

The History of the Reformation...



HOW
CHRIST
RESTORED
THE GOSPEL
TO HIS
CHURCH

Mass Confusion & Marriage... Martin Luther

One of the great phrases that came out of the Protestant Reformation is the phrase
“**post tenebras lux.**”

It’s Latin and it means, “**After darkness, light.**”

In fact, many Lutheran Churches to this day still hold “**tenebras**” services every year on Good Friday. “**Tenebras**” services are marked by solemnity and by silence as worshippers read and sing of Christ’s passion and ponder how their sin and disobedience led to His death in their place. The service is always held in a darkened chapel. At the end of the “**tenebras**” service, the few candles that are used are blown out as the congregation files out quietly in the darkness and head home without speaking to each other or fellowshiping with each other.

All of that is transformed, of course, two days later on Easter Sunday morning into joy and singing and light. The darkness is gone...the light has come. Easter Sunday is filled with celebration as worshippers read and sing of Christ’s victory over death and the grave.

“**Tenebras**” means darkness. That darkness is observed on Good Friday.

“**Lux**” means light. That is what is pondered and celebrated on Easter Sunday...“**After darkness, light.**”

Now when the phrase “**post tenebras lux**” is used, it is normally used in reference to the recovery of the doctrine of justification and to the principle of “**sola fide**” but there is a sense in which the phrase refers to other things associated with the Reformation as well. It refers to the reformation of worship and to the reformation of clerical orders. It refers to the accessibility of Scripture and to the reformation of the sacraments and it even refers to the reformation of the concepts of work and family.

You can see now, I think, how the phrase was used. That which was dark was illuminated by Scripture and by Christ’s great redemptive work...by the gospel. People were no longer held in the bondage of superstition and idolatry. They were no longer held in bondage and ignorance of what Christ had accomplished on their behalf. They could see at last what Christ had accomplished on their behalf. They were a little like the man who had been born blind but who could now see for himself. They were like the people Isaiah described when he wrote:

^{NIV} **Isaiah 9:2**...The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

That is what happened in the Reformation...“**post tenebras lux.**”

Men came to see their lives as having meaning in Christ. Men came to see their vocations as having meaning in Christ. Men who had been cobblers were suddenly grateful that God had granted them a vocation and calling. They were no longer

ashamed of having menial positions in life. They no longer looked with jealousy and envy upon those called to other or higher vocations. Instead, they rejoiced in what others had been called to even as they rejoiced in their own vocation and calling.

Listen to what Luther taught his people:

To serve God simply means to do what God has commanded and not to do what God has forbidden. And if only we would accustom ourselves properly to this view, the entire world would be full of service to God, not only the churches but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop, and the field of townsfolk and farmers. It is certain that God would have that sort of order not only in the church and world order but also in the home. All, therefore, who serve the latter purpose — father and mother first, then the children, and finally the servants and neighbors — are jointly serving God; for so He wills and commands.

In the light of this view of the matter a poor maid should have the joy in her heart of being able to say: **“Now I am cooking, making the bed, sweeping the house. Who has commanded me to do these things? My master and mistress have. Who has given them this authority over me? God has. Very well, then it must be true that I am serving not them alone but also God in heaven and that God must be pleased with my service, How could I possibly be more blessed? Why, my service is equal to cooking for God in heaven!”**

In this way a man could be happy and of good cheer in all his trouble and labor; and if he accustomed himself to look at his service and calling in this way nothing would be distasteful to him. But the devil opposes this point of view tooth and nail, to keep one from coming to this joy and to cause everybody to have a special dislike for what he should do and is commanded to do. So the devil operates in order to make sure that people do not love *the idea of work and at the same time to rob them of the joy they feel and to diminish their service to God.*¹

