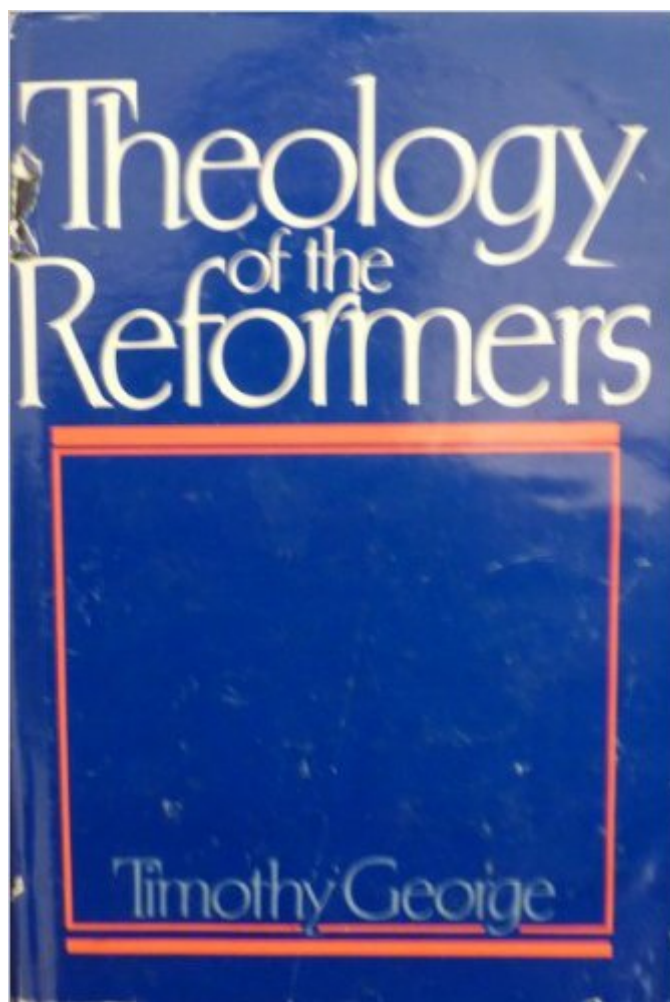


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Theology Of The Reformers



Synopsis

First released in 1988, this 25th Anniversary Edition of Timothy George's *Theology of the Reformers* includes a new chapter and bibliography on William Tyndale, the reformer who courageously stood at the headwaters of the English Reformation. Also included are expanded opening and concluding chapters and updated bibliographies on each reformer. *Theology of the Reformers* articulates the theological self-understanding of five principal figures from the period of the Reformation: Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Menno Simons, and William Tyndale. George establishes the context for their work by describing the spiritual climate of their time. Then he profiles each reformer, providing a picture of their theology that does justice to the scope of their involvement in the reforming effort. George details the valuable contributions these men made to issues historically considered pillars of the Christian faith: Scripture, Jesus Christ, salvation, the church, and last things. The intent is not just to document the theology of these reformers, but also to help the church of today better understand and more faithfully live its calling as followers of the one true God. Through and through, George's work provides a truly integrated and comprehensive picture of Christian theology at the time of the Reformation. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Timothy George is founding dean and professor at Beeson Divinity School. He has also been a pastor and editor of numerous Christian magazines. Currently he is executive editor of *Christianity*

Today. It was a refreshing change to read *Theology of the Reformers*. George comes to the subject as a Christian. He does not fudge difficulties presented to believers, but, as we shall see, seeks to assist in our growing in faith and knowledge of God through the reformers. George moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar in that most theological students have read biographies of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, but probably not Menno Simons. The chapter on Menno Simons, then, is couched in a familiar setting which presented me with some quite new and challenging material. The basic aim of this book is to bring out the emphases in the theologies of these four reformers. In being faithful to this aim, George has assisted in breaking down a number of myths commonly held about the reformers. For example, rather than Calvin being a melancholic and unemotional theologian, he is shown as a pastor who (page 212) "...was frequently called on to counsel those Protestants who had been imprisoned for their faith and who often faced imminent martyrdom." A quick scan of the footnotes between pages 238 and 246 will show that Calvin greatly drew on the Pastoral Epistles to shape his theology. The key phrase used in the four main biographical chapter headings are something that won't easily be forgotten by most readers: "Yearning for Grace: Martin Luther"; "Something Bold for God: Huldrych Zwingli"; "Glory unto God: John Calvin"; and "No Other Foundation: Menno Simons".

George's *Theology of the Reformers* explores the history and theology of four key reformation leaders: Luther, Zwingli, and Menno Simons. The writer displays the personal challenges and struggles of each of these men and the resulting impact on their faith and theology, for it is their theology that bears great impact on the theology of Christians today. As George himself states, "for those who stand committedly within the Christian tradition, it is a matter of genuine concern to understand what was so decisively at stake in the great debates of the Reformation" (7). George's introduction to the work itself as well as to the historical and theological setting of the Reformation is very insightful. These first 38 pages take the reader through the milieu of the Renaissance and Reformation era. George points out that the Late Middle Ages was an era of "decline, disintegration, and decay" (22) which drove many to anxiety and on a search for meaning. In this quest, many sought to gain insight into the true meaning of the church (30-40) and to probe deeper into theology (40-49). These currents converged at the right time to birth what we know now as the Great Reformation. To Luther, George devotes 57 pages as he outlines his journey towards justification by faith alone. The writer debunks some misconceptions of Luther as he details the Reformer's quest for truth. One poignant statement regarding Luther was of great significance to this reviewer. George states that Luther's theology was "a life-long process of struggle, conflict, and temptation"

(61). Luther did not just arrive at the conclusions of the 95 Theses or suddenly become struck with the doctrines of faith, grace, and Scripture alone. Luther was, admittedly, a work in progress.

This text centers on the ideas of reformers (Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Menno Simons) who lived some 450-500 years ago. Their world was much different from our own, in many ways that we cannot comprehend. Yet, Timothy George helps us to bridge that gap in this highly illuminating and insightful work. Having read multiple biographies on Luther, as well as various works on Calvin and the Anabaptists, I was surprised by how many new insights Theology of the Reformers contains. Not only does Timothy George review some better-known aspects of the Reformation (such as how Luther and Zwingli disagreed on the Lord's Supper), but he helps us understand how and why they arrived at their theological positions. Further, as this work examines two generations of reformers, we learn how the younger reformers sought to respectfully build on the insights of those who preceded them. George also helps to see that the early reformers were far from perfect. Like Christian leaders and thinkers of the modern era, they struggled with various issues in their own lives as well as with what they found in Holy Scripture. We see how the reformers dealt with opposition, sometimes in a way that didn't demonstrate love for one's neighbor. In addition, the perspectives of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli on church and state and Menno Simon's pacifism will likely not be well-received by modern readers. Yet, in spite of their shortcomings, we can learn much from each reformer. They were all very much in love with their Creator, and sought to glorify Him in all their works.

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