

## **Teesdale u3a Monthly Meeting – April 2025**

Professor Alec Ryrie gave an inspirational talk at the April meeting, entitled 'Protestantism: A History in Seven Characters'.

Martin Luther was a 16th Century German priest, who challenged the authority of the pope and preached that the bible is the only source of divine knowledge on the gospel. He was accused of heresy and excommunicated. He is considered to be one of the most influential figures in Western and Christian history.

Mary Pennington (née Proud) lived during the time of the English Civil War. Her husband was killed fighting on the side of the Parliamentarians when she was aged 18. She was a very independent and capable young woman who rejected the established Church although had a deep interest in spiritual affairs. She later married again to Sir Isaac Pennington, Lord Mayor of London and they both embraced Quakerism. She wrote a spiritual autobiography describing her own beliefs and the Quakerism that she had found.

Rebecca Freundlich Protten (also Shelley) was an 18th Century former slave in the Caribbean who bridged Christianity in the West Indies, Europe and West Africa, regions she had lived in. She became one of the first ordained Afro-Caribbean women in Western Christianity. She became a spiritual leader whose teachings were often challenged by enslavers. These teachings gave spiritual sustenance to millions and were a tool for the emancipation of African women.

During the war of 1812, William Miller was a captain in the American army. He became convinced that God influences human history. After a detailed study of the bible, he concluded that Christ would soon return to earth. He provided a date although he had to recalculate this several times. Millerism spread quickly and became a mass movement. Christ's return did not happen which was a great disappointment to him, but the movement survives today through the 7th Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Hong Xiuquan was a revolutionary and religious Chinese leader who led a major rebellion against the Qing dynasty in the 1850s. Following mystical visions, he declared himself Heavenly King of the Heavenly Kingdom of Peace. He travelled widely propagating his form of Christianity. In the war that ensued, millions were killed. In 2018, the number of Protestants in China was estimated at 38 million.

Walter Grundmann was a German Protestant theologian during the third Reich who helped set up the The Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. The Institute produced a revised edition of the bible and hymn book. Grundmann was also a secret informer for the Stasi (State Security).

Willie Jonker was an Afrikaner theologian and Dutch Reformed Church minister. He made a public confession identifying the sins caused by the policy of apartheid. This confession was accepted by the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which was a significant step towards reconciliation.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 22nd May when Dr Patrick Eyres will be speaking on 'Turner in the Pennines'.