

Key Events In Church History, Part III

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9. The Reformation

For Lutheran Christians the Reformation marks a key turning point in the history of the visible church. After centuries of decline, during which the church moved away from Scripture, the Lord of history once again returned his truth to his people. Although our gracious Lord works through men and women, using earthly events to carry out his divine purpose, the fact still remains that the Reformation is God's doing.

Reformation Preparations

The Lord made careful preparations before sending his Son into the world to be our Savior, providing international peace, a web of travel routes and a common language to accentuate the spread of the gospel. Likewise the Lord guided the events of history and provided the necessary resources, so that "in the fullness of time" he might purify his church. There are three distinct areas in which we can observe these preparations.

It is no secret that the Lord guides and directs the course of world events for the benefit of his kingdom. This fact is readily apparent in the political realm. A century before the advent of the Reformation another attempt at reform had ended in the execution of John Hus. Invited to Constance to defend his doctrinal position before a church council, he quickly found out the church was not interested in restoring the truth. Stripped of his safe conduct, Hus soon became the victim of a strong monarch who cooperated with an aggressive Roman church.

As we move into the sixteenth century the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire faced a number of challenges which prevented this same kind of intervention from taking place. Beginning in 1494 a series of confrontations between the Valois kings of France and the Hapsburg emperors allowed the German nobility to demand the rights and privileges originally granted in the empire's constitution. No longer was the emperor in a position to ignore the concerns of his princes.

The pressure on the emperors increased as the Muslim invasions into Hungary gobbled up large tracts of territory and brought the invaders to the borders of Hapsburg Austria. The military action necessary to salvage a buffer zone east of Vienna once again required the support of the German nobles. Adding to the difficulty of the situation was the papacy's efforts to play the French against the Hapsburgs for its own gain. The emperor needed the German princes, even if they supported some ideals that were not in keeping with the emperor's personal goals.

A second change that took place in the century prior to the Reformation can be described as a revolution in technology. The spread of ideas had been hampered by the inability of writers to distribute their works quickly and at a reasonable price. By the middle of the fourteenth century the development of moveable metallic type, coupled with improvements in the printing press and the availability of paper, provided the resources necessary for the rapid dissemination of information. As the Reformation was ready to begin, it was possible to share one's thoughts with the European continent within a few weeks' time.

The ability to spread information made it possible for a more widespread audience to examine works that had previously been available only in a limited number of manuscripts to a select few. As a result, Martin Luther, during his years at the University of Erfurt and then later in the monasteries at Erfurt and Wittenberg, was exposed to the Renaissance emphasis on examining works in their original languages. He was also able to read the works of men who had challenged the established position of the medieval church. The works of Johann Tauler, William of Ockham, Thomas a Kempis and Gabriel Biel were just a few of the stimulating books available. In addition, Luther had contact with Christian humanist instructors who promoted a "new way" of learning that was sometimes at odds with the established church.

The Lord used the political situation, the technology revolution and the free flow of ideas to prepare the ground for the Reformation. When Luther, assisted by other reformed-minded men, began to sow the seed of the Word, he found a favorable environment for its growth and people who were interested in reaping the harvest.

The Posting of the 95 Theses

Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses on 31 October 1517 is generally considered to be the beginning of the Reformation. Although some may make a case for a different event at a different time, deciding on such a starting point is rather arbitrary. If the circumstances had not changed in the decades prior to 1517, this event would have been of little significance and it would have had little impact. The posting and then the publication of this series of debating points indicated how much the world had changed since 1415.

The 95 Theses attacked the abuse of indulgences, rather than indulgences themselves. Pope Boniface VIII had offered the first Jubilee Indulgence in 1300. Although the original intent was to offer these pardons from the church's treasury of merits every 100 years, indulgences were such a financial boon that it was decided to have one every 50 years, then every 33 years and finally every 25 years. In 1393 the purchase of such an indulgence was made easier and more systematic – agents were sent out with the power to absolve. Additional benefits became available in 1476 when Sixtus IV established an indulgence for the dead in purgatory.

Pope Julius II (1503-1513) began a plenary Jubilee Indulgence to obtain funds for rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. After some hesitation his successor, Leo X (1513-1521), revived the indulgence. But by special arrangement between the pope and the North German princes, this indulgence was not to be sold in their territories.

Like many of his contemporaries Luther criticized the abuses connected with this indulgence from the beginning of the sales campaign. His classroom lectures indicate Luther was much concerned about the religious and ethical effects of the indulgence traffic. In 1514 Luther in his lectures on the Psalms had complained about indulgences as an "easy way" out. In 1516, when Luther began to work with Erasmus' notes in his Greek New Testament, he discovered that the Greek word for "repentance" spoke of a "change of mind."

