¹⁰ For more detail, see in this issue, Garry J. Williams, "The Five Solas of the Reformation: Then and Now." See also the *Five Solas Series* edited by Matthew Barrett published by Crossway. A book has been written for each of the "solas" for the 2017 Reformation anniversary year. See also Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525–1556* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002).

¹¹ For a brief treatment and application of this principle to the contemporary African church, see in this issue, Conrad Mbewe, "The Priesthood of All Believers in Africa."

II. *Interpretations of the Protestant Reformation: Why Was There a Reformation?*

Given the Reformation's continuity with early Christian theology, why was there a Reformation? Was the Reformation necessary? To answer these questions, various interpretations of the Reformation have been offered.¹² Many Protestants in the Reformed tradition follow Merle d'Aubigné's perspective developed in his nineteenth-century *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*. D'Aubigné saw the Reformation as the providential blessing of God's action in history,¹³ declaring, "History must live by that principle of life which is proper to it, and that life is God. He must be acknowledged and proclaimed in history;—and the course of events must be displayed as the annals of the government of a Supreme Disposer."¹⁴

Early Roman Catholic interpretations of the Reformation, however, took an opposite perspective. Seeking to refute d'Aubigné, American Catholic Bishop Martin John Spalding wrote *D'Aubigné's History of the Great Reformation in Germany and Switzerland*,¹⁵ in which he claimed against d'Aubigné that Luther's Reformation was a rebellion against the true church and influenced by the devil.¹⁶ Émile G. Léonard rejoined,

Adopting the traditional position of the anti-Protestant polemicists, M. Maritain can still write, on the subject of Luther: "This, if I may say so, is no more than the classic story of the fallen monk." But the Protestants long maintained, and still do occasionally, that the Reformation was a reaction against the licentiousness of the priests and the debaucheries of the Papacy; they are confirmed in this view by a late writing in which Luther claims that his revolt arose from his horrified discovery of the shameful practices of Rome, during his visit to Italy.¹⁷

¹² See W. Stanford Reid, *The Reformation: Revival or Revolution?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968); Lewis W. Spitz, ed., *The Reformation: Basic Interpretations* (Lexington, MA: Heath & Company, 1972).

¹³ For example, "Thus the English Reformation began independently of those of Luther and Zwingle—deriving its origin from God alone." Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: American Tract Society, 1846), 1:150, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41484/41484-h/41484-h.htm>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:v.

¹⁵ He concludes, "We have now completed our task.... We have examined the principal false statements of M. D'Aubigné. ... To have unmasked his hypocrisy and laid bare his contradictions, would have imposed on us an almost endless labor." Martin John Spalding, *D'Aubigné's Great Reformation in Germany and Switzerland, Reviewed and Refuted*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Battersby, 1846), 358; online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=dKFdAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹⁶ Among the forty plus references connecting Luther with the devil, we find, "He is puffed up," says another, "with pride and arrogance, and is seduced by Satan." *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁷ Émile G. Léonard, "Revival of the Church's Life," in Reid, *The Reformation: Revival or Revolution?*, 14.

Hugh Ross Williamson, a twentieth-century convert to Catholicism from a nonconformist background, asserted in *The Beginnings of the English Reformation* that the English Reformation was motivated by the nobility's greed and quest to confiscate the Church's lands.¹⁸ While recognizing the covetousness of the lords of old England, Henri Hauser answers this charge by rejecting its reductionist explanation: "The Reformation of the sixteenth century has the dual character of a social revolution and a religious revolution."¹⁹ Neither economics nor spiritual issues alone can fully account for all that happened in the political and ecclesiastical arenas of the Reformation era.

After the mid-twentieth century, post-Vatican II Catholic interpretations have generally been less antagonistic. George H. Tavard insisted that there are points of similarity between Reformation doctrine and Catholic beliefs: "If these precautions are adopted, it will then be seen how much closer is the profound spirituality of the Protestant mind to Catholicism than it believes itself to be."²⁰ Pierre Janelle focused on the Catholic Reformation, arguing that a reformation was needed due to "the disease of anarchy" that afflicted the Church.²¹ This new tone has been met by a friendlier Protestant approach represented, for example, by Léonard. In his *A History of Protestantism*, he interpreted the Reformation in terms of continuity with the historic Catholic faith rather than as a revolt, considering the Reformation the full flowering of the Catholic tradition.²²

Twentieth-century Lutheran scholars such as Gerhard Ritter and Ernest George Schwiebert have interpreted the Reformation in light of Luther's Germanic spirit and emphasized the German context of the Reformation.²³

¹⁸ Hugh Ross Williamson, *The Beginnings of the English Reformation* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1957), 9–21.

¹⁹ Cited in Léonard, "Revival of the Church's Life," 15.