Now, I can't tell you what a revolutionary idea that was. The idea that common people should ever hope to view their common labor and their common vocation as a gift from God was revolutionary in every sense of the word. Up until Luther,

the world thought that unless a man was a priest or a monk and unless a woman was nun, he or she was insignificant. But Luther said, **“No...we are all priests. Your vocation and your contentment in your vocation should not be dependent upon your being in vocational ministry or in being a figure of public acclaim. If God wills that fine...if He does not do that, you ought to still do what he has granted you to do to the glory of God.”**

Even today, it is a truth that is not proclaimed nearly often enough or loudly enough. As a result, lay people want to be ministers. Ministers want to be lay people...rich, lay people but lay people. Women want to be men. Kids want to be adults and adults want to be kids. Everyone wants what they believe to be the principal place of honor and the end result is that even Christians grumble about being something other than what they are. That is why so many people today have so much leisure time and are yet so unfulfilled. That is why so many wives and children live lives of deep, abiding bitterness. Of course, many times husbands do not help the matter...for they hold their wives and children in contempt in the name of the principle of **“submission.”** But the idea, Luther’s idea...the Reformation idea, that life and work are a gift from God militates against all that. In fact, in the Reformation, the underlying concept that life and work were a gift from God led to a transformation of how society viewed individual purpose and importance. It later found its ultimate expression in the rise of what was called the Puritan work ethic.

There is one particular story...my personal favorite...that especially illustrates the way Luther and the reformers looked at these things. Once Luther was asked by a shoe maker, **“Dr. Luther...I am but a humble cobbler but I am grateful to God**

for Christ's justifying work on my behalf...what should I do in light of Christ's great redemptive work?"

Luther response, **"Make a better shoe."**

You see, Luther believed that life ought to be lived in gratitude for what Christ had done. He believed in the worth of the individual not just because he had a sentimental view of man but rather because he saw man as a reflection of His creator and the instrument through which God accomplished His purpose. That was a theme that Luther hammered over and over again. Still it was not a reality that happened very quickly. It was certainly not a reality that happened with any sort of neatness or order. In fact, and I think we have to be honest here as Protestants, it only happened over a period of time and while it was happening there was a great deal of confusion and error.

What many common people thought they heard in Luther's teaching on the priesthood of all believers was that all authority was to be cast aside. What they thought they heard is that in the same way the church had overthrown the authority of Rome and replaced it with the authority of Scripture so the common man ought to overthrow the authority of governmental rule and replace it with his own individual freedom and self-rule. But that was not what Luther was saying at all. Luther was not a huge advocate of individual rights. He was not opposed to individual rights in principle but such rights were always relegated to a secondary position behind the proclamation of the gospel, the greater good of Christian society and the purpose and will of God.

Luther was not a modern day capitalist.

He was not a Republican.

But neither was he a communist.

He was most assuredly not a Democrat.

Luther was a medieval man struggling to live out the implications of the gospel. I think he was the last of the great medieval men and the first of the great moderns. And because he stood in the transition between those two great epochs life around Luther was sometimes very messy.

Life in the Reformation was sometimes messy.

That was especially true in Wittenberg while Luther was locked away in Wartburg Castle. He was there from May 4, 1521 till March 1, 1522. You will remember he was **“kidnapped”** by Frederick the Wise after the Diet at Worms and that he was **“kidnapped”** for his own protection. The Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, had both excommunicated him and ruled him to be an obstinate heretic.

That meant that if they could find him and catch him, they could kill him. They wanted to kill him. But Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony and Luther's Prince and Protector did not want that to happen. So, he hid Luther out in the Wartburg Castle through the last half of 1521 and the first half of 1522 and waited.