It was 1517 before this new indulgence traffic really got underway in northern Germany. At that time Luther was neither a schismatic nor a reformer – he was simply an inquiring professor and a concerned pastor. In the confessional booth, Luther noted the effects of indulgences. Around Easter 1517 the Wittenbergers were running like mad to Zerbst and Jüterbog in the neighboring territory of the archbishopric of Magdeburg to obtain these new indulgence letters. Then they wanted Luther to absolve them without repentance or amending their lives.

Luther first attempted to correct this situation through his sermons. He himself was not completely clear about the value of indulgences. But he was convinced there was something more certain than indulgence letters. Luther first reviewed the literature about indulgences and discussed the problem with the jurists. After doing so quietly during the summer of 1517, Luther, as a doctor of theology, believed that he could not remain silent any longer. This feeling of responsibility, together with his inner conviction that people were being misled, forced Luther to take action.

By the end of October 1517 Luther had prepared 95 theses for discussion. Allegedly – because only Melancthon mentions this – Luther posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the bulletin board for the city's university. Pilgrims would be thronging there for the celebration of All Saints' Day and the educated in their ranks would see Luther's discussion points. Although there were special services at the Castle Church throughout the year, the principal celebration was always the festival of All Saints, November 1. This annual festival provided an indulgence traffic not unlike that of Tetzl.

The 95 Theses were intended only for theological discussion. It was for that reason that the theses were written in Latin and not in German. But if Luther believed he could keep this an academic discussion, he was sadly mistaken. Within weeks his theses, now also translated into German, were available throughout Germany

and beyond. Friedrich Myconius in his *Historia Reformationis* suggested, "It was as though the angels themselves were the messengers carrying the news to all peoples."

Although Rome initially shrugged the matter off as a "monks' squabble," it became apparent that Luther's efforts were hurting the sale of indulgences. Brandenburg received only 20% of the income originally anticipated from the sale of the indulgence. Once he realized that his plans for this money were threatened, Pope Leo X understood that action had to be taken against the author of the theses.

In January 1518 the Dominicans sent a formal denunciation of Luther to the papal curia. This was an effort to protect their own image by coming to the defense of their member John Tetzel, who was the chief salesman for the indulgence in northern Germany. They also won to their side influential people who were close to the pope. Luther's enemies, of course, did not miss the opportunity to brand him a heretic. Dr. John Eck, professor of theology and chancellor of the Bavarian University at Ingolstadt called Luther a "Bohemian," a thinly veiled reference to the earlier heretic John Hus.

Initially Leo X tried to put pressure on Luther through his monastic order. The Augustinians in Germany were about to hold their triennial conference at Heidelberg. Called before the assembly, Luther was given a five-week leave of absence from the University of Wittenberg, so he could attend the conference and defend himself.

On 26 April 1518 in the monastery at Heidelberg, Luther made a spirited defense of his position and expressed his refusal to recant his views. During this debate many for the first time realized that indulgences were symptomatic of a much deeper problem in the church. In general the Augustinians were divided according to age. The older monks supported the status quo, while the young men became Luther's disciples.

Unable to quiet the Saxon monk through local controls, the church took action. Luther received a summons to Rome on 7 August 1518, along with a copy of a document written by Cardinal Prierias. In it Prierias accused Luther of heresy and stated that it was not necessary for the absolute and infallible papacy to reason with a heretic. The cardinal wanted Luther brought to Rome to face these charges.

On 8 August, Luther appealed to Elector Frederick the Wise. He did this not because he feared Rome. The matter had become a political issue, so he turned it over to his political leader. Thanks to Frederick's intervention, Leo X lifted the first order. Once again the German political scene played a role. Leo X wanted Frederick the Wise to be a candidate for emperor against the Hapsburgs. This meant the Luther affair had to be treated gently and very carefully. As a result, in September 1518 Cardinal Cajetan offered Luther a "fatherly" hearing at Augsburg. Arriving on foot in Augsburg on 7 October 1518, Luther had three hearings with Cajetan from 12-14 October and then left the city on the night of 20 October, having refused to recant his position and having been denied the opportunity to debate the issues publicly.

Leo X made a second attempt to salvage his relationship with the elector of Saxony and quiet Luther when he sent his nuncio Karl von Miltitz to present an award, the golden rose, to Frederick the Wise. Miltitz, on his own initiative, used this opportunity to meet with Luther on 4-6 January 1519. At this point Luther agreed that he would remain silent if his opponents likewise remained silent. He also agreed that he would write a conciliatory letter to the pope and would publicly urge the people to remain loyal to the church.

The "quiet" quickly gave way to additional debate. Leading the opposition to Luther was Dr. Eck of Ingolstadt, who invited Luther's colleague Andreas Rudolf Bodenstein von Karlstadt to debate the issues in Leipzig during the summer of 1519. It was there that Luther and Eck debated face to face, 4-14 July. Instead of debating the indulgence problem for which Luther was fully prepared, Eck brought up new issues. Luther hadn't given these items much thought. Eck hoped to draw out of Luther "heretical" comments on the authority of the pope and councils.

