

“A classic is reborn! And it is even better than the original—which was outstanding! I cut my theological teeth on *Theology of the Reformers* in 1988. It was one of the best books I have ever read. Virtually every page is marked up. This new edition, with an added chapter on William Tyndale, promises to bless a new generation of church historians and theologians. This book is a great gift to the Body of Christ.”

Daniel L. Akin

President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“I have long regarded Timothy George to reside at the apex of gifted writers in the Baptist world. His *Theology of the Reformers* was a remarkable feat for such a young theologian twenty-five years ago. This 25th anniversary revised edition will now reintroduce George’s masterpiece to a new generation. With the addition of a chapter on Tyndale, an empty nave in the shrine of the invincible quartet of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Simons is now filled. In true etymological fashion, George has now provided us with the “quintessential” work on the reformers and their theology. Scholarly yet readable, this book brims with the incredible story of the legacy of these Reformation legends. Read . . . ponder. . . and give thanks for their sacrifice.”

David L. Allen,

Dean, Professor of Preaching,

George W. Truett Chair of Pastoral Ministry,

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“With the publication of the 25th anniversary edition of his classic work on the theology of the reformers, Timothy George has demonstrated once again why he is one of the premier historical theologians of our day. With brilliant insight, he serves as a most capable and trustworthy guide through the best of the medieval and Reformation thinkers, including updated chapters on Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Menno Simons, along with a marvelous new chapter on the life and work of William Tyndale. Those who missed the first edition will find this book to be essential reading. Those who learned much from the first edition will not be disappointed by the rich and valuable updates to this outstanding work. We congratulate Timothy George and B&H on the theological feast found in this special anniversary publication.”

David S. Dockery

President, Union University

“Without a doubt, the Reformation is among the two or three most important turning-points in the past thousand years of church history. But given the major changes that have taken place theologically and ecclesiologically in the last century or so, it is easy for us to forget the importance of that momentous event. This new edition of Timothy George’s reliable study of the theology of five key Protestants (he has rightfully added William Tyndale to the original four of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Simons) is a tremendous reminder of the significance of the Reformation and the nature of its doctrinal emphases. While these men did not always agree among themselves, their thought changed their world and ours—and for us, their heirs, we would have to say, it was a change for the better.”

Michael A.G. Haykin

*Professor of Church History & Biblical Spirituality,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

“Theology, history, and biography come together in this remarkable volume, even more timely today than when it was first released. This book is a solid introduction to the theology of the reformers, as well as a sourcebook motivating lifelong study of their influence. Add it to your library—but more importantly read it for your edification!”

Dr. Jeff Iorg

President, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

“Timothy George’s *Theology of the Reformers* is a masterpiece of penetrating theological analysis and lucid historical narrative. This classic study of sixteenth-century Protestant theology (with a new chapter devoted to William Tyndale) deserves to be rediscovered by a new generation of Reformation scholars and students.”

Scott Manetsch

*Professor of Church History and Christian Thought,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

“Twenty-five years ago, Timothy George released his magisterial interpretation of the Reformation, *Theology of the Reformers*. Now, a quarter century later, we receive the gift of a second edition of this fine and important work. Timothy George is a teacher of passion, a scholar of the first rank, a churchman of deep conviction, and a writer of great ability. *Theology of the Reformers* was an important book twenty-five years ago, it is even more important now, arriving just as the convictions of the reformers are even now more at stake.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“The Protestant reformers are often seen as almost cartoon characters, two-dimensional super heroes for some and two-dimensional villains for others. Timothy George’s *Theology of the Reformers* is my favorite book on the turbulent era of the Protestant Reformation. George, with precision-focus, explores the deep theology that drove these pioneers, while demonstrating the nuances of their thought, and applying it to the contemporary era. With delightful prose and provocative insight, this book is one of the most well-worn volumes in my library. I am delighted that a 25th anniversary edition will reach a new generation with some ancient truths.”

Russell D. Moore

*President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission,
Southern Baptist Convention*

“*Theology of the Reformers* is a classic and compelling volume written by one of evangelicalism’s most prized thinkers. Timothy George lucidly and masterfully introduces the context, life, thought, and impact of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Menno Simons, and William Tyndale. But this book is more than an important and sound historical treatment; it is a vista into history, theology, leadership, and culture as well as a fresh restating of truths that sparked epochal events and holds promise to recapture succeeding generations. I hope the 25th anniversary edition impacts others as its engagement with Reformation leaders and ideas impacted me when I read it as a college freshman.”

Christopher W. Morgan

*Dean and Professor of Theology,
California Baptist University, Riverside*

“Like many other professors, I made Timothy George’s *Theology of the Reformers* required reading when it first appeared—because it was clear, reliable, historically sound, and theologically rich. Now a good book has become even better in this new updated and expanded edition. For professors, students, and a much broader reading public, it is just the book to prepare thoughtfully for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017.

Mark Noll

Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

“If I had to be confined somewhere, I would still be a relatively happy man if I could have this 25th anniversary volume. Timothy George’s *Theology of the Reformers*, with its supporting revisions and an added valuable chapter on William Tyndale, would be one of the books I would want near at hand. Many people understand the reformers, but few have the ability to write about

them in a way that makes them come to life as though they were present with us even today. Do not miss *Theology of the Reformers* by Timothy George.”

Paige Patterson

President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Timothy George is the preeminent living Church historian. I sat under his teaching when he was a young and budding professor. I have co-labored with him on more than one occasion. When Timothy George speaks, I listen. Twenty-five years ago I read *Theology of the Reformers* for the first time. Even before I finished the book, I knew I had a classic in my hands. And this revised edition is even better. This revision reminded me again that Dr. George is an incredible historical theologian writing an incredible theological history to the glory of an omnipotent God!”

