

HERALDS *of the*
REFORMATION

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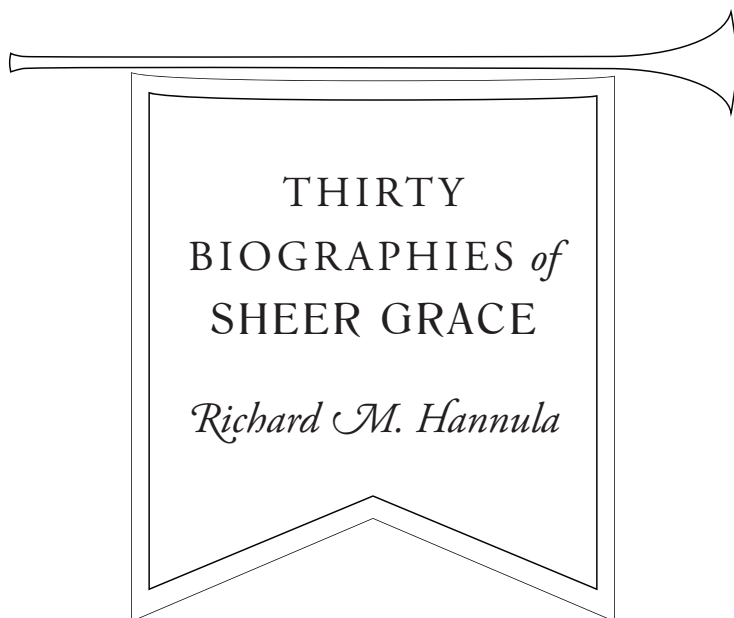
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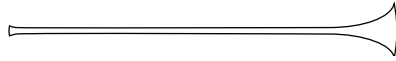


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With love to my grandchildren.

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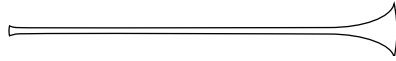
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INTRODUCTION



The Protestant Reformation was a great spiritual awakening of faith in Christ that swept across Europe in the 1500s. The Spirit of God stirred the hearts and minds of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and countless others to rediscover the Christ of the Scriptures and the message that sinners are saved by God's grace when they trust in Christ's sacrifice for their sins.

However, for centuries the good news of Christ had been distorted and overlaid with layers of unbiblical teaching and false practices. The Church of Rome taught that salvation came by believing in Christ and earning merit with God through good works. It declared that Christ's death on the cross did not fully pay the penalty for His people's sin, but that believers must still be purged of their sins after death by a long period of punishment in a place called purgatory to be made fit for heaven. Although the Scriptures clearly teach that "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), the

Roman church taught the people to pray to Mary and the saints in heaven to intercede for them with God. Most medieval parishioners offered more prayers to Mary and the saints than to the Lord God Himself, and they believed the church's teaching that God's blessing came to those who venerated relics, adorned images and made pilgrimages to holy shrines. "As often as I read the Bible," one German bishop said, "I find in it a different religion from that which we are taught."

When the congregation came to church, they watched an elaborate ritual that the priest performed in Latin—a language they did not understand. Most parishioners did not hear sermons that explained to them the truths of the Word of God. In fact, in many regions the Church of Rome barred the common people from reading the Scriptures in their own language. The church instructed the people that salvation and grace came to them through the sacraments, and therefore their spiritual lives depended on the priests who alone could administer the sacraments. God had granted the pope and his ministers the keys to the gates of heaven, the church taught. To challenge their authority was to challenge God.

By the sixteenth century, greed and corruption had choked the spiritual life out of many clergymen. The pope and most bishops lived lives of luxury in regal palaces and showed little concern for the poor. When Leo X became pope in 1513, he declared, "Now that we have attained the papacy, let us enjoy it!" Church offices were sold to the highest bidder. Indulgence salesmen—endorsed by church officials—told anxious crowds that they could relieve the sufferings of their departed loved ones in purgatory by buying indulgences. Money-grubbing and immoral priests and monks set a terrible example for the flock. Bishops imposed heavy ministry taxes on the people, and priests demanded fees for everything.

Through the years, when brave critics pointed out the unbiblical beliefs and practices of the church, church authorities accused them of heresy, and many of the accused suffered imprisonment, torture and even death by burning.

But at a time when the church had drifted farthest from the teachings and practices of the New Testament, a revival of classical learning and the wide-spread use of the printing press prepared the way for reform. The Renaissance and its appreciation for the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome had begun to transform university education in Europe. Scholars sought knowledge from original sources. Instead of relying on the teachings of medieval theologians to understand the Scriptures, they studied the New Testament in its original Greek and sought out the straightforward meaning of biblical texts. Many—like Thomas Bilney in Cambridge, England—discovered a welcoming Savior, not an aloof judge. “At last I heard Jesus,” Bilney said. “Christ alone saves His people from their sins. I came to Christ, and my despairing heart leapt for joy.”

