

After Darkness, Light

The Reformation: Historical & Theological Stage

Sources

- ❖ Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation* *
- ❖ Ryan Reeves, Reformation & Modern Church History (39 videos) *
- ❖ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*
- ❖ “ “ , *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* *
- ❖ Harold Grimm (ed.), *Luther’s Works, Career of the Reformer I* (Vol. 31)
- ❖ Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History*
- ❖ Frank Flinn, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*
- ❖ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*
- ❖ Gordon Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*

What was the Protestant Reformation?

"The Reformation was the great disintegrator of medieval Catholicism."

Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (4)

"The Reformation was a revolution, and revolutions not only fight for something, they also fight against something, in this case, the old world of medieval Roman Catholicism."

Michael Reeves, *Unquenchable Flame* (17)

- ▶ ***"It is...[Martin] Luther with whom everyone who attempts to write a history of the Reformation must engage. For without Luther, we can be reasonably certain that there would have been no Reformation, or not the same Reformation."***

Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (6)

The Reformations of the 16th Century

- ▶ ***The Magisterial Reformers*** - Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox (interdependence of church and secular authorities)
- ▶ ***Radical Reformers*** - Zwingli, Conrad Grebel, the Anabaptists (rejection of any secular authority over the church)
- ▶ ***Catholic/Counter Reformation*** - Post-reform efforts to correct problems of the Roman Catholic Church and to stand against the reformers, which occurred chiefly through the Council of Trent (1545-1563)

Late Medieval Context for the Reformation

Medieval life was religious & revolved around the Roman Catholic Church.

“The identification of the church with the whole of organized society is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the Middle Ages from earlier and later periods of history.” R.W. Southern

The authority of the papacy was a key & unifying feature of the Middle Ages.

“The dominating ideal in the rebuilding [of western society] was that the unitary authority of the [Roman] Empire should be replaced by the unitary authority of the papacy....An imperial papacy was the main articulate principle behind the reconstruction of society.” R.W. Southern

The authority of the church was eroded, challenged & significantly weakened.

- “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1309-1377) - Papal court moved from Rome to Avignon
- “Papal Schism” (1378-1417) - period of two & later three popes ruling simultaneously
- “Donation of Constantine,” used by popes to gain leverage, shown to be an 8th century forgery
- Simony (buying/selling of church offices) & Pluralism (holding multiple offices)
- Breakdown of celibacy
- Greed & resentment of the flow of wealth from the Holy Roman Empire to Rome
- “Morning Stars of the Reformation:” John Wycliffe (c.1320-1384) & Jan Hus (1369-1415)
- Renaissance Humanism: Erasmus of Rotterdam’s Greek edition of the NT
- Johannes Gutenberg (c.1400-1468), movable type & the Printing Revolution

Why the Reformation?

❑ Initiatives to correct abuses were bubbling-up within the church.

“There were efforts to reform the church but not to overthrow it.” Ryan Reeves

❑ Participation in the religious life of the church was widespread & popular.

“Historical research, especially from the 1980s and on, has shown beyond any doubt that in the generation before the Reformation, religion became more popular than ever....Such were most Christians on the eve of the Reformation: devoted, and devoted to the improvement, but not the overthrow, of their religion. This was not a society looking for radical change, only a clearing-up of acknowledged abuses. So, vigorous or corrupt? It is a false antithesis. Christianity on the eve of the Reformation was undoubtedly popular and lively, but that doesn’t mean it was healthy or biblical.”
Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame*: 24-25.

❑ Luther’s focus & stand was on theological, not moral issues.

- Where does religious authority reside?
- What is the nature of the sinner’s will?
- How is a sinner justified before God?

Medieval Approach to Salvation

- ▶ Infant is baptized 7 days after birth, regenerated, & the Holy Spirit enters in to wash away original sin, all without regard to the child's works
- ▶ State of Grace whereby one is reconciled to God, enters into life with God & cooperates with God's grace to become a more & more just & righteous person who merits salvation
- ▶ Personal sins tarnish, defile & can even cause the loss of the State of Grace
 - Venial (slight) sins are lesser sins that hinder sanctification but do not break the relationship with God
 - Mortal (deadly) sins are knowing & willful violations of God's moral law in serious matters, which result in damnation if there is no repentance
- ▶ Confession to a priest and feelings of genuine sorrow
- ▶ The priest absolves of sin (forgiveness) and imposes penance (satisfaction)
- ▶ Penance pays the temporal penalty (reparation) for a sin & strengthens against temptation (alms, prayers, pilgrimages, fasting, good works).
- ▶ Purgatory is an intermediate state where the soul after death undergoes further purgation, or cleansing, to rid itself of lesser sins so that it may enter heaven.