Thom S. Rainer

President & CEO, LifeWay Christian Resources

Theology of the Reformers





Theology of the Reformers



Timothy George

REVISED EDITION



Nashville, Tennessee

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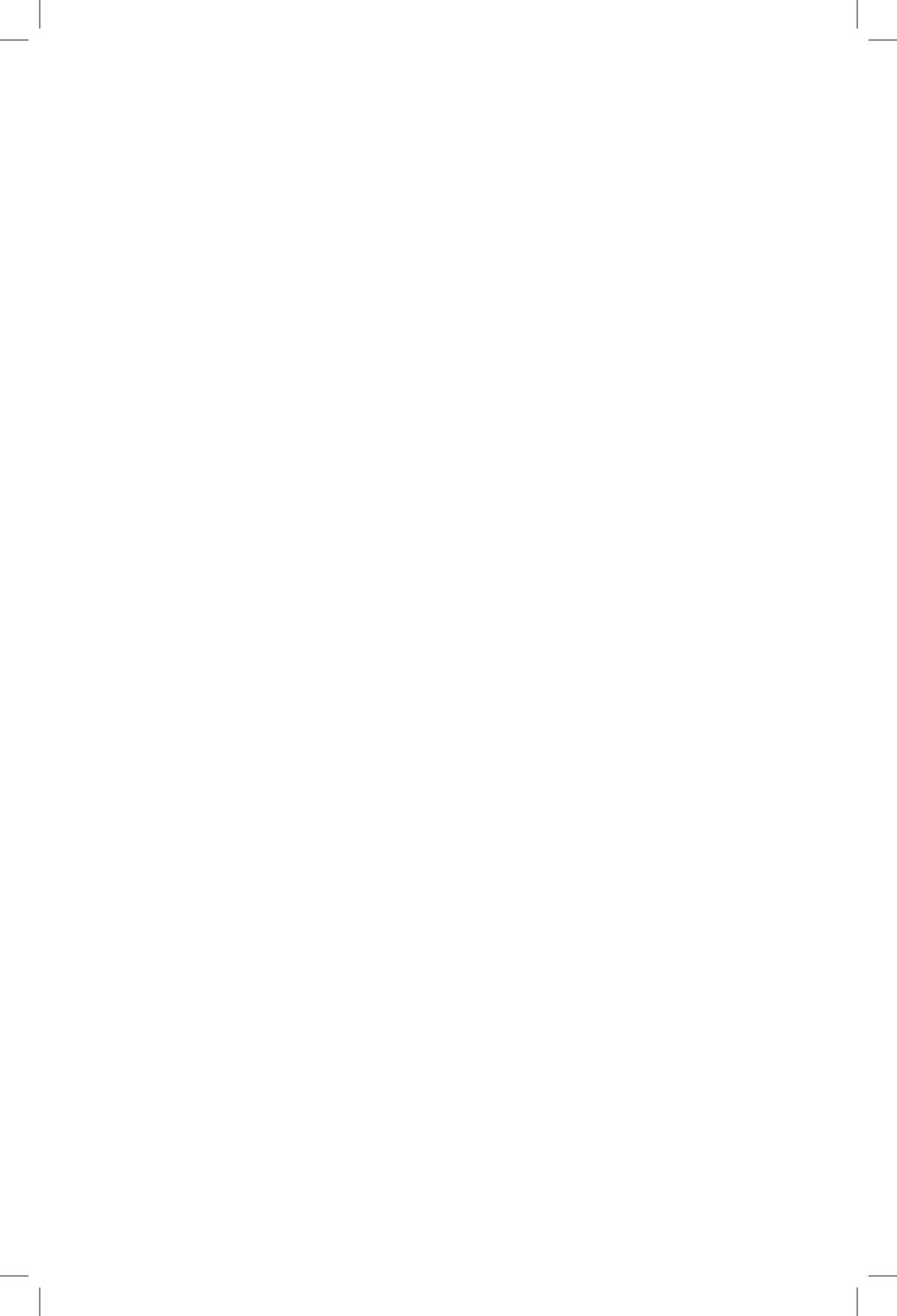
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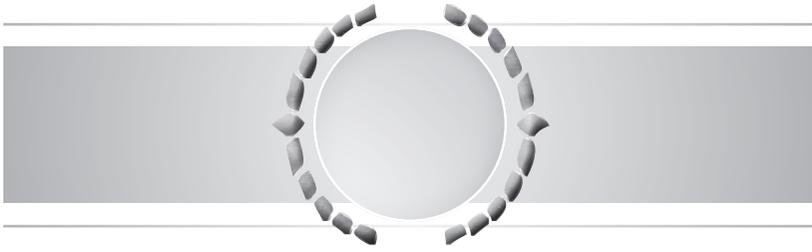
George Huntston Williams,
(1914–2000)

Hollis Professor of Divinity Emeritus,
Harvard University,



*master historian,
compassionate pilgrim,
citizen of that City that hath foundations,
on the fortieth anniversary
of his teaching appointment at Harvard
and the fifty-seventh anniversary
of his ordination to the Christian ministry*

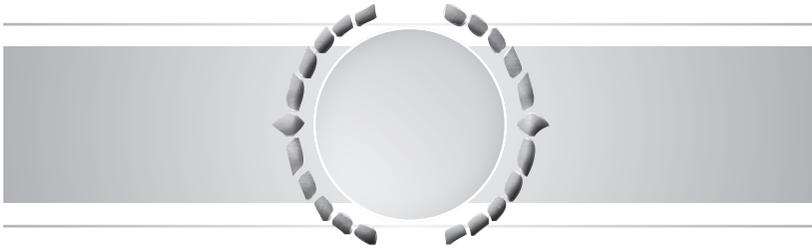




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Preface to the Second Edition

This book was originally written during my first decade as a teacher. Young professors often do rash things. Today no one in the academy likely would be so bold as to write a book titled *Theology of the Reformers*. Theology, when it is given any truck at all, is usually considered a quaint form of *belles lettres*, while the Reformation is generally perceived as having lost much of its explanatory valence as a coherent term of historical understanding. This book assumes the contrary on both counts: theology matters, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century is a critical, even essential, epoch for our understanding of the Christian story then and now.

