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THE REFORMATION.¹

BY ALBERT MITCHELL.

THE ERA OF THE REFORMATION.

THE Chronology of the Reformation is difficult. The Reformation hangs upon the Renaissance, but is not its child. In a sense we may say that the Reformation was born of two parents, the Greek Testament and the Printing Press. In 1440 Gutenberg invented printing from movable types, and set up the first printing press. In 1455 the first Bible was printed in Latin. And in the providence of God the Greek Testament was recovered for the Church just at the time when the printing press was invented; the great pivot upon which the recovery of the Greek Testament turned being the date 1453, the fall of Constantinople before the attack of Mohammed II, which broke down the Eastern Greek kingdom, and scattered the Greek scholars into the west.

The Ottoman foothold in Europe had been secured in 1358 under Orchan. During the century that followed, the steady weakening of the Eastern Empire resulted in the gradual passing of Greek scholars across the Adriatic. A Greek Chair was established at Florence in 1397; and in 1438 there were five hundred Greeks at Ferrara for the Council of that year. But the capture of Constantinople by Mohammed II ended both the Byzantine Empire and Byzantine learning. In the library of Nicholas V (Pope 1447-55) there were 824 Latin MSS. and 352 Greek MSS., but beyond the celebrated Codex B there was little New Testament Greek. Much the same was the case elsewhere. Lincoln College, Oxford, acquired a Greek MS. of the Acts and Catholic Epistles about 1483 and the text of the Gospels in 1502. Ximenes in Spain published the Complutensian Polyglot Bible (in Hebrew, Greek and Latin) in 1522, the printing having been commenced in 1514. But his action was anticipated by Erasmus, who produced his Greek Testament in 1516. The Hebrew Old Testament had at some time previously been printed for the Jews; and the Latin version had then been sixty years in print. The Renaissance can be dated with reasonable fairness by the two events, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the discovery of the New World in 1492. But it would be hard to give a date for the Reformation. Yet I repeat that in a sense it was born of two parents, the Greek Testament and the printing press. So long as the circulation of the Scriptures was limited by the work of the Scriptorium in the monastery or of the private scribe often suspect of heresy the cost was prohibitive. The change wrought by the printer may be gauged by the prices charged for the English Prayer

¹ Based upon the substance of a lecture delivered in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, on Monday evening, March 4, 1935, to Leaders of the Crusaders' Union and Senior Crusaders; but revised, and extended by the addition of matter omitted for lack of time.

Book of 1552—2s. 5*d.* in quires (2s. second impression); 3s. 4*d.* in parchment (2s. 8*d.* second impression) and 4s. in leather (3s. 4*d.* second impression). Certain copies of Tindale's New Testament sold for about 3s. (30s. or more in to-day's values) and in 1552 a copy is said to have cost 22 pence. Bibles were, of course, more costly. And so long as the student had no appeal from the Latin versions of the Scriptures theology remained constricted by Roman law. With access to the original tongue of the New Testament thought was liberated and theology emerged from bondage.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT OF THE REFORMATION.

The Reformation practically affected Western Christendom only. The East was cut off altogether by the Turks, and the Slavonic North-East depended on the Greeks, and was not directly touched. But the old Western Roman Empire was affected, with the Scandinavian North and Germany, Poland in part, and the outlying States on the Baltic. The Mediterranean lands were but little touched: there it reached only the *intelligentsia*, and gained no firm hold. The Spanish Inquisition was set up in 1480-1, and was introduced also into the Spanish possessions in Italy; and the rest of Italy was no better off. The Germanic Reformation, usually associated with the name of Luther, affected Northern Germany, Scandinavia, Finland and the other Baltic regions. The Helvetic Reformation, of which Zwingli was the earliest outstanding leader, swept over Switzerland and touched parts of Southern Germany, the Low Countries, France, Hungary, and Poland, and Scotland. The English Reformation had a character of its own: in its earlier phases it was not without affinity with the Germanic, but later it approximated more to the Helvetic; but throughout it was national, and harked back to influences that preceded the Continental beginnings. The Counter-Reformation which took its inspiration from the Council of Trent (1542-3, 1545-7—Bologna—1550-1-2 and 1561-2-3), and its instruments from the ranks of the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534-40, found its field primarily in the possessions of the House of Austria and spread more gradually over Southern Europe.

THE PRELUDE TO THE REFORMATION.