For the first time at Leipzig Luther was exposed to the public charge of heresy. Here Luther also was forced to clarify his own views more fully than before. He saw the full implications of his theology and he realized that his views were not the views of the majority of the church. The great publicity generated at Leipzig brought the Lutheran controversy to the center of the religious stage. Unfortunately, it also made Luther the focus of the smoldering discontent in Germany.

By the beginning of 1520 Luther's views had crystallized and led to a flurry of publishing activity. In addition to lesser works, he completed five major writing projects. His *Treatise on Good Works* demonstrated how faith in Christ was, so to speak, the only good work. Moreover, this work was something that could be performed only by grace because faith itself is a gift of God. He followed this with *The Papacy of Rome*. Here Luther pointed out that the pope was the Antichrist because he kept people from understanding and listening to the message of the gospel, even though the pope claimed to be Christ's vicar on earth.

He closed the year with three of what would become his best-known works. The *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* appealed to the German princes to cut the ties that bound them to Rome. This meant the nobility had to take the lead in economic and political issues, as well as spiritual concerns. Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* examined the sacramental system of the Catholic church. He argued that only baptism and the Lord's Supper, and perhaps confession, were sacraments as authorized by Christ in the New Testament. In contrast the Catholic church had developed a system that turned sacraments into works of self-righteousness. Finally, in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther explained how a believer, redeemed entirely by God's grace, would be naturally active in doing good works. "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹

His formative years were over and now the struggle was on. The stakes reached new heights when *Exsurge domine*, a papal bull excommunicating Luther, was issued on 15 June 1520. It condemned him for holding doctrines that were contrary to the bible as interpreted by church fathers, councils and popes. It also warned people to reject Luther's heresies and burn his writings. When Luther responded by burning the bull on 10 December 1520, the Roman church on 3 January 1521 issued *Decet pontificem romanum* which declared the excommunication to be in effect. The break was now complete. Luther had worked to reform the church from within. Now he would work to reform from the outside.

The Diet of Worms

Diets were annual or biennial gatherings to conduct the business of the Holy Roman Empire. This particular diet, summoned to meet at Worms, began on 28 January 1521. Called by Charles V, who had been elected emperor in 1519, this was his first opportunity to be present at a diet.

Luther was not the main issue before this group. Yet the religious debate was an agenda item that the emperor and his advisors considered worthy of careful attention. Girolamo Aleander, one of two papal nuncios at the Diet of Worms, had convinced Charles V to publish an edict before the diet demanding the burning of Luther's books in the Low Countries. Aleander suggested that Charles publish a similar edict against Luther in Germany and carry out the papal bull of excommunication. On the other side, Frederick the Wise and his supporters urged the emperor to give Luther a fair hearing at the diet. Charles V knew that Pope Leo X did not approve of his election. At the same time Charles understood that Luther was under the protection of Frederick the Wise and Charles needed the cooperation of the princes, especially an elector, in his on-going campaigns against the Turks.

After a stormy session on 15 February, the diet decided on 19 February to summon Luther to Worms. Luther was already excommunicated by this time and he had published a pamphlet against the bull of excommunication. Because he would be leaving the safety of electoral Saxony, Luther received a "safe conduct." This gave him 21 days to get to the Diet and another 21 days to return from the Diet.

On 2 April 1521, Luther left Wittenberg in the company of the imperial herald, Kaspar Sturm. Two weeks later, 16 April, Luther arrived in Worms and discovered that he was to go before the emperor the next day. The advisers of Frederick urged Luther to avoid a direct answer to the questions placed before him and to request time for a careful consideration of the questions.

¹ Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," LW 31:344.

At 4 p.m. on 17 April, imperial herald Sturm and Reichsmarshal Ulrich von Pappenheim called for Luther. Luther appeared before the Diet along with Dr. Jerome Schurff who was professor of canon law at Wittenberg. It had been agreed that Schurff would serve as Luther's lawyer before the emperor.

Pappenheim reminded Luther that he was not to speak except to answer direct questions from the presiding officer, Johann von Eck, an official from the court of the Archbishop of Trier – not the Eck of the Leipzig Debate. Luther was given two questions to answer. He was asked whether he was the author of a number of books that had been placed on a table in front of him. Secondly, he was asked if he would recant any part of them.

To the first question Luther replied in the affirmative, adding that the list was not complete. To the second, he stated that he wished for time to consider such an important matter so that he might answer "without detriment to the Word of God and danger to my salvation." As a result of his request, Luther was given 24 hours to consider his reply.

At 6:00 p.m. on the following day Luther had to give his answer orally. It could not be polished or published. As a result what he had to say could be easily misrepresented, if he was not careful. The presiding officer addressed Luther with the same question he had left unanswered the day before. After Luther made his initial remarks about the three different kinds of books he had published, Eck stated that they were not interested in his personal interpretations of Scripture and that the emperor wanted a direct answer "without horns or evasions."