The first edition of this book was published in the spring of 1988, when the world looked quite different than it does today. In 1988, the Berlin Wall was standing, Ronald Reagan was president of the United States, and Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of Great Britain. No one in America had heard of Osama bin Laden, Barack Obama was in his twenties, and Britney Spears was a sweet little Southern Baptist Sunbeam in Kentwood, Louisiana. Back then the technological revolution was in its infancy. Fax machines were still new, and there was no World Wide Web, e-mail, Facebook, or Twitter. Much has changed since this book first appeared, and yet the theological and spiritual realities it describes through the prism of four (now five) reformers are more relevant and more urgent now than ever.

Many of the major issues that confront our modern world were first given decisive shape in the era of the Reformation. The conflict between Christianity and Islam, often described today as a clash of civilizations, was made urgent by the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the

subsequent incursion of the Ottoman Turks into Europe. The discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus and the circumnavigation of the globe by Ferdinand Magellan meant that Europe would not long remain the center of the known world. Inventions of the age produced effects that are with us still. Galileo's telescope opened up the heavens to the human eye, making possible the exploration of space in our own time. The rise of the modern nation-state and the discovery of gunpowder raised warfare to a new level of savagery. Gutenberg's Bible, first printed at Mainz in 1455, initiated the printing revolution and led to our own culture of instant communication. Amid these seismic changes, the reformers sought to answer two basic questions: First, how can I know that God is for me, not against me? Put differently, how can I find a gracious God? Or, in the words of the jailer's question in Acts 16:30, "What must I do to be saved?" The second question had to do with the nature of Christian community: Where can I find the true church? What does it mean to belong to the people of God? The reformers were gospel people and Bible people, and they sought to answer these questions by giving renewed attention to the Holy Scriptures understood in the light of Jesus Christ.

Jaroslav Pelikan once wrote about "the tragic necessity of the Reformation."¹ The Reformation was necessary because at its heart was the reformers' concern that the living voice of the gospel—*viva vox evangelii*—be heard afresh in their generation and in every other generation. We cannot leapfrog over the Reformation and recapture willy-nilly the undivided Christianity of the first millennium, much less the pristine faith of the apostolic church. No, we "needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4 KJV). The tragedy of the Reformation stems from the paradox that the great and much-needed spiritual and theological renewal of the sixteenth century left the Western church divided into two mutually hostile camps: Protestants and Catholics. Both the necessity and the tragedy of the Reformation remain part of its disputed legacy.

Perhaps it is ironic I am writing this preface while en route to the Vatican to participate as a fraternal delegate in the Synod of Bishops, which has been called by Pope Benedict XVI to consider "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith." Martin Luther and William Tyndale, both condemned by the Catholic Church for heresy—Tyndale was executed for it—would, I think, be surprised that one of their spiritual descendants has been given such an assignment. This can only mean, as Father Raniero Cantalamessa, the

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 45.

preacher to the papal household, wrote to me in a personal letter, “The Lord must be doing something new in his church.” May it be so!

Those who write books can only hope that the published product will find readers. Such has been the case with *Theology of the Reformers*, which has never been out of print since its first publication twenty-five years ago. It has been widely adopted as a basic primer in Reformation theology and has also been translated into several languages, most recently Chinese. I am grateful for all those who have shared their thoughts about what I have written here. Nothing is so rewarding as receiving an e-mail from a theology student in Shanghai asking what I meant by what I wrote about Calvin’s doctrine of predestination or Luther’s view of the Eucharist.

What appears here is a revised edition of the original version of this book. Some minor changes have been made in the text, the bibliographies have been updated, and a new chapter has been added on William Tyndale, that remarkable translator-martyr who stands at the headwaters of the English Reformation. My hope is that this revised edition will inspire its readers to explore the original writings of the five figures treated here. No minister of the gospel and no theological student should be without a good working knowledge of Martin, Huldrych, John, Menno, and William.

The year 1988 was an important period of transition in my life. I completed ten years on the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and moved to Birmingham, Alabama, to begin the work of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. During my time at Southern Seminary, I was greatly encouraged in my scholarly endeavors, including the provision of a full sabbatical year in Switzerland, during which most of the first edition of this book was written. The leaders of Samford University, especially the late President Thomas E. Corts and his successor, President Andrew Westmoreland, have likewise offered friendship and unstinting support in all of my work. I have been ably assisted in the revision of this book by two devoted research associates, Dr. B. Coyne and Jason Odom, and by the superb staff of the Harwell G. Davis Memorial Library. As ever, I am grateful to Le-Ann Little, my wonderful administrative secretary, for her help with this and all of my other projects. My first love is teaching, and my life has been greatly enriched by the many students I have known and worked with across the years, at both Southern and Beeson as well as at other seminaries and universities where I have given theological lectures and offered short-term courses.

