

Seeds of the Reformation

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Seeds that blossomed into the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century – the various factors in the late medieval world that made the Reformation possible and pointed the way towards it – movements of thought and outstanding personalities.

Some people like to see the Protestant Reformation as a celestial ‘bolt from the blue’, a miraculous restoration of apostolic Christianity which God (so to speak) dropped into history straight down from Heaven. That view once held sway in the English-speaking Protestant world. It was, however, strongly challenged in the middle of the 19th century by two reformed giants of historical-theological thinking, John Williamson Nevin and Philip Schaff of Mercersburg Seminary in Pennsylvania. Nevin was himself American, trained under Charles Hodge at Princeton, while Schaff was an English-speaker from Switzerland.

I must admit my personal bias, and acknowledge that I have always been an admirer of the lives and work of Nevin and Schaff. (By the way, Schaff’s eight-volume *History of the Christian Church* is still a masterpiece worthy of our affection and attention. It combines depth of scholarship, flowing style, rich biographical colour, and spirituality of tone.)

However, personal bias aside, the arguments of Nevin and Schaff won the day. The Reformation was no heavenly bolt from the blue. It grew organically out of the history that went before it. There were many historical roots that sprouted forth in the 16th century into the fruits of Reformation Protestantism. The historian can perceive and analyse those roots. If we would fully understand what happened in the 16th-century Reformation, we must look at the medieval soil in which that great movement was planted, and from which it arose.

Ever since Nevin and Schaff presented this argument with overwhelming philosophical force and historical scholarship, there has I think been no going back to the older view. True though it is that God worked mightily by his Spirit in the 16th century, he did not do this in a way that bypassed the ongoing stream of history, or short-circuited human causes. What then were the factors present in the late medieval world that gave birth to the Reformation?

A new climate

The first and most widespread was, in my view, very simply the Renaissance. In many ways, the Reformation was in fact the spiritual side of the Renaissance. It is notoriously hard to define the Renaissance, but even harder to ignore it. Beginning with the life and work of the Italian literary genius Francesco Petrarch in the latter half of the 14th century, a wind of change was blowing across Western European culture. Many Renaissance thinkers reacted against huge slices of medieval culture, calling for a return to a more ancient (and, they believed, healthier) type of culture found in classical Greece and Rome.

This style of thinking, and its research into the historical sources of European culture, including its ancient languages, was given the name *humanism* in the early 19th century. This was long before that word took on an anti-religious meaning, so we must not be alarmed when we hear about Renaissance humanism. Very few of the humanists of that time were anti-religious. Especially in northern Europe, they were devoutly Christian.

The well-known Renaissance humanist motto and war cry was *ad fontes* – back to the sources. This did not mean a slavish imitation of the ideals of ancient Greece and Rome, but much more what scholars today would call a *ressourcement*: seeking inspiration from the ancient sources of European culture, and applying them in new ways to the present. For some Renaissance humanists, especially in northern Europe, this came to include a critical rejection of much medieval theology and spirituality, and a return for inspiration to the original sources of Christianity, namely the Bible itself and the early church fathers. The fathers of the first four or five centuries came to be seen as better interpreters of the Gospel than the medieval scholastic theologians.

This double movement of return to the Bible and to the fathers is most powerfully seen in the life and work of Erasmus of Rotterdam. We know of Erasmus' scholarly devotion to the Greek New Testament, by which he weighed and found wanting the Latin translation of the Vulgate, the official Bible of the Western medieval church. The Renaissance rediscovery of the Greek language, coupled with the *ad fontes* drive towards the sources of Christianity, resulted in Erasmus' printed edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. This was a bridge across which many students travelled from the Renaissance into the Reformation. Martin Luther was one of them. We find it in Luther's *95 Theses*, the earliest Reformation manifesto, in the first two theses:

‘When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent,” he meant that the entire life of believers should be a life of repentance. The word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance – that is, confession and satisfaction – as administered by priests.’

Luther here is appealing to the Greek word for ‘repent’, which means a change of attitude, against the Latin Vulgate translation *paenitentium agite*, ‘do penance’, which had previously been understood as referring to the sacrament of penance (confession to a Catholic priest followed by absolution and a prescribed act of penitence).