²⁰ George H. Tavard, *Protestantism* (New York: Hawthorne, 1959) quoted in Reid, *The Reformation: Revival or Revolution?*, 79. See also Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²¹ "According to early Protestant controversialists, such as Tyndale, the abuses in the Church were the consequence of false doctrine: errors in faith led to errors in conduct. A close study of fifteenth-century conditions brings us, however, to a wholly different conclusion. The abuses may be shown to have sprung, not from mistaken notions on justification, the worship of the saints, Purgatory, etc., but from the state of administrative anarchy which had prevailed since the Great Schism." Pierre Janelle, *The Catholic Reformation* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1949), 4–5. Online: <https://archive.org/details/catholicreformat012266mbp>.

²² "I must emphasise at the outset—for it is one of the basic principles and guiding themes of this book—that *the Reformation, far more than a revolt against Catholic faith, was its culmination and its full flowering.*" Léonard, "Revival of the Church's Life," 16. Cf. Émile G. Léonard, *Histoire générale du protestantisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 1:10.

²³ Cf. Arthur C. McGiffert, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (New York: Century, 1912), 166; online: <https://archive.org/details/martinluthermanh00mcgiffert>; and Ernest

Yet Léonard has reasoned,

Luther appeared in Germany; but three years after the Theses there were “Lutherans” all over Europe. When a problem of vital importance concerns a whole world, and it adopts, from the first and everywhere at once, the solution found in a particular place, this place itself is of little account.²⁴

Moreover, George H. Williams, in his *Radical Reformation*, demonstrated the theological expanse of the Reformation beyond Luther and Calvin by highlighting the important impact of even more radical Reformers. He documented that “radical reformers” rejected the role of the state in the reforming of the church, thus by contrast making the Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed “magisterial reformers.”²⁵

Secular interpreters have identified other causes for the Reformation. Preserved Smith has pointed to science and ethical feeling.²⁶ Eva Priester has interpreted the Reformation in socioeconomic terms along Marxist lines.²⁷ H. A. E. Van Gelder has claimed that the Renaissance was the true Reformation.²⁸ Roland Bainton has offered a multifaceted approach, developing the varied issues of morals, doctrine, economics and politics.²⁹

III. *Indulgences and Other Abuses Evoked Concerns for Reform*

Regardless of the interpretation one holds regarding the Reformation, early Protestants saw themselves as reformers.³⁰ Protestants criticized Rome due to the endemic abuses they observed and experienced in medieval Christendom. Best known, given its role in Luther’s Reformation, was the

George Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950).

²⁴ Léonard, “Revival of the Church’s Life,” 13.

²⁵ George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

²⁶ Preserved Smith, *The Age of the Reformation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1948), 743–50.

²⁷ Eva Priester, *Kurze Geschichte Österreichs* (Vienna: Globus, 1946), 111–19. Cf. translation by C. J. Munford and W. Stanford Reid in Reid, *The Reformation: Revival or Revolution?*, 98–105.

²⁸ H. A. E. Van Gelder, *The Two Reformations of the 16th Century* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961), 3–10.

²⁹ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950).

³⁰ For surveys of the Reformation, see Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1956); Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements* (Chicago: McNally, 1971); *The Protestant Reformation, 1517–1559* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

sale of indulgences emerging from the sacrament of penance. Forerunners of the Reformation had identified indulgences as an abuse that needed to be reformed.³¹

Concern to correct the church's abuses is seen in the first Protestant creed that appeared in 1530, thirteen years after Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. The Augsburg Confession addressed seven abuses that had been remedied by 1530 in the churches adhering to Luther's Reformation, namely, both elements of the Sacrament, the marriage of priests, the Mass, confession, the distinction of meats, monastic vows, and ecclesiastical power.³² Surprisingly, the issue of indulgences was not addressed, although it was mentioned in the conclusion. The conclusion also stated that along with the enumerated abuses, others remained, some of which were identified but left without critique.³³ Thus medieval Christianity was permeated with practices tolerated by the church that could not be warranted by Scripture alone.

There was a direct link between penance and indulgences.³⁴ In the sacrament of penance, forgiveness of sins was thought to be secured in part by acts of self-denial such as pilgrimages to shrines or the veneration of relics. When such acts of penance became inconvenient, a monetary payment was accepted in lieu of the performance of the spiritual actions specified by the priest.

Indulgences grew out of the third and final aspect of penance. The three steps of the sacrament of penance in Roman Catholic theology are contrition, confession and absolution, and satisfaction. When the sinner felt sorrow for sin (contrition) and was moved to confess the sin to the priest, he could be forgiven or absolved of his sin by the priest. But to be sure that the confession was sincere and to make up for the sinner's wrongdoing, something specific needed to be done. This then was the act of penance, providing satisfaction for the sin.

In those circumstances when the sinner could not effectively offer satisfaction for his sin by the mandated penance, a substitute act was needed. In such cases, purchasing an indulgence was deemed appropriate. Indulgences were aptly named, as the church was "indulging" the penitent by providing

³¹ See Peter A. Lillback, "Forerunners of the Reformation," in *Unio cum Christo* 1.1–2 (Fall 2016): 77–101.

³² See the Augsburg Confession, articles XXII–XXVIII. The heading to these articles explains the early Reformation efforts to correct the abuses of the medieval church: "The churches among us do not dissent from the catholic church in any article of the faith but only set aside a few abuses that are new and were accepted because of corruption over time." See Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 60–105, esp. 61.

