

# Church History #5:

## 1517 Anno Domini

### The Reformation & Reaction

#### PRECURSORS OF THE REFORMATION

1. Immorality, decadence, and corruption of papacy and clerical system.
  - Erasmus ridiculed the church's superstitions, its fanatical devotion to relics, its stories of bleeding hosts, and its cult of saints. In one tract, he depicted Saint Peter castigating Pope Julius II for his life of luxury, military conquest, and opulence, denying him entrance into heaven.
2. Rise of Nationalism.
3. Renaissance.
4. Gutenberg's Printing Press.

#### THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The Reformation was the 16th-century religious and political revolution in Western Europe, which ended the supremacy of the pope and established the Protestant churches. The Reformation completely changed Europe and precipitated the modern age. The Reformation leaders went back to the Apostolic Church, as described in the New Testament, to find there the spirit and practice of the Church as they believed it should operate. They sought to eliminate the forms and traditions which men had come to trust for salvation, and to stress the preaching of salvation by grace alone.

- Four distinct traditions emerged during this period: Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican.

#### Lutheran

1. The Monk & Priest - Martin Luther (1483–1546).
  - Condemnation and conscience as a monk.
  - In 1510, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, and was shocked by the worldliness of the Roman clergy.
  - He was then assigned to Wittenberg, received his doctorate, and took the chair of Biblical Theology.
  - While studying the New Testament, Luther came to believe that Christians are saved by God's grace, accepted by faith.

## 2. Sale of Indulgences

- Leo X and Renovation of St. Peter's Basilica.
- Simony and Albert, Archbishop of Mainz.
- Johann Tetzel.
- Forbidden in Wittenberg & Saxony.

## 3. 95 Theses - On October 31, 1517, he published his 95 Theses, opposing the sale of indulgences to build St. Peter's in Rome.

Although forbidden in Saxony, people in Wittenberg traveled to purchase indulgences. When these people came to confession, they presented their indulgences for which they paid, claiming they no longer had to repent of their sins, since the document promised to forgive all their sins. **Luther was outraged.** He felt compelled to expose the fraud that was being sold to the people. This exposure was to take place in the form of a public scholarly debate at the University of Wittenberg. The Ninety-Five Theses outlined the items to be discussed and issued the challenge to any and all comers.

The Ninety-Five Theses question the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences and the notion that a papal pardon rather than penance or genuine contrition can achieve forgiveness of sins.

- Within weeks copies circulated throughout Germany and Europe reducing the sale of indulgences to almost nothing.
- Pope Leo X angered summoned Luther to stand trial in Rome (Augsburg).
- Papal Bull against the Heresies of Luther – 60 Days to recant, Luther publicly burned it.

## 4. Diet of Worms April 1521.

- Summoned to appear before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in April 1521, he was asked before the assembled secular and ecclesiastical rulers to recant his writings.

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor

right to go against conscience. *Here I stand. I can do no other.*  
May God help me. Amen”

- Wartburg Castle  
Charles ordered Luther’s arrest. But Frederick the Wise kidnapped Luther and hid him at the Castle of Wartburg. During his stay at the castle, Luther translated the Bible into German and poured out doctrinal and polemical works.
    - Justification by Faith.
    - Condemned Mass, compulsory confession, and monastic vows.
5. In 1525, he married the former nun, Katarina von Bora, and had six children with her. Kate brought order and joy to Luther’s life.
6. Luther influence:
- The German bible influenced and standardized the German language.
  - He was a prolific writer, producing 544 publications totaling over 60,000 pages.
  - He reorganized the church.
  - Education and Civil laws throughout Germany.
7. The Teachings of Martin Luther.
- Luther taught the doctrines called Sola Fide (Faith Alone), Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone), Sola Gratia (Grace Alone), Solus Christus (Christ Alone), and Soli Deo Gloria (To the glory of God alone).
  - Luther considered justification by faith “the summary of all Christian doctrine” and “the article by which the church stands or falls.”
  - Priesthood of all believers.
8. The Failings of Martin Luther.
- Luther & Antisemitism.
  - He proposed several measures the German princes could take against Jews.

“We are at fault for not slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite their murder, cursing, lying, blaspheming, and defaming. Set fire to their synagogues and schools; let their houses be destroyed, and their prayer books and

Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, should be taken from them. Their rabbis should be forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb.”<sup>1</sup>

- Luther used an inflammatory style of writing that made any type of reconciliation impossible.
  - A few examples:
    - Against the Roman Catholics: “We should take the pope, the cardinals, and whatever riffraff belongs to His Idolatrous and Papal Holiness—and tear out their tongues from the back, and nail them on the gallows.”<sup>2</sup>
    - Against Erasmus: “Erasmus is a snake, a piece of manure, the insane destroyer of the church, the inflamer of the base passions of young boys. I saw him walking arm in arm with the devil in Rome.”<sup>3</sup>
    - Against Zwingli: “I’ve bitten into many a nut, believing it to be good, only to find it wormy. Zwingli is nothing but a wormy nut that tastes like crap in my mouth!”<sup>4</sup>