In other words, Luther here, in affirming that Christ’s exhortation to repent means to change one’s attitude and life, is acting the part of a critical Renaissance thinker; he wants to get behind secondary sources in the encrusted traditions of an ecclesiastical translation of Scripture, back to the primary sources in the Greek text and the Greek language. If this involved questioning the place of church practices hallowed by long usage, such as the sacrament of penance, so be it.

Luther may have parted company with Erasmus over what exactly the Greek New Testament taught; but it was Erasmus who put the Greek New Testament into Luther’s hands and taught him to prefer it over the Latin Vulgate.

Erasmus not only threw a ticking time bomb into the institutional church of his day by publishing the Greek New Testament, he also strongly advocated the translation of Scripture from its original languages into the various native languages of Europe and indeed the world. In a famous passage he says:

‘The sun itself is not more common and open to everyone than the teaching of Christ is. I utterly disagree with those who do not want the holy Scriptures to be translated into the native tongue and read by ordinary people – as if Christ’s teaching were so complicated that only a few theologians could understand it! Or as if the strength of the Christian faith were found in people’s ignorance of it! It may be wise to conceal the mysteries of kingly government from ordinary folk, but Christ wanted his mysteries to be proclaimed as openly as possible. I want even the lowliest woman to read the Gospels and the letters of Saint Paul. I want them to be translated into all languages, so that they can be read and understood by Scots and Irishmen, by Turks and Muslims. To make people understand what Christianity *teaches* is surely the first step to converting them. Perhaps many will mock the Scriptures, but some will take them to heart. I greatly desire that the farm worker should sing parts of Scripture to himself as he follows his plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should banish the boredom of his journey by reading Bible stories. Let the conversations of all Christians flow from Scripture. For our everyday conversations generally reveal what we are.’

When Luther and William Tyndale translated the Greek New Testament into German and English, they were acting as good Erasmians, putting Erasmus’ ideals into practice. Once again we see how Renaissance humanism opened up space for Reformation values and measures.

Erasmus’ fruitful devotion to the Greek New Testament is well known. It is perhaps less well known that he was almost as devoted, in both a scholarly and

spiritual way, to the writings of the early church fathers. Prior to the Renaissance, Western theologians knew very little of the writings of the fathers. They would have been known, pretty much, only as disconnected quotations in the writings of the great medieval scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas. However, the Renaissance brought a wealth of new manuscripts of patristic writings to light, especially the Greek fathers, when the scholars of the dying Byzantine Empire in the East fled West, bringing with them precious treasures of ancient literature. The *ad fontes* impulse of the Renaissance meant that these literary treasures were seized upon and eagerly studied and discussed by Western scholars. The writings of the fathers could now be studied in full, treatise by treatise.

Erasmus was the foremost of these champions of the early church fathers. He edited and reprinted many of their writings, inviting readers to find in them a purer Christianity than was available in medieval sources. Erasmus' own personal role model was the great Western father Jerome: the celibate scholar who consecrated his intellectual gifts to advancing the cause of true faith.

This greater and more accurate knowledge of the early church fathers, so vigorously promoted by Erasmus, led many to question contemporary Christianity. Was *this* the faith that had animated the beloved pioneers of the Gospel, giving birth to those great Creeds of the Church (the Nicene Creed, the Creed of Chalcedon) which were considered the bedrock of Christian theology?

For many, a credibility gap began to open up between church life as they experienced it in the religious institutions of their day, and church life as they saw it in these newly available writings of the fathers. John Calvin, for example, would put it like this to the Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadoleto:

'Our agreement with antiquity is far closer than yours, and all we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the church, which was at first sullied and distorted by uneducated men of undistinguished character, and afterwards disgracefully mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman pope and his faction. I will not press you so closely as to call you back to that form of the church which the apostles instituted (though it presents us with a unique pattern of a true church, and deviation from that pattern, even slightly, involves us in error). But to indulge you so far, I beg you to place before your eyes that ancient form of the church, such as it is shown to have been during those times in the writings of Chrysostom and Basil among the Greeks, and Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine among the Latins.'