³³ "Although more abuses could be mentioned, we have included only the principal ones to avoid prolixity." *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁴ See Thomas Schirrmacher, *Indulgences: A History of Theology and Reality of Indulgences and Purgatory: A Protestant Evaluation*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2012).

help that it was not required to offer. The theological basis for indulgences was the treasury of merit. The church claimed that the saints had done so much good that they had done even more than they needed for themselves. These works above and beyond the call of duty—works of supererogation—by the saints, Mary, and Christ were retained by the church and could be administered to others through the sale of indulgences.

The practice proved lucrative and was gradually expanded, reaching to even future sins through plenary indulgences. The Crusades, for example, were advanced by the promise of a plenary indulgence for participation by Pope Boniface VIII in the Jubilee year of 1300. Eventually, the purchase of indulgences benefited not only the living but also deceased sinners by shortening their suffering in purgatory. Thus indulgences helped raise troops for the Crusades, and their revenues supported the building of papal edifices.

Given the wealth and power vested in the papacy along with the lack of accountability, various forms of corruption developed. The exercise of untethered papal power manifested itself via the interdict, which forbade the celebration of the sacraments in a given locale based on the claim that the pontiff had the power to remove the priests' ability to distribute sacramental grace if he so determined.³⁵ This threat weighed heavily on Roman Catholic civil authorities when they contemplated challenging papal power or prerogatives. Due to the power and wealth associated with the bishop's office, simony, or the sale of church offices, was a temptation and a regular practice of the medieval hierarchy.³⁶

Superstitions became widespread due to vast illiteracy and the absence of the Bible in the languages of the people, exacerbated by the carnage of the plague.³⁷ The preeminence of the priest was enhanced by teaching the spiritual inferiority of family life in comparison to celibacy. The elevation of the monastic ideals of obedience, chastity, and poverty added to social instability. The social fabric was stretched beyond biblical values as mandatory celibacy was ameliorated by a general acceptance of priests having concubines. The vow of poverty resulted in the glorification of begging, while the mandate of obedience to monastic authorities became tantamount to blind faith.

The issue of authority for the medieval church became problematic due to the recognition of three conflicting sources of authority in Roman Catholicism: the pope, tradition, and the Bible. It was not clear which was the

³⁵ Cf. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1970), 208–10.

³⁶ Cf. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, 54.

³⁷ See Peter A. Lillback, "Into the Mystic," in *Table Talk* (July 2014): 24–27; "Forerunners of the Reformation," 77–84.

ultimate authority in controversies. Moreover, there was an inherent struggle between the relationship of nature and grace. Did man save himself partly by merit?³⁸ Was Christ's saving work sufficient, or must human effort and the merits of the saints assist in man's salvation? Could man discover spiritual truth by reason without divine revelation, as claimed by Thomas Aquinas's integration of Aristotle's philosophy with semi-Augustinian theology?

International crises helped prepare the way for the Reformation. In the preceding century, various church councils dealt with schisms that arose when three popes simultaneously claimed legitimate authority.³⁹ The Council of Constance was called to restore order. European nationalism emerged as the church levied the crusades against Muslim-controlled holy sites and to resist Islamic invasions in the East. The discovery of the New World and scientific investigation also created intellectual challenges, as long-held faith positions were challenged by empirical research.

The popes compelled uniformity through the Inquisition. The Holy Office addressed perceived heresies—such as the views of forerunners and Protestants like Luther and Calvin—by church-sanctioned persecution and torture. Ultimately, Rome's unwillingness to reform from within compelled magistrates to seek reformation from without.

IV. Luther's Critique of Indulgences Led to the Break with Rome and the Beginnings of Lutheran Theology

The times and the man met in Luther.⁴⁰ His Ninety-Five Theses unleashed a firestorm that ultimately gave rise to the Protestant faith.⁴¹ The sale of

³⁸ See Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 45–57; “Theological Light from the Medieval Era? Anselm and the Logic of the Atonement,” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage. In Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002), 69–93; Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

³⁹ See Peter A. Lillback, “The Relationship of Church and State,” in *Reformation Theology*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 500–538.

⁴⁰ Important sources on Luther include: Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1988); Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma, 1300–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

⁴¹ For a text of Luther's famous Ninety-Five Theses, see Martin Luther, “The 95 Theses,” Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index>.

indulgences in Germany was authorized by Pope Leo X and Albrecht of Brandenburg to build Saint Peter's. Johann Tetzel, a German Dominican friar, who held the positions of Grand Inquisitor of Heresy in Poland and Grand Commissioner for Indulgences in Germany, was authorized to sell indulgences in Wittenberg, where Luther ministered. Luther's concern over the deleterious impact of indulgences on the morality of the people led him to compose his theses. He posted his critique on October 31, 1517. The theses gained great interest among humanist scholars. They were soon published and disseminated, creating controversy and financial furor in Rome.

Their themes can be illustrated by a few examples. Theses 1–2 undercut the alleged scriptural basis for indulgences:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," 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.