All of the reformers featured in this book, with the notable exception of Tyndale, were called to pursue their vocation in the context of

family commitments, and so it has been with me. In the preface of the first edition, I mentioned my wife Denise and our two children, Christian and Alyce. Here is an update: Denise has not flagged in her passion for writing and now has to her credit twenty-six published books and 350 articles and essays. In the meantime, Christian has not only learned the Apostles' Creed but has also earned a PhD in theology at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He and his wife Rebecca are training a new generation of Christ followers at Oklahoma Baptist University, where they both work. My daughter Alyce not only can say the Lord's Prayer but is growing, as she puts it, in her "newfound Anglican faith." She holds a master's degree in German literature and lives with her husband Gregory Myers in Birmingham.

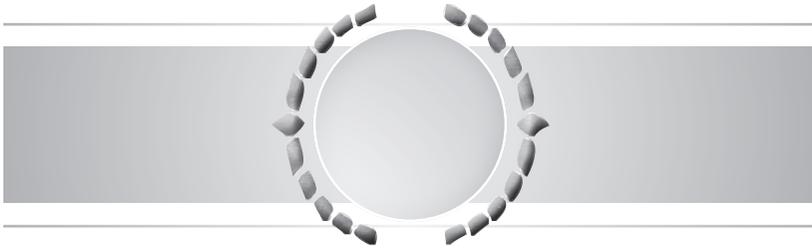
I take book dedications seriously and have retained the original dedication to George Huntston Williams. He is one of three remarkable scholars who profoundly shaped my understanding of the church and its history. The others were Jaroslav Pelikan and Heiko A. Oberman. During my seven years of graduate and postgraduate study at Harvard University, George Williams taught me to approach church history as a theological discipline and to understand the church as the body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space.

Perhaps the best way to close this preface is to repeat what William Tyndale wrote in the introduction to his English translation of the New Testament. It applies to this book and to everything else I have written:

As concerning all I have translated or otherwise written, I beseech all men to read it for that purpose I wrote it: even to bring them to the knowledge of the Scripture. As far as the Scripture approveth it, so far to allow it, and if in any place the Word of God disallow it, there to refuse it, as I do before our Savior Christ and his congregation. And where they find faults, let them show it me, if they be nigh, or write to me, if they be far off: or write openly against it and improve it, and I promise them, if I shall perceive that their reasons conclude, I will confess mine ignorance openly.²

Timothy George,
Beeson Divinity School of Samford University,
Birmingham, Alabama
Reformation Day 2012

² William Tyndale, "Yet Once More to the Christian Reader," in *Tyndale's New Testament*, ed. D. Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 16.



Preface to the First Edition

The noted Elizabethan scholar, A. L. Rowse, once complained that “the sixteenth century is full of the useless fooleries of disputes about doctrine.”¹ This book is essentially about such disputes, and it assumes that they were neither useless nor foolish insofar as they form a significant chapter in the history of what the church of Jesus Christ “has believed, taught and confessed on the basis of the Word of God.”² To be sure, most people who live on this side of the Enlightenment in a secular, pluralistic society are acutely indifferent about the niceties of predestinarian theology or the rationale for—or against—the practice of infant baptism. Such issues, and many others discussed in this book, have no measurable influence on the gross national product. At best, they might come in handy in a casual game of theological Trivial Pursuit. However, for those who stand committed within the Christian tradition, it is a matter of genuine concern to understand what was so decisively at stake in the great debates of the Reformation.

The Reformation was not merely a tempest in a teacup. Jerome once said that when he read the letters of the apostle Paul, he could hear thunder. That same thunder reverberates through the writings of the reformers as well. Contemporary theologians would do well to listen afresh to the message of these courageous Christians who defied emperors and popes, kings and city councils because their consciences were captive to the Word of God. Their gospel of the free grace of Almighty God, the Lord God Sabaoth, as Luther’s great

¹ A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 387.

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1.

hymn put it, and their emphasis on the centrality and finality of Jesus Christ stand in marked contrast to the attenuated, transcendence-starved theologies that dominate the current scene. It is not the purpose of this study to canonize the reformers. The sixteenth century was an age of violence and coercion, and the mainline reformers were not completely innocent of bigotry and intolerance. The Anabaptists, who had warts of their own, offered a counterwitness on this score, a witness that still needs to be heard in our own violence-ridden century. Luther's invective against the Jews, Zwingli's complicity in the drowning of Anabaptists, and Calvin's in the burning of Servetus are all the more tragic because one senses that these, of all people, should have known better. However, what is remarkable about the reformers is that despite their foibles and sins and blind spots, they were able to grasp with such perspicuity the paradoxical character of the human condition and the great possibility of human redemption through Jesus Christ. This concern undergirded their approach to the church, worship, ministry, spiritual life, and ethics. In each of these arenas we need desperately to hear what they have to say.

Much of this book was assembled during a sabbatical year in Switzerland. Professor H. Wayne Pipkin of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüslikon lent me many books from his valuable collection and made helpful comments on the Zwingli chapter. Professor Fritz Büsser of the Institute für Schweizerische Kirchengeschichte in Zurich and Dres. Pierre Fraenkel and Irena Backus of the Institut de la Réformation in Geneva received me warmly and made available the excellent resources of their respective research facilities. Professor Jan Lochman of the University of Basel was a genial host on my frequent visits to the city where Calvin's *Institutes* were first published in 1536. A section of chapter 4 appeared earlier as "The Presuppositions of Zwingli's Baptismal Theology" in *Prophet, Pastor, Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli After Five Hundred Years*, E. J. Furcha and H. Wayne Pipkin, editors. I am grateful for permission to reproduce this material.

