

# The Fifth Age of the Church

Luther and the Protestant  
Reformation

# Martin Luther

- Augustinian Monk
- Professor of Scripture
- Demon possessed?
- Morally Corrupt?
- Courageous reformer?
- Roman Catholic Prophet? (Greg Sobolewski)
- Founder of Protestant Reformation

“So wie das Geld im Kasten klingt, die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt”

- Attributed to Johann Tetzel, Dominican Friar: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from the fires of Purgatory springs.”
- Tetzel was the abusive seller of indulgences who prompted Martin Luther to write his 95 Theses.
- These theses were initially ignored by the Church, but the political environment soon caused them to have great significance.

# Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences

“Out of love for the truth and from desire to elucidate it, the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and ordinary lecturer therein at Wittenberg, intends to defend the following statements and to dispute on them in that place. Therefore he asks that those who cannot be present and dispute with him orally shall do so in their absence by letter. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen”

([www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/martin-luther-95-theses.html](http://www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/martin-luther-95-theses.html))

# Repentance Is The Duty of All Christians

- 1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying “Repent ye, etc.,” intended that the whole life of his believers on earth should be a constant penance.
- 30. Nobody is sure of having repented sincerely enough; much less can he be sure of having received perfect remission of sins.
- 35. Every Christian who feels sincere repentance and woe on account of his sins, has perfect remission of pain and guilt even without letters of indulgence.

# Indulgences Are Optional and Prone to Abuse

- 27. They preach vanity who say that the soul flies out of Purgatory as soon as the money thrown into the chest rings.
- 28. What is sure, is, that as soon as the penny rattles in the chest, gain and avarice are on the way of increase; but the intercession of the church depends only on the will of God himself.
- 43. Christians should be taught, he who gives to the poor, or lends to a needy man, does better than buying indulgence.

# Bible Is the Treasure of the Church

- 59. St. Lawrence called the poor of the community the treasure of the community and of the Church, but he understood the word according to the use in his time.
- 54. Wrong is done to the word of God if one in the same sermon spends as much or more time on indulgences as on the word of the Gospel.
- 62. The right and true treasure of the Church is the most Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

# Pope Has Limited Power

- 5. The Pope will not, and cannot, remit other punishments than those which he has imposed by his own decree or according to the canons.
- 11. This abuse of changing canonical penalty into the penalty of Purgatory seems to have arisen when the bishops were asleep.



# Actions Show Limits of Power

- 82. Why does not the Pope deliver all souls at the same time out of Purgatory for the sake of most holy love and account of the bitterest distress of those souls—this being the most imperative of all motives—while he saves an infinite number of souls for the sake of that most miserable thing, money, to be spent on St. Peter's; this being the very slightest of motives?

# Reflection

- CCC 1478— “An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins.”
- Are indulgences important in your faith life?
- Are they a motivating factor to you in your choice of spiritual practices?

# Political Factors of Reformation

- The Reformation was largely political in its origins, so was the Church at the time.
- Church and state were intertwined, especially in Germany, the Holy Roman Empire.
- Frederick (The Wise) of Saxony, an elector, played a large part in protecting Luther and allowing his following to grow.
- Taxation and autonomy were the issues.

# Peasant's Revolt

- Luther used incendiary language without thinking through the consequences.
- Luther was unable to control followers and other leaders emerged who were more activist.
- New class of common landholders and landless poor revolted violently against the princes and the Church.
- Suppressed quickly with great loss of life.

# Theological Factors of Reformation

- The theological factors of the Reformation had tremendous impact. We are still feeling the effects today.
- Luther did not originally plan on breaking from the Church.
- As the Church sought to excommunicate him, he developed his theology more fully.
- He had the protection of Frederick and others.

# Basic Tenets of Luther's Thought

- Scripture as sole authority—*Sola Scriptura*
  - only two sacraments scripturally based: Eucharist and baptism
  - God's will revealed in scripture
  - “Reason is directly opposed to faith.”
- Justification by faith alone
  - One cannot earn (through good works) or buy entrance to heaven
  - An external relationship with God: “through the merits of Christ, our sins are forgiven” (Vidmar 195)
- The priesthood of all believers

# Reflection

God created the world and all that is in it, including humans, and it was good. Evil entered the world through the sin of Adam and Eve.

After the Fall, was God's creation still good?

Is it still good today?

# Justification an External Relationship with God

- Since the fall, God does not dwell in us.
- We may be reborn in the Holy Spirit through an internal conversion that comes from outside through the grace of God. God saves us if he wills it.
- Catholics hold that God does dwell in all of us and that we actively participate in our salvation from within our hearts.



# God Dwells In Us

Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests in observing this law, and by it they will be judged. Their conscience is people's most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one's neighbor.

*Gaudium et Spes, 16*

# Phillip Melanchthon

- Gave structure to Luther's theology
- Wrote the "Augsburg Confession" which is still the statement of faith for Lutherans.
- Tried to show that Luther's reforms were not opposed to the teaching of the Church.
- Without Melanchthon the Lutheran Church would probably not exist.

# Ulrich Zwingli (Zurich)

- Sought freedom from celibacy.
- Absolute authority of scripture as understood by individual reader. The Bible is sufficient unto itself.
- Iconoclastic
- Promoted secular control of faith matters
- De-emphasized the Eucharist. Symbolic “last supper” four times a year. Service of the Word all other Sundays. Protestants still follow this pattern.
- Amish are spiritual descendants in America.

# John Calvin (Geneva)

- “Double-predestination”
- God controls everything and everyone, no free will, only God’s will.
- Espoused extreme moral rigor. No dancing, cards, etc.
- Eucharist as “fellowship” not sacrament.
- God physically rewards those who assent to his will (basis for modern “prosperity Gospel”).
- Puritans were Calvinists.