## Reformed

1. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was born again by teaching the New Testament to his congregation in Zürich.
  - Luther’s stand against indulgences and his burning of the papal bull inspired Zwingli to make an attack on the Roman Church. Images were removed from the church buildings in Zürich and altars, relics, and processions were discarded. Zwingli broke with the pope and preached openly against celibacy.
  - The Reformation spread to six districts in Switzerland while the remaining five remained Catholic. The hostility between the districts flared into civil war, and Zwingli, wounded in battle, was later put to death by the Roman Catholic troops.
2. John Calvin (1509-1564) worked in Geneva to promote the Reformation.
  - Calvin worked hard from 1536 to 1538 to make of Geneva a model community or “city of God,” and to secure the freedom of the Church from the State. His proposals soon aroused opposition that led to his expulsion from the city. In 1541, Calvin returned to

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

<sup>2</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, *The Unrefined Reformer*, in *Christian History Interactive*.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in, Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in, *Allies or Enemies*, in *Christian History Interactive*.

Geneva and labored there the rest of his life. He held no government office, but he dominated the city. He exercised strict discipline over the morals of the community and drew up a new form of government and liturgy for the church. Luther, under the force of circumstances, had allowed the German territorial princes a great deal of power in the affairs of the Church. Calvin's idea, on the other hand, was of a Church free and independent from the State. Calvin was also largely responsible for a system of universal education and programs to care for the poor. He established the Geneva Academy, the first Protestant university. Calvin gained followers everywhere through his university, his pattern of Church government, and his writings.

- Calvin's theology and form of Church government eventually triumphed in the Protestant Church of France (Huguenots), the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), the Reformed Church in Hungary and Holland, and in Puritanism in England and New England.

3. John Knox (1513 – 1572) was the key figure of the Reformation in Scotland.

- Knox was ordained a Roman Catholic priest sometime between 1530 and 1540. His friend George Wishart, who was later burned at the stake (1546), led him to Christ.
- Shortly after his conversion, Knox was captured by the French and made a galley slave for nineteen months. After his release, he went to England and aided the cause of the Reformation under Edward VI. He returned to Scotland in 1559 and spent the rest of his life leading the Church and shaping the character of the nation.
- Knox was a fervent intercessor, whose constant prayer was "Give me Scotland or I die!" His adversary, Mary Queen of Scots, once said, "I fear the prayers of John Knox more than an army of 10,000 men!"
- One of the greatest contributions Knox made to the Reformation in Scotland was the Book of Discipline. In it, he set forth principles for the guidance of the Church. He gave strong emphasis to the nature of education. Every town should have a schoolmaster, and in every rural parish the minister should teach the children. Men should be compelled by the magistrates to send their children to school. Poor men's children should be helped, and no one should be denied basic education.

## **Anabaptist**

1. The Anabaptists were not a centrally organized group, but a collection of many groups with common values.
  - The name means, “To baptize again,” referring to their practice of adult baptism.
  - The Anabaptists were devoted students of the Bible who felt that the reformers were not moving fast enough in applying the principles taught in the Scriptures.
2. They advocated pacifism and opposition to State churches.
  - They rejected the hierarchy of the Church and the authority of civil bodies in religious matters.
  - The 1527 the Anabaptist Confession of Schleitheim outlined essential Anabaptist doctrine:
    - Adult baptism is the true baptism.
    - Reject all forms of papal influence.
    - Refuse to accept any form of state-controlled church.
    - Prohibit members attending parish churches and taverns.
    - Uphold pacifism.
3. They were accused of sedition and heresy by civil and religious leaders; hunted, persecuted, and martyred.
  - The Anabaptists believed that infant baptism and the close union between Church and State were behind all the corruption in the Church. Because most of the citizens of the State were also members of the Church, the bond between Church and State was very strong. When city councils made decisions to join the Reformation, they brought whole cities and states into the Protestant churches. Although external aspects of Roman Catholic ritual were easily changed, the personal lives of many remained untouched. The Anabaptists insisted that membership in the Church be limited to those who committed themselves to Christ.
4. Mennonites, Amish, and the Brethern find their roots in the Anabaptist radical reformers.

## **Anglican**

1. When the pope denied Henry VIII’s (1491-1547) divorce from Catherine of Aragon, he broke with Rome, and declared himself head of the English Church.

