



## Introduction: A Call to Renewal

In the history of the Church, few topics are as fascinating—and at the same time as controversial—as that of ecclesiastical reform. Two figures stand out in this context: **Saint Francis of Assisi, the poverello of Assisi**, and **Martin Luther, the Augustinian friar who sparked the Protestant Reformation**. Both lived in times of crisis, both called for change, but their methods, motivations, and fruits were radically different.

What can we learn today from these two paths? How can we discern between a reform faithful to the Magisterium and one that breaks with Tradition? This article will not only explore their histories but will also help us apply their lessons to our spiritual lives, especially in a time when many, with good intentions, seek to “reform” the faith—but not always in accordance with the heart of Christ.

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## 1. Saint Francis: Reform in Obedience and Love for the Cross

### a) Historical Context: A Church in Crisis

In the early 13th century, the Church faced serious problems: clerical corruption, excessive luxury in the hierarchy, and a disconnect between faith and the daily lives of the people. In the midst of this scenario, **God raised up a young man named Francis Bernardone**, who, after a profound conversion, heard the Crucified say to him:

“Francis, rebuild my Church, which is in ruins” (*Legenda Major of St. Bonaventure*).

### b) His Method: Humility, Poverty, and Submission

Unlike other reformers, Francis did not publicly criticize bishops or rebel against Rome. Instead:

- **He lived the Gospel radically** (Matthew 10:7-10: “Freely you have received, freely give”).



- **Founded an order under papal approval** (Innocent III approved his rule in 1209).
- **Maintained an unbreakable love for the Eucharist and the priesthood**, despite the sins of some clerics.

### c) Fruits of His Reform

- **Spiritual renewal from within**, without schism.
- **Millions of souls converted** through his witness of joy and penance.
- **An order that endures to this day**, including saints like St. Anthony, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and others.

#### Lesson for Today:

In times of ecclesial crisis, **true reform is born from personal holiness, not destructive criticism**. As St. Paul says: *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21).

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## 2. Luther: Reform in Rebellion and Rupture

### a) Historical Context: Abuses and Discontent

In the 16th century, the Church also faced serious problems: the sale of indulgences, nepotism, and moral decay. Luther, an Augustinian monk, initially sought interior reform, but his frustration led him down a different path.

### b) His Method: Public Criticism and Rejection of Authority

In 1517, he nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of Wittenberg, denouncing abuses. However, over time:

- **He denied the Pope’s authority** (contrary to Matthew 16:18: *“You are Peter...”*).
- **Rejected Tradition and the Magisterium**, proclaiming *“sola Scriptura”* (though he himself modified the Bible, removing books).
- **Justification by faith alone without works** (contrary to James 2:24: *“A person is justified by works and not by faith alone”*).



### c) Fruits of His Reform

- **Division of Christendom** (Protestantism, later splintering into hundreds of denominations).
- **Loss of sacraments** (such as the Eucharist and Confession).
- **Religious wars and secularization** in Europe.

#### Lesson for Today:

**Anger and impatience** can lead to grave errors. As Proverbs 21:2 says: *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.”*

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## 3. What Kind of Reform Do We Need Today?

We live in an age of doctrinal confusion, secularism, and division. How should we respond?

### a) Following Francis’ Model:

- **Love the Church as Mother**, despite her wounds.
- **Live holiness before demanding it of others.**
- **Trust that Christ guides His Church** (Matthew 28:20).

### b) Avoiding Luther’s Mistakes:

- **Do not fall into spiritual pride** (“only I understand the Gospel”).
  - **Do not divide: unity is essential** (John 17:21).
  - **Submission to the Magisterium**, as Francis did.
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## Conclusion: Builder or Destroyer?

Two men, two reforms:

- **Francis built, Luther divided.**
- **Francis obeyed, Luther rebelled.**
- **Francis led souls to Christ, Luther led many away from the Church.**



Today, every Catholic faces a choice: **Will we be bitter critics or saints who renew the Church through love?**

May Saint Francis inspire us to rebuild, not to destroy. May his example remind us that **true reform begins in the heart**, in prayer, and in fidelity to Christ and His Church.

*“Where there is love and charity, there is God”* (Hymn from the Franciscan Liturgy).

**Are you ready to be an instrument of peace and renewal?**

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