

**David K. Bernard**

**A**  
**HISTORY**  
**of**  
**HISTORY**  
**Christian Doctrine**

**T h e R e f o r m a t i o n t o**  
**t h e H o l i n e s s M o v e m e n t**  
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**Volume 2**

# A History of Christian Doctrine, Volume Two

The Reformation to the Holiness Movement,  
A.D. 1500-1900

by David K. Bernard

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# 1

## The Protestant Reformation

In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation brought dramatic changes to Christianity and instituted the modern era. Beginning with Martin Luther in 1517, significant numbers of people in Western Europe challenged and soon rejected many important features of medieval theology. In addition to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, there emerged a third branch of Christendom, called Protestantism.

### **The Road to the Reformation**

A number of individuals and groups had already repudiated some Roman Catholic practices and beliefs, but they had not successfully threatened the entire system. In the twelfth century, two strong groups had arisen

as alternatives to the institutional church of the Middle Ages. The Waldenses, or Waldensians, sought to return to a more biblical theology and a more holy lifestyle. The Albigenses, or Albigensians, also desired a purer, more simple life but brought elements of Persian dualism into their thinking.

In response, the Roman Catholics established the Inquisition to root out “heretical” beliefs and people. Although no one knows how many people were imprisoned, tortured, or executed, a crusade called by Pope Innocent III in the early thirteenth century slaughtered twenty thousand men, women, and children in the town of Béziers, France, because it refused to surrender its heretics. Under its first grand inquisitor, the Dominican monk Tomás de Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisition burned at the stake about two thousand people.<sup>1</sup> The Inquisition was successful in exterminating the Albigenses, and it severely curtailed the Waldenses.

By the early sixteenth century, the times were ripe for the Reformation. Undeniably the hand of God was at work. In addition, volume 1 of *A History of Christian Doctrine* discusses several important reasons for the beginning of widespread skepticism and the greater willingness to question traditional doctrines:<sup>2</sup>

- The Crusades raised questions by bringing new influence from the Muslim world and from ancient Greek philosophy preserved by the Arabs.
- *The corruption of the clergy and the papacy* caused great disillusionment and questioning.
- The Catholic Church was guilty of *many economic abuses*, including ecclesiastical taxation, absenteeism, simony, and the sale of indulgences.

- *The rise of nationalism* made people less willing to submit to the Roman pontiff, especially in political matters.

- *Mysticism*, an emphasis on subjective religious experience, helped undermine the authority of the church.

- *Nominalism*, the philosophical view that universal concepts and ideas have no objective reality, also helped undercut the church's authority.

- The *Catholic humanists*, led by Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) of Rotterdam, questioned and reinterpreted many traditional doctrines, proposed ethical reforms, and proved as forgeries some supposedly ancient documents that the church and pope used to support their claims of political power.

- *Theological and spiritual conviction* was undoubtedly the most important factor.

- *The invention of the printing press* in 1456 by Johann Gutenberg facilitated the spread of dissent. For the first time, the Bible and other literature could be published cheaply and made available to the masses. The common people were able to compare the teachings of the church with Scripture in a way that few had been able to do before. Now, dissenters could present their views to thousands via simple tracts, and it was almost impossible to destroy all the literature. Without the printing press, it is doubtful that the Reformation could have succeeded to the extent that it did.

Despite earlier dissenters such as Peter Waldo, John Wyclif, and John Hus (or Huss), the Reformation did not take place with them but with Martin Luther. Although Luther initially sought only to reform the doctrines and