In this Renaissance advocacy of the fathers as the best interpreters of the Gospel, one particular father loomed very large: Augustine of Hippo. Partly this was simply because Augustine towered over all the other fathers in the Western church for his theological genius, formative influence, and prolific authorship. But many found food for their souls in Augustine's devotional and doctrinal writings.

Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli became wholehearted disciples of Augustine, notably his understanding of the sovereignty of divine grace. A generation later, John Calvin said he would be happy to have his faith expressed entirely according to the teachings of Augustine. Here, then, is another and very specific way the Renaissance flowed into the Reformation. By creating a new market for Augustine, it fed into the Augustinian ‘renewal movement’ that lay close to the Reformation’s heart.

Nor must we discount Erasmus himself. His disgust at the flaws of late-medieval Catholicism, articulated often in devastating satire, helped to awaken in people’s minds a readiness for drastic remedies. His *Praise of Folly* is generally held up as the supreme example of Erasmus’ writing in this genre. To my mind, far funnier is his *Julius Excluded from Heaven*, in which the soul of Pope Julius II (1503-13) arrives at the gates of Heaven, only to find that St Peter doesn’t recognise him and refuses him entry – upon which Julius threatens to excommunicate Peter. It is side-splitting humour, and it is hard to see how the papacy could wholly recover from such irreverent mockery. Here is a brief extract – this is Pope Julius arguing with the apostle Peter at Heaven’s gate:

‘Julius: Cut out the nonsense and open the door. Unless, that is, you’d rather have it battered down? In a word, do you see what a body of followers I have?’

Peter: Well, I can see a lot of hardened bandits. But in case you didn’t realise, these doors have to be stormed with different weapons.

Julius: I’ve had enough of all this talk. Unless you obey me right this minute, I will hurl even against *you* the thunderbolt of excommunication, with which I once terrified the mightiest kings and entire kingdoms! Behold the Bull I’ve already drawn up for the purpose.

Peter: What is this wretched thunderbolt, this thunder, these Bulls? What high-sounding drivel are you prating to me about, for goodness’ sake? We never heard about any of these things from Christ!

Julius: Well, you’ll feel them if you don’t obey.

Peter: Perhaps you did once terrify some people with this hot air, but up here it doesn’t mean a thing. Here you have to operate with truth. This citadel is won by good deeds, not evil words.’

More positively, Erasmus set out a programme of reform for society, involving the centrality of education, a knowledge of Greek, the study of the New Testament, and a spirituality that sat light to mere external ritual and focused on the faith of the heart. Many people learned from Erasmus a Christ-centred spirituality that could so easily become a conduit into Reformation faith. Most influential in this regard was Erasmus’ *Enchiridion*, or *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* (it could also be translated *Dagger of the Christian Soldier*), first published in 1503. Drenched in the faith of the early church fathers, the *Enchiridion* remained a Protestant favourite long after the dust of the Reformation had settled. Here is a typical passage:

‘To worship Christ with nothing more than outward ceremonies, as if such worship were the height of spirituality, while all the time you are puffed up with self-importance, and condemn other people, and think yourself secure because you live and die in your outward worship: well, the very ordinances of worship that were meant to *draw* you to Christ will *withdraw* you from him. Your religion is a rebellion against the spirit of the Gospel, a falling back into the superstitions and rituals of Judaism...The apostle Paul, the foremost defender of spiritual religion, never ceased trying to get the Jews to give up their confidence in outward works and rituals, and to lead them to spiritual realities. Yet I feel that the great majority of Christians have fallen back again into that sickness.’

So often we find that Protestant Reformers across Europe were steeped in these Erasmian ideals. The Reformers added a theological dimension that was missing from Erasmus’ own outlook (specifically, an Augustinian doctrine of grace), but the two aspects – Erasmianism and Augustinianism – proved powerfully compatible. In some cases, we can even document a direct impact of Erasmus’ ideals and writings in placing someone on the path of reform, especially Ulrich Zwingli, the Reformer of Switzerland. Zwingli always claimed he owed his conversion to a belief that salvation is through trust in Christ alone to a religious poem by Erasmus:

‘In 1514 or 1515, I read a poem about the Lord Jesus, written by the profoundly learned Erasmus of Rotterdam, in which with many very beautiful words Jesus complains that people do not seek all blessing in him, so that he might be to them a fountain of every blessing, a Saviour, a comfort, a treasure of the soul. So I thought, “Well, if this is true, why then should we seek help from any created being?”’