Enter Martin Luther

- ▶ 1483 - Born November 10, in Eisleben (central Germany) to Hans & Margaret Luder
- ▶ 1501 - Enters the renowned University of Erfurt destined for the Law
- ▶ 1505 - Caught in a terrible storm, Luther vows to become a monk if St. Anne saves him.
July 16th he enters the Augustinian order at the Observant monastery in Erfurt.
- ▶ 1507 - Ordained to the priesthood, celebrates his first Mass & studies theology at the university.
- ▶ 1508 - Transferred to Wittenberg to lecture and study theology at the new university, which was the pride of Elector Frederick III.
- ▶ 1510 - Travels to Rome on monastery business
- ▶ 1512 - Becomes a Doctor in Theology
- ▶ 1517 - Writes Disputation Against Scholastic Theology (97 Theses) and nails the Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (95 Theses) to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church.
- ▶ 1518 - Charged with heresy by Rome, defends himself at Augsburg & flees to Wittenberg
- ▶ 1521 - Excommunicated and summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms

Luther's Anfechtungen

Luther's causes of profound misery, anxiety & depression:

Have I been truly sorrowful for my sins?

Have I done any penance that is truly efficacious?

“When I was a monk, I tried with all diligence to live according to the Rule, and I used to be contrite, to confess and number off my sins, and often repeated my confession, and sedulously performed my allotted penance. And yet my conscience could near give me certainty, but I always doubted and said, ‘You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.’ The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak and afflicted conscience with the traditions of men, the more each day found it more uncertain, weaker, more troubled. ‘After watchings, studies, fastings, prayers and other most severe exercises with which as a monk I afflicted myself almost to death, yet that doubt was left in the soul, and I thought “Who knows whether such things are pleasing to God.””

Quoted by Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms*: 27

Luther's 95 Theses

► **Context** Pope Leo X desires to rebuilt St. Peter's Basilica in Rome but needs money. Meantime, Albert of Mainz needs money to repay a loan to the Fuggers for the purchase of church offices. Albert asks Leo if *indulgences* could be sold in his lands to raise money to repay loans. Leo agrees with the condition that a portion of the proceeds are sent to Rome. Their agreement is not public knowledge and Johann Tetzel is sent to sell indulgences. *"When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."*

► **Luther's Intention** A theses was a summons in Latin for an academic debate. Luther is taking on the abuse of indulgences by certain preachers-indulgence salesmen who misrepresent and slander the pope and his rightful authority (Thesis 81). *"The theses, then, were not a dramatic, popular protest, but a summons to an academic disputation. And, if the ninety-five theses were meant to be a Reformation manifesto, they were a pretty poor effort: they contain not a mention of justification by faith alone, the authority of the Bible, or, indeed, any core Reformation thought."* Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame*: 43.

► **Response** January, 1518, the 95 Theses are translated, distributed and received well among the German populous. Luther unwittingly sends a letter with an explanation of the Theses to Albert of Mainz, which are forwarded to the pope. Leo X begins to exert indirect pressure to silence Luther. On his part, Luther begins clarifying his own theology especially on the point of papal authority. He does this especially in April, 1518 at the Heidelberg Disputation in a debate with Cajetan. Luther asserts clearly that Scripture has authority over the pope.

Luther's Breakthrough

- ▶ In the preface to his *Works* (1545), Luther writes: *“Meanwhile, in that year [1519] I turned once more to interpret the Psalms...I had indeed been seized with a great eagerness to understand Paul in the Epistle to the Romans...The Justice of God is revealed in [the gospel]. For I hated this word ‘Justice of God’, which by the use and custom of all doctors I been taught to understand...that formal and active justice whereby God is just and punishes sinners. For, however irreproachable my life as a monk, I felt myself, in the presence of God, to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience, nor would I believe him to be pleased with my satisfaction. I did not love, indeed I hated this just God who punishes sinners...as if it were really not enough that miserable sinners, eternally ruined by original sin, should be crushed with every kind of calamity by the law of the Ten Commandments, but God through the Gospel must add sorrow on sorrow, and through the Gospel bring his wrath and justice to bear on us. I raged with a fierce and disturbed conscience in this way, and yet I knocked with importunity at Paul in this place, with a burning desire to know what St. Paul could intend. At last...as I mediated day and night...there I began to understand that Justice of God in which the just man lives by the gift of God...to be understood passively as that whereby the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith’. At this I felt myself to be born anew, and to enter through open gates into paradise itself...And now as much as I hated that word ‘Justice of God’ so now did I love and extol it as the sweetest of all words and then this place was to me as the gates of paradise.”* Quoted by Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms*: 33.
- ▶ But from Luther's lectures on the Psalms (1513-4), Romans (1515-6), Galatians (1516-7) and Hebrews (1517-18), we know the essentials of his theology were in existence before 1517.

Journey to the Diet of Worms

- ▶ 1518 Heidelberg Disputation
- ▶ 1519 Leipzig Debate
- ▶ 1520 Pope Leo X's Papal Bull *Exsurge Domine* threatens excommunication
- ▶ 1521 (January 3) Excommunication of Martin Luther
- ▶ 1521 (April 18) Martin Luther appears before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and 300 princes at the Diet of Worms. Luther is called up on to recant his writings, which he refuses to do. As a result, Luther is condemned as a heretic, his writings are banned, and his capture and arrest is called for.

Reply to the Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521

“Since then your...Majesty and your Lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. 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 I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.”

Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 33: Career of the Reformer III