

Church History II

(Pre-Reformation to Modern Day)

Week 2 – Luther and the Anabaptists

Introduction: As alluded to last week, the impact of Luther in the Reformation, or of any reformer, can at times be overstated. It was not something inherent to Luther but the truth of God, which had been trying to come to the surface and had previously met fierce opposition within the corrupted system of the Catholic Church, that finally found a clear way out. It was more a point of God anointing the right time in which to again redirect the church. The opportunities abounded with new inventions like the printing press invented by Gutenberg in the 1400's, the nationalistic structures emerging across different forming countries, the weakness and avarice of the Catholic leadership, and the Renaissance's renewal of classical learning and its focus on returning to the source.¹ Thus, the church underwent reform across Europe before, during, and after Luther, through men like Wycliffe, Hus, Savonarola, Calvin, Zwingli, and many others.

I. A Wild Boar in the Vineyard

1. Background

- A. Martin was born into the house of a miner who, over time, owned a much bigger operation.
- B. Martin was intended to be a Lawyer but was never really prepared to take that step.
 - i. What pulled Martin away from a lawyer's duty?
 - ii. The first experience of having one of his university friends die in a brawl.²

PTQ

 - 1) This caused Luther to keep in mind his own mortality, wondering what would happen if he had died.
 - iii. The second experience was a thunderstorm in 1505. **PTQ**
 - 1) "A bolt of lightning knocked him to the ground, and Luther, terrified, called out to Catholicism's patroness of miners, "Save me, St. Anne! And I'll become a monk."³
- C. Luther's search for being right with God.
 - i. Luther's struggle came particularly with the idea of the righteousness of God. Because if God is as righteous and holy as the word says, then what hope exists for a sinner like him?

¹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 19-21.

² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In the Year of Our Lord: Reflections on Twenty Centuries of Church History* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2018), 164.

³ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, ed. Marshall Shelley, 5th Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 284.

- ii. Monastic life – self-castigation **PTQ**
 - 1) “I kept the rule so strictly,” he recalled years later, “that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his sheer monkery, it was I.”⁴
 - 2) “He sometimes fasted for three days and slept without a blanket in freezing winter. He was driven by a profound sense of his own sinfulness and of God’s unutterable majesty and holiness.”⁵
- iii. Priest life – Service **PTQ**
 - 1) Luther's instructor thought that what could be most helpful for Luther in regard to his personal struggles with sin would be being a part of the church’s solution and joining the priesthood.
 - 2) In the midst of saying his first mass, said Luther, “I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, ‘Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin, and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God.’ ”⁶
 - 3) One day he heard a different paradigm in which he thought he could find solace from the righteousness of God. The ancient and common mystic teaching was that the solution was to love God. However, Luther rightly recognized he did not and could not love God as he ought to, leading to the well-known outburst, “I do not love God! I hate him!”⁷
- iv. Professor Life – Study **PTQ**
 - 1) Luther was encouraged to teach as a way to help him refocus. His advisor's thought was that if it had helped Jerome, maybe it would help Luther.⁸
 - 2) By 1512, Luther had received his doctorate in Theology and had the psalter committed to memory. He taught his opening lectures at Wittenberg in 1513 on the Psalms. **PTQ**
 - 3) “Assigned to the chair of biblical studies at the recently established Wittenberg University, he became fascinated with the words of Christ from the cross: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Christ forsaken! How could our Lord be forsaken? Luther felt forsaken, but he was a sinner. Christ was not.”⁹

⁴ Shelley, [Church History in Plain Language](#), 284.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 24.

⁹ Shelley, [Church History in Plain Language](#), 284.

- 4) Luther, upon great study and contemplation on the connection between the righteousness of God and that through faith in Romans 1:17, realized the very grace of God. **PTQ**
- 5) Luther, upon enjoying this realization, found great peace in it, but did not yet see its difficulty with the system to which he was a part. Luther quietly convinced several members of the Wittenberg staff of his views.