The necessity for reformation commenced very early; we can almost say at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 315, when Constantine established his claim to the Roman Empire. For, from the moment that Christianity became fashionable, the court religion, the religion of the Emperor, the seeds of decay were sown. The controversy between Arius and Athanasius in the fourth century, though it led to the assertion of the true doctrine of the Church in creed, also set in motion other movements that began to corrupt the practice of the Church. I sometimes think that the devil, having failed at the Council of Nicea (325) to corrupt the creed of the Church, turned his attention to the ritual and

ceremony of the Church, and found he could be more effective in working evil thereby. After the death of Athanasius, about 367, came the growth of the Papacy in worldly power. From Gregory the Great in 590–604 to Gregory VII (whom we know better as Hildebrand) in 1073–85, there was a steady progress upwards in power, and the establishment of the Roman Church as a worldly, temporal power. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed the doctrine of Transubstantiation as part of the creed of the Church.¹ (You must remember that Transubstantiation does not exhaust the doctrine of the Real Presence, but Transubstantiation is the logical result of the doctrine of the Real Presence. A study of the accusations made against the Reformers reveals that they contained a double indictment, that they denied both the Real Presence and Transubstantiation.) During the whole of this period there was a steady decay of faith and of learning, and that was due to the closing of the Scriptures. The Scriptures existed only in a dead tongue, and were not in the vernacular.

Even in the Dark Ages the existence of various bodies, as the Cathari and Albigenses, pilloried by the authorities as heretics and Manichæans—an accusation always to be received with caution—witnesses to the earnest struggles of often ignorant people after better things. And we have one very important piece of evidence in the long history of the Vallenses or Dalesmen of the Piedmontese valleys who were certainly in existence in the eleventh century, and under the later names of Vaudois and Waldensians have survived through bitter persecution to the present day and are essentially orthodox. In the twelfth century Peter of Lyons (*c.* 1160), surnamed Waldo, attached himself to them, and some time thereafter the “d” found its way into their name and led to confusion. At one time the Vaudois claimed spiritual descent from Claudius, Bishop of Turin in the ninth century and even asserted continuity with the teachers of the fourth century, the time of Athanasius. But since the Vaudois or modern Waldensians have definitely adopted presbyterian² principles they have become shy of emphasising pre-Reformation origin. But in the fourteenth century they spread over Europe in the guise of pedlars, and even of Friars Predicant, and may have influenced the English country-side and prepared it for the later Lollardy. The Dominican house of Edington had a Vaudois prior, who was in the service of Edward II as chaplain or confessor.

¹ The doctrine of transubstantiation is found long before 1215: it was introduced into England by Lanfranc soon after 1066. It was a product of the West, but it spread to the East and there displaced the older doctrine of Augmentation traceable to John Damascene (otherwise Al Mansur) *c.* 730.

² The question whether the earlier Waldenses (Vallenses) were presbyterian or not is in doubt. The early Bohemian Brethren (Moravians) received their episcopate from Stephen, a Waldensian who claimed (and was believed by them) to be an apostolic bishop. There certainly was some distinction between Senior Elders and younger elders: but a committee of the Lambeth Conference has reported against Moravian Orders, or at least declared that they are “not proven.”

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

The great "Morning Star of the Reformation" was John Wycliffe. Born about 1324; Master of Balliol College, 1360; Rector of Lutterworth, 1374; he died ten years later. In 1380 he produced the New Testament in English, and the Old Testament followed from his "School." His leading disciples and co-workers were Nicholas of Hereford and John Purvey. Wycliffe's version was the first in English. Before his day there was (except some partial Anglo-Saxon versions prior to the Norman Conquest) no part of the Scriptures available in English except the Psalter (notably Richard Rolle's, 1349).¹

Wycliffe's teaching is very obscure. The extraordinary thing is that we cannot find very clearly what many of these early people taught. Most of their emphasis was on conduct and morals—a significant indication. Sir John Oldcastle (Lord Cobham) said he never did hate sin before he was taught by Wycliffe.² But it is perfectly clear that Wycliffe denied Transubstantiation, and said that the Presence of the Lord in the Sacrament was to be taken figuratively. What remains of his sermons and teaching indicate that he probably held Protestant doctrine, and there are constant references to the Holy Scriptures, the Gospel, and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can judge better of his doctrine by his disciples. Walter Brute, 1392, gives definite witness to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, the free Grace of God, and the fact that Christ fulfilled the law for us. So we may reasonably take that as a summary of Wycliffe's teaching.³ Another of Wycliffe's disciples, Peter Payne (otherwise Peter Clerk, or the clerk) was Master of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, but fled to Dresden in 1411, and two years later went to Prague, where he taught in the University and attained great influence in the Hussite camp.

