



Greg Daly

# 500

## Reformation

Five Hundred Years • 1517-2017

If ever there was a precise date we can point to and say that it changed the world, October 31, 2017 would surely be a contender. Then it was that the young German professor, the Augustinian friar Martin Luther, gave notice of an academic debate around 95 'theses', signalling the beginning of what we now know as the Protestant Reformation.

This would within decades be immortalised as his launching of the Reformation by nailing his theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle's church, but whether or not that happened, what is indisputable is Luther's questioning of the teaching and practices around indulgences was made public and widely shared, generating huge public interest and enthusiasm.

The new technology of printing gave Luther's theses a reach that obvious forerunners such as the Englishman John Wycliffe and the Czech John Hus had never had, transforming what could have been a mere academic debate into a popular movement with dynamics neither Luther nor anyone else could ever realistically hope to control.

### Theses

Excommunicated in 1520 and with Pope Leo X having issued a formal rebuttal of the theses, Luther was called to recant his views the following year at the Diet – imperial assembly – at Worms. There he said that some of his writings might indeed have been inappropriately harsh coming from a monk, but that the consciences of the laity had been so tortured by the laws of the Pope and Church teaching that to recant his claims would have bolstered "tyranny".

Further, he said, his opponents had taken to attacking his belief that the Pope's power should be limited purely because they knew they could not refute his arguments against

indulgences.

Condemned as an outlaw, Luther was protected for some months by his patron, Frederick III of Saxony, before returning to Wittenberg where he restrained and challenged some of his more radical fellow-reformers, over this period translating the New Testament into German and becoming an even more influential figure across Germany and Europe as his ideas about justification by faith alone and about the interpretation of Scripture catching the imaginations of many.

**“Luther has seen something of a rehabilitation in the Church over recent decades”**

The peasants' revolt that convulsed Germany between 1524 and 1526 saw many Germans looking to Luther for leadership, but despite widespread support for the peasants among Protestant clergy, Luther opposed the revolt.

In 1525 he married Katharina von Bora, with whom he would go on to have six children. Although his work continued as he wrote numerous important hymns, forging

a tradition that would reach its pinnacle with the 18th-Century composer Johann Sebastian Bach [pictured], and devoted himself to organising a new church, with its own order of worship and catechisms, he disagreed with other reformers on the key issue of the nature of the Eucharist, preventing the Protestant Reformation from coalescing into a single coherent movement.

From 1531 on Luther's health declined, while conflicts both with the Catholic Church and across the Protestant reform movement took its toll, and as his writings grew more polemical so did his health worsen until his death in 1546, by which time the second-generation Reformer John Calvin was perhaps an even more influential figure, transforming Geneva into a 'Protestant Rome', and building a systematic theology that would underpin reformation movements in the Netherlands, England, Scotland and further afield.

Long viewed in Catholic circles as an 'arch-heretic', Luther has seen something of a rehabilitation in the Church over recent decades, with Cardinal Jan Willebrands referring to him in 1970 as our "common teacher".

As Pope Francis remarked last year, before visiting Sweden to begin a year

marking the fifth centenary of Luther's 95 Theses, "I think that Martin Luther's intentions were not mistaken; he was a reformer.

Perhaps some of his methods were not right, although at that time ... the Church was not exactly a model to emulate."

**“Martin Luther's intentions were not mistaken...”**



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**Reformation 500 supplement starts here**



The modern world was born with the publication of Luther's 95 theses, writes Fintan Lyons

The year beginning October 13, 2016 was chosen to mark the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation because of Martin Luther's posting of his theses against indulgences on that date in 1517, putting him squarely at the heart of this commemoration.

Luther was indeed the dominant figure at the beginning, but even within his lifetime the movement became a multi-faceted one with other leaders and other centres of action. Luther himself was left out of negotiations, while the next couple of generations saw the emergence of separate denominations. Friedrich Schleiermacher in the 19th Century believed the Reformation still went on.

It is worth considering then how relevant Luther is to the story of this huge event in the history of Christianity and whether his relevance continues today. There had been movements of a similar type earlier than the 16th Century: the Waldensians in Italy in the 12th, the Lollards in England in the 14th and especially the Hussites in Bohemia in the 15th.

## Relevance

Luther's relevance to religious history begins with how in his attempt to remedy what he saw as corruption in the Church he unintentionally unleashed forces which ruptured a monolithic Christian society, leaving it divided and prone to continual fissiparous forces.

In some ways he is still relevant, if only because the issues with which he attempted to deal with have never fully gone away and the contemporary project to bring Christianity back to a recognisable state of unity will require re-visiting many of the issues on which he challenged his contemporaries, and not just the ecclesiastical authorities, because religion and politics affected each other very much.

His relevance to the reli-



gious and cultural issues of today can be distinguished from the historical question of what were the immediate effects of his career. He accepted at the end of his life that only limited success had attended his efforts, yet the change that took place in Christendom after Luther was obviously real.

But it is hard to estimate how much of it was actually due to Luther or his immediate successors in the Reformation movement. Wilhelm Dilthey (1883-1911) saw the beginning of a new social order stemming from the writings of Luther, a society marked by the recognition of the autocracy of the human person, an appreciation of the secular world and the fostering of a new kind of personal religion free from the influence of repressive institutions.

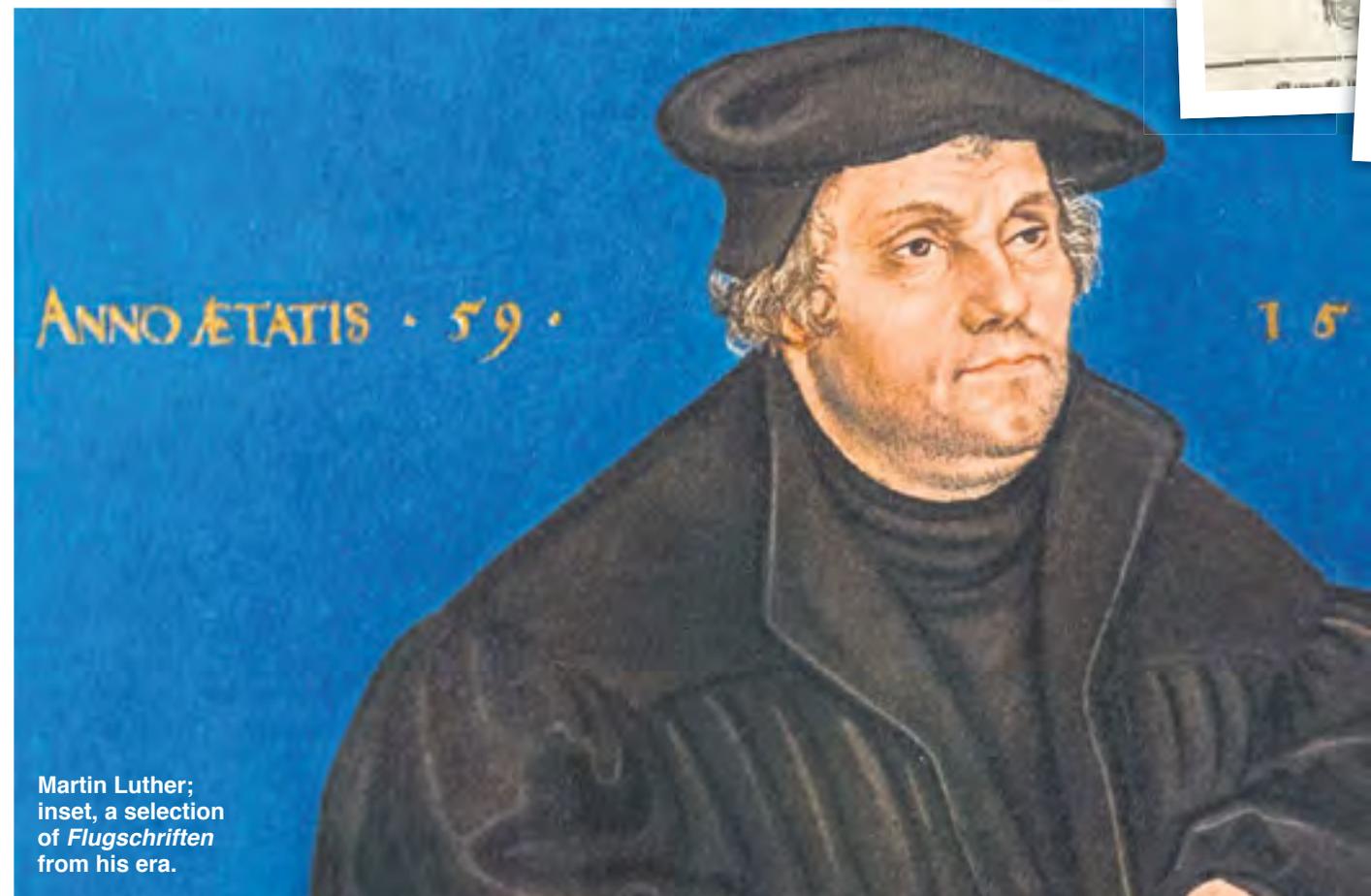
**“All these attempts to identify the influence of the Reformation on society have had their critics”**

Much interest has also focused on the kind of society, its moral values and economic outlook, which existed in the period following the second stage of the Reformation, that influenced by Calvin. In the late 19th Century, Max Weber advanced the theory that capitalism flourished because of the Protestant ethic that emerged from Calvinism in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

Ernst Troeltsch agreed with Weber about later Protestantism, but held that Luther's Reformation remained pre-modern, creating a religion that was still Church-dominated, in which life was still ruled by supernatural revelation, but based now on the Bible rather than papal hegemony and subservient to the princely, or later state, authorities.

All of these attempts to identify the influence of the Reformation on society have had their critics; capitalism already operated in the society into which Luther was born and it was also the sys-

# Author of modernity



Martin Luther; inset, a selection of *Flugschriften* from his era.

tem that obtained in Renaissance Italy. The Medici family, which gave the Church Pope Leo X, Luther's antagonist, were financiers with branches in various parts of Europe.

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By the beginning of the 16th Century, the prohibition of usury in Christian tradition was breaking down as low-interest lending to people in need became part of normal living and Luther would come to accept the practice as part of his distinction between the two kingdoms, the realms of Church and state, or more exactly, the two sets of relationships within which the Christian lived, usually described as the two kingdoms.

On the one hand, the law of the Gospel required forbearance, forgiveness, refusal to exploit another's condition; on the other, the common life of mankind required regulation by just laws to ensure justice was available to all.

While he had no systematic teaching on these matters, in later centuries Luther came to be criticised for apparently granting to the state an autonomy which could leave

the community passive in the face of the state's control of culture and this was held to explain the failure of Lutherans to adopt a critical attitude towards the policies of Germany's National Socialist government before and during World War II.

Such criticism hardly took sufficient account of the emergence of the Confessing Church, the movement against Nazism in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was committed to Luther's theology rather than liberal versions of it, played a prominent part.

**“Such criticism hardly took sufficient account of the emergence of the Confessing Church”**

What Luther's movement brought to early modern society in Germany was an emphasis not just on the national culture and economy but also on the local community including the promotion of family life even though he denied marriage was a sacrament.

The Bible in his vernacular translation took a prominent place in the family, bridging the gap between home and church and giving literacy a boost; Luther is credited with contributing considerably to the emergence of the German vernacular and its literary riches.

His contributions to hymnody further enriched the culture which went on to produce the monumental figure of J. S. Bach in less than 200 years. This was quite a legacy for someone who even as a national figure and religious leader took pride in claiming he was of farming stock, going back to his grandfather and great-grandfather.

To speculate on what would not have happened without Luther may be a futile exercise, nor is it clear, according to Carlos Eire, whether the 'Reformations' which did occur changed the world for the better or for the worse – a legitimate question, he maintains, most historians prefer to avoid.

It seems clear, however, that even without the upheaval of the Reformation the Church's structures and administrative control would

have been put under enormous strain as a new world opened up through revolutionary developments, technical and social, at the end of the 15th Century.

## Principles

It is interesting that contemporaneously with Luther's promotion of Augustine's Neoplatonist theology, though from a different perspective, an Aristotelian philosophy of nature with beginning to be replaced with more Platonist ideas as a foundation for science and technology. Not that the world of commerce and politics reflected on these deeper principles; rather it was a case of the new technologies such as astronomical and navigational equipment favouring voyages of exploration and the expansionist policies of old Europe's states.

This resulted in rapid growth in trading activity and a new commercially-focused society. Medieval thinking in religion as in much else would have found itself less and less relevant in this new situation, while on the other hand it is clear that the theology and the ecclesio-political structures generated by the





regularly held and local episcopal conferences are brought into the reckoning. The ambiguities of Luther's attitudes in this regard could profitably be borne in mind.

Turning to the external issues, the context in which Luther's movement grew was highly political in the sense that alliance with rulers or military force at times determined its growth or threatened its existence.

In relation to social justice, his tendency to favour the rulers against the demands of the peasants at the time of the Peasants' War of 1525 came from his dissociation of religion from social issues, which today seems simplistic, though the distinctions he made echo in some way the ideals expressed in the Sermon on the Mount.

Today, church-state relationships encounter added difficulties because of ethical issues unknown in Luther's time and require even more discernment than his perspective could provide.

**“There was also a degree of populism, whipped up by the rapid growth of pamphleteering in the early 16th Century”**

One lesson the Reformation taught is that neither patronage nor hostility advances the Church's position and that the relationship between Church and state depends on many factors, in particular nationalism. In Germany, the strong sense of being German led to a 'Germexit' in relation to Rome (as happened in England under Henry VIII).

There was also a degree of populism, whipped up by Luther's publications, but also by the rapid growth of pamphleteering in the early 16th Century, of the *Flugschriften* or short, cheaply produced pamphlets (a phenomenon corresponding to the similar growth and influence of the social media today). How social media and populism affect not just the Catholic Church but religion generally should not be underestimated.

The problems besetting the well-being of Christianity as a cultural phenomenon, as giving a 'tone' to society, can be seen reflected in the story of Luther and a society which became Lutheran in tone. It can be helpful to take account of the many-sided cultural, economic and political contexts in which his theology developed and the interaction between them.

Five hundred years later, it is both important and challenging to understand the world in which Luther grew

up, one which looked back on centuries of an unchanging culture steeped in Christian tradition, but was now undergoing sudden change at the level of thought and social and political structures, much like what has happened in the Western world in recent times.

The economy of a world unaccustomed to technological discovery was jolted and forever altered in the late 15th century by the discovery of printing, a technology derived from weaving and multiplying the results of the physical effort previously put into manuscript production. That this benefited the Reformation is clear – though it also benefited its opponents in the dispute – but its effects on the culture generally were enormous because of the spread it brought to existing knowledge and new thinking, hitherto the preserve of the few. New thinking developed in economics, science, technology, politics and of course theology.

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Printing was a hugely important factor in the emergence of the era known as modernity. An interesting example relating printing and modernity – and by chance in the context of the Swiss

Reformation – can be found in the story of church life in the town of Zürich in the early stages of its Reformation.

The priest Huldrych Zwingli was administrator at the Great Minster – an important church, with its own chapter. In his preaching he drew attention to the contrast between law and Gospel; the church laid down many laws whereas the Gospel conferred freedom on Christians, freedom to judge for themselves.

