

# THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Major Documents

*Edited by*

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3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO  
63118-3968

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Protestant Reformation / Lewis W.  
Spitz, ed.

p. cm.

Selections of little-known documents to accompany the central statements of the reformers; each selection is prefaced by the editor with remarks and an introd. to the whole volume.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-570-04993-8

1. Reformation—Sources. I. Spitz, Lewis William,  
1922-

BR301.P76 1997

270.6—dc21

97-17817

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# Foreword

In this book the reader will find a series of statements made between the years 1501 and 1559, illustrating the ideas, beliefs, and sometimes the fates, of men and women who had come to share a profound discontent with the church as it then existed and a positive determination to put new strength into the life of the spirit. They did not often agree on anything else; many times they denounced each other's theories and behavior, and sometimes even killed each other, although more often they met with violence at the hands of the established authorities. Except for Erasmus, the reforming humanist who stayed within the church, all of these people were "Protestants" on the offensive. As Professor Spitz points out, there had long been many Catholics who felt similar discontent and a similar determination, but their opportunity to launch a counter-offensive did not arise until the second half of the same century.

The spectrum ranges from Erasmus and Hutten the humanists, to Luther and Melancthon; thence to Zwingli, to Sattler the Anabaptist and Servetus the Unitarian, to Calvin the theologian and lawgiver; and, finally, to the English reformers, a special breed—from the rabble-rousing Fish to Cromwell the administrator, Starkey the moderate, the King, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

*What did these people believe?* Here we may read all of Luther's Ninety-five Theses, all of Zwingli's Sixty-seven Articles, the Anabaptist Confession, Farel and Calvin's Geneva Convention, Henry VIII's Six Articles, the Elizabethan Act of Settlement. *How did they reach their*

*beliefs?* Here is the record of Luther's inner wrestling and theological break-through; here is Calvin's own account of his conversion. And here we may listen to the moving voices of human beings in the grip of passionate emotions: Melancthon lamenting Luther, whom he ranks with Isaiah, John the Baptist, St. Paul, and Augustine, and whom he remembers not only as a brilliant expositor and tireless fighter but as kind, affable, and gracious; Michael Sattler facing his judges' sneers and abuse as calmly as he faces their grisly tortures; Lady Jane Grey showing herself a Protestant theologian at age sixteen, four days before the authorities executed her.

By his choice of little-known documents to accompany the key central statements of the reformers, by his terse and lucid remarks prefaced to each selection, and by his sweeping, tightly-packed introduction to the whole volume, Professor Spitz has made it possible to see the Protestant Reformation vividly and to see it whole.

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# Introduction

“We have become the spectacle of the world,” Luther once complained, and so he and the other religious reformers have remained. Although it is no longer fashionable for historians to speak, as did James Froude, of the Reformation as “the hinge on which all modern history turns,” the great religious movement of the sixteenth century created events whose impact is still felt today and gave birth to ideas which are very much a part of the contemporary world. That movement toward reform and renewal within Christendom was primarily religious in its concerns and consequently highly theological in its expressions. “The deepest theme in history,” wrote Goethe, “has been posed by the conflict between faith and unfaith.” Because the Reformation focused in its religious dimension upon questions touching the most inward reaches of the human spirit, its historical era has remained of vital interest to western man. The eyes of the world are still upon the reformers, all the more so in our ecumenical age.

The division between Protestant and Catholic Reformation writings in this series is made for convenience only, for beyond the polemics and antithetical positions of both sides lay a common drive toward a revitalized spiritual culture which was in evidence before Luther’s reforming activities began and lasted beyond his death. During the first four decades after the dramatic publication of the Ninety-five Theses in 1517, the evangelical movement and the reformed churches were on the offensive. The Peace of Augsburg in

1555 legalized the position of the Lutheran churches in the Empire and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 guaranteed the Anglican establishment. Calvinism was still embattled in France, but the North was firmly Protestant while Italy and Spain remained fairly securely Catholic. There followed then the final sessions of the Council of Trent and a resurgent Catholicism which kept Protestantism on the defensive for the remainder of the century. The writings in this volume are all taken from these first decades of the Protestant Reformation.