Luther realized the time had come for a complete break with Rome. His answer was simple:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope nor 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 retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen."²

Eck tried to control the situation by telling Luther his conscience was not a safe guide and councils were far safer. The emperor was also excited and in his anger left the hall, which brought the session to an end. As Luther returned to his quarters, the Spanish guards shouted: "To the fire with him."

Under leadership of Albert of Mainz, in whose lands the Diet was being held, Elector Frederick and others worked out a plan whereby a select group of three or four theologians would talk with Luther to see if reconciliation possible. Several days of meetings with various officials followed, but no progress was evident. Finally on 26 April, imperial herald Sturm escorted Luther's carriage through city on way home.

Charles V would have preferred to condemn Luther without further ado, as Aleander wanted. But the problem was not that simple. According to the constitution of the empire, Charles had no real personal power in Germany, and he needed money for his Italian campaign. There were other reforms he hoped to make in Germany, but he also needed the good will of the German Diet for them. There were those who still insisted that this matter could be brought to a reasonable solution, if they approached Luther privately in a less offensive manner.

Charles summoned the Electors and some of the more powerful princes to discuss what should be done with Luther. He stated that he could not see how a single monk could be right and a thousand years of Christian testimony wrong. Although Charles was willing to honor the safe-conduct, he would not give additional audience to Luther and would take necessary measure to suppress this heresy. Accordingly he placed Luther under the imperial ban and an edict was formulated to make it legal.

Fearful that Luther was in danger, Elector Frederick made plans to remove his prize professor from the limelight and to sequester him out of harm's way. On the return trip to Wittenberg, Luther's party was attacked on 4 May and Luther was carried off to the Wartburg. It was in this setting that Luther began work on a project that helped to spread the Reformation and to solidify its results.

² Luther, "Luther at the Diet of Worms," LW 32:112-113.

The German Bible

Luther's most significant accomplishment during his stay at the Wartburg was his translation of the New Testament into German. Luther's effort was not the first German translation of the New Testament. Before 1518, fourteen High German and four Low German editions were available. All of them, however, were translations of the Vulgate. Luther's was the first German translation made from the Greek, using the second edition of Erasmus' Greek New Testament.

In working with the Greek, Luther's idea was to make the evangelists and the apostles speak German. He wanted to take the thoughts expressed by the Greek words and transform them into the corresponding ideas in German. Begun in mid-December 1521, the task was complete by the time Luther left the Wartburg in March 1522. The effort was originally a one-man project, but Luther sought and received input from others, especially after his return to Wittenberg.

Luther translated the New Testament into the language of the Saxon court. His effort did a great deal to standardize the German language. Luther was not the first nor the only person to develop High German as a literary language. His Bible, however, was one of High German's most significant and most widely distributed documents. It made Luther the "most influential author in the German tongue."

Luther would later say that he did not have a German of his own, but used a common German that could be understood in both southern and northern Germany. Some 80-90% of Luther's expressions – much higher than earlier translation – could be understood in both northern and southern Germany. Luther's German avoided courtly or stilted expressions and refrained from using foreign words or slang. Such a language should speak to the people, and they should be able to understand it.

The publication date for Luther's New Testament was 21 September 1522. Therefore it is known as the "September Testament." For this volume Luther wrote prefaces to the New Testament and to the individual books of the New Testament. These were necessary to combat the Vulgate prefaces, which obscured the distinction between law and gospel. In addition, Luther also provided marginal notes or "glosses" for the translation. They explained foreign or ambiguous words, expressions and contexts. The glosses often presented a short interpretation according to Luther's theology. Again and again the glosses stress the importance of God's Word and its opposition to the teaching of man. Likewise the central role of justification by faith was emphasized.

Almost immediately after publishing the New Testament, Luther began translating the Old Testament. Unlike the New Testament this effort was never begun as a one-man operation. Luther served as the chairman of a team effort. Because he soon recognized the complete translation would take a great deal of time, Luther published the Old Testament in installments. When the "Sanhedrin," Luther's nickname for his translation colleagues, completed the translation of the Pentateuch in December 1522, it was published in the summer of 1523. In his introduction Luther stated the difficulty:

I freely admit that I have undertaken too much, especially in trying to put the Old Testament into German. The Hebrew language, sad to say, has gone down so far that even Jews know little enough about it, and their glosses and interpretations (which I have tested) are not to be relied upon ...

In a word, if all of us were to work together, we would have plenty to do in bringing the Bible to light, one working with the meaning, the other with the language. For I too have not worked at this alone, but have used the services of anyone whom I could get.³

Joshua to Esther next appeared in print and then the translation effort bogged down in Job. The difficulty of the Hebrew text, together with his battles against Erasmus, the Sacramentarians and the peasants, slowed down the progress. Because of the delay in translating Job, Luther decided to publish the third section in September or October 1524 without the prophets. The Psalms were also printed in a small volume in 1524.

³ Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," LW 35: 249, 250.

After publishing some of the prophets individually, all the prophets were published as book in February 1532. Later in that same year the entire Old Testament was printed in one volume.

Luther then turned his attention to the apocryphal books even though he did not consider them to be part of the canon. Only after the completion of the translation of the Apocrypha was the entire Bible published in 1534. But even then the project did not come to an end. Luther always thought of translation as a work in progress. In 1539 - 1541 the entire translation of the Bible was reexamined, when the Elector of Saxony contributed money for a revision. In 1545 the final edition printed during Luther's life came off the presses. This was followed by a posthumous edition in 1546, including Luther's final changes.

Throughout the project Luther worked with a fundamental presupposition: the entire Bible is a unit, therefore the more obscure passages must be translated in light of the clearer portions of Scripture. Since Christ the crucified Savior is the central theme of Scripture, Luther believed there was gospel in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The job of the translator was to understand the divine message thoroughly in original language and then express the same thoughts in the language of the people. In this case Luther took biblical values and translated them into sixteenth century German values.

10. The Marburg Colloquy: the End of Protestant Unity

The second Diet of Speyer (1529) demanded the enforcement of the Edict of Worms. Objecting that the conclusions of other diets were being ignored, the Lutherans and others formally protested Speyer's decision for which they were branded "Protestants." Although Roman Catholicism viewed all the protesters as being the same, they had differences that became more apparent with the passage of time.

Faced with the possibility of imperial intervention, some of the princes, notably Landgrave Philip of Hesse, suggested that a defensive alliance be formed. An important question, however, among the Lutherans need to be addressed. "With whom can we ally ourselves with a clear conscience?" Luther contended that there had to be agreement on God's Word before an alliance was possible. A conference at Rostock had already failed, since the Lutherans were not minded to get together with those with whom they were not in agreement on the Lord's Supper.

In an effort to break the doctrinal impasse between the followers of Luther and those of Ulrich Zwingli, Philip of Hesse proposed that representatives from both camps meet at his new university in Marburg. Philip's idea, along with that of Martin Bucer and Philip Melancthon, was "if we can find the right way to say it, we can agree." Bucer went so far as to say that he believed that the difference between Luther and Zwingli was "only words."

The proposed discussion took place on 1-3 October 1529. Zwingli had welcomed the suggestions for an alliance. Luther, however, had opposed the idea of a league as he had all political alliances for religious reasons. He did not believe that force should be used in matters of faith. Melancthon too had hesitated to unite with what he considered the radical religious groups, but his concern had a different source. He feared this alliance would offend the Catholics, with whom he still hoped to come to an agreement. But in deference to the wishes of the landgrave and their own prince, Luther and Melancthon, accompanied by Jonas, Brenz, Menius, Cruciger, Roerer, Myconius, Agricola and Osiander, met at Marburg to discuss doctrinal issues with Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bucer, Capito, and Sturm. Landgrave Philip of Hesse and Duke Ulrich of Wuerttemberg were also present.

In the preliminary sessions on 1 October, Oecolampadius and Luther, as well as Zwingli and Melancthon, set out to identify the problems. Despite Luther's statement at the first meeting that the two parties were "of a different spirit," they came to a general, though not unreserved, agreement on fourteen articles dealing with such matters as the Trinity, the person of Christ, faith and baptism. There was even much agreement on the fifteenth article, concerning the Lord's Supper. Both sides denied the sacrificial character of the mass and the Capernaite eating of the actual body of Christ. They also agreed that both bread and wine should be given to the communicant, that the Lord's Supper was a "sacrament of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ," and that the spiritual partaking of the body and blood was necessary to every Christian. They

differed only with respect to the bodily presence of Christ. But they agreed to refrain from further polemical writing and to study this problem in Christian love.

After the formal meeting had ended, Luther drew up a formula in which he described Christ's body as being present "essentially and substantively," but not "qualitatively, quantitatively, or locally." Bucer was at first willing to accept this formula, but Zwingli refused, for he could believe in only a clearly spiritual presence and feared that the common people would look upon this concession as the beginning of the return to the Roman way.

The Wittenbergers upheld the concept of "closed communion." They were willing to acknowledge the Zwinglians as "friends" but not as "brothers." Luther's inability to recognize the Swiss as brethren and Zwingli's fear of a Catholic reaction made it clear that these two branches of the Reformation could not unite and would now go their separate ways.

Any agreement since Marburg has demanded that one side compromise or else that they "agree to disagree." The separate positions of the Lutherans and the Reformed became evident in the following year at the Diet at Augsburg (1530). In preparation for the diet, the Lutherans had prepared 17 Torgau articles to defend Luther's teaching and practice against Eck's *404 Propositions*. The Torgau Articles, together with those from Schwabach and Marburg, were used as the foundation stones for a new confession that Melancthon prepared for presentation to the emperor.

