

1517–1917 - Reformation and Revolution - Religious Freedom and Social Justice

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Barbara Grabner giving her presentation in Bratislava, Slovakia. Across from her holding a microphone is her husband, UPF-Slovakia Secretary General Milos Klas

In 2017, Europe celebrated two momentous anniversaries -- five hundred years since the Reformation inspired by Martin Luther and a hundred years since the Russian Revolution. In the light of the providence, both dates are of great significance. On the one hand, God wanted to save Christianity from moral decay and confusion; on the other hand, the rise of atheistic communism endangered the Lord at his Second Coming.

In June, I searched in the Divine Principle book for ideas to create a suitable presentation for the public. Usually the fifth chapter is reserved for advanced seminars, and rarely taught in detail to guests. This is regrettable since "The Period of Preparation for the Second Advent of the Messiah" marks the highlight of Christian civilization. During the four-hundred-year period the greatest achievements in society took place; for example, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Strauss and Brahms composed the most splendid music ever.

Much reading and other preparation resulted in an attractive Power-Point presentation. Starting in September, I held seven public lectures titled "Reformation and Revolution: The struggle for religious freedom and social justice from Luther to Lenin" in seven towns in three nations (Austria, Slovakia and Hungary), which FFWPU or UPF hosted. All audiences listened attentively though most people were not familiar with the material. When I ended my lecture in the town of Linz, one guest asked, "Where will your next lecture be held?" Generally, people look forward to meeting me again. If time allows, I add the Third Revelation of Fatima, which speaks about the Return of Christ. What follows are some key points of the portion of my presentation that mainly covered the Reformation.

Cain and Abel in modern times

The Reformation started in 1517 in Germany with Martin Luther's criticism of errant traditions in the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the seed of the Cain-type revolution took root -- the German Peasants' War (1524–1525) was the largest popular uprising prior to the French Revolution (1789–1799). The rural population was terribly oppressed; peasants were not allowed to hunt, fish, use water or chop wood as they previously had, because landowners had taken possession of all that. Even small children had to serve the property owners like slaves. Famines were common.

When the peasants learned to read the Bible that Martin Luther had translated into German, their understanding of justice changed. What rights had feudal overlords to enslave them? Martin Luther criticized the injustices done to the peasants, but rather than support their uprisings, he encouraged the nobility to suppress the revolt swiftly. By 1525, around a hundred thousand peasants had been mutilated and killed; that episode remains one of the sore spots of the Reformation period. Martin Luther has often been criticized for his failure to guide and protect the peasants. His former friend, the radical preacher Thomas Muentzer, sided with the peasantry. His call for a "new world order" fused with their demands for freedom. A division took place as tragic as that between Cain and Abel -- Luther and Muentzer condemned each other thereby causing confusion and despair among peasants.



Martin Luther and the 95 Theses

A more radical aspect

Within a short time, the reform movement became more radical, in both teachings and action. Many wished to return to the practices of early Christianity. One of them was baptizing only adults, as was the custom until the sixth century. Yet it was just one of many revolutionary ideas typical of a diverse group called Anabaptists.

Their movement is also known as the Radical Reformation. They wanted to do away with child-baptism, tithing, usury and military service. Further, some of these groups wanted a self-governing church, free of government interference.

They said that Jesus taught the way of nonviolence and the Christian community in Jerusalem had no personal property. To the Anabaptists, pacifism became an important feature of their lives, as did collective property. To both Catholics and mainline Protestants at the time, Anabaptists' pure faith was a thorn in the side. Anabaptists were executed by fire, by sword or by drowning; within a few decades many thousands were martyred throughout Europe. One Anabaptist leader wrote, "True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter. Neither do they use worldly sword or war, since all killing has ceased with them." What a tragedy that Christians killed Christians who did not want to compromise the standard set by Jesus and his disciples!

Moscow honored a Catholic saint

The restoration of faith was not the only pressing issue. Many conscientious people asked what an ideal society should look like. Is Paradise on earth possible? A major inspiration came from Sir Thomas More, a noted statesman and Renaissance humanist. More wrote the famous novel Utopia, published in 1516, just a year before Luther made history in the German town of Wittenberg.

Life on the island Utopia is based on communal ownership. Men and women are educated alike, and there is almost complete religious toleration except for atheists, who are allowed but despised. More was praised as a "communist hero" by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and under Soviet communism, his name was inscribed near the top of Moscow's Stele of Freedom as one of the most influential thinkers "who promoted the liberation of humankind from oppression, arbitrariness and exploitation." The monument was erected in 1918 near the Kremlin at Lenin's suggestion.

This fact is truly amazing; King Henry VIII had executed Thomas More because of More's loyalty to the Catholic Church, which declared him a saint in 1935! His novel inspired a section of idealistic French socialists in the nineteenth century who became known as the Utopian Socialists.

