

## Chapter 40 Addendum – The Reformation to the Modern Church

At the outset of the Reformation, the sick church became mired in the complex politics of the day. Europe was essentially a “quilt” of independent states and principalities, broken only by a few strong and growing national states (Portugal, Spain, France and England). The Holy Roman Empire (now, essentially Germany), had only a weak alliance left. Moreover, the Ottoman Turks (Muslims) had conquered Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire (1453) and were closing in on Europe. As reformers came into the picture, their influence became simply another pawn that had to be considered in political struggles and decisions.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), often credited with being the leader of the Protestant Reformation, became powerful within the Church soon after serving time in a monastery and as a professor at the University of Wittenberg, where he earned his Ph.D. of theology in 1512. He began teaching several reformation ideas that quickly made him well known throughout Europe. But he was launched into the public spotlight by posting his famous Ninety-five thesis on the door of Castle Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, in protest to the sale of indulgences.

Indulgences were essentially “rights” that were sold by the Roman Catholic Church in exchange for punishment that the purchaser would otherwise receive in Purgatory (a spiritual abode after death where Catholics believe that people’s souls face punishment for unresolved sin). It bothered Luther that a full remission of sin could be bought and sold for a living person, and what was considered even worse to Luther, remission for sin could be purchased for dead relatives as well. It was common practice for the pope (and other church leaders as well) to launch indulgence campaigns to finance building projects (such as the building of St. Peter’s in Rome, financed largely through sale of indulgences).

Pope Leo X (the one attempting to finance the building of St. Peter’s at the time through indulgences) reacted quickly against Luther and attempted to have him brought to Rome on charges of heresy. However, the intermingling of political and religious power bases at the time provided Luther with the protection he needed since he had already garnered a considerable base of support. Luther continued to teach his various viewpoints which eventually became known as “Protestant”—because Luther’s followers “protested” a proclamation at the Diet of Speyer (1529) that forbid the spread of the Lutheran movement.

Martin Luther was one of the most important leaders of the Protestant reformation. Some of his major accomplishments were:

1. He translated the Bible from Latin into German.
2. He promoted the idea that only Holy Scripture was an unchangeable authority for theology and doctrine.
3. He promoted the concept of justification by faith alone.
4. He promoted the concept of salvation by grace alone.
5. He promoted the idea that any person could approach God directly (i.e. without the necessity of a priest).
6. He promoted singing praises and worship to God.

### **Memorize This:**

Martin Luther is often referred to as the father of Protestantism. His break with church thinking at the time (much of which still exists in the Roman Catholic Church) includes condemnation of indulgences, focusing on Holy Scripture as the sole authority of doctrine, justification by faith, and salvation by grace, and the direct access to God without the need for priests.

Protestantism grew rapidly. And in 1546, the year of Luther’s death, war broke out between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. By 1555, the war ended with the Diet of Augsburg, in which both the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church being recognized as legitimate state religions throughout the Holy Roman Empire (others were not to be tolerated, however).

John Calvin (1509-1564) was probably the most influential reformer of all in western religion and culture. Although he started in the Roman church, Calvin failed to find peace in the

various rules and rituals of the Catholic Church. Rather outspoken, he was imprisoned for his Protestant faith twice and ended up in Geneva, Switzerland, which had broken ties with the Catholic Church, confiscating its property.

Calvin's influence was great in many areas. His theological commentaries were extensive, and included every book of the Bible except Song of Songs and Revelation.

Calvin was also a reformer in the area of church governance. He built a system around that outlined in the book of Acts in which pastors were designated as the religious leaders of an area. Teachers were then empowered to teach doctrine to the people. Elders were 12 men appointed by the municipal council to oversee what everyone in the city did. And finally deacons (modeled after Acts 6-8) were appointed to care for the sick, elderly, widowed and poor.

Education was another area of emphasis in Calvin's reform. People at his school in Geneva were trained to spread Presbyterianism throughout Europe. Calvin stressed a very literal and strict interpretation of the scripture.

Finally, we have Calvin's theological viewpoint--his most famous one being that of "predestination." In other words, Calvin believed that since God knows everything from beginning to the end (Is. 46:9-10) everyone is predestined at birth regarding their salvation. (This particular idea has been hotly debated through the centuries resulting in many viewpoints.) In overall doctrine and theology, however, Calvin's book *Institutes of the Christian Religion* became the dominant text for the systematic theology of the reformation (except in the Lutheran areas).

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was taught by John Calvin's followers and became a "Calvinist", yet introduced some theological differences later known as Arminianism. The essential differences of Arminianism and Calvinism deal with concepts of predestination, free will, and ultimately the security of salvation. Both Calvinistic beliefs and Arminian beliefs, and a broad mix of beliefs that are somewhat in between, have developed within the Protestant church. These theological differences do not break from the Protestant foundation laid by Martin Luther, and are beyond the scope of this book.

The Protestant reformation ideas spread quickly throughout Europe. The most common of these ideas were:

1. The replacement of the pope's authority with the authority of scripture only,
2. Salvation and justification by grace alone,
3. The direct access to God in prayer (i.e. no need for an intercessor),
4. The rejection of idols, indulgences, simony and other Catholic traditions,
5. A revamping of Church governance and worship.

In France conditions in the church had grown so bad that it was estimated that only 10% of the clergy could even read. In spite of this the growing influx of Protestants were being persecuted. A rise in a new, typically younger, Protestant group known as the Huguenots began in the reign of Henry II (1547-1559). Eventually political-religious tension escalated in France into an out and out bloody civil war between the Catholics and Protestants. Later King Henry IV turned Catholic, ostensibly to help stop the fighting, and eventually issued an edict that tolerated the Huguenots. While this stopped the bloodshed, as time passed, the edict was revoked and the Protestants were forced out into other European nations.