In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses against indulgences on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, he expected a scholarly discussion among the churchmen of Wittenberg. Instead, printers published his theses and within weeks monks, noblemen and peasants hotly debated the theses throughout Europe. At about the same time that Luther understood the doctrine of justification by faith taught in the Scriptures, reformers in France, Switzerland, England and elsewhere also found the Bible’s message of forgiveness in Christ alone. These reformers did not claim to have discovered something new. On the contrary, they made it clear that they simply believed the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant reformers tried to call the church back to the biblical Christianity of the New Testament

church. But officials of the Church of Rome rejected the call and fiercely persecuted the courageous heralds of the Reformation who risked their lives to proclaim the good news of Christ. By God's grace, they led millions of people to a living faith in Jesus Christ and restored the churches of many lands to the Scriptures and to biblical worship.

The following sketches simply scratch the surface of these reformers' lives. Effort was made to honestly depict them in the midst of their unique time and circumstances. However, it was not possible within a few pages to thoroughly explore their teachings and their strengths and weaknesses. To learn much more about these reformers see "For Further Reading" at the end of the book. It is my hope that the reader—boy or girl, man or woman—will be inspired, by the grace of God, to follow in their steps as they followed in Christ's.

REFORMATION TIMELINE

- 1516** Erasmus published the Greek New Testament
- 1517** Martin Luther posted the *Ninety-five Theses*
- 1519** Ulrich Zwingli began preaching in Zurich
- 1521** Diet of Worms; Luther was excommunicated and declared an outlaw in the empire
- 1522** Martin Luther published the New Testament in German
- 1523** Jacques Lefevre published the New Testament in French; Johann Esch and Hendrich Voes became the first martyrs of the Protestant Reformation
- 1526** William Tyndale published the New Testament in English; Olaf Petri published the New Testament in Swedish
- 1528** Patrick Hamilton martyred in Scotland
- 1529** Marburg Colloquy
- 1530** *Augsburg Confession* signed by German princes
- 1531** Swedish King Gustavus declared Sweden Protestant; Ulrich Zwingli died; Thomas Bilney martyred
- 1534** Act of Supremacy declared Henry VIII supreme head of the Church of England
- 1533** Thomas Cranmer consecrated as the first Protestant archbishop of Canterbury
- 1536** Dissolution of the monasteries began in England; John Calvin published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Geneva became Protestant; Calvin began his ministry in Geneva; William Tyndale martyred
- 1538** Henry VIII required the use of English Bibles in all churches

- 1545 Roman Catholic Council of Trent convened
- 1546 Martin Luther died; George Wishart martyred
- 1547 Henry VIII died and Edward VI began his reign
- 1549 The *Book of Common Prayer* adopted in the Church of England
- 1551 The *Forty-two Articles* adopted as the doctrinal statement of the Church of England
- 1553 Mary I began to persecute English Protestants
- 1555 Peace of Augsburg granted religious liberty to Lutheran princes and their subjects; Latimer, Ridley and Bradford martyred
- 1556 Thomas Cranmer martyred
- 1558 Elizabeth I crowned and restored Protestantism in England
- 1560 Scotland became Protestant and adopted the *Scots Confession*
- 1562–98 French Wars of Religion fought between Roman Catholics and Huguenots
- 1563 *Heidelberg Catechism* completed
- 1564 John Calvin died
- 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre; John Knox died
- 1584 William the Silent, Prince of Orange, assassinated
- 1598 Edict of Nantes granted French Huguenots a measure of religious liberty



PART ONE

FORERUNNERS
OF THE
REFORMATION

The Reformation did not burst upon Europe like a bolt out of the blue. Just as a thunderstorm warns of its coming with dark clouds in the distance, so, too, long before Martin Luther ignited the Reformation by posting his Ninety-five Theses, brave men and women protested corruptions and false teachings in the Church of Rome and strove to bring her back to the Scriptures.

The Waldensians, living in the mountain valleys of the Alps, read the Bible in their own language and rejected the unbiblical beliefs and practices present in so much of the medieval church. Despite centuries of harsh persecution, they worshiped God and served Him according to the light of Scripture truth. Reformers before the Reformation—like Wyclif, Huss and Savonarola—sought to lead their flocks away from reliance on rituals, saints and good works and back to Christ. They called the church to return to the Word of God as the supreme authority for faith and practice—far above the pronouncements of popes and councils. And for their labors, they suffered excommunication, the confiscation of their homes and property, torture and even death by burning. But they planted the seeds that would one day spring up into the great harvest of souls for Jesus Christ known as the Protestant Reformation.

