

**Gifts of Finest Wheat**  
**Year 2, Session 2, Week 7:**  
**The Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther and John Calvin**

**Things to Consider Before we Begin**

How could anyone leave the church of St. Athanasius, St. Antony of the Desert, Popes Leo and Gregory the Great, Sts. Benedict and Scholastica, St. Anselm, and Thomas A’Kempis?

How could anyone stay in the church of Pope Sergius III, Pope Alexander VI, of bishops and cardinals who viewed their offices as investments, and of the priests guilty of the incredibly wide range of sins discussed with such anger by the medieval Catholic reformers?

- Great examples of virtue and strong character within the Catholic Church
- Great examples as well of sin and vice
- Same things seen as we look at the individuals and events connected with the emergence of Protestantism

Simplistic approaches to this period in church history will not help us. There is enough of a record of vice and virtue on the part of those involved in the controversies of this period for anyone to construct a version of church history that best suits their own purposes. All you have to do is to discuss all the virtues displayed by those you agree with, and all the vices displayed by those you disagree with, and you have a fine foundation laid for whatever type of propaganda you want to put forward. Plenty of Protestants and Catholics have taken this approach and have written books that are very helpful...

...if you’ve run out of toilet paper or need to start a campfire.

I think that a more helpful approach can be found by looking at a passage written by someone who would understand the theological issues of the Reformation much differently than I would. John Piper is a Baptist pastor, as well as a well known author and speaker. He wrote these words about the 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic missionary St. Francis Xavier:

Francis Xavier (1506-1552), who founded the Jesuit missionary movement and served in India and Japan, was always in pursuit of a deeper life with God. He died at forty-six awaiting passage to the great forbidden China. Keep in mind the doctor-patient analogy as you read one of his last letters concerning his desire to enter China. *We need not minimize the serious theological problems with sixteenth century Roman Catholic teaching in order to see the truth expressed about missionary motivation in this quotation.*

The danger of all dangers would be to lose trust and confidence in the mercy of God for whose love and service we came to manifest the law of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Redeemer and Lord, as he well knows.... To distrust him would be a far more terrible thing than any physical evil which all the enemies of God put together could inflict on us, for without God's permission neither the devils nor their human ministers could hinder us in the slightest degree.... We are therefore determined to make our way into China at all costs, and *I hope in God that the upshot of our journey will be the increase of our holy faith*, however much the devil and his ministers may persecute us. If God is for us who can overthrow us?<sup>1</sup>

The italics in the Francis Xavier quote are Piper's, the italics in the Piper quote are mine.

Piper's take on St. Francis Xavier

- Willing to acknowledge agreement with and respect for someone on the other side of divisions within Christianity
- Willing to use Xavier's own words, words that show him in a very good light
- Does not hide the fact of his disagreements with Xavier.

Piper gives us an excellent example of a helpful methodology to use as we study the Protestant Reformation

- Don't try to score easy points by highlighting the flaws of those you disagree with
- Same honesty applied to own side means not trying to present some sort of falsely idealistic image
- Leads to charitable and accurate discussion of specific and objective disagreements
- Excludes slander and demonization

This brings us back to the two questions on the last page of this packet. How could someone stay in the church of Sergius III and Alexander VI? Because they believed that Catholic doctrine was true, no matter what sins were committed by someone of those within the Catholic Church. How could someone leave the church of Sts. Francis and Clare? Because they believed that some Catholic doctrines were not true, no matter how much holiness was shown by some members of the Catholic Church.

So what are the questions we need to ask as we study the era of the Protestant Reformation? I would suggest questions like these:

What is true?

Where do we find the source of the fullest possible understanding of Christian doctrine?

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah Book: Sisters, OR, 1996), 208.

What were the correct responses to the problems the church was facing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century?

How do the responses that people actually did have compare to these?

## Martin Luther (1483-1546)

### Luther's Biography and Basic Beliefs

#### Early Life

- Born in Saxony, from relatively prosperous miner's family, university student, made decision to become monk<sup>2</sup>
  - Vocational decision tied in with dramatic experience of calling out to St. Anne for help in the midst of a thunderstorm
- Observant monk, went about his studies and duties according to expectations of Augustinian order of which he was a part
  - But overwhelmed by guilt
    - Could not trust he was forgiven for his sins
    - Idea of God's justice terrified him<sup>3</sup>
- Study of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans led him to find comfort in Romans 1:17 "The one who is righteous will live by faith", referred to as his "tower experience" after location of university office he was in when he had this insight<sup>4</sup>
  - His tower experience is dated sometime between 1512 and 1518, most likely before his 1517 posting of the 95 theses<sup>5</sup>
  - Saw this as break with scholastic theology of his day and a return to the thought of St. Augustine<sup>6</sup>
  - Enabled him to see God's justice as force acting on his behalf and not as something to be feared

