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Laypeople Who Forwarded the Protestant Reformation

A leader's following defines him; his strength is only as great as his followers' support and his beliefs are only as authentic as their validation. This concept proves especially true regarding religious leaders. Faith is a very personal sentiment, and because beliefs vary greatly from person to person, finding a consensus regarding religious thought becomes increasingly difficult. From the time of the early Christian Church until the beginning of the 16th century—nearly 1,500 years—the agreed-upon system of Western Europe remained the Roman Catholic Church. But when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, a divisive and irreparable rift appeared, igniting the Protestant Reformation. When more reformers joined the cry for change, the movement reached new heights. The Reformation would have amounted to nothing more than the musings of a few rebellious theologians, though, had it not been for the support of great names in the secular world.

Visual art was one of the primary methods of documenting important events and communicating opinions during the Renaissance. Through their paintings, sculptures, frescoes, and woodcuts, artists gave the public visual representations of popular Biblical, mythological, and historical events, using their work as a vehicle to symbolically express their—or a specific group's—position on an topic of the day. As the era's scribes, they were instrumental in spreading their perspectives on current and past issues, in addition to those of their influential donors. Renaissance artists' pieces served as faithful accounts for posterity to glimpse what life was like during a period of great progress, as well as great upheaval. The Protestant Reformation shared its messages through the works of well-known painters who supported its cause. Luther

became friends with several and impacted them personally. These artists portrayed through their religious works the tenets of Lutheranism: the importance of Biblical study, the reception of salvation by the grace of God as the result of faith, and the “priesthood of all believers,” which by definition included both the Protestant clergy and laity together in the brotherhood of worship.

In addition to being a major force in German art, Lucas Cranach the Elder became a close friend of Luther’s while they both lived in Wittenberg. Elector Frederick III appointed Cranach as his court painter and introduced him to Luther. He made countless copies of the portraits he did of Luther, his reformer-colleagues, and rulers sympathetic to their cause. It was primarily through his paintings, engravings, and woodcuts that Europeans were first exposed to the Reformation. When Lutheranism was well established, Cranach painted images and altarpieces for Lutheran churches, continuing to show people its values and beliefs.¹ *The Crucifixion*, painted in 1538, exemplifies Cranach’s ability to portray Luther’s teaching of the theology of the



¹ “Lucas Cranach the Elder,” in *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. David Rundle (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 117-118.

cross, which emphasized the importance of faith, repentance, and grace.

The painting is divided in half with The Blessed on the right and The Damned on the left. Among the latter are the soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' clothes and the unrepentant criminal who was crucified next to Jesus. On the right is a newly converted soldier, who points at Jesus, acknowledging him as his savior. In addition to a group of mourning women, a father and son stand together looking at Jesus, symbolizing that everyone, regardless of age, gender, or social status, can have faith and a close relationship with God. Cranach wanted every viewer of his piece to realize that, as Luther taught, they too could believe and be saved by the grace of God.

Another defining attribute of Protestant culture was the focus on Jesus and His crucifixion, and in turn the de-emphasis on Mary. Luther did not support the veneration of Mary as the Mother of God or co-redeemer, as some had come to acknowledge her, and instead encouraged his followers to pray directly to God in Jesus' name. However, Luther did appreciate the sentiment of the first Hail Mary: *"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."* Although the new emphasis was on Jesus as man and God, Mary remained an important symbol in art for all Christian sects, because of her role in bringing Jesus to earth and the inspiring example of her unconditional faith in God.

Like Cranach, Albrecht Dürer was an influential German painter whose life was touched by Luther's teachings. He first met Luther in 1518 when Luther was called to Augsburg by Cardinal Cajetan to recant his statements offending the papacy. Luther's messages of salvation by faith and the ability to develop a loving, personal relationship with God helped Dürer through his grief after his parents' deaths. Despite his Lutheran leanings, Dürer served as one of Emperor

Charles V's court painters in the Netherlands, and was also a favorite of Pope Rudolph II, causing his popularity to grow. Giorgio Vasari elevated his standing to an international scale when he made frequent mention of the artist in his book, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors*. Durer depicted the uplifting messages of Lutheranism in his works, such as *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (1519), a moving portrayal of maternal tenderness and deep faith, and the *Four Apostles* panels, which displayed excerpts from Luther's translation of the Bible. These panels adorned a predominant place: the Nuremberg town council, acting as an overt reminder to everyone, even the government, of the importance of faith and obedience to God.²