- Henry VIII was a devout Roman Catholic who had received the title “Defender of the Faith” by the pope for his attack against Luther entitled *The Seven Sacraments*.
  - Henry was tired of Catherine for not having a male heir. He was also deeply enamored with his paramour Anne Boleyn. He sought a divorce from Catherine because Catherine had been married for two months to his older brother Arthur. Catherine swore the marriage to Arthur had never been consummated and appealed to her nephew Charles V. After much political intrigue, Henry signed the Act of Supremacy in 1534, broke with Rome, and birthed the Church of England.
  - Henry’s son Edward VI introduced real change and genuine Protestant doctrine in the Church. Edward was the last in the male line of the house of Tudor. He was the only son of Henry and his third wife Jane Seymour. Although only nine when he came to the throne, he favored the Reformation and worked to establish Protestantism in England.
  - Six years later Edward died and Mary, a fanatical Roman Catholic, began her reign. She abolished the innovations of her father and brother, restored the Mass, and reestablished the authority of the pope. She also executed over 300 Protestants, earning the name “Bloody Mary.”
  - When Mary died in 1558, Elizabeth became queen and restored Protestantism.
2. Puritanism was a Calvinistic movement that sought to purify the Church of England from within. They stressed rigid morals, church discipline, and conversion as a prerequisite to church membership.
- During Elizabeth’s reign, further changes were made to doctrine and worship. But the Church of England was still a compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, many people wished to see the Church purified more thoroughly. These members of the Church of England were called Puritans. The Puritans wanted to reform the Church from within, molding it after the pattern of Calvin’s church in Geneva.
  - Some believed the Church of England could not be changed. They separated from the Church and went to Holland or North America.
3. Many of the current major Protestant Denominations find their roots in the Church of England: Baptist, Methodists, Episcopalian, and Congregational Churches.



## THE COUNTER REFORMATION

The Counter Reformation was the revival of the Roman Catholic Church in response to the Protestant Reformation. The three most significant aspects of the Counter Reformation were The Council of Trent, The Society of Jesus, and The Spanish Inquisition.

1. The Council of Trent was called to initiate reform in the church and to define its essential doctrines.
  - It met in twenty-five sessions, under three popes, from 1545 to 1563. The Council responded to every one of the major points of the Protestants with absolute inflexibility, cementing their position with renewed vigor. The following are some of their main decisions:
    - Scripture is but one of the sources of the doctrines of Christianity and must be understood within the written and oral tradition of the Church.
    - The seven sacraments bestow merit on the believer and are necessary for salvation.
    - Salvation is by faith and good works.
    - Upheld the traditional Roman Catholic view of Transubstantiation, Purgatory, relics, indulgences, and prayer to the saints.



- They also sanctioned the fledgling organization of Ignatius of Loyola, the Society of Jesus.
2. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).
    - In 1521, Ignatius was seriously wounded in battle. While recovering, he resolved to devote himself to a spiritual life. He retired to a cave for ten months, practicing severe mental and physical mortification, including flagellation and fasting. He formed a small band of disciples and went to Rome to affirm his unqualified allegiance to the pope.
    - The Jesuits were largely responsible for the recovery of Poland, Austria, and parts of Germany for Catholicism, as well as for retaining Belgium and Ireland. They performed extensive missionary work in the Americas.
    - Their devotion to the papacy called forth opposition from rulers and leaders. At one time or another, the order has been expelled from every country in Europe. They were even suppressed by the papacy from 1773 to 1814.
    - Francis Xavier (1506–1552) was the premier Jesuit missionary, with over 700,000 converts during ten years of labor. He started churches in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Japan, finally dying while trying to plant a church in China.
  3. The Spanish Inquisition was established with papal approval in 1478.
    - Initially the Inquisition was to deal with the problem of Jews and Muslims who through social pressure had insincerely converted to Christianity. After 1520, it turned its attention to persons suspected of Protestantism. It was finally suppressed in Spain in 1834.
    - The Inquisition became a political institution that enabled Tomás de Torquemada, the most notorious grand inquisitor, to execute thousands of reputed heretics.

### **THIRTY YEARS WAR**

The Reformation led to a series of religious wars that culminated in the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), which devastated much of Germany, killing between 25% and 40% of its entire population. The Roman Catholic House of Habsburg and its allies fought against the Protestant princes of Germany, supported at various times by Denmark, Sweden and France. The Habsburgs, who ruled Spain, Austria, the Crown of Bohemia,

Hungary, Slovene Lands, the Spanish Netherlands and much of Germany and Italy, were staunch defenders of the Roman Catholic Church.

1. Peace of Augsburg.
  - Rulers of the 224 German states could choose the religion (Lutheranism or Catholicism) of their realms. Subjects had to follow that decision or emigrate.
  - Calvinism started to spread in Germany and was not covered by the treaty.
  - Hapsburg Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were all interested in weak German states.
  - Catholic France was threatened by two surrounding Hapsburg states Spain and Austria.
2. Leagues and Unions formed and were armed.
3. Revolts, Rebellions, and intervention.
4. Eight million casualties.

### **Discussion and Consideration**

1. During Luther's "exile" in the Wartburg castle he used his circumstances to change the world. How do you think God can use you with your current circumstances?
2. How do you explain all the denominations and factions within Christianity to someone from the outside?

### **Homework:**

1. Read your notes again. Considering what you have learned in this lesson, how would you reintroduce the gospel to a post-Christian Europe?