

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Thursday Morning Bible Study
Week Five: From 1517-1609 (The Reformation)
May 4, 2017

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

I. The Reformation

- The Political conditions – Tension between the German states which were gaining increasing autonomy and the Holy Roman Empire to which they were a part. Tension between the Roman Catholic Church led by the Pope and the German states. Resentment over taxes by the church to support the bishops and the monasteries. Great poverty among the peasants who were still serfs for the nobles in Germany.
- Religious conditions – Widespread fear of judgment by God; superstition especially over the influence of witches; Searching for religious devotion in pilgrimages and relics and the intercession of Mary because Jesus was seen as a strict judge who needed to be placated. Over against this was the search to find a more personal religion without the trappings and power of the church. There was also great dissatisfaction with the corruption, power, politics and immorality in the Roman Catholic Church.
- Social conditions – Learning and a new humanism had taken root in Germany spread from Italy and the Renaissance. It was critical of the worldview of the Roman Catholic Church viewing it as demeaning human beings and promoting a strict hierarchy. In France and Italy there was a growing middle class which contrasted with Germany where there was a huge divide between the nobles and the peasants who worked their lands.
- The Protestant Reformation became the most gigantic revolution in the history of the Christian Church!

II. Martin Luther (Lutheran Churches) (1483-1546)

- He became an Augustine monk when he was 22 and made a pilgrimage to Rome which affected him greatly because of the spiritual laxity he observed.
- He was awarded his doctorate in theology and became the chief lecturer in theology and the Scriptures in Wittenberg.
- *The 95 Theses* in Wittenberg (October 31, 1517 – Reformation Day) – posted against the abuses of indulgences.
“Martin Luther... is one of the few men of whom it may be said that the history of the world was profoundly altered by his work. Not an organizer or a politician,

he moved men by the power of a profound religious faith, resulting in unshakable trust in God, and in direct, immediate and personal relations to Him, which brought a confident salvation that left no room for the elaborate hierarchical and sacramental structures of the Middle Ages."

- In 1520 Luther wrote three treatises that set out his basic theology. They declared that faith in Jesus Christ not extra good works procured forgiveness; that all Christians are priests before God; that the Pope is not the ultimate authority in the church but Scripture is; that baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only true sacraments and not the 7 of the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope promptly excommunicated him but when Luther received the Pope's letter of excommunication he threw it in the fire!
- These declarations became the rallying cry for the Reformation: sola fide; sola Scriptura; sola Christos!
- Luther was put on trial before the Holy Roman Emperor and the German princes at the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521 and asked to recant. *"Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen!"*
- He was kidnapped on his way back to Wittenberg by Frederick the Wise his prince. Supposedly under house arrest he translated the Bible, first the New Testament, into German (1522)
- He married Katherine von Bora, a former nun in 1525 with whom he had 6 children!
- The Augsburg Confession (1530) summarized Lutheran doctrine and thinking.
- Luther never originally sought to break from the Catholic faith he wanted instead to reform it.

III. Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland (1484-1531)

- Ordained a priest in 1506 in 1518 he became the chief pastor at the main church in Zurich. He was drawn to Luther's writings.
- In 1523 he appealed to the town council of Zurich in a dispute with the Catholic Church. They approved his statement of theology which proclaimed: the gospel as the only source of truth; that the Pope was not the supreme authority and that the Mass as sacrifice, clerical celibacy (he had secretly married a year before), monastic orders and pilgrimages were invalid and unbiblical. His basic premise was that anything not supported by the New Testament was null and void. Zwingli destroyed the twin pillars of Scripture and tradition that had stood for 1000 years in the Catholic Church.
- He celebrated communion in German and faced the congregation.
- He split with Luther in 1529 over the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Zwingli said it was primarily a memorial meal and not a mystery or a means of grace to the person. The faith of the individual believer is what communicates Christ to the believer. This is the view of most Baptist and evangelical churches.

IV. The Anabaptist Movement (1525)

- Back in Germany a group of theologians and reformers wanted to go further than Luther. They became leaders in what became known as the Radical Reformation.
- Among them emerged a group that rejected infant baptism who held that only those who professed faith in Jesus should be baptized. They were described as people who demanded people be “re-baptized” thus Anabaptists. The Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish, and some Baptists are descended from the Anabaptists. They were persecuted by Zwingli in Zurich and by the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin opposed them in Geneva and Luther in Germany and the Low Countries as well.

V. Lutheranism spreads to Denmark and Norway (1528)

- Lutheranism was adopted in Holstein in northern Germany and spread to Scandinavia from there.

VI. Henry VIII breaks with Rome and establishes the Church of England (Anglican Church) (1534)

- Henry needed a male heir. He was married to Catherine of Aragon with whom he was childless. He appealed to the Pope for an annulment but was refused.
- In 1534 Henry broke with Rome and denied papal jurisdiction in England seeing the Pope as weakened because of the Reformation in Germany and Switzerland. With the help of Thomas Cranmer now Archbishop of Canterbury his marriage was annulled. Henry as King of England became head of the Church of England that became known as the Anglican Church.
- Henry re-married five more times including Anne Boleyn who bore him a daughter, Elizabeth who would eventually succeed him as queen.