Just as their artistic counterparts used visual works to exhibit the Reformation's messages, progressive Renaissance thinkers employed the written word. Luther, though passionate, obstinate, and demanding, could not win over nations on his own. Scholars' support gained steady momentum for the movement. As intellectuals wrote their pamphlets and papers, the sympathetic public saw them as people of faith like themselves, who could react to the newly-presented religious teachings with greater objectivity. People wanted to make independent decisions about a faith with which they could identify. Intellectuals' clear and convincing words were essential in the struggle to acquire followers of Protestantism.

With the invention of the moveable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450 came the ability to disseminate the written word faster and simpler than ever before. Luther's publications, especially his 1522 translation of the New Testament into the German vernacular, were only able to have such a powerful effect because of their immediate widespread distribution

² "Albecht Dürer," in *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. David Rundle (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 139-140.

among the common people throughout Germany. Sympathetic printers willingly produced copies without being asked or paid to do so, a testament in itself of the writings' popularity. In Nuremberg, seven out of the nine printers in the city published Lutheran writings despite discouragement from the magistrates. It is estimated that in the 1520s there were nearly fifty printers issuing Lutheran writings in at least twelve separate locations throughout Germany. Out of 391 total printers counted in the 1500s, another seventy were noted for publishing Protestant works throughout the century. Forty-two of the 125 cities where printers existed have been noted as significant to the history of printing.³ Through this significant support, the texts eventually reached many more countries and were translated into the local language. In addition, Germany's rich trade quickly carried Reformation ideas abroad and established it in foreign nations.

The writings of Philipp Melancthon, Luther's colleague and friend from the University of Wittenberg and one of the greatest public allies of the Reformation, were essential in organizing and spreading the Lutheran theology. Luther was a theorist; he had powerful ideas about religion, but his original goal was not to form a new church, nor did he know how to create one when the inevitability of separation from the Roman Catholic Church became obvious. While Luther was translating the Bible into the German vernacular, he consulted Melancthon for his extensive knowledge of Greek, from which the Bible had only been translated in limited amounts a few times. Even while Luther was in hiding at Wartburg Castle in 1522, they debated over the semantics of Bible verses whose interpretations could vary based on their Greek, Latin, or Hebrew origins. Luther sought accuracy of translation as well as precision of the message conveyed. He preached that the Bible was the source of Christian truth, and used verses to

³ Richard G. Cole, "Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 3 (1984): 337, accessed September 13, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540767>.

support his theology. Melanchthon did not hesitate to defend Luther's position at the Leipzig Debate against John Eck using excerpts directly from the Bible. An important Bible passage that expresses the Lutheran doctrine is Romans 3:23-28:

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.⁴

Both Luther and Melanchthon grounded their teachings in the concept of justification by faith, which stated that faith in Jesus is the only necessity for a person to be granted salvation; good works and indulgences do not have that power.

Another important distinction of Lutheranism is its opposition of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation—the belief that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ during the mass, a miracle witnessed by the priest. In fact, Melanchthon rejected this principle even before Luther did, instead advocating for consubstantiation, which stated that the substance of the wine and bread do not change, but the Spirit of Christ is present in them. By denying that priests initiated any miracles during the mass, this Protestant doctrine deemed them inessential and undermined sacerdotalism, a central Roman Catholic belief that necessitated priests as mediators between God and men.

In 1521 at Luther's suggestion, Melanchthon published the first organized compilation of Reformation theology in the *Loci communes rerum theologicarum* ("Theological Commonplaces"), which addressed primarily sin, law, and grace, and well as free will, vows,

⁴ *The English Standard Bible*, Romans 3.21-28

hope, and confession.⁵ During the same year he risked his life by defying the imperial decree which stated that supporters of Luther would be executed by writing “Against the Furious Decree of the Parisian Theologasters,” answering the Sorbonne’s censure of 104 of Luther’s statements. Melanchthon was the primary voice of the Reformation at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, where he wrote the Augsburg Confession, a powerful statement on Protestant theology and thought. His *Apology of the Confession of Augsburg* refuted any changes that had been negotiated with Roman Catholic leaders regarding the *Confession*’s position. The *Confession* and *Apology* became principal Lutheran doctrines of faith, along with Melanchthon’s *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*. Although he often worked cooperatively with Roman Catholic opposition in the attempt to earn recognition for the movement, Melanchthon stayed true to the Lutheran ideologies of “by faith alone” and Biblical truth.⁶

