



A NEW

REFORMATION



FROM LUTHER'S WORLD TO OURS

ROB FUQUAY

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7
1. A Perfect Storm.....	13
2. <i>Sola Scriptura</i>	29
3. <i>Sola Fide</i>	45
4. Taking a Stand.....	63
5. Refuge	79
6. The Priesthood of All Believers.....	95
Afterword.....	113
Acknowledgments.....	123
Notes	125

CHAPTER 1

A PERFECT STORM

It is through living, indeed through dying and being damned, that one becomes a theologian, not through understanding, reading, or speculation.

—Martin Luther¹

Forming and re-forming. You could say that is God’s basic job description. Look at how the Bible begins in Genesis 1, “The earth was formless and empty” (Genesis 1:2 NIV). Then just a few verses later, “the LORD God formed [humankind]” (Genesis 2:7 NRSV). We don’t have any specifics on how God formed humanity, but what we do know is that formation was just a beginning. The human body is constantly undergoing reformation.

Scientists have revealed that the body regenerates itself every few years. The 50–75 trillion cells in the body have regenerative ability, meaning that cells are constantly dying. They reproduce so that each part of the body can continue to

function and carry out its purpose. For instance, according to British medical experts, the lungs' set of air sac cells basically regenerate every year. Fingernails do about every six months. Every decade we have, in effect, a whole new skeletal system. The only part of the body that does not re-form is the brain.² In order for living organisms to continue serving a purpose, they must be re-formed.

Martin Luther was aiming for this kind of reformation when he nailed his 95 theses to the doors of *Schlosskirche*, or Castle Church, in Wittenberg on All Hallows' Eve (October 31) in 1517. He was calling for reforms that would help the church reclaim its core purpose and mission. Specifically, Luther attacked the practice of indulgences. The very first thesis, based on Matthew 4:17, read: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent'...he willed the entire life of believers to be of one repentance." The word translated as repentance in the New Testament is the Greek word *metanoia*, meaning "to change one's mind or direction." To put in modern parlance, Jesus was saying, "It's time to reform." Luther led off his list with Jesus' words about repentance to say it's time for the people, and the church, to reform.



Doors of Castle Church

Luther didn't intend to set off a firestorm. In fact, he posted his theses in Latin in order to address only the university scholars who would be able to understand his words. Luther was calling for a debate on a current hot topic, not an uncommon thing at a university. But the doors of the Castle Church functioned something like today's Internet. They were a place where people posted their opinions and ideas, much like we do with our "posts" on social media. As it turns out, someone took Luther's post and translated his disputation into German. Then a new invention called the Gutenberg press was used to mass produce his 95 protests, and Luther's words went viral. To appreciate why they caused such a reaction, we need to go back at least a century before Martin Luther and understand the complex mixture of forces and tensions mounting in Europe.

The Perfect Storm

The 2000 movie *The Perfect Storm* featured an all-star cast portraying the crew of the ill-fated fishing boat the *Andrea Gail*. In October 1991, the boat sank off the coast of New England in what was described as a meteorological phenomenon. Three different weather systems collided, causing hurricane force winds and tidal wave conditions, all combining to create "the perfect storm."

That's essentially what was happening in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Three distinct forces collided, setting the stage for major upheaval. These were religious, political, and personal, and each shared a common lightning rod: indulgences. Indulgences were printed certificates sold by the church that granted the buyer release from purgatory or quicker entry into heaven. Understanding this background is critical to understanding what led to the Protestant Reformation.

The Religious Storm

The Protestant Reformation started long before Martin Luther. For a century and a half prior, there had been reformers in Europe like John Hus speaking out against the same abuses and practices Luther would later decry. Hus was the priest of the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague in the early 1400s. His sharpest criticism focused on indulgences.

To appreciate the significance of indulgences, we have to understand purgatory, a Catholic doctrine foreign to most Protestants today. Purgatory came from the belief that the soul must be *purged* before entering heaven, and therefore it first passes through an intermediate state. Add to this belief the very real experience of death. The average life expectancy was thirty-five to forty years old. Frequent plagues and disease could wipe out entire communities. More than half of all children didn't live past infancy. Death loomed large and therefore the church emphasized the afterlife, and very importantly, the role of the church in gaining admission to heaven.

Indulgences served to calm the fears of people. Given all the struggles of this life, especially for peasants, a written guarantee by the church granting release from further struggle in purgatory made indulgences very popular. In fact, the first big business of the Gutenberg Press was printing indulgences, which, in turn, made them a popular source of revenue for the church. A rising number of church leaders like John Hus saw this as an abuse of the church's power and authority. Instead of fueling people's fear of death, the church, in the opinion of these leaders, should be doing more to help people in *this* life. Hus was a true priest who cared deeply about the needs of his parish and the people in his native Bohemia. He began preaching against indulgences and decisions by the pope that seemed to serve the needs of the institution over the people who were part of it.