The printing press

Just as important as the Renaissance in preparing the soil for the Reformation was a revolutionary new way of disseminating information – printing by movable type. Perhaps one of the basic reasons why the public mind of Western Europe had not been captured by previous movements of evangelical reform (we think of the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites) was simply that they had come on the scene before the printing press had been invented. In a Europe dominated by the Catholic establishment, the intellectual spread of new ‘unofficial’ ideas was far more difficult without a printing industry.

The invention of printing by movable type was the information revolution of the late Middle Ages. It was their equivalent of the internet. Johann Gutenberg of Mainz in Germany was the great pioneer in the 1450s. By 1500, over 200 printing presses were churning out books throughout Europe. Gone were the days when scribes (usually monks) had to copy out literary works laboriously by hand. For the first time, a publisher could make thousands of copies of a book easily and quickly, and

put them into mass circulation. This meant that ideas could spread so much more rapidly. It also meant that the ability to read became more highly valued. Literacy was a by-product of the printing revolution, and without literacy it is difficult to see how Reformation ideas could have been so widely communicated.

As a result of the new printing industry, the ideals of Renaissance humanism were able to flow out across Europe relatively easily, and in their wake, the even more radically reforming ideals of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (and others). We might say that printing enabled the Reformation to 'go viral' in a way that frankly would not have been possible in a previous age. The new information technology turned out to be God's gift to his people.

We can discern the alignment between the printing revolution and the spread of the Reformation in a single fact: it was cities and universities that first embraced the Reformation. In England, for example, London fast became the nation's hotbed of Protestantism. Here were the great printing presses; here too was a thriving port, where merchant ships could bring in Protestant literature from Continental Europe. Long before Henry VIII's death, his capital city had already been infected at every level with the good infection of the Reformation, and it owed little or nothing to Henry's political breach with Rome.

A similar phenomenon greets us if we look at 16th-century Switzerland. The Swiss Confederacy was made up of thirteen member states, called 'cantons'. Four of these were 'city cantons': Zurich, Basel, Berne, and Schaffhausen. The other nine were agricultural cantons, based around farm and village, dominated by five central 'forest cantons'. Is it a mere accident of history that the Reformation was victorious in all four of the city cantons, whereas the forest cantons remained the strongholds of Roman Catholicism? The cities, with their centres of higher learning and their printing industries, were the perfect places for Reformation thought to be disseminated.

Likewise in Germany, the majority of the 'free imperial cities' (self-governing cities, little independent states in effect, with no higher allegiance save to the Holy Roman Emperor) turned Protestant. Nor was this some superficial political or cultural conversion, as the Emperor Charles V discovered to his cost, when he tried to reimpose Roman Catholicism on the cities by armed force in the late 1540s. The people of the German cities remained defiantly Protestant. The sword could conquer their territories but not their souls. Charles eventually had to admit defeat and withdraw. He learned what so many other military powers have learned, that vanquishing a people's land does not mean vanquishing a people's mind and spirit.

Dissenting movements

Now let us look at some other factors that helped pave the way for the Reformation. I mentioned earlier the evangelical dissenting movements of the later Middle Ages, the Waldensians (located chiefly in northern Italy), the Lollards (England and Scotland), and the Hussites (Bohemia, the Slavic region of the Holy Roman Empire). These dissenting movements were very much alive and flourishing on the eve of the Reformation, although mostly underground. Despite contributing little to Luther and Zwingli's reform, they did provide a rich and ready-made soil for Lutheran and Zwinglian ideals.

The Waldensians gladly embraced the new reform movement of the 16th century, and became part of the wider Protestant world that was taking shape. One interesting point of contact between Waldensianism and the Reformation was the Waldensian merchant Étienne de la Forge, stationed in Paris. He used his home to give shelter and hospitality to Protestant refugees from the Netherlands. More strikingly, it was in the Waldensian merchant's Paris home that a young John Calvin lodged while a student in Paris. He and La Forge were good friends, and we may conjecture that La Forge's influence might have helped push young Calvin across the boundary between Erasmus-inspired Catholic reform (which Calvin at that point accepted) into outright Protestantism. La Forge died as a martyr along with many Parisian Protestants in 1534; Calvin escaped to Switzerland, and from there wrote a moving defence of the Parisian martyrs, including his Waldensian friend.