Similar in theology to Luther, but radical in approach, reformer Ulrich Zwingli is credited with igniting what is often called the Second Reformation. Whereas Luther’s influence extended through central and northern Europe, Zwingli’s spread from its epicenter at Zurich into Great Britain, inspiring the Presbyterians of Scotland and Puritans of England. His successor as leader of the Swiss reform movement was John Calvin, who created the theocratic city of Geneva and won many followers in France, known as Huguenots.

Despite the similarity of Zwingli’s and Luther’s faiths, the former insisted that his theology developed independently. Though they both held to similar tenets, their methods were very different. For example, both men held that the Bible is the source of Christian truth, but their varying interpretations left them unable to find common ground on the sacrament of Holy

⁵ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 317.

⁶ *Ibid*, 487-490.

Communion. In an attempt to reconcile their differences, in October 1529 the two agreed to a meeting dubbed the Marburg Colloquy. Heated debate ensued, especially over their positions on the Eucharist. Luther raged over Zwingli's belief that the bread and wine were only symbolic, not actual, representations of Christ's body and blood. Luther even wrote "This is my body" in chalk on the table, pointing to it and crying that there can be no argument with the Word of God.⁷ When the debate came to an end, no agreement could be made because neither man was willing to sacrifice his beliefs. The Swiss asked Luther if he would call them brothers, but he refused that association, along with their offer to take Holy Communion together.⁸ Though Zwingli firmly held to the importance of Biblical truth and the saving power of faith, Luther would not accept his attachment to symbolism and appeal to reason.

Interestingly enough, Zwingli's radical system placed him even farther on the anti-Rome spectrum than Luther. In Zurich, he instituted the first "puritanical" city, banning music and dancing, believing them distracting to a personal communication with God. People were constantly watched and their activities recorded to ensure the order, security, and purity of the city.⁹ The Puritans embraced these concepts and took them from England to Amsterdam (where religious tolerance was granted to everyone), and from there to the New World. Zwingli's pragmatic realism and emphasis on proper moral conduct appealed to people, as they sought order out of the chaos created by the violence and strife of the decade. Zwingli's system served as a fast-growing alternative to both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. After the Marburg Colloquy, it became clear that union was impossible within Christianity, as well as Protestantism; a primary theology of Protestantism could not be decided on, so it broke up

⁷ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 503-505.

⁸ Leonard W. Cowie, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 39-40.

⁹ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 500.

further into individual sects, the predominant ones led by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Each amassed a considerable following within their respective spheres of influence throughout Europe, making Protestantism a strong, though not unified, opposition to Roman Catholicism.

Another significant aid to the Reformation's cause was Europe's secular leaders. Unlike the great Renaissance minds that supported the reform movement, the religious alignment of Europe's rulers carried fate-determining weight. A ruler's religion determined that of his subjects, a policy encompassed by the slogan *cuius regio, eius religio*.¹⁰ Therefore, the refusal to convert often necessitated a difficult choice: emigrate or be executed. Throughout Europe at this time, religion was more concerned with politics than faith; a leader's religion and his religion's enemy determined his allies.

Luther found one of his most influential supporters in Frederick, Elector of Saxony. Frederick founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502 and appointed Luther and Melancthon as professors. Aptly called Frederick the Wise, he felt that as Luther's territorial ruler it was his duty to ensure that he got a fair hearing when Luther was summoned to Rome to have his theology examined. Frederick intervened and instead had him sent to Worms, where an imperial Diet was in session. Rome acquiesced to his intercession because it needed Germany's monetary support of a planned military operation against the Ottoman Empire, whose troops were ready to attack central Europe by way of Hungary.