As a result of his protests, a Church Council was called in 1415 in Constance, where Hus would be tried for heresy. Officials promised a fair hearing, but once Hus arrived, the proceedings moved quickly from trial to sentencing. The bishop who oversaw the proceedings was Johannes Zacharias. It is reported that Hus, whose name means goose, said to the bishop, "You may cook this goose but there will come a swan who will not be silenced." (This is the origin of our expression, "Your goose is cooked.") Hus was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

The executioners collected Hus's ashes and threw them into a lake as a symbol of removing Hus's influence. Some of Hus's followers, however, gathered the dirt where his ashes were taken and returned them to Prague, where today a beautiful monument built on the 500th anniversary of his death stands in the city square.

By Luther's time, the practice of indulgences was given unprecedented attention. The pope desperately needed funds to complete the building of St. Peter's Basilica. Vatican representatives were sent throughout the Holy Roman Empire to preach about the importance of indulgences and collect the purchases. The pope even extended the benefits. Release from purgatory was granted not only for those who bought indulgences, but also for loved ones who were deceased. What better way to still be able give to that special someone who has gone before you in death than to provide a direct pass to heaven. Talk about a gift that keeps on giving!

The representative who went to the region of Saxony in northern Germany was Johann Tetzel. He was known for his passionate pleas and effective results in drawing crowds that purchased indulgences. His popular jingle was, "When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs." It was said that Tetzel even went so far as to claim that if a man had raped the Mother Mary, an indulgence would send him straight to heaven.

Tetzel's role in the community as a carnival-like figure hawking indulgences incensed Luther.

Like Hus a century before him, Luther vehemently spoke out against this practice, and like Hus, he put his life in danger. But before we get to that, let's consider a fundamental question raised by all this: why did people buy indulgences? Why was the mostly poor general population so willing to support such a system? This is where the religious storm combines with the political.

The Political Storm

It was impossible to separate the religious from the political in sixteenth-century Germany. In the fifteenth century, the Holy Roman Empire encompassed all of the German nation. The church and state ruled as one. Various provinces were governed by "electors," who were wealthy local rulers designated by the empire with power to elect emperors. This often put electors in the unique position of being able to curry favor from the Vatican when the pope had a favorite candidate he wanted elected. This was an important reality that would later save Martin Luther's life. The elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, interceded numerous times on Luther's behalf using his political favors with the Vatican to protect Luther. Suffice it to say, the church and government were as rife with politics then as now, if not more so!

Even more important to understand is that Europe was still locked in a feudal system. The majority of the population was peasants, and they had no rights. They were denied adequate health care and education. They worked for landowners, most of whom were church officials. Peasants could be beaten and whipped without recourse for disobeying masters. With no ability to fight their case in court, they began to make their

voices heard with clubs and swords. Peasant rebellions were appearing more frequently throughout German lands.

For its part, the church tried to preserve the existing social order by emphasizing heaven and Final Judgment. If a peasant class was encouraged to focus on the next life, they might not be as compelled to change conditions in *this* one. Fear of death dominated the art of the times. Paintings adorned the walls of churches showing Christ as Judge sending some to heaven and others to hell. Notice the ones going to heaven do so through the doors of the church! A sort of religious/social codependence had been created. Peasants needed the very institution that preserved the status quo.

Understanding this religious and political climate is key to understanding why the Reformation ignited in the sixteenth century. The peasant culture had grown tired of a church-state that preserved their powerless condition. While they continued to buy into this system by supporting practices like indulgences, more and more voices were speaking out. The brush pile had been laid; all that was needed was for someone to strike a match. This brings us to the third storm.

The Personal Storm

Martin Luther came from a peasant family, something that would always earn him respect and influence with the majority of the German population. He was born on November 9, 1483, in the small village of Eisleben, Germany. He was presented for baptism the very next day at The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul by his father, Hans. Having given birth just the day before, his mother stayed home, understandably! This fact provides further insight to the beliefs and practices of the time. High infant mortality rates meant you didn't take the chance of waiting until the mother could attend in order to make sure the child went to heaven!



Shortly after his birth, Luther's family moved from Eisleben to Mansfeld. Luther's father was a miner, though he eventually ascended from the peasant class and became a part owner of a mine. Even with this changed reality, life did not become easier for Martin. His parents were harsh and demanding. His early educational experiences were not easy. His quick wit and temperament often resulted in frequent canings from his teachers. Luther's father was insistent that his son do well in school, and because he was in a position to afford to send his son to university, Luther's father wanted him to become a lawyer. Hans's success meant that Martin would be a respected member of society, perhaps something his father never fully felt about himself. Whatever the reason, upon completion of his primary education, Martin Luther enrolled as a law student at the University of Erfurt.

One summer day in 1505 while walking back to the university following a visit home, Luther was caught in a horrific thunderstorm. He feared for his life and prayed to the patron saint of miners, "Save me, St. Anne, and I'll become a monk." Upon his arrival in Erfurt, instead of going to the university, Luther went straight to the monastery, where at the age of twenty-one, he was admitted to the cloister.

