

## We Start With...

A two minute period of silence - a moment of peace.

## From the ‘Chair’

Our March meeting was a first for our group, we watched a TED talk, by Dan Dennett ‘*Let’s teach religion – all religion – in schools*’. He introduced a topic important to New Zealand right now. We had a good discussion, and interestingly decided we didn’t agree with Dennett’s particular approach – but that’s fine. We’re all certainly more aware of the issues.

We hope to use this way of introducing a topic, using TED or other resources from the internet, at future meetings. There is no limit of interesting speakers available to us, though it was the discussion led by Marion that followed that we found the more valuable last month.

*Gretchen*

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## Next Meeting (April)

This year marks the generally accepted 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther’s “nailing of the 95 theses” on the church door at Wittenberg. Sea of Faith couldn’t let that anniversary pass without spending at least one meeting looking at Luther and the consequences. The National Conference in Wellington later in the year will take that theme too.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b086nzhk>

We plan to listen to this BBC (radio) podcast and hear the discussion on what led Luther to take his step, how his thought and personality affected the course of the Reformation and whether - were he to walk into the 21st century - he might actually find himself to be a good Catholic.

The podcast bears listening to more than once and if you can find 30 minutes to tune in to it ahead of time you will be in an even better position to discuss the topic.

At Otago we are lucky to have Prof Peter Mathieson, a world expert on The Reformation, as part of the team in the Theology Dept. There

## Martin Luther & The Reformation

Alan Jackson

Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL

St John’s Church Hall,  
Cnr Wright Street  
& Highgate

Tea and Coffee  
will be available from 5.30pm

The programme will start at  
6.00pm

Contribution - \$5

is a series of lectures and seminars on this subject during the semester.

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/news/events/index.html?eventtype=lecture&days=30>

Several of our Group's members have been attending the lectures and we will all agree that they are fascinating. In addition there is a Special Collection of materials in the University Library (admission free) – first floor – de Beer gallery.

Luther was a monk and Professor of Theology at the University of Wittenberg and he posed some opinions (theses) to which he invited responses and argument (like any of our contemporary Professors who write a paper on climate change for example).

Luther didn't set out to split the Catholic Church but to reform it. He objected to the selling of indulgences (a sort of "get out of hell free" card) which were used by the Pope and some others to raise funds for themselves and the rebuilding of St Peter's in Rome and taught that the only true path to salvation lay through the faithfulness to Jesus and his teachings. He translated the bible into the local language that people could read (German) and some people were surprised to find "that Jesus could speak such good German". His ideas spread widely and rapidly thanks to the printing press – a new technology then which we can equate with social media today. The church did split and it responded with a catholic reformation, an inquisition and the Council of Trent (held in Trento and Bologna, northern Italy from 1545-63, it lasted through three Popes). The destabilised states of Europe entered a period called the 30 Years' War during which power amongst the controlling factions of Europe were more to the fore than religion.

John Calvin, a humanist French theologian, was a strong supporter of Luther's Reforms but the Protestant French Reformed community (Huguenots – 10% of the French community) were harried by the Catholics especially at the

siege of the township of La Rochelle, and many fled to England (my ancestors amongst them).

In amongst the characters of the Reformation we find the Borgias, Ignatius Loyola and the formation of the Jesuits, and the ancestors of Queen Elizabeth. It was a massively turbulent time in European history with consequences for all the countries that the Europeans later colonised. It accounts for much of the violent loss of life in Ireland, the two major sorts of Christian school that we find in Dunedin as well as much rivalry on the rugby fields here and elsewhere.

### **May Meeting**

At our May meeting we are to hear from Derek McCullough, the minister with the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Christchurch. Unitarian Universalism is found in seventeen countries, and is particularly strong in the USA and Canada; there are UU communities in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Blenheim.

I have found people who have belonged to a UU church before coming to New Zealand, and not living in one of the above cities, have found their local Sea of Faith to meet some of their beliefs and needs.

We extend a warm welcome to all who would be interested to know more about Unitarian Universalism to join us at our May meeting, to hear from Derek and join our discussion.

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