The Lollards, English and Scottish followers of the 14th-century reformer John Wycliffe, also embraced the Reformation at an early stage. Various examples of progress from Lollardy to Lutheranism have been discovered and documented by modern scholars: for example, John Stacey and Lawrence Maxwell, prominent Lollard guildsmen, both became Lutherans in the 1520s and distributed Lutheran books. Probably old Lollardy and new Protestantism began to merge together from around the time that William Tyndale's English New Testament began circulating in 1525-6. The English Church authorities tended to see all heresy in terms of Lollardy; in 1523, Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall of London wrote, 'It is no question of pernicious novelty; it is only that new arms are being added to the great crowd of Wycliffite heresies.'

The Hussites of Bohemia, disciples of the 15th-century reformer Jan Hus, also embraced the Reformation. Luther had early been strengthened in his reforming convictions by reading some of the writings of Jan Hus. These astonished him; Hus seemed to be saying so many of the same things Luther was now saying. 'We are all Hussites without knowing it!' Luther exclaimed. 'St Paul and St Augustine are Hussites!'

The United Bohemian Brotherhood, one of the main Hussite bodies, gave a warm welcome to the new Protestant movement. Their leader, John Augusta,

positively sparked with enthusiasm for Luther. In 1532, Augusta published a Brotherhood confession of faith for which Luther himself wrote a preface. In 1536 Augusta actually visited Wittenberg, and Luther helped to get a revised Hussite confession of faith printed in 1538. Luther's enthusiasm for the Brotherhood was strongly expressed in 1542, when he told Augusta that the Bohemian Brotherhood were to be the apostles to the Bohemians, as Luther and his co-workers were apostles to the Germans.

So in various ways, Italian Waldensians, British Lollards, and Bohemian Hussites all helped to create a fertile and receptive soil for the Reformation.

Voices of reform

Alongside the Renaissance, Erasmus, and these pre-Reformation movements of evangelical dissent, there were individual church voices of reform in the 15th century which, to one degree or another, at least put the idea of reform into the air. Let us look at four.

First, Lorenzo Valla, one of Luther's heroes. Valla was a native of Rome, ordained to the priesthood in 1431, and thereafter engaged in a life of lecturing, study, and writing, financed by Pope Nicholas V and King Alphonso I of Naples. Valla combined a zeal for the writings of Augustine with a pioneering study of the Greek text of the New Testament, and a highly critical attitude to some ancient Catholic traditions. His two greatest works were his *Concerning the False Credit and Eminence of the Donation of Constantine* (1440) and his *Annotations on the New Testament*. In the first of these works, Valla correctly exposed as a forgery the so-called 'Donation of Constantine', which the popes had used for 700 years to back up their exalted claims. Based on this exposé, Valla argued that the papacy should renounce all political power and become a purely spiritual institution. His *Annotations on the New Testament* were not published until 1505, by Erasmus of Rotterdam. They consisted of a critical comparison between the Greek text of the New Testament and the Latin New Testament of the Vulgate, pointing out the Vulgate's many errors. Not surprisingly, the papacy eventually condemned all Valla's writings in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, regarding him as an evil precursor of Luther and Zwingli.

Second, John of Wesel. Born at Oberwesel on the Rhine (western Germany), John lectured at Basel University in Switzerland, and in 1463 was appointed a preacher in Worms Cathedral. His criticisms of the prevailing theology of the Catholic Church were many and bold. John taught that Scripture alone was the source of Christian teaching, and that popes and councils should not be followed if they contradicted Scripture. He defined the Church as the whole body of believers, not the ecclesiastical organisation headed by the papacy. He denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, rejected indulgences because God alone could pardon sins,

attacked the enforced celibacy of the clergy, and maintained that the distinction between priest and diocesan bishop was of merely human origin. With such views, it was not surprising that John entered into friendly relations with the Hussites.

