

Web Review

by Amy Limpitlaw

Theological Perspectives of the Reformation

<http://www.reformationhappens.com/>

Theological Perspectives of the Reformation is a freely available website whose purpose is to provide information about the various movements of the Reformation. The site is well designed and user-friendly. It is primarily the work of Mark Gstohl, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Xavier University of Louisiana (<http://www.xula.edu/>), with the assistance of Bart Everson and sponsored by Xavier's Center for the Advancement of Teaching (<http://cat.xula.edu/>).

Visually, the site is attractive without being distracting. Organization of the site revolves around seven topic areas:

- Reformation Happens
- Catholic Reformation
- Magisterial Reformation
- English Reformation
- Radical Reformation
- Women of the Reformation
- Popes of the Renaissance and Reformation

The main menu on the homepage clearly lays out each category and provides a succinct (two- to three-sentence) description. The homepage also includes a search box at the top as well as links to an *About this Site* page and to Gstohl's homepage. The search feature works quite well, with a quick search on [Balthasar] *Hübmaier*, for example, bringing up 48 results.

Each individual topic area has its own page, most of which (with the exception of *Women of the Reformation* and *Popes of the Renaissance and Reformation*) begin with a brief (two- to three-paragraph) description of the topic. The topic pages further subdivide into sections: *Works*, *Events*, and *More* (the *Reformation Happens* page, which discusses the historical background leading to the Reformation, also includes a section on *Factors*). There is also a list of links to people significant to the topic, located in a column on the right side of the page. The two topic pages that do not follow this pattern, *Women of the Reformation* and *Popes of the Reformation and Renaissance*, are organized slightly differently: the first (*Women...*) provides a table with columns for the first five main topic areas (*Reformation Happens* through *Radical Reformation*), with links to pages on individual women listed beneath each column. The *Popes* page simply provides links to individual popes listed chronologically, beginning with Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) and ending with Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623).

The pages on individual people provide basic information, presented in a grid format (which seems to be the consistent organizational feature of this website). The page on Martin Luther, for example, presents a table with the following topic headings going down the left-hand column:

- Movement
- Born

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- Died
- Significance
- Works
- Critiques by Luther
- Critiques of Luther
- See Also

Not every person page is as detailed, but all seem to have at the minimum the categories *Movement*, *Born*, *Died*, and *Significance*. The entries for *Movement* link back to the main page for the movement indicated (for example, for Luther, the movement he is associated with is the Magisterial Reformation, and this entry links back to the main page for that movement).

From the homepage there is also a link to an *Advanced Resources* page, which provides further menu options. One of the features of particular interest is the *Comparative Chronology*. This feature allows the user to compare both people and movements. The *Comparative Chronology* page provides another table grid listing the five different “movements” (Pre-Reformation, Catholic Reformation, Magisterial Reformation, English Reformation, Radical Reformation) both horizontally and vertically. The user can link to a comparison, for example, of the Catholic Reformation with the English Reformation. Clicking on one of these links brings up a chronology of the two movements listed side by side. Beneath the table with links for comparing movements are two dropdown boxes that allow the user to select people to compare. Again, the selection brings up side-by-side chronologies for the two individuals selected.

Another interesting feature is the *Comparative Theologies*. Clicking on this link from the *Advanced Resources* page brings up a table which briefly compares the views of various reformers on topics such as the Eucharist, baptism, justification, the church, and the relationship between church and the state.

Overall, this is a well-designed website with a wealth of resources that are presented in a clear and concise manner. The only drawback to the site is that it is incomplete. While most of the links go to other pages within the site itself (and therefore there are few problems with dead links), too many of the pages greet the user with the message “This website is currently under construction. I intend to provide more detailed content at a later date. Stay tuned!” This is particularly the case with many of the links to pages on individuals, including (surprisingly!) the page on John Calvin. Another feature that seems promising but similarly disappoints is the section on quizzes. Although this section features multiple-choice quizzes, after hitting the Submit button at the end of the quiz, the user is taken to a page with the message “Invalid selector!” Although the website has a copyright date of 2004 there is no indication of when the site was most recently updated. An email to the author asking for this information has thus far elicited no response. Finally, although the site provides sections with internet links, it is surprising that there are no bibliographies provided.

Despite these drawbacks, the content and organization of the site makes it a worthwhile resource. The easy navigation makes it especially useful for ready-reference on topics related to the Reformation. It is a pity if the creator of the site no longer has interest in maintaining it. If this is the case, it would be helpful if he would pass ownership of the site on to someone interested in finishing the fine work he has begun.