Now where Luther was hidden and who had hidden him there was a great secret at the time. Not more than a half a dozen people in Germany knew the real truth...the whole truth. It is said that not even Frederick the Wise knew where he was...and that was true. He refused to let his aides tell him where they had hidden

Luther. He wanted to be able to say to the other electors and to the Holy Roman Emperor that he honestly had no idea where Luther was.²

While Luther was in the Wartburg Castle, in order to disguise himself, he grew out his hair and his beard and laid aside his monastic robe and began to wear the clothes of a knight. He went by the name Junker George...which meant Knight George.³

In the first weeks and months of his seclusion, there were many reports of his capture and death. Common people mourned the loss of Luther terribly. Even his bitterest enemies wished that whoever had taken him or whoever had killed him would just come out with it all. One Catholic leader fearing a revolt by the people wrote to Albrecht the Archbishop of Mainz saying, **“The only way of saving ourselves is to light torches and hunt for Luther through the whole world, to restore him to the nation that is calling for him.”**⁴ It was harder, it seems, for his enemies to deal with the ghost of a martyr than with a living legend. And then suddenly people began to receive letters from Luther. Still, he never revealed where he was. He signed his letters cryptically...From Luther on the Isle of Patmos or From Luther in the Wilderness or something like that.⁵

Now the Reformation did not stop just because Luther went into hiding. While he was sequestered at the Wartburg Castle, the Reformation continued and it continued with great speed.⁶ In his absence, leadership fell to Philip Melancthon the Greek professor at the university and to Carlstadt the archdeacon at the Castle Church and to Gabriel Zwilling an Augustinian monk who like Luther had a gift for preaching.

Of the three men...Melanchthon, Zwillling and Carlstadt...only Melanchthon remained resolutely loyal to Luther. The other two men and Carlstadt in particular were not only disloyal to Luther...they wanted to replace Luther. Carlstadt in particular and this is my own personal opinion, longed to be Luther. He wanted the relationship Luther had with the people of Wittenberg. He wanted the limelight Luther had...and yet he was never really able to capture the hearts and minds of Luther's flock. Still, he was perfectly willing to step into Luther's place and position. He wanted to step into Luther's place and position. He wanted to drive the Reformation ahead in Luther's absence so that when Luther finally did return he would find that he had long since been left behind.

Still, that is not quite how it worked out. But I am getting ahead of myself. As I was saying, in Luther's absence the Reformation pressed ahead, not so much theologically as it did practically.

In September 1521, Melanchthon offered communion in both kinds to the people...that is, he offered them both bread and cup.

In November, at Zwillling's urging and in light of Luther's rejection of the sacrament of Orders, thirteen monks of the Augustinian Order at Wittenberg revoked their vows and left the monastery.⁷

In Christmas Day 1521, Carlstadt officiated over the service at the Castle Church at Wittenberg. He wore no vestments...only a plain black robe. He said the mass...a scaled down version of the mass...eliminating all references to Jesus being offered as a sacrifice in the mass. At the point of consecration, he switched from Latin into German. For the first time in their lives, the 2,000 people or so in

attendance heard these words in their own language, **“This is the cup of my blood of the new and eternal testament, spirit and secret of the faith, shed for you for the remission of sins.”**

Carlstadt then offered the elements to the congregation without their having attended confession. In fact, he told them if they needed confession they were unworthy of the sacrament. What they needed, he argued, was faith in what Christ had accomplished on their behalf. Carlstadt distributed the elements in both kinds to the congregation. He actually placed the wafers into the hands of the congregants. One of the men who received the bread from Carlstadt dropped the piece he had been holding. Carlstadt told him to pick it up...but the man...who only moments before had been bold enough to come down to the front of the church and receive the bread and cup...seeing the wafer on the floor was so terrified at seeing Christ’s body desecrated that he could not bring himself to touch it.

I want you to remember that picture. A man liberated on the one hand and yet still captive on the other. It is a wonderful picture of the state of the Reformation at that moment in time.

