

Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Henry VIII are the names people are most familiar with as the reformers. The Protestant Reformation influenced religion, government, society, and the economy.

The names below are from an article published in *Evangelical Focus* (located in Spain) in two parts. I highly recommend it for discussion and a vote on the "Top Ten" Protestant Reformers! There are other reformers who came a hundred years before the Reformation (Hus, Wycliffe) and contemporaries who opposed Luther (Erasmus, More) This article is also on our website, [www.reverendluther.org/content/education](http://www.reverendluther.org/content/education) with an opportunity to vote for the top 5!

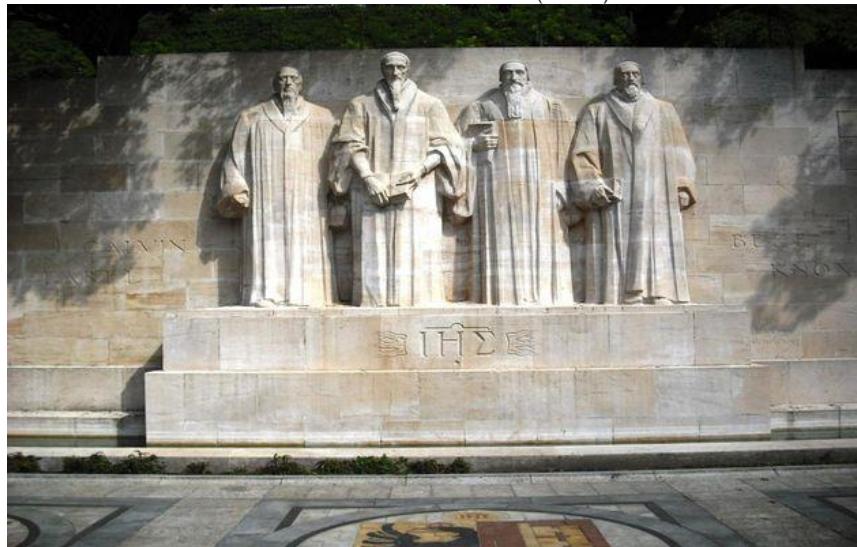
## *10 lesser-known Protestant Reformers*

A closer look at Philip Melancthon, Matthias Flacius, Martin Bucer, John Knox and William Farel.

A closer look at Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Beza, Thomas Cranmer, William Perkins and Conrad Grebel.

[FRESH BREEZE](#) AUTHOR [Will Graham](#) 07 MAY 2016 16:40 h GMT+1 (Part 1)

[FRESH BREEZE](#) AUTHOR [Will Graham](#) 14 MAY 2016 10:07 h GMT+1 (Part 2)



**Apart from the towering figures of Martin Luther and John Calvin, the original Protestant Reformers have more or less slipped into the abyss of oblivion. With the possible exception of Ulrich Zwingli, it would be fair to say that most contemporary evangelicals are hard-pressed to name one other leading Protestant from the sixteenth century.**

What we are going to do today, then, is to recover ten key names from the past of Protestantism and give a brief explanation as to why each figure was relevant in his own way.

Let's hope it's an eye-opening and soul-enriching experience!

## # 1 Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Lutheran

Melanchthon is best-known for being Martin Luther's young and faithful right-hand man. The two were pretty much a sixteenth-century version of Batman and Robin! The humanist Philip, much more peace-loving and academically-orientated than Luther, defended the chief insights of his senior's Reformation thought via his numerous books, tracts and confessions.

Fifteen years before Calvin published his initial edition of the 'Institutes' over in Basel (1536), Melanchthon had already released the first groundbreaking book upon systematic theology from an Evangelical perspective, namely, 'Loci Communes' in Latin or 'Common Places' in English. So highly revered was the tome that Luther literally proclaimed: **"Next to the Scriptures, there is no better book"**.

As well as 'Common Places', Melanchthon would go down in Lutheran history for drawing up what was to become perhaps the most significant document of early Protestantism, that is, the 'Augsburg Confession', hot-off the press just in time for the well-known Diet of Augsburg (8th April 1530). Diet, it should be pointed out, referring to the general assembly of the former estates of the Holy Roman Empire; not to fruit and veg. To this day, the Augsburg Confession continues to enjoy authoritative status within the walls of Lutheranism.

After Luther's death on 18th February 1546, the reins of the German Evangelical movement fell into the hands of Philip. Nevertheless, due to his willingness to give in to the State and Roman Catholicism over 'secondary matters' (adiaphora), another faction, led by Matthias Flacius, arose within Lutheranism in opposition to Melanchthon's compromising tendencies.