Reformácia & Revolúcia

1517



1917

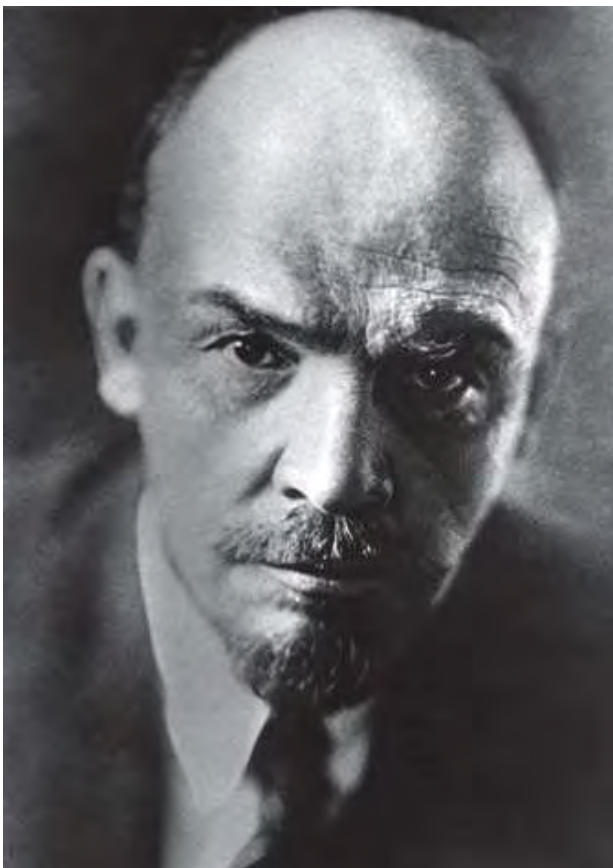
- od Luthera (1517) po Lenina (1917) -

Boj o raj na zemi

The advertisement for the event reads in Bratislava, Slovakia reads, "Reform and Revolution from Luther to Lenin: the Fight for Paradise on Earth"

Political development

Another cornerstone of the four-hundred-year period was the maturation of politics and ideology, which is marked by the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. Although the revolutionaries propagated Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood, in practice they resorted to wholesale anti-religious measures. They set the pattern that later became a typical feature of communism in Russia and elsewhere. Within ten years, the revolutionary authorities confiscated church property, exiled thirty thousand priests and killed hundreds; the deistic Cult of the Supreme Being and the atheistic Cult of Reason were to replace the Christian faith; signs of worship like bells and statues were destroyed; nonjuring priests and all persons who harbored them risked death. About twenty thousand priests were forced to abdicate and six thousand priests were coerced into marrying. Many who were dissuaded from their traditional religious practices never resumed them.



Vladimir Lenin

Killing "Abel" and rebellion against God characterized the Cain-type democracy in the French Revolution. In contrast, the Abel-type democracy had a bloodless start with the Glorious Revolution in 1688 in England. That was the decisive step toward modern parliamentary democracy.

Never again would the monarch hold absolute power, and the Bill of Rights granted essential freedom. Strangely, the French Revolution inspired far more books and movies than did its Abel-type counterpart. The blessing of God moved to the Protestant hemisphere as is shown by the rapid development that took place in the non-Catholic parts of Europe from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

Oasis of freedom and justice

Some examples of torchbearers in the religious sphere were George Fox, John and Charles Wesley, or John Whitfield. Another central figure was William Penn, who founded Pennsylvania, which later became a U.S. state. In the colony given to him by the English King, he ventured to make a "holy experiment." Penn,

an early and prominent Quaker, drafted a charter of liberties guaranteeing free and fair trial by jury, freedom of religion, freedom from unjust imprisonment and free elections, etc. Penn hoped that an amendable constitution would accommodate dissent and new ideas and allow meaningful societal change without resorting to violent uprisings or revolution. French philosopher Voltaire praised Pennsylvania as "the only government in the world responsible to the people and respectful of minority rights." Many of Penn's thoughts later found their way into the American Constitution. To attract settlers in large numbers to this utopia, he wrote a glowing prospectus promising religious freedom as well as material advantages, which he marketed throughout Europe. Huguenots, Amish, Mennonites, Jews and other persecuted minorities came in large numbers. William Penn treated the Native Americans with great respect; he learned their languages and protected them in many ways.

To understand the whole course of European Christianity, one should read books like *The Story of Christianity* by Justo L. Gonzales. The New Testament does not include the two thousand years of restoration as the Old Testament does. It is a riddle why the compilation of the New Testament scriptures ends with the Revelation of John. *The Story of Christianity* helps to bridge the gap in knowledge. Via search engines, please discover the additional brain food that the internet provides -- details about people and movements mentioned in the chapter "The Period of Preparation for the Second Advent of the Messiah."

Surely, we should be confident to share freely individual aspects of the Principle on fitting occasions the year round! Deeper knowledge of the providential course of events will reward us richly.