The reformers usually referred to themselves as the evangelicals and conceived of their religious communities as parts of the one holy universal or Catholic Church on earth. Only in later years was the term Protestant applied to the reformed or evangelical churches, and it was not until the seventeenth century that the Reformed and Lutheran Churches were defined and designated as separate church bodies. The term Protestant derived from the protest made at the Diet of Speyer in 1529 when the evangelical estates—princes and cities—objected to the decree that the religious *status quo* was to be preserved, no innovations introduced in additional territories, and that the mass should be everywhere tolerated. Although in sixteenth-century usage the word protest meant assertive affirmation as well as articulate objection, historians have often stressed the negative aspect, interpreting the Reformation primarily as a reaction against abuses and institutional decay. This view of the Reformation, popular with many nineteenth-century historians, stressed the moral decline of the clergy, the institutional corruption of the Church, and the displacement of the true spiritual ends by economic considerations and political power drives on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

That grave ills were spreading through the body of

## 2. 1. Erasmus: The Praise of Folly

It is ironic that Erasmus, the greatest scholar among the northern humanists and the literary arbiter of his age, should be best known for *The Praise of Folly*, which has been published in over six hundred editions through the centuries. Compared with his scholarly editions of the Greek and Latin Church fathers and his more learned treatises it was a light satirical work which he dashed off in 1509 while resting from his Italian journey in the home of Sir Thomas More. Yet the *Folly* had the same serious purpose as his other works: to criticize abuses in the church and in society and to promote greater inwardness and purer spirituality in religion. The selections which follow present some of the most famous passages of the *Folly*, ridiculing superstition and idle ceremonies, castigating the insincere monks and the prelates and popes who bring shame upon their high office through impure and unchristian lives. In the preface to More he wrote, "We have praised folly not quite foolishly." From Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1887), pp. 90–96, 143–149, 164–169.

The next to be placed among the regiment of fools are such as make a trade of telling or inquiring after incredible stories of miracles and prodigies. Never doubting that a lie will choke them, they will muster up a thousand several strange relations of spirits, ghosts, apparitions, raising of the devil, and such like bugbears of superstition; which the farther they are from being probably true, the more greedily they are swallowed, and the more devoutly believed. And these absurdities do not only bring an empty

pleasure and cheap divertisement, but they are a good trade and procure a comfortable income to such priests and friars as by this craft get their gain.

To these again are nearly related such others as attribute strange virtues to the shrines and images of saints and martyrs, and so would make their credulous proselytes believe that if they pay their devotion to St. Christopher in the morning, they shall be guarded and secured the day following from all dangers and misfortunes. If soldiers, when they first take arms, shall come and mumble over such a set prayer before the picture of St. Barbara, they shall return safe from all engagements. Or if any pray to Erasmus on such particular holidays, with the ceremony of wax candles and other fopperies, he shall in a short time be rewarded with a plentiful increase of wealth and riches. The Christians have now their gigantic St. George, as well as the pagans had their Hercules; they paint the saint on horseback, and drawing the horse in splendid trappings, very gloriously accoutred, they scarce refrain in a literal sense from worshipping the very beast.

What shall I say of such as cry up and maintain the cheat of pardons and indulgences? That by these compute the time of each soul's residence in purgatory, and assign them a longer or shorter continuance, according as they purchase more or fewer of these paltry pardons and saleable exemptions? Or what can be said bad enough of others, who pretend that by the force of such magical charms, or by the fumbling over their beads in the rehearsal of such and such petitions; which some religious imposters invented, either for diversion, or, what is more likely, for advantage; they shall procure riches, honor, pleasure, health, long life, a lusty old age, nay, after death a sitting at the right hand of our Saviour in His kingdom.

