Reformation ABCs

# Q is for Queen Mary I: Mary Tudor

Queen of England from 1553-1558. As the 16-year-old King Edward VI lay dying, he excluded his Catholic half-sister Mary from the succession in favor of a Protestant, Henry VIII’s grandniece Lady Jane Grey. Mary gathered an army for a popular and successful march on London; even many committed Protestants supported her. The people would have a proper “Tudor” as their ruler, and it was not yet certain that Mary would reverse the course of reformation entirely. The now old, wily and wise Emperor Charles V—with whom Luther had squared off for 25 years, but whose authority Luther had largely re-fused to reject—and the protector of Mary’s interests from her youth, counseled the 37-year-old queen to compromise. She issued a proclamation promising not to force her religious convictions on her subjects. Yet unlike Charles, Mary did not face the sobering armed opposition of Protestant princes, and soon, over the objections of her parliament, she chose an unpopular marriage to another prince: Philip of Spain. This made Philip king “by right of wife,” and England a very junior partner on the losing end of Spanish mega-power foreign and economic policies. Reconciliation with the papacy came in 1554. Evangelical bishops would be deposed, married priests removed from parishes. Heresy trials of those who hadn’t fled the country began the next year, leading to 280 public executions by burning. Widespread disgust over the executions and her inability to have children cost her the people’s affection. Mary died tragically at 42, having inadvertently primed a majority in the country for a careful, independent and moderate Protestant program.

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# Q is for Quran (or Koran)

In 1542 Luther first encountered the Quran, holy scripture for Muslims, in a Latin translation. He read it and advocated its publication even as others objected. Of course, Luther’s motive was not interfaith dialogue or understanding; he wanted the Quran accessible, so Christians could refute it, deeming the work “accursed, shameful, desperate.” (Quoted in Lyndal Roper, Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet) As the Ottoman Empire expanded into formerly Christian territory, Luther and other Christians responded with fear and calls to arms. In one sermon he encouraged Christian mercenaries confronting the Turks “to make use of their fists and confidently lay into, kill, rob, and do as much damage as they want.” (Quoted in Heinz Schilling, Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval) But Luther also counseled that the threat of the Turks was “God’s rod”—a call to repentance and prayer—and therefore, the primary battle to engage was spiritual rather than military.

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