#### The Indulgence Controversy and the 95 Theses

- Albrecht, Archbishop of Brandenburg and Mainz could not come up with money to pay "installation tax" and for papal dispensation to be head of two dioceses
  - Only way Pope Leo X, who had been made a cardinal at age 13 by Pope Alexander VI, would install Albrecht is if he allowed preachers of papal indulgences to enter his diocese
    - Part of reason money was sought for indulgences was in order to pay for construction of St. Peter's Basilica<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1990), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, eds., *Faith and Freedom: An Invitation to the Writings of Martin Luther*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), xxxvi-xxxvii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, and Chadwick, 45.

<sup>6</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 272-273.

- Luther, upset by preaching of sellers of indulgences, posts his now famous 95 Theses to church door in Wittenburg on October 31, 1517
- Typical invitation to theological debate/dispute, common practice at the time, introduced with these words “In the desire and with the purpose of elucidating the truth, a disputation will be held on the underwritten propositions at Wittenburg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Monk of the Order of St. Augustine, Master of Sacred Arts and of Sacred Theology, and ordinary reader of the same in that place. He therefore asks those who cannot be present and discuss the subject with us orally, to do so by letter in their absence. In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

Not words of revolution, or of radical break

- At this point Luther had not broken with Catholic church  
95 Theses clearly show his acceptance of sacramental confession and his belief in the existence of Purgatory<sup>9</sup>  
Near end of the document Luther writes:

If, then, pardons were preached according to the spirit and mind of the Pope, all of these questions would be resolved with ease – nay, would not exist.<sup>10</sup>

Not rejecting Catholicism or Papacy

Opposing corrupt preachers of indulgences who were taking advantage of uneducated believers for the sake of material benefit

So it certainly seems that this point in 1517 Luther could be described as a Catholic preacher and theologian who was attacking corruption within the church. He had a particular focus on the thought of St. Paul and St. Augustine, and was profoundly influenced by St. Paul’s discussions of salvation by faith. He believed that this doctrine shows us God’s power and justice working on our behalf to rescue us from sin. The disputes and arguments he was a part of followed the same patterns of disagreement that were (and are) typical for theologians and scholars. There was little reason to think that this particular monk, involved in one theological debate among many, using one aspect of St. Paul’s thought as the basis of his theology, was going to be responsible for fracturing Christianity.

#### Escalation of Controversy

- Blow by blow account very intricate, following points are rough outline
- Luther’s arrogance  
From attack on those acting foolishly in Pope’s name – certainly justified, to being upset by belief that Leo X was mishandling a complex situation –

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Basic Luther: Four of his Fundamental Work*. (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1994), 10

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 10-18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 18.

very likely Luther was right about that too, to complete rejection of Papal authority – throwing out the baby with the bath water

- Failures on part of Catholic leaders
  - Slow to realize how serious situation had become
  - Acting arrogantly as well
    - Poor arguments sometimes put forward out of belief that mere exercise of authority would be enough to end this controversy
- Backing of political leaders
  - Initially German leaders desiring to resist Roman influence<sup>11</sup>
  - Eventually political leaders throughout Europe also glad to use Protestant doctrine as means of asserting their independence from Papal political influence
- Hard to say at what point there was no going back
  - Eventually Luther went beyond a legitimate understanding of St. Paul's discussion of salvation by faith
    - Presented doctrine of salvation by faith alone in such a way that authentic biblical and traditional understanding of value of sacraments and good works of believers was lost
  - Beyond rejection of Papal shortcomings and mismanagement to rejection of office of the Papacy
    - Correct understanding of sacrament of Holy Orders also lost
      - Lutherans have not preserved validly ordained bishops or sacramental priesthood
        - Lutheran communion is not valid Eucharist
    - This schism was not Catholics cut off from other Catholics
      - Not like Avignon and Pisa anti-Popes
      - Not like when Henry IV and his bishops fought with Pope Gregory VII
      - Not even like split between Catholic west and Orthodox east
    - New theological reality
      - Groups with own theological beliefs with no desire to be in union with the Pope
      - Independence aided by secular rulers who wanted church in their lands to be free of Roman influence
        - Sometimes for political convenience and desire to be able to control church
        - At other times motivated by sincere theological conviction
        - Probably sometimes both facts were at work

#### Quoting Luther

- His life writings are incredibly extensive
- “Table Talk”

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<sup>11</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 47-48.