### 3. Hutten: Letter to Elector Frederick of Saxony

Ulrich von Hutten, a German knight and young humanist, was one of the most articulate spokesmen for a kind of German cultural nationalism. He carried on a vendetta against ecclesiastical abuses, the monastic orders, scholastic barbarism, and the exploitation of the Germans by the Roman church. "He is," wrote a fellow humanist Mutian, "sharp and vehement and a great poet, but such that he can be irritated by the slightest word!" Hutten extended his literary attacks against the prelates and popes such as Julius II and Leo X. With tension mounting he feared for life and sought refuge in Ebernburg, the castle of the imperial knight Franz von Sickingen. From there on September 11, 1520, he wrote the following letter to Luther's protector, Elector Frederick of Saxony. From Merrick Whitcomb, *A Literary Source-Book of the German Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899), II, 6, 19–20.

We see that there is no gold and almost no silver in our German land. What little may perhaps be left is drawn away daily by the new schemes invented by the council of the most holy members of the Roman Curia. What is thus squeezed out of us is put to the most shameful uses. Would you know, dear Germans, what employment I have myself seen that they make at Rome of our money? It does not lie idle! Leo X gives a part to nephews and relatives (these are so numerous that there is a proverb at Rome, "As thick as Leo's relations"). A portion is consumed by so many most reverend cardinals (of which the holy father created no

# 1. Luther: Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans

On October 19, 1512, Martin Luther became a doctor of theology in the University of Wittenberg, a promotion which made it possible for him to assume the chair of Biblical theology. He lectured on the Psalms and then in 1515–1516 on St. Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*. His brilliant commentary on Romans, a work of genius growing from the depths of great scholarship and intense spiritual struggle, revealed his evangelical insight that man is justified by God's grace alone through faith in Christ. During the years which followed he clarified his thought further, and shortly before the publication of his translation of the New Testament in German in 1522 he wrote the following *Preface to Romans* which defines clearly his understanding of the relationship of God's law and the gospel, a religious breakthrough of momentous historical consequences. From Bertram Lee Woolf, ed., *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, II* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 284–290. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression. Not only is it well worth a Christian's while to know it word for word by heart, but also to meditate on it day by day. It is the soul's daily bread, and can never be read too often or studied too much. The more you probe into it the more precious it becomes, and the better its flavor. God helping me, I shall try my best to make this Preface serve as an introduction which will enable everyone to

understand it in the best possible way. Hitherto, this epistle has been smothered with comments and all sorts of irrelevancies; yet, in essence, it is a brilliant light, almost enough to illumine the whole Bible.

The first thing needed is to master the terminology. We must learn what St. Paul means by such words as law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, spirit, and the like; otherwise we shall read and only waste our time. You must not understand the term LAW in its everyday sense as something which explains what acts are permitted or forbidden. This holds for ordinary laws, and you keep them by doing what they enjoin, although you may have no heart in it. But God judges according to your inmost convictions; His law must be fulfilled in your very heart, and cannot be obeyed if you merely perform certain acts. Its penalties do indeed apply to certain acts done apart from our inmost convictions, such as hypocrisy and lying. Psalm 117 declares that all men are liars, because no one keeps God's law from his heart; nor can he do so, for to be averse to goodness and prone to evil are traits found in all men. If we do not choose goodness freely, we do not keep God's law from the heart. Then sin enters in, and divine wrath is incurred even though, to outward appearance, we are doing many virtuous works and living an honorable life.

