



# Reformation Reflections

“*They cry out “Peace, peace” when there is no peace!*” declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 6:14). As we look back on this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we see the truth of it.



Ancient kingdoms were beginning to falter at the rise of modern nation-states. Feudalism was giving way to new social and economic realities, fueled by a growing middle-class. And a largely illiterate population was being transformed by the emergence of a tremendous new technology—the printing press.

But of greatest importance was the recovery of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ from generations of neglect and abuse at the hands of both a church and a state entrusted with its care.

The twin tyrannies of the Roman Church and the Holy Roman Empire struggled to maintain their power and supremacy in their changing world, especially with the surging impact of the re-emerging Gospel. Additionally, uprisings by anarchists and heretics across Europe, along with the ever present threat of invasion by the Islamic Ottoman Empire from the outside, threatened the whole social order.

Almost from the day he posted his 95 Theses, Martin Luther found himself in the middle. Over the next decades he often found himself in the dual roles of “troublemaker” and “peacemaker” simultaneously. And no wonder!

Truth must always contend against falsehood. The true confession of the faith must always find itself “cross-wise” with this world of sin and unbelief, as Jesus clearly warned, “*In the world you will have tribulation*” (John 16:33).



Not unlike today, the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was a complex world of shifting politics, with alliances made and betrayed and treaties written and broken. Luther died in February of 1546. In mere months, open war finally erupted between the Lutheran princes allying themselves in the Schmalkaldic League and the Catholic forces of Emperor Charles V, with the Emperor coming out on top.

Not able to permanently subdue the Lutheran territories, Charles established the Augsburg Interim—a compromise agreement heavily favoring the Catholics—in the hopes that it would bring peace to the Empire. It didn't. It was followed by the Leipzig Interim, which failed as well. In 1552, the Second Schmalkaldic War began, which ended better for the Lutherans with the Peace of Augsburg on September 25, 1555.

This, too, was a compromise. The terms allowed the ruler of each region to determine the religion of his territory, either Lutheran or Catholic. Nonetheless, at last, (for the time being) there was peace. However, the fatal flaw to long-term religious peace within the Empire was the exclusion of other Protestants, as Calvinists and other sects remained illegal in both Lutheran and Catholic lands.

This set the stage for what was arguably the worst religious war in European history—the Thirty Years War. At its end in 1648, the Peace of Westphalia declared that all lands would return to their pre-war status. The net gain on all sides? Zero. The net loss? More than 8 million people killed in the German territories alone.



Peace Treaties among men can never establish lasting peace. Men are sinful. Only Jesus Christ who has triumphed over sin and death can bring real peace, peace without compromise, lasting and eternal peace! And it is Jesus who not only says, “*In the world you will have tribulation*” but also, “*Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

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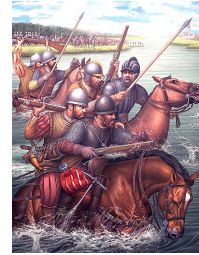
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