CHAPTER 4 :
GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA

Preacher of Righteousness
(1452–1498)



I n the spring of 1492, Lorenzo de Medici, the dictator of Florence, Italy, lay on his deathbed. Lorenzo the Magnificent did not seem so magnificent now. His sumptuous palace—buzzing with servants and filled with the finest artwork—could do nothing for his shriveled body, wasting away from disease. He found no comfort in the priests who, despite his brutality, had always assured him of salvation. Now his sins loomed ominously before him, and he feared the fast-approaching judgment of God. Then he remembered Savonarola, the preaching monk. Savonarola had never flattered him and spoke the stark truth no matter the consequences. “I know no honest friar but him,” Lorenzo told an aide. “Send for him.”

Medici, like all the followers of the Church of Rome, believed that in order to receive forgiveness from God, a repentant sinner must confess his sins to a priest. The priest would give the penitent something to do as a sign of his repentance and absolve his sins on behalf of God, saying, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Lorenzo longed to hear those words from the lips of Savonarola.

Savonarola arrived at the palace wearing his threadbare robe, his dark complexion and large nose partially hidden under his cowl. "Father," Lorenzo said, his voice quaking, "I want to confess my sins and receive absolution." Through his tears, he confessed that he had shed innocent blood and extorted large sums of money. As he spoke, Lorenzo grew so overcome with grief that he could barely utter a word. "God is good, God is merciful," Savonarola reminded him. When Lorenzo finished speaking, Savonarola looked long into his eyes, raised his right hand and said, "For me to pronounce absolution, you need to do three things."

"What things, Father?" asked Lorenzo.

"You must have a full and living faith in God's mercy."

"I do," he answered.

"And you must restore all the wealth that you unjustly took from others, or charge your sons to restore it in your name." Lorenzo's face fell at this requirement. After mulling it over for a few minutes, he weakly nodded his head.

"Lastly," Savonarola said, standing over the dying prince, "you must restore liberty to the people of Florence."

Lorenzo clenched his jaw and glared at him. He had spent his life consolidating his power at the expense of the people's freedom. His will was law. The power of the Medici family was one thing he would never give up. Mustering all his strength, he rolled on his

side, turning his back on the monk. Savonarola left without giving him absolution. Not long after, Lorenzo died.

From the moment that Savonarola had arrived three years earlier at San Marco—the Dominican monastery in the heart of Florence—his faithful preaching and forthright truth-telling clashed with Lorenzo and his court. Florence, a wealthy commercial center, embraced the Renaissance and its devotion to art and learning. Lorenzo was a popular despot who won the people's favor by sponsoring great public feasts and carnivals that featured wine, song and debauchery. The citizens loved to hear the stories of classical Greece and reenact their pagan revelries. Savonarola spoke out against it. "Those ancient authors whom they praise are strangers to Christ and the Christian virtues," he preached, "and their art is idolatry of heathen gods."

Most priests, monks and bishops followed the trend. They quoted the Greek philosophers in their sermons, but failed to proclaim the Scripture. "The preachers preach to please princes and to be praised by them," Savonarola said. "Instead of teaching so many other books, why don't they expound the one book in which is the law and spirit of life—the Gospel!"

At first, Savonarola preached to his fellow monks and the few people who came to the monastery church. He spoke simply in Italian, not Latin, so the people could understand him as he taught the law of God and the sacrifice of Christ. "Flee from your sins," he preached. "Behold there will come a time of darkness, when Christ will rain fire and storm upon the wicked. Fly from your sins and turn to Christ." They had never heard anything like it before. "I felt a cold shiver run through me, and my hair stand on end," one man said about the effect of his preaching.

Soon the church at San Marco overflowed with all who came to hear him. To accommodate the large crowds, he started preaching

in the Duomo, the grand cathedral of Florence. There, he preached to the rich and the poor—to over ten thousand people at once—including Lorenzo and his officials and the bishops and their clerics. They were used to bland sermons that did not call them to repent. Shunning church tradition and the teachings of men, Savonarola preached from the Word of God. “I take the Scriptures as my only guide,” he said.

He sought to shake his hearers out of their sins and drive them to Christ by proclaiming the wrath of God against wickedness. “This city shall no longer be called Florence, but a den of thieves, wickedness and bloodshed!” he preached. “Repent, for the Lord will have mercy on the just.” People wept and cried out as they imagined the coming judgment of the Lord. Then Savonarola pointed them to Christ. “Love led Christ to the cross,” he said, “love raised Him from the dead and made Him ascend into heaven to accomplish our redemption.”

Savonarola saved his sternest words for the wealthy and powerful. “Consider well, O you rich, for affliction shall smite you,” he proclaimed. “Arise, O Lord and deliver Your church from the hands of tyrants and from the hands of sinful bishops.”