In the revered name of the late Martin Luther, the strict Gnesio-Lutherans (translated as the 'genuine' Lutherans) slammed Melanchthon's concessions and his alleged more Reformed understanding of the Lord's Supper as "Crypto-Calvinism". Not surprisingly whilst on his death-bed one of the reasons why Master Philip looked forward to leaving this life was to be delivered from the "wrath of the theologians".

## #2 Matthias Flacius (1520-75), Lutheran

Flacius was a much more die-hard Martin Luther fan than Melanchthon ever was. As far as Flacius was concerned, Dr. Martin could do no wrong. Hence his fierce rebuttal of what he saw as Melanchthon's watering down of the pristine Lutheran message. Fiery, feisty and always up for a fight, the Croatian-born thinker appeared to be Luther reincarnate. Flacius was Luther's pit-bull.

It seems that everywhere Flacius went, flames sparked. Some called him "the most hated man in Germany", others an "abominable monster" and as the Jesuit James Brodick wrote, "Seldom was there a man whose life was mastered by such dark and mad conviction".

In fact, Flacius was so polemical that he was denied a Christian burial when death overtook him at Frankfurt in 1575. Nevertheless, his academic brilliance was also undisputed. Whether he put his hand to linguistics, philosophy, hermeneutics, church history or theology, Flacius excelled as few before him.

Doctrinally speaking, Flacius' importance can be summed up in three key dogmatic issues. Firstly, Flacius openly decried any sort of cooperation between God and man's free-will in the act of salvation. As far as Flacius was concerned, salvation was an entirely monergistic affair. **In this sense he was resolutely opposed to what he perceived to be Melanchthon's Semi-Pelagian leanings.**

Secondly, he championed the Reformation truth of justification as a divine legal declaration against the errors of his fellow Lutheran Andreas Osiander (1498-1552) who advanced the mystical theory that God justifies a man by indwelling in him. Justification, as Luther and Flacius both pointed out, was a forensic and judicial affair that occurred outside of man. It had to do first and foremost with a sinner's standing before God; not his inner-nature.

Thirdly –and perhaps most importantly for contemporary theological discussion- Flacius disparaged the idea that the State could ultimately tell the church what to do. The government should have no say in the things of God. Yet again, such thinking was in complete divergence to Melanchthon's thinking who pretty much believed in blind submission to the State. The scholar Oliver Olson recently remarked that had Lutheranism paid more attention to Flacius, the German Lutheran church could have had a clearer guide in her struggle against twentieth-century National Socialism.

### # 3 Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Reformed

Martin Bucer was unique amongst the Reformers in that he influenced the three main strands of the Magisterial Reformation i.e. Lutheranism, the Reformed Church and Anglicanism. Stationed in the strategic town of Strasbourg throughout most of his ministerial career, Bucer is perhaps best-known for trying to forge links of unity between Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (albeit unsuccessfully).

Not only did he desire to bring the two Protestant giants together, but he also envisioned a united national German church wherein both Protestants and Catholics could fellowship independently of papal Rome.

In this sense, Bucer is sometimes seen as a forerunner of what would become the ecumenical movement. It should come as no surprise, then, to realize that Bucer is perhaps most remembered for his doctrine of the church. He longed to see congregations both reformed and united by the Scriptures.

As well as his friendship with Luther and Zwingli, he also had quite an effect upon the young John Calvin who spent three years in Strasbourg (1538-41) before the Frenchman inaugurated his own work of reformation in the city of Geneva. **Moreover, once Bucer was driven out of Strasbourg, he was able to have a say in the emerging Anglican movement thanks to his new teaching position at Cambridge.**

He helped pen the 1552 'Book of Common Prayer' and exercised a considerable influence upon key English Reformers such as the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker (1504-75) and John Bradford (1510-55). After continual battles with sickness, he finally succumbed to death whilst still at Cambridge in 1551.

### # 4 John Knox (c. 1513-72), Reformed

John Knox was a good old-fashioned fearless Scottish fireman. Not fireman in the modern sense of extinguishing flames but in the biblical John-the-Baptist-sense of igniting them. He was a Reformed version of Matthias Flacius. Despite his small stature, Knox endured unspeakable hardship as an imprisoned rower on the French galleys between 1547 and 1549. Miraculously, he survived his time aboard although his health never quite recovered.

One high point in Knox's life came in the 1550s when he got to spend various years at Calvin's Geneva referring to the work there as "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the Earth since the days of the apostles".

Knox himself was held in such high esteem by Geneva that to this day he figures in the centre of the renowned one-hundred-metre-long 'Reformation Wall' alongside the statues of fellow Reformers William Farel (1489-1565), Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and John Calvin (1509-64). Enthused with the advance of Evangelicalism on the continent, he sought after a similar revival of the Christian religion in his beloved Scotland. "Give me Scotland or I die!" he prayed.

