

Summary of "The Plain Truth about the Protestant Reformation", *Plain Truth* (1958-59, 11 chapters)

by Roderick C. Meredith

The series authored by Roderick C. Meredith of the Worldwide Church of God (published as part of the *Plain Truth* magazine series), presents a critical, polemical history of the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath. From a Sabbatarian Christian perspective, it argues that the Reformation was not a pure return to Biblical truth but a flawed movement marred by violence, moral failings, doctrinal compromises, and material greed—often mirroring the corruptions it sought to reform in Roman Catholicism. The text draws on historical sources to substantiate claims of hypocrisy, emphasizing how Protestant leaders' actions contradicted their calls for purity.

The Spark of Discontent and Early Reform Failures (Pre-1517 to Luther's Rise)

Meredith begins by contextualizing the Reformation against the backdrop of a corrupt medieval Catholic Church, rife with simony (selling indulgences), clerical immorality, and power abuses. He describes the Church's "sale of salvation" as a false doctrine, where forgiveness was commodified, leading to widespread spiritual deception. However, he critiques early reform attempts as equally flawed. For instance, John Wycliffe (14th century) and Jan Hus (early 15th century) challenged papal authority but were executed for heresy—Hus burned at the stake in 1415 at the Council of Constance, a killing ordered by church leaders despite a safe-conduct promise, highlighting Catholic hypocrisy.

Turning to Martin Luther, Meredith portrays him as a tormented monk whose 95 Theses (1517) ignited the Reformation by decrying indulgences. Yet, Luther's early zeal faltered into compromise. A key adultery scandal: Luther himself struggled with lust, later marrying ex-nun Katharina von Bora in 1525 amid rumors of impropriety, which Meredith frames as inconsistent with monastic vows. False doctrines emerge early—Luther's rejection of James as "an epistle of straw" dismissed works-based faith, promoting a sola fide (faith alone) that Meredith calls unbalanced, ignoring biblical Sabbath observance. Property confiscation hints appear in Luther's alliance with German princes, who eyed church lands. Killings are foreshadowed in the execution of reformers like Hus, setting a violent tone. Meredith argues this era's "reforms" sowed seeds of division, not true restoration.

Luther's Revolution and the Peasants' Bloodbath (1517-1525)

Luther's break from Rome escalated rapidly. Meredith details how his translation of the Bible into German democratized scripture but introduced interpretive biases, such as Sunday worship over the biblical seventh-day Sabbath—a false doctrine Meredith lambasts as pagan-influenced carryover from Constantine. Adultery scandals intensify: Luther's marriage is depicted not just as personal but emblematic of Protestant clergy abandoning celibacy for "evangelical freedom," leading to widespread clerical immorality.

The text's darkest focus is the Peasants' War (1524-1525), a killing spree Meredith attributes directly to Luther's inflammatory rhetoric. Peasants, inspired by Luther's anti-authority stance, revolted against feudal lords, demanding reforms. Luther initially sympathized but, fearing princely backlash, urged brutal suppression in his pamphlet **Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants**. Result: Over 100,000 peasants slaughtered, with atrocities like the massacre at Frankenhausen (5,000 killed in one day). Meredith calls this "Luther's betrayal," a hypocritical pivot from gospel liberty to state-backed violence. Property confiscation ramps up—German nobles seized vast church estates, enriching themselves under the guise of reform; by 1555, Protestant territories had absorbed millions in Catholic holdings. False doctrines proliferated, like infant baptism, which Meredith deems unbiblical magic. This section underscores the Reformation's class betrayal, where theological fire fueled social carnage.

Zwingli and Swiss Schisms: Doctrinal Chaos and Street Killings (1520s-1531)

Shifting to Switzerland, Meredith examines Ulrich Zwingli, whose Zurich reforms paralleled Luther's but diverged on the Eucharist (Zwingli rejected transubstantiation as idolatrous superstition). Yet, Zwingli's iconoclasm—smashing statues and altars—devolved into forced conformity, enforcing a false doctrine of state-church unity that suppressed Anabaptists (rebaptizers) who advocated adult baptism and pacifism.

Killings dominate: The 1525 Zurich Anabaptist executions, where drownings in the Limmat River symbolized their "error," set a precedent. Zwingli, a chaplain in wars against Catholic cantons, died in the 1531 Battle of Kappel—a Protestant defeat with 500 casualties—exemplifying reformist militarism. Meredith highlights the irony: Reformers preaching peace executed dissenters, with over 2,500 Anabaptists killed across Europe in the 1520s-30s.