JOHN HUSS.

For in Bohemia, Wycliffe's doctrine had roused John Huss, who was burned at Constance in 1415. Bohemian students were at Oxford in 1390. In 1467, the Hussites or Bohemians broke away from the Roman Church altogether, and started a ministry of their own, and an episcopate. From the Hussite Church, and the evangelical views that began to spread, came the Gospel message of Martin Luther. In 1609 nine-tenths of the Protestants of Bohemia were Hussites, when they joined forces with the Lutherans. But the battle of the White Mountain in 1620 broke them.

MARTIN LUTHER.

Martin Luther was born in 1483. He died in 1546. Of all Luther's ninety-five theses, scarcely more than one is doctrinal.

¹ For fuller treatment of this point see my article "The Growth of the Bible in English," in the *Church of England Year Book for 1936*.

² "For Oldcastle died a martyr." Epilogue to Henry IV., pt. 2.

³ In the Lollard conclusions presented to Parliament in 1394 there is a reference to the "Pretended miracle of the Sacrament of bread."

All relate to abuses of the Church, penances and indulgences. But at the bottom Luther's inspiration was spiritual. These are his own words :

"Then I began to understand the justice of God to be that by which the just man lives by the Gift of God, namely by faith, and that the meaning was that the Gospel reveals that justice of God by which He justifies us beggars through faith, as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' Here I felt myself absolutely born again ; the gates of heaven were opened, and I had entered Paradise itself."

"He has delivered, purchased, and won me, a lost and doomed man, from all sins, from death and the devil's power."

"Now therefore those tyrants and gaolers (sin and blindness) are all crushed, and in their place is come Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life, righteousness, all good and holiness, and He has snatched us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and brought us back to the Father's goodness and grace."

That was the spirit that lay behind Luther's work for the Reformation.

ULRICH OR HULDREICH ZWINGLI.

And if we turn to the other great movement in Switzerland, we have the words of Ulrich Zwingli, although he, just like Luther, makes his public theses purely upon temporal and political grounds. He says : "Christ, Who offered Himself once, is for ever a perfect and satisfactory sacrifice for the sins of all believers, from which we conclude that the Mass is no sacrifice." Again he speaks of "the greatness and freedom of God's mercy." "The Gospel is nothing but the Good News of the grace of God ; on this we should rest our hearts." Again : "That in the Holy Supper the very body of Christ is present to the eye, contemplation, and beholding of faith : that is that they which give thus to the Lord for the benefits given to us in His Son, acknowledge Him to have taken of His very flesh, in it verily to have suffered, and verily to have washed away our sins in His blood, and so all things done by Christ to be made to them, in the beholding of faith, as it were present." Again, you see, it is the spiritual conception of the Grace of God. Zwingli was born in 1484, took his M.A. degree at Vienna, was ordained priest at Constance in 1506, appointed Chief Pastor of Zurich in 1518, and died on the battlefield of Kappel in 1531.

JOHN CALVIN.

John Calvin (born at Noyon in 1509 and qualified as a lawyer in 1532), who organised the Helvetic Reformation, was more of a law-giver than a theologian, but even he says, as Dr. Fairbairn translates him, that "if man was to be saved God must save him. . . . God did it all. We had no merit, and He had all the glory."¹

In 1549 in the Consensus Tigurinus (Zurich) Calvin's system was recognised by the Swiss. But with the Peace of Augsburg

¹ Calvin joined William Farel at Geneva in 1536, and died in 1564.

in 1555 the progress of the Continental Reformation was checked by the establishment of the doctrine of *Uti possidetis*; whereby the position was, so to say, petrified on the basis of *Cujus Regio ejus religio*.

THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND.

While the Reformation on the Continent was largely stemmed as a result of the Peace of Augsburg, in England things were a little different, for many reasons, amongst them the following. We had the Anglo-Saxon tradition from the first lingering among the people with the sacramental doctrine of Ælfric; the infiltration of the doctrines of grace in the hidden teaching of the wandering predicants, and the leavening of the country-side and the back streets of the towns with Lollardy. And the killing off of the nobility and gentry in the Wars of the Roses, and the rising of the new middle class changed the balance of power. The Tudor kings crushed feudalism, and cultivated the mercantile middle class on whom they relied.