His preaching ignited fierce opposition from the leaders of church and state. They called him “the chattering friar,” and they plotted to get rid of him. After Lorenzo died, his son Piero banished Savonarola from Florence. However, at that time, the king of France and his army had invaded Italy, conquering one city after another. Savonarola believed that God was using the French to punish the Italians for their sins and to purify the church. When Piero—in an effort to preserve Florence from destruction—handed over the city’s fortresses to the French king and paid him a large ransom, the people turned against him. Piero fled. Soon, the people chafed under the rough occupation of the French troops. They looked to

Savonarola for leadership. He met the French king and said, “The people are afflicted by your stay in Florence, and you waste your time. God has called you to renew His church. Go forth to your high calling lest God visit you with His wrath and choose another instrument in your stead to carry out His plans!” With the promise that Florence would not aid France’s enemies, the king withdrew his forces from the city.

With the Medici and the French army gone, Savonarola urged the city council and the people to create a new republic—one that would honor God. He warned them against allowing one man to control the state as the Medici had done. “Jesus Christ seeks to become your king!” he said. Raising a crucifix in his hand, he asked, “Florence, will you have Him to be your king?” With tears in their eyes, many stood up and cried out, “Long live Christ, our king!”

“Citizens, would you be free?” he said in a sermon. “First of all, love God, love your neighbor and love one another. If you have this loving union among you, true liberty will be yours.”

Savonarola called the people to lay aside immorality and rid themselves of anything that tempted them to sin. On a February evening in 1496, the people threw their immoral books, lewd pictures, gambling cards and other stumbling blocks to holiness into a great bonfire in the central piazza. “Pious hymns took the place of crude carnival songs,” one man reported. “The townsfolk passed their leisure hours reading the Bible or Savonarola’s works. All prayed frequently, flocked to the churches and gave generously to the poor.”

While many people in Florence repented, the bishops and councilmen resented his influence and plotted to get rid of him. When the pope excommunicated Savonarola, he ignored it. He pointed out that the pope was a notorious sinner who had bought his office

with a bribe. “The church is teeming with abomination from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet,” he said.

Before long, the city council banned Savonarola from the pulpit. At first he complied, but then he felt God’s call to resume preaching. In May 1497, he announced that he would ignore the ban and preach again in the Duomo. His supporters warned him of the danger. “I’m ready to lay down my life for my office,” he replied.

His enemies filled the Duomo’s pulpit with garbage and nailed spikes into it. This did not keep him from preaching. But over time, more and more people grew weary of Savonarola’s calls to repent and live holy lives, and they turned against him. Savonarola’s enemies whipped up a mob and sent them with a band of soldiers to capture him from San Marco. The friars barred the gates to protect him. When the besiegers began to batter the monastery walls with cannon, the friars fought back, even though Savonarola told them not to. As violence raged outside, Savonarola preached a final sermon to a small crowd in the chapel. “Have courage, embrace the cross, and you will find the port of salvation,” he said.

The siege ended when Savonarola and two other monks turned themselves over to the attackers. In order to force a confession out of Savonarola, they stretched him on the rack, straining his muscles and making every limb quiver with pain. For nearly two weeks, they tormented him. Eventually, they broke his will, and he signed a confession. But the pope in Rome thought his written confession inadequate. “Try again,” the pope commanded the authorities in Florence. “We’ve had to deal with a man of most extraordinary patience and suffering,” they told the pope. “Even with the help of torture, we can scarcely pull anything out of him.”

For the next month, Savonarola endured another round of torture applied by agents of the pope, and he waited patiently for his

execution. In his cell, he wrote about his faith in Christ. Friends smuggled the writings out of jail and had them printed. The *Prison Meditations* revealed his growing trust in the grace of God. “Do you have faith?” he asked himself. “Yes: this is a great grace of God, for faith is His gift, not of your works, that no one may glory in them.”

On May 23, 1498, guards led Savonarola and his two friends to a tall scaffold in the central piazza. Church officials stripped the condemned monks of their priestly robes, scraped their hands raw and shaved their heads—symbolically wiping away their ordination.

A bishop stepped forward and declared, “I separate you from the church militant and triumphant!” “You have no power to separate me from the church triumphant to which I go,” Savonarola replied. After the hangman did his work, guards lit a large pile of wood and straw, and they burned the bodies of the three martyrs.

Savonarola’s ideas did not die with him. His books and printed sermons continued to be read widely in Italy and beyond, even though the Church of Rome banned them as heresy. Martin Luther, the great reformer of Germany, thought so highly of Savonarola’s *Prison Meditations* that he had the booklet reprinted in Wittenberg. “Although some theological mud still adhered to the feet of that holy man,” Luther wrote of Savonarola, “nevertheless, he maintained justification by faith alone without works.”

Girolamo Savonarola’s life and preaching helped to pave the way for the good news of Christ to be fully recovered by the reformers who followed him.

