



# LUTHER, FATHER OF SECULARISM

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This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (which would later be called, Protestantism)).

This is when an obscure German monk decided that it was up to him to finally establish real Christianity in the world, because the faith had been hijacked by paganism embodied by Roman Catholicism. He was going to return Christianity to what Christ meant it to be.

Of course, he could never point out in history where he could find the first, original church.

This monk wanted a purer faith, a faith that was immediate, uncluttered by show and ceremony, freed of all superstition, mysticism and obscurantism.

Most important of all, he wanted a faith that had no need of authority of any kind, and so he preached that the true church lay inside the heart of each believing Christian. Therefore, anything other than faith was just nonsense, or worse, anything other than faith was a system designed to oppress and enslave and must be destroyed.

The name of this monk was [Martin Luther](#) (1483-1546), the man responsible for laying the foundation of the secular world.

There is no point in getting into the whys and wherefores of the entire Reformation and Luther's rebellion – [all those have been often told](#) and many books have been written in the subject.

It is far more fruitful to look at the consequences of what Luther taught, and more importantly the kind of world that he created, which is his true legacy.

His most immediate contribution is the de-sacralization of the world, in that daily life is not connected to God, which means that the only real obligation that human beings have to God is to simply believe in Him – and everything else will be fine (this is the famous, "faith alone" doctrine).

What this means is that God is a personal choice because, as Luther explains, the true church is inside each of us, and we need to tend that inner church by personal meditation through Scripture and prayer.

This means that the institution of the church is not needed at all. This has always made the organized church itself very problematic for Protestants, and this has always caused questions as to whether a church building is actually needed or not. We have to keep in mind that in the early days, tearing down churches was a common activity among Protestants (the famous "[Beeldenstorm](#)").

As well, Protestants were iconoclasts, and as such had a very negative view of the arts in general, [especially music](#).

Given this problematic relationship to the institution, the arch-enemy was always the Roman Catholic Church, which maintained that it was the true, historical church, as founded by Christ, through his

disciple Peter, the very first Bishop of Rome. Of course, it had history to back up this claim.

Luther denied this priority and in its place stressed the individual – who became his own priest. This is why in most Protestant traditions, there is no priesthood; there are only ministers, whose function is to teach and preach the Gospel.

To further this radical departure from the historical church, Luther also revamped the Bible by taking out books of the Old Testament that he deemed did not belong (this is now known as the [Apocrypha](#)). The logic behind this editing was that these books were corruptions introduced by the Roman Catholics. Here Luther was simply demonstrating his own ignorance.

This stress on the self also meant that each individual could construct his own parameters of morality, whatever those might be, as guided by his inner church. In fact, Luther famously denied the Ten Commandments any kind of authority. For him, they were simply leftovers from a primitive understanding of God. This established the strain of anti-establishment that weaves throughout western culture.

As well, the strong propaganda against Catholicism that the Protestants engaged in, especially the groundless charge that since the Roman Catholic Church was essentially pagan, it had always conspired to keep the real truth of the Gospel from the people - gained prominence.

How this could possibly have happened, the Protestants never bothered to explain. It was simply enough to state this charge, and then repeat it often until it became fact. There are similar such baseless charges, and these collectively are known as the "[Black Legend](#)."

Thus, the Protestants were the first conspiracy theorists, and the first creators of "fake news." And, the tradition of conspiracy theories has had very, very long legs.

For example, the claim that Christmas is an old pagan sun festival which the Catholics adopted is a very old charge first invented by Protestants – and the Protestants always railed against celebrating the birthday of Jesus.

This narrative is repeated so often that it now passes off as true. Of course, no one bothers to look at why this cannot be true (as there is no historical evidence to back up any of it, other than a lot of opining).

Thus, the grand-old tradition of "concealed truth" remains a very powerful pastime and is so widely used that it has become a scholarly strategy of sorts.

This assertion then leads to another theme that runs throughout Protestantism, namely, that the Roman Catholic Church is illegitimate, corrupt, and pagan. These charges have had a very deep influence in

the modern world, namely, the marginalization of Christianity in society, which is also known as secularism.

By denying that the church has any meaningful role to play in society (since the individual is his own priest and can perfectly look after his own spiritual needs), morality itself becomes fragmented – and this gives rise to a curious secular invention – the State-as-Church.

The state takes on all the privileges once retained by the church (especially the instruction in moral care of the self and of the world), and becomes the sole dispenser of what society might need – by way of legislation.

So, from the earliest days, Luther enabled the state to become far more powerful than it needed to be, because there were no real moral checks that could be placed upon it – since the individual cannot be an institution.

Since God was a private choice, the world could be managed perfectly well without Him. All these assumptions, or “truths” are the hallmark of contemporary secularism.

As well, it is important to point out that a major component of secularism is atheism, and another likely unintended result of Luther’s ideas.

It is always easy to deny God's existence when He is denied in the social sphere. Since all God wants is belief (faith), and He is not interested in people doing good works, then it is not all that difficult to say, “I don’t need to believe in God anymore.”

In other words, Luther makes the man-God relationship a very arbitrary one, and even a very casual one. He famously said that it was good to sin boldly, since actions had nothing to do with salvation (which could easily be obtained by simply saying, “I believe”)

This may seem a harsh assessment, but it is important to look at the consequences of ideas, since ideas always have consequences.

And here, of course, Luther falls apart. Since ideas have consequences, then it is certainly not enough to simply believe and then carry on doing all kinds of nefarious and nasty things.

Here, the usual answer is that by believing in God, a person’s life is transformed for the better. That may well be, but the point remains, that the stress on faith alone cuts loose personal responsibility from action.

But this is where the state steps in with legislation. Since God neither rewards good deeds nor punishes bad ones, then it is the job of the state to do so. This is the basis of the famous separation of church and state.

Of course, Luther himself never really believed in this separation, because the church was an internal property and could never be manifested in the world. Thus, the state was all that existed in the world, and the state could act and behave like God.

Here, too, we have the germ of communism and socialism, which have had an appalling record when it comes to cruelty.

Given all this, what was the point of the Reformation? It was one man's ego trip. Why? Simply look at the demise of the Protestant churches, with their graying members and empty pews, and the flight of youth from church buildings – and right into the arms of the state, which offers them heady ideas like social justice, human rights, and legislated free speech. And where do these ideas actually come from?

Who needs the church? This is the one question that Protestants have a very tough time answering, because each man is his own church. And therein lies Luther's greatest contribution to the modern world - alienation and atomization which haunt us all.

***The photo shows, "Luther Posting His 95 Theses," by Ferdinand Pauwels, painted in 1872.***