In the weeks that followed and at Carlstadt’s urging, the town council issued its first ordinance concerning the mass. From that point on, it was to be conducted about as Carlstadt had done in the Christmas service. The town council issued other ordinances as well at Carlstadt’s urging. Some of the ordinances were simply Luther’s ideas put in effect. For example, begging was forbidden. The genuinely poor of the town were no longer permitted to beg but were provided for out of a general fund distributed by the council.⁸ Prostitution was forbidden. But then

Carlstadt went beyond Luther. He urged the council to outlaw the presence of images of any kind in the churches. Zwilling, in fact, led an iconoclastic riot in which the citizens of the town rushed into the churches and destroyed all the images, pictures, crucifixes and crosses they could lay their hands on. Zwilling led the party but it was Carlstadt's doctrine.

Carlstadt took as his text, **"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."**

But Carlstadt was not relying on scripture alone. His understanding the 10th commandment was buttressed by the deep seated idolatry he had struggled with in first coming to the faith. He had been so deeply attached to images that they had diverted him from true worship. He had in fact worshipped them and now that he had come to faith he despised them all the more for the way he had been deluded. He wanted everything to go.

That included music.

"Relegate organs, trumpets, and flutes to the theater," he argued. **"Better one heart—felt prayer than a thousand cantatas of the Psalms. The lascivious notes of the organ awaken thoughts of the world. When we should be meditating on the suffering of Christ, we are reminded of Pyrrhus and Thisbe. Or, if there is to be singing, let it be no more than a solo."**⁹

Carlstadt wanted worship to be genuinely spiritual. He wanted it to not be tainted by anything materialistic. It is a wonder, I think, that he did not give up the sacraments themselves.

In January, Carlstadt took a wife.

Frederick the Wise was flabbergasted not with the reform but with the confusion. Finally, he issued his own instructions.

We have gone too fast. The common man has been incited to frivolity, and no one has been edified. We should have consideration for the weak. Images should be left until further notice. The question of begging should be canvassed. No essential portion of the mass should be omitted. Moot points should be discussed. Carlstadt should not preach any more.¹⁰

About that time, three men from the town of Zwickau showed up in Wittenberg. Their names were Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel and Marcus Thomae...also known as Marcus Stubner.¹¹ They are known in history as the Zwickau Prophets.

Storch was a tailor. Drechsel a weaver and Stubner had been at one time a student at Wittenberg. These three men were remarkable in their manner and in their claim. They claimed they had been sent by God to take over the Reformation at Wittenberg. **“Though Luther had gone far, he had not gone far enough,”** they argued.¹² That claim had been implicit in the actions and reforms of others. Carlstadt had essentially made the same claim in his rapid advancement of new ideas and reforms. But these three men went beyond Carlstadt. They claimed to possess direct revelation from God. In fact, they claimed continuing direct revelation from God.

Storch, the leader of the three, claimed a direct and continual word from God. To that he added an extraordinary knowledge of the Bible...and extraordinary knowledge of the Bible despite the fact that he was apparently illiterate. But Storch did not depend upon on his knowledge of the Bible. He claimed that God spoke to him in direct revelations and in dreams and in visions and he claimed that

because God did, in fact, speak to him directly the Bible was no longer of very much importance.¹³ I love the way D'Aubigne summarizes their thought.

“What is the use,” said they, “of clinging so closely to the Bible? The Bible! always the Bible! Can the Bible preach to us? Is it sufficient for our instruction? If God had designed to instruct us by a book, would he not have sent us a Bible from heaven? It is by the Spirit alone that we can be enlightened. God himself speaks to us. God himself reveals to us what we should do, and what we should preach.” Thus did these fanatics, like the adherents of Rome, attack the fundamental principle on which the entire Reformation is founded — the all-sufficiency of the Word of God.¹⁴

You see, in essence, Storch had claimed to be God’s new prophet to the elect. To make matters worse, he advocated the idea of violently overthrowing unbelievers. That is, he wanted to put unbelievers to the sword. In fact, he claimed that the destruction of unbelievers was inevitable but that when it came he would be God’s prophet to them all. Listen to how D'Aubigne puts it:

