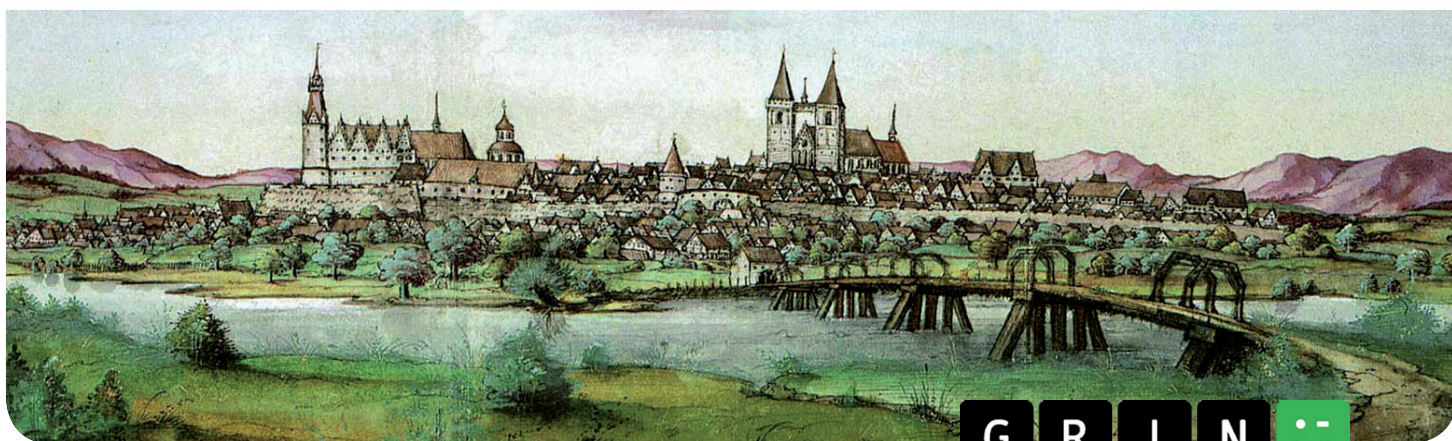




Thorsten Prill

Luther, Calvin and the Mission of the Church

The Mission Theology and Practice of the Protestant Reformers



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Luther, Calvin and
the Mission of the Church
The Mission Theology and Practice of the
Protestant Reformers

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Waak, Bid en Stry

*Aan al my broers en susters van die Rynse Kerk in Namibië
wat my ontvang het as een van hulle!*

Met baie dankbaarheid!

*‘Maar julle sal krag ontvang wanneer die Heilige Gees oor julle kom,
en julle sal my getuies wees in Jerusalem sowel as in die hele Judea
en Samaria en tot aan die uiterste van die aarde.’*

(Handelinge 1:8)

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Foreword

The year 2017 commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517 Martin Luther, a German monk and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg published his *Ninety-Five Theses* in which he criticised the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church. On the 31st October of the same year Luther sent his *Theses* to his bishop, Albert of Brandenburg. This date is considered the beginning of the Reformation. While the Protestant Reformers are widely praised for the rediscovery of the biblical gospel, they have come under fire regarding their views on mission.

There is a school of missiologists and church historians who argue that the Protestant Reformers were not interested in mission and, in fact, ignored the mission mandate which Christ had given to his Church. Consequently, the Reformers did not make any noteworthy contribution to mission theology, so the critics claim. This view is widespread and accepted by many as fact. However, a closer study of Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and Melanchthon, shows that the critics miss both the Reformers' commitment to practical mission work and their missiological contributions.

The critics seem to overlook the fact that cities, such as Geneva and Wittenberg, in which the Reformers lived, studied and taught, served as hubs of a huge missionary enterprise. Thousands of preachers went out from these centres of the Reformation to spread the gospel all over Europe. Leading Scandinavian theologians, such as Mikael Agricola, Olaus Petri, or Hans Tausen, had all studied under Luther and Melanchthon in Wittenberg before they began their reform work in their home countries.

Furthermore, with their re-discovery of the gospel of justification by faith alone, their emphasis on the personal character of faith in Christ, their radical re-interpretation of the priesthood, their recognition of God's authorship of mission, their reminder that the witness to the gospel takes place in

the midst of a spiritual battle, and their insistence that the Bible has to be available in common languages, the Protestant Reformers laid down important principles for the mission work of the church which are still valid today.

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