A crisis arose on March 5th 1522, Ash Wednesday, and was recorded in a contemporary chronicle: Elsi Flammer, maidservant of the printer in the Niederdorf, said she had by her master's orders cooked some sausages on Ash Wednesday, and that the People's Priest of Einsiedeln, Bartholomew Pur and Michael Hirt had eaten of them.

The printer, Froschauer, was subsequently hauled before the town council, where in his defence he said: "Prudent, gracious, pious and dear Lords, as it has come to your knowledge that I have eaten flesh in my house, I plead guilty, and in the following manner: I have so much work on hand, and it is costing me so much in body, goods and work, that I have to get on and work at it day and

night, holy day and work-day, so that I may get it ready for the Frankfurt Fair."

The work in hand was the Epistles of St Paul, presumably in the interests of the new reform movement or, more accurately perhaps, arising from the humanist movement's drive to make the Scriptures available, but the defence the printer gave provides a very early glimpse of the culture we have come to call modernity.

The scientific revolution that formed that culture fully had yet to come, but the relationship between man and the world is already altering here, 40 years after the invention of printing. The machine is beginning to impose its rhythms on human life and Froschauer feels its pressure. Modernity's philosophy will in time subscribe to the idea of an unending cycle of production and consumerism affecting all of religion.

**1** P. Fintan Lyons OSB is a monk of Glenstal Abbey who has taught at the Angelicum University and the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome. The above is an edited extract from Martin Luther: His Challenge Then and Now, published by Columba Press.

Reformation movement had significant effects on European culture.

It is true that the early Reformation churches were inward-looking rather than missionary-minded, so there is certainly a question as to whether what Luther inaugurated left Christianity less adapted to the task of bringing the Gospel message to this new world, new in culture and new in geographical extent. At first sight, the Reformation's negative effects are apparent.

**“Expanding the present-day discussion to include this perspective could be helpful”**

The wars now known as the 'Wars of Religion', which devastated much of Europe and sparked off a secularisation process in European culture so evident today, could hardly have happened, at least not under a religious banner, if Christianity had remained united. But would the health of Western Christianity have declined even

more from its fragile state in the 16th Century and would the divided witness of West and East have continued to be an obstacle when facing the spread of Islam? These are fascinating questions, but impossible to answer.

A study of Luther, and his effects on Church and society, leads in the end to recognising that issues which existed then are endemic to Christianity in every century: ecclesiological issues in the sense of the Church's self-understanding but also broader ones concerning religion in a secular society.

In modern times, this was the agenda for Vatican II, where the Council's theology endeavoured to be creative by privileging mystery over institutionalism with its attendant drawbacks and adopted a 'People of God' perspective.

The Church can learn from how Luther had to cope with the unexpected consequences of his focusing on the individual rather than the institution and the divisions which soon appeared. Luther's concentration on the individual act of faith, through making justification by faith the main principle of his theology, brought a subjective dimension of religion to the forefront in a way that made a sense of corporate belonging more difficult to retain.

**Personality**

Contemporary theology's aspiration to enfranchise fully the individual believer raises questions about the psychological as well spiritual state and indeed educational status of the believer. Much has been written about Luther's attempts to deal with an anarchic movement claiming to be guided by the Spirit and about his own personality.

An issue which has come more into focus with Pope Francis' papacy is the relationship between central authority and the local Church. This question was of course central to the Reformation movement and then involved the question also of the relationship between a council of the Church and the papacy.

Expanding the present-day discussion to include this perspective could be helpful, especially when synods are



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# A constant reformation

Luther was by no means the first Christian to claim to be a reformer, Carlos Eire tells **Greg Daly**



Until the 1970s almost all historical writing about the Reformation was written from a confessional standpoint, according to Yale's Prof. Carlos Eire. Since then, though, serious efforts at objectivity have been more commonplace, he says, maintaining that he always tries to remain objective on the subject.

"I can't speak for everyone but in my case what I try to do is to try to get inside the mind of people on every side to write from within – you know 'what made people do this? what made people think this way?'," he says, continuing, "I'm not trying to prove that any one of those sides was correct – I'm just simply trying to explain because that's what historians try to do. We don't just tell a story – we try to explain what happened and why it might have happened and not take sides. You can't write the history of the religious mess at this point if you're partisan."

Singling out Eric Metaxas' *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* as a case study in how not to write history – he calls it "very partisan", "awful", and "terrible", with the author apparently convinced that Luther could do no wrong, he says "you have to detach yourself".

## Awards

Author of seven books, starting with 1986's *War Against The Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, and winner of numerous awards, not least the National Book Award for Nonfiction, Prof. Eire's mastery of Reformation history is all too apparent in *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650*.

As readable as it is vast – the hardback edition weighs almost two kilograms – the book's title gives a subtle but important clue to Prof. Eire's overall take on the period: he carefully avoids the term 'The Reformation', opting instead

to point to how many reformations there were.

"There are still historians around who would use the singular," he says, adding, "I think that's fine – I can see the value of the argument up to a point."

There were numerous Protestant reformations, of course, starting with most obviously Luther's own, but Prof. Eire is keen to impress how the term's not simply a Protestant one.

**“The peasants had understood Luther to be talking about economic and social freedom and they were mistaken”**

"One of the reasons I felt justified in using the plural is that that's a term that Catholics used at that time," he says. "They were always talking about reform and reformation in the old usage of the term among Catholics. The Protestant reformation was not called a reformation – it was called a rebellion or a revolt."

Everyone claimed to be carrying out a reformation, he says, gloomily adding that these reformations all too often also entailed killing those of different convictions.

The concept of reformation had been an old one in the Catholic Church long before Luther, of course, with such figures as St Benedict of Nursia, St Bernard of Clairvaux, and Ss Francis and Dominic all having spearheaded important reform projects in the times.

"It was constant," Prof. Eire says. "What I argue is that yeah, you do have peak periods, but you always have somebody reforming, because there's always some corruption somewhere. Always. It's just a human reality – things go bad. If there's a chance for something to become corrupt, it will become corrupt, and somebody will

spot it and try to fix it."

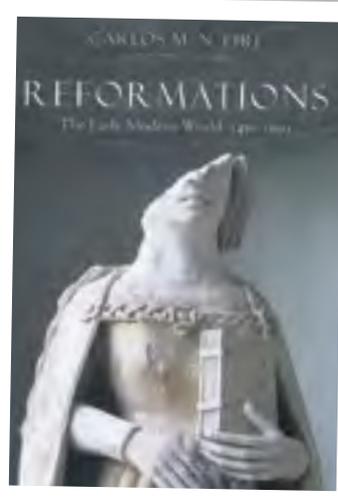
Martin Luther's own reform project started with the issue of indulgences – a common enough sort of complaint and one that others had previously expressed unease about – but it soon moved onto deeper issues of where authority lay in the Church, and of how people are saved. Did ordinary people grasp the theological niceties of Luther's arguments?

"There were people who understood perfectly, and liked what they heard or read, and there were people who just didn't get it right," Prof. Eire says. "Was the basic message understood? There were a lot of basic messages and people kind of mix and match and pick whichever one appealed to them the most."

Acknowledging that there would definitely have been some glad simply not to have to go to Confession, but doubting that many really comprehended Luther's arguments about the saving power of Faith alone, Prof. Eire says there were doubtless those who mainly saw Luther's project as an opportunity to get rid of monastic landlords and take Church lands.

"Luther backed away from the Peasants Revolt precisely for that reason," he says. "The peasants had understood him to be talking about economic and social freedom and they were mistaken."

It didn't take long for the Reformation to spread and



The Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), who met Luther at the Marburg Colloquy in 1522, but disagreed vigorously with him over the Eucharist.

mutate with different groups holding to different interpretations of Scripture, a process that has carried on to this day when it's sometimes estimated that there are upwards of 25,000 distinct Protestant groups.

"It's like a branching tree," Prof. Eire says. "I had a student a few years ago who was a mathematics major and wrote a paper interpreting what happened in the Reformation according to fractal theory." Describing the paper as "wonderful", he says: "In fact that is the pattern. You get this constant branching, and the branching doesn't stop right now – the branching continues."

"Luther, I don't think, had this in mind," he muses, pointing to Brad Gregory's 2012 book *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularised Society*, and observing "the title is perfect".

Luther had no idea such divisions would happen, and was immediately angry whenever people disagreed with him, he says. "This is key to understanding Luther. He may have said 'scripture alone' but from day one he wouldn't allow anyone to have any interpretation of scripture that differed from his. So, he wasn't really granting people personal individual freedom to inter-

pret scripture; he was the interpreter, he was the one with special gift to interpret it correctly."

This, however, is exactly the stance the other Protestant reformers took too, he adds.

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A further irony lies in how Luther, despite his promotion of the Scriptures' authority, also acted to exclude and downgraded established parts of the Christian canon.

"In the Old Testament what he doesn't accept are those books that were not written originally in Hebrew," Prof. Eire says, continuing, "what he rejects are the books that were sort of closer to the time of Jesus that appeared in the Septuagint Bible which was written in Greek by Jews in Egypt."

While this meant that Tobit and the books of the Maccabees, for example, were deemed not revelation and so cut from the Bible or relegated to appendices, certain New Testament books were kept, but on sufferance.

"In the New Testament he doesn't throw anything out, but he basically sets up a hierarchy of which texts are more important and then says very clearly that the entire New Testament and the entire Bible needs to be read through Paul's letter to

the Romans and Paul's letter to the Galatians – they're the key for understanding scripture," he says.

Other books would not be so elevated. "He takes some books like the letter of James and Revelation and says they're not so important – he actually called the letter of James a 'letter of straw', in other words it's trash because it doesn't agree with Paul's letter to the Romans on the issue of faith and works – which was so important to him – because the letter of James says faith without works is dead."

**“Protestantism has a tendency to see the paradoxes in the Bible and there are many as either/or black and white”**

The Catholic response to this, he said, tended to accept the apparent conflict between Paul and James. "This is one of the many differences between Protestantism and Catholicism – Protestantism has a tendency to see the paradoxes in the Bible and there are many as either/or black and white whereas Catholicism, for 2000 years, and this applies through the 1500s as well has always embrace



Prof Carlos Eire (second from left) at a conference on Luther at Limerick's Mary Immaculate College earlier this month, accompanied by Rev Noel Hession, OSA, Rev Kieran O'Mahony, OSA, Colmán Ó Clabaigh, OSB, Prof. Jim Puglisi, Prof. Marian Lyons and Dr Eugene Duffy.

paradox and the both/and," Prof. Eire says, citing as an example how the Council of Trent would affirm the reality of predestination while also saying that we have free will which Luther denied.

Modern Lutherans have come closer over time to accepting this 'both/and', he ventures, adding that the Catholic Church for its part has since the Second Vatican Council de-emphasised the one thing that bothered Luther the most, which was the counting of individual sins.

While speculating that this has played a decisive role in bringing Lutherans and Catholics to an agreement over the issues of justification or salvation, he says it has also affected Catholic sacramental practice: "people don't go to confession like they used to".

### Reality

Speaking in Limerick's Mary Immaculate College earlier this month, Prof. Eire expounded on how Luther and his successors had 'disenchanted' the world, denying the reality of the supernatural, with all miracles claimed by the Catholic Church since the death of the last Apostle dismissed as diabolical manipulations of nature. But the Reformers were by no means of one mind in how they looked at reality, Prof. Eire stresses.

"This makes a huge difference – how you interpret reality," he says, noting that the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli, who vigorously disagreed with Luther on the issue of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, had been heavily influenced by Plato.

"Zwingli is very much a Platonist – that's why he

finds it difficult for matter and spirit to coincide, because Plato believed that everything in the material world of matter is a poor reflection of a higher reality," he explains. "So Zwingli makes the spiritual the real and the material here is not unreal, but it's a poor reflection – it's so different from and inferior to spirit that you can't mix the two."

### “Luther accused Zwingli of being too mathematical and Zwingli challenged Luther as being excessively literal”

Luther, on the other hand, draws from a very different philosophical well, one perhaps most famously associated with the English Franciscan William of Ockham.

"Luther couldn't care less about that because he's not a Platonist and he's not an Aristotelian either – to him, these metaphysical questions don't matter," Prof. Eire says.

"He doesn't care because he picked up a different kind of philosophy that developed in the late Middle Ages – he picked up what's called 'nominalism' which is basically that God can do whatever he wants, and that's God's absolute Power," he says. "Of course, in creating the world, God created it in a certain way with certain laws and he only breaks those laws when he needs to get a message across."

While under this schema, the laws basically stay in place but God can nonetheless do anything, for Luther there was no contradiction

in Jesus' body being present both in Heaven and in the Eucharist.

"Luther says of course Jesus's body can be in more than one place at one time – he's divine! That makes sense to him but for Zwingli, who has this other metaphysical understanding of reality, it is impossible," Prof. Eire says, detailing how Luther accused Zwingli of being too mathematical and Zwingli challenged Luther as being excessively literal.

"And there's no talking to the other side and not going to be any agreement because they have a different understanding of basically reality," he says. "It's not physics – it's a different understanding of reality."

The French reformer John Calvin – who was but a child when Luther first launched the Reformation, and who would go on to become, after Luther, probably the most important of the Reformers, was in some respects on the Zwinglian side of this dispute, Prof. Eire says.

"For Calvin, matter and spirit are like fire and water: he uses that metaphor. They're unmixable. They're completely different things. Though when it comes to the Eucharist, Calvin does kind of move a little bit towards the Lutheran side: there's no real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but you can have spiritual communion with Christ: it's purely spiritual. He puts the Holy Spirit to work and says that during Communion the Holy Spirit brings you close to Christ – but not to his body."

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The question of the relationship between matter and

the Lutherans in the north and the Reformed in the south from forming a single church.

"It's not the only issue," he says, pointing to straightforward personality clashes as well as differences of understanding and conflicts between the local and the universal which sped up fragmentation, as Swiss and Germans and others felt they should have their own local churches.

### “I think the Anabaptists give us a clue as to what happens to people who don't want to belong to the national or local church”

At the same time, he says, one has to wonder what would have happened had Luther and Zwingli agreed on the spirit-matter debate.

"Maybe you would have had a kind of mega-Protestant church," he ventures, "but I think you would have still had dissenters to that Church."

"I think the Anabaptists

give us a clue as to what happens to people who don't want to belong to the national or local church – the Anabaptists are always few in number, and they kind of gravitate geographically farther and farther east to where local governments are weak, places like Poland and Russia. But you never have a national church which is Anabaptist. They're always a minority, they're often persecuted, so they end up in Eastern Europe or in the Netherlands which is more tolerant – they're always small in number."

Ultimately, he suspects, Brad Gregory may have it right in that the principle of personal interpretation of scripture was always going to prevent any kind of Protestant unity.

"It's like Pandora's box," he says. "Once the box is open and the stuff comes out you can't put it back in."

**1** Carlos Eire is T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale University, and is author of *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650*, published by Yale University Press.

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Manuel Steven, Peter James and Chifindo Kagons pose for a photo in their village of Jambawe in Lilongwe, Malawi, which is supported by Concern's Livelihoods programme.

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There was a common belief that the Reformation would blow over, writes **Rory Rapple**

**W**estern Europe may be post-Christian, but the effects of its sectarian divide are everywhere to be seen. Ask almost any Bavarian what makes her different from a Saxon, or any Swede what marks him off from a Spaniard and each is likely to point to cultural differences based on his or her region's religious heritage.