WILLIAM TINDALE.

In 1483 William Tindale was born. He graduated at Oxford in 1512. In 1525 he brought out an octavo edition of the New Testament, and in 1536 he was strangled and burned at Vilvorde in Belgium. And the same year the King ordered Bibles to be set up in the churches. No more dramatic evidence could be given of the fact that God buries His workmen but carries on His work. In the very year that the first man who gave the printed Bible in the English tongue was burned, the Royal order came for the Bible to be set up in the churches. The permanent endurance of Tindale's work is shown in the Revised Version of the Bible, 1881-4. Sixty to seventy-five per cent of the words are the very words of Tindale.

The printing of the Scriptures in English was the basic fact of the English Reformation without which it could never have reached the hearts of the people. Tindale had followers in the good work, but he was its hero. Nothing exasperated the Marian persecutors more than the constant appeal to the Bible of the lay folk haled before their tribunals.

THE PRAYER BOOK OF EDWARD VI.

The Henrician part of the Reformation was very largely legal and political and centred round the Restraint of Appeals to Rome and the Submission of the Clergy in 1534; and the doctrinal issues did not fully emerge till Edward VI's reign, and then they were grouped round the English Prayer Book. The next great pillar of the Protestant Reformation, after the Bible, was the Prayer Book of Edward VI. After a short tentative service for the people's Communion in both kinds in 1547, the First Prayer Book was put out in 1549. It was not very popular and was never reprinted. But the Second Book (1552), more carefully revised, "faithfully and

godly perused, explained, and made fully perfect," was received with alacrity and went into eight editions: it was maintained by a strong minority in Mary's House of Commons and in its secret use focused the faithful during her reign: and was re-enacted under Elizabeth in 1559 with three specified alterations "and none other or otherwise"; and has subsisted without grave changes down to our own day. The English Prayer Book was popularly referred to as "the Communion Book"; and it may almost be said that the English Reformers wove all their distinctive teaching round the great "Sacrament of our redemption," and made their witness to Christ's propitiatory sacrifice the keystone of their position. In 1571 the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion were issued "for the establishing of consent touching true religion."¹ In one sense the Reformation was thus formally complete: although the aftermath of the "diversities of opinion" continued for at least a century, and Cranmer's scheme for the settlement of the Ecclesiastical Laws was never proceeded with. For the English Reformation owes more than can be expressed to the genius of Thomas Cranmer, last of the Schoolmen, consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in the chapter house of St. Stephen's on March 30, 1533, and burned at Oxford on March 21, 1556. Nor must we forget due tribute to the quieter labours of Matthew Parker, the first Archbishop consecrated under the new order in 1559, in consolidating the work of his martyred predecessor, in co-operation with Queen Elizabeth and her other advisers.

THE CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION.

But the Reformation, whether on the Continent of Europe or in England, was really one, although in accentuating its causes we linger specially upon the story of our own land. Those causes were:

1. *Economic.* The wealth of the Ecclesiastical Corporations, the lands in their hands, and the pressure upon the growing population, made an economic difficulty that brought out the need for Reformation.

2. *Political,* hanging on the economic. The Ecclesiastical Corporations were great territorial magnates who never died. There was a continuity of policy and polity on the part of those great Ecclesiastical Corporations that made a steady pressure in opposition to progress.²

3. *Moral.* The morals of the Middle Ages were very bad, which was largely due to the immunity of the clergy from the national

¹ Be it always remembered that the Articles explain the Prayer Book, and not *vice versa*!

² We must not wholly forget the echoes of the Continental conflicts between Guelf and Ghibelline, and between Canonists and Civilians, which reached even to England. Nor must we overlook the fact that in the English Parliament the "lords spiritual" just outnumbered the "lords temporal"—a really serious political danger. While death-bed gifts and priestly influence had resulted in the vesting of a disproportionate extent of the lands in ecclesiastical hands.

laws; and the term "clergy" was widely construed, anybody who could get a little office in the Church was included.