In due time, the awakening came! Thanks to Knox's passionate Protestant preaching and his tenacious resistance to the Romanizing tendencies of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-87), the cause of the Reformation triumphed in Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was established. **Mary was reported to have confessed: "I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe".**

Knox was instrumental in penning the 'Scots Confession' and the Church of Scotland's first 'Book of Discipline', both published in 1560. Five years before he died, Knox also had the joy of preaching at the coronation service of the young Protestant king James VI of Scotland (or James I of England) in 1567 after the Catholic Mary was forced to abdicate.

## # 5 William Farel (1489-1565), Reformed

Alongside John Knox, William Farel was perhaps the most singularly gifted evangelist of the early Protestants. His figure also appears on the aforementioned 'Reformation Wall'. Converted to the Evangelical movement in France under the influence of the scholar Jacques Lefevre (1450-1537), Farel was chased out of his homeland and forced to take up residence in the French-speaking areas of Switzerland. Rather than being deterred by the events back home, Farel gave himself wholeheartedly to the work of the Gospel, preaching and debating incessantly in the midst of violent Catholic opposition.

Farel's labours were blessed to such an extent that various Swiss towns were won over to the Protestant faith. One such town was Geneva in 1532. It was thanks to Farel's potent powers of persuasion that a young John Calvin was convinced to stay there in 1536 to help advance the cause of the Reformation.

Even though Calvin merely wanted to pass by Geneva to dedicate himself to academic work at Strasbourg, the forceful Farel, "proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquillity of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken" (Calvin).

Calvin and Farel ministered together until they were axed from Geneva in 1538. Nevertheless, three years later the Genevan authorities pleaded with them to return. Calvin was not in the slightest bit interested. But it was Farel who yet again induced him to go back. Instead of accompanying his compatriot back to Geneva, Farel decided to dedicate the the rest of his ministerial life to the work of the Lord in the quiet town of Neuchâtel where he died in 1565.

## # 6 Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75), Reformed

Heinrich Bullinger was nothing short of a Scriptural and pastoral giant. Although somewhat reserved, he had a colossal impact upon almost all of Europe's nascent Protestant communities from as far east as Hungary to as far west as Scotland and England. He is best-known today for two reasons: firstly, for being Ulrich Zwingli's faithful successor in Zurich; and secondly, for penning the immortal 'Second Helvetic Confession' (1566).

Most of Bullinger's vast literary output stemmed from his expository preaching ministry whilst at Zurich. He preached upon every single book of the Bible over the course of his ministry there which spanned more than forty years. Some estimates reckon **Bullinger preached anything between 7,000 and 7,500 times**. Writes Steve Lawson: "Bullinger was a tireless preacher.

For the first ten years of his ministry, he preached six or seven times a week. After 1542, he preached twice a week, on Sundays and Fridays". His preacher's heart led him to aim at clarity and warmth in the pulpit which won him the affection of many. Not only was he loved by his people, but all of Zurich's ministers looked up to him as a pastor's pastor. In fact, even beyond Zurich he was considered as "the common shepherd of all Christian churches".

Despite tradition seeing in Bullinger a mere replica of Zwingli, it would be true to say that his thought was rather independent of that of his beloved predecessor. Zwingli, to give but one example, was a Supralapsarian whereas Bullinger was most certainly an Infralapsarian. Bullinger was also rather different in temperament, exhibiting a fairly mild spirit in comparison to the brutish attitude of both Zwingli and the men of his generation.

One point of Bullinger's life which has fallen into oblivion is the story behind the 'Second Helvetic Confession'. **Interestingly enough, the Confession was originally Bullinger's own personal declaration of faith which he had completed after being infected by the lethal Black Plague in 1564.**

Although never quite recovering after his bout with the illness, Bullinger was able to minister faithfully for a further eleven years and his Confession, thanks to the mediation of the Elector of the Palatine Friedrich III, became one of the most important documents of sixteenth century Protestantism. To this day the 'Second Helvetic Confession' is still widely-consulted and cited within the Reformed world.

## # 7 Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Reformed

With the possible exception of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) the only other continental Reformed thinker who could justly be deemed as an intellectual equal of the likes of Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger and Calvin would be the French exegete, pastor, author, theologian and teacher, Theodore Beza.

Just as Bullinger was handed the unenviable task of filling Zwingli's shoes, Beza had the nigh on impossible duty of taking over both Calvin's pulpit and his newly founded Protestant Academy in Geneva following the latter's death in May 1564.