The Augsburg Confession, indicating issues on which there was agreement as well as those doctrinal matters where there was no agreement, was presented to the Charles V on 25 June 1530. Martin Bucer and the Strassburgers were not permitted to sign this document, since no agreement has been reached at Marburg. As a result the South Germans prepared their own confession. When they tried to present the *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, a confession for the cities of Strassburg, Constance, Lindau, Memmingen, the emperor refused to accept it.

Although there were efforts made in subsequent years to bring the Reformed and the Lutheran sides together, there was no lasting success. The colloquy at Marburg clarified the doctrinal differences that existed between the two groups, especially concerning the Lord's Supper. Despite the efforts of some to do so, these differences could not be ignored. The separate confessions at Augsburg further verified that there was a doctrinal gap and demonstrated that unity was not possible.

11. The Council of Trent

In response to the Reformation, Rome engineered a "Counter-Reformation" to undo what had taken place. Many Catholics, however, agreed with the attacks that had been made on abuses within the church. Therefore a "Catholic Reformation" also began to take shape. This was an effort to reform the church in "head and members." For a thousand years monks had periodically tried to cleanse and purify the church. Councils and humanists had also tried to reform the church. Each of these movements, in their own way, had tried to remedy the most obvious problems, but each had achieved only limited success. Under pressure from Emperor Charles V the papacy called a council into session to deal with the threats from outside the church and to address the problems within it.

Originally called in 1536 for Mantua, the council was set to begin meeting in 1537. From the beginning the Germans did not want to participate in a council that was on Italian territory where it would be under papal control. They believed that the council should be held on German soil, since it was to address German concerns. Due to the papacy's lack of enthusiasm for a council and the question of where it should be located, the opening of the Mantua council was pushed back and finally dropped.

When the effort to assemble a council was revived, a compromise was made – the council would be held in Trent. Technically this was part of the Holy Roman Empire, but it was on the wrong side of the Alps as far as most Germans were concerned. Since the emperor viewed a council as necessary for settling the religious questions in the empire, he pushed for German participation in spite of the location. The long awaited council opened in Trent on 13 December 1545.

The pope and the Italians wanted to consider dogma first. Charles V and his supporters wanted to concentrate on reform: moral, administrative, fiscal. They hoped that these external reforms would satisfy at least some of the church's critics and bring the German Protestants back into the church. Neither side gave any thought to changing doctrine. They only wanted to solidify, clarify, and define the historic position of the Roman church. It soon became apparent that any reforms would be limited to outward abuses.

The doctrinal decisions that came out of the Council of Trent were very much a reactionary response to the Augsburg Confession. In keeping with Catholic teaching Trent proclaimed that original sin was only a taint that was removed in baptism. The participants reiterated that while mankind is spiritually weak, people are not spiritually dead. There is still a spark of spiritual life in them. Therefore the Roman Catholic church saw only a need for "prevenient" grace. In their way of thinking God's grace must come first to fan spark into flame. Trent spoke of justification, not as the forgiveness of sins but as sanctification with justification as its end. In addition a sacramental system containing seven sacraments was upheld. In short, medieval Catholicism was confirmed.

In response to the Lutheran emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*, the Council of Trent addressed the role of the Bible. Rome retained its insistence that the Bible included the eleven books of the Apocrypha. Furthermore it noted that the source of doctrine was Scripture **and** tradition, the church's interpretation of the bible through the centuries. Finally Rome also noted that the "bible" had to be the "Vulgate." It rejected the Protestant effort to provide the Scriptures in the language of the people.

Although Trent's agenda included the reform of abuses, progress here was slow in coming. For example, multiple positions held by one man had led to absentee bishops. According to the council, the bishops were the culprits and Trent insisted that they must reform themselves. Unfortunately the council did not provide for follow up. As a result little help was actually given when it came to solving the problem.

One issue that did receive attention at Trent was the matter of clergy education. The concern of the Protestant clergy for their parishioners and the reform of the educational system that began at Wittenberg had made it painfully clear that Rome's clergy were not as well prepared for service as they might have been. The council decided that clergy education should be moved out of the universities and put into the hands of the dioceses where these men would serve. Moreover, improvements were made as the Jesuits opened new schools and spearheaded reforms in existing institutions.

In general Charles V was disappointed by the lack of action on the part of the Council of Trent. Since he never understood the magnitude of the differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, it was impossible for him to see the difficulty in restoring the unity of European Christendom. Under pressure from the politicians to do more, Rome used an outbreak of the plague as its excuse to move the assembly from Trent to Bologna in March 1547. Finally the council was recessed altogether in September of that year.