Because these differences are hardwired into attitudes and cultures it's easy to think that this polarity between Protestant and Catholic was always fated to happen. And it's tempting when analysing the past only to look for the clues that lead to this result. But, in fact, in the three decades after Luther's commitment to defying papal authority many thought that the divisions could be patched up.

When we consider early 16th-Century predictions of those 'in the know' about the future of Western Christendom it is difficult not to see parallels with the spectrum of views to be found about Brexit.

Some believe that Brexit will never happen because a critical mass of clever people are opposed to it. Others think it'll happen, but only temporarily, before a rational reconciliation on a new improved basis in the face of a hostile global environment. Still others think Brexit changes everything, but only by showing other countries what is possible, and that every country will have its own 'Irexit', 'Frexit' and 'Grexit'.

In different ways all these views express a sort of faith in the capacity of Britain and the EU to self-regulate and return to a normal familiar equilibrium.

### Tradition

Similarly, in the period following Martin Luther's defiance some thought that Western Christendom wouldn't splinter permanently, that whatever breach occurred would be temporary, and others believed that while Christianity in the West might shake off the trappings of tradition it would stand aloft renewed and reformed.

All these conclusions at certain points appeared plausible. Many thought that the role of reforming the church so that it could survive into

the future belonged to secular power – kings and emperors – not clergy.

Although Luther's abrasive personality and high oratory captured the imagination, the tinder that he set ablaze had in large part been provided by Desiderius Erasmus, a man of very different temperament, best known to history as Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Erasmus, although ordained as a priest with the canons regular of St Augustine, had chosen in the late 15th Century to throw himself into an exhaustive academic life and became the best-known scholar in Europe. Critical of both the Church's scholastic intellectual tradition and its Augustinian moral theology, Erasmus believed that external signs and symbols of devotion mattered less to the Christian life than an individual's interior disposition.

His scholarship in Greek-language works both Biblical and those written by the Church Fathers brought to light ancient resources that he used to vindicate his analysis. Early Church spirituality, Erasmus believed, reflected an ethos at odds with the carnal externalities of the world of pilgrimages, votive masses and relics that surrounded him.

**“Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone even found some sympathy among prominent churchmen”**

Furthermore, he believed that the key to reforming things would likely lie outside the institutional Church. His tract on the education of a Christian Prince was optimistic about the fruits that might result from those in authority imbibing his 'Christian philosophy'.

This encouraged the view that heads of state, following the example of the Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicaea, were in a better position to secure the much-needed reform of the Church's abuses at a national level, than the underpowered and, in many ways, tarnished papacy.

This type of thinking pro-

# Seeking a Reformation middle way



Michel de Montaigne's tower where he wrote his famous essays.

vided a model for proceeding followed by many in the prominent actors in the 'Reformation Dramas' of Western Europe from St Thomas More to the Lutheran Phillip Melancthon, and the father of Presbyterianism, John Calvin. Erasmus's scepticism about the cosmic efficacy of many of the devotional practices of his time was easily extrapo-

lated by others to cast doubt on the inherent value of the Sacramental system of the Church itself.

### Justification

Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone even found some sympathy among prominent churchmen, most notably the group of Italian clerics beloved by Pope Paul



Desiderius Erasmus.

III known as the *Spirituali*. Among the membership of this group could be found the *crème de la crème* of the Church's intellectual elite, including figures like Cardinals Sadoletto, Contarini and Pole.

Pole, that is Reginald Pole (1500-1558), had been educated in Italy at the expense of his relative Henry VIII of England. Nevertheless, he strongly rejected King Henry's schism by publishing a polemic against the supposed Royal Supremacy over the new Church of England.

Yet, Pole proved something of a 'Marmite' cleric in Rome, either loved or hated. Despite the great favour of Paul III, others, notably Gian Pietro Carafa – the future Pope Paul IV – hated the *Spirituali* and suspected that Pole's sympathy for the doctrine of justification by faith was a sign of greater heresy.

Some *Spirituali* had gone too far. The most embarrassing example was when the vicar general of the Capuchin

Order Bernardino Ochino fled to Geneva and converted to Protestantism. Yet Pole was considered orthodox enough to be almost elected Pope at the conclave of 1549. Subsequently he returned to England to assist Queen Mary in her attempts to restore Catholicism and, perhaps ironically, assist her in the persecution of Protestants.

**“Pole proved something of a 'Marmite' cleric in Rome, either loved or hated”**

Pending the conclusion of the final sessions of the Council of Trent in 1562 and 1563, the hope was not infrequently expressed that the sectarian division could be patched up by a General Council of the Church that might be in some way responsive to the theological objections and arguments of the 'reformers', or, even better, by national



Michel de Montaigne.

Divergent teaching on the Eucharist became the sticking point, although great pressure was placed on participants to arrive at a workably vague compromise.

The French (or Gallican) Church had always been independent minded, and since the mid-15th Century, the kings of France had placed limitations on papal authority within their territories, but, nevertheless, despite their encouragement neither the Calvinist nor Catholic party could arrive at a solution.

The formal conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563 and its cast-iron restatement of Catholic doctrine, especially on the Eucharist, short-circuited national attempts at compromise and rescued the papacy from being on the doctrinal back foot relative to national monarchs.

Now, there could be no ambiguity about Catholic teaching and the time-worn ecumenical strategy of appealing to the likely outcome of a future council to justify heterodox views became much less feasible.

**“In 1589 following the assassination of Henry III the legitimate heir to the throne was Henry of Navarre, a committed Protestant”**

Nevertheless, some intellectuals, faced with the distasteful polarity between Catholicism and Protestantism and the mayhem it was causing across Europe, chose a type of internal exile.

The great essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) is best remembered for this. Impeccably orthodox in his external observance and willing to fight for the defence of Catholicism when his King deemed it necessary, Montaigne, having immersed himself in the philosophical writings of the Stoics and Epicureans, believed that the range of things knowable to human reason was very finite. He expressed ongoing distaste in his many essays for the vehement passion which he saw being vented upon religious war.

His personal sympathy was towards a type of scepticism. He interrogated himself, holding as a motto: *Que sais je?* What do I know?

Montaigne was clever enough, however, to avoid getting into trouble with Church authorities and his essays were wildly popular

in late-16th-Century France. In many ways he could easily pose as a type of mystic. His scepticism relativised all kinds of knowledge and could be seen as removing the dead hand of philosophy from religion and religious experience.

So, as with Erasmus, in Montaigne the emphasis returned to internal dispositions and natural knowledge, rather than the importance of disputes between the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.

France demonstrated in distilled form the nightmare that religious difference could cause, and the essential appeal of arriving at an agreed solution.

Not only had she been convulsed by stop-start religious war since the 1560s, in 1589 following the assassination of Henry III the legitimate heir to the throne was Henry of Navarre, a committed Protestant.

This posed a dreadful dilemma. To many it was unthinkable that the ‘most Catholic’ king of France could be a Protestant and to others it was unthinkable that the legitimate heir, tradi-

tionally understood, could be excluded from his right. The nobility who attempted to exclude Henry of Navarre were supported by the King of Spain and, although in the minority, put up a fierce resistance, retaining control of Paris.

\* \* \* \* \*

Henry of Navarre (now Henry IV) in 1593 simplified matters by converting to Catholicism. Five years later, when secure on the throne, he promulgated the Edict of Nantes which provided for limited toleration of Calvinist worship in particular safe havens and, secretly, the protection of French Protestants when abroad from the workings of the Inquisition in other territories.

This seemed to provide a template for future pragmatic attempts at religious toleration, but Henry IV himself was assassinated by a disaffected Catholic fanatic in 1610.

It is easy using the terminology of today to think that ‘toleration’ denoted mutual respect and affection. This was certainly not the case. ‘Toleration’ just meant that

different sectarian groups were protected, certainly not loved. By the turn of the 17th Century the sectarian divisions across Western Europe had calcified and serious hope for a great reconciliation was difficult to find.

In the Holy Roman Empire the old settlement arrived at by the Peace of Augsburg held in place until 1618 when the balance between Catholic and Protestant powers was disrupted leading to a horrible conflict that convulsed the entirety of Central Europe, known as the Thirty Years’ War.

The carnage that resulted tarnished the brand of Christianity, but was a world away from the quiet confidence of Erasmus of Rotterdam 100 years before that a well-disposed humanity using its reason could arrive at a true Christian philosophy.

This, instead, was the sectarian equivalent of a No-Deal Brexit.

**Rory Rapple is an Associate Professor, in the Department of History, at the University of Notre Dame.**

councils, or in the Holy Roman Empire, imperial diets. Indeed, in the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor Charles V seemed to believe that he could facilitate a solution to the division of the Church in his territories by refereeing a colloquy between Catholic and Lutheran advocates on theological matters at Ratisbon in 1541.

**“It was frequently hoped that the clarion call of a crusade would mean that all the wrangling between Catholic and Protestant would be cast aside”**

Alongside this local strategy the Emperor tried to ensure that the sessions of the Council of Trent in the 1540s and 1550s concentrated on disciplinary matters rather than matters of dogma. He also exerted pressure to prevent the Council formally condemning Lutheranism as heretical.

While his effort at reconciliation at Ratisbon failed, despite some agreement on matters like original sin and justification by faith, in 1548 Charles attempted another resolution of the schism by trying to impose ‘the Augsburg Interim’; a selection of edicts which strove to placate Protestants by permitting

clerical marriage and reception of Communion under the appearances of both bread and wine.

The failure of these internal solutions ultimately led to the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 which decreed that individual princes within the Empire had the power to determine the faith established by law within their own territories.

It is easy to forget that the Holy Roman Emperor and other princes in Central Europe in their anxiety to find a compromise were not just doing anything for a quiet life. The ongoing expansion of the Islamic Ottoman Empire on the Empire’s eastern borders terrified them and led them to hope for a restoration of the unity of Christendom.

In short, their attempts at top-down ecumenism were designed to bring about the preconditions for a crusade against Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. It was frequently hoped that the clarion call of a crusade would mean that all the wrangling between Catholic and Protestant would be cast aside.

\* \* \* \* \*

Similarly, in France in 1561, Catherine de Medici, the mother of the boy king Charles IX, tried to pour oil on troubled waters. She organised a meeting between Catholic hierarchs and Calvinist theologians, known to history as the Colloquy of Poissy.

This aimed to arrive at an internal French solution to national sectarian strife.

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The foreign nature of Ireland's Reformation was key to its failure, writes **John McCafferty**

**A**ll over the world 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. What happened here in Ireland? Why did this island remain overwhelmingly Catholic even though its rulers were Protestant? How did religious changes get sucked into the long and troubled relationship between England and Ireland?

In 1632, James Spottiswoode was rowed out into the middle of Lough Derg in Co. Donegal. He was a Scot, ordained in the Church of England, who had become Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher in 1621. In his hand he had permission from Dublin Castle to demolish "the chapel and all the Irish houses now situate in that island called St Patrick's purgatory".

It did not go well. The high sheriff of Donegal failed to turn up to support him. The bishop and his companions were nearly sunk and then nearly marooned. Meanwhile onlookers, the 'country people', stood by and waited for a divine thunderbolt while Spottiswoode dashed about toppling hostels, chapels and other devotional structures erected by the Franciscans only a few years earlier.

All this happened just four years short of the 100th anniversary of the passage of Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in the Irish parliament. By that date – 1636 – Lough Derg was once again open for business as Catholic Ireland's leading pilgrimage site. James Spottiswoode had wasted his time and risked the lives of his servants.

Ireland had no popular Protestant uprising, none of the outpouring of evangelical feeling that took place elsewhere in Europe, instead getting a reformation based on laws. Ireland got an English reformation, yet while state-sponsored religious change in England worked out in the long run, it failed in Ireland.

This was not inevitable, and was not expected. For example, in Lent 1542, Paschase Broet and Alphonse Salmeron became the first two Jesuits to set foot in Ireland. After a cool reception from the powerful lords Conn O'Neill and Manus O'Donnell, they concluded Ireland would

# English seeds on Irish soil



Henry VIII.

definitely follow Henry VIII into schism.

## Time lag

So what was Henry VIII's schismatic Church of Ireland, his *Hibernia Ecclesia* anyway? Put simply, the Church of Ireland was the product of the Dublin parliament's ratification of a series of English statutes. The English Act of Supremacy of 1534 was followed by an Irish Act of Supremacy in 1536. So Ireland, it seemed, was just England with a little time lag.

The Irish 'reformation' parliament of 1536-7 put through Acts of Supremacy, Appeals, Slander, First Fruits, against the authority of the Bishop of Rome – all mirroring Westminster a couple of years earlier. Apart from cosmetic changes such as replacing 'England' with 'Ireland' in the wording of bills they were virtually identical.

**“Dublin Castle found it almost impossible to give away dioceses such as Ardfert and Kilmore”**

Henry VIII's Dublin parliament also passed an Act for the English order, habit and language – the kind of anglicising legislation that had been famously attempted at Kilkenny in 1366. This 1537 statute decreed that English-speaking clergy get priority in parish appointments. Every Irish-speaking priest was to take an oath at ordination to endeavour to learn

the "English tongue...to the uttermost of his power, wit and cunning".

Having done so he was then to instruct his flock. So pastors were to become instruments of anglicisation in a church of which Henry and his heirs would be supreme heads. This church made the acquisition and spread of English language and manners a priority.

Four years later Ireland's constitutional status was changed in the 1541 Act for kingly title. So Henry VIII attempted by strategy, by policy and by law to make all of the inhabitants of Ireland into his obedient subjects and into Englishmen and Englishwomen and lead them into schism with Rome all at once.

Like today, 16th-Century Ireland had over 20 dioceses. Most bishoprics were poor. This turned into a poisoned chalice for the state church. Places like Killaloe, Cloyne, Ferns, Kilfenora, Leighlin, Dromore – indeed a majority of sites – were pretty much dilapidated by the time of the Tudors and Stuarts.

Yet the very title 'Church of Ireland' meant that authorities shied away from logical pastoral proposals for mergers of dioceses and relocations of cathedral churches to more populous towns. Dublin Castle found it almost impossible to give away dioceses such as Ardfert and Kilmore. Impoverished bishops began to lease away lands with manic intensity simply to make ends meet. Discredit followed on dilapidation. Catholics in turn took delight in declaring that the Reforma-

tion was propelled by avarice and rapine.

Many of the Church of Ireland bishops had little Irish experience and so found themselves strangers in a strange land, disliked and alien. Their headaches were worsened by the defiant existence of a rival continentally-trained episcopate who held identical titles.

**“Headaches were worsened by the defiant existence of a rival continentally-trained episcopate who held identical titles”**

The bishops appointed by Rome were locals, sons of the well-connected, who were supported by voluntary contributions and free to work in the towns that counted. Moreover many of the old cities like Waterford and Limerick possessed chartered liberties which allowed corporations to hamper the state church if they chose – and some chose to do so.

Most spectacularly of all, the Old English, descended from the Norman settlers, overwhelmingly decided to try to remain loyal to the Crown and to the Holy See at the same time.

Theirs is another story. The moral of this part of the story is that what ended by working well in England often backfired in Ireland. Elizabeth I's achievement was the creation of a church "which looked Catholic and sounded

Protestant". Her Church of England worked out to be a national majority but her Church of Ireland a mainly settler minority.