4. *Social*. The dominance over the laity through the Confessional corrupted the moral relations between the Confessor and the confessing. And the relentless persecution of the Lollards (or Wycliffites) touched the life of the homely people at many points.¹

5. *The Increase of Knowledge or Education*. This centred in the Greek Testament and the translations of the Scriptures, issued through the printing press. Eyes were opened to the weakness of the foundations on which ecclesiastical authority rested.²

6. *Increased Comity of Nations*. The commerce and travel due to the increased knowledge of the world. England's insularity limited the Reformation movement, but it also concentrated it; and so it is that it can be said that the English Reformation was really, at the bottom, more thorough-going and permanent than that on the Continent.

PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFORMATION.

Let us look for and recognise the principles or characteristics of the Reformation.

1. First and foremost, *The Appeal to the Bible as God's Word written*. Men set up the Word of God, God's Word written, now becoming known to them, as the Authority against all the ecclesiasticism of the day. They tested the Pope and they tested the priest by his conformity to the Bible, and found him wanting. That was the outstanding principle upon which the Reformation was built.

2. *Deliverance from the Terrible Burden of the Confessional*. Liberty of conscience. There can be no liberty of conscience when the confessional exists. That led to

3. *A Limited Freedom of Speech*. "The liberty of prophesying," the power of the pulpit. But it was a long time before even the "reformed" people realised the consequences in freedom of speech.

4. *Individual Faith*. The doctrine of justification by faith alone can be set up next to the supremacy of God's Word written, as the next pivot upon which the Reformation turned, in England and on the Continent. Man is justified by faith, apart from the deeds of the law. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." That cut right through all the priestcraft and ecclesiasticism, and it was the second of the great keynotes of the Reformation. It was the key to the abolition of the confessional; it was because a man believed that he was justified by faith in God, through God's gift of grace, that he threw aside the confessional.

5. That all meant that there was a *Realisation of the Grace of God*, which bringeth salvation, and has appeared to all men. Salva-

¹ William Sawtre, priest of St. Osyth, London, was burned in 1401; and many others suffered death or humiliation.

² Much was due to John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's 1504-1519.

tion was God's gift, not something man could earn. That was a revelation, and new life to the people of the sixteenth century. It was the opened Bible that brought this about.

6. With that came, *a Revolt against the Mass-miracle*, varying in degree, but one in principle.

7. *The Value of the Individual Soul*. That was very slowly realised, and even after the Reformation people still believed that the Community had the power to coerce the individual, but the realisation of this value was nevertheless one of the characteristics of the Reformation. It was partly affected by, and reciprocally affected, political conditions, and the political liberty that we have to-day we owe to the Reformation. It was the religious Reformation that made the possibility of not only religious freedom but political freedom to-day; and that was recognised in the earlier centuries, and we ought to recognise it to-day.

8. The crown and aim of the Reformation was the establishment of *the Personal Relationship between God and Man*. Religion begins with a personal relation between a personal God and the individual man, and until that takes place the man does not begin to be religious. That fact revolutionised belief, conduct, and morals; because a man who realises that the essence of his religion is that he is brought into fellowship with God, can never be the same as he was before, either in belief, or in the standards by which he works his life.

SOME CAUTIONS.

If the appeal of the Reformation is to God's Word, the obligation to study and read God's Word must be foremost in our minds.

And let us remember the saying that "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." We are up to-day, as they were in the sixteenth century, against the confessional and the Mass. In the sixteenth century the confessional and the Mass were in possession, and it was persecution for anybody who stood out against them. To-day they are striving to get back into possession, yet people are disposed to stand back and sheer off from controversy.

Liberty of speech, individual faith, the realisation of God's grace, all impose upon us the necessity for witness. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." The duty of witnesses to-day is to preserve the teaching of the Reformation. The sum of it is that the essence of religion is fellowship between God and man, the fellowship for which man was made in the image of God, a fellowship broken and marred by sin, a fellowship that can be restored only by the act of God Himself. And God *has* restored it. For "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him,

beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Could you have a more perfect exemplification and paraphrase of the whole Gospel, and the grace of the Gospel, and the life of the Church, than those wonderful verses?

Yet it may be said that the Reformation was not complete until there came the Evangelical revival of religion. For mere nominal Protestantism, without the positive evangelism that was reasserted in the Evangelical Revival, will never save a soul. But the great thing is that God loved, God gave, God's grace saves, the work of Christ is done, Christ bore our sins that we might go free, and God in Christ forgives us, and we in Christ regain fellowship with God. That is the message and the principle and the teaching of the glorious Reformation, that was the greatest event in history since the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.