When Julius III became pope (1550-1555), he was convinced that he should reopen the church's self-examination. Even though the English and the French were now boycotting the meeting, it was decided that the Council of Trent should be continued, rather than having a new council start over. The second phase of the council was called into session on 1 May 1551. Once again Charles V wanted the Protestants to be represented. From January to March 1552 there were Protestants present, although most understood the futility of their attendance. Philip Melancthon's *Saxon Confession*, a revision of the Augsburg Confession, and John Brenz's *Württemberg Confession* were presented to the council as representative of the Protestant doctrinal position. From the perspective of the Protestants the highpoint of Trent's second phase came on 24 January 1552, when Protestant deputies were allowed to address the body.

Rather than showing a willingness to compromise, the Protestant representatives pointed to the need for more than cosmetic reforms within the Roman church. To that end they proposed that:

- 1) this body confirm the decisions of the Councils of Constance and Basel, namely that councils are superior to popes.
- 2) the members of the present council be released from their oath of loyalty to Pope Julius.
- 3) all previous decisions of this council should be annulled.
- 4) all issues should be discussed in an enlarged synod that would include more Protestant representatives.

After hearing this presentation the council did not immediately deal with the proposals. They only agreed to discuss them at a later date. This, of course, never happened, since Pope Julius III forbade the council from considering the Protestant propositions. Shortly thereafter, on 28 April 1552, Trent was once again recessed.

The third and final phase of the Council of Trent met from 18 January 1562 to 4 December 1563. Pope Pius IV (1560-65) called it back into session and a new emperor, Ferdinand I, offered safe-conduct to any Protestants who wanted to attend. Given the council's record, it was not surprising that no one came. Once again, every participating bishop was required to swear an oath of obedience to the pope.

By the time this session opened, the Peace of Augsburg (1555) had rendered the issue of Lutheranism in the Empire a moot point. It was here and it was here to stay, although the Spanish bishops remained adamant about the need to oppose all Protestants everywhere. Even if the Reformed groups had no standing in the empire, Lutheranism was now a legal entity with the same rights and privileges enjoyed by Catholicism.

Ultimately Pius IV, retaining full control of doctrine and having blunted serious efforts at reform, declared the council closed. The position of the papacy was summarized in the bull *Benedictus deus*. It gave the pope the right and responsibility to interpret and to execute all of the council's canons and decrees. Although this council did not declare the pope to be infallible, it certainly set the stage for Vatican I's declaration.

In recent years there has been an ongoing dialog between some Lutherans and the Roman church about justification. Regardless of recent joint declarations, Trent's proclamations on justification still stand as the official teaching of the Catholic church. Lutherans who believe that Roman Catholicism has changed its position on justification or who shrink from the doctrine of Antichrist are not paying attention. Canon IX of the Council of Trent still stands as an official teaching of Rome. It states: "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema."

Likewise Canon XI makes it clear: "If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema."

In Canon XII Trent reaffirmed the position: "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema." Although this canon and the other proclamations of Trent may no longer be given top billing, the fact remains they have never been rescinded.

It is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the Council of Trent a number of new efforts were begun. In 1564 the *Index of Prohibited Books* was established. It listed those books Catholics could not read. Although scholars were permitted to read non-religious books written by heretics, those religious books deemed heretical were forbidden to all. The penalty for the possession and the use of heretical books was excommunication. In some instances the *Index* provided a reading list for people who had questions about Rome's position, but overall it was effective in preventing the spread of Protestant ideas in Catholic countries.

The Council of Trent also showed its continuing impact in 1566 when Pius V (1565-1572) issued A *Roman Catechism* for the clergy, prepared by the German Jesuit Peter Canisius. This was Rome's first authoritative statement of doctrine, similar to the confessions that had been issued by the Lutherans and by the Reformed. Pius V also urged more use of the Psalms and Scripture in the mass, and he even tried to improve morality in Rome.

The Council of Trent was Rome's nineteenth ecumenical council. It established Rome's doctrine for 400 years. By the time Trent closed there were only two doctrinal issues left to be addressed. The Immaculate Conception of Mary and the infallibility of the pope would have to wait until the nineteenth century to be finally formulated, defined and promulgated. With these two exceptions, Rome's doctrine and practice were set until Vatican II opened in 1962. Although that most recent council introduced many changes in practice, Vatican II did not change the doctrinal position of the Roman church.

12. The Wesleys and the Great Awakening -- Revivalism

By the time the Council of Trent was opened, the Roman Catholic church had to address the defection of the church in England as well as that of the churches in northern Germany. Initially, the English Reformation under Henry VIII (1509-1547) and Edward VI (1547-1553) had instituted few lasting results. It wasn't until the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) that permanent changes were established in the English church. For some, however, these reforms did not go far enough. Elizabeth tried to force the dissenters to accept her reformation, but they continued to voice their disapproval.