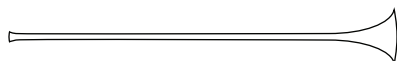
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

for Introduction, Overview, and Part One

1. List several unbiblical beliefs and practices implemented by the Church of Rome during the Middle Ages.
2. What developments helped to make Europe ripe for the Reformation in the early sixteenth century?
3. Which monarchs in Western Europe were the greatest enemies of the Reformation?
4. Which monarchs in Western Europe used their power to support the Reformation?
5. In what ways were the Waldensians forerunners of the Reformation?
6. Why is John Wyclif considered the most important reformer before the age of the Reformation?
7. Why was Wyclif not burned at the stake for his views?
8. Why was John Huss burned at the stake at the Council of Constance?
9. Why did Savonarola clash with Lorenzo de Medici?
10. Why was Savonarola burned at the stake?

CHAPTER 7 : PHILIP MELANCHTHON

Nothing Except Heaven
(1497–1560)



In 1530, things looked bad for the Evangelicals of Germany. Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire wanted to crush them and their leader, Martin Luther. When the Protestant states of Germany met to form a mutual defense pact against the emperor, they argued and failed to act. The emperor, hoping to dominate the German Protestants without having to go to war, called for a conference of Roman Catholic and Evangelical church leaders in Augsburg “to consult and decide about the disturbances and dissensions in the holy faith and Christian religion.”

At first, Prince John, the Elector of Saxony, planned to have Martin Luther head the delegation of Evangelical theologians. But Luther stood condemned by the pope and banned as an outlaw by

the emperor. So the elector assigned Philip Melanchthon—a professor of Greek and theology at the University of Wittenberg and Luther’s closest friend—to be the chief spokesman for the Protestant cause. He didn’t want the job. Melanchthon was a renowned classical scholar, not a controversialist. “Why have I, born for my Greek studies and for the humble pursuits of the scholar, been set in the high places of theological debates and war? If only Doctor Martin had been with us, he would have saved it all!”

It fell to Melanchthon to write a defense of Evangelical teaching. He strove to present the basic truths of Christianity as simply as possible. For two months, Melanchthon endured sleepless nights as he labored over every word of the statement of the Evangelical faith. He wrote and rewrote and constantly sought the advice of other theologians, especially Luther with whom he exchanged letters frequently. Melanchthon’s mastery of the Greek and Latin classics and philosophy honed his skill to express ideas concisely, clearly and beautifully.

When Luther read a draft, he said, “I know not how to improve it.” Luther appreciated his godly character and remarkable talents. “I was born,” Luther said, “only for the field of battle and to fight with demons. Hence my writings are full of war and tempest. But Philip advances slowly and gently—he sows and waters joyfully—according to the gifts which God has bestowed on him with such a liberal hand.”

When Melanchthon completed the *Augsburg Confession*, as his statement of faith was called, the elector of Saxony and the leaders of all the Protestant cities and provinces of Germany signed it. On June 25, 1530, the conference gathered in the chapel of the bishop of Augsburg’s palace to hear the Evangelicals defend their faith. Emperor Charles sat on his throne, surrounded by crimson-robed princes, dignitaries and a crowd of bishops and archbishops wearing their episcopal miters. Melanchthon’s confession of faith was read out in German, impressing all

open-minded listeners with its clarity, simplicity and firm grounding in the Scriptures. The theologians from the Church of Rome insisted that good works were necessary for justification. “We cannot be justified before God by our own strength, merit, or works,” Melanchthon wrote, “but we are justified on account of Christ—by grace through faith. His death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith is the righteousness which God imputes to the sinner.”

“You must submit to the pope and the councils of the church,” the Roman Catholic authorities said.

“It is not necessary to obey the bishops,” the confession stated, “if they teach anything contrary to the Scriptures of God. We accept no doctrine or ceremony contrary to the holy Scripture.”

A Roman Catholic duke from Bavaria, after listening to Melanchthon speak, said to John Eck, the chief spokesman for the Catholic theologians, “You assured us that the Lutherans could easily be refuted. Can you answer that?”

“I can refute it from the writings of the church fathers,” Eck said, “but not from the Scriptures.”

“Then,” the duke replied, “the Lutherans stand in the Scriptures, and we Catholics stand outside of them.”

The conference continued for several weeks, and the Roman Catholic theologians kept demanding that the Evangelicals submit to the absolute authority of the pope and church councils. Cardinal Campeggio went further, urging the emperor to wage war on the Evangelicals. “Extirpate the poisonous plant by fire and sword,” he advised Emperor Charles.

Charles decreed that the Protestants must abandon any beliefs and practices not approved by the Church of Rome. Later, he threatened to use force if they failed to comply within six months. On the conference floor, Cardinal Campeggio demanded that the

Protestants yield to the teachings of the Roman church. Then Melanchthon stood up and looked at all the assembled dignitaries. “We cannot yield, nor desert the truth,” he said. “We pray—that for God’s sake in Christ—our opponents will grant us that which we cannot surrender with a good conscience.”

“I cannot, I cannot,” Campeggio shouted! “The keys of papal authority do not err.”

“We will commit our cause to God,” Melanchthon said. “If God be for us, who can be against us? We will toil and fight and die, if God so wills, rather than betray the souls in our care.”