“Woe! woe!” said they; “a Church governed by men so corrupt as the bishops cannot be the Church of Christ. The impious rulers of Christendom will be overthrown. In five, six, or seven years, a universal desolation will come upon the world. The Turk will seize upon Germany; all the priests will be put to death, even those who are married. No ungodly man, no sinner will remain alive; and after the earth has been purified by blood, God will then set up a kingdom; We (by that they meant Storch) will be put in possession of the supreme authority, and commit the government of the nations to the saints. Then there will be one only faith, one only baptism. The day of the Lord is at hand, and the end of the world draweth nigh. Woe! woe! woe!” Then...the new prophets called upon all men to come and receive from their hands the true baptism, as a sign of their introduction into the new Church of God.¹⁵

They rejected the idea of infant baptism. They insisted that the true saints be rebaptized with their baptism. They were called **“anabaptists”**...those that rebaptized.

Stubner, the young man who had once been a student at Wittenberg, claimed that God had granted to him the ability to read other people’s minds. Later, and I have to tell you this one story, when Luther met with Stubner, Stubner told him that he could read his mind. Luther asked him what he was thinking. Stubner said, **“You are wondering whether or not what I said might be true.”** Luther responded by saying that yes that was indeed what he had been thinking. He then asked Stubner to tell him what Bible verse he was pondering...Stubner vacillated. Luther told him, **“The Lord rebuke you, O Satan.”**

Melanchthon had been deeply impressed by Storch right from the beginning. He was worried that rejecting the Zwickau Prophets outright might mean a rejection of God’s prophetic word. He wrote to Luther to ask him what to do and how he should respond. Luther replied that Melanchthon ought not worry very much about the Zwickau Prophets. He assured Melanchthon that they were frauds. He asked Melanchthon to ask them whether they had suffered in their revelations...or whether their revelations had come easily. He assured Melanchthon that receiving God’s revelation was always painful and that their pride and arrogance demonstrated that they had never communicated with God face to face.

Luther moved to accommodate the weak in faith. He moved to go slowly in dealing with those who were unable to make the transition to the reformed view of things quickly.

Now about that same time another man from Zwickau, a man by the name of Thomas Muntzer began to preach the violent overthrow of government. He was like the Zwickau Prophets except educated. He set himself forth as the end time, great prophet of God and he charged the peasants to overthrow the nobility...to indeed kill all but the faithful, the elect. He despised Luther's view of providing for the weaker brothers. He argued that those who were weak in faith were not in the faith and all and should be sacrificed. He called Luther and this is hard for me to imagine...he called Luther Dr. Easychair and Dr. Soft-Life because of his concern for the weak and helpless.

Luther could see that the princes of Germany were going to have to act. Muntzer was willing to destroy everything to elevate himself. Frederick the Wise had had enough. The people of Wittenberg had had enough. They appealed to Luther to come home.

He did and when he did he put things right in Wittenberg. He restored order. He expelled Carlstadt. He admonished the people, encouraged the princes and blasted Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets as devils and he did all of that by preaching. He preached eight sermons in a row when he returned and restored order and civility and peace almost instantly. Luther was a reformer, a prophet, and an educator...but he was primarily a pastor. Luther shepherded his sheep.

Now I wanted to bring all of this up...Carlstadt, the Zwickau Prophets and Thomas Muntzer to show you that the Reformation was not always neat and tidy. There were times of great confusion as people began to try to figure out the implications of the gospel. I also wanted to show you that Luther exercised great leadership and patience and a tremendous amount of endurance. Luther wrote

against Muntzer and his followers and against the Prophets and yet the sway they had over the peasants was never completely wretched away. There remained a great deal of unrest and that unrest eventually worked itself out in the Peasants' War of 1525. Around a hundred thousand peasants were killed...the Prophets were banished...Carlstadt was banished...Muntzer was executed...and many people, especially his theological opponents in the Roman Church blamed Luther. They accused him of going from nearly being a martyr to making martyrs. Luther always felt that he should have done more...that he should have acted sooner...that he had dawdled too long but that is a bit unfair. It was a messy time and in light of the many forces coming into play at the time, I think Luther was one of the few men able to see the whole picture with any sort of clarity. He was able to discern who the real enemies were and he always exercised a shepherd's heart toward the poor and the oppressed.