2. Interactions with Catholics and other Reformers

- A. Luther's 95 Thesis – Significantly focused on indulgences and the wickedness of the papal system. **PTQ**
 - i. Much of this was in response to the lying work of Johann Tetzel. “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,” went his jingle, “the soul from purgatory springs.”¹⁰ **PTQ**
 - ii. During an eighteen-day debate in 1519 with theologian John Eck at Leipzig, Luther blurted out, “A council may sometimes err. Neither the church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture.”¹¹
- B. Luther to be declared a heretic?
 - i. In an attempt to protect claims Eck made against Luther as a heretic, Luther made pamphlets calling German princes to correct the churches of the German area and create a national German church.¹² **PTQ**
 - ii. “In June 1520 Pope Leo X issued his bull condemning Luther and giving him sixty days to turn from his heretical course. The bonfire at Wittenberg made clear Luther's intent, so his excommunication followed. In January 1521 the pope declared him a heretic and expelled him from the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”¹³
 - iii. Luther was then called to the Diet of Worms, in which he was questioned by the Emperor Charles V. When asked to recant his writings, Luther gave the famous quote, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God,” he told the court. “I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”¹⁴
- C. On his way home from the council in which Luther had received promises of Safe conduct, much like Hus had, Frederick the Wise “Kidnapped Luther and kept him hidden at Wartburg Castle. **PTQ**
 - i. While here Luther had the New Testament translated into German.
 - ii. Luther spent the next several years helping formulate the spiritual reforms known to the protestant church many of which are listed below.

¹⁰ Shelley, [Church History in Plain Language](#), 286.

¹¹ Ibid., 287.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 288.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- iii. Luther's focus and attention in the Reformation dwindled after the peasants' war turned much of the people against Luther, as he supported their destruction after he felt that they had wrongly risen up in insurrection.

3. Accomplishments **PTQ**

- A. Created First Protestant Sect – Lutheranism
- B. Translated the Latin Bible into German
- C. Articulated important doctrines like Justification by faith, the supremacy of the scriptures, the priesthood of the Believer, the antibiblical nature of the papal system, opposed transubstantiation, and rid the ideas of clerical celibacy.¹⁵
- D. With the Assistance of Phillip Melancthon, creating the Augsburg Confession (1530)
- E. Creating the difficulties needed for the eventual civil war ending in the Peace of Augsburg (1555), granting Religious choice to the rulers of territories.¹⁶

4. Difficulties **PTQ**

- A. Luther Struggled greatly with Anxiety and Depression – Kat Von Bora Story
- B. Luther had imprecise and at times inconsistent theology – Sin Boldly
- C. He accidentally encouraged a Peasants revolt
- D. He created another state church
- E. He said things about the Jews in the latter part of his life that would have made Hitler blush.
- F. He tended to be so divisive that historically, when he and Zwingli met, they agreed on 13/14 points, but due to their different views of the sacramental status of the Lord's supper, Luther deemed Zwingli a heretic.

II. Creators of Chaos

1. Anabaptists

- A. In Zurich, during the prime time of Luther, another portion of the Reformation was going on, that of the Anabaptists.
 - i. "The city council of Zurich had that day ordered their leaders, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, to stop holding Bible classes...the council had warned all parents to have their babies baptized within eight days of birth or face banishment from the territory."¹⁷
 - ii. "George Blaurock, a former priest, stepped over to Conrad Grebel and asked him for baptism in the apostolic fashion—upon confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ. Grebel baptized him on the spot and Blaurock proceeded to baptize the others. Thus Anabaptism (literally, "rebaptism"), another important expression of the Protestant Reformation, was born."¹⁸

¹⁵ Shelley, [Church History in Plain Language](#), 289.

¹⁶ Ibid., 290.

¹⁷ Ibid., 293.

¹⁸ Ibid.