Nevertheless, against all odds, Beza did a simply breathtaking job at consolidating and expanding Calvin's rich legacy. For over forty years, Beza held generations of young Evangelicals spellbound at the Academy due to his exegetical mastery of the Scriptures and theological knowhow. However it should be pointed out that he was much more than a mere academic.

Combining his academic place of duty with grassroots church ministry, Beza served as a local preacher and as the leader of 'The Company of Pastors' up until 1580. Commenting upon John 21:15 he preached, "It is not only necessary that [a pastor] have general knowledge of his flock but he must also know and call each of his sheep by name, both in public and in their homes, both night and day. **Pastors must run after lost sheep, bandaging up the one with a broken leg, strengthening the one that is sick** [...] In sum, the pastor must consider his sheep more dear to him than his own life, following the example of the Good Shepherd".

Beza kept up a European-wide correspondence with the key Reformed leaders throughout the continent. Not surprisingly, he was most closely connected to his native France and thus received a torrent of French refugees in Geneva after the infamous St. Bartholomew's Massacre which occurred in August 1572. Thousands of French Protestants (Huguenots) had been brutally butchered by their Catholic counterparts.

His influence also went beyond the sphere of the church into the civil realm. Due to his wise words of counsel and diplomatic spirit, the magistrates in Geneva were always willing to lend him a listening ear. The St. Bartholomew's Massacre led him to publish the significant work 'Right of Magistrates' (1574) in which he reasons that, "the magistrates have the duty to resist tyranny, including the tyrannical rule of a legitimately enthroned monarch" (Richard Muller). In this sense, Beza went a step beyond Calvin's more conservatively-minded political thought.

He stayed put in Geneva until he went home on 13th October 1605 at the ripe old age of 86.

## # 8 Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), Anglican

Continental Europe was not the only place to be struck by the insights of the Reformation. As we saw last week, Scotland experienced a Presbyterian revival via the powerful preaching ministry of John Knox (c. 1513-72). Down in England, however, a distinctive brand of Protestantism known as Anglicanism came into being once the English Parliament proclaimed King Henry VIII (1491-1547) to be the true Head of the Church of England by means of the groundbreaking 1534 'Act of Supremacy'.

**The English Reformation, then, was not sparked off so much by a concern for doctrinal matters (as in Germany under Luther) or by affairs of church worship (as in Switzerland under Zwingli), but by political issues.** To cut a long story short, Henry wanted to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536).

Pope Clement VII was having none of it. So the King decided to set up a new church independent from Rome. Henry's first Archbishop of Canterbury (the religious leader of the Church of England) was chosen to be Thomas Cranmer.

Although Cranmer has gone down in history as Henry's cowardly 'yes-man', he did indeed play quite a significant part in reforming the Anglican Church. Not only did he publish the first authorized church service in English – 'The Exhortation and Litany' (1534) - but he also drew up the first two editions of the oft-quoted 'Book of Common Prayer' (in 1549 and 1552) which incorporated some of the key thoughts from continental Protestantism thanks to the help of Martin Bucer (then at Cambridge) and Peter Martyr Vermigli (at Oxford). The Anglican 'Thirty-Nine Articles' (first published under the direction of Matthew Parker in 1563 and finalized in 1571) were also greatly dependent upon Cranmer's doctrine.

Cranmer's ministry was sadly cut short by martyrdom once Henry and Catherine's angry pro-Roman daughter Mary ascended to the throne. Cranmer lost his post and was sentenced to death. In the words of Reformation expert Michael Reeves, "The old archbishop and architect of so much of the English Reformation, now nearly seventy, had, under extreme duress, renounced his Protestantism. It was a triumph for Mary's reign.

Despite his recantation, however, he was such an embodiment of the Reformation that it was decided he should be burned in any case. It was a decision that would more than undo Mary's victory, for when the day came, Cranmer refused to read out his recantation. Instead he stated boldly that he was indeed a Protestant, though a cowardly one for forsaking his principles".

"In consequence he announced, **'for as much as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished there-for'**. He was true to his word: as the fires were lit, he held out the hand that had signed his recantation so that it might burn first. Having briefly denied his Protestantism, Cranmer thus burned with movingly defiant bravery, and so died the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury".<sup>1</sup>

The date was 21st March, 1556.

### **# 9 William Perkins (1558-1602), Mainline Puritan**

The Puritan movement felt that the Reformation in England had not gone deep enough. It was the powerful Anglican preacher William Perkins who exercised the most powerful influence upon the early generations of non-conformist Puritans, although he himself never left the Church of England.