Thesis 5 declared that the pope's power with respect to indulgences was limited. Theses 7, 71, and 91 revealed that Luther thought of himself as a Catholic and was not completely opposed to indulgences. Theses 11 and 13 questioned the effect of indulgences on those in purgatory. Several theses aimed at correcting abuses fostered by Tetzel (21, 27, 28, 35, 75, 77, and 79) and clarifying what Christians should be taught about them (42–51). Luther raised searching questions that were difficult to answer (81–90):

82. Such as: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church? The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.
86. Again: "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?

In 1519 Luther debated his developing theology with John Eck at Leipzig, where Luther was compelled to identify some of his views with those of John Hus, who had been burned at the stake as a heretic by the Council of Constance a century earlier. He then received Pope Leo X's bull of

excommunication, *Exsurge Domine*, dated June 15, 1520. He was given sixty days to recant upon the publication of the bull in Saxony or else be excommunicated. Luther received it in October 1520, and sixty days later, on December 10, 1520, he publically burned it. Luther's condemnation of the bull was decisive:

Whoever wrote this bull, he is Antichrist. I protest before God, our Lord Jesus, his sacred angels, and the whole world that with my whole heart I dissent from the damnation of this bull, that I curse and execrate it as sacrilege and blasphemy of Christ, God's Son and our Lord. This be my recantation, O bull, thou daughter of bulls.⁴²

Luther was excommunicated on January 3, 1521. His fate was now in the hands of Emperor Charles V.

He arrived in Worms on April 16, cheered and welcomed by the people, and was summoned to the Imperial Diet to appear before Charles V on April 18, 1521. He appeared before the emperor twice, and each time he was told to recant. Luther refused, since he saw no evidence his teachings were unbiblical. He famously declared,

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen.⁴³

Some claim that the words “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise” were not spoken by Luther, but scholars like Bainton argue that they could well be authentic.⁴⁴

When dismissed, Luther was not arrested, because he had a letter of safe conduct guaranteeing three weeks' safe travel. He left for home on April 25. But when Luther and his protecting princes departed, the emperor imposed an Imperial Act declaring Luther an outlaw. Thus he could be slain by anyone without fear of reprisal. So Elector Friedrich the Wise had Luther kidnapped on May 4 to assure Luther's safety. Taken to the Wartburg Castle, Luther remained there for ten months. After only three months, he had translated the New Testament into German. Later he translated the Old Testament into German.

⁴² Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 155–56.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁴ The memorial statue of Luther in Worms bears the famous words.

Foundational theological themes emerged in Luther's thought.⁴⁵ Rejecting the synergism of medieval covenant theology, he affirmed human spiritual inability in his classic treatise, the 1525 *Bondage of the Will*. Medieval theologians taught that "God will not deny grace to the ones who do what lies within them."⁴⁶ Instead of the doctrine of doing one's best in order to merit grace, his theology focused on the cross. Luther distinguished the theology of the cross, *theologia crucis*, from the theology of glory, *theologia gloriae*. Luther's theology of the cross insisted that salvation was found entirely in the work of Christ. The theology of glory, however, was Rome's doctrine that a person in some measure could merit salvation. For Luther, if this were true, the glory of salvation was not exclusively in Christ and his cross, but shared with human good works. Luther insisted that the theology of glory had to be resisted, as it denied the work of Christ alone in salvation. This was essential for establishing his central doctrine of Christ's alien righteousness forgiving a sinner through faith, or, justification by faith alone.

Luther's view of the Christian is captured in the phrase *simul justus et peccator*, that is, believers in Christ are "simultaneously both righteous and sinful." They are sinful in themselves before God. But in Christ by faith, the believer though sinner is forgiven and declared righteous. Luther buttressed his understanding of the gospel by an interpretative method contrasting law and gospel: the law was God's demand of obedience, a law that none could keep and that reveals human sinfulness, but the gospel, the good news of salvation in Christ, manifests the forgiveness of sins. The gospel is Christ's work for sinners, not sinners' works for God. Indulgences were unacceptable because they put human effort (law) in place of the good news of Christ.⁴⁷

For Luther, the church was the place of gospel proclamation and the administration of the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and hence a vital expression of God's saving work. Luther's doctrine of the sacraments was central to the proclamation of the gospel. The preached word of Scripture was to be conjoined with the visible word of the sacraments. The church imparted the grace of God through the gospel and through the saving benefit of baptism and by reception of the body and blood of Christ

⁴⁵ Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962).

⁴⁶ *Faciuntibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*. Cf. Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 46–50.

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 58–80.

in the Lord's Supper. Luther's view of the Eucharist was not the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, where the Eucharistic elements became the body and blood of Christ. Rather, he affirmed consubstantiation, wherein the bread and wine remained what they were, but with the consecration of the elements, the literal body and blood of Christ were "in, with, and under" the elements, and thus truly present to those who partake.