VII. Ignatius of Loyola founds the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) (1534)

- Along with several companions including Francis Xavier, he formed a new order vowing to live in poverty and chastity. In 1539 the Pope granted them permanent status and Ignatius was elected general and the Jesuits as they were called stood ready to *“live in any part of the world where there is hope of God’s greater glory and the good of souls”*.
- They were opposed by some Catholics for excluding penance as part of their practice. They were opposed by Protestants because they were successful in recovering many Catholics who had gone over to Protestantism. The Jesuits became the most powerful arm of the Roman Catholic Church in what became known as the Counter Reformation.
- They were from the beginning a missionary society and evangelistic in nature sending missionaries all over the world including India, China, Japan, and North and South America. Father Desmet who evangelized the Spokane Tribe was a Jesuit. They were also famous for their schools of which Gonzaga is an example.

VIII. John Calvin (1509-1564)

- Born in France he was educated as a lawyer at the University of Orleans. He experienced a "sudden conversion" in 1532 in which he said God spoke to him through the Scriptures and that God's will must be obeyed.
- He allied himself with several who were supporting the writings of Luther and when King Francis of France tried to put a stop to the Lutherans Calvin was forced to flee France for Switzerland in 1534.
- Calvin came to Geneva and became one of the city's three pastors in 1537. He was expelled for two years but then returned and began a long career in Geneva, writing, reforming, teaching and pastoring.
- He began work on *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* his biblical theology in 1536 which went through many editions and updates up until 1559. In it he sets out the central themes of his theology: the sovereignty of God, justification by faith, the authority of the Scriptures, the priesthood of all believers, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and predestination. Calvin also taught that baptism is the sign of God's covenant with us and infants can be baptized. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace whereby Jesus body and blood are spiritually present in the elements through the Holy Spirit which is appropriated to the believer by faith. Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper was the middle ground between Luther and Zwingli.
- His work became, along with the ideas of Zwingli, the foundation for the Reformed Churches, those Protestant churches which began in Switzerland and spread down the Rhine Valley to the Netherlands and thence to England and Scotland.
- Calvin wanted to educate clergy and civil leaders and so formed both a grammar school and The Academy which trained adults in 1559 in Geneva. He also tried, though unsuccessfully, to unite the civil authorities in Geneva with the religious authorities of the church into one. The experiment failed.
- In his church in Geneva he put forward a form of church government led by elders or presbyters which became the foundation of the Presbyterian Church. Pastors were elders or teaching elders and not priests. Lay elders were ruling elders. They were elected by the congregation they served. There were no bishops but a gathering of elders and pastors in a city or jurisdiction called the presbytery (which in Greek is simply the plural of presbyter).

IX. Thomas Cranmer writes the *Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican)

- He became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532. He favored Henry VIII's annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and thereby became a favorite of Henry's.
- He wrote the Book of Common Prayer in 1549 and the Forty-Two Articles in 1553, the foundational documents of the Anglican Church, which later became the Episcopal Church in America. They were influenced by both Luther and Calvin but retained a more conservative and sacramental view than either of the two great Reformers.

XI. John Knox and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian)

- Knox, who by this time was a well-known Protestant preacher, fled England when Catholic Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary) became Queen of England in 1553. He made his way to Geneva and began to study under John Calvin.
- He returned to Scotland in 1559 and joined Scottish Lords who opposed French and Catholic rule through Mary Queen of Scots. He desired to see his homeland break free of Catholic influence and become Reformed. He famously said, *"Give me Scotland or I die!"*
- The Scottish Lords adapted the Scots Confession, a year later in 1560. It was written in four days by Knox and three others. It is Reformed and Calvinist in nature. Here is a sample:
"For by nature we are so dead, blind, and perverse, that neither can we feel when we are pricked, see the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will."
- Knox brought with him from Geneva Calvin's elder based system of church government which became the foundation for the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and later in America.

XII. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609)

- Arminius was a Dutch Reformed pastor in Amsterdam
- He came to question the strict Calvinist understanding of the Reformed churches.
- Arminius taught that human beings were free to accept or reject God's offer of salvation in Christ and denied Calvin's doctrine of predestination. They also taught that Christ's offer of forgiveness is given to all humankind and not just to the elect; the limited atonement doctrine of Calvinism.
- His followers called the Remonstrants were banned from the Netherlands in 1618 but were allowed to return in 1626. They formed a free church in Holland separate from the state supported Dutch Reformed Church.
- Arminianism took root in England especially in the Anglican Church and in the General Baptists. A century later the Methodists followed Arminian teaching.

XIII. Baptist Church founded in England (1609)

- John Smyth was an Anglican pastor who joined the Separatist Movement in England that rejected the authority of King James I and the Church of England.
- Smyth became convinced that infant baptism was not biblical and that only believers should be baptized by immersion. He also maintained an Arminian position which said people were free to accept or reject the gospel as they choose. His followers became known as Baptists and specifically General Baptists.