

How Do Believers Complete the Reformation?

It was the same vision again and again, and Derek Frank was getting more than a little frustrated by it. Frank was on staff at a large charismatic church in England.

It was the late 1980s at the height of the charismatic renewal movement when visions and interpretations were common. Yet “no one could interpret mine,” Frank says.

Each time he saw the same thing: a large building with an imposing Greek-style entrance with pillars, steps and a cobblestone courtyard. The people going in and out were dressed in medieval clothing. The scene changed to the 21st century with people wearing headsets while attending a conference.

“The vision always ended with the command to ‘complete the Reformation,’” Frank says.

Finally, Frank asked God to either explain the recurring vision and command, or stop showing it to him. God answered—by stopping the vision.

Fast forward a few years. Frank was in Geneva, Switzerland, walking in the old part of the city when he saw something that shocked him. “In front of me, precise to the last detail, was the very building I had seen so often in my vision,” he says. It was the Cathedral of St. Pierre, seat of John Calvin’s Reformation.

That Calvin, Frank knew, was a contemporary of another great reformer, Martin Luther. Could God be saying, Frank wondered, that the reformers of the 16th century had left something unfinished, something that remains to this day—and that He wanted Frank to help complete it? But what?

Frank began a journey studying the Reformation, what it accomplished and what it might possibly have left incomplete. He knew that the reformers—Luther, Calvin and many others—reversed many of the abuses, sinful practices and erroneous beliefs of the medieval church. Luther, for example, revolutionized what had been accepted church theology by insisting that the Bible says we are saved not by works but by grace alone. He was imprisoned because he fought for the right of people to read the Bible in their own language.

Likewise, Calvin contributed greatly to the Reformation. As “supreme governor” of Geneva, he used scriptural principles to transform a city filled with crime and corruption into a model city. Isaiah 33:22, for example, became the basis for developing Geneva’s legislative, executive and judicial branches of government.

In that respect, Frank knew that these and other reformers were to be commended. Yet he found another alarming belief that the reformers not only didn’t stop but actually perpetrated: anti-Semitism. Frank found shocking evidence that Luther, Calvin and other reformers disliked Jews.

Luther, for example, who once fought the papacy because of its oppression against the Jews, eventually turned against the Jews himself. He wrote a 65,000-word book called *The Jews and Their Lies* in which he called Jews “stupid fools,” “miserable,” “blind,” “senseless” and “thieves and robbers.” In the book, he urged the authorities to “eject them forever from this country ... do not grant them protection (or) safe conduct.”

In the same book, Luther openly urged Christians “first to set fire to (Jews’) synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord ... so that God might see that we are Christians.... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed

and destroyed.”

Frank learned that Calvin was anti-Semitic too. While he purposely designed Geneva to be a city of refuge, there was no refuge there for Jews, who at the time were persecuted throughout Europe.

Calvin wrote the Jews’ “rotten and unbending stiff-neckedness deserves that they be oppressed unendingly and without measure or end and that they die in their misery without the pity of anyone.” He also wrote that Scriptures such as “and so all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26) do not refer to Israel itself. Instead he said, “The Israel of God is what Paul calls the church.”

Today, this belief is known as “replacement theology,” meaning that God broke His covenant with the Jews and instead gave it to the church.

Anti-Semitism in the Church

As Frank read these and other instances of open anti-Semitism among the reformers, he could not forget God’s command to him to “complete the Reformation.” In 2014, he and his wife, Francoise, and their filmmaker daughter, Vanessa, produced a docudrama called *Let the Lion Roar* (). The film exposes the anti-Semitism of the early church reformers, shows how it still affects the church today and urges believers to “complete the Reformation” by reversing the anti-Semitism and replacement theology that still exist in the church.

The title comes from Amos 3:8. “The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?”

The film includes cameo appearances by Sid Roth, Chuck Pierce, Robert Stearns, Jim Goll, Jaci Velasquez, Paul Wilbur, Boede Thoene, Mark Biltz, Stephen Baldwin, Don Finto, Rabbi Jonathan Bernis, Kevin Sorbo and others. The film has been shown in 49 nations and will be in Christian bookstores in early 2016.

“We actually toned down a lot of what we could have said,” says the film’s director, Vanessa Frank, “and used only 10 percent of what we could have used. The list of leaders goes on and on. We depict a little of what they said, but it doesn’t do justice to the volume of sermons telling people (to commit) full-on anti-Semitic hate crimes—telling them to set fire to synagogues and worse.”

Adds actor Brad Stine, who plays Ambrose of Milan: “This film deals with some very well-known, famous and important founders and fathers of church history who also had these incredibly anti-Semitic moments. Frankly, it’s shocking. (But) if you’re a Christian, you should know what you believe. You’ve committed your life to this thing; you need to know all of its flaws. These were brilliant men who could also be brilliantly wrong.”

“Centuries later,” says Vanessa Frank, “Hitler said he was only continuing what the church had been doing for 1,500 years. Most historians recognize that what went on in World War II would not have happened if people had not been indoctrinated that one of the most influential people of their nation—Luther—taught the persecution of Jews. That’s the culture in which World War II was able to take place.”

The Necessity of Reform

Earlier this year the Franks were at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Nashville, Tennessee. While waiting for breakfast one morning, they talked with Jani Salokangas, the marketing and young adults director of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ). They told him about Derek’s visions and the resulting film.

Now it was Salokangas’ turn to be stunned. He’d recently had three vivid dreams in which a man sat at a desk writing fervently for days at a time, which turned to months and years.

“His ink is writing history,” Salokangas remembers. “This message is about to transform nations.” Finally, the man rises from his desk and leaves the room with his masterpiece, “yet the air is suddenly filled with a heavy dread of a work unfinished. Something must have been forgotten.”

