

Reformation (3/3)

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(3 out of 3)

There are several non-theological factors that impacted the Protestant Reformation and made for great discontinuity in terms of the spirituality between Protestants and Catholics.

These factors include:

1. The end of monasticism—so monasticism was no longer the model.
2. The growth of towns and cities—commercial class—which required literacy—but not necessarily in Latin.
3. Vernacular languages—increased the reading public—as opposed to Latin used in scholarly circles and the church.
4. The printing press—because there was sufficient market
5. The rise of nationalism—Protestant churches were generally national, and still are. This is opposed to the Catholic Church that is transnational.

Printing Press

The **Bible** was obviously the central authority for Protestants—and the fact that it now could be printed cheaply, it became the central feature of Protestant spirituality for individuals as well as families. Though Protestant reformers did not stress individualism, the spirit of the times made it difficult to resist. Protestants definitely raised the status of the laity, and this would also

add to the sense that the laity could study the Bible for themselves.

Luther also took advantage of the printing press and developed a **catechism**—a question and answer primer to educate children—and the parents at the same time. Calvin and others did the same, and even the Catholics took up the idea at Trent.

Hymnbooks—singing central to Protestants. They continued the use of Psalms—but other hymns as well. These were also used in families and in social gatherings in later centuries. Many Catholics said that Protestants sang their way into the Reformation!

Spirituality for Protestants—especially for the Reformed Tradition—generally included private reading of Scripture—along with prayer and examination of conscience. Family prayers were important as well. Morning and evening times of prayer are usual.

After the immediate time of the Reformation, Protestants, both Reformed and Lutheran, felt it necessary to define their theology more completely. For pastors, the stress in the seventeenth century was proving doctrine by the Bible, often leading to many sermons that were more academic arguments than to helping the laity in their daily lives. This was Protestant Orthodoxy.

In the eighteenth century, reacting to Orthodoxy, the rise of Pietism had an enormous effect on all Protestant spirituality. It continued the importance of private reading of Scripture, but also

included small groups for Bible study and prayer, and these small groups became extremely important in the spirituality of the congregation. Pietism stressed the centrality of the Bible for the inner life, for spirituality. This was in contrast to the previous century's use of Scripture for proving doctrine. There was an understanding that the Holy Spirit was directly involved in speaking to the person through Scripture. In extreme cases, this could mean finding things in the text that objectively had nothing to do with the text. There was less emphasis on learning the Biblical languages or on studying the text academically. In fact, education might interfere with the direct work of the Spirit. But in terms of spirituality, Pietism was very important in helping the life of faith, the experience of God in Christ, and actions in the wider society that came out of such an experience. Missions, orphanages and other social service agencies, abolition of slavery, all came out of the Pietist movement. Pietism also emphasized hymns, especially those that spoke of individual experience. Hymn songs were popular. Revivals were also very much a part of the spirituality of Pietism.

AETH

The usual style of Protestant spirituality from the sixteenth to the twentieth century often involved a period of time, usually in the morning, for study and meditation on a portion of Scripture, and prayer based on it. Many also kept a journal based on these meditations and prayers. There may also have been family prayers that included children. For some, these private devotions were much more important than attending church, and in fact, could substitute for the church. That was not their original intent, however.

At the present time:

For many Christians today, the neat pattern of an hour or so of private devotions in the morning is close to impossible, at least for those who are working. With long commutes, both parents working, getting children ready for school, mornings are often harried. Time in the evening is also limited, and many are simply too exhausted to engage in any serious devotion. Besides, there is limited time for being with the family. Many Christians therefore rely on the church gatherings for the totality of their spiritual life. In addition, because of the rise of secularism, many younger Christians today did not grow up in families that had any tradition of family devotion, or any model of private devotion. Young parents may wish to establish such traditions within their families, but do not know how to do this. Many also wish to find a pattern of spiritual discipline that will help them as well.

We live in the midst of a highly scientific culture where truth is determined by what can be proven. And yet, there is also a longing for a sense of holy mystery in their lives. They wish the Gospel to be a living reality in the whole of their lives, and not just something for Sundays.

It is an interesting time. Many Catholics are now engaged in serious Bible study in groups—a traditional Protestant practice, and many Protestants are now looking again at some of the monastic practices of spirituality. There is a hunger for deeper discipleship that brings the heart and the head together; that speaks to the individual at a deep, personal level and at the same time strengthens the community of the local congregation; that lets us know ourselves to be

creatures, part of the wider creation of a good and gracious God.

We retain from the Reformation the centrality of the Bible and congregational singing. We can learn from the early church that the sacraments can be central to a congregation's spirituality, but this takes conscious effort and the solid use of ritual. We can learn from the medieval church that the hallowing of time, surrounding our lives by brief times of prayer, using the Psalms. We can recapture the meaning of the priestly role of the church in the world.

