

# **"Church History: Heroes, Heretics & Holy Wars"**

## **Sunday School Notes**

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### **CLASS 10 – Pre-Reformation and Luther**

Random historical events before the Reformation:

- 1265-1321 – Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*
- 1340-1400 – Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*
- 1431- Joan of Arc burned at the stake
- 1455- Gutenberg's Bible first printed
- 1492- Columbus sailed the ocean blue
- 1495-1498 - daVinci's *Last Supper*

### PRE-REFORMATION

20 years before St. Francis, **Peter Waldo** had been a successful merchant in Southern France, but came to Christ in 1175. He decided to follow Christ's example by leading a life of poverty and preaching; gave his wife his money, put his daughters in a convent. Reaction against the affluent church, but not a monk; he was a layperson. Started a group called the Waldensians: simple communal lifestyle, preached Scripture in French, and used lay & women preachers. Prohibited from preaching by an Archbishop in 1181, then all were excommunicated by Pope in 1184, followed by persecution by the Inquisition. But they formed into a church and spread throughout Europe. Were around when the Reformation came in 1530s and joined right in. But they were 350 years ahead of the game!

A true misunderstanding of the Reformation is that Martin Luther and a couple other guys started writing stuff in the 1500s that resonated with theologians and got everybody excited about changing the church. If it had not been for the conditions of the 2 centuries before this, the Reformation would not have "caught on" like it had. There was seriously fertile ground for the Reformation to spring from:

- Financial and sexual scandals in the church leadership
- Ineptitude of local priests
- Total loss of clarity of what the Christian faith was all about

Many political and social factors in Western Europe:

1337-1453 – **Hundred Years War** between France & England. On-again, off-again war fought mostly in Northern France. Peasant workers attacked nobles and their estates in other areas of Europe, turning society upside down; great uncertainty.

1347–1351 - **The Black Death** arrives in Europe. In the early 1300s, very poor growing seasons resulted in bad harvests that wiped out between 10-25 percent of Western Europe. Then for 5 years, the Black Death or Bubonic Plague wiped out between one-third and one-half of Western Europe. Started in trade centers in Italy carried by rats and fleas, then on to the rest of the continent.

1378-1414 **The Great Papal Schism** (see earlier lecture on Popes)

The papacy had been moved to Avignon, France in the early 1300s – also called the “Babylonian Captivity” in reference to the OT exile of the Jews to Babylon. **Gregory XI** succeeded in bringing the papacy back to Rome in 1377. But he died the following year, and many of the cardinals and bureaucracy were still in Avignon. So cardinals in both cities elected Popes. France, Spain & Scotland sided with Clement/Avignon; England, German & Italian empires sided with Urban/Rome. Successors were appointed in both places for the next 40 years. A third Pope came along in 1410 in Pisa (John XXIII). Ended with the Council of Constance from 1414-1418, new **Pope Martin V** bringing both sides back together.

**1330-1384 – John Wyclif/Wycliffe- “The Morning Star of the Reformation”**

Wycliffe was a priest in Oxford, England while the Papacy was in Avignon; when the Schism happened and there were 2 popes, he started publically declaring that the Bible is over the church. Wrote *Of Civil Dominion* in 1376, that argued that God had given church authorities leadership and property for moral use, and if those authorities acted immorally, they were to be relieved of both by civil authorities. Christ was the head of the church, not the Pope. The Bible is the authority for faith and practice; the church and clergy are not needed for salvation. He even said that if Popes were the heirs of Peter, then they should be without silver and gold like Peter. Went further and said that the papacy was “full of poison” and the Antichrist itself. Eventually he questioned almost everything unbiblical in the church: monasticism, indulgences, pilgrimages, worship of images, adoration of saints, venial vs. mortal sins, etc.

SCRIPTURE IS STANDARD! 150 years before Luther so many of the same themes!

His attack on transubstantiation brought the most opposition. He held that Christ is present sacramentally, not physically. Within 2 years he was silenced at Oxford.

His crowning achievement was translating the entire Bible from Latin to English in 1382 (used a team of scholars). His views were condemned in London. He died in 1384 of a stroke while saying Mass. Was long dead when the Council of Constance (1414-1418, which also settled the Great Papal Schism) condemned him as a heretic; his remains were dug up, burned and scattered. His followers would have group Bible readings in secret- they were called “Lollards” (meant “mumblers”)- lay preachers who walked around like Jehovah’s Witnesses two by two, used English Bibles, were pacifists, denied much of Catholicism: images, celibacy, purgatory, mass, etc. Many were martyred, many recanted on trial.

**1370-1415 – John Hus**, Bohemian (Czech Republic) reformer

There was much talk of reforming the church leading up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century; Rome hunted down its critics and put them to the sword. Wycliffe’s ideas were spreading throughout Europe, though Rome threatened the death penalty for any who taught his ideas. John Hus was a University Rector and a priest who spoke out against vice and ignorance of Scripture. Christ was the head of the church, not the Pope.