As the man leaves, Salokangas sees what is left behind on the desk: a small, solitary star of David. Salokangas knew the man in his dream was Luther.

“Luther’s anti-Semitism would blind him to one of the great truths (that) remain buried by the Reformation: that God still has reserved a central place for the Jews in His redemptive plan for the world,” Salokangas says. “Israel’s restoration simply lay forgotten on Luther’s desk. This left a crack in the Reformation’s foundation, which has hindered many Christians from seeing the full scope of God’s redemptive purpose.”

At the same time God was highlighting to the Franks the necessity of reformation, He was also speaking it to ICEJ. In fact, ICEJ had already planned that “reformation” would be the theme of its annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration and conference in Jerusalem this fall, which thousands of believers attend from all over the world. There are many areas where the church desperately needs reform, says ICEJ Executive Director Dr. Jürgen Bühler, and one of them is that “the early church’s understanding of God’s enduring purposes for Israel and our connection to the Jewish people must be brought back to mainstream Christianity today.”

How Did This Happen?

How in the world did anti-Semitism infiltrate the church?

After all, when the church was born on Pentecost in Acts 2, it was almost 100 percent Jewish. The 2,000 new believers who were swept up by the power of the Holy Spirit that day were nearly all Jews. They realized that Jesus (Yeshua to them) was

the Messiah, and they didn't give up their Jewishness or become Christians. They remained Jewish, as believers in Jesus, and kept their customs, feasts and their Jewishness. They were not "converted" to Christianity. In fact, unbelievers were converted to Judaism—Messianic Judaism.

The church continued this way for 300 years. "When Constantine came to power, however, all this began to change," says Dr. Robert Heidler, author of *The Messianic Church Arising*. "Like many Romans, Constantine hated the Jewish people. ... (He) determined to establish the paganized Christianity of Rome and Alexandria as the standard for the entire church. Every church in the empire was commanded to conform to this non-Messianic standard. Those who would not conform were severely persecuted."

The shift intensified as the church began to twist Scriptures like Genesis 12; Jeremiah 31:36; Isaiah 60:3, 61:6 and 62:1-2; Hosea 2:14-16; Zephaniah 3:14-17, 8:14-15 and dozens more where God promised He would never break His covenant with the Jews.

Instead, church leaders preached that God was angry with Jews for "rejecting" Jesus, saying He not only withdrew His covenant from them, but gave it to the church instead. They "replaced" Jews with the church—and replacement theology was born. Frank calls it the "great deception."

Anti-Semitism in Today's Church

Well into the 21st century, many mainline denominations and even some charismatic churches still believe the lie of replacement theology and actively preach it from the pulpit.

Let the Lion Roar director Vanessa Frank once attended a church that taught replacement theology, and she just assumed it was true. Then she went to a conference where a speaker laid out the fallacy of that belief.

“He said if God would renege on that promise, what does that say about His character?” she remembers. “If He reneges on His promises to the Jews, what does that mean for His promises to Gentiles?”

Frank hopes the film will stimulate debate and cause believers to ask questions about things they’ve assumed to be true. Responses to the film have been “polarizing,” she says.

The message the film shares is “a very, very, very hard message to swallow,” she says.

“It’s a very offensive message—the message of God choosing Israel and His eternal love for Israel. It’s offending today (just) as it was 2,000 years ago and even further back in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For many people, it’s not what they want to hear.”

Is This Really Important?

Many well-meaning Christians who respect Israel nonetheless feel that focusing on Israel and replacement theology is not a critical issue when there are so many other more immediate crises facing the church. They argue it is a minor issue and a distraction.

Three reasons point to why this theological view is significant.

First, “replacement theology always leads to anti-Semitism,” says Ron Cantor, author of *Identity Theft*. “(It) means we get the promises, (but) Jews keep the curses. ... While (some) claim that you can be replacement and not anti-Semitic, history would testify that eventually it always leads to the death of Jews.”

Many Christians today “are absolutely not anti-Semites, and they would never sanction the persecution of the Jewish people in Jesus’ name,” adds Dr. Michael Brown, author of *Our Hands*

Are Stained With Blood. “But the sad fact of history is that it is this very theology that opened up the door to centuries of ‘Christian’ anti-Semitism in the past, and it is threatening to open up that ugly door once again in the present.”

Second, replacement theology disempowers the church by disconnecting it from its roots.

“The devil can’t reverse the fact that the Jewish Messiah has come,” says Derek Frank. “He can’t reverse the resurrection, that the church is the light of the world and has inside them the light of the world, or that they are a people who turn the world upside down. The devil couldn’t reverse that, but he could disconnect believers from their roots. A tree whose roots are damaged doesn’t pull up what it is supposed to. Therefore the fruit is damaged and the tree can’t stand when the storms come. This is the devil’s strategy of replacement theology. Once you buy that lie, you disempower the church.”

Third, if replacement theology is true, then God is not a covenant keeper but a covenant breaker. If He broke His word in this instance, then everything else He said eventually can be discounted.

A rising movement within the church says it is time to complete the work of the Reformation by exposing the lie of replacement theology and ending the sin of anti-Semitism in the church.

Exactly two years from now—in October 2017—the church will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It is time, this movement says, to complete the work that the reformers left unfinished.

Diana Scimone is a journalist who has written extensively for *Charisma* for more than 25 years, particularly on issues of

justice, global missions and the move of Holy Spirit among persecuted Christians. She is founder and president of the Born2Fly Project to stop child trafficking and author of Audacious and numerous children's books including Born to Fly and the Adventures With PawPaw series.

Sid Roth discusses how acting in *Let the Lion Roar* stirred up a deeper compassion for his Jewish people at .