In England, marital problems led King Henry VIII to break with Rome, opening the door for the spread of the reformation there. Later, in need of money, he closed the monasteries in England. Henry VIII, however, had no intention of introducing Protestantism for theological change, only for political benefit—as evidenced by his Act of the Six Articles (1539), a Catholic creed, and by his severe persecution of the Lutherans. Ironically, King Henry VIII did pronounce the Great Bible—John Wycliffe's English translation, forbidden by the Pope—to be the Bible of the realm in 1537).

### ***The Counter Reformations***

Not everyone in the Roman Catholic Church defended the atrocities that the Protestant reformation had exposed. In fact, there were many calls to reform the teaching and practices of the Church long before Martin Luther. However, the Protestant exposure and its rapid expansion was the spark that ignited the counter-reformation to change within the Roman Catholic Church.

Eventually, however, the Roman Catholics did initiate change which included such things as discontinuing the sale of indulgences and the practice of simony. The counter reformation of the Catholics was quite successful in recapturing its position in many areas for the following reasons:

1. The Roman Church had learned from the Protestant reformation and was already in the process of reconsidering its position on various practices.
2. The Protestants started to run into the same problems that the Catholics had—primarily the conflict of religious and political objectives as Protestantism became the leading religion in certain areas.
3. Initial evangelical enthusiasm of the Protestants started to wane.
4. The papacy was already highly organized with centuries of experience.

The first area of renewal within the Roman Catholic Church was in the various orders of the Church—The Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines; and the new orders of the Theatines, Ursulines, and Jesuits.

The Inquisition that occurred in the medieval church period was reinstated. To an extent, it had a positive effect in maintaining Catholicism with a check on heresy.

Perhaps the most important event of the Counter Reformation was the 25 session Council of Trent (1545-1563) that finally sought to define the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, that Martin Luther had attacked as being ambiguous. For the first time, key Catholic doctrine was defined including:

1. Sale of indulgences
2. Value of images and relics
3. Existence of Purgatory
4. Canonicity of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament
5. The necessity of the seven sacraments for salvation
6. The value of tradition as a basis of religious authority alongside the Bible
7. The importance of confession to a priest
8. A statement of faith was essentially developed

A new sense of spirituality existed amongst Roman Catholics during and after this period of Counter Reformation.

#### **Important Information:**

The Roman Catholic Church recognized many of the problems uncovered by the Protestant Reformation long before the reformation began. However the Protestants brought the issues to a head which ultimately caused the Roman Catholics to reform, making some of the same changes, and clarifying their position on others at the Council of Trent from 1545-1563.

### ***Church Development since the Reformations***

The Protestant and Catholic Counter Reformations was the key defining point for the church. Certainly a great deal of development has occurred since that time, with introduction of many denominations, clarification and disagreement over details of church doctrine amongst both Protestants and Catholics; and even wars and the advent of new Christian cults. However, the essentials of church change are relatively unchanged since the reformations.

One problem that, though existing to some extent earlier, increased following the reformations is the conflict between the church and science. It continues to exist today. Essentially, it is a struggle between an emphasis on General Revelation (tending to be the emphasis of scientists) and Specific Revelation (tending to be the emphasis of theologians). Refer to *Examine the Evidence* by Ralph O. Muncaster.

A well known example of problems resulting from the conflict between the church and science is the history of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo. In the early 1500's Copernicus introduced the theory that the earth and planets revolved around the sun. However, fearing condemnation by the church, he refused to have his work released until his death. However, Kepler and Galileo brought this work to the fore, and Galileo brought experimental proof to back the theory. The church was outraged, thinking that proper biblical theology taught that the earth

was the center of the universe and therefore the sun “rose and set” about the earth. Galileo, thought to be at odds with Holy Scripture, was condemned. It was not until 1992, that this condemnation was reversed by the Roman Catholic Church.

It is beyond the scope of this section to enter into discussion and/or evaluation of various doctrines within denominations. It is within the scope of this site to argue for the viewpoint that we should ultimately trust Holy Scripture alone, not any person, in the determination of God’s communication. This is not to imply that we not listen to the many excellent church leaders, quite the contrary—simply that any human leader be evaluated based on the Bible, not vice versa. Remember that we are called to “test everything” and that only 100% perfect prophecy is an indication of something being from God.

***Fascinating Facts:***

Key events during the reformation period are:

1320-1384 – John Wycliffe, John Hus initiate reform beliefs

1372-1414 – John Hus initiates reform beliefs

1492 – Christopher Columbus discovers America

1512 – Martin Luther posts famous Ninety-five thesis founding Protestantism

1473-1543 – Copernicus hides findings that earth revolves about sun until death

1509-1547 – King Henry VIII of England breaks ties with Pope

1537 – King Henry VIII makes Wycliff’s English translation, Bible of England

1509-1564 – John Calvin initiates extensive reforms with broad influence

1546 – War breaks out between Protestants and Roman Catholics

1547-1559 – Reign of Henry II in France. Protestant Huguenots are formed.

1545-1563 – Council of Trent redefines Catholic Counter Reformation

1609 – Colonists in Jamestown, Virginia are starving

1560-1609 – Jacobus Arminius introduces new reformed ideas

1616 – Church condemns Galileo for scientific discoveries thought to be heretical

1620 – Mayflower sails to America

1992 – Roman Catholic Church overturns previous condemnation of Galileo