The papacy also had incentive to please Frederick, who was one of the seven electors that would choose Maximilian I's successor as Holy Roman Emperor, and hoped for a favorable outcome. Frederick pushed for the nomination of the new German king, Charles V, to the

¹⁰ Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 87.

position (after he had refused it himself). Charles V instituted legislation stating that a German could only be convicted of a crime following a proper trial, a law that saved Luther from excommunication (at this juncture—Luther was later excommunicated in 1521) at the hand of the papal bull *Decet Romanum pontificem* (“It Pleases the Roman Pontiff”). The populace wanted Luther to have a serious trial, though, so they proposed that he appear later that spring before the imperial Diet convening at Worms, which is about 300 miles from Wittenberg near the French border. On April 18, 1521, Luther went before the Diet of Worms and admitted that he had used inflammatory language in his writings, but refused to recant their substance. A famous account of the incident has him declaring, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” Fierce debates between Luther and Charles V’s representatives followed this declaration. Luther left Worms on April 26. On May 8, Charles V drew up an edict against Luther that stated Luther’s wrongdoings, declared his followers and he outlaws, and ordered the burning of all his writings. The edict became law on May 26, but faced immediate opposition for its blatant untruth; it claimed to have the “unanimous consensus of the estates,” yet the majority of the rulers who had participated in the Diet had returned home by then.¹¹

On his journey from Worms, Frederick’s soldiers “kidnapped” Luther and brought him to hide at Wartburg Castle, where he would remain for most of the year, presumed dead by many. While hiding at Wartburg, Luther was able to begin one of his greatest accomplishments, the New Testament translation into the German vernacular.¹² Not only did this work support his teaching that the Bible was the foremost source of Christian truth and faith and win him many appreciative followers, but it also greatly advanced the German written language. Furthermore, it

¹¹ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 289-291.

¹² Alister McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 215.

encouraged other like-minded scholars and reformers in Europe to follow suit in their own languages.

Protestantism became a powerful movement and serious threat to papal authority by its dissemination outside of Germany, predominantly through the support of the foreign kings. In 1537, King Christian II made Lutheranism the state religion in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. It had already taken firm root in Germany, but this action ignited widespread support throughout northern Europe and established it as an international force.

Accidentally but effectively, King Henry VIII of England also helped the Protestant cause. A staunch supporter of the Roman Catholic Church, Henry wrote pamphlets deriding Luther and his teachings, which led Pope Leo X to declare him Defender of the Faith in 1521. Papal opinion regarding Henry VIII soon changed in 1533 when he broke with the Roman Catholic Church in order to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, which the pope would not allow, and marry his pregnant mistress Anne Boleyn. This act of defiance created further opposition against the established sect of Christianity. As supreme head of his new Anglican Church, Henry introduced reforms that placed his system somewhere in between that of the Roman Catholic Church and the reformers. For the most part, he stayed true to the tenets of Roman Catholicism, especially transubstantiation and the hierarchy of religious leaders, but he instituted the restriction of monasteries, the use of English vernacular Bibles, and the ability of clergy to marry, though this last change was later retracted.¹³ Henry's pseudo-Protestantism was refined by his children. His son and successor Edward VI passed reforms regarding doctrine, worship and discipline, the three precepts of what people considered the true church. Elizabeth I,

¹³ Martin Luther quoted in Leonard W. Cowie, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 81-88.

Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn, established through the Act of Uniformity that services would adhere to the guidelines of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Although Protestantism became firmly rooted in England through the Anglican Church, the Puritans sought to purify the new church of its similarities to the Roman Catholic religion. A century later, they brought Protestantism to the New World, emphasizing the importance of God's Word and enforcing strict moral behavior.

The movement gained important ground in France thanks to King Henri IV, who was raised Protestant but converted to Roman Catholicism on becoming king to prevent revolt by his mainly Roman Catholic subjects. He ended the religious wars that had ravaged France for decades. The worst example of the conflicts' violence occurred in 1572 with the Massacre on St. Bartholomew Day, when thousands of Parisian Protestants were indiscriminately and brutally murdered. Through the Edict of Nantes in 1598, Henri IV granted religious freedom to all French Huguenots. He made a speech to the *Parlement* of Paris in order to secure its passage, demanding obedience to his legislation because he had restored peace and promised to maintain it, as his predecessor had not.¹⁴

Despite their religious affiliations, the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor were also political entities with vast influence, many allies, and the ability to raise armies. This was not a prosperous time for the Roman Catholic Church, as it was losing a great deal of its following to the various sects of Protestantism. In addition, the frivolous lifestyles of its popes, cardinals, and emperors emptied once-prosperous coffers, and forced leaders of the Church to institute extreme taxation. In order to bring in desperately-needed money, Pope Clement VII created five