Now in the minute or two I have left. I want to just introduce to you to Luther's wife, Katie. Luther was married in June 1525 shortly after the peasant uprising. The woman that he married was named Katie von Bora.

She and eleven nuns had escaped from a nunnery...and yes she was held there against her will. They had escaped in the spring of 1523 and had been aided in their escape by a merchant who made deliveries to their convent. They escaped in a wagon containing empty barrels that had once contained pickled herring...a fish that was preserved in a brine solution...something like sardines. The popular story goes that the nuns actually got in the barrels and that the barrels stacked in the merchant's wagon were covered over by a tarp. The barrels with the nuns in them were delivered after an insufferable two day ride to Luther's residence in Wittenberg. I think modern scholarship has determined that the women were not

actually in the barrels more or less lined the edges of the wagon and that the tarp stretched over the top formed a sort of a tent in the merchant's wagon and that the runaway nuns were all together in a clump in the middle.

Anyway when they arrived in Wittenberg they were a mess. One of the women was the sister of Luther's old prior von Staupitz.

Luther felt that he was obligated to take care of the nuns and he did so. He also felt that since they had revoked their vows it was appropriate for them to get married if they wanted. Over the next two years, he...and this is one of the wonderful quirks of history played the role of a matchmaker. In 1524, Luther found that he had three ex-nuns left. One of the nuns, Katie von Bora had agreed to marry one of the ex-monks and then changed her mind. She sent word to Luther that she didn't want to marry the man that had been arranged for her but that she was not against the idea of marriage and that she was willing even to marry Luther if he ever thought he might be so inclined. Luther dawdled. Frederick the Wise's secretary Spalatin wrote Luther a letter and suggested that he give it some thought. Luther answered back.

As for what you write about my marrying, do not be surprised that I do not wed, even if I am so famous a lover. You should be more surprised when I write so much about marriage and in this way have so much to do with women that I do not turn into a woman, let alone marry one. Although if you want my example you have it abundantly, for I have had three wives at once (he is referring to the three final nuns to be placed) and have loved them so hard as to lose two to other husbands. The third (Katie von Bora) I hold barely with my left hand, and she is perhaps about to be snatched from me. You are really the timid lover who do not dare to marry even one.¹⁶

Anyway, in June 1525 they were married. Luther had dawdled because he thought he might wind up martyred at any moment.

He was not in love when he got married...neither was his bride. No, their marriage was a statement...an affirmation that marriage was a holy and righteous institution given by God to the comfort of his people. But something happened over the next twenty years of their marriage. They fell in love...deeply in love. They had six children. Martin Luther learned to be mocked and laughed at because of his adeptness at both changing and washing diapers.

It was a messy time. But we'll talk more about that next week.

Let's pray.

¹ Martin Luther, edited by Ewald M. Plass "Faith Sanctifies All Work" ... Sect. 1699 in *What Luther Says: An Anthology* Vol. 2. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 560.

² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 193.

³ Roland Bainton, 195.

⁴ J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the 16th Century*, Book 9, Chapter 1, 774-5.

⁵ Roland Bainton, 193.

⁶ Roland Bainton, 197.

⁷ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, translated by James L. Schaaf, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 23.

⁸ Roland Bainton, 207.

⁹ Roland Bainton, 208.

¹⁰ Roland Bainton, 210.

¹¹ Martin Brecht, 36.

¹² J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, 811.

¹³ Richard Marius, *Martin Luther; The Christian Between God and Man*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 323.

¹⁴ J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, 811.

¹⁵ J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, 812.

¹⁶ Roland Bainton, 286.