

“Reform Boldly:
But Believe and Rejoice In the Spirit Working More Boldly Still”

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(Portraits of: Martin Luther, Johann Tetzel, Teresa of Avila, Huldrych Zwingli, Elisabeth Cruciger, and John Calvin)

Reform Boldly

John Calvin: *(from pulpit)* 16th century Germany: the final frontier. These are the adventures of the Protestant Reformers. Their continuing mission: to explore strange new theologies, to seek out new life and new revelations, to boldly reform where no one has reformed before.

(Calvin exits to the stairwell. Tetzel enters and speaks from the floor)

Johann Tetzel: Gather ‘round friends! The name’s Johann Tetzel and I want to talk about a genuine, bona fide, soul saving miracle. You heard me right, “miracle”! I’ve travelled this land from Madgeburg to Halberstadt to Jüterburg. And I hear you wondering, “Why not peddle in Wittenberg?” Well, your fearsome prince won’t let me in. He doesn’t really care for the state of your soul. No, sir, not like I do! I’ve sold this prize for fifteen years since the year of our Lord 1502 and I’ve never had a customer leave me sad. You, there!

Martin Luther: Me?

Tetzel: Yes, you. You look like a man whose soul weighs heavy, whose mind needs a lift, whose prayers don’t make it quite up to heaven. Have I read that right?

Luther: How dare you! I am a priest and a monk and a professor!

Tetzel: So you are! Sorry, friend, didn’t see the haircut. What do they call you back home at the monastery?

Luther: Martin Luther.

Tetzel: Well, Martin Luther, I reckon we two are in the same business – doin’ what we can to snatch back souls from the devil; addin’ our voices to the rods and staffs that guide those sheep on home. You hear what I’m sayin’: we give the people the tools of faith to make our savior glad.

Luther: Well, yeah. I guess that’s one way to put it. Say, Tetzel, didn’t you say you were selling something?

Tetzel: A clever man, you’ll surely go far. And right you are good sir. I’ve come to offer these fine people the hearty help of indulgences.

Luther: Indulgences?

Tetzel: You heard me right, “indulgences.” Say it with me now: “indulgences.”

(Martin Luther shakes his head.)

Tetzel: Now, Luther, sir, you must admit, that most all humans sin.

Luther: Of course.

Tetzel: And reveling in this sorry state can lead one far from heaven.

Luther: Well, sure.

Tetzel: Well, in this life, we suffer so for all the wrong we've done.

Luther: Sometimes.

Tetzel: So we please God with our good works so Christ our soul has won.

Luther: Wait, so you're selling God's forgiveness?

Tetzel: Not at all – it's a chance to prove our penitent, obedient, resil-i-ent hearts.

Luther: I'm gonna have to think about this.

Tetzel: Don't delay – limited supply and orders pouring in!

(Martin Luther walks off to think to himself on the chancel)

Luther: Repent, repent – it's all over scripture. But what does it really mean? Is doing a good deed a kind of repentance? Surely it's a sign of a heart changed by the love of God in Jesus Christ. And isn't that what we owe our loving savior? Lives filled with repentance?

(Luther steps back off the chancel to Tetzel)

Tetzel: Yes, friends, now you're starting to get it. "As soon as a coin in the coffer rings / the soul from purgatory springs."

Luther: Zounds and Gadzooks! Did you just say what I think you did? It's one thing to encourage someone to make confession, repent, and do good works, but give money and a soul gets out of purgatory?! Give money and your dead relatives pop right up to heaven?!

Teresa of Avila: *(pops up)* Yeah, can I just say something?

Luther: Blah! Where did you come from?

Teresa: I'm Teresa of Avila and at this point, I'm only 2 years old. Even I know that that is NOT official Catholic teaching. *(hides away again)*

Tetzel: Eh...pay no attention to that toddler. Buy your indulgences today!

Luther: Mister Tetzel, sir?

Tetzel: Father Tetzel.

Luther: Sorry, right, Father Tetzel. What are you selling indulgences for, anyway?

Tetzel: The Pope is contributing to the on-going project of rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica – the church over the resting place of the keeper of the keys himself – the first pope, the apostle Peter.

Luther: Well, that certainly seems like a worthy project.

Tetzel: And *(mutters loudly under his breath)*

Luther: Didn't quite catch that Tetzel....

Tetzel: Well, the Archbishop has debts from, you know, all the fees and wardrobe and various expenses it takes to...erm...become Archbishop.

Luther: And how much of what you take in goes for the church and how much for the debts?

Tetzel: Umm...half?

Luther: Egads, man! Have you no shame?

Tetzel: Shame? What are you talking about? This is God's work!

(Teresa pops up again)

Teresa: Nope, nope, nope. This sounds quite bad to me.