Even dissolution of the monasteries and nunneries, the greatest fissure in English religious life, which did so much to secure aristocratic and moneyed support for Henry VIII's policies, played out in almost farcical reverse on this side of the water.

By the end of Henry VIII's reign in 1547 only 55% of Ireland's 140 monasteries and 40% of about 200 mendicant houses had been suppressed. Donegal friary, for example, a key Franciscan house, kept functioning up into the early 1600s – more than 60 years after its official 'close-by' date!

By the 1570s, Dubliners were actually siphoning off the profits from the dissolved monastery lands that they had been granted to pay for the upkeep of the new Catholic seminary clerics. 'Massing' priests in the Pale area were often better off than the established church incumbents. Here, at least, the Pope did better from dissolution than the king.

## Temptation

There can be a temptation to ask when it was 'all over' for the project of creating a Protestant Ireland. Many people, especially in the sectarian heat of the 19th-Century, tried to argue that the Irish were incapable of becoming Protestant. It was never 'all over', of course. If it had been there would be no Protestant churches today. But the Englishness of Ireland's reforma-

tion was critical.

Timing too – as ever – was also critical. England ended up with a vigorous church that mixed Henry VIII's state-sponsored schism with a Calvinist theology which took firm root during Elizabeth I's long reign, but attempted religious change in Ireland took place against a backdrop of warfare, vast confiscations of land, and multiple plantations.

Indeed, all of the big things that historians point to as making that Church of England work – Henry's Act of Supremacy (1534), the *Prayer Book* (1559), the 39 Articles (1571), the *Authorised Version of the Bible* (1611) – arrived in Ireland at differing dates and into very different conditions.

To put it starkly: none of them, none at all, were designed or intended for Irish conditions.

Martin Luther made services in languages people spoke and understood the key to his reformation. Here, given the official commitment to anglicisation and a long tradition of seeing Irish as barbarous, translations of scripture and service books were long delayed.

While a brief catechism in Irish Gaelic was issued in 1567 there was no New Testament until 1602, no *Common Prayer Book* until 1608, and no Old Testament until 1685. This compares woefully with Wales where the Welsh-speaking state church succeeded.

**“Martin Luther made services in languages people spoke and understood the key to his reformation”**

By contrast, the Gaelic typeface in the exile Irish college at Louvain stamped out Bonabhentura Ó hEoghusa's uncompromisingly counter-reformation *Teagas Críosaíde* (catechism), Flaithe Ó Maolconaire's *Desiderius*, which was based on a popular Spanish devotional text and Aodh MacAingil's tract on confession *Scáthán Shacramuinte na Aithridhe*, which was based on the teaching on the 14th session of the Council of Trent.

So, as it happened, the church with the Latin liturgy would do the bulk of its pasto-

ral work in the Gaelic tongue. Irish (Europe's oldest written vernacular) was far from being an ebbing tide. It would fuel an ebulliently Catholic piety that drew deeply on tradition and cultivated a new type of patriotism.

Tradition was not just on the tongue, it was also in the eye of the beholder. In June 1580 the Church of Ireland Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, Marmaduke Middleton, complained that "the windows and walls of the churches are still full of images. They will not deface them, and I dare not for fear of tumult". Official iconoclasm more or less began and ended in 1540-41 and focused only on a few high profile relics such as the Bachall Ísu in Christchurch and the image of Our Lady of Trim.

### Worship

The old medieval fabric of worship remained intact in many parish churches for many years. As late as 1631 there were parish churches in the Dublin diocese still in use for Mass. Even the dead began to declare allegiance as burials switched to ruined abbeys and friaries. The living openly crowded around holy wells even at the very walls of Dublin, the royal capital. In the heart of cities 'Mass

houses' were opulently kitted out, barely discreet.

On St Stephen's Day 1629 raids on a religious house on Cook street ended with Lancelot Bulkeley, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, and a detachment of musketeers bolting for the Castle under a hail of stones from furious worshippers.

### “The gallows also became a venue for display of sectarian sentiment”

Catholicism could never become 'old-time' religion in Ireland because it never went away, not even for a little. Unlike England the pre-Reformation medieval church was neither phased out nor obliterated. The result was that old late medieval ways persisted long enough to be transformed into new Tridentine ways. Yet the majority did more than 'keep the faith' – they created, over time, an equation of 'Ireland' and 'Catholic'.

Martyrdom made its depressing return to these islands in the 16th and 17th Centuries. When Bishop Conor O'Devaney was executed in 1612 at Oxmanstown in Dublin, thousands turned

out to watch his procession to the gallows and in doing so expressed their hostility to the government's religious policies.

The authorities were powerless to stop the open rush for relics – the inverse of England where the crowds were inclined to mock and Catholics were careful to stay quiet. These new martyr cults became a badge of orthodoxy for both Catholics in Ireland and the thousands in exile abroad.

### Choices

The gallows also became a venue for display of sectarian sentiment. On November 18, 1581 the Nugents or 'Baltinlass' rebels approached the scaffold reciting the Ave Maria. When approached by Thomas Jones, Church of Ireland minister, they shouted "vade satana, vade satana, vade post me satana" (get behind me Satan).

Once the majority of people had made their choices in the 1560s and 1570s there were very few conversions either way as sectarian identity froze out religious fluidity. Irish Protestants were saturated with the apocalyptic anti-Catholicism of their English origins. They thought the Pope was the Antichrist.

At about the same time many Catholics in Ireland began to express an anti-Protestantism which insisted on these very same English origins. In his entry in the *Annals of the Four Masters* for 1537 the Franciscan Mícheál Ó Cléirigh noted: "A heresy and new error sprang up in England through pride, vain-glory, avarice and lust... so that the men of England went into opposition to the Pope and Rome and they also appointed bishops for themselves."

Here is a verse from the late 1570s:

"An chliar-sa anois tig anall  
Ciar dhall ar a ndeachaidh  
ceo,  
ní mó leo muire ná dog,  
dar by God ní rachaidh leo"

"These clergymen who have come from the Other side – blind clergy enveloped in Fog, respect a dog more than Mary. And, By God, they shall not get away with it."

The same poet called on Ireland to resist Captain Luther and Captain Calvin through adherence to 'General' St Patrick and so to avoid becoming an inferior replica of England. Everywhere in Europe – whether among Prot-

estants or Catholics – rhymes and songs played a key part in moulding popular religious feeling. So in this country those few Gaelic clerics who did conform such as Maol Muire Mac Craith (Miler McGrath), Archbishop of Cashel from 1571-1622, invited particular poetic spleen:

"You empty, befogged churchmen, you shall live in hell;  
Whilst Mary's clergy shall flourish fruitfully, high up in God's heaven  
Maol-without-Mary you are a fool. You journey not towards heaven.  
A Maol-without-Mass, a Maol-without-canonical hours is a  
Maol destined for hell with its savage pain  
An archbishop and his wife, and a suffragan of unclean Life, who breaks the fast and burns statues, shall have only bitter  
Fire for ever and ever"

This is not easy language. These are the bitter words from a society where the state had tried – and failed – to determine religious allegiance. Almost everything that ultimately made state reform in England a success – the language, the old ecclesiastical structures, the law,

the towns, the aristocracy and gentry, the lawyers, the habits of obedience – had the opposite effect in Ireland.

The Church of Ireland was saddled from the start with a policy that insisted on anglicising Ireland just as much as preaching the Gospel. An evangelical reformed Irish-speaking church was not really attempted at all in 16th- and 17th-Century Ireland.

Something else happened though, something unexpected. The pressures created by trying to operate an English reformation on this side of the Irish Sea unintentionally helped create a vision of an Ireland that had not existed before. That vision was of Ireland as a Catholic kingdom whose inhabitants were Catholics who held obedience to Rome as vital to their existence.

The really unexpected fruit of Henry VIII's reformation – a belief that to be Irish was to be Catholic – would have a long and troubled future ahead of it.

**John McCafferty** is a member of the School of History at UCD, where he is Director of the Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute, and is Chairman of the Irish Manuscripts Commission.

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# Remembering the

Martyrdom was a central – and complex – part of the Irish Reformation experience, writes **Alan Ford**

It's hard to escape the tradition of political martyrdom in Ireland. The litany of names, from Wolfe Tone to Patrick Pearse to Bobby Sands, is commemorated annually at Bodenstown and on the gable ends of houses in the Falls Road. But the religious martyrs of Ireland are, surprisingly, less well known.

Martyrdom, of course, is a hallowed Christian tradition from the earliest days – “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church” is the old cliché – with the various horrible deaths recorded in the extensive books of martyrs – the martyrologies. But in Ireland and England, unusually, the early Church was unpersecuted, leading to a severe shortage of martyrs.

It was not till the 16th-Century Reformation, and the fatal competition between Protestant and Catholic, that the martyr-count rose dramatically in the two countries. In England, Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth between them executed around 300 Catholics; Queen Mary put to death over 250 Protestants between 1553 and 1558. In Ireland lists of martyrs began to be compiled from the 1590s, as the toll of Catholic deaths at the hand of the English government rose during the sixteenth century's rising tide of violence and persecution: in all, between 1529 and 1691 well over 260 martyrs are recorded.

The tragedy, of course, is that, unlike in the early Church where Christians were being killed by an uncomprehending Roman Empire, they were now being put to death by fellow Christians. “Truth purchaseth hatred”, as one contemporary English Catholic writer put it. The mutually conflicting truths of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation doubled the hatred.

## Emperors

Though each side sought to preserve appearances by insisting that those that they were executing were not martyrs, but heretics, blasphemers or traitors, the horrifying reality was that Christians were once more being put to death for religion, just as in the days of the early Church, but this time not by pagan monsters such as Nero, but at the hands of



Engraving showing a composite of the 1612 executions of Bishop Conor O'Devany and Fr Patrick O'Loughran, and in the foreground the 1584 torture and death of Archbishop Dermot O'Hurley.

emperors, monarchs and states who claimed to be Christian.

With terrifying logic, each side of the confessional divide claimed exclusive ownership of the title martyr. Catholic martyrs, as a result, now vied with their Protestant rivals to prove by their zeal and bravery the rectitude of their cause.

The deaths, often painful, gruesome and harrowing, can make for difficult reading. The most celebrated of the Elizabethan martyrs, Archbishop Dermot O'Hurley of Cashel, was arrested by the Dublin authorities in 1583. Suspected of being a Spanish agent, he was tortured by having his legs boiled in oil till the flesh came away from the bones: he remained resolute.

After a hurried trial by martial law, on June 24, 1584 he was executed on the gallows with a makeshift noose of bound twigs.

One of the few female martyrs, Margaret Ball (*née* Bermingham), was the widow of a Dublin Mayor, who was arrested on the orders of her Protestant son, and imprisoned in Dublin Castle for her Faith, where she died after three years in 1584.

Of those recorded by

contemporary martyrologists, most came from the south of Ireland, especially Munster, under a third were lay people, and of the clergy, most were from religious orders, with a particularly large number of Franciscans. Most of the recorded martyrdoms took place during the last three decades of the 16th Century and the 1640s and 1650s.

**“There is no doubt that the process of creating martyrs does intermingle narrative and history”**

We tend to assume that the process of martyrdom is fairly straightforward: godly martyrs are killed, their deaths are recorded, they are informally venerated, and in due course the Church formally beatifies them. But as with much of history, the facts of martyrdom can vary in the telling, often being intermingled with fiction.

Indeed, Candida Moss has recently shocked many people by arguing in her book *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom* that many of the early martyr

stories were pious exaggerations, even inventions.

The accounts that have been religiously handed down from the early Church as history, as, indeed, moving and inspiring as examples of Christian fortitude, but they often strain the credulity of the unpius historian.

There is no doubt that the process of creating martyrs does intermingle narrative and history. John Foxe, who immortalised the Marian martyrs in his best-selling *Book of Martyrs*, was both a good historian and a consummate storyteller.

One Irish martyrologist, concerned at the lack of martyrs in his Trinitarian order and the shortage of recorded martyrs in Ireland during Henry VIII's reign, even went so far as to invent a massacre of Trinitarians in Dublin in 1539.

It was only relatively late, in 1625, that the Papacy formalised the procedures for beatification – with an elaborate quasi-judicial inquiry or ‘process’ looking into the martyr's or saint's cause.

Martyrdom was of course a special case. For saints it was necessary to establish that the candidate had led a life of heroic

virtue. But martyrdom was by its very nature more dramatic and less complicated – all was focused upon the heroic death. But the very ease with which it could be recognised created certain tensions between Church and people, as unofficial, local martyrs often gained wide followings without ever receiving official sanction.

This was what was happening in Ireland from the 1590s onwards, as a series of priests and bishops began to collect together accounts of the heroic death of Catholic clergy and laity, beginning with the Wexford Jesuit, John Howlin, who, around 1590 compiled a list of 46 Irish people who had died for the Faith, and continuing with the Bishop of Down and Connor, Conor O'Devany who compiled a martyr's index of bishops and priests who had died since 1585.

These two works were expanded by David Rother, the Bishop of Ossory, who in 1619 published a list of 89 martyrs. Building on these works, the number of recorded Irish martyrs grew, and as the 17th Century progressed, they were increasingly incorporated into European Catholic martyrologies, particularly those of the religious orders.

# Irish martyrs



Statues outside St Mary's Pro-Cathedral of the Dublin Martyrs, Mayor Francis Taylor and his grandmother-in-law Mayoress Margaret Ball, both of whom were beatified by St John Paul II in 1992 as part of a representative group of martyrs from the 16th and 17th Centuries. Photo: William Murphy. Right: Oliver Plunkett as painted by Edward Luttrell.



As with political martyrs, religious martyrs provided an important rallying point for the faithful. In late 16th- and early 17th-Century Ireland, as the English crown established control for the first time over the whole country following a series of bloody wars, the previously antagonistic native Irish and Anglo-Norman populations were increasingly drawn together by their common religion and the idea of an Irish Catholic identity. The unofficial martyrologies reflected this new political reality, transforming what had previously been the random casualties of state violence into religious icons, symbols of faith and fatherland.

The martyrs became a battleground, as the Protestant state sought to portray them as traitors to the monarch, agents of foreign powers, stirring up unrest and participating in rebellion, whilst the Church emphasised their purely spiritual aims, seeking to bring pastoral and sacramental comfort to the persecuted Catholics of Ireland.

The way in which the public theatre of martyrdom could bring together the Irish Catholic people was most evident in the execution of the aged Franciscan bishop, Conor O'Devany. Accused of treason because of his association with Hugh O'Neill, he was sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered in 1612. As O'Devany went through the streets of Dublin to his execution sympathetic crowds gathered – “such a multitude as the like was never seen before at any execution about Dublin”, according to one chronicler – going down on their knees as he passed.

Even a hostile Protestant observer, Barnaby Rich, had to acknowledge the pious fervour:

“The execution had no sooner taken off the bishop's head but the townsmen of Dublin began to flock about him...some cut away all the hair from the head, which they preserved for a relic; some others gave practice to steal the head away...”

“Now when he began to quarter the body, the women thronged about him, and happy was she that could get but her handkerchief dipped in the blood of the traitor; and the body being dissevered into four quarters, they neither left finger or toe, but they cut them

“The way in which the public theatre of martyrdom could bring together the Irish Catholic people was most evident in the execution of the aged Franciscan bishop, Conor O'Devany”

off and carried them away... and some others who could get no holy monuments that appertained to his person, with their knives they shaved off chips from the hallowed gallows; neither could they omit the halter with which he was hanged, but it was rescued for holy uses.”