Luther never wanted a church named for him. He wished his church to be named the Evangelical Church, after the gospel. Eck first used the term Lutheran at the Leipzig debate (1519) in the way Catholics labeled heretical groups. Nowadays, churches in the tradition of Luther are positively termed Lutheran, often without the name Evangelical.⁴⁸ The contributions of Luther are vast, but some best known are the Lutheran churches, Luther's catechisms, the German Bible, Luther's immense writings, a system of education, the centrality of preaching in worship, the elevation of Christian home life, including marriage for the clergy, Bible translations in the language of the people, critique of the papacy, the establishment of the Protestant work ethic resulting in the demise of the mendicant orders, and his hymns and his choral and instrumental liturgical music. Luther died in Eisleben, his birth town, on February 18, 1546. His last words were spoken in German and Latin, "We are beggars (German). This is true (Latin)." Lutheranism spread, becoming established in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, while making significant impact in Scotland, England, Poland, and Holland.

V. The Reformed Tradition of Calvin

Luther's Reformation swept through Europe, aided by the printing press, interested scholars, and devout and self-interested nobility, as well as the threat of Islam, which prevented imperial forces from crushing the Lutheran movement. Other Reformers followed, who critiqued and perfected Luther's Reformation theology. Important names among these include the following:

- Philip Melancthon and Martin Chemnitz, Luther's followers
- Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and Heinrich Bullinger, who were German and Swiss German Reformed
- In reaction to the Zwinglian and Rhineland Reformers and the Lutheran Reformers, the more radical Anabaptists and Brethren Reformers emerged

⁴⁸ "Lutheranism," Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheranism>. Cf. Orlando O. Espin and James B. Nickoloff, eds., *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 796.

- John Calvin and Theodore Beza, who were Swiss and French Reformed
- Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley, fathers of the Anglican Reformation and the Puritan movement, from which in turn the Baptists emerged
- John Knox, father of Scottish Presbyterianism.

Calvin's reformation activities cannot be understood apart from those of Luther and Zwingli.⁴⁹ Zwingli (1484–1531) was a scholarly priest who began ministry in Zurich in 1519. Among his theological contributions were the development of a covenantal hermeneutic, the defense of infant baptism from a covenantal perspective, and development of the memorial view of the Lord's Supper against the Roman Church's transubstantiation and Luther's consubstantiation theory. He was converted to the Reformation movement in 1519, facing the plague, reading Luther's writings, and studying Erasmus's newly published Greek New Testament (1516). His Reformation theology publically appeared in 1521 with his Sixty-Seven Articles. The Mass in Zurich was abolished in 1525. Zwingli and Luther split over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in spite of the best efforts of Bucer to reconcile them.⁵⁰ Zwingli died at the Second Battle of Cappel in 1531, fighting as a warrior chaplain against Roman Catholic Swiss cantons. Zwingli's theology tended to stress the social and covenantal dimensions of faith, while Luther's theology emphasized the individual's faith for justification.⁵¹

Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) succeeded Zwingli. After his university studies, Bullinger was persuaded of Zwingli's reforms. Taking up Zwingli's mantle, he proved to be a gifted leader whose ministry reached internationally through his voluminous letters. He contributed early to covenant theology,⁵² and his works included the Second Helvetic Confession and his sermons entitled the *Decades*, which greatly influenced the Reformation in England.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gregory J. Miller, "Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531)," in *The Reformation Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 165.

⁵⁰ Cf. Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971). For a contemporary summary of the great debate between Luther and Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy, see Hillerbrand, *The Reformation: A Narrative History*, 155–63.

⁵¹ See Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation*, ed. and trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 90–103.

⁵² For how the covenant concept of Bullinger impacted the Reformers, see Peter A. Lillback, "The Early Reformed Covenant Paradigm: Vermigli in the Context of Bullinger, Luther and Calvin," in *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations*, ed. Frank A. James III (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 70–96.

The Reformation in Geneva was intimately connected with the work of John Calvin.⁵³ Calvin's studies led to expertise in law and the classical languages celebrated by the humanists. His first book appeared in 1532, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. Around this time he was converted to the Lutheran perspective.⁵⁴ Calvin planned to be a scholar and had received acclaim for his first edition of the *Institutes*, written in 1536. However, William Farel's dramatic plea for Calvin to assist him in his reforming work in Geneva, made during Calvin's stop in Geneva on a journey elsewhere, changed the course of his life. From 1536 to his death in 1564 Calvin was associated with the theological leadership of Geneva—except for a three-year exile in Strasbourg during 1538–41. He had gotten on the wrong side of the newly reformed Genevan magistrates regarding who could participate in the Lord's Supper. After Calvin had been called back, Geneva became the center of Reformed worship and theology that greatly impacted Reformation theology.⁵⁵

Calvin preferred Luther's writings over Zwingli's. Comparing Luther to Zwingli, he wrote in 1539, "If the two men are compared with each other, you yourself know how much Luther has the preference."⁵⁶ His identification of Luther with the gospel is seen in his 1551 comments on Isaiah 22:17, where he describes Thomas More's persecution of Reformed believers: "He had been a very great persecutor of the Lutherans, that is, of the godly."⁵⁷ In the same year, Calvin related to Bullinger that adherents of "Lutheran doctrines" in his beloved France were facing persecutions of all kinds.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Calvin was impacted by the Swiss in terms of his covenantal approach to Scripture, and he reached a consensus on the Lord's Supper

⁵³ For biographies of Calvin, see Irena Backus and Philip Benedict, eds., *Calvin and His Influence, 1509–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin's Life," in Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); John T. McNeil, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁴ See Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 11.