Some scholars question if the storm actually happened, or if it was just a figurative way for Luther to describe his emotional and spiritual state at the time. Two things can be said for sure. Based on the way Luther later wrote about his relationship with his father, attending law school may have been his attempt to earn his father's approval. If this was the case, then no doubt each return to Erfurt would have felt like walking further down a road he didn't want to travel.

Second, Luther was a religious product of his time. He was raised with a healthy fear of God. If pleasing his father was difficult, how much harder was it to please a perfect and

holy God who demanded righteousness? If Luther had indeed experienced a literal thunderstorm that summer afternoon in 1505, it certainly fit his inner condition. Literal or figurative, this was a storm God used, and the converging forces in Luther's life and his native Germany were coming together in a way that would forever change history.



*Often it takes a storm to
change conditions keeping us
from being all that God wants....
Storms can be purposeful,
and the more powerful a storm,
the greater the change it brings.*

Today's Storms

Before we go any further looking at this history, let's pause to consider the role and impact of our own storms. What storms do we face today? What are the storms brewing in our nation, in the church, and in your life? Often it takes a storm to change conditions keeping us from being all that God wants. It took a storm to get Jonah to go to Ninevah. A storm led Peter to step out of a boat and walk on water. A storm brought Paul to Malta. Storms can be purposeful, and the more powerful a storm, the greater the change it brings. Storms can be the catalysts of reform.

If the hypothesis at the beginning of this chapter is true, that God is always forming and re-forming, then in order to understand the reformation God seeks now, it may be helpful to consider the storms we face. Let's start with our country. What storms do we face as a nation? What issues are creating fear and uncertainty? In naming these, where do you see Christian faith having application? What would it look like in your church to bring a faith perspective to these matters? Often the issues are so fraught with division there is a fear of even having dialogue. Yet what happens if we don't talk in church about the most important issues of our day? What happens if national and global challenges are devoid of a faith influence? Either we become out of touch and disconnected from the rest of the world or we become fearful of conflict. If nothing else, perhaps naming the ways we are divided and the dangers that exist give a focus to our prayers. Agreeing on what we need to pray about can be the start of reform.

Let's move on to the present-day church. American society is experiencing a dwindling Christian influence. In 1992, only 6 percent of Americans denied having a church preference. Today, about 22 percent of Americans do not claim any church preference. Thirty-five percent of millennials deny having any involvement in church. On the average Sunday, only 17 percent of our population is in church.

According to research from the Barna Group, some of the reasons for decline are the following:

- Distrust of institutions
- Feeling that churches are judgmental and political
- Family makeup is different and many churches struggle to relate to singles, divorced people, same-sex couples, and just about anyone who does not fit the definition of a traditional family

Discover What Makes Martin Luther's Message Revolutionary Today

Before we throw things away of importance, maybe we should consider if it may be time for a new story. This book is a refreshing look at Martin Luther and the Reformation with a great focus on the importance of our stories as part of God's bigger story. A timely look back and forward as we "focus on our source of life not our success in life." I strongly recommend this book.

—**Julius C. Trimble**, Bishop, Indiana Conference, The United Methodist Church

With practical wisdom, clarity of vision, and a light touch, Rob Fuquay explores the fundamentals of Martin Luther's life of reforming, and how those basics matter today, and might even give us new life.

—**James C. Howell**, Senior Pastor, Myers Park UMC, author of *Weak Enough to Lead: What the Bible Says About Powerful Leadership*

*Rob Fuquay has done a masterful job in demonstrating how God used Martin Luther 500 years ago to bring new life and vitality to the Church in his day and how God can use us to bring new life and vitality to the Church of Jesus Christ in our time. I found *A New Reformation* to be enlightening, encouraging, engaging, and highly educational.*

—**Kent Millard**, President, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

Justified by faith. This rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation is just as relevant and true for Christians today as it was in Martin Luther's time. In *A New Reformation*, author Rob Fuquay introduces you to the life of Martin Luther and two important themes of the Reformation he sparked: the centrality of Scripture and the power of God's grace. Through a close look into the life of Martin Luther and the world of sixteenth-century Europe, you will discover what makes Luther's message revolutionary today—and how we can embrace Reformation in the church and in our personal lives.

Also Available: DVD, Leader Guide



Rob Fuquay is the Senior Pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. He has served various congregations with his gifts of strong preaching, leadership development, and visioning. Rob is the author of *The God We Can Know*, a 7-week study designed for the entire congregation to explore the "I Am" sayings of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. He is also the author of *Which Way, Lord: Exploring Your Life's Purpose in the Journeys of Paul* on how to discern and follow God's leading.

Abingdon Press™
www.abingdonpress.com

Cover design: Studio Gearbox
www.studiogearbox.com

RELIGION/Christian Life/ Spiritual Growth US \$14.99

ISBN-13: 978-1-5018-6401-8



9 781501 864018

5 1499