Eventually Lutherans would write down much of what Luther said even at meals and in private conversations

Percentage of his words that are preserved is very high

Most of us can imagine plenty of things we've said and done that we would not want recorded

- Possible to portray Martin Luther just about any way you want
  - Tender, caring family man with love for his Lord and German people
  - Arrogant, misogynistic, anti-Semitic brute
  - Truth somewhere in-between

## Particular Controversies Surrounding Martin Luther

### The Peasants' Revolt

- Germany was not one organized political entity at Luther's time
  - Nobility, bishops, city leaders exercised local authority
  - Actual degree of control exercised by Holy Roman Emperor was limited
- Also great poverty among peasants
- Conflict among peasant and local rulers relatively common
- Luther's theological efforts involved encouraging resistance to authority of the Emperor and the bishops
- Luther's resistance to authority was one cause of crisis in 1524-1525
  - Widespread and violent uprisings spread across Germany
  - Nobility responded with violent and bloody repression
- Luther was shocked by intensity of uprising, disorder it brought about
  - Wrote strongly about the need to use force to restore order<sup>12</sup>
- Many have said that Luther's actions here make him a friend of tyrants
  - Certainly possible to say he was too vehement
  - Basic right to use force to preserve order is morally legitimate, but questions can be asked about how it was used in this case and what Luther's involvement with this was
- Not particularly useful when arguing with intelligent people about Catholic/Protestant differences
  - Might be some who think everything bad that has ever happened is the Catholic Church's fault
  - If you meet someone that stupid then bringing this up will help
  - But on Catholic side we have to deal with excesses of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition (still horrible even though modern scholarship shows it's cruelty and extent has traditionally been greatly exaggerated)<sup>13</sup>, and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre<sup>14</sup>, to name just a few

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 59-61.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision*. (London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 365-366.

- Repression of Peasant's Revolt shows truth that some Protestant rulers, backed by some Protestant theologians, have at times used force and violence excessively and inappropriately  
Tragic and shameful, but true also of Catholicism

## Bigamy

- Strange situation where Luther did not feel there were explicit biblical grounds for saying nobleman Philip of Hesse could not take a second wife<sup>15</sup>
- Hesse was supportive of Protestants  
When he pressured Luther for second church wedding threatened to appeal to Pope if turned down  
Some fear on Luther's part Pope would grant annulment of first marriage<sup>16</sup>
- Certain possible to have impression that Luther gave powerful leader what he wanted in order to maintain political support
- Rome famously did refuse to concede to demands from King Henry VIII of England when it came to having things his own way when in regards to marriage  
But plenty of times where Catholic leaders did not show this integrity
- Luther's actions in this case were scandalous  
Perhaps unique in way in which he tried to justify them theologically  
But pot calling kettle black for Catholics to point to 16<sup>th</sup> century church leader giving in political pressure to compromise on Christian sexual teaching  
Allowing of clerical concubinage  
Selling of annulments
- Shows Luther's imperfections, but Protestant Reformation stands or falls on strength of doctrinal arguments, not perfection of it's leader

## Anti-Semitism

- Attempt often made by Catholics, as an attack on Protestantism, to link Martin Luther with Hitler's anti-Semitism
- Same attempt sometimes made by secularists, as an attack on Christianity
- Problems with this approach  
Catholic anti-Semitism
  - Attacks on Jews during the Crusades<sup>17</sup>
  - Expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492<sup>18</sup>
  - Pius V expulsion of vast majority of Jews from the Papal States<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Mark Shea, *By What Authority?: An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition*. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996), 101-106.

<sup>16</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 71-72.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 100-106, 282-286.

<sup>18</sup> Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 19-22.

Nazi distaste for Christianity, desire to eventually rid Germany of Christianity<sup>20</sup>

- Occultism founded on Norse mythology was religious/spiritual system given most credence by prominent Nazis<sup>21</sup>

Supported idea of Northern European racial superiority

- Hitler's wish that Muslims had won Battle of Tours<sup>22</sup>

Thought Islamic dominated Europe would have been preferable to Christian continent

Secularization stripping of way of Christian restraints on anti-Semitism, turning it into purely racial matter

Ideological roots of Holocaust much more easily found in anti-Christian eugenics movement of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries than in any strain of Christian thought<sup>23</sup> – Lutheran, Catholic, or whatever the case might be

- Does Luther bear some responsibility for German anti-Semitism?

Yes, but blame can also be placed on Catholics, on Norse mythology, on the eugenics movement, on the groundwork laid for this movement by the Enlightenment and Charles Darwin, on the normal human tendency for majorities to treat minorities poorly, and last but not least on Hitler and his accomplices themselves.