The Church authorities could not remain for ever silent in the face of such sweeping criticisms; in 1477, they finally deposed John from the priesthood, and in 1479 the inquisition put him on trial, accusing him of being a Hussite. John's great frailty (he was now 79 years old) proved unequal to the ordeal, and he agreed to renounce his heresies. The authorities burnt all his writings, and sentenced him to imprisonment in the Augustinian convent in Mainz, where John died two years later.

Third, Wessel Gansfort. Born at Groningen in the Netherlands, Gansfort was taught in a school at Deventer run by the Brethren of the Common Life, then went on to study in various universities before lecturing in Heidelberg and Paris. Gansfort was a pioneer Renaissance scholar, expert in Greek and Hebrew. In theology, Gansfort was at first a disciple of Thomas Aquinas, but later turned away from Aquinas to Augustine of Hippo as a safer guide. He went back to Groningen in about 1474 to act as spiritual director of a nunnery there, and also in the Mount Saint Agnes monastery (where Thomas à Kempis had lived). Gansfort's preaching and teaching attracted a wide circle of admirers. Like John of Wesel, he made many probing criticisms of Catholic doctrine – indeed, many of the same criticisms. He denied the infallibility of the papacy. He rejected indulgences. He defined the Church as the entire company of believers, not the organisation headed by the papacy. He continued to accept transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass, yet also maintained that Christ's presence in the bread and wine was for believers only. A strong Augustinian, he upheld salvation by God's grace alone, and even taught an embryonic idea of justification by faith. Gansfort was more fortunate than John of Wesel in escaping the attentions of the inquisition; he died peacefully in his bed. Luther was a great admirer of Gansfort, publishing his writings with a commendatory preface, and asserting: 'If I had read his books before, my enemies might have thought that Luther had borrowed everything from Gansfort, so great is the agreement between our spirits. I feel my joy and my strength increase, and have no doubt that I have taught correctly, when I find that someone who wrote at a different time, in another land, and with a different purpose, agrees so totally with my views and expresses them in almost the same words.'

Fourth and lastly, Girolamo Savonarola. Savonarola was a native of the Italian city of Ferrara who in 1474 became a Dominican friar. After preaching in various Italian cities, in 1491 he was appointed prior of San Marco, a Dominican convent in Florence, in many ways the capital city of the Italian Renaissance. Savonarola's preaching in Florence was so effective and popular that it gave him almost complete power over the city, especially after its ruling family, the Medici, fled from a French invasion force in 1494. Savonarola's popularity was not because his sermons flattered

people; no one denounced sin or warned of divine judgement as sternly as he. His moral reforms made Florence into a sort of holy city, where famously, in 1496, the entire body of citizens burned in a great public fire (the ‘bonfire of the vanities’) all their pornography, cosmetics, and things used for gambling – cards, dice, etc. Savonarola also carried out far-reaching political reforms, drawing up a new democratic constitution for Florence.

However, a long and fierce quarrel broke out between Savonarola and Pope Alexander VI. Alexander did not like Savonarola’s claim to be a Heaven-sent messenger of Christ, or the friar’s involvement in politics. (Alexander was also under the influence of the Medici who wanted to regain their power in Florence.) Pope Alexander commanded Savonarola to cease from his preaching. Savonarola refused to obey, denounced Alexander as a servant of Satan, and began preaching against the corruptions of the papal court. Alexander excommunicated Savonarola in 1497. To cut a long and complex story short, in 1498 Savonarola’s popular support finally bled away, the political authorities turned against him, and he was arrested, condemned, and burnt at the stake.

Savonarola was not really a theological reformer like John of Wesel or Wessel Gansfort. But Luther and others counted him a forerunner of the Reformation for two reasons. First, Savonarola was a strong Augustinian in his understanding of the sovereignty of God’s grace in salvation. Second, he defied the papacy, and paid for his defiance with his life.

A right study of the Reformation, then, shows us that, far from being an inexplicable bolt shot down from the blue, it was at every point immersed in the history of its times. It had roots and antecedents; it had identifiable channels of influence; it sprang from the soil of the Middle Ages, where many good seeds were sprouting. To summarise the view of the reformed scholars Nevin and Schaff, with whom I began, the Reformation – rather than a mysterious and inexplicable miracle – was nothing other than the best elements of medieval Catholicism correcting the worst elements.