



HUMANITIES

Schismatics, New and Old

The Ferrari Humanities Symposia looks at the Reformation.

By Kathleen McGarvey

A 16TH-CENTURY SCHISM IN CHRISTIANITY might seem an unlikely source for a historical movement the reverberations of which continue to be felt today. But the Reformation, which left turbulent warfare and profound changes in religious and secular thought in its wake, had just such effects. When the *Ninety-Five Theses* of German cleric Martin Luther were posted on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg in 1517, in protestation of the sale of indulgences—to pay for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Cathedral—by the Roman Catholic Church, that action put in motion a splintering of the faith and the creation of Protestant churches.

This spring, the Ferrari Humanities Symposia took the Reformation as their focus, examining not just the rise of Protestantism and the corresponding Catholic Counter-Reformation, but also the technological, political, social, and economic changes that the Reformation ushered in, touching on science, medicine, law, art, education, and moral and ethical thought.

The symposium included a two-credit course, *Reformations in Western Thought*, and featured lectures from leading scholars of the Reformation: Susan Schreiner, professor of the history of Christianity and theology in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago; James Simpson, the Donald P. and Katherine B. Loker Professor of English at Harvard; and Diarmaid MacCulloch, professor of the history of the church at Oxford.

What has the Reformation wrought? A few of the participating faculty members offer their perspectives on the changes

brought about by the Reformation, and how we feel them still.

Dorinda Outram

*Franklin W. Clark and Gladys I. Clark
Professor of History*

The Reformation divided a hitherto nominally united Latin Christendom. And with the emergence of Protestant churches emphasizing individual reading of scriptural texts, literacy becomes important. This helps people to internalize the word of Christ and the religious messages of the reformers.

Still unclear, however, is the actual tipping point of religious change; it is too easy,

▲ **REFORMATIONS:** A series of academic programs this spring explored the technological and social changes inspired by the ideas of Martin Luther—above, depicted burning an announcement of his excommunication—and others of his era.

given the long prior history of discontent with the Catholic Church, to ascribe everything to Luther's theses in 1517.

Thomas Hahn

Professor of English

In insisting on the need for widespread change in their own lives and in the culture at large, many of the voices of the Reformation (and the Catholic response, in the Counter-Reformation) articulated a sense of "religious values" that resonates strongly with contemporary events and movements. Recent evangelical movements in Africa and elsewhere in World Christianity clearly reflect that original impulse.

Beyond the boundaries of Christian practice, the Reformation raises questions about how we understand the origins and impact of religious sentiment, whether as grassroots spontaneity or top-down policy control: the Arab Spring and the civil war in Syria or the spreading capitalist reform of China versus the failed Cultural Revolution model some of the difficulties we face in handling the historical dimensions of reformed cultural change.

Finally, there is the central issue of the nature of change itself: from a Confucian, Hindu, or even a Muslim perspective, the major divisions within Christianity, let alone the fine distinctions among Protestant sects, may seem hard to parse, yet on any view the Reformation was clearly a central component of internal historical changes that dramatically redefined Western identities.

Curt Cadorette

John Henry Newman Associate Professor in Roman Catholic Studies

Martin Luther was a medieval person in many respects, who saw the social order as divinely constructed. And the Peasants' War—an uprising in Germany in 1524–25 inspired by Reformation thought—made his conservative social values really kick in.

The idea that the Reformation says you can believe what you want is a misperception. And the only true egalitarians of the period were the Anabaptists, who believed in radical equality. Fear of anarchy brought Luther's intolerance to the fore. Theoretically, the Reformation is a statement of Christian equality, but practically, how do you implement that? The question leads to religious violence in the 17th century.

John Calvin and Luther say you can and should—Calvin would go so far as to say you must—read religious materials. But

EXCERPT

An 'Extraordinary, Civilized Declaration'

Oxford historian Diarmaid MacCulloch delivered the keynote address of this year's symposium, "Toleration in Reformation Europe: Laughter Versus Tidy-Mindedness." In his lecture, he called attention to a little-noted model of religious tolerance in 16th-century Europe:

The Diet, or parliament, of Transylvania met in the town of Turda in 1568, in the parish church, which you can still go and visit, now Roman Catholic again, but at that stage was the meeting place of a Diet that decided to give total choice to the people of Transylvania, parish by parish. It recognized the legal status not just of Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed, but by implication, by omission, by silence, also anti-Trinitarians, and it made this splendidly trenchant declaration: ministers everywhere should preach the gospel according to their understanding of it, and if their community is willing to accept this, good. If not, however, no one should be compelled by force if their spirit is not at peace. No one is permitted to threaten, put in prison, or banish anyone



KEYNOTE TALK: Historian Diarmaid MacCulloch discussed toleration and the Reformation.

because of their teachings, because faith is a gift from God. Transylvania, 1568. What a shame we remember Transylvania by someone who was never there, Count Dracula, instead of that extraordinary, civilized declaration.

For a video of the talk, visit the symposia's website: www.rochester.edu/college/ferrari-symposia/.

these are very complicated documents. Luther and Calvin say to pick up a text, read it, and your interpretation—arrived at in light of your neighbor's well-being—is legitimate. That leads to one of the wonderful

Symposia Founders

Trustee Bernard Ferrari '70, '74M (MD) and Linda Gaddis Ferrari established the annual Ferrari Humanities Symposia to broaden the liberal education of Rochester undergraduates, enhance the experience of graduate students, and expand the connections of University faculty with other scholars from around the world. The symposia include lectures by visiting senior scholars of humanistic thought with an emphasis on the Renaissance period, intensive short courses taught by faculty members from across the University, and focused study in reading groups and similar endeavors.

aspects of the Reformation: pluralism. It was a frontal challenge to the hegemony of the Catholic system.

A good example of where the effects of the Reformation are still being felt is in the Supreme Court case involving the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act.

Some people see the Defense of Marriage Act as defending a traditional understanding of marriage with a religious dimension, drawing on the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, to conclude that God says marriage should be between a man and a woman.

Others, arguing from the perspective of John Locke, say religion shouldn't define this union—and if people are willing to fulfill the obligations of such a union, why shouldn't they enter into it?

Locke says in his "Letter Concerning Toleration" that we must agree to disagree and there is no right to impose religious premises on other people. In some ways we're still living out 17th-century religious issues. **R**