

The Protestant Reformation Revolutionized Art

Martin Luther's Reformation ended a period of dominance and unity in Europe under the Roman Catholic Church. This unity lasted for more than 1,000 years. The Protestant reformers influenced artists who became inspired by the new ideas of faith, forgiveness, a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the powerful stories in the *Holy Bible*.

The Four Apostles, Albrecht Durer (1526)



Despite the presence of the Evangelist, Mark, the pair of panels with their slightly larger than life-size figures have since the 1530s usually been called 'The Four Apostles'. John the Evangelist stands on the far left, holding an open New Testament from which he is reading the first verses of his Gospel. Behind him is the figure of Peter, holding the golden key to the gate of heaven. On the other panel, standing at the back, is the Evangelist Mark, with a scroll. On the far right is Paul, holding a closed Bible and leaning on the sword - a reference to his subsequent execution in Rome under Emperor Nero for preaching the good news. The 1520s were violent years in Europe and Protestant reformers were executed for their teachings against the Roman Catholic Church.

The Four Apostles, witnesses to the faith that Luther wrote about, were to simultaneously function as a warning to those who continued to sin boldly. Since this painting is a gift to the Nuremberg Town Hall, its implicit message was that government rulers must not limit the teaching of God's Word. A bold statement for the freedom of religious expression by Durer!

The figures have inscriptions affixed to the bottom of the panels, which reproduced biblical passages from the recent translation of the Bible into German by Martin Luther (1522). The first line is a reference to the Apocalypse

of St John (Revelation 22:18), "***I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.***"

Dürer knew that his support of the Lutheran movement, which surely came out from the words of the inscriptions, would have been shared by important and influential citizens in public. What a powerful means of evangelism!

This is the last painting produced by Durer before his death on April 6, 1528 - in his native city of Nuremberg.