

THE REFORMATION – ITS IMPACT ON IRELAND

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Response to an Address by Dr. Martin Mansergh to the Irish Association at its Dublin Summer Lunch, Wynn's Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, Saturday, 20 May 2017

Thanks: To the Irish Association for the opportunity to respond to this address and to Martin for kindly giving me sight of his presentation.

There are as you would expect a number of statements which Martin has made with which I would take issue.

1. 'The Reformation began in Wittenberg 500 years ago on 31 October 1517 as a revolt against the crude marketing of indulgences to fund grandiose building projects in Rome.'

Martin does mention later on - the Albigensians, Lollards and Hussites condemned as heretics, not to mention the fiery preacher and denouncer of abuses who was burnt at the stake in Florence in 1498, Savonarola.

This, however, is to ignore much of what went before 31 October 1517. When churchmen in the medieval church spoke of REVIVAL or Reformation they were almost always thinking of administrative legal or moral reformation hardly ever of doctrinal Reformation. There is an important distinction to be made between the catholic revival of the Medieval church and the protestant reformation although of course one had an impact upon the OTHER.

EXAMPLES -

JOHN TAULER(1300-1361) Dominican preacher

Cardinal Ximenes (1435-1517) - he condemned indulgences. Died the year in which Martin Luther nailed his Thesis/Statements to the Church. Those thesis or statements are carved on the Church Door today!

Age old method of reforming the Medieval church was to found new orders or new forms of old orders

11th CENTURY REFORMATION - The *pataria* was an eleventh-century religious movement in the Archdiocese of Milan in northern Italy, aimed at reforming the clergy and ecclesiastic government in the province and supportive of Papal sanctions against simony and clerical marriage.

12th CENTURY REFORMATION - Waldenses - **DOCTRINAL REFORMATION (300 years before Luther)** Valdes (also called [Peter Waldo](#), or Valdo). As a layman, Valdes preached in [Lyon](#) (1170–76) The Waldenses departed from the teaching of the Roman Catholic church by rejecting some of the seven [sacraments](#) and the notion of purgatory. Their views were based on a simplified biblicism, moral rigour, and criticism of abuses in the contemporary church.

13th CENTURY REFORMATION - Religious Orders & Crusades

14th CENTURY REFORMATION - John Wycliffe (1329 1389) - Burnt for translating the Bible
Jan Hus (1373 to 1415) - also burnt at the stake

15th -16th CENTURY REFORMATION - William Tyndale the great translator of the Bible in English

16th CENTURY REFORMATION - Martin Luther - part of a wider picture.

2. German is as much in his debt, as English is to the King James Bible. His emphasis on direct access to the Bible, on the importance of preaching, his approval of priests marrying, and of course his rejection of unquestioned Papal authority are among his legacies to Protestantism.

So also is his legacy of congregational praise in worship - rather than a choir chanting in Latin! Luther translated many of the Psalms into German - subsequently translated into English to be sung as part of congregational worship. It was said of Luther that he sang the Reformation throughout Europe.

One of his most popular setting of the Psalms is Psalm 46 - still known today as Luther's Psalm.

PSALM 46:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

METRICAL PSALM: A Mighty Fortress is our God//A Safe Stronghold Our God is Still (Martin Luther) SET TO Tune:EIN FESTE BURG it is a majestic Psalm

A safe stronghold our God is still

Author: Martin Luther (1529); Translator: Thomas Carlyle (1831)

Tune:EIN FESTE BURG

1 A safe stronghold our God is still, (A mighty fortress is our God)
a trusty shield and weapon;
he'll keep us clear from all the ill
that hath us now o'ertaken.
The ancient prince of hell
hath risen with purpose fell;
strong mail of craft and power
he weareth in this hour;
on earth is not his fellow.

2 With force of arms we nothing can,
full soon were we down-ridden;
but for us fights the proper Man
whom God himself hath bidden.
Ask ye who is this same?
Christ Jesus is his name,
the Lord Sabaoth's Son;
he, and no other one,
shall conquer in the battle.

3 And were this world all devils o'er,
and watching to devour us,
we lay it not to heart so sore;
they cannot overpower us.
And let the prince of ill
look grim as e'er he will,
he harms us not a whit;
for why? his doom is writ;
a word shall quickly slay him.

4 God's word, for all their craft and force,
one moment will not linger,
but, spite of hell, shall have its course;
'tis written by his finger.

And though they take our life,
goods, honour, children, wife,
yet is their profit small;
these things shall vanish all:
the city of God remaineth.