⁵⁵ See J. Todd Billings and I. John Hesselink, eds., *Calvin's Theology and Its Reception: Disputes, Developments, and New Possibilities* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012).

⁵⁶ John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 7 vols., ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (1844–1858; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), February 28, 1539, 4:109.

⁵⁷ The French has "C'est à dire, des enfans de Dieu;"—"That is, of the children of God." John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:131.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 5:320.

with Bullinger in 1549.⁵⁹ In 1534, two years before Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes*, Bullinger developed Zwingli's view of the covenant in the first monograph ever written on the covenant, *Of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*.⁶⁰ Within a year or two of Bullinger's work, Calvin wrote the preface to the *Geneva Bible*, which developed a covenant theology that paralleled some of the perspectives of Bullinger.⁶¹ Calvin developed covenantal themes in the *Institutes*.⁶²

Among the many contributions of Calvin, his greatest and most lasting was his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536 and continually edited and expanded until its final 1559 edition. The *Institutes* were intended to be a theological guidebook for reading the Bible, offering a logical summation of its main truths from the Reformation perspective, dealing in four books with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, as well as the church and sacraments. Calvin interacted with the history of the Christian tradition in the context of the clash of Protestantism with medieval Catholicism.

Reformed and Presbyterian theology, in its earliest form, is found in Calvin's theology.⁶³ The *Institutes* presents classic statements of biblical authority, the Trinity, creation and providence, the history of the covenant,⁶⁴ the application of the Ten Commandments to the Christian life, Christology, the saving work of Christ and its application to the believer by union with

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the Consensus Tigurinus, see Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:471–73.

⁶⁰ See Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., eds., *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013), 245–70.

⁶¹ The French title is, “A Tous Amateurs de Iesus Christ et de son Evangile, Salut,” translated in English as *Christ the End of the Law, Being the Preface to the Geneva Bible of 1550*; see Lillback and Gaffin, *Thy Word Is Still Truth*, 271–82.

⁶² See Lillback, *The Binding of God*.

⁶³ Brian A. Gerrish, “The Place of Calvin in Christian Theology,” in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 289–304; W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1971); Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); I. John Hesselink, “Calvin's Theology,” in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, 74–92; Anthony N. S. Lane, *A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ See Peter A. Lillback, “Calvin's Interpretation of the History of Salvation: The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Covenant,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 168–204.

Christ through the Holy Spirit,⁶⁵ the church and sacraments (infant baptism and the Lord's Supper),⁶⁶ and the relationship of church and state.⁶⁷

The *Institutes* also presents "Calvinian" distinctives. While Calvin was a "Calvinist" teaching "double predestination," he did not treat predestination in the doctrine of God, but in Book Three, after his discussion of the work of Christ. Interestingly, he did not explicitly develop limited atonement, one of the traditional five points of Calvinism developed at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619). Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith alone supports Luther's justification by grace through faith, but Calvin developed justification within the covenant of grace as one of its dual blessings alongside sanctification.⁶⁸

Calvin's theological approach differed significantly from Luther's, but generally not in an adversarial manner. These distinctions appear not only in his emphasis on the covenant⁶⁹ and the covenantal context of justification,⁷⁰ but also in his expression of other matters such as hermeneutics,⁷¹ the role of the law in the Christian's life,⁷² the Presbyterian form of church government,⁷³ the relationship between church and state,⁷⁴ how grace is administered

⁶⁵ See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 176–209.

⁶⁶ See Peter A. Lillback, "Calvin's Covenantal Response to the Anabaptist View of Baptism," *Biblical Horizons*, <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/miscellaneous/calvins-covenantal-response-to-the-anabaptist-view-of-baptism/>.

⁶⁷ See Lillback, "The Relationship of Church and State."

⁶⁸ See Peter A. Lillback, "Calvin's Development of the Doctrine of Forensic Justification: Calvin and the Early Lutherans on the Relationship of Justification and Renewal," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2007), 51–80; Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 178–209.

⁶⁹ Peter A. Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29.1 (1994): 42–74; "Ursinus' Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 247–88.

⁷⁰ See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 180–83.

⁷¹ See Peter A. Lillback, "All the Glorious Offices of Christ—1 Corinthians 1:29–31," in *Preaching Like Calvin: Sermons from the 500th Anniversary Celebration*, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010), 85–99; "Proclaiming Christ: An Apologetic for Redemptive Historical Preaching," in *Westminster Conference in Korea* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2016), 9–43.

⁷² See Peter A. Lillback, "Indicative and Imperative: Calvin's Exposition of Deuteronomy 29:9–18 as an Example of Preaching the Covenant from an OT Context for the NT Church," in *Westminster Conference in Korea* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2016), 76–107.

⁷³ See Peter A. Lillback, "The Reformers' Rediscovery of Presbyterian Polity," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 63–81; "Calvin's Primer on Presbyterianism," Christian Study Library, <http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/20110011%20-%20Lillback%20PA%20-%20Calvins%20Primer%20on%20Presbyterianism.pdf>.