In spite of his untimely death at forty-four, **Perkin's writings encouraged the Puritans to become more consciously reformed (in the Swiss sense) and not to remain content with the nominal Protestantism which flourished under Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603)**. Perkins, for instance, popularized the thought of the aforementioned Theodore Beza in England and ignited a passion for the centrality of the pulpit in Christian worship.

One tome wherein Perkins' love for the ministry of the Word can be sensed is his 1592 work upon 'The Art of Prophesying' (or in contemporary terms 'The Art of Preaching'). As far as Perkins was concerned, the chief characteristic of any minister is the preaching of the Word. He writes in the preface to the book, **"So, if anyone asks which spiritual gift is the most excellent, undoubtedly the prize must be given to prophesy"**.

Perkins was convinced that a Gospel preacher had to aim at clarity and simplicity whilst in the pulpit and thus was resolutely opposed to the flowery preaching of his age which majored upon human wisdom and wit.

His Scripture-saturated ministry and books bore fruit in the lives of many of his theological students among whom appear the names of William Ames (1576-1633), the renowned Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) and the Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher (1581-1656).

### **#10 Conrad Grebel (1498-1526), Anabaptist**

Our survey of lesser-known Protestant Reformers would not be complete without mentioning at least one Anabaptist thinker. In stark contrast to the Magisterial Reformation (Lutherans, Reformed and Anglicans) which took the presence of the State with utmost seriousness; **the Anabaptists wanted to break off from all earthly ties and denounce any type of cooperation between state and church**. Ecclesiastically speaking, they also decried infant baptism as invalid given that the baptized person had to know what he (or she) was doing.

Conrad Grebel (1498-1526) was one such preacher. 'The Father of the Anabaptists' had actually been led to faith in Christ thanks to Zwingli's ministry in 1522; nevertheless, the following year he began to feel that his pastor was not carrying out a full-blown reform at his church at Zurich, especially due to Zwingli's willingness to compromise with the State over the question of abolishing the Mass.

Two years later, Zwingli and Grebel met for a final showdown. They were to debate publically upon the controversial theme of infant baptism. **After the debate, Zurich's authorities officially endorsed Zwingli's stance, so Grebel and his faithful followers decided to leave Zurich in order to preach their newfound faith,**

**baptizing men and women who responded to their Gospel preaching.** From that moment on, Anabaptism (which literally means ‘rebaptism’ or ‘baptism again’) was to become an independent movement, separate from the Swiss Reformation.

As can be imagined, the civil authorities were incensed at Grebel’s re-baptizing antics. Therefore all of the Anabaptist preachers were sentenced to death by drowning. Grebel’s close friend Felix Mantz was the first to die in January 1527.

Grebel himself had been arrested in October 1525 and handed a life-sentence, however, his friends helped him to escape some five months later. But all to no avail. The young Grebel was to be struck down by the plague that very summer. Notwithstanding his relative youth, Grebel was to prove instrumental in the development of a Protestant alternative to the mainline thought of Luther, Zwingli and Bullinger.

IREEVES, Michael, *The Unquenchable Flame: Introducing the Reformation* (IVP: Nottingham, 2009), p. 132.



The original source is from:



[http://evangelicalfocus.com/magazine/1595/10\\_Lesser\\_Known\\_Protestant\\_Reformers](http://evangelicalfocus.com/magazine/1595/10_Lesser_Known_Protestant_Reformers)

[http://evangelicalfocus.com/magazine/1614/10\\_Lesser\\_Known\\_Protestant\\_Reformers\\_II](http://evangelicalfocus.com/magazine/1614/10_Lesser_Known_Protestant_Reformers_II)

## About us

Evangelical Focus is a free online News website with a worldview related to the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) creed. This website belongs to the Areópago Protestante project, an initiative developed by the Spanish Evangelical Alliance (AEE) whose aim is to encourage the dialogue between the Evangelical community and society.

Director: Pedro Tarquis

Editor: Joel Forster

Editorial team: Belén Díaz, Daniel Hofkamp, Joel Forster, Pedro Tarquis, Joëlle Philippe, Gabriela Pérez, Roger Marshall (Translation), Nicky Seadon (Translation), Jonathan Dawson (Translation), Esther Barrett (Translation), Joana Morales (Translation) Rachel Feliciano (Translation), Noemí Sánchez Read (Translation), Karen Brooker (Translation)

Reference Committee: Pablo Martínez, Jaume Llenas, Greg Pritchard, Pedro Tarquis, Joel Forster

Webmaster: Pablo Malagón                      Art Design: Marina Acuña

Programming: Claudenir Martines              Advertising: Rose Lojas

Administration: María Quintero