Portions of this book were originally presented as lectures to theological students and pastors in a variety of settings. I am indebted to those who heard me and offered valuable suggestions at the Furman Pastors' School, Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina; Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia; Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; the Baptist seminaries in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, and Budapest, Hungary; and the

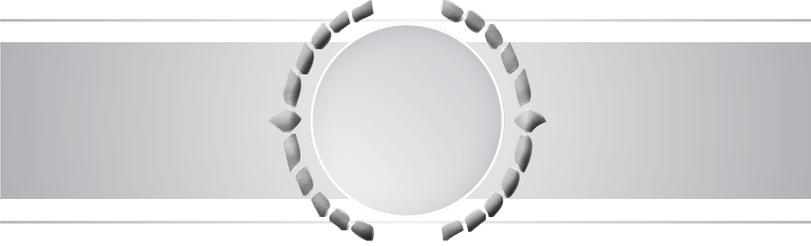
1986 Amsterdam Colloquium on Anabaptism sponsored jointly by the Doopsgezind Seminarium and the Theologisch Instituut of the University of Amsterdam. My own students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, have served as a hospitable nursery in which my ideas could grow and be tested. My colleagues in the departments of church history and theology have been remarkably tolerant of one who has argued, somewhat against the prevailing consensus, that Reformed and Baptist are not mutually exclusive terms. From the beginning of my tenure on the faculty, President Roy L. Honeycutt has been unflagging in his support for me and the discipline to which I am committed. Gaylyn Bishop, Connie Easterling, and Jackie Morcom provided able and cheerful assistance in preparing this manuscript for press. Barbara Bruce, a doctoral candidate in church history, interrupted her translation of Origen's homilies on Joshua to prepare the index for this book.

Like the writings of the four major figures studied in this volume, this book was written amid the struggles and joys of daily family life. I am grateful for the loving support given by my wife Denise, an accomplished author in her own right and my own special Katie von Bora. As this book goes to press, my son Christian, age six, has mastered the first ten questions of Calvin's Genevan Catechism, while my daughter Alyce, age four, is making good progress on the Apostles' Creed.

Finally, I would like to mention those scholars with whom I have studied Reformation history and theology: Professors William J. Wright, James S. Preus, Arthur C. McGill, Caroline Walker Bynum, Donald R. Kelly, David C. Steinmetz, Ian D. K. Siggins, Heiko A. Oberman, John E. Booty, Peter J. Gomes, and last, but not least, George Huntston Williams. To each of these I owe much more than a prefatory acknowledgment can express. This volume is dedicated to Professor Williams, my mentor and friend, who was a continuing source of encouragement and inspiration during seven years of graduate and postgraduate study at the Harvard Divinity School. One of the premier church historians of the twentieth century, Professor Williams modeled for me the two qualities required of anyone who aspires to the vocation of what Cotton Mather once called "the Lord's remembrancer": a critical reverence for the Christian tradition in all of its varied modalities and a sense of membership in the church universal, the body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space. This book is dedicated to Professor Williams with

affection and esteem, in partial repayment for a debt that can never be cancelled.

Timothy George
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky
Epiphany 1987



Abbreviations

- CNTC *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds. 12 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–70.
- CO *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt Omnia*. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, eds. 59 vols. Brunswick and Berlin: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
- CR *Corpus Reformatorum*. Halle/Saale, 1835–60; 1905–.
- CWE *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–.
- CWMS *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. John C. Wenger, ed. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1956.
- EE *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*. 11 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906–47.
- LW *Luther's Works*. Jaroslav Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann et al., eds.
- MQR *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*.
- OS *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*. P. Barth, W. Niesel, and D. Scheuner, eds. 5 vols. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926–62.
- PL *Patrologia Latina*. J. P. Migne, ed. Paris: 1844–64.
- PS *Parker Society Series: Doctrinal Treatises* (1), *Expositions* (2), *Answer to More* (3). Henry Walter, ed. Cambridge: University Press, 1848–50.
- SAW *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957.

- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* 58 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1833–.
- WA BR *Briefwechsel* (Luther's Letters, 14 vols. in the Weimar Edition).
- WA DB *Deutsch Bibel* (Luther's German Bible, 12 vols. in the Weimar Edition).
- WA TR *Tischreden* (Luther's *Table Talk*, 6 vols. In the Weimar Edition).
- Z *Huldreich Zwinglis Samtliche Werke.* Emil Egli, Georg Finsler et al., eds. Berlin, Leipzig, Zurich: 1950–.



Introduction

In 1518 the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus, having entered his fifty-first year and believing his death to be imminent, longed to be rejuvenated for a few years, “for this only reason that I believe I see a golden age dawning in the near future.”¹ In retrospect, it seems that Erasmus was unduly pessimistic about his own end—he had nearly twenty years yet to live—and overly optimistic about his times. His heady vision of a “golden age” of peace and learning would soon vanish before renewed war between the pope and the emperor, peasants’ uprisings, the assault of the Turks in the East and, above all, a religious crisis of profound impact. This crisis, which we call the Reformation, would shake the foundations of Western Christendom, leaving the church permanently divided. Before he died in 1536, Erasmus was referring to his age as “the worst century since Jesus Christ.”²

This negative assessment, however, must be set alongside other, more positive appraisals. Thus, the Scottish Presbyterian theologian William Cunningham opened his massive study of Reformation theology with the bold claim that the Reformation of the sixteenth century “was the greatest event, or series of events, that has occurred since the close of the canon of Scripture.”³ In a similar vein, the philosopher Hegel, a Protestant of a different sort, referred to the Reformation as

¹ The motif of the “golden age” is a recurrent theme in Erasmus’s early writings. Compare his exclamation in the *Panegyric* written in 1504 for Archduke Philip of Austria: “O fortunate age of ours, a truly golden age, when . . . the whole crop of virtues from that age of innocence are renewed, restored to life, and bloom again!” CWE 27:48.