In Chapter 2, St. Paul therefore asserts that the Jews are all sinners. He says that only those who keep the law are righteous in God's eyes, his point being that no one keeps the law by "works." Rather, Paul says to the Jews, "You teach us not to commit adultery, but you commit adultery yourselves, since you do the very things which you condemn." It is as if he were to say, To outward appearance, you observe the law

## **2. Luther: Ninety-Five Theses *or* Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences**

Luther's evangelical emphasis upon the full and complete forgiveness of man's sin and his reconciliation with God through God's grace alone led him to question the ecclesiastical practice of selling indulgences. The indulgence or permission to relax the satisfaction to be made by a contrite sinner, even to the point of reducing the suffering of departed souls in purgatory, was a medieval development connected with the history of the sacrament of penance. Luther observed the bad effects of the abusive sale of indulgences, seemingly for money, upon members of his own congregation, when John Tetzel, a Dominican indulgence hawker, came close to the border of Electoral Saxony. Tetzel had been commissioned by Albrecht of Hohenzollern, Archbishop of Mainz, for the sale of a Jubilee indulgence designed to help pay for the new basilica of St. Peter in Rome and to finance Albrecht's debts to the Fugger bankers. Luther prepared the *Theses* for an academic debate on indulgences and according to tradition posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Within a few weeks they were carried to all parts of Christendom and unleashed a storm of controversy that never abated. Reprinted from Luther's Works, Volume 31, edited by Harold Grimm, copyright © 1957 Fortress Press pp. 25\_LLS:LW31–33\_LLS:LW31. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress.

Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following theses will be publicly

discussed at Wittenberg under the chairmanship of the reverend father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology and regularly appointed Lecturer on these subjects at that place. He requests that those who cannot be present to debate orally with us will do so by letter.

In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], 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.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self, that is, true inner repentance, until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.

# 1. Zwingli: The First Zurich Disputation and The Sixty-Seven Articles

Ulrich Zwingli, the people's priest in the Great Minster in Zurich, worked for a reform in the church initially guided by Erasmian humanist impulses, but increasingly under evangelical influence. The Word of God as the purest authority became for him the canon of all faith and life. Impressed by the example of Luther's debate with the Catholic apologist Dr. John Eck at Leipzig, Zwingli long cherished a plan for a public discussion of religion which would clarify the points at issue. Friends and foes, including the episcopal curia in Constance, were invited to the Zurich town hall on January 29, 1523. Six hundred men assembled there, among them the diocesan chancellor John Faber, the Vicar General. Zwingli sat in the center at the front with his Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Bibles open before him. He had prepared Sixty-Seven Articles as a basis for the discussion. The first fifteen articles state his positive doctrines, what the gospel is, who Christ is, what the Church is. The remainder constitute his objections to the pope, the mass, intercession of the saints, compulsory fasting, pilgrimages, monastic vows, clerical celibacy, gabbled prayers, indulgences, confessions, purgatory and other teachings and practices. The disputation resulted in enthusiastic approval of Zwingli's teachings and an order from the authorities that all priests of the canton should promote them. From *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531)*, Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), pp. 40, 47-54, 111-117.

## *The Sixty-Seven Articles of Zwingli*

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

1. All who say that the gospel is invalid without the confirmation of the Church err and slander God.

2. The sum and substance of the gospel is that our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has made known to us the will of His heavenly Father, and has with His innocence released us from death and reconciled God.

3. Hence Christ is the only way to salvation for all who ever were, are and shall be.

4. Who seeks or points out another door errs, yea, he is a murderer of souls and a thief.

5. Hence all who consider other teachings equal to or higher than the gospel err and do not know what the gospel is.

6. For Jesus Christ is the guide and leader, promised by God to all human beings, which promise was fulfilled.

7.... He is an eternal salvation and head of all believers, who are his body, but which is dead and can do nothing without him.