In short, by the second decade of the 17th Century, the cult of martyrdom was fully established in Dublin. The execution of a native Irish bishop was able to attract a large and sympathetic crowd in the very centre of the English presence in Ireland. The popular response, the way the *fama martyrii* spread throughout Ireland, and the publicity accorded to O'Devany's death across Europe, meant that the official efforts to define Catholic martyrs as traitors had failed.

It was not till the wars of the 1640s and the arrival of Cromwell that religious persecution and martyrdom resumed on a large scale, with a further 126 deaths being recorded by the martyrologists.

The final Irish Catholic martyrdoms by Protestant hands occurred in 1691, preceded by perhaps the most famous martyr of all, in 1681, Archbishop Oliver Plunkett of Armagh, an innocent victim of the Popish Plot.

Despite the efforts of Rothe and his fellow martyrologists, the cause for the Irish martyrs never got under way at Rome, possibly for fear of exacerbating the position of Irish Catholics by offending the British government. It was not till the resurgence in Catholic confidence in the 19th Century, following emancipation in 1829, that interest grew once again in the fate of early modern Irish martyrs.

Cardinal Cullen and that formidable historian, Cardinal Moran, took up the case. A Jesuit, Denis Murphy, was put in compiling the evidence for the martyrs' cause, and in 1896 published *Our Martyrs: A Record of Those who Suffered for the Catholic Faith Under the Penal Laws in Ireland* giving details of 264 individual martyrdoms, along with massacres of groups of martyrs, dating from 1535 to 1691.

With the support of Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin, work continued into the early decades

of the 20th Century, and in 1917 formal approval was given by Rome for the introduction of the causes of 260 Irish martyrs.

The speed with which this cause proceeded was, however, very slow. The obvious contrast is with that of the English Catholic martyrs.

As early as the reign of Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) 63 English martyrs were informally recognised, though they were not formally beatified till the late 20th Century. Pope Pius XI beatified a further 108 English martyrs in 1929. In 1970 Pope Paul VI made 40 English and Welsh martyrs saints, and in 1987 Pope John Paul II beatified a further 85.

By contrast it was not till 1920 that Oliver Plunkett was beatified, and not till 1975 that he was canonised, the first new Irish saint for over 700 years. And it was only in 1992 that 17 Irish early-modern martyrs were beatified, including Dermot O'Hurley, Margaret Ball, and Conor O'Devany.

Part of the reason for the delay in promoting the cause of the Irish martyrs was the complexity of their cases, and the shortage of resources to conduct the necessary historical research. In the complex politics of early-modern Ireland,

distinguishing between political and religious deaths was often difficult, and in the case of some of those recorded by the early martyrologists, such as the Earl of Desmond, religious motivation was not always clear.

It was not till 1975, when Archbishop Dermot Ryan established a Diocesan Commission for Causes, led by the two leading historians, Patrick Corish and Benignus Millett, that substantial progress was made.

The Commission selected 12 causes, which included 17 individuals, as a representative sample, including bishops, clergy – secular and regular – and lay people, male and female. The case was submitted in 1988 and approved in 1991, with the 17 Irish martyrs being beatified by Pope John Paul II in St Peter's Square on 27 September 1992.

The Irish martyrs had finally been officially recognised and acknowledged.

Alan Ford is Professor Emeritus of Theology at the University of Nottingham and with Mark Empey and Miriam Moffatt a co-editor of *The Church of Ireland and its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity* (Four Courts Press).

“Pope Pius XI beatified a further 108 English martyrs in 1929”

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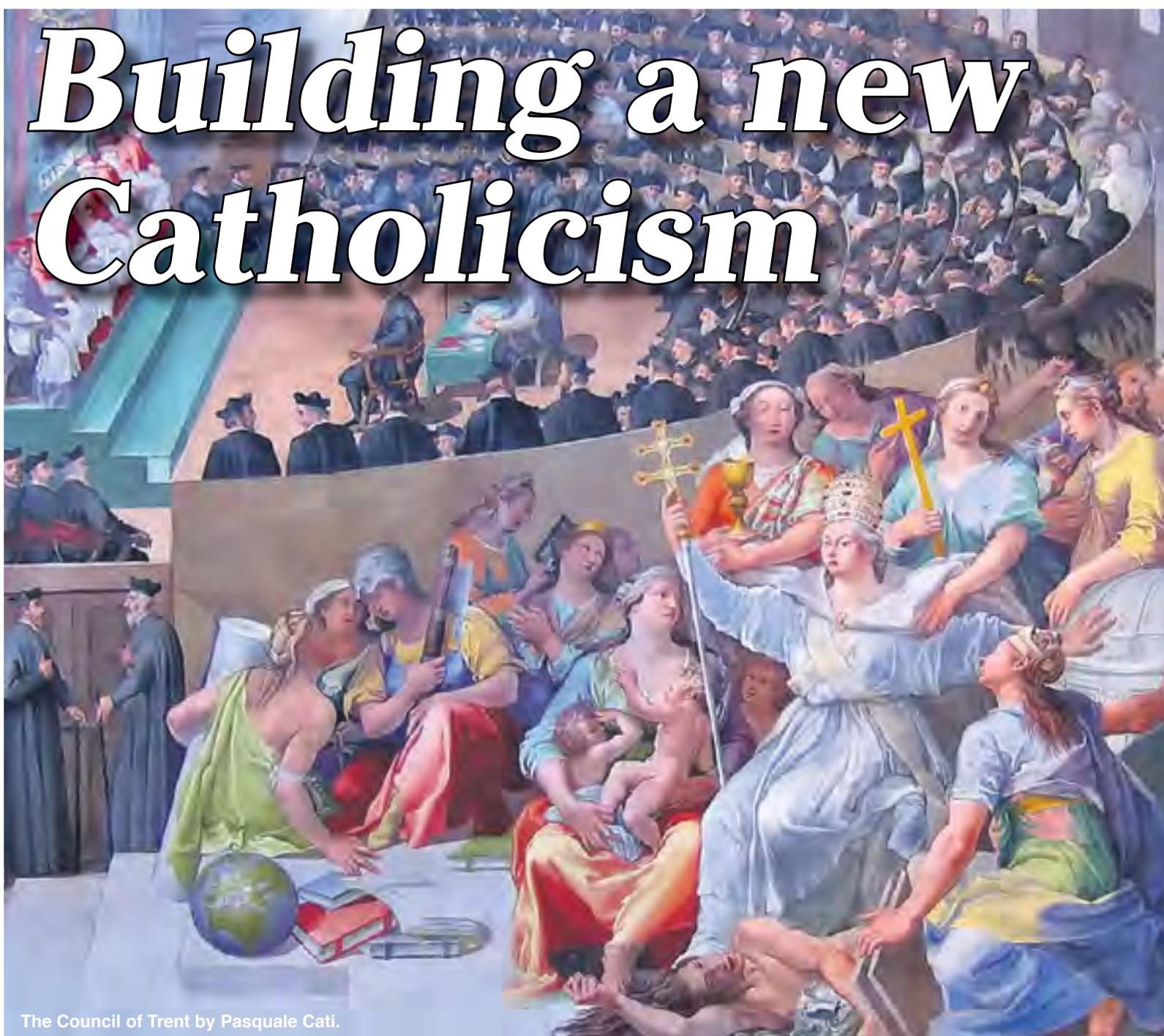
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# Building a new Catholicism



The Council of Trent by Pasquale Cati.



The Catholic Reformation entailed coercion as well as wide-ranging reform projects, writes **Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin**

**F**ew terms in historical writing have attracted more dissatisfaction than 'the Counter-Reformation'. Among the more recent attempts to formulate an alternative are 'Catholic Reformation', 'Catholic Renewal' or the broad catch-all of 'Early Modern Catholicism'.

Each of these designations depart from the conviction that the changes which occurred in 16th- and 17th-Century Catholicism were not simply reactions to the emergence of various forms of Protestantism in the wake of Martin Luther's break with Rome. Rather, they represented something more profound, of a much longer duration and not confined to Europe, which cannot be considered as merely reactive.

The term 'Catholic Reformation', for instance, builds on the insights of German historiography, in particular, that similar developments occurred both in that portion of the continent which remained in communion with Rome and in Protestant Europe, so that in many respects 17th-Century Catholicism came to resemble its reformed counterparts more than it did its medieval ancestor.

Yet the term 'Counter-Reformation' continues to hold considerable currency among non-specialists and it has the indisputable merit of focusing attention on the massive stimulus which the fracturing of European Christendom gave to the Roman Church in its future development.

## Evolution

The 'Holy Trinity' of the historiography of the Counter-Reformation are the Council of Trent, the rise of new religious orders – most notably the Jesuits, and the reforming

Popes. All were indisputably important in the evolution of Early Modern Catholicism.

The Council of Trent was of course neither the first nor the last major ecumenical council of the Church but the interpretation of its decrees was to be profoundly influential. The emphasis here is consciously on the interpretation because, to a significant degree, what was decided at Trent was less important than what Trent was believed to represent – some of its decrees were observed much more than others.

Many of those present at the council saw it as something approaching a failure and it was actually the subsequent generation which helped to create the legend of the council as a decisive moment and as a definitive formulation of Catholicism. In this regard, the work of the late 16th-Century Jesuit theologian, Robert Bellarmine, was of great significance.

His *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei Adversus Hujus*

**“Trent articulated a vision of pastoral reform which aimed above all at improving the quality of the clergy in terms of their education”**

*Temporis Haereticos* (Arguments against the heretics of the current time about the controversies of the Christian faith) provided a detailed working-out of the theological positions articulated at Trent and an exhaustive defence of their legitimacy that helped to create an enormous sense of intellectual confidence within Catholicism.

Bellarmino's work contributed to a sense among Catholics that their Protestant opponents had been put on the defensive, and to some extent they were correct.

Trent, which closed in 1563, is generally credited with two principal accomplishments: in its doctrinal decrees it drew a clear line between an official Catholic position – including a defence of the traditional Latin Bible (Vulgate text) as free from significant error, the interpretative role of the Church, seven Sacraments, the intercession of saints and the role of works in salvation – and that of the Protestant reformers.

The council was dominated by Spanish and Italian representatives and one of the effects was to confirm that

there was to be no possibility of accommodation with the different theological positions which had been consolidated north of the Alps over the previous decades. It thus protected central aspects of the traditional doctrine which had developed in the Latin Church over centuries, although at the expense of closing the door on the possibility of compromise and agreement with ideas which were now pronounced as anathema and deadly heresy.

## Quality

In tandem with this, Trent articulated a vision of pastoral reform which aimed above all at improving the quality of the clergy in terms of their education, their personal life and their residence and activity in their ministry, with the expectation that this would have dramatic effects on the lives, morals, and chances of salvation of those within their spiritual care.

Those who enjoyed the fruits of a benefice, such as a parish, were now expected to discharge its duties or at the very minimum to use the revenues to ensure that those dependent

upon it for ministry received their due from a substitute. In many respects this represented merely a re-articulation of received wisdom and it was only slowly and unevenly adopted but the long-term effects were profound.

The Jesuits, ironically, were not originally conceived as a teaching order although this was arguably the area in which they were to make their greatest contribution.

By the second decade of the 17th Century, Jesuit numbers stood at over 13,000 personnel (a close to four-fold increase on the situation in 1563 when the Council of Trent actually closed) and they boasted 400 colleges and a common mode of teaching which was to prove hugely influential in the formation of the Catholic elite, both secular and lay.

But neither in its distinctive spirituality, which had clear roots in medieval Catholicism, nor in its organisation, which was heavily influenced by Ignatius Loyola's personal background, was the Society of Jesus simply a reaction to the Reformation even if it was fated to become the bogeyman

St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits.



of the European Protestant imagination.

The common emphasis on the Jesuits tends to ignore the vital importance, frequently exceeding that of the Society, which other religious orders continued to have, in particular the families of friars such as the Franciscans and Dominicans.

In terms of the reforming Popes, arguably one of the most important changes of the Early Modern period was the manner in which the papacy became an advocate and champion of reform rather than its greatest opponent.

Among the reasons why an ecumenical council of the Church did not meet until 1545 was the fear in Rome that it would actually intensify the attack on papal power. In the event, the papacy assumed authority over the council's legacy and interpretation and used this to intensify the monarchical character of the Church's leadership.

But this line of reform certainly did not stop with the eccentric Franciscan Pope, Sixtus V (1585-90). His successors continued to see patronisation of the implementation of what they saw as the core of Tridentine legacy as a key aspect of their function.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the beginning of the 1560s, European Catholicism was in notable disarray. Trent had been stalled since 1552. In

Germany the Peace of Augsburg (1555) had confirmed that the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, was unable to re-impose Catholicism in northern Germany which also opened the way to the consolidation of Lutheranism in Scandinavia.

In Poland, state support for Church sentences of excommunication had been withdrawn creating a platform for Protestant growth.

**“Only in the Italian and Iberian peninsulas...could the Roman Church be seen as safe from an internal Protestant challenge”**

Even in Habsburg dominions, different strands of reformed belief were spreading like wildfire so that Catholicism was being reduced to minority status in Austria, Royal Hungary and Bohemia. Elizabeth I's accession in England in 1558 opened the way to the loss of Britain, and apparently Ireland.

The number of Huguenots was mushrooming in France and in 1559 the sudden death of King Henri II initiated decades of political chaos which allowed the Protestant party to grow further in strength and create a formidable military capacity.

In the Netherlands, Philip II's attempts to reinvigorate the

Catholic Church to better repress the spread of Protestantism was on the throes of igniting an 80-year conflict which created a Calvinist-dominated Dutch republic.

Throughout, the menace of the Ottoman empire, which had swallowed important Catholic outposts such as Albania and the Kingdom of Bosnia in the preceding centuries, continued to grow, cementing its position in central Hungary while its naval power threatened the entire southern flank of European Catholicism (yet effectively posing little or no danger to the Protestant north).

Only in the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, both politically dominated by Spain, could the Roman Church be seen as safe from an internal Protestant challenge and the possibility seemed to threaten that Catholicism might be reduced to simply the religion of the Spanish crown.

The next three-quarters of a century, however, were to witness a dramatic recovery and this can be seen as the central period of Counter-Reformation. Much of it was saturated in violence. In Ireland, it was the state-building wars of the late Tudors which so alienated the population that they rejected Elizabeth's Church. In most of the continent though, violence and repression were to be among the Catholic weapons of choice although, of course, it was not merely the Church of Rome which practiced religious war.

The whole might of the Spanish empire was poured against the Dutch resulting in the end in the partition of the Netherlands into the Spanish-retained Catholic south (eventually Belgium) and the Dutch Republic. Ironically, at the beginning of the conflict, the north had actually been the area with fewest Protestants.

### Claim to the throne

Decades of often vicious internal war in France were finally resolved when the leader of the Huguenot party, Henri of Navarre, who had the strongest claim to the throne, abjured Protestantism. Crucially, Pope Clement VIII resisted Spanish pressure and accepted his reconciliation with the Church.