The Archbishop of Prague excommunicated Hus, which prompted greater criticism from Hus. He lost the support of Good King Wenceslas. The Pope summoned him, but he wouldn’t appear out of fear. So the Pope put the whole city of Prague under interdict, which meant the gates of heaven were closed to all of its citizens. Submitted to appear at the Council of Constance where he was condemned on 267 counts of heresy, imprisoned for 8 months, and then burned when he would not admit his error; though he had been promised “safe conduct” by the Emperor and one of the Popes.

His final words were: "God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. In the truth of the gospel I have written, taught, and preached; today I will gladly die."

Luther and others used his death as an example of shocking abuses of power by the church. It's fascinating that Hus somewhat prophesied Luther's coming: "You may roast this goose (Hus means 'goose' in Czech) but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence." The Hussites carried on his legacy, becoming a religious party as well as a national movement. Five Crusades were directed against them! They eventually become the modern day Moravian church.

**Desiderius Erasmus**; Dutch humanist, compiled Greek text of NT used by Luther, but debated Luther about free will. Erasmus was quoted as saying that by the sixteenth century, Western Christendom was so desperately sick that God sent it a violent physician.

Martin Luther was that violent physician, a wonderful man of God who loved the Scriptures and true doctrine and Christian living, but one who was so stubborn and argumentative that he quarreled with his allies and called them tools of Satan! A papal decree said that "a wild boar has invaded Thy vineyard." In response Luther had a big bonfire with the decree and other Catholic teachings with a group of students. So much for his being a swan!

**Martin Luther** was born in 1483 in central Germany. He studied at the University of Erfurt, was a gregarious young man who loved friends, music and laughter. But the sudden death of a friend and terrifying experience during a thunderstorm led to his promise to become a monk, so he joined the Augustinian monks against his father's wishes. He got his doctorate in theology, and eventually became professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg in 1512.

Johann Tetzel was sent around Germany to collect money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by collecting money from people and giving them indulgences – which would allow their loved ones to leave purgatory and go to heaven. "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther was offended theologically because it belittled true repentance.

On All Saints Day (Oct. 31), 1517, he nailed a list of 95 Theses for debate on the church door. They were in Latin, meant to be a summons to academic debate.

(Distribute 95 Thesis on 8.5 x 14 Paper) – highlight the Top Five:

#1- repent is not "doing penance", it's turning to God to confess, receive forgiveness and embrace Him by faith

#27- Tetzel's selling of indulgences

#50- Tetzel's indulgence \$; Luther felt they were building the basilica on the backs of the German peasants.

#62

#92&93

Though he hadn't "arrived" in his theology (no mention of "justification by faith alone") when he published the 95 Thesis, his supporters got hold of it and spread it all over Europe; he was a huge star and a hero.

*Tower experience:* As a monk he obsessed over finding peace with God and being made acceptable to God. He would sometimes confess in his cell for hours, but would still be anxious that he was not good enough or repentant enough. He confided to his friend Johann von Staupitz that rather than

loving God, he hated Him! He was teaching on Romans and he couldn't get over 1:16-17 – “the just shall live by faith.” Studying in the monastery tower, Luther finally realized that the gospel was good news if God counted those who believed in Jesus as righteous in His sight. This insight totally changed him – “I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Over the next several years he re-examined everything he had been taught to be in line with “justification by faith,” which he said was the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls.

Between 1519-1521 Luther wrote tons of commentaries, tracts & treatises, many attacking Rome. The average literate German citizen could understand them, and they had memorable slogans and a winsome call for change in the way the church functioned; his writings became instant bestsellers. They argued that there was no distinction between clergy and laity, that every Christian has the right to interpret Scripture, and that God's grace was not controlled by the church but could be had by faith.

January 3, 1520, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther as a heretic.

June 15, 1520- a papal bull was issued condemning 41 of Luther's propositions. Aleander the papal legate brought the bull to Germany, expecting to find a compliant Germany, but had to return to Rome telling them that Germany overwhelmingly supported Luther. He was summoned to the Diet of Worms in 1521, given safe conduct by Emperor Charles V. After asking for a day to consider whether to recant his writings or not, his resolve strengthened - he would not recant!

“...I implore you by the mercies of God to prove to me by the writings of the prophets and apostles that I am in error. As soon as I shall be convinced, I will instantly retract all my errors, and will myself be the first to seize my writings, and commit them to the flames...”

“...Since your most serene majesty and your high mightiness require of me a simple, clear and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: I can not submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is as clear as noonday that they have fallen into error and even into glaring inconsistency with themselves. If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it can not be right for a Christian to speak against his country. I stand here and can say no more. God help me. Amen.”

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