² EE IV, no. 1239.

³ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866), 1.

“the all-illuminating sun, which follows that day-break at the end of the Middle Ages.”⁴

Until recent years one’s interpretation of the Reformation depended, almost invariably, upon prior confessional or ideological commitments. Roman Catholic partisans, beginning with Johannes Cochlaeus in the sixteenth century and continuing to Heinrich Denifle and Hartmann Grisar in the twentieth, have not been slack in their insistence that the Reformation was—to put it mildly—a mistake. What were its causes? Luther, a mad monk driven by narcissism and sexual compulsion; the German princes, greedy, self-serving autocrats; the Protestant preachers, renegade priests ready to sell their souls to become womanizers. And its consequences? Equally obvious: the rending of the seamless robe of medieval civilization, the splitting apart of faith and reason, nature and grace (so perfectly harmonized by Thomas Aquinas), and the unleashing of the forces of absolutism, nationalism, and secularism.

Protestant polemicists, for their part, responded to the Catholic caricatures in kind. In 1564 the Protestant court chaplain, Jerome Rauscher, published a treatise entitled *One Hundred Select, Great, Shameless, Fat, Well-Swilled, Stinking, Papistical Lies*. The leaders of the Protestant movement—Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—were depicted as heroes of the faith. Their words and deeds took on cosmic significance in the unfolding of salvation history.⁵

In the tradition of liberal Protestantism, the reformers were frequently extolled not because of, but in spite of, their actual reformatory doctrines. For Hegel, and especially Luther, the Reformation constituted a crucial moment in the history of thought because at this juncture the concept of human freedom came to the fore. He thus reduced Reformation theology to the dictum: “Man is destined through himself to be free.”⁶ In this view the Reformation was merely the first phase of the Enlightenment; Luther and Calvin, the precursors of Rousseau and Voltaire!

The German historian Leopold von Ranke inaugurated a new era in Reformation historiography when he published his monumental

⁴ H. Glockner, ed., *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Sämliche Werke* (Stuttgart-Bad Constanz, 1956–65), XI:519. On Hegel as an interpreter of Luther, see Gerhard Ebeling, “Luther and the Beginning of the Modern Age,” in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 11–39.

⁵ Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), 20.

⁶ Glockner, *Werke*, XI:524.

German History in the Age of the Reformation (1839).⁷ Although a Lutheran by confession, Ranke sought to rise above denominational prejudice. (He also wrote a history of the popes, in order to prove his evenhandedness!) He stressed the interaction of religion and politics in the period of the Reformation and insisted on extensive and critical use of the primary sources. The proper aim of the historian, as Ranke put it, is to know and reconstruct the actual past *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (“as it actually happened”).

Ranke’s influence on subsequent Reformation historiography, and indeed on the study of history in general, has been immense. His emphasis on the scrupulous use of sources has raised critical study of the Reformation to a new level. The writings of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, as well as those of many Catholic and radical reformers, have since been published in modern critical editions. Much more is known today about the complex combination of political, social, and cultural factors that characterized the Reformation. At the same time, Ranke’s desire for an utterly objective history has not been fulfilled. Nor indeed can it be. History is never the simple recounting of the past as it really was. It is inevitably an interpretation of the past, a retrospective vision of the past, which is limited both by the sources themselves and by the historian who selects and interprets them.

PERSPECTIVES IN REFORMATION STUDIES

Reformation studies today embrace a variety of competing approaches. Before setting forth the aim and perspective of this book, let us look at three general areas of concern in contemporary Reformation scholarship.⁸

The Problem of Periodization

Lord Acton, who was a keen student of the Reformation, once declared that historians should be more concerned with problems than with periods. The attempt to situate the Reformation between the medieval civilization that preceded it on the one hand and modern culture that followed it on the other has proved to be exceedingly awkward. Early in the twentieth century, Ernst Troeltsch argued that

⁷ Leopold von Ranke, *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1873).

⁸ A helpful introduction to Reformation historiography is Lewis W. Spitz, ed., *The Reformation: Basic Interpretations* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1962). Cf. also Hans J. Hillerbrand, *Men and Ideas in the Sixteenth Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 1–8.

the Reformation, in its seminal tendencies, belonged to the “authoritarian” worldview of the Middle Ages. The breakthrough to modern times came not in the sixteenth century with the Reformation but in the eighteenth with the Enlightenment. The famous church historian and Luther scholar Karl Holl rebutted Troeltsch and claimed that Luther and the reformers had presaged many positive developments in modern culture, notably in the concepts of personality and community.⁹

Closely related to this debate is the issue of the relationship of the Renaissance to the Reformation. The word *Renaissance*, which was originally only a term in the history of art, has come to represent a period of cultural flourishing—intellectual, literary, artistic—that swept through Italy and then northern Europe from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. The link between Renaissance and Reformation is often said to be humanism, which refers not to an anthropocentric philosophy of life but rather to a pattern of education and activism modeled upon a quasi-religious reverence for classical precedence. Humanism deeply affected every branch of the Reformation. Luther developed his insight into Pauline theology while using Erasmus’s edition of the Greek New Testament. Zwingli, Calvin, Melancthon, and Beza, among many others, were steeped in humanistic studies before embracing the Protestant message. Still, we cannot simply equate humanism and the Reformation; for in the wake of the Lutheran schism, humanist was divided from humanist as deeply as Protestant was from Catholic.