This paved the way for European Catholicism to be rebalanced between two great royal families, the Bourbons of France and the Habsburgs. From the 1590s, the Habsburgs began a policy of forcible re-Catholicisation in Austria

**“Briefly in the 1620s, it seemed in Rome that the entirety of Protestant Europe was on the verge of being reclaimed for the Church of Rome as Habsburg armies marched to the Baltic”**

in which Emperor Ferdinand II played a leading role.

Following the military conquest of Bohemia in 1619, the same policies were introduced there. Those who refused to conform to Catholicism were forced to sell over their property and go into exile, as tens of thousands did. Converts, on the other hand, were treated very generously.

In Hungary (which included much of modern-day Croatia and Slovakia), because of the Turkish threat the dynasty could not be so severe but instituted a successful policy of blandishment which inspired many conversions and recreated the framework of a Catholic kingdom.

### Important aspect

Similarly, in Poland, the position of the Roman Church strengthened steadily without overt persecution of Protestants but as the kingdom faced threats from Orthodox Muscovy (Russia), the Muslim Ottoman Empire and Lutheran Sweden, Catholicism became an increasingly important aspect of Polish national consciousness.

Briefly in the 1620s, it seemed in Rome that the entirety of Protestant Europe was on the verge of being reclaimed for the Church of Rome as Habsburg armies marched to the Baltic and Charles I of England married a Catholic princess, but Ferdinand II overreached himself and the English monarchy did not become a vehicle for re-Catholicisation. In 1635 the Peace of Prague re-stabilised the religious border in Germany and Catholic France went openly to war with the Habsburgs.

What forces allowed for this remarkable recovery? It is important not to underplay the role of coercion. Catholic states, with some exceptions such as Poland and Royal Hungary, persecuted heretics (just as states such as England and Denmark proscribed Catholicism).

But repression was never the whole story. A huge educational and mission endeavour underpinned the Counter-Reformation much of which was consciously designed to inoculate the faithful against the seductions of Protestant belief. Clerical training and education improved dramatically and they in turn provided a high quality of consciously Catholic schooling for the European elite. Catholicism developed a highly varied panoply of devotional practices which reached out to the simple as much through the senses and the emotions as the mind while offering the educated a much richer theological and spiritual diet.

In effect, while maintaining much of its medieval inheritance, Catholicism

responded to many of the criticisms of the reformers (and their Catholic predecessors) and like the Protestant confessions became focused on the project of how to create a new and, from their perspective, better type of Christian.

Remodelled confraternities, a wide literature ranging from simple catechisms to such texts as Francois de Sales's enormously popular *Introduction to the Devout Life*, religious theatre and songs, concentrated missions by regular clergy which supplemented much more bureaucratic oversight by the parish clergy of morals and religious practice, pilgrimages and processions, devotions such as Loreto, the 40 Hours and the Child of Prague, all became instruments in the transformation of spiritual life of the general population.



St Robert Bellarmine.

So successful were some of the devotional texts such as de Sales's *Introduction* or Robert Persons's *Christian Directorie* that they ended up being translated (with some cosmetic alterations to disguise their Catholic origin) for a wide readership in Protestant Europe.

The consolidation of Catholicism was also helped by the contemporary splintering of Protestantism into various different doctrinal positions which enormously bolstered confidence that the Church of Rome was the only credible candidate with the history and the range to be the institution against which the gates of hell could not prevail.

After the Council of Trent, there was no room for the peaceful negotiation of the reunion of Latin Christianity: the era of the Counter-Reformation instead was one of fierce competition between different brands of Christian belief. And within that context, on a whole variety of levels, Catholicism competed very fiercely indeed.

➊ *Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin is Head of the UCD School of History, and author of Catholic Europe, 1592-1648: Centre and Peripheries (Oxford University Press).*

# Love makes the world go 'round

One of the Reformation's greatest ruptures was its transformation of how Christians saw relations between the living and the dead: for those who embraced the ideas of Luther and the other Reformers, it was no longer possible to ask the saints in Heaven to pray for them, while there would be no point in praying for the souls of the dead.

Partly this was, of course, because the very idea of Purgatory as a final place of purification had been dismissed as unbiblical, its implicit scriptural roots ignored, rejected, or even cut away. Partly too, however, it lay in a denial that the Catholic belief in the 'Treasury of Merit', through which the good works of Christians and above all Christ himself could be employed to help others, was in any sense biblical.

For Gary Anderson, Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Notre Dame, and author of *Sin: A History* and *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, claims to this effect can hardly be further off the mark.

"The notion of a Treasury of Merit is found both in Rabbinic Judaism and in early Christianity," he says. "They didn't borrow it one from the other so how do both of them have this idea if it's not biblical?"

The origins of this "deeply biblical" idea lie, he says, in such Second Temple Jewish Scriptures as the books of Tobit and Ben Sira, the latter perhaps better known as Sirach or Ecclesiasticus – which were excluded from the Bible by Martin Luther and other Reformers.

Claiming that the after-effects of this idea are strewn throughout the New Testament, Prof. Anderson says that especially since the Enlightenment, "There has been a deep 'forgetting' of the scriptural origins and the prominence of this motif in Christianity."

## Metaphor

However, he says, "when one moves from the vault of the Hebrew bible itself to the Hebrew of the Second Temple period and the Aramaic of the second Temple period – in other words the mother tongue of Jesus – the dominant metaphor for sin, culpability etc is sin as a debt, which is obvious from the Lord's Prayer".

Jesus doesn't say "forgive us our debts" in the Our Father for no reason or as a metaphor he made up on the spot, Prof. Anderson explains: he's simply reproducing the way he spoke on an everyday basis.

"As soon as you have this notion

The idea of indulgences has profoundly biblical roots, **Greg Daly** writes



that sin is a debt, then virtuous activities are thought to be a counter-balance to that and they're accrued as merits or credits," he says. "The question then is where do they accrue? Where do the debts accrue? In Heaven?"

A key text underpinning this conceit in early Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity was Proverbs 10:2, he says, which was read in the New Testament period as contrasting earthly treasuries with treasuries funded by charity that deliver one from death. This set up an opposition, he points out, between acquiring earthly wealth and acquiring heavenly wealth.

"Earthly wealth was useless. That's why Jesus tells the rich young man in that famous parable in the New Testament that if he wants eternal life he needs to give his wealth to the poor, then he'll have a treasury in heaven, then to come and follow him.

"That comes right out of the theology of this proverb," he says, pointing also to the parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21, which likewise contrasts earthly and heavenly riches, warning against hoarding the former and urging an effort to become rich in God's eyes, which was done, it was believed in New Testament times, through charity to the poor.

**"The treasury of merits is nothing other than those treasuries that are the result of one good work"**

"It's deeply biblical, it's all built on the proverb that I just mentioned, especially the way it's read in the book of Tobit and Ben Sira, and the treasury of merits follows from that," he continues, explaining: "The Treasury of Merit is nothing other than those treasuries that are the result of one good work and not generally any good work: for the Church the good work was particularly giving your money to the poor."

When Luther published his 95 theses, Prof. Anderson says, his concern was not with indulgences in themselves. "What he doesn't like is the Pope's proposal that funding the restoration of St Peter's is

going to count whereas for Luther what counted was giving the money to the poor.

"That's the beef he has with Rome," he stresses, "building what will be one of the most spectacular buildings in the Western world over the next 100 years for Luther is at variance with the traditional way that the Church has understood the accumulation of a divine treasury."

**"In Luther's day, indulgences could be sold, and while there were abuses in this, the process wasn't in itself quite as mechanical or cynical as often portrayed"**

For the early Church, the Treasury of Merit was based on those specific actions that involved good deeds for the poor, and upon which our eternal salvation rested. The separation of the sheep and goats in the Last Judgment scene of Matthew 25 clearly maps out the importance of this, he says.

Much of this has been sidelined in the modern world, he observes, pointing out that the important concepts of altruism and social justice have obscured the foundational Christian call to imitate Christ. The exclusion of the books of Tobit and Ben Sira from Protestant Bibles and theology have further driven out this concept, removing the underpinnings from key New Testament passages.



Prof. Gary Anderson.



The Dominican friar John Tetzel, whose selling of indulgences to help raise funds for the building of the new St Peter's Basilica in Rome inspired Luther's challenge to indulgences.

In Luther's day, indulgences could be sold, and while there were abuses in this, the process wasn't in itself quite as mechanical or cynical as often portrayed. "One gave money to the poor because it was good in and of itself," Prof. Anderson says, explaining how the Church believed it could draw down from the Treasury of Merit to help those who had helped the poor. "It was the way in which the Church helped the poor, and the Church was happy for you to do such and as repayment for such they'd they'd give you 50 years off purgatory."

## Unmerited love

Even a few years ago, Pope Benedict XVI expressed concerns in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* ('God is love') about an ethics that would completely separate an unmerited love for the other with one that benefits the self.

"The reason why I as an individual will benefit from helping the poor isn't so much that God has put that reward

in place to encourage me to do such but rather the reason why I benefit is that is how the universe is made," Prof. Anderson explains, recalling how in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, charity is what moves the stars.

"For modern readers that just sounds like a poetic nicety but Dante really believed that, he really thought that love was a governing agency within the world," he says.

Our post-Reformation disenchanting world can seem a mechanical universe of impersonal forces, where love is simply an accidental thing that happens between two persons, but the pre-modern world view was completely different.

"The world was driven by love and it was incumbent upon the Church to instruct people about it," he says, continuing, "the world doesn't look that way but that is in fact how it is. So, that's why I benefit from acting charitably, because I'm tapping into the very way the world is organised."

Pope Francis' praise for Luther continues the work of his predecessor, writes **Greg Daly**

**P**ope Francis' praise for Martin Luther ahead of and during his visit to Lund last year – notably when he said that Luther's intentions and his understanding of justification were not mistaken – may have sounded startling to some ears, but as so often with the Pope, he was simply building on his predecessors' work.

Formal Catholic-Lutheran ecumenical dialogue began in 1964 as a fruit of the Second Vatican Council, which a small number of Lutherans had attended as observers. There they heard, for instance, Strasbourg's Archbishop Léon Elchinger speak of how Catholics owed a debt to non-Catholics for developments in biblical scholarship and of how the Reformation's Protestant communities had highlighted the truth and role of justification by faith in Christianity.

This was a far cry from how Protestants had been spoken of in the First Vatican Council, and augured well for the council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Meetings and dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans have carried on to this day, with one highlight of the process being in November 1983.

That month, in a letter to mark the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, St John Paul II wrote to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, president of the Secretariate for Christian Unity, calling for Catholics to meditate in truth and Christian charity on the Reformation. Of Luther himself, the Pope said his "profound piety that, with burning passion, was driven by questioning on eternal salvation, is clearly delineated".

That a Pope should speak so admiringly of Luther's "profound piety" would have been striking enough; a few weeks later he visited and preached in Rome's Evangelical Lutheran church.

### Understanding

1999 would see a far more dramatic event in the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, with the Church and the Lutheran World Federation proclaiming that they share "a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ".

In this, they addressed

# Taking up Benedict's baton



Pope Benedict XVI is welcomed by the Rev. Nikolaus Schneider, head of the Evangelical Church in Germany, in the former Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. Photo: CNS

one of the key issues of the Reformation, agreeing that "by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping us and calling us to good works".

Subsequently signed in 2006 by the World Methodist Council and this July by the leadership of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the document was recognised as having been made possible by the then Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

**“The young Joseph Ratzinger had read all of Luther's works from before the Reformation”**

Described in 1998 by Wolfgang Huber, president of the Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany and onetime Lutheran Evangelical Bishop of Berlin as "one of the few who really know Luther", Cardinal Ratzinger was clearly someone who had read Luther deeply and been profoundly influenced by him.

Even before entering university the young Joseph Ratzinger had read all of Luther's works from before the Reformation – in 1998 he would urge Protestant interlocutors to "rediscover

the Luther of those years" – and as a seminarian he had sought closer relations with Lutherans.

As a professor in the University of Regensburg in 1976 he said it might be possible to interpret the Augsburg Confession, the first Lutheran declaration of faith, as a Catholic document, and interviewed in 1984, he spoke warmly of the 20th-Century shift, based on serious historical work, in Catholic understandings of Luther. He distinguished between Luther's catechism, songs, and liturgical directives which can be interpreted with his "evangelical churchliness" in mind, and his polemical works, which he said should be read bearing in mind Luther's piety.

Given such familiarity with Luther, it is perhaps unsurprising that the then Cardinal Ratzinger would play an instrumental role in resolving apparently insurmountable difficulties in the joint declaration on justification. As the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's Bishop George Anderson said: "It was Ratzinger who untied the knots – without him we might not have an agreement."

As Pope Benedict XVI in November 2008, he would tell a general audience in Rome that "Luther's phrase 'faith alone' is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in love", and in 2011 the German Pope would dramatically meet in Luther's old Augustinian convent with the Council of the Evangeli-

cal Church in Germany.

"As the Bishop of Rome, it is deeply moving for me to be meeting you here in the ancient Augustinian convent in Erfurt. As we have just heard, this is where Luther studied theology. This is where he celebrated his first Mass," he said, adding that Luther's lifelong grappling with the question of how he could receive God's grace never ceased to make a deep impression on him.

### Spirituality

Recalling how thoroughly Christocentric Luther's whole thinking and spirituality were, he said: "The question: what is God's position towards me, where do I stand before God? – Luther's burning question must once more, doubtless in a new form, become our question too, not an academic question, but a real one."

On the flight to Germany, the Pontiff had been asked about the ecumenical significance of the trip, and had said that "to deepen the unity between Catholics and Evangelicals is essential at this precise moment in history", adding that in this "time of secularism", Christians have the mission of coming together to make present the message of Christ.

It should be clear to all of us, then, that when Pope Francis spoke last year in praise of Luther, appealing for unity in a time of secularism and persecution, he was simply taking the baton from his predecessors, and running with it.

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# AN UNINTENDED



If Luther created our world, he didn't mean to, Brad Gregory tells Greg Daly

**I**t's something of a cliché to say that Martin Luther never intended to create the storm he generated, and that matters took their own momentum, but for Brad Gregory, this could hardly be more true.

"Luther initially was just objecting to what he regarded as excessive promotion and misunderstanding among the laity about indulgences," says Notre Dame University's Dorothy G. Griffin Professor of Early Modern European History. "Indulgences are widespread in late medieval Europe – they are very popular with the laity. It is a myth and a mistake to think this was a clerically-driven scam, nothing but fundraising and pulling the wool over the eyes of the laity. They're the ones in effect who were driving the demand."

Luther, he says, was concerned that indulgences were not well understood and that some indulgence preachers were taking advantage of that lack of understanding to maximise fundraising.

## Reaction

The 95 theses themselves didn't quite spark the Reformation in the way we tend to imagine it, he continues: "It's really the printing of those and the reaction to them that leads to the unexpected enthusiasm on the part of those who had been concerned with reform and long-recognised problems within the Church, on the one hand, and also those who see in the Theses some implicit claims by Luther about what the power of the Pope supposedly is and is not."



An image from the video 'This Changed Everything' and left, Brad Gregory.

**“In the middle of 1517 almost nobody knows who Martin Luther is, and by the middle of 1520 he is the most published author since the invention of the printing press”**

This in turn, he says, becomes a bridge to the deeper and more threatening questions about authority in the Church that defined the controversy from 1518 through 1521.