¹⁴ Leonard W. Cowie, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 56-57.

cardinals' positions, selling them for 40 thousand ducats each.¹⁵ When Holy Roman Emperor Charles V could no longer pay his troops, they went on strike. In 1527, Charles V, discontented with his impecunious situation, rebelled against the pope. He had drafted tens of thousands of men to fight with him, but was unable to pay them. Greedy for a reward for their sacrifice, the Imperial troops stormed the Holy City, wildly looting, murdering, and sinning. Pope Clement VII fled to the Castle of St. Angelo, where German landsknechts mocked him by dressing up as cardinals, drinking to Clement's health, and shouting, "Luther for pope!"¹⁶ Lutheranism had become quite popular since its inception a decade before. It appealed to many because of its stark contrast to Roman Catholicism and the participatory and equalizing nature of Luther's teachings.

People's discontentment with the Roman Catholic Church, disconnect within church leaders, and the threat from what Luther called the "Muslim Antichrist," worried Charles V. By some stroke of luck, he was able to stop Ottoman emperor Suleiman from taking control of Vienna, but by the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was a pernicious force, controlling Hungary, much of the Middle East, and colonies in North Africa. To fight its numerous enemies, Charles V felt that the Roman Catholic Church needed to unify. Through the reigns of five popes he impotently pushed for a Council, and finally in 1545, he got his wish.

The Council of Trent convened, each member bringing different goals; some sought immediate reform, while others wanted to address and dismiss any criticism presented by the Protestants. Despite its numerous postponements over eighteen years, the Council accomplished important goals, including the creation of the Profession of Faith to unify Church doctrine and reforms regarding jurisdiction and property to reduce corruption among the clergy. Through the

¹⁵Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984), 268.

¹⁶ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 465-479.

Council of Trent's progress and the global evangelism of the Jesuit society formed by Ignatius Loyola, the Roman Catholic Church began to rally. Controlling and limiting corruption among Roman Catholic Church leaders, though, proved a difficult task, especially when Pope Clement VII's successor, Pope Paul III, was appointed solely because he was the brother of influential Alexander Borgia's mistress Giulia. The pope had no real interest in enforcing the reforms made.¹⁷ Poor leadership at the head of the Roman Catholic Church easily trickled down through the ranks. Despite the Council's steps forward, the Church's struggle continued, for allegiance quickly shifted as rulers used religious alignments to achieve their ambitious political goals.

Unfortunately, the Protestant opposition to the papacy was greatly weakened by several events in quick succession: Francis I's defeat by Charles V, which led the French king to withdraw his support of the Protestants; Charles V's improved relationship with Pope Paul III, which won him troops and funds; and Luther's death in 1546, which dealt a psychological blow to the Protestant cause. During the last years of Luther's life, the powerful Schmalkalden Alliance had united the German Protestant princes, along with other enemies of Rome, including the French, English, and Danish. Upon Luther's death, the conflict between the Protestants and their Roman Catholic opponents reached a climax in 1546-47 during the Schmalkaldic Wars.

Despite Charles V's outlawing its two main leaders, the landgrave Philip of Hesse and the elector John Frederick of Saxony, the Schmalkaldic League posed a considerable threat, from its position along the Danube River and in Tyrol, to the oncoming papal troops. Nevertheless the Roman Catholic reinforcements were able to join Charles V's and battle the Protestants at Muhlberg, near Leipzig, on April 24, 1547. During the battle, the Schmalkaldic League took

¹⁷ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 511-513.

great casualties, suffering a decisive military loss and the capture of commanders Philip of Hesse and Elector John Frederick. Charles V had the latter tried and sentenced to death, though the sentence was lessened afterward to life imprisonment.