Was the Reformation the fulfillment or the antithesis of the Renaissance? Enno van Gelder argued the latter, claiming that the Reformation was basically at odds with positive elements of the Renaissance carried forth by such scholars as Erasmus and Montaigne.¹⁰ On the other hand, William Bouwsma pointed to important affinities between the deep tensions in Renaissance culture and the solutions offered by the Protestant reformers. Thus, he described the Reformation as “the theological fulfillment of the Renaissance.”¹¹

⁹ Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912). Holl’s seminal essay, “Was verstand Luther unter Religion?” has been translated in *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* ed. and trans. James Luther Adams and Walter Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). See also Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation* (New York: Meridian, 1959).

¹⁰ H. A. Enno van Gelder, *The Two Reformations of the Sixteenth Century* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). We may compare Gelder’s thesis to the starker statement of Friedrich Nietzsche: “If Luther had been burned like Hus, the dawn of the Enlightenment might perhaps have come a little earlier and more brilliantly than we can now imagine.” *Nietzsches Werke* (Leipzig, 1899–1904), I:iii, 224–25.

¹¹ William J. Bouwsma, “Renaissance and Reformation: An Essay in Their Affinities and

The problem of periodization has defied an easy consensus. It is clear that the Reformation was ambiguously and eclectically related to both medieval and modern impulses. Heiko A. Oberman, whose research on the late medieval context of the Reformation would seem to validate Troeltsch's thesis, has nonetheless found "the birthpangs of the Modern Era" in three characteristics of the later Middle Ages: (1) the discovery of the inductive method in scientific research, (2) a new view of human dignity based on a covenantal understanding of the relationship between God and the human, and (3) the closing of the gap between sacred and secular.¹² Without overdefining our terms, it is best to see the Reformation as an era of transition, characterized by the emergence of a new kind of culture that was struggling to be born even as the old one was still passing away.

Political, Social, and Economic Interpretations

Clearly the Reformation lends itself to an examination of these factors. In the political sphere it witnessed the rise of the modern nation-state, the last serious attempt to make the Holy Roman Empire a viable force in European politics, and the beginning of dynastic religious wars. Why the Reformation succeeded in Germany, failed in France, and never took root in Spain can only be understood in the light of the distinct political histories of these nations. Economically, the influx of gold from the New World, together with the breakup of feudal land economies, created runaway inflation and economic dislocation. The relationship between the Reformation and the rise of capitalism has been studied extensively and continues to generate controversy. Likewise, the social forces operative in the Reformation have been investigated in great detail. We now have a much fuller picture of the social realities of the sixteenth century: the resurgence of witchcraft, the impact of printing, the ethos of urban life, changing family structures—all of which impinged directly upon the religious impulses of the age.¹³ Some of the most creative interpretations of the Reformation have been set forth by Marxist historians who, from Friedrich Engels

Connections," in Oberman, *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era*, 127–49.

¹² H. A. Oberman, "The Shape of Late Medieval Thought: The Birthpangs of the Modern Era," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus and H. A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 3–25.

¹³ A useful survey of trends in Reformation studies is Steven Ozment, ed., *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982). A good sampling of recent social history of the Reformation is found in a memorial volume dedicated to Harold J. Grimm: *Pietas et Societas: New Trends in Reformation Social History*, ed. Kyle C. Sessions and Phillip N. Bebb (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1985).

to Gerhard Zschabitz, have interpreted the class struggles of the sixteenth century as a prototype of revolutions in the twentieth.

Ecumenical Historiography

Perhaps no scholar has had more influence on contemporary Roman Catholic interpretations of the Reformation than Joseph Lortz. His two-volume study of *The Reformation in Germany* (1939–40) broke decisively with earlier Catholic polemics against the Reformation and offered a basically positive, if still critical, appraisal of Luther. An entire “school” of ecumenical Catholic historians has followed in Lortz’s footsteps. This tradition of irenic scholarship has received a further impetus since the Second Vatican Council. On the Protestant side, we may mention the new interest in the reformers generated by Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, and especially Karl Barth. While this emphasis has been decidedly confessional in part (cf. the “Luther renaissance” associated with Karl Holl), it has also contributed to a wider appreciation of the reformers as servants of the entire church.

THE REFORMATION AS RELIGIOUS INITIATIVE

While the foregoing approaches to Reformation history provide valuable insights for understanding such a complex period, we must recognize that the Reformation was essentially a religious event; its deepest concerns, theological. In this study we are not concerned to tell the “whole story” of the Reformation. Our primary focus is neither the political, social, nor the strictly historical dimensions. Rather we are concerned with the theological self-understanding of five major reformers. Although we shall have occasion for critical assessment, we must not prejudice the validity of the reformers’ thought. If F. M. Powicke’s dictum, “A vision or an idea is not to be judged by its value for us, but by its value to the man who had it,”¹⁴ is not the whole truth, it at least reminds us that we cannot begin to evaluate the significance of earlier Christians, especially the reformers, until we have asked ourselves their questions and listened well to their answers.

Such an approach requires an appreciation for what John T. McNeill has called the “religious initiative” in Reformation history.¹⁵

¹⁴ Quoted, G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), 168.

¹⁵ John T. McNeill, “The Religious Initiative in Reformation History,” in *The Impact of the Church upon Its Culture*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 173–205.