“You would think him a mere lad,” one man said of Melanchthon, “but in intellect, learning and talent, he is a giant. One cannot conceive how such heights of genius and wisdom can be enclosed in such a little body.”

Although fierce trials lay in store, the *Augsburg Confession* firmly planted Evangelical doctrine in the world never to be uprooted.

Roman Catholic theologians fiercely criticized Melanchthon’s writings and savagely attacked his character. “He is a minister of Satan,” one wrote. The controversy wounded his gentle spirit. “What utterly lays me low is strife and controversy,” Melanchthon confided to a friend. “God is my witness that my intentions have been good. My reward is that I shall be hated.”

Melanchthon longed to return to the calm life of a university professor, but that was not to be. Time and again, Protestant rulers called on him to expound and defend the gospel at conferences throughout Germany. “What tempests are these that drive me,” he wrote a friend, “from the quiet and more useful studies I love into the heart of these bitter controversies which I abhor?”

He did it all without neglecting his university duties. Melanchthon lectured several times a day, beginning at 7 o’clock in the

morning. He slept from 9:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m. when he arose, lit his oil lamp and resumed his studies. Luther worried about Melanchthon's health. Once when they were eating dinner together, Melanchthon scribbled notes for a book as he ate. Luther grabbed the pen out of his hand and said, "Dear Philip, we can serve God not only by work, but also by rest."

Students flocked to hear Melanchthon's Greek lectures on Homer and the Apostle Paul. He wrote *Commonplaces*, the first Protestant systematic theology. "In this most beautiful book—a book of gold," Luther told his students, "you will find pure theology stated in a quiet and orderly way."

Melanchthon published commentaries on several books of the Bible, two books on rhetoric, a treatise on the Lord's Supper and several translations of Greek and Latin classics. He wrote hundreds of letters each year to monarchs, theologians, magistrates and friends across Europe. The heavy workload took its toll. "For the last three years," he told a colleague, "I feel as if I must sink and die."

Then, in 1540, while visiting the city of Weimar, Melanchthon collapsed. He grew delirious, didn't recognize his friends and stopped eating. Luther rushed to Melanchthon's side and found him nearly comatose. Seeing him on the verge of death, Luther wept and prayed fervently for his life. Then, taking Melanchthon's hand, Luther said, "Be of good cheer, my friend Philip, you will not die. Trust in the Lord who can wound and bind up, can smite and heal again."

A few hours later, Melanchthon breathed deeply, weakly raised his head and whispered to Luther, "I am now on a good journey. I beg you, let me go."

"We can't spare you yet, Philip," Luther told him. "You must serve our God a little longer."

Luther spoon fed his friend, cajoled him to press on and prayed for his recovery. “If Luther had not come to me,” Melanchthon said after regaining his strength, “I should certainly have died.”

The year 1546 cast dark clouds of trouble over Melanchthon. Emperor Charles V made peace with France, his adversary to the west, and with the Turks, his great enemy to the east. This freed him to concentrate his forces on crushing the German Protestants. As the emperor prepared for war, Martin Luther died. “The charioteer of Israel is gone,” the grieving Melanchthon told the students at Wittenberg University.

Many years earlier, Melanchthon had said of Luther, “I embrace him with all my heart. I would rather die than be separated from him.” They had made an effective team. Melanchthon’s tact and gentleness helped to balance Luther’s blunt and bold personality. And now, when the Evangelicals of Germany faced their greatest peril, Luther was gone.

The emperor’s armies crushed the Protestant forces that tried to stop them. Imperial soldiers took the elector of Saxony prisoner and laid siege to Wittenberg. The professors closed Wittenberg University, and the students and faculty fled the city. Melanchthon took comfort in the fact that Christ would not forsake His flock. “Lo! I am with you always even to the end of the world,” Melanchthon said. “He will preserve the people that maintain the doctrines of the gospel and truly call upon His name.”

Although defeated temporarily, the Protestant princes soon rose up, made a secret treaty with France and defeated the imperial forces in battle. And Charles grudgingly granted Protestantism official status within the Holy Roman Empire. The faith that Luther and Melanchthon had struggled for was secured.

In 1560, as Melanchthon lay on his deathbed, a relative asked him, “Do you want anything?” Melanchthon replied, “Nothing except heaven.”

REFORMATION BASICS 2

Sola Gratia and Sola Fide

(“By Grace Alone” and “Through Faith Alone”)

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Although the Scriptures clearly teach that peace with God and eternal life are gifts of God’s free grace received by faith in Christ alone, the medieval church rejected this doctrine. It taught that salvation came in stages by believing in Christ, receiving God’s grace through the sacraments of the church and doing good works, and condemned anyone who taught otherwise.

Martin Luther’s life was transformed when he understood the Bible’s message of justification by faith in Christ. “I saw that God had given me the righteousness of Christ through faith,” Luther said. “Christ suffered all the penalty for my sin on the cross. By faith Christ’s righteousness becomes my righteousness.”