Printing was key to this. "It's the first mass communications phenomenon in Western history, and a lot of people have drawn analogies – and I think they're helpful ones – between the kind of

revolution in communications that has been a result of our own online and digital environment, over the last say 20 years, and popular print in the 1520s in Germany," he says.

Although printing had been around for over half a century, it had never been leveraged in this way before, Prof. Gregory says, describing it as an innovation of Luther's to put "matters of controversial religious and

theological content into the vernacular language, so that he was encouraging every ordinary person who could read".

Luther's pamphlets reached beyond the literate, he adds, noting how in villages there would usually be somebody who could read who would be called upon to read the pamphlets aloud in the village square.

"There's no question that printing is absolutely crucial, and that's what makes Luther's reputation," he says. "In the middle of 1517 almost nobody knows who Martin Luther is, and by the middle of 1520 he is the most published author since the invention of the printing press. It's an astonishing rise out of nowhere in those terms."

\* \* \* \* \*

Prof. Gregory's latest book, *Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, The Reformation and the Conflicts that Continue to Shape our World* picks up on a central point in his 2011 book *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularised Society* in identifying how the related factors of printing, vernacular literature, and the principle of the private interpretation of Scripture meant that fragmentation was built into the DNA of the Reformation.

"I think this is the key – this is what Luther does and the stand that he takes that ends up being so incredibly consequential. It's not as if Luther's movement is going along for a few years and then suddenly people start to dissent – it's right from the beginning,"

he says, relating how Wittenburg colleagues of Luther such as Andreas Karlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling quickly ran with their own readings of Scripture, taking the Reformation in radical directions of which Luther disapproved. Luther, who had been in protective hiding, rushed back to Wittenburg in spring 1522, and effectively ran Karlstadt out of the town; Zwilling acquiesced to Luther's vision.

"So the emphasis on Scripture Alone proves to be a completely unworkable principle for any sort of unified reform of the Church," Prof. Gregory says, "because it simply displaces the question about authority and interpreting Scripture back to the respective reformers or interpreters who then argue with one another over what turns out to be the divisive points, like the understanding of the Eucharist between Luther and Zwingli, like infant baptism between both of those reformers and all of the groups that collectively then become known as Anabaptists, and so on.

**“It takes a very long time before the conflicts that the Reformation sparks off and fuels settle down”**

"The story of Protestantism is the story of disagreements about what God's word means, who has the authority to say so, and you know 'if I don't like your

# LEGACY



interpretation or my group doesn't, then we're just going to go off on our own and do our own thing," he adds, observing that the problem was spotted at the beginning in some senses, but that with few exceptions they never stepped back and saw that the principle itself was the core problem.

"Those Protestants in the 16th Century who take a step back and say the problem is the principle itself, it just doesn't work – they are the ones who end up either returning or becoming Catholic," he says, remarking, "that's not the typical version."

\* \* \* \* \*

It's important to understand, he says, just how high the stakes were for the Reformers, and why challenges to interpretations were often met so furiously.

"It's not just a kind of distant, aloof, reading of scripture. These guys are not simply interested in interpreting the Bible because they want to know what a particular verse in the Gospel of Luke means," he says.

"This is also intimately connected to their devotional lives, to their experience of what they understand God's grace and salvation to be, to their experience of community and the way in which worship is carried out, and so forth. It's not a purely detached, philological scholarly interpretation of Scripture; this is about their relationship with God. And so if you're attacking somebody's interpretation of Scripture, you're also really attacking their religious lives as a whole."

It takes a very long time before the conflicts that the Reformation sparks off and fuels settle down, and modern concepts of tolerance come to the fore.

"There are impulses in the 17th Century where you can find that attitude, but it would be a mistake to say that after the uproar of the English Revolution in the British Isles and after the Thirty Years War was done in 1648, all of the leaders of Europe kind of decided 'Ah! What we really need is modern liberalism and we're going separate out religion and make it a private thing, and so forth,'" he says, acknowledging that that is – more or less – what eventually happens, though over a much longer period.

## Pioneers

The pioneers in this respect were the Dutch, he explains, who in the late 16th Century realise, as he puts it, that "Militaristic Calvinism is not the way we want to go, and we also don't want Counter-Reformation aggressive post-Tridentine Catholicism, but what we definitely want is to get rich, and we have a chance to do that as a commercial empire."

And so a sort of religious toleration – albeit not an



impeccably robust sort – was born. "They realise that that kind of religious toleration is simply good for business, and if you can allow people to worship the way that they want to in private, while still maintaining – as the Dutch do – public support for a Calvinist Church, well, that turns out that Catholics and Lutherans and Mennonites prefer, surprise, surprise, not being persecuted."

Mass and other forms of Christian worship could take place behind closed doors, he said, while public conflict was kept to a minimum and the Dutch as a whole participated in their 17th-Century commercial miracle.

**“The fragmentation that was endemic in Protestantism was sowing the seeds for Christianity in general looking increasingly irrelevant”**

"What is eventually going to of course become modern industrial capitalism and consumerism essentially what papers over and makes it easier, let's say, for Christians with the legacy of conflict and violence behind them to in a sense agree to disagree, because can't we all agree that it's nice to be able to shop and buy the things that we want to buy, regardless of our religious differences," he says.

This, he argues, is a key step towards modern secularisation, noting that while the Dutch were the most important figures in this

development, others fumbled with less success towards similar principles of tolerance during the period, matters being made more difficult by rulers fearing that they would be called to account by God for not having protected the Church and Christian truth.

"European civilisation was basically dragged into modern toleration. It did not embrace it in an enthusiastic, robust way," he says.

At the same time, the fragmentation that was endemic in Protestantism was sowing the seeds for Christianity in general looking increasingly irrelevant, with some Catholic observers making that point polemically from the 16th Century, criticising Protestantism for the divisions that had arisen from it.

"Of course they don't draw from this the conclusion that Catholicism also could somehow be put under the same sceptical gaze or people could throw up their hands about it as well – there are Protestants in this Revolution who would look around themselves and say you can make anything you want out of the Bible and really the result is or should be a kind of scepticism," he says.

This insight has really only started to corrode and bite in more recent times, he says, especially in the last half century or so.

"For a long time the sort of rhetoric of it throughout the Enlightenment was 'Clearly the problem was these stupid religious people, arguing over these minute points and the violence that comes from that and so forth when all you need is the clear light of reason to tell us all how exactly people

should live and so forth,'" he says, adding that this rhetoric is still common in the contemporary public square.

"The problem with that, is that the content of reason and what it is to be rational and what are rational reasonable understandings of human nature and human society and human morality have never been a matter of consensus any more than the disagreements that have arrived through the Protestant emphasis on Sola Scriptura ('Scripture alone')," he says, concluding that "reason has not done what scripture failed to do – it's adding to the problem".

The extent to which consensus understandings of such things have broken down can be shown in today's arguments about what constitutes a person or a family, he says – these being what debates about abortion and same-sex marriage, for instance, are really about.

Such arguments, he says, are far beyond the kind of arguments Catholics and Protestants had over the form of the Church or the nature of the Sacraments.

\* \* \* \* \*

There's a clear echo in Prof. Gregory's work of the thesis of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre who argued in 1981's *After Virtue* that late medieval philosophical developments and the Enlightenment as a whole have left us with a pre-modern language of morality masking an absence of agreement over what our moral language means.

"I'm majorly influenced by MacIntyre," says Prof. Gregory. "I think there is probably no way I would have arrived at my interpretation of the Reformation era without the influence of MacIntyre and I think if you take MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and you combine it with *The Unintended Reformation* then you've really got a very powerful long term interpretation – it seems to me – of what happened to society and morality and politics.

## Analysis

MacIntyre's analysis skips from late medieval scholastic philosophy to the Enlightenment, Prof. Gregory says, adamant that the intellectual shifts and divisions of the Reformation period are part of the same story.

"There are so many tragic ironies in the history of religion," he says, observing how "the thing that's meant to bind us very often ends up dividing us, the thing that's meant to be collective ends up contributing to the rise of individualism and atomisation".

One key irony is that although Luther is often hailed as a liberating figure, the liberty we current have is one that would

have been anathema to him, with this being his legacy only by means of a long and tortuous route.

"Now in the sense that things that have intervened have led to where we are today, yes, but in the sense that Luther wanted to bring that about or that he would have approved of where we ended up – absolutely not," he says.

"Luther's idea of freedom for a person is that because you've been saved by God's grace you are now free to devote yourself to worry-free endless service to your neighbour," he says, with this service being engaged in without any need to consider whether your actions are in any way contributing to your salvation. Describing this as "a paradoxical freedom", Prof. Gregory says: "It's like an enslaved freedom of Christian service and I think everybody can agree that that's a long way from 'do your own thing' or 'I'll buy as much as I want up to my credit limit!'"

**“Many of Luther's emphases on God's grace and so forth had the right impulse”**

Commenting on how the Catholic world has engaged ecumenically with what Luther was saying, he notes that the Second Vatican Council adopted such characteristic features of the Protestant Reformation as vernacular liturgy, the orientation of celebrants towards the congregation, and a greatly increased emphasis on the role and vocation of the laity in the Church and the world.

At a theological level, he adds, for decades theologians have recognised that "many of Luther's emphases on God's grace and so forth had the right impulse", even if they were pushed in excessive ways that should be rejected.

However, he says, the real story of the relationship between Catholics and Protestants, is "their tremendously diminished influence in wider society in ways that I think have made them recognise one another as allies, not withstanding whatever doctrinal or religious differences might remain".

Describing these differences as pining in comparison compared to the need to find common ground against the more dangerous and insidious trends of a secularised society, he also says that it is, quote simply, "a more Christian and Christlike thing to do to be charitable and get along with one another and be friends than it is to hold one another at arm's length and continue to polemicise in ways that our predecessors did for centuries".



Luther's ideas are still driving the Christian world, says Francis Campbell

The Reformation was more of a phenomenon than we sometimes perceive. It was not simply religious but was societal, political, social and economic too. It is also more apt to speak of Reformations, rather than The Reformation, for in the end Luther also initiated a Catholic Reformation. In summary, what we can agree is that Luther ushered in a Reform that had, and still has far-reaching consequences for religion and also for society across the Western world.

The question then is whether the Reformation remains unfinished. For me, the simple answer has to be a clear yes – not just politically or culturally but most importantly at a personal and individual level, for remember that Luther's core message was about how to achieve salvation.

The Reformation, if we hold it to be an effort to bring us closer to the core meaning of the Christian message; if it is an effort to ask us to examine our ways as practicing Christians, and to change accordingly, then one cannot but answer that the Reformation remains unfinished.

So that is as true in our respective Churches as it is in wider society. However, too often when we look at such a question of whether the Reformation remains unfinished, we look at the other, or we focus on an organisation or structure.

But, for believers, it must always be an internal question. A constant question if one were to cite St John Paul II. One which is not static but the work of a lifetime. It is a question that asks us to reexamine the basics and to strive for holiness. It is something that asks us not to be complacent, but to re-examine a baptismal calling which can sometimes get lost in our wider (and worthwhile) considerations.

#### Question

For Luther that question – “How do I receive the grace of God?” – was in the view of Pope Benedict XVI (probably the Pope who in the last 500 years best understood Lutheranism), the driving force of Luther's whole life and one that always made an impression on Benedict. Pope Benedict, speaking at Erfurt in 2011, at the Augustinian Seminary where Luther studied theology, asked how many Christians today concern themselves with such a question.



# Martin Luther's ideas continue to drive the Christian world



**“Pope Francis visited Sweden and he identified two positive consequences of the Reformation saying: ‘That while separation has led to suffering and misunderstanding, without Jesus, we can do nothing; and also that it helped to give greater centrality to sacred scripture in the Church's life’”**

He said, “what does the question of God mean in our lives?”

So in the sense that the Reformation is a phenomenon, which was societal, and in the sense that it asked a Church and individual believers to re-examine their faith, then clearly the Reformation is unfinished, and always will be.

It remains to consider the importance and implications of “unfinished Reformation” for the modern Catholic Church. Some have suggested that the Reformation was a trajectory and that Catholics were somehow slow learners. That Vatican II heralded some of the steps which the Reformation dealt with some centuries earlier.

I do not agree with that perspective. Why? Because it conveys a misunderstanding of both Lutheranism and Catholicism since 1517 and before. It would also place too much emphasis on the areas of disagreement – historical and continued – than is appropriate. It would also suggest that there is a single trajectory of reform to follow.

#### Static

History, however, has shown that reforms are more appropriate to speak of than a singular, and that reform would include not just Protestant or Anglican reforms, but also Catholic reforms too. Few entities remain static, and so a reform has to take account of how respective Churches and organisations evolved and how

they are constituted.

So reform is not a question of simply catching up. So perhaps we should remind ourselves of that distinction in the word reform, between restoring to an original condition and changes simply to improve. Of course, the influence of each branch of mainstream Christianity on the other is rich, even when in direct opposition.

In the last 50 years, the ecumenical dialogue has formed all the participants to reappraise what the other holds dear: scripture; tradition; liturgy; Eucharist. A year ago this month, Pope Francis visited Sweden to mark the 500th-anniversary celebrations of Lutheranism. Speaking at the Lutheran cathedral in Lund he identified two positive consequences of the Reformation saying: “that while separation has led to suffering and misunderstanding, without Jesus, we can do nothing; and also that it helped to give greater centrality to sacred scripture in the Church's life”.

So while attesting to the difference, there is also interdependence. Luther – a priest and theologian – contributed to the reform of the Catholic Church. Without him, would it have happened? Would the Council of Trent have occurred? Would it have followed the trajectory that it took? Again authors differ on these questions as to whether the reforming nature of Trent would have taken the direction that it did if it had not been for Lutheranism and subsequently Calvinism. So

while Catholicism has been shaped and formed by the Protestant Reformations, so too have they been formed by Catholicism.

So is there an unfinished reformation in Catholicism? Again the answer would have to be yes. A reformation that asks each of us as believers, the question posed by Luther to himself – “how am I to be saved?”

However, it is not just the personal call to each of us to reform. We also have organisational and societal calls which we cannot ignore because reform is constant. So what does this mean for Catholicism? Is there an unfinished Reformation? In diplomatic speak: yes and no. The events of 500 years ago are not the same circumstances or conditions faced now in Western or Irish life. The power structures have changed considerably. Faith groups, if they do have special constitutional provisions in states, have little real temporal power.

**“Luther – a priest and theologian – contributed to the reform of the Catholic Church. Without him, would it have happened?”**

However, even if conditions differ, similar themes within faiths can still reemerge, hence our attempt to straddle the yes and no answer.



One similar theme, which is still present in Catholicism, is the relationship to the universal and the particular. I mean the global and local nature of the Church and its unity, and yet at the same time the huge differences, cultural, linguistic, tribal and ethnic, one finds across the globe. In the media, the Vatican is often portrayed as detached, a monolith, similar to what one hears in some quarters about the European Commission. (Having worked in the latter and observed the former, I think Whitehall and Stormont could learn something about lean and effective structures from both the Vatican and the Commission.)

However, the question is not about the relative size to the task in hand, but more about power and effectiveness. Today, it is not the same power that Luther saw, a temporal and spiritual power, where the Pope was often chosen from among the noble families of Rome and ruled over the Papal States.

