

Everyone admits that the Reformers were great men. They were only men, however, and they were the children of their time. They did not see all truth, and the truth they did see was mingled with error and expressed in the language of the 16th and 17th centuries, which, it need hardly be said, was vigorous, especially when used controversially. What we would call Billingsgate was the ordinary language, even when men like Luther, Milton, and Rutherford took up the pen to answer opponents. That however was only the literary form of the time, and we are searching for principles.

First, then, the Reformers were above everything else men of faith, and the essence of their faith was the Gospel. To use a word that has been much abused, they were evangelical, and they found the evangel in the Bible. They believed that God had revealed himself to Israel as a God of redeeming love, and that His revelation had culminated in the Christ. As the revelation was recorded in Holy Scriptures they counted these beyond all price, and they studied them under all the lights of their time, and with all the fearlessness of men of science, who may doubt their own powers but never doubt truth, no matter in what volume it may be revealed. Erasmus, Reuchlin, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, were the scholars and higher critics of their day, and the monks and many good people clamoured against them on that ground. Were they not bold, bad men, who were substituting human learning for the divine treasure which in the hands of the Church had proved itself powerful to convert the nations of Europe? They were saying that a New Testament in that new language—Greek—was better than the grand old Vulgate, and they were studying Hebrew, though it was well known that all who did so became Jews. The clamour that then filled the air means to us no more than the cackling of multitudinous geese, that has long since died away, but then it was the voice of the Church, loud, strident, terrible. Except in those places where the moral laxity of monks and priests had outraged the public conscience, the majority was opposed to the Reformers. Tradition is strong and habit stronger; the people generally could not read; books were scarce; and of course the Church as an organization was opposed to change that imperilled the fabric. The innovators were warned that by disturbing the faith of the people they were bringing innumerable