⁷⁴ See Lillback, "The Relationship of Church and State," 509–17.

through baptism and how Christ is present in the Eucharist,⁷⁵ and the significance and authority of the Augsburg Confession.⁷⁶ Calvin's Reformed tradition spread from Switzerland into France, Germany, Hungary, Scotland, and the Netherlands.

VI. *How Luther and Calvin Viewed Each Other*

Calvin and Luther never met. Luther knew only a little about Calvin but seemed favorably disposed to him.⁷⁷ But Calvin was ever aware of Luther and had a range of opinions of the towering colossus on the Reformation terrain. For example, Calvin strove to limit the conflict between the Swiss Reformed and Luther that broke out over the Eucharist. Writing to Bullinger on November 25, 1544, he praised Luther's work, reminding Bullinger of Luther's extraordinary giftedness and the Reformed movement's indebtedness to him.⁷⁸ However, the eventual failure to unite the Protestants, in Calvin's mind, was due to all sides, including Luther.⁷⁹ In spite of the rupture, Calvin "was ready to pay him tribute. 'I have often said,' Calvin declared, 'that even though he were to call me a devil, I would nevertheless hold him in such honor that I would acknowledge him to be a distinguished servant of God.'"⁸⁰

Yet Calvin also struggled with the dominating and fiery temper of Luther. His criticism of Luther appeared in the ongoing sacramental controversy in 1544, marked by Luther's renewed disdain for the late Zwingli, who had died in 1531. Luther's stinging invective condemned the doctrines of the Zurich Reformer and his church, comparing them to the heresies of the radical Reformers.⁸¹ Deeply troubled and feeling Luther's wrath, even Melancthon was distressed. Calvin wrote to Bucer on August 28, 1544,

I have written to you about our Pericles, who has again begun to thunder most vehemently on the subject of the Lord's Supper, and has written a fierce attack, in which you and I are beaten black and blue. I am a quiet peaceable bird, nor would be unwilling if I may depart out of this prison-house, if our disturber shall constrain me.⁸²

⁷⁵ See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 242–63.

⁷⁶ See Peter A. Lillback, "Confessional Subscription Among the Sixteenth Century Reformers," in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. David W. Hall (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 33–66; "Calvin's Final Verdict on the Augsburg Confession."

⁷⁷ See Calvin's November 20, 1539, letter to Farel, relating that Luther had spoken well of Calvin and his writings even though Calvin had been critical of Luther. In Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 4:166–67. Cf. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, 412–13.

⁷⁸ Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 4:432–34.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:89–90.

⁸⁰ Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 18.

⁸¹ See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 76–80.

⁸² Calvin, *Tracts and Letters*, 4:433.

Calvin addressed Melancthon about his “Pericles [who] allows himself to be carried beyond all due bounds with his love of thunder.” Calvin argued that the church was at great risk if an individual possesses total authority: “In the Church we must always be upon our guard, lest we pay too great a deference to men. For it is all over with her, when a single individual, be he whosoever you please, has more authority than all the rest, especially where this very person does not scruple to try how far he may go.”⁸³ Similarly, Calvin wrote to Farel on October 10, 1544, praising the patience of the brethren in Zurich while admitting “the rage of Luther,” “Luther’s unkindness,” and “the danger ... from Luther.”⁸⁴

Calvin attempted to limit the conflict by writing to Bullinger on November 25, 1544, about Luther’s extraordinary giftedness and the Reformed movement’s indebtedness to him.⁸⁵ Under these difficult circumstances, Calvin highly appreciated Luther’s work.⁸⁶ He did not, however, ignore Luther’s “evil qualities” that “beset him.” Moreover, he referred to his “violence” and “fierce invective,” with which he had “harassed” the Reformed, revealing his “serious faults” and “vehemence of natural temperament.” Calvin wished Luther were “more observant and careful in the acknowledgment of his own vices” instead of being so “prone to be over-indulgent to himself.”⁸⁷ William Bouwsma well summarizes Calvin’s assessment of Luther:

Calvin wrote to Bucer in 1538, although he was “perfectly convinced of Luther’s piety,” he was repelled by his “craving for victory,” his “haughty manner and abusive language,” his “ignorance and most gross delusions,” his “insolent fury,” the same failings that had repelled Erasmus. Calvin was also critical of Luther’s scholarship. He thought him, as an expositor, careless about “propriety of expression or historical context” and satisfied—for Calvin this was not enough—when he could “draw out fruitful doctrine.” Like Zwingli, Calvin did not consider Luther the only early Reformer; he was “not the only one in the church of God to be looked up to.”⁸⁸

But for all this, in Calvin’s mind, Luther was one of God’s “good men.” Luther’s death illustrated how “God takes good men out of this world, when he intends to punish ... the ungodly,” adding, “In our own times a remarkable instance of this was given in the death of Luther, who was snatched from the world a short time before that terrible calamity befell Germany.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Ibid., 4:466–67.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4:428–29.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 4:432–434.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4:433.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4:432–33.

