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Reformation Day

By Wesley Trobaugh



October 31st isn't just Halloween. October 31st is a very important day for those of us who are Protestants. If you live in a predominantly Catholic country, Protestantism is probably something you were never told much about. But if you go to England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Latvia, Namibia, or Switzerland, you might want to know a little about it.

On October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther, a monk, posted his 95 Theses on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Martin Luther didn't like the Church's practices on indulgences at the time; he didn't think you could buy your way into heaven. His original intention was not to found a new religion, but to cause Church leaders to consider the issue. Those particular Church leaders were not too keen on considering issues.

Martin Luther proceeded to preach on justification by faith, what his beliefs were founded on. His writings eventually reached Pope Leo X, who told Luther that he could either remove 41 sentences from those 95 Theses or be excommunicated. Martin Luther burned the Papal bull and was thus excommunicated from the Catholic church.

Martin Luther was then sent before the Diet of Worms, where conferences were held and where he was essentially banned and arrested for heresy. It was a crime to feed Martin Luther and you could kill him and receive no punishment. Martin Luther was exiled in Wartburg Castle at Eisenach and passed the hours translating the Bible into German so that the common people could read it and not just the educated and the clergy.

Lutheranism was officially recognized, though with the aim to stop it, in 1530, and by that time it was widespread among Germanic countries.

There are many denominations of Protestants but almost all of them can trace their history back to Martin Luther or at least to his era, when the all-powerful Church was questioned. Here are a few basic things that Catholics and Protestants differ on:

The Virgin Mary: Protestants do not believe she was immaculately conceived and do not believe that she remained a Virgin for the rest of her life. She is not prayed to, as prayers are only directed to God (or the Trinity) and intercession by the Saints is not a common belief.

The Eucharist: Protestants do not believe in the actual presence of Christ in the Eucharist; Catholics believe the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation).

Priests: Protestants allow priests to marry and have families. Most also allow women to be priests.

We do celebrate Christmas, complete with the Virgin Birth, the Baby Jesus and We Three Kings of Orient Are and we have Easter and have weddings and funerals and baptisms. It's not as different as you would think, especially on a superficial level. I'll leave the theology for another day.

Happy Reformation Day!