Luther and the other reformers embraced this biblical truth and it became the foundation of their preaching and writing. Perhaps the most beautiful expression of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* (justification by grace alone, through faith alone) is found in question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question: How are you right with God?

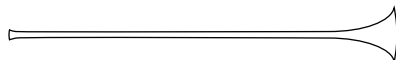
Answer: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned

against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

CHAPTER 19:
RENÉE, DUCHESS
OF FERRARA

Protector of the Persecuted

(1510–1575)



In autumn of 1534, King Francis I of France ordered a crackdown on French Protestants, the Huguenots. Agents of the king arrested and tortured Huguenot ministers, and church courts declared them heretics. Francis ordered them burned at the stake as a grand show.

On January 21, 1535, Francis I, wearing robes of purple velvet, and his wife, Queen Claudia, glittering with precious jewels, led a great procession on horseback through Paris. The royalty of France and other dignitaries followed on foot, carrying lighted candles. The churchmen held aloft sacred relics, including items claimed to be

Christ's crown of thorns and Moses' stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. After the procession, they feasted at a lavish banquet and then watched the burning of six Huguenots.

Huguenot leaders fled the country to Germany, Switzerland, Navarre and Ferrara—a small duchy in northern Italy. They escaped to Ferrara for the shelter and hospitality of Renée, duchess of Ferrara. Renée's deceased father was King Louis XII of France, and her sister Claudia reigned as queen of France. Renée's marriage in 1528 to Ercole Este, Duke of Ferrara, was not a marriage of love, but a political arrangement. The tiny duchy of Ferrara, in order to preserve its independence, needed to maintain friendly relations with France, the German empire and the pope. King Francis I, eager to strengthen France's hand in northern Italy, arranged for his sister-in-law, Renée, to marry the duke of Ferrara. But strong religious differences separated the duke and Renée.

Duke Ercole defended the teaching of the Roman church. Renée followed the Protestant reformers and supported Huguenot preachers. Renée's parents died when she was a little girl and she was raised by a governess, Madame de Soubise, who came to her from England with a hidden copy of Wyclif's Bible in her luggage. She opened Renée's eyes to the Word of God. As a teenager, Renée devoured all the writings of the French reformers and later brought Madame de Soubise to Ferrara as a member of her royal court. They prayed, worshiped and studied the Scriptures together and listened to Protestant preachers that Renée brought to her court.

As the persecution in France grew, many Huguenots fled to Renée's court in Ferrara, and among them were Clement Marot, preacher and translator of the Psalms into French verse, and John Calvin, author of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Renée's activities infuriated her husband. He threw Madame de Soubise out

of the royal court and forbade Renée to travel outside of Ferrara. He intercepted her mail and removed Protestants from her court.

After church leaders ordered the arrest of Calvin and Marot, Renée aided their escape. When the pope summoned the Italian preacher, Orchino, to appear before the Inquisition in Rome, Renée helped him to flee from Italy to Geneva, where he worked with Calvin. Renée regularly sent money to the Protestant refugees in Geneva. She brought an Italian scholar, Antonio Bruccioli, to her court and supported his work translating the Bible into Italian.

Priests in Ferrara sent word to the pope, reporting that the duchess ate meat during Lent, refused to attend mass and erected a private chapel in the castle without a crucifix or images of the saints. The pope sent a representative to interrogate Renée. She refused to see him. "My confidence is in God and none other," she told her husband. The duke brought the Inquisition to Ferrara and threw many of his Protestant subjects in jail. Renée asked him to release them. "I beg you very humbly," she wrote him, "to free the prisoners you have sent to the inquisitors. Remember the grief of the poor fathers, mothers and little children of those you have imprisoned." The duke ignored her requests.

When the popular preacher, Fanino Fanini, fell into the duke's hands, Renée pleaded with tears for his release. Fanini preached using Bruccioli's Italian translation of the Bible. When he traveled through Ferrara, Duke Ercole's men seized him and cast him into prison. Many people gathered outside the barred window of his cell to hear Fanini preach the Word of God. To break up the crowds, jailers moved him to an inner cell. Renée had food and fresh clothing sent to him. She fired off letters to church leaders and the king of France on his behalf. The pope demanded that Duke Ercole burn Fanini at once and purge his duchy of all Evangelicals. He complained of Renée's interference

on Fanini's behalf. "My wife often acts without our knowledge and against our will," the duke wrote the pope. "As a Christian and Catholic prince, I intend to give Fanini the punishment he deserves."

Under orders from the duke, guards dragged Fanini from his cell, hanged him and burned his body. Then Duke Ercole launched an all-out effort to rid his wife of her heresy, enlisting the help of the king of France. The French king sent several inquisitors at once to Ferrara. For three months, they daily preached to Renée and grilled her on her beliefs and actions on behalf of the Protestants. Renée told them that she was neither a Lutheran nor a Calvinist but simply a Christian. Her defiance forced the duke's hand. He shut up Renée in solitary confinement in the castle and placed a guard outside her door. Her daughters were forbidden to see her and were sent to a convent. The inquisitor threatened her with life imprisonment and even death if she did not recant.