Martin did say - 'His emphasis on direct access to the Bible,'

The Protestant principal of *Sola Scriptura* is key to the understanding of the Protestant Reformation - particularly in Ireland. The Scriptures **alone** imply as stated in the Code of PCI:
"It is the privilege, right and duty of everyone to examine the Scriptures personally, and each individual is bound to submit to their **authority**. This Protestant principal underscores the fact that the Scriptures are **sufficient** - for life, death and eternity!

THE ISSUE OF THE REFORMATION WAS AN ISSUE OF **AUTHORITY!**

Thus it was in Jesus's day - This was the question asked of Jesus - **Matthew 21:23** - "*the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"*"

At the end of Jesus's earthly Ministry he tells His Disciples - **Matthew 28:18,19** "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"

It issue is the same today - where to e get out AUTHORITY from?

HERE IS A TEST FOR AN INTERACTIVE AUDIENCE:

QUESTION WHO WAS Mary Magdalene?

Mary Magdalene was a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2). The name Magdalene likely indicates that she came from Magdala, a city on the southwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. After Jesus cast seven demons from her, she became one of His followers.

What was her profession? - The common answer is often 'a prostitute'.

It was however Pope Gregory the Great 590 - 604 who said she was, and that has gone down AS HISTORICAL FACT - No Biblical Evidence for such a statement.

When it comes to extra-scriptural revelation - be it from the Pope or anyone else it is to be rejected!

POST TRENT 'DOGMAS':

- A. **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION** - Declared by Pope Pius IX on 8 December **1854** - That Mary herself was conceive without sin. This has nothing to do with the Virgin Birth of Christ - there is NO BIBLICAL EVIDENCE
- B. **PERPETUAL VIRGINITY** - Declared by Pope Paul IV in **1555** - in spite of references in Scripture to others in the family of Mary & Joseph [Matthew 12;46. Mark 3;31 & 6;3. Luke 8:19. John 7;3-5. Acts 1;14]
- C. **THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY** - On 1 November **1950** Pope Pius XII spoke 'ex cathedra' and claimed that Mary was raised, body and soul to heaven. (ie. She did not die) All Roman Catholics must believe this otherwise they are guilty of a mortal sin.
- D. **"QUEEN OF HEAVEN"** - In **1954** Pius Xii's encyclical proclaimed may to be 'Queen of Heaven'

E. “MOTHER OF THE CHURCH” - Third Session of Vatican II in 1963-1965

ALL THESE BELIEFS/DOGMAS ARE DEVOID OF BIBLICAL EVIDENCE!

3. ‘One of the successes of ecumenism was an agreed statement in 1991 on the issue of justification by faith, one of the causes of the break with Rome.’

This statement is not universally correct - not all agreed!

Subsequent to 1991 was *DOMINUS IESUS* (6 Aug 2000)

17. *On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery,⁶¹ are not Churches in the proper sense;*

Martin as an Episcopalian may be closer to acceptance by the Pope - but Dissenters, such as I, are a long way off!

4. The names of Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer are not to be found on the Wall of the Reformers in Geneva. THAT IS CORRECT

It was erected by the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* in 1909 - you do find Farel, Calvin, Beza and Knox as centre-pieces with Martin Luther, Oliver Cromwell (of bad press fame) and William of Orange receiving the ‘Bill of Rights’ from the Lords and Commons, as well as Rodger Williams the Pilgrim Father.

5. While Martin recognises that ‘Presbyterians were too independent to be liked or trusted by either royalists or parliamentarians, he fails to give recognition to the contribution of Presbyterians and other dissenters made to the life of this Island and beyond.’

14 Presidents of the United States trace their origin to their roots to THE REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN VALUES OF THE ULSTER-SCOTS. Thankfully the present incumbent is an exception!

However may I say that I found the reference to De Lorean rather trite - ‘De Lorean became a born-again Christian in 1982. . .’. It is foolish to look to America as an example of Evangelical Reformed Christianity. As someone once said - “America is the home of all lost causes”.

IN SUMMARY - WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE REFORMATION ON IRELAND?

1. AN OPEN BIBLE: - IN THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE, INCLUDING IRISH
- Although it took many years for the Roman Catholic Church to accept that!!
2. AN INDEPENDENT MIND AND CONSCIENCE - ENLIGHTENED BY THE WORD OF GOD
- Although that is not always clearly evident.
3. PARTICIPATION OF THE COMMON PEOPLE OIN WORSHIP
- Particularly in the realm of congregational praise

UNFORTUNATELY the English Church was seen as tied to an English political regime - regarded by the native Irish as an imposition.

Therefore the statement - “They took our land now they want to take our faith” has some justification.