Impressed by the secular context of current events, we are tempted to interpret the past in terms of contemporary standards, rather than those of the age we are studying. It is easy to assume that princes and reformers, like modern statesmen and diplomats, were motivated primarily by secular concerns. Yet the Lutheran George of Brandenburg, when required by Emperor Charles V to participate in a Corpus Christi procession, replied that he would sooner kneel down and have his head cut off.¹⁶ Likewise, Galaezzo Caracciolo, a relative of the pope who was converted to the reform, preferred a life of exile, including separation from his wife and six children, to the renunciation of his new-found faith.¹⁷ Such examples give poignancy to Luther's lines: "Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also; The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever." It is well to remember that the age of the Reformation produced more martyrs than all of the persecutions in the early church.

Of course, not everyone in the Reformation was afflicted with martyrdom lust. Montaigne, no doubt, spoke for many when he said, "There is nothing for which I wish to break my neck."¹⁸ Religious toleration was often advocated by those least moved by religious passion, as the case of *les politiques* in France demonstrates. Still, the reformers—Protestant, Catholic, and radical alike—were able to accomplish what they did because they were alive to the deepest struggles and hopes of their age. By tapping this profound reservoir of spiritual yearning, the reformers affected a major change in religious sensibilities. In this sense the Reformation was at once a revival and a revolution.

After an initial chapter, in which a number of the spiritual currents of the late Middle Ages are described, this book offers a theological profile of five major reformers of the sixteenth century: Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Menno Simons, and William Tyndale. Each of these figures stands at the headwaters of a major confessional tradition in the Reformation. Luther, who is the seminal theological genius of the entire Reformation, left his particular stamp on those Protestants who adhered to the Augsburg Confession. By the end of the sixteenth century, the "Lutherans" were the dominant religious party in most of Germany and in all of Scandinavia. Zwingli and Calvin, reformers of Zurich and Geneva respectively, are

¹⁶ Roland H. Bainton, *Early and Medieval Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 164.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Albert Thibaudet, ed., *Essais de Michel de Montaigne* (Argenteuil, 1933), Bk. II:389.

the coparents of the Reformed tradition, which spread far beyond the confines of its native Swiss context to embrace reformatory movements from Scotland and France to Hungary and Poland. Each of these three—Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—though differing from one another in significant ways, was a *magisterial* Reformer; that is, his reform movement was endorsed, indeed established, by magistrates, the ruling civil authorities. Tyndale was condemned in England and executed on the Continent at the hands of imperial authorities, but his last recorded words reveal his hope for a renewal of the church led by a reformed magistracy: “Oh Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.” Menno Simons is the “odd fellow out” among these five. He left his position as priest in the Roman Church to become a leader of the Anabaptists, one of the major groupings of the Radical Reformation. The Mennonites, or Mennists, as they were originally called, were quite active in the Low Countries. Their influence was felt from England in the West to Russia in the East. By the early seventeenth century they had gained a measure of toleration in some places; in Menno’s day they lived under perpetual threat of banishment and death.

Luther (1483–1546), Zwingli (1484–1531), and Tyndale (1492–1536) were reformers of the first generation; Calvin (1509–64) and Menno (1496–1561) were of the second. Zwingli met Luther once; besides the possibility of a meeting between Tyndale and Luther, there was no other personal contact among these five reformers. Many other reformers could well have been chosen. Philip Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, and Theodore Beza—the successors respectively of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin—were all major theologians who transmuted as well as transmitted the traditions they inherited. Among the Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier was more learned and Pilgram Marpeck more incisive than Menno. The Catholic reformers, Ignatius Loyola and Girolamo Seripando; the Anglicans, Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker; the Puritans, Thomas Cartwright and William Perkins; the “evangelical rationalists,” Michael Servetus and Faustus Socinus; the mediating theologian, Martin Bucer—these and many others could well serve as prisms into the rich diversity of Reformation theology. In this volume, however, we shall attempt an in-depth sounding of select formative figures rather than a broad sampling from a wide range of religious thinkers.

Our interest in the theology of the reformers is neither antiquarian nor obscurantist. Historical theology is the study of what “the church of Jesus Christ believes, confesses, and teaches on the basis of the

Word of God.”¹⁹ The church of Jesus Christ, however, is universal in respect to time as well as space. The reformers we study are both our fathers in the faith and our brothers in the community of the faithful. Their struggles and doubts, their victories and defeats are also ours.

Many of the theological issues with which they wrestled seem far removed from contemporary concerns. For most modern Christians the intricacies of predestination, the precise mode of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, and the arguments for and against infant baptism are matters of acute indifference. Concealed in such controverted points, however, are burning questions of life and death, questions about who God is, how divine revelation is imparted, and what constitutes the true church. The five reformers we focus on in this book faced these and many other questions with an integrity and lived-out courage that we can both admire and emulate, even if we cannot agree with all of their answers. Peter of Blois, a medieval theologian who died nearly three hundred years before Luther was born, expressed a sense of gratitude for the Christian writers of antiquity that should also characterize our attitude toward the reformers of the sixteenth century: “We are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants; thanks to them, we see farther than they. Busying ourselves with the treatises written by the ancients, we take their choice thoughts, buried by age and human neglect, and we raise them, as it were, from death to renewed life.”²⁰

¹⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1. Pelikan’s definition echoes the opening article of the Formula of Concord: “We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and of the New Testaments.” *Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Harper and Bros., 1877), III:93–94. For a fuller statement of the perspective on historical theology that informs this study, see Timothy George, “Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the Service of the Church,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987).

²⁰ PL 207, col. 290 AB (Epistola 92): “Nos, quasi nani super gigantum humeros sumus, quorum beneficio longius, quam ipsi, speculamur, dum antiquorum tractatibus inhaerentes elegantiores eorum sententias, quas vetustas aboleverat, hominumve neglectus, quasi jam mortuas in quamdam novitatem essentiae suscitamus.”