- iii. Why was this a big deal? Ultimately, what is being said in the rebaptism of those previously in the catholic church is that infant baptism is both unbiblical and the Christians are not baptized into the state but into the body of actual believers. This became a key point in the separation of Church and State.¹⁹
 - iv. “Finally, the Zurich council lost all patience. On March 7, 1526, it decided that anyone found rebaptizing would be put to death by drowning. Apparently their thought was, “If the heretics want water, let them have it.” Within a year, on January 5, 1527, Felix Manz became the first Anabaptist martyr.”²⁰
 - v. This is at times called their third baptism. **PTQ**
- B. Who were the Anabaptists?**
- i. “A voice calling the moderate reformers to strike even more deeply at the foundations of the old order.”²¹ **PTQ**
 - ii. The hard part in defining the Anabaptists is that it was not a monolithic group and there were vast differences that existed in their theologies. Some of which went so far as to deny the Trinity.
 - iii. The name comes from Rebaptizer, which those in the movement would disagree with, as they would not count the sprinkling of a baby as baptism, as it was not done to a believer and certainly not in a proper mode. They preferred the designation of Baptists. **PTQ**
 - iv. They sought to follow the Bible. “As a result, little groups of Anabaptist believers gathered about their Bibles. They discovered a different world in the pages of the New Testament. They found no state-church alliance, no Christendom. Instead they discovered that the apostolic churches were companies of committed believers, communities of men and women who had freely and personally chosen to follow Jesus.”²²
 - v. “The apostolic churches knew nothing of the practice of baptizing infants. That tradition was simply a convenient device for perpetuating Christendom, a nominal but spiritually impotent society, Christian in name only.”²³
 - vi. Like the missionary monks of the Middle Ages, the Anabaptists wanted to shape society by their example of radical discipleship—if necessary, even by death. They steadfastly refused to be a part of worldly power, including bearing arms, holding political office, or taking oaths. In the sixteenth century that sort of talk was inflammatory, revolutionary, and even treasonous.²⁴ **PTQ**

¹⁹ Shelley, [*Church History in Plain Language*](#), 294.

²⁰ Ibid., 297.

²¹ Ibid. 294.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 295.

²⁴ Ibid.

C. The Schleithem Confession **PTQ**

- i. “The Christian’s relationship with Jesus Christ must go beyond inner assent to doctrines; it must involve a daily walk with God in which Christ’s teaching and example shape a transformed way of life” ²⁵
- ii. “A second Anabaptist principle, love, grew logically out of the first. In their dealings with non-Anabaptists, they acted as peacemakers and pacifists. They would not go to war, defend themselves against their persecutors, or take part in coercion by the state.” ²⁶
- iii. “The third Anabaptist principle is what we have come to call the congregational view of church authority...Each believer, then, was both a priest to his fellow believers and a missionary to unbelievers.” ²⁷
- iv. “A fourth major Anabaptist conviction was the insistence on the separation of church and state.” ²⁸

2. Radical Reformers

A. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

- i. “In 1519, the year Luther debated John Eck at Leipzig, Zwingli became the people’s priest at the Great Minster Church in Zurich. He launched the reformation not by posting theses on the church door but by preaching Bible-centered sermons from the pulpit” ²⁹ **PTQ**
- ii. “In one important respect Zwingli followed the Bible even more stringently than did Luther. The Wittenbergers would allow whatever the Bible did not prohibit; Zwingli rejected whatever the Bible did not prescribe. For this reason the Reformation in Zurich tended to strip away more traditional symbols of the Roman church: candles, statues, organ and choir music, and pictures. Later, in England, this spirit was called Puritanism” ³⁰
- iii. He was radical in the sense that he saw baptism and the Lord's supper and ordinances instead of sacraments. **PTQ**
- iv. However, the public dissent with infant baptism where Zwingli and the more radical reformers parted ways.

B. Jan Matthijs and Jan of Leiden

- i. This man led the city of Munster to a kind of rebellion.
- ii. He made the people think that Jesus was coming back to Munster.
- iii. When the catholic bishop came to quell this organization, they defended themselves.

²⁵ Shelley, [*Church History in Plain Language*](#), 299.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 300.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 296.

- iv. In the craziness of the situation, in 1534 an innkeeper came into power claiming new revelations from God, he endorsed polygamy and named himself King David. He actually managed to keep his charade together even with widespread hunger for over a year. **PTQ**
- C. Menno Simmons also came from the line of Anabaptists
 - i. They become the Mennonites, which are probably one of the more familiar groups to us today.
 - ii. “Over the centuries, the descendants of Anabaptism lost many of the characteristics of their founders. In their search for a pure church, they often became legalistic. In the interests of sheer survival, they lost their evangelistic zeal and became known simply as excellent farmers, good people, and the Quiet in the Land.”³¹

Conclusion: The church had in many ways been set free from the difficult and previously oppressive catholic way of thought, which led both to a resurgence of early Christian thought and teaching, but also at times led to heretical movements, odd beliefs, and new wolves in different kinds of wool. With truth and freedom come the opportunity for danger, misunderstanding, but also true reformation.

³¹ Shelley, [*Church History in Plain Language*](#), 301.

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