Luther: *(crosses over to Teresa)* True repentance is the key! Not money changing hands. Ooh, I have so many ideas running around my head, I've gotta start writing them down. *(Sits down on chancel steps and begins jotting things down on the note)* First off – Our lives should be repentant because of our struggle with sin. Going to a confessional may be important, but it's not the same thing!

Teresa: Whoa, buddy! Confessing our sins is important! The Bible says to do it and the Church has practiced confession for hundreds of years.

Luther: But God is the one with the true power to forgive – not the priest, not even the pope in the end!

Teresa: What?

Luther: Calm down – the pope announces God’s forgiveness. The pope is still super important. I’m just not sure about all this purgatory stuff from the indulgences. They say the indulgences can decrease the time we spend there for punishment, but that seems like God’s choice, not our choice. And we influence our punishment by responding to God’s grace, by being better Christians, right? So, paying money can’t get somebody else out of purgatory.

Teresa: Well, I agree with you there. The good works that we do benefit our own souls and help us get into heaven.

Luther: What? No! Grace first – God’s grace is first and greatest and, and, and there’s nothing that we can do that earns our way up to heaven.

Teresa: Nonsense! Grace and good works gain us salvation because the good that we do, we do together with God. We do good and become better people and please God. If good works don’t help you, why would you do anything good at all?

Luther: Because good works are our joyful response to God’s glorious grace!

Teresa: Really?

Luther: (*pauses for a moment*) Agree to disagree?

Teresa: Sure.

Luther: Back to my letter, I think that it’s better to give money to help poor people than to buy indulgences. I mean, if the pope knew what people like Tetzl were saying in his name, he would be shocked! Shocked! And, anyway, chasing after merit and good works isn’t the true treasure of the church – the gospel of Christ is!

Teresa: Yes, Jesus Christ first and last, teaching us to help the poor. That part sounds right to me.

Luther: Indulgences make people greedy and teach them that money is more important to God than changed lives. Not cool! AND, even where the teaching is good, I think that the regular folks are not understanding things. People ask me, “If the pope can empty purgatory, why doesn’t he just do it already?” “Why are we saying masses for the people in purgatory if I just bought my father’s soul a ticket out of purgatory?” “How can sinful people buy indulgences for saintly people?” These are the questions I’m getting every day! And people are confused and worried. Then they wonder why the pope with all his money and wealth needs coins from the poorest Christians to build St. Peter’s. I tell you, soon they’ll start questioning and mocking him! We shouldn’t bog things down. We should all be walking in the way of Christ even if it’s hard.

Teresa: Here, here!

Luther: So, I'll take my handy-dandy little note...well, not so much little as...detailed. Nail it up right here on the church door. (*attaches note to door*) Hopefully we can start talking about this and make some improvements, some changes, dare I say, reforms in the Catholic church!

Tetzel: (*marches over and reads the note*) This is shocking! I'll tell the archbishop about this! Why, I'll see it makes it all the way to the pope!

Luther: Calm down. I sent a copy to the archbishop myself. I'm sure he'll be happy to answer my concerns so that we can make the church a better place.

Tetzel: You haven't heard the last of me, Luther!

(Tetzel storms off and Teresa pops back down)

Luther: Well, that all happened just about a year ago and I've had lots of debates and meetings. Many of the officials in the church seem...less interested in reform than I thought they'd be. In fact, the last hearing I had with a representative of the pope became a shouting match. They think I'm an enemy of the pope, but I'm not! I've just been reading the scriptures. And my 95 Theses – that's what they're calling my note – they got published all over Germany and France and England and Italy – that printing press has made such a difference in getting the word out!

Huldrych Zwingli: Excuse me, sir, I'm a stranger in town, a priest out of the Swiss lands, and I'm weary from travel. Huldrych Zwingli's the name.

Luther: Ulrich Zwiebel, you say? You're mister onion?

Zwingli: No, Father Onion. I'm a priest. Wait, no. Zwingli – my name is Zwingli!

Luther: (*struggling to pronounce the name*) Zwingli – I've got it. Say, you're a priest, too. You mind talking faith with me for a minute?

Zwingli: Well, no, I don't mind, but to tell you the truth, I didn't get much of an education in theology at all.

Luther: That's terrible! How can you lead the people if you don't understand what you're doing or reading?

Zwingli: I've been reading up on my own. I think that the Bible has to be the starting point of everything that we do.

Luther: (*getting excited*) Me, too! I'm so relieved to hear you say that. I'm Martin Luther.

Zwingli: You're Martin Luther? I've heard of you! You wrote the theses about indulgences. I think you've got it totally right. I've studied the Bible pretty carefully, too, and I don't

see anything there that looks remotely like indulgences. It sort of seems like they're saying that if you spend enough money, God won't care what you do. That's not how I understand God at all.