8. From this follows first that all who dwell in the Head are

## 5. Castellio: Concerning Heretics

Among the few truly liberal voices heard during the sixteenth century in favor of religious toleration was that of Sebastian Castellio (d. 1563), author of the work, *Concerning Heretics Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated*. Castellio, a native of Savoy, came to Geneva as a refugee from the Inquisition. He became a teacher there but was rejected for ordination because of non-conformist views. He then became a professor of Greek at the University of Basel, anticipating a quiet life of study. But the execution of Michael Servetus in Geneva in 1553 involved him in a bitter controversy and he was finally brought to trial himself for heresies, but died during the proceedings in 1563. In the Preface to *Concerning Heretics* addressed to the evangelical Prince Christoph of Wuerttemberg, presented here in part, he presented a parable to illustrate that tolerance and mutual love constitute a Christian imperative. From Sebastian Costellio, *Concerning Heretics Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated*. Roland H. Bainton, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), pp. 121–123. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Most Illustrious Prince, suppose you had told your subjects that you would come to them at some uncertain time and had commanded them to make ready to go forth clad in white garments to meet you whenever you might appear. What would you do if, on your return, you discovered that they had taken no thought for the white robes but instead were disputing among themselves concerning your person? Some were saying that you were in France, others that you

# 1. Calvin: Conversion and Call to Geneva

The great reformer John Calvin was less open and articulate about his own personal spiritual development than was Luther, who wore his heart on his sleeve. This very reticence about speaking of himself makes all the more precious the account of his own conversion and call to Geneva which he included almost incidentally in the Author's Preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, dated July 22, 1557. From John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), xl–xliv. Used by permission of the publishers.

[Just] as he [King David] was taken from the sheepfold and elevated to the rank of supreme authority, so God having taken me from my originally obscure and humble condition has reckoned me worthy of being invested with the honorable office of a preacher and minister of the gospel. When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of His providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately

# 1. FISH: A SUPPLICATION OF BEGGARS

The English Reformation is so often thought of in terms of the King's great question and Acts of Parliament that the popular furor and rage of the masses is left out of the picture. Simon Fish, an Oxford student who entered Gray's Inn about 1525, joined a circle of young men in London who were very critical of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, King Henry VIII's chief minister, and the hierarchy. As a chauvinistic anticlerical pamphleteer, he helped to stir up feeling among the rabble against the churchmen with his *Supplication of Beggars* which he circulated in the city as early as 1529. Fish was embittered when he was forced into exile following a quarrel with Cardinal Wolsey, and he was later instrumental in distributing copies of the Protestant William Tyndale's New Testament. John Fox in his *Acts and Monuments* relates that Anne Boleyn, King Henry VIII's second wife, gave a copy of the *Supplication* to her husband. Henry then asked to meet the author, who was in hiding nearby. The King embraced him, took him hunting with him, and gave him the royal signet to protect him from Chancellor Thomas More, the staunch defender of the Catholic faith. Fish died of the plague the next year in 1531. From Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *A Supplication for the Beggars, Written about the Year 1529 by Simon Fish* (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1871), pp. 1–15, spelling modernized.

*To the King Our Sovereign Lord*

## 7. Elizabethan Settlement: The Act of Supremacy, 1559

With the accession to the throne of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) England became the leading Protestant nation. At the very outset of her long and glorious reign she undertook to secure the unity of the nation by arranging a religious settlement which has lasted through the subsequent centuries. She disliked both Catholicism and radical sectarian Protestantism and chose rather the *via media* of an Anglican establishment with an episcopal form of church government. In doctrine and discipline authority was to rest with King and parliament with the consent of the Convocation of the clergy. The Act of Supremacy, passed in January, 1559, repealed the Heresy Act of Philip and Mary, restored the Acts of King Henry VIII including the Acts on Annates and Appeals, and renewed the claims of the crown to supremacy over the church in England. From Henry Gee and William Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), pp. 446–449.

And to the intent that all usurped and foreign power and authority, spiritual and temporal, may forever be clearly extinguished, and never ... be used or obeyed within this realm or any other [of] your majesty's dominions or countries, may it please your highness that it may be further enacted by the authority aforesaid that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state or potentate, spiritual or temporal, shall at any time after the last day of this session of Parliament use, enjoy or exercise any manner of power, jurisdiction, superiority, authority, pre-eminence or privilege,