

David C. Steinmetz, Reformation historian, dies at 79

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [December 23, 2015](#) issue

David C. Steinmetz, a [leading historian of the Reformation](#), died November 26 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He was 79.

Steinmetz was professor emeritus of the history of Christianity at Duke Divinity School, where he taught for nearly four decades before retiring in 2009.

L. Gregory Jones, a Duke theology professor, [wrote of Steinmetz in a 2002 \*Christian Century\* article](#) that “he has devoted much of his career to interpreting our forebears’ interpretations of scripture. He has discovered a sophisticated, imaginative conversation that is more like contemporary approaches to detective fiction or other novels than what we have come to call exegesis.”

Steinmetz was the author, most recently, of *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective*, as well as books on the Reformers, including *Calvin in Context* and *Luther in Context*.

In a 2012 *Century* article, [Steinmetz reflected on Catholic-Protestant relations](#) and the approaching 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

“The issues dividing the churches were very specific and limited,” he wrote. “Most of these Reformation-era issues can still be classified as unfinished or only partially finished business.”

He went on to suggest how interchurch dialogue might proceed: “The question of how scripture and church tradition are related and what authority each has is as old as the Reformation itself, but Protestants and Catholics approach these issues today rather differently than they did in the 16th century. That makes careful rethinking of the topic a pressing matter for Catholics and Protestants alike.”

Steinmetz was also a United Methodist minister, a former president of the American Society of Church History, and a former professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary of the United Church of Christ, according to Duke Divinity’s news release.