Luther: Not hardly. And this whole thing is getting bigger than that. I'm worried about the church. Priests like you without a good theological education, people buying their way into church offices, monasteries that look like...erm...houses of ill repute. That can't be God's will for the Church! More and more greed and money and abuse!

Zwingli: Like Simon the magician from the book of Acts 8:20. He tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit and Peter told him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!" What greater gift does God give us than forgiveness and eternal life?

Luther: Tetzel was saying that giving money counted as good works and that that would gain you salvation, but how can we buy salvation? I mean, whether it's money or being nice to other people, we can't force God to take us to heaven! We are justified – we are saved by God's free grace, through faith.

Zwingli: Yes, yes! It looks like this is the start of something big!

Elisabeth Cruciger (*runs onstage*) I, I, I (*pants*)

Zwingli: Are you alright? (*Cruciger nods, still out of breath*)

Luther: What's your name, young lady?

Cruciger: (*still panting*) Elisabeth (*pants*) Cruciger. You're Martin Luther, right?

Luther: Yep! Pleased to meet you.

Cruciger: I've heard about your ideas and I think I like them!

Luther: Oh, yeah? Where did you come from?

Cruciger: I just ran away from a convent in Pomerania.

Zwingli: They have convents for dogs?

Luther: Zwingli, just, no.

Cruciger: I heard about your note and your cause and the people in charge didn't like that. I had to escape! I came straight here to find you.

Luther: Well, we're glad you made it here. There are still a lot of people who disagree with us, but we're finding more and more people on our side every day. So, let's think through what we believe here: we are saved by grace through faith and not good works.

Cruciger: Right!

Luther: The Bible is the cornerstone of our theology.

Zwingli: Absolutely! The Bible under Christ is our true authority – not popes, not church councils!

Luther: Beautiful!

Zwingli: You know, I've got my own reform movement going on in the Swiss lands. Since we seem to agree on so much, maybe we could join together! I've got lots of followers and leaders like Conrad Grebel, here!

(Conrad Grebel enters)

Grebel: Hello! We've got lots of new and exciting things we're doing. We stopped praying to saints, we don't think tithing is required by God – we're questioning all the old ways!

Zwingli: Yes, in 1522 we did something very special for Lent.

Teresa: *(popping up again)*: I'm almost afraid to ask.

Zwingli: I and about twelve other congregants ate smoked sausages!

Grebel: They were so delicious. Sausages of righteousness. Mmm.

Teresa: *(shocked and angry)* During Lent?! When you're supposed to be fasting in remembrance of the sufferings of our Lord and Savior. You ate – meat?!

Zwingli: The Bible doesn't require a time of fasting for Lent. That's something some pope made up!

Teresa: I – just – you – what?

Luther: Yeah, guys, I'm not so sure about that.

Cruciger: Me neither.

Zwingli: What?! I thought you'd be on our side!

Grebel: Yeah, come on! It's about what the Bible says, not what some church council decided!

Zwingli: Oh, erm...leaving aside the Affair of the Sausages for a moment.

Grebel: (*chuckles*) (*to the congregation*) Seriously, though, that's what the history books call it: "The Affair of the Sausages"! If you don't believe me – look it up! Tasty sausages.

Zwingli: (*elbows Grebel to get him to stop talking*) Moving on: I think that clergy should be permitted to marry.

Cruciger: Me, too!

Luther: Well, we could certainly take some time to discuss this issue, study the scriptures, weigh the ins and outs...

Zwingli: (*interrupting*) No, now. We should be allowed to marry now.

Luther: Umm...why so urgent, Zwingli?

Teresa: (*to herself*) No, no, no, no...

Zwingli: Oh, because I secretly married this widow named Anna earlier this year and I think she's pregnant so I'd like to make it official.

Teresa: What?! The Catholic church will never, ever, ever go for that!

Luther: Well, I never thought that I would want to marry either, but there is this nun that I helped escape from a convent in 1523....Oh, Katy....

Teresa: Bonkers, you are all bonkers!

Zwingli: Well, at least we can still get along with Luther...

Grebel: It's so nice to have allies.

Cruciger: Maybe we should talk about worship...

Luther: That's an excellent idea! Worship should be in a language that people understand and based on the Bible. And, you know what? We need our own music. Good hymns help teach good theology and draw us closer to God. Too bad there aren't too many of us who can write hymns...

Cruciger: Oh, oh, oh! Me! I write hymns! I just wrote one on the way over here called "Lord Christ, the Only Son of God." (*Pulls out a piece of paper*)

Luther: Let me see that (*takes paper*). Hey, I like that. Check it out, Zwingli! It's almost as good as mine. I'll publish this with my Lutheran hymn book! That makes you the first protestant female hymn writer, you know.

Cruciger: Neat!

Zwingli: Moving on....we have another important worship issue: the eucharist, the Lord's Supper.

