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## EDITORIAL

Sadly, we wish to intimate the death, at the age of 85, of **William Peter Stephens**, formerly professor of Church History at Aberdeen University until his retirement in 1999 when he returned to England. He was not only an active member of the editorial board of this journal since its inception in 1999, but also a leading founding member of its sponsor, the Society of Reformation Studies, a few years previously. In nominal retirement he remained fully engaged in both academic and church work right up to the end. Earlier this year he participated in an international Zurich conference on the wider influence of the Zurich Reformation. His special research subjects were the theologies of Bucer, Zwingli, and Bullinger and which he was always able to present in a readable style. A snapshot of Peter Stephens's career by Tony Lane and Emidio Campi can be found in *RRR* 16, no. 2 (2014): 101, in the context of a tribute to him on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Furthermore, Professor Bruce Gordon, President of the Society, comments: *'As a scholar who bridged the German and Anglo-American Reformation research worlds, Peter Stephens played a major role in the recovery of Huldrych Zwingli as a figure of serious theological investigation. The current revival of strong interest in the Swiss Reformers owes much to his pioneering work.'*

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This Issue contains four, thematically contrasting articles as well as book reviews (see <https://www.reformationstudies.org/> under the tab of 'Reformation and Renaissance Review' for books available for review on request). The first article, by Alexander Ayris, is an interesting study arising out of the use and subsequent disuse of a puzzling literary trope – 'like a German's lips.' It features chiefly in vernacular English controversial theology and religious polemics during the Elizabethan and Stewart eras. Such a simile was employed occasionally in debate to point fallacious argument, nonsense or blether. It understandably disappeared in Hanoverian times. But the article is about more the meaning of an obscure and xenophobic figure of speech. It relates to the predominance in early-modern religious literature in England of the more porous vernacular over Latin writings. Ayris counsels caution about seeing this as a testimony to theological 'popularization' or 'democratization' as with early-Reformation German pamphlets. English-language religious works were still largely 'academic' or at least pseudo-academic in a half-way-house sense. Ayris rounds off the study by showing that accompanying the drift to the elitist Enlightenment was a socio-linguistic shift: most demotic usages and even popular proverbial wisdom were eliminated

from published religious discourse in English as poor taste. That reverted to Latinate tones from socially respectable and appropriately qualified authors shunning the ‘popular touch.’

The eternal problem of the relationship between ‘Athens’ and ‘Jerusalem’ in Christian self-understanding, articulation and action underlies the next article by Jamie Gianoutsos on John Colet’s conception of the issue. The focus is on the latter’s lectures on First Corinthians, unpublished at the time. This Epistle projects famously the binary motifs of revealed divine wisdom and truth on the one hand (folly to the world), and human or demonical cleverness, reason and wit on the other (fake wisdom). The author’s essay maps key elements and influences which shaped Colet’s thinking. She shows how his approach (concerned with ‘purgation’) envisaged not just cognitive correctness, but also moral rectitude – characteristic of reform-minded Christian Humanists on the eve of the Reformation. Accordingly, the study links the dean’s thought particularly with that of Paul, Augustine, ps.-Dionysius, and Colet’s close friend, Erasmus, who counselled against a quasi-fundamentalist option of quarantining biblical interpretation. The dean’s message is clear: controlled and proper use of the Classics and secular writings can legitimately assist the understanding and articulation of belief in the uniquely transforming and morally improving power of revealed divine wisdom and truth in both individuals and institutions.

Bernward Schmidt spotlights opinion(s) on Luther from the standpoint of Catholic Church in Italy in respect of its early efforts (directed from Rome) at adjustment, self-correction and stabilization within existing frameworks – broadly part of the ‘Counter-Reformation.’ Since there is not much in English in a summary form on the specifically Italian context, the essay is welcome. Schmidt concentrates here on reaction(s) to the often-concealed penetration of Italy by Luther-writings or ideas. This helped engender what is perhaps unrealistically called the ‘Italian Reformation’ – also linked to native reform aspirations and potentially subversive spiritualizing movements like Valdesianism or the illuminist *Alumbradismo*. Prompted by the contemporary Italian Church historian, Massimo Firpo, the author warns against an over-simplistic, retrospectively determined depiction of the Church’s coping strategy based on post-Tridentine confessional and papalist Catholicism, rigidly coherent, monolithic, monochrome and repressive. Before the failure of the Imperial religious colloquies, the establishment of the Roman Inquisition (1542), and the Council of Trent, however, the general success of conservative Catholic reaction (even in Italy) was not inevitable. This was due to some internal theological flexibility and diversity, explicit institutional tensions and cracks, as well as clerical and lay discontent – not exclusively

among the higher echelons. Schmidt shows how the curtain finally came down on this in Italy.

Lastly, Herman Selderhuis introduces a topic about which little is known widely, namely, the nature of the impact and influence of Luther in The Netherlands (including the Flemish regions of modern 'Belgium,' especially Antwerp). Due to the subsequent, better documented impact of radical and Anabaptist ideas as well as of Zurich and Genevan theologies on the Netherlands, the initial and even continuing impact of Luther there has suffered traditionally from an historiographical deficit - especially in English. It is pointed out that even Dutch and German literature have not adequately addressed the issue. And as mentioned in the previous article, retrospectively conditioned views of the past can often be astigmatic and reductionist. Selderhuis affirms boldly that 'in the Netherlands, Luther's ideas exercised much earlier and stronger influence than anywhere else except Germany itself.' The evidence presented for this claim is *prima facie* plausible, but implies a need for comparisons with elsewhere. The means of Luther-dissemination are spelt out – Dutch translations, various notable preachers, Dutch students returning from Wittenberg, the negative publicity of refutations and severe persecution, hymns, religious theatre and so on. The author also challenges the familiar three-phase paradigm for the Dutch Reformation: Lutheran, then Radical/Anabaptist, then Reformed. Instead, he asserts a continuing influence of Luther in various forms throughout and beyond, especially in the sphere of spirituality.

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