

MUSIC, MAYHEM AND THE RECTOR'S PICK OF REFORMATION READS

On Sunday October 22, 2017 St John's Cathedral will host for the Bishop's Institute a Diocesan Hymn-fest: *Singing the Reformation* led by the distinguished hymnologist Dr Carl Daw. The hymn-fest hopes to bring together choirs from across our churches in the Diocese of Florida. Dr Daw will help us focus our attention on the wonderful abundance of church music that flowed out of the otherwise turbulent upheavals of sixteenth century Europe.

Our autumn 2017 musical gathering will mark a much earlier event of some 500 years ago reputed to have taken place on October 31, 1517 when an academic friar called Martin Luther nailed some 95 theses or points for disputation of the church practice of selling special blessings or indulgences to the door of All Saints' Church, Wittenberg, Germany. Luther's action is credited with being the starting point of the Protestant Reformation—or of the reformations of all the churches across Europe. And as one contemporary Reformation scholar wisely reminds, 'The history of these reformations continues to fascinate – and to matter – because it is universally recognized that many of the dominant features of modernity originated in the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'.

A couple of people have asked me what might be worth reading this year in order to learn more about the Reformation and to mark the half-millennium. Here is my pick of some of the best and most interesting. They can all be ordered from Amazon.

The Time Before You Die: A Novel of the Reformation by Lucy Beckett, 2016.

Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England by Eamon Duffy, 2017.

Reformations: The Early Modern World by Carlos M. N. Eire, 2016.

All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy by Diarmaid MacCulloch, 2016.

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation by Peter Marshall, 2015.

Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Centre of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe – and Started the Protestant Reformation by Andrew Pettegree, 2015.

Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet by Lyndal Roper, 2017.

Luther's act is often referred to as the 'reputed' event of October 31, 1517. Andrew Pettegree's book is good for wrestling with the issue of whether Luther did indeed nail those disputations to the church door. He gives a convincing affirmative answer. His examination of the impact of printing, advertising and what we might call a sixteenth-century version of our 'social media'

explosion helps answer how Luther's declaration went viral so that within fifty years of the event the words 'Reformation' and 'Protestant' were already well established.

There are so many books in every generation on the Reformation and indeed, so many biographies of Martin Luther, that one is bewildered as where to begin a study of the subject. Peter Marshall's illustrated history encompassing a wide range of Reformation topics by contemporary scholars is a good starting point. It helps us see where Reformation studies stand today. And if one would like an excellent guide to the Reformation again covering a multitude of topics but by way of providing familiarity with the work of one specific scholar then Diarmaid MacCulloch's book is well worthwhile.

Was there *a* Reformation or a series of reformations across Christian Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries? Carlos Eire's book explores the Reformation as a series of 'reformations' right across the continent in this complex early modern period. 'Equal time' is given to reforming elements and movements in the Catholic Church and in Protestant churches alike. Eire writes for the non-specialist with the conviction that it matters that we make the attempt to understand the period as "we cannot begin to comprehend who we are now as Westerners without first understanding the changes wrought by the Reformations of the early modern era." [Cuba fans in the Diocese may recall Eire as the author of a wonderful personal memoir of his being one of some 14,000 Cuban children taken out of Cuba to the United States as part of the Operation Peter Pan airlift started in 1960. *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*, 2004 won the National Book Award.]

Eamon Duffy also tells the Catholic side of things in a collection of essays on English recusant Catholicism in his *Reformation Divided*. He writes that Luther's campaign to restore biblical Christianity to sixteenth-century Germany resulted also in a violent attack on Marian veneration and papal infallibility. Within two generations, Duffy, writes, "England's Catholic past was obliterated". Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* published in 2005 brought home to many of us just how much good was lost from our Medieval inheritance in the upheaval of the Reformation.

Finally, if you enjoy learning your history better in solution, especially via fiction, Lucy Beckett's novel *The Time Before You Die* is a wonderful rendition of turbulent Tutor England and of her hero Robert Fletcher, a Carthusian monk of the dismantled priory of Mount Grace in Yorkshire. His story is interwoven with that of Reginald Pole, exiled English cardinal who attempted to restore Catholic England.

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