

Reformation Reflections

PROVIDENCE

There are timely births and timely deaths. A change of direction for a nation or society or a world, maybe just a funeral away.

On January 12th, 1519, Emperor Maximilian I of the Holy Roman Empire died.

He was Austrian, of the Habsburgs, and known for his ambitious plans to acquire territory and influence through marriages. It was said "Let others wage war, but thou, O happy Austria, marry; for those kingdoms which Mars gives to others, Venus gives to thee." He married off his 3-year-old daughter to the young son of his chief antagonist, Louis XI of France, just to shore up relations.



But although he greatly expanded the Habsburg family rule, he was not known to look on the sunny-side of life. In fact, after suffering a fall in his 40's, he endured constant pain which rendered him rather gloomy. After age 55, he did not travel without dragging around his own coffin in the baggage wagon – just in case!

Maximilian's own son, Philip the Handsome, died before he did; so when at last the coffin was filled, the heir to the throne was his teenage grandson, Charles.

Such a funeral is what we may call "providence."

It is due to the protective care of God that, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther was confronted by a 21-year-old Charles V and not his more politically savvy or cynical grandfather.



The responsibilities of young Charles were vast. His position made him ruler of the troublesome Netherlands, Spain, and all her newly acquired conquests in the New World. To the east, the Turks were devouring portions of Hungary and Austria. The Germans were not necessarily his highest priority. He is to have said, "I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to my horse."

Compared to his Austrian grandfather, Charles was at a distinct and uncomfortable disadvantage in front of the seasoned German electors and rulers at Worms, as Luther stood his ground. Some of those same electors had actually helped put him in power!

Due to God's providential care, the Reformation was a determined sprout in the fertile soil of Germany and northern Europe. It was allowed just enough time to grow.

Daniel 2 says of God: **"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding"** (v. 21).

The funeral of Maximilian, at just the right time, meant good for the Gospel.

We also celebrate a birth that meant good for the whole world! **"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"** (Galatians 4:4-5).

In Christ we have a King who reigns forever. He has called the church His bride and we have been named his children. Paul writes, **"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him"** (Romans 8:16-17).

Thank God for his loving care of times and rulers and heirs of His kingdom – His Providence!

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