Teresa: Yes, the true and holy teaching of transubstantiation. The wine and the bread become the actual, living blood and body of Jesus Christ. In each mass, we celebrate the eucharist as the true sacrifice of our savior. It is a sacrament and a way we experience the grace of God. Praise the Lord!

Luther & Zwingli & Grebel & Cruciger (*swing their necks away and then toward her dramatically*): What?!

Luther: I disagree with you there, Teresa. The wine and the bread are joined with the blood and the body of Christ as a sacramental union. It is the real presence of Jesus Christ, mystically united, but not transformed. But I agree, that it is a sacrament and a way to receive the grace of God.

Teresa & Zwingli & Grebel (*swing their necks away and then toward him dramatically*): What?!

Zwingli: Real presence? I don't think so... when Jesus says, "This is my body," he's speaking metaphorically. He's saying the bread signifies his body so communion is just a symbolic re-creation of the Last Super. Sacraments aren't how you get grace – they're like taking an oath of membership and loyalty!

Teresa & Luther & Cruciger (*swing their necks away and then toward him dramatically*): What?!

Luther: This seems like a pretty significant difference. What do you think about baptism, Zwingli?

Zwingli: Same thing! It's like a pledge, but not a magical, grace-giving machine.

Teresa: Shocking!

Luther: Terrible.

Cruciger: Wrong.

Zwingli: I mean, I still think we should do them.

Grebel: Well, you know what? I don't.

Teresa & Luther & Zwingli & Cruciger (*swing their necks away and then toward him dramatically*): What?!

Grebel: Well, not the way you guys do them. What are sacraments? What are these acts? They're distracting us from what's really important. Zwingli, you were gonna get rid of the formal, structured mass, get all those images taken out of the churches. But when the Zurich council dragged their feet in 1523, you dropped the ball. We need to be more radical! Who can compromise when the name and gospel of Christ is on the line? I can't do the same old mass any more. I obey God's laws and not the laws of humans. You've betrayed our cause and I'm not the only one who feels this way.

Zwingli: Wait! What's so different in your beliefs that we can't stay together?

Grebel: The final straw for me is infant baptism. How can you baptize infants? Baptism is an act of faith – it should be reserved for adults. Me and my group, we are getting rebaptized into the true path.

Teresa: Rebaptized?

Cruciger: Nope.

Luther: Baptism is once and for all time – an eternal seal on each soul!

Grebel: I and my church, we are going to the countryside – we will evangelize all we can find. We will lead movements of peace and pacifism, stay separate from the workings of government, and live by freedom of conscience. May you be well in Christ! (*sits by himself off to the side*)

Teresa: Gosh, it looks like we're never gonna come back together again.

Luther: Yeah, I guess not.

Teresa: You know, Luther, I was listening to you before. You're not the only one who noticed problems in the Catholic church.

Luther: I know, Teresa.

Teresa: There are many of us: me and St. John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola – we will change the church from within. Leaders in the church will confront financial abuses and corrupt priests. We'll found better seminaries to make sure priests get proper training, we'll whip the monasteries into shape with new, vital spiritual movements. I, Teresa of Avila, will be especially busy in that area, giving spiritual direction and teaching greater devotional practice to everyone I meet. We'll send more missionaries out to the world to share the Gospel. In the end, your Reformation spurred us on to our own reformation

Luther: It seems like my work inspired a lot of people. Martin Luther is remembered by the Episcopalians, the Church of England, the Reformed churches like Presbyterians, and by the Lutheran church. I'll never get comfortable with that name...

Cruciger: And I was there from early on, writing hymns, studying scripture, learning and teaching the faith. We weren't wives in the background – we fought for the Reformation and carved new paths!

Zwingli: I know you've never heard of a Zwinglian church, but my words and thoughts became part of Reformed theology – one voice among many. I influenced Calvin and Bullinger and he's the one that wrote the "Second Helvetic Confession," which I understand is in your Book of Confessions to this day.

Grebel: You might not have heard of me, but Conrad Grebel is the father of the Anabaptists: the Amish, the Mennonites, and, of course, any and all Baptists you'll ever meet.

John Calvin: And what would a Reformation Day play be without me, John Calvin? Come on, you didn't think they'd leave me out totally, didya? Being Calvin means I get to have the last word. Sure, maybe the play fudged some details and imagined conversations that never exactly happened, but the ideas were there. I was more of a second generation Reformer. I heard the ideas of all of these people – some of them I argued with personally. We influenced one another, we learned from one another, and that's how we found our own way to follow and worship God. This Reformation was not for any one of us – not for any one of our traditions – it was for all of us to pray, to worship, and to serve just as God meant for us to. As Paul reminds us in Romans, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ" and individually we still belong to one another.

All: Praise God, Amen!