Finally, exhausted and in tears, Renée agreed to confess her sins to a priest and attend mass. Her trial ended, and the duke restored some of her privileges, but he burned all her books and surrounded her with spies. He told her that he did not believe the sincerity of her confession but pretended publicly to believe her to spare the duchy the scandal of heresy. Her son, Alphonso, said that he believed his mother deserved to be burned at the stake as a heretic. For the last five years of their marriage, Renée and the duke remained unreconciled until his death in 1559.

Outwardly Renée conformed, but secretly she kept up her correspondence with Evangelical leaders and sent money to aid Protestant exiles in France and Switzerland. At the death of his father, Alphonso became duke. He detested Protestants more than his father had. "I would rather live with the plague," he said while visiting the French court, "than live with Huguenots."

Shortly after being crowned, he issued an ultimatum to his mother—either she give up her Evangelical faith completely or be banished from Ferrara forever. Rather than abandon her faith, Renée left the country where she had reigned as duchess for thirty-two years and returned to France. “My Son,” she wrote in a note as she departed, “I could not say to you what was in my heart for fear of being overwhelmed with tears.”

Renée found France on the brink of civil war. The Parliament of Paris declared the death penalty for anyone worshipping as a Protestant. Soldiers and mobs massacred Huguenots in twenty French cities. Enraged Huguenots took up arms, broke into churches, smashed images and shattered windows. In some places, monks and priests were killed. In one city, two hundred people died when a Huguenot mob sacked the cathedral. Renée spoke out against violence. “We are to render good for evil,” she urged the Huguenots. “Hate and Christianity are incompatible. We must seek peace with all.”

Upon returning to France, Renée took possession of her inheritance, the castle of Montargis. As troubles escalated, she expanded the moat, reinforced the walls, installed cannons and welcomed hundreds of Roman Catholic and Huguenot refugees fleeing the bloodshed. She set up a chapel in the castle for Protestant worship and encouraged the preaching of the good news of Jesus throughout the city. Renée forbade violence from either side and sent her soldiers to stop pillaging and murder whether committed by Roman Catholics or Huguenots.

Battles raged across France, and Roman Catholic forces invaded Montargis. A commander ordered her to surrender her castle, and when she refused he set up cannon and threatened to open fire. Renée told the commander, “Consider well what you are

planning to do. There is no one in this kingdom who commands me except the king himself. If you come, I will throw myself into the breach and see whether you will have the audacity to kill the daughter of a king.”

The commander backed down and withdrew his forces from the city. The castle and the refugees were saved. Renée’s protection and hospitality became known throughout France. Huguenots called her castle “The Hotel of the Lord.”

John Calvin rejoiced in her work and wrote, “I know that you have been like a nursing mother to those poor, persecuted brothers and sisters who did not know where to go. God has done you a great honor in allowing you to carry His banner.”

While Renée was in Paris in 1572, the king ordered the massacre of Huguenots on St. Bartholomew’s Day. Blood ran in the streets, and thousands were slaughtered. Renée could hear their shouts and screams. For a week, she and her ladies remained behind a locked door and an armed guard. She hastily returned to Montargis and threw open the gates of her castle to hundreds of Huguenots fleeing for their lives.

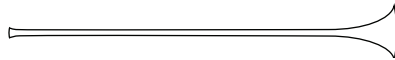
For the next two years, she endured sickness and pain and did what she could to preserve life. She died among her Christian friends but was separated from her children, who rejected her religious beliefs. The king of France forbade her body to be laid to rest in St. Denis, the burial site for French kings and queens and their children. Renée’s body was placed in a simple wooden casket and buried without ceremony within her castle walls.

In her will, she left a long statement of her faith in Jesus Christ and concluded with a note to her children: “I pray that my children

will read and listen to the Word of God in which they will find comfort and the true guide to eternal life.”

“Renée, Duchess of Ferrara: Protector of the Persecuted” is excerpted from *Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History* (1999).

ANSWERS FOR
COMPREHENSION
QUESTIONS



INTRODUCTION, OVERVIEW, AND PART 1

1. Answers might include: Belief in purgatory, prayers to and veneration of Mary and the saints, the sacrifice of Christ in the mass, the pope as the undisputed head of the church, a process of salvation dependent on good works and the intercession of a priest in the sacraments, seven sacraments, insistence that worship be conducted in Latin and not the language of the people...
2. The invention of the printing press spread new ideas rapidly; the Renaissance revival of classical learning led scholars to question medieval authorities and drew them back to original sources, including studying the New Testament in its original Greek; the power of the pope had weakened while the power of regional and national political leaders had strengthened; the prestige of