Rather the debate today is about the proper relationship between the central and the local within the Church. It is not a question solely for the Catholic Church, but runs through all global churches and many other bodies besides; balancing unity with representative structures.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the central dimensions of Catholicism, in how it structures itself, which is broadly the same as the latter structures of the Roman Empire, is the sometimes healthy tension between local and central power. That was as true in 1517 as it is today. Some today press for greater consideration to be taken of the local situation and complain of Rome's lack of engagement. Others ask for greater clarity from Rome to establish uniformity.

Within Catholicism, the central organisational power rests on three broad and essential areas: the office of the papacy; the appointment of bishops who are all centrally chosen and vetted by the Vatican; and finally, the ability to settle doctrinal disputes centrally which results in universal

applicability.

Tonight we are marking an anniversary of what must be seen as the second biggest break in Church unity. The first being the Great Schism of 1054. However, despite this, it is nonetheless remarkable that unity and continuity have broadly been maintained in a global structure which directly inherited its governance model from the Roman Empire.

But when it has been broken, as in 1517, it has often been the case that the delicate balance between the local and the universal has not been respected or that the Church went through periods of exaggerated centralisations where the efforts at reform, aimed at restoring an original condition, found it difficult to get heard.

**“The challenge is thus maintaining unity around core beliefs while covering such a huge swathe of humanity”**

The governance model of the Catholic Church, or for that matter any other governance model, cannot be static. It never has and never will be. Nor can governance in a faith context be conflated with governance in a political context.

And in this sense Pope Francis is aiming to bring sharper separation between sacramental and political power. Governance in a faith setting cannot come down to what simple majorities want or might perceive they want at a particular point in time. But yet governance must be in touch with local conditions while all the time ensuring believers do not conflate notions of secular democracy with church governance. Doctrines cannot be universally applicable and eternal if they are reliant on momentary polls at particular points in time.

Pope Francis, in my view, appears to be reexamining the balance between local and central authority in the Church

and allowing for more local interpretation or initiative. For some, that is met with skepticism, and they point to what other faith groups have encountered such as the Anglican Communion, which has found it difficult to maintain global unity in the face of debates and tensions on the ordination of female clergy and homosexuality. For others in the Church, it is a return to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the Early Church, with a greater emphasis on the use of synods, which bring together all the national churches, rather than have an over-reliance on the Roman curia.

### Relationship

Pope Francis, in his papacy, seems to be re-balancing the relationship between central authority and local churches. His group of nine cardinals, whom he has convened to advise him on Vatican reforms, are mostly drawn from large dioceses across the world, rather than chosen from within the Roman curia.

Developments in communication and technology naturally bring the local consideration closer to Rome and the Vatican, but I believe that his lasting legacy is more likely to create a greater space for the local view in the universal nature of the Church.

So more might creep up and less be pushed down. I think the effects of that change could be with us for centuries to come. It will no doubt change the Catholic Church as voices are heard, within its universal structure, which will come from far beyond Europe. Such changes to governance, though, are not new as some might suggest. Nor do they simply arise from the Second Vatican Council. Rather they are taken from the life of the Church – in particular the early Church – and as such they are an authentic expression of the governance model within Catholicism, which balances papal authority with the collective voice of the Bishops in Synod or Council.

But as with any change, it will require careful nurturing to ensure unity. The Orthodox Church has

**“The task today for all mainstream Christian Churches is how to re-listen to that message of 2,000 years ago and to ask how it can be heard afresh by a population, especially in the West, which is overwhelmed with information, but often lacks meaning”**

managed to achieve and maintain doctrinal unity through such a model of governance; however, it has not been able to avoid issues of primacy in recent decades.

Tensions between central and local will always be in flux in any organisation; too tight control will likely lead to sharper tensions and too loose control will likely damage unity. The challenge is thus maintaining unity around core beliefs while covering such a huge swathe of humanity. It requires careful discernment about when to allow for greater autonomy, and in what areas, and when to rein in views or behaviors which risk unity by not according with core doctrine. Provided the three critical instruments of unity remain in place; setting doctrine, selecting bishops and the unifying office of the papacy, then tensions within the Catholic Church, between central and local authority, will remain healthy.

For me, that is the central issue in the Church around reform, the link between the local and universal church. That need to balance traces its origins back to the early Church with the letters

of St Paul. So reform is not in my view about a modern-day series of changes to, or liberalisation of positions such as on celibacy, etc. That would not capture the Lutheran Reformation. Because it was not simply a manifesto for change, like a political manifesto which promises change to improve things or sometimes is just change for the sake of change.

Rather the Lutheran Reformation was a change which was about re-listening to the original message of salvation and acting accordingly. The task today for all mainstream Christian Churches is how to re-listen to that message of 2,000 years ago and to ask how it can be heard afresh by a population, especially in the West, which is overwhelmed with information, but often lacks meaning.

### Key challenge

The key challenge, for the Catholic Church and any faith group, is to discern how it offers a continuity which speaks to the modern conditions of the day, rather than a rupture which fragments the message and the tradition.

So is there an unfinished reformation in the Catholic Church? Yes, if you believe that Christ is active in and through the life of the Church. Yes, if you believe that the Holy Spirit guides the Church and the synods do discern the signs of the times and thereby makes the message of Christ more relevant to the age in which we live. So yes if you believe the call to a reformation is an individual call to examine God's role in your life, a call to restore our lives to the message of faith.

But the 'how' is what is vital, and is a challenge for Catholicism and all Christian faiths, and indeed all faiths.

**† Francis Campbell is the former British ambassador to the Holy See, and is vice-chancellor of St Mary's University, Twickenham. This is an edited extract from his October 6 speech in Queen's University Belfast on 'The Unfinished Reformation?'**

# Catholics and Lutherans today



**Bishop  
Brendan Leahy**

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, it is good to ask: where is the Catholic Church today with regard to Martin Luther and the issues he raised? A gesture that speaks volumes in answer to that question is the visit on October 31 last year by Pope Francis to Lund, Sweden, to begin the 500th commemoration with the World Lutheran Federation. By any standard that was a majorly significant event when we consider how for centuries Catholics viewed Martin Luther.

In his homily during the ceremony in Lund, the Pope commented on positive aspects of the Reformation that we need to name and be thankful for: "With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church's life." He also referred to the value of Martin Luther's spiritual experience "that challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing".

With Luther's concept of "by grace alone", he reminds us "that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response".

**“Over the past 50 years there have been many very encouraging developments in relations between Catholics and Lutherans”**

Pope Francis' positive gesture and remarks echo gestures and sentiments expressed by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Of course, it's not that Catholics and Lutherans deny the painful history we have experienced over 500 years of division.

During the Lund prayer service, one of the texts put it bluntly: "In the 16th Century, Catholics and Lutherans frequently not only misunderstood but also exaggerated and caricatured their opponents in order to make them look ridiculous....they accepted that the Gospel was mixed with the political and economic interests of those in power. Their failures resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people."

## Summary

Over the past 50 years there have been many very encouraging



Pope Francis embraces Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the World Lutheran Federation, in Lund, Sweden, on October 31, 2016.

developments in relations between Catholics and Lutherans enabling each side to understand each other better. An excellent summary – available online – of where things stand now is to be found in the 2013 document published by the international Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: The Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*.

The document combines insightful evaluation of the past, explains the doctrinal issues and then offers what it calls ecumenical imperatives on how to go forward.

The main theological topics that Luther raised include: justification, the Eucharist, Ministry and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

There has been much progress in recognising dimensions of Luther's thought that hadn't always been heard before, dimensions that we today recognise as resonating with Catholic teaching more than we realised in the past. There has been much agreement on our understanding of Eucharist and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

However, the main topic for Luther was justification and on this there has been a very significant development. Martin Luther and other Reformers saw this as the "first and main article" of faith. To understand the issue, we need to go back to Luther's own personal experience as an Augustinian friar

and Scripture scholar. He was grappling with a hell-like terror before a perceived judgemental God that was typical of his era that had suffered a terrible plague decimating Europe.

Luther's question was fundamental: how can I find a gracious, merciful God? He knew the 10 Commandments and the high bar of moral conduct demanded by the Church. He looked around and people accumulating indulgences and doing penances of all sorts.

**“It was clear for Luther, the fruit of this cannot but be good works and outreach to one's neighbour”**

Luther's big personal discovery was that God is not just transcendent, almighty and all-powerful (and very demanding) but also the God who "emptied" himself and took on our human nature to the point of identifying with our sufferings and pain. In Jesus Crucified, God looks on us in our incapacities, makes himself 'cursed', and offers us a new, flourishing life. He doesn't condemn; he saves. And this is pure gift.

All we have to do with hand over in faith, trust in Jesus Christ. He alone 'justifies' us. Luther was particularly struck by Romans 1:17: "The righteousness of God

is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'."

Luther was so taken with the gift dimension of God's grace that he promoted a notion of what's called justification by grace alone, by faith alone, by the Cross alone. It's not our works, our merits, our efforts that matter. It's God's doing. Once a person has a very personal faith experience of God in Christ Crucified, then, yes, it was clear for Luther, the fruit of this cannot but be good works and outreach to one's neighbour.

## Righteousness

Writing on April 8, 1516 to one of his fellow Augustinians, George Spennlein, he commented that just as Christ "has received you and... has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours", then, "you ought... to receive your... brothers, patiently help them, make their sins yours, and, if you have any goodness, let it be theirs."

For Catholics, the problem was that the way Luther expressed his beliefs seemed to deny personal responsibility and our cooperation with God's grace. There was also the problem that Luther seemed to say we remain sinners even when we are justified (ie, God only declares us just but doesn't actually transform us in baptism).

The Council of Trent (1545-1563), called by the Pope, emphasised that we must contribute through free will and

through agreeing to prepare to receive the grace of justification and to increase grace through our good works.

Polemical debates continued around all of this for centuries. However, after decades of dialogue, in 1999, the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, offering what it called "a differentiated consensus". In other words, both sides could sign up to a common statement about justification while recognising that each side has different emphases.

The heart of that statement is as follows: "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works." (n. 15).

Now that a certain consensus has been established on what the Luther and the Reformers considered the "first and main article" of faith, it is possible to proceed in dialogue on other points such as the significance of the Church, the Eucharist and ministry. It is noteworthy that since 1999 other churches have also signed up to the Joint Declaration.

**❶** *Brendan Leahy is Bishop of Limerick and chairman of the Irish bishops' Council for Ecumenism and Dialogue.*

## Ecumenism is more important than ever now, Sweden's Cardinal Anders Arborelius tells Greg Daly

**“W**e were of course very honoured and happy that the Holy Father could come here, and I think this has some historical reasons,” Cardinal Anders Arborelius tells *The Irish Catholic* of Pope Francis' decision to visit the Swedish city of Lund last October 31 at the start of the year that marked half a millennium since Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation.

Explaining how the Lutheran World Federation was founded in Lund 50 years ago, the cardinal – the first native-born Swedish cardinal, and only the second native-born Swede to be ordained bishop since the Reformation – says the Finnish and Swedish Lutheran Churches have liturgical and other similarities to the Catholic Church.

“You can find many things that you won't find in the Lutheran church in Germany – for instance – and I've also heard that in Germany it would be a bit delicate for the Pope to come to commemorate the Reformation,” he says.

### Delicacy

There was no such delicacy in Sweden. “He was very well received from everyone from the king down to the people in the streets,” he says, noting the clear happiness the Lutherans felt about the papal visit, “and for the Catholics it was really something very special especially because we could celebrate holy Mass with the Holy Father”.

Not, of course, that the visit had come out of the blue.

“We had a very good relationship between John Paul and the former Lutheran archbishop here, and a history of a long and fruitful dialogue,” the cardinal observes, adding, “I think it's also very realistic because we know that there are differences in doctrine and ethical questions, but we have always tried to co-operate in those areas where we have no difficulties. Swedes are very pragmatic people, you see. If we cannot speak about somethings when we know the differences are

New Cardinal Anders Arborelius of Stockholm, right, greets other cardinals during a consistory led by Pope Francis in St Peter's Basilica. Photo: CNS



there, we try to concentrate on issues where we have something in common.”

Repeating that the doctrinal and ethical differences between the two Churches are well-known, he highlights two key areas of effective cooperation. “The field of spirituality – that has been very obvious in Sweden, where many Lutherans adopt the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola and they are also very open to classical Carmelite and monastic spirituality – and then for instance on the issues of migrants and refugees, and social issues,” he says.

Sweden's Lutherans even have a small but distinct group who claim to have a Catholic faith within the Church of Sweden, he adds, with this – and not simply ‘the Lutheran Church’ – being the name of the state church. “It's more a national church than a confessional church, he says.

**“I have to admit that during my childhood and youth I was never very active in the church”**

Three years before the ecumenical gathering in Lund, the joint document *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* was published, mapping out a common path for commemoration and drawing together the world's many distinct Lutheran groupings. Had the

ecumenical project served to help bind the Lutherans themselves together?

“Well I think so,” the cardinal says, adding, “and of course there are no real doctrinal issues taken up – it's more about how shall we try to dialogue, and I think that in that way it can be accepted by all groups within the Lutheran church.”

**“We have to accept that there are different outlooks and different traditions among the other churches”**

The cardinal was in fact born into a Lutheran family, not becoming a Catholic until he was 20. Despite this, the development of Catholic-Lutheran relations over recent decades do not seem unusually moving for him.

“I was not a very good and active Lutheran,” he explains, continuing, “I have to admit that during my childhood and youth I was never very active in the church. I was a believer – it's like that in Sweden – most Lutherans are not very active churchgoers. Of course society at that time was imbued by the Lutheran Church that was the established church we had catechism at school and prayer so of course I was in a way influenced.”

Although there had been Lutheran pastors on both sides of his family tree, his own parents rarely went to church, he continues. “Secularisation came early in the 20th century to Sweden,

so it was very rare in my childhood or youth that people would go to church.”

While describing Catholic-Lutheran ecumenism as “a very slow process”, he notes that one of the effects of Sweden's secular character, he says, is that it pushes Christians of all sorts to cooperate because there are so few of them left.

“I would say that somehow those who believe – who are still Christians – we have to do what we can in order to work together and pray together and somehow we have to accept that there are different outlooks and different traditions among the other churches,” he says. Adding that it remains a source of disquiet for Lutherans that Catholics and Lutherans cannot share Communion, he says “we have to calm them down”.

Describing this kind of common solidarity – as much as possible – as “realistic”, and noting that it is more multilateral than bilateral, involving as it does a range of Christian churches, he acknowledges that this ‘ecumenism of necessity’ in a sense parallels the far more dramatic and alarming ‘ecumenism of blood’ that is a reality among the Christians being persecuted in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Sweden, he says, “has become a safe haven for Christians from the Middle East”, and that with large numbers of Syrian Orthodox and Chaldean Christians in the country, “martyrdom has become also very present for many Christians in Sweden thanks to these immigrants from those parts of the world”.

Recalling the diversity of Sweden's own Catholic community – in many respects an immigrant

Church, immigration has dramatically boosted Catholic numbers in Sweden of late – the cardinal recalls that solidarity among Christians worldwide was at the heart of the ecumenical commemoration last October.

**“I think we realised that in our global world ecumenism is more important than ever”**

“I was struck that in the common service in the cathedral in Lund, the Holy Father and the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation spoke in Spanish,” he says, adding that Dr Martin Junge was raised in Chile

“Somehow I think we realised that in our global world ecumenism is more important than ever especially when we think about the situation of the persecuted believers in so many parts of the world,” he says.



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