In addition, the Protestants lost religious toleration, but Charles V insisted on religious peace until the Council of Trent's final reforms were published. Through the Augsburg Interim of 1548, he began reinstating the Roman Catholic Mass into churches, compromising only by permitting the marriage of clergy and Holy Communion in two parts.¹⁸ Protestants became targets of violence and discrimination, suffering job loss and threats to their lives. Even Luther's widow, Katharine von Bora, and her children were forced to move several times to escape the violence and pestilence in Wittenberg, living off of the generosity of friends and nobility. When they returned home, their farm was in a state of disarray; the livestock had been stolen and the property's faithful caretaker had died. The strain of borrowing money to rebuild their home, combined with an injury suffered from a carriage accident, eventually sent the resilient Katharine to her grave on December 20, 1552.¹⁹

Though the Protestant defeat at Muhlberg marked the end of the Schmalkaldic Wars' military conflict with a Roman Catholic victory, the struggle did not end there. Charles V's success following the deaths of his three primary rivals—Luther, Henry VIII, and Francis I—was short lived, as the new French king Henri II partnered with the self-serving elector of Saxony Maurice. Maurice had turned traitor against the Protestants in the beginning of the Schmalkaldic Wars, seeking—and receiving—the reward of his rival Elector John Frederick's titles from Charles V. Always the opportunist, Maurice turned again and threatened Charles V's forces. This

¹⁸ Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 86.

¹⁹ E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 600-601.

renewed Protestant resistance forced Charles V to release Philip of Hesse and Elector John Frederick and promise religious tolerance in their lands.²⁰ Turkish opposition in the east spread imperial forces thin and led Charles V to compromise with the Protestants in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg. This allowed each German prince to choose Protestantism or Roman Catholicism and granted all citizens the right to worship as they chose in safety.²¹

Despite the positive influence of various leaders and events, the Reformation's greatest help came from ordinary people, not from those of renowned reputation. Without the masses to spread its teachings, Protestantism would have been isolated in pockets, and may have only amounted to a cult-like following of hundreds, rather than hundreds of thousands. Luther knew the importance of engaging the common man. He wrote numerous pamphlets in the German vernacular, including his fiery *Appeal to the German Nobility*, in which he introduced his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He stated

all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office. As St. Paul says (1 Cor. xii), we are all one body, though each member does its own work so as to serve to others. This is because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, Gospel, and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.²²

Luther's pamphlets addressed the educated class and were often very political. He convinced them by speaking in their own language and in terms they could understand. He also had a goal of presenting a uniform doctrine so that his supporters could have a clear and consistent understanding of Lutheranism.

²⁰ Alex, Barker, "Charles V defeats German Protestants in Battle at Muhlberg," *History Today* 47, no. 4 (1997) <http://www.historytoday.com/alex-barker/charles-v-defeats-german-protestants-battle-muhlberg>.

²¹ Leonard W. Cowie, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 36-37.

²² Martin Luther quoted in *ibid*, 26.

Luther encouraged his followers to read the Bible, study on their own, and ask questions. He did not want to get in the middle of their relationship with God. As a proponent of communal worship, Luther encouraged music and public confession. He published his first hymnal in 1524, which proved a major factor in winning the laypeople's support. Luther wrote three hymnals by the time he died, putting 75 thousand into circulation. He blended the boundaries of secular and sacred by putting religious lyrics to popular songs.²³ Singing gave people the right to participate and express their faith in their own way. In the end, it was these people—the common man—that carried the tune of Protestantism throughout Europe and beyond. Their support and faith in its doctrines held more weight than the opinion of rulers or the paintings of great artists, because they had no ulterior motives; they were just people sharing from the heart what they believed. Luther knew the power of the people's faith and convictions and the importance of making them his audience. In his *Epistle on Translation*, he said, "It is no use asking the letters of the Latin language how to speak German, as these fools do; it is the mothers in their homes we must ask, the children in the streets, the common man in the market place... Then they will understand and realize that we are speaking to them in German."²⁴

Luther's ability to simplify the message of salvation made him popular with the masses and their leaders. He broke down the barriers between God and man that the Roman Catholic Church had established in order to justify the essential role of priests. Appealing to the uncomplicated ways in which people lived, Luther emphasized the availability of God to anyone, replacing the grandeur of the Roman Catholic cathedrals for hymns based on folk tunes and sermons taken straight from Bible verses, rather than commentary. Luther's theology empowered

²³ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther: His Life and Times*, trans. John Nowell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 463.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 307-308.

people to embrace God's Word in their art, education, and political decisions. His teachings were accessible, inviting, and comforting. They provided support on which people relied during times of war, persecution, and uncertainty.

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