- Using attacks on Luther's anti-Semitism as Catholic apologetic tool almost certain to backfire

Only use is against those who would idealize Luther and demonize Catholics

Shame of anti-Semitism is something present among Catholics as well as among Protestants

Can't reject Lutheranism because of anti-Semitism unless you're willing to reject Catholicism as well

### **John Calvin (1509-1564)**

#### **Early Biography**

- Born in France, student at the University of Paris
- At unknown point become adherent of Reformation thinking, 1533 fled Paris with other like minded individuals<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> McBrien, *Lives of the Popes*, 290, 292.

<sup>20</sup> Roy H. Schoeman, *Salvation is From the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming*. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), 217-218.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 214, 222-226.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*. (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1997), 96.

<sup>23</sup> Schoeman, *Salvation is From the Jews*, 179-191.

<sup>24</sup> John Piper, February 4, 1997 address to Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, *The Divine Majesty of the Word*, *John Calvin: The Man and His Preaching*, footnoted text of this address can be found at: [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1471\\_The\\_Divine\\_Majesty\\_of\\_the\\_Word](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1471_The_Divine_Majesty_of_the_Word)

- 1534-1536 resided in Swiss town of Basel, during time of temporary amnesty returned to France, gathered some belongings, brother and sister left with him, intended to travel to Strasbourg to take up the life of a scholar, troop movements on road diverted him to Geneva, banished from there in 1538, returned in 1541, resided there until his death<sup>25</sup>

### **Calvin's Strictness in Ruling Geneva**

- Organized rule of city in such a way that power was divided between city council and group of pastors, tension between the two groups, but church leaders exercised tremendous influence in ruling the city<sup>26</sup>
- Strict man, not prone to enjoying pleasures of this life  
    "One almost suspects him of marrying to set an example"<sup>27</sup>
- Regulations concerning clothing, dancing forbidden<sup>28</sup>
- Clergy authorized to make annul visit to homes of church members, means of enforcing various laws and disciplines<sup>29</sup>
- Card playing, and giving children any names not found in the bible were forbidden as well<sup>30</sup>
- Attempt made to ban taverns, this law was unpopular enough to be quickly repealed<sup>31</sup>
- 1553 burning at the stake of Spaniard Servetus for denial of Trinity used against Calvin  
    Can at least be said in his defense that City Council imposed burning, Calvin argued for more humane means of execution<sup>32</sup>
- Looking at these facts, and other examples not cited here we can easily say that Calvin...  
    ...used state and church authority to ban acts that are not immoral  
    ...made illegal acts that while immoral should probably not be dealt with using government's authority  
    ...used excessive means to punish and enforce various laws and rules of Geneva

### **Putting Calvin's Rule of Geneva in it's Proper Context**

- There is very little of Calvin's rule of Geneva that can be used to form any sort of thoughtful attack on Reformed theology
- The burning of Servetus was horrific, but even a figure as widely admired as St. Thomas More approved at times of the execution of Protestants

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 83-84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 87, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 90.

- Pope St. Pius V's (1566-1572) attempts to bring about reform within the city of Rome were basically as strict as Calvin's legislation in Geneva<sup>33</sup>
- Need to realize seriousness of some of what Calvin was fighting against
  - Libertines, group of Calvin's opponents that among other things argued for permissibility of having mistresses and concubines, and of engaging in wife swapping<sup>34</sup>
    - Sought to be allowed to participate in the life of the church without changing their lifestyles
  - We disagree of severity of Calvin's approach to enforcing moral life, but safe to see he was in the right when it came to who he was opposing
  - Same with Pius V a little bit later, he was motivated to rid Rome of, among other things, prostitution and financial corruption

### Calvin's Doctrine and Writings

- Main work was lengthy *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, five editions published starting in 1536, final and current form in 1559<sup>35</sup>
- Systematic, careful thinker, as opposed to Luther's emotional intensity<sup>36</sup>
- Particularly known for his strong doctrine of predestination
  - Christ did not die for all, salvation only offered to some<sup>37</sup>
    - We need to and should reject this idea
      - But remember he arrived at this conclusion out of desire to protect truth of God's power and to oppose any man centered approach to Christianity which would put salvation in our hands
      - Remember as well that Augustine believed this in the later stages of his life
        - Some later Catholics followed him in this
          - Harsh doctrine of predestination dominated Reformation thought, but has been present at time among Catholics
            - Pope John Paul II's doctoral advisor Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance<sup>38</sup>
              - Pope John Paul II himself did not hold to this position

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 281-284.

<sup>34</sup> Piper, *The Divine Majesty of the Word*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 92-93.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 94-95.

<sup>38</sup> Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, O.P., *Predestination: The Meaning of Predestination in Scripture and in the Church*. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1998).