⁸⁸ Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 18.

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 4:196 (on Isa 57:1).

Thus Calvin, indebted to Luther, praised, defended, and criticized him. Calvin's essential assessment of the great Reformer was that Luther had launched a movement—a “miraculous” one to be sure—but one that nevertheless had to be advanced and perfected by others. Calvin mused in his 1550 *Concerning Scandals*,

We remember with amazement how deep was the abyss of ignorance and how horrible the darkness of the papacy. It was a great miracle of God that Luther and those who worked with him at the beginning in restoring the pure truth were able to emerge from it little by little. Some claim to be scandalized because these good personages did not see everything at once and did not finish and polish such a difficult work. It is as though they were accusing us of not seeing the sun shine as fully at dawn as at midday.⁹⁰

VII. *Twenty Lasting Consequences of Luther's and Calvin's Protestant Reformations*

The Reformation changed the medieval world and left a vast and permanent impact that is readily visible even today. Some of the most important are these:

1. The Protestant faith, with its distinctive doctrines, liturgies, hymnody, and psalm singing⁹¹
2. Bible translations in the languages of the people
3. The elevation of the vernacular languages into scholarly languages by the translation of the Bible, resulting in the decline of Latin
4. Universal education to promote the reading of the Bible, and the establishment of schools from childhood to university level⁹²
5. The growth of printing, with the publication of Bibles and theological books, creating libraries, a literate clergy, and Bible-reading congregations
6. Marriage of the clergy, putting an end to monastic communities in Protestant lands, and elevating the spiritual value of the family for the church

⁹⁰ John Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 83.

⁹¹ See Peter A. Lillback, “Our Songs in God’s Worship,” Christian Study Library, <http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/20100168%20-%20Lillback%20A%20-%20Our%20Songs%20in%20Gods%20Worship.pdf>.

⁹² See Peter A. Lillback, “The Reformation and Education,” in *Table Talk* (October 2016): 30–31.

7. The development of the nation state with a national church and the principle that the subject follows the faith of the ruler
8. The end of the hegemony of medieval Catholicism due to the birth of nations and state churches
9. Protestant confessions of faith and the birth of denominations due to confessional differences⁹³
10. Liberty of conscience, the first step to political liberty and religious liberty, which gradually developed from the wars of religion as various confessional churches and minorities struggled with the established faith⁹⁴
11. Development of an Erastian view of church and state, whereby the state was over the church, as among European Lutherans and Anglicans and in Zwingli's Zurich
12. Development of a sphere sovereignty view of church and state under Calvin, wherein each possessed a measure of independence from the other in matters that pertained to each⁹⁵
13. Exploration and colonization of the New World advanced by persecuted minorities seeking religious freedom and by the sending out of missionaries with Reformation commitments
14. The interplay between republican and federal ideas of constitutional government, shaped by federal or covenantal theology⁹⁶
15. The curtailment of monarchical power due to the rise of republican ideas of government, especially in regions impacted by Calvinism and covenant theology
16. Theories of political resistance developed by minorities who found the necessity of defending themselves from persecution and defending their consciences before governmental authorities⁹⁷
17. Investigation in the humanities and development of the fields of empirical scientific exploration, encouraged by the Reformation's commitment to education

⁹³ See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vols. 1, 3.

⁹⁴ See Peter A. Lillback, "From America to the World: Protestant Christianity's Creation of Religious Liberty," in *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama Dan Masyarakat* 2.1 (April 2015): 8–94; "The Huguenots' Via Dolorosa: The Life Under the Cross of the Persecuted Protestants of France," in *God's Fiery Challenger for Our Time: Festschrift in Honor of Stephen Tong*, ed. Benyamin F. Intan (Jakarta: Reformed Center for Religion and Society, 2007), 215–32.

⁹⁵ See Lillback, "The Relationship of Church and State," 510, 533.

⁹⁶ See Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

⁹⁷ See Lillback, "The Relationship of Church and State," 517ff.

18. The Protestant work ethic and the idea of a godly “secular” vocation, issuing in capitalism and the rise of an educated middle class, and in turn the growth of capital and business development, as well as banking and financial markets in Protestant lands⁹⁸
19. World-affirming art and aesthetics, resulting from the doctrine of the goodness of creation and the questioning of the spiritual value of asceticism⁹⁹
20. The division of Europe into Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed regions, divisions still culturally evident, due to the conclusion of the Reformation era by the Religious Peace of Westphalia after the Thirty Years War.

Whether one agrees or not with Luther’s and Calvin’s Protestant Reformations, their labors have an abiding legacy. For those who agree, the Reformation was necessary and is relevant today. The Word of God, the glory of Christ in the gospel, and a life of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit’s grace are as essential today as they were in the sixteenth century of Luther and Calvin.

⁹⁸ See Michael Wykes, “Devaluing the Scholastics: Calvin’s Ethics of Usury,” in *Business Ethics Today*, ed. Philip J. Clements (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2011), 95–125.

⁹⁹ See Laurel Gasque, *Art and the Christian Mind: The Life and Work of H. R. Rookmaaker* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994).