Adultery appears in clerical scandals; Zwingli's circle tolerated concubines, eroding moral authority. Property confiscation: Zurich councils seized monastic lands, redistributing to elites—a pattern of "reform" as plunder. False doctrines include Zwingli's allegorical Lord's Supper, dismissed by Meredith as diluting Christ's sacrifice. This era reveals the Reformation's fragmentation, where competing "truths" bred bloodshed and greed, far from apostolic purity.

Calvin's Geneva Tyranny: Executions and Moral Policing (1536-1564)

John Calvin's Geneva becomes Meredith's prime exhibit of Protestant despotism. Fleeing France after the 1535 Affair of the Placards (anti-Catholic protests), Calvin imposed a theocratic regime blending Old Testament law with reformist zeal. False doctrines abound: Predestination (double decree, where God elects some to damnation) is critiqued as fatalistic heresy, contradicting free will and God's mercy; Calvin's infant baptism and Sunday Sabbath perpetuate "pagan errors."

Killings are graphic: The 1553 execution of Michael Servetus, burned at the stake for anti-Trinitarian views, is central—Calvin denied him a quick death by strangling, prolonging agony. Meredith cites Calvin's letters gloating over it, calling it "tyranny in Christ's name." Geneva's consistory court executed dozens for blasphemy, adultery, and heresy, with whippings and banishments common. Adultery scandals cut both ways: Calvin's regime policed morals harshly (e.g., a 1546 case where a woman was beheaded for poisoning her adulterous husband), yet hypocritically overlooked elite indiscretions.

Property confiscation: Exiled Catholics' assets were seized, funding Calvin's academy; French refugee wealth bolstered Geneva's economy. Meredith portrays Calvin as a "pope in Geneva," whose Institutes of the Christian Religion spread flawed theology while enabling inquisitorial violence—over 58 executions during his rule, per historical tallies.

Henry VIII's English Plunder and the Bloody Aftermath (1530s-1558)

Across the Channel, King Henry VIII's "Reformation" is Meredith's template for royal opportunism. Denied annulment from Catherine of Aragon, Henry declared himself Supreme Head of the Church (1534 Act of Supremacy), rejecting papal authority not for doctrine but dynastic lust. Adultery defines this: Henry's serial marriages—six wives,

two executed (Anne Boleyn in 1536 for treason/adultery charges, Catherine Howard in 1542 for actual infidelity)—exemplify monarchical debauchery masked as piety.

False doctrines: Henry's retention of Catholic rituals (transubstantiation, celibacy) while looting made his faith a sham; Meredith calls it "Protestantism lite," ignoring Sabbath and promoting a state idol. Killings: Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-1541) involved executing resisters like the Pilgrimage of Grace rebels (over 200 hanged). Property confiscation was staggering—monasteries' £1.4 million in assets (equivalent to billions today) seized, sold to nobles, creating a landed gentry enriched by sacrilege.

Under Edward VI and Mary I, violence escalated: Protestant burnings under Mary (300 in the Marian Persecutions, 1555-1558) mirrored Catholic revenge, while Elizabeth I's later reign continued executions (e.g., Anabaptists drowned). Meredith argues England's "reform" was theft-driven, birthing Anglicanism's doctrinal mishmash.

Counter-Reformation Carnage and the Reformation's Legacy (1545 Onward)

The Catholic response, the Counter-Reformation, is depicted as equal-opportunity horror. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed "false doctrines" like purgatory and indulgences, but Meredith notes Protestant complicity in escalation. Killings peaked in the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598), with the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre slaughtering 5,000-30,000 Huguenots (French Protestants) in Paris alone—instigated by Catherine de' Medici, but abetted by prior Protestant aggressions.

Adultery lingers in tales of licentious courts; false doctrines clash in debates, with Jesuits enforcing Catholic orthodoxy via torture. Property confiscation: Both sides ravaged estates—Huguenots stripped churches, Catholics reclaimed via edicts like the 1598 Nantes revocation (1685), expelling Protestants and seizing their holdings.

Meredith concludes with the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), a pan-European apocalypse killing 8 million through battle, famine, and plague—Protestants vs. Catholics in a vortex of mutual atrocities. The Reformation's legacy? Doctrinal confusion (Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist schisms), moral erosion, and economic predation, all veiling a failure to restore "true Christianity" (i.e., Sabbath-keeping). He urges readers to discern beyond "heroes," citing sources like Ranke's histories for substantiation. This "Plain Truth" warns: History's reforms were revolutions of blood and gold, not light.