It wasn't until 1689 that the Act of Toleration brought the religious struggles for most English dissenters to an end. Unfortunately the end of these seventeenth century struggles was marked by a general spiritual lethargy in the established Anglican church and among the dissenters too. Rationalism had penetrated all classes of religious thinkers, so that Christianity seemed little more than a system of morality supported by divine sanctions. There were able preachers, but the sermon was usually a colorless essay on moral virtues. Outreach work among the unchurched was scanty. The condition of the lower classes was one of spiritual destitution. Popular amusements were coarse, illiteracy was widespread, laws were savage in their enforcement, and jails were sinkholes of disease. Drunkenness was more widespread than at any other time in English history.

Great Britain stood on the eve of the Industrial Revolution that would transform the country in the last third of the eighteenth century from a collection of medieval agricultural communities to a modern manufacturing state. Early in the eighteenth century there were many men and movements looking toward better things. Some efforts were also underway for a return to a more religious life. Among the revivalists were the "societies," the earliest of which was formed by a group of young men in London about 1678, for prayer, reading the Scriptures, the cultivation of a religious life, frequent communion, aid to the poor, soldiers, sailors and prisoners, and encouragement of preaching. These groups multiplied rapidly. By 1700 there were nearly 100 in London alone, and they were found in many other parts of England and Ireland as well. In many ways these "societies" resembled Jacob Spener's *collegia pietatis*, but they had no Spener to lead them. They were composed almost entirely of communicants of the established state church. Many clergy looked upon the societies as "enthusiastic" or fanatical.

Even in its spiritual lethargy the mass of English people was blindly conscious of sin and convinced of the reality of future reward and retribution. Yet the emotions of loyalty to Christ, of salvation through him, and of a present transforming faith had not been aroused. The development of this consciousness was primarily the work of three men: the brothers John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield.

The parents of the Wesleys were non-conformists. Both grandfathers had been ejected from the Anglican clergy in 1662. Their father, Samuel (1662-1735), had preferred, however, to remain within the ministry of the establishment. Their mother too was a devout Anglican who bore nineteen children, eight of whom died in infancy. Of this large brood John (born 17 June 1703) was the fifteenth and Charles (born 18 December 1707) the eighteenth. Both boys were saved from the burning rectory in 1709 with a great deal of difficulty. John therefore regarded himself as a "brand snatched from the burning."

Both boys distinguished themselves in school. In 1720 John entered Christ Church College, Oxford and Charles followed him there six years later. In 1725 John was ordained a deacon, but from then until his conversion in 1738 he struggled spiritually. From 1726 until 1729, John was mostly his father's assistant. It was during this period, on 22 September 1728, that he was ordained a priest.

During John's absence from Oxford, in the spring of 1729, Charles Wesley, along with Robert Kirkham and William Morgan, formed a little club, primarily to help them in their studies. Soon they were engaged in reading helpful books and frequent communion. On his return to Oxford in November 1729, John Wesley became the leader of the group that soon attracted other students. Under John's direction they pursued the ideals of a consecrated life. Under Morgan's influence they began to visit prisoners in the Oxford jail in August 1730. The members fasted and pursued ideals that went beyond what others were doing. They were ridiculed by the university and called the "Holy Club." Some student finally hit upon a name that stuck, the "Methodists" – though the name had been used a century before. Yet they were far from what Methodism would become. They

were a company bent on working out their own salvation. At this point, however, they more resembled the Anglo-Catholic movement of the nineteenth century than the later Methodists.

An important addition to the club, early in 1735, was George Whitefield. Born 16 December 1714, Whitefield was the son of an innkeeper and had entered Oxford in 1733. A severe illness in the Spring of 1735 initiated a religious experience that ultimately brought him peace with God. In June 1736, Whitefield was ordained and began his career as a preacher. A man without denominational feeling, he was ready to preach anywhere and in any pulpit open to him. His message was the gospel of God's forgiving grace. He promoted peace through the acceptance of Christ by faith and favored a life of joyful service. A large part of his ministry was spent in America, arriving in Georgia in 1738. His preaching in New England in 1740 introduced the greatest spiritual upheaval ever witnessed in America, the so-called "Great Awakening." He visited America seven times, finally dying in Newburysport, Massachusetts on 30 September 1770. Whitefield, however, was no organizer. He left no party to bear his name, but he did "awaken" thousands.

None of the Methodist Club remained at Oxford for very long. When their father died in April 1735, both Wesleys succeeded in getting employment as missionaries in the new colony of Georgia, begun by General Ogelthorpe in 1733. Sailing in October 1735, they crossed the Atlantic on a ship with twenty-six Moravians. The cheerful courage of this group in a storm convinced John Wesley that the Moravians had a trust in God that he had not yet experienced. In Savannah he met August Gottlieb Spangenberg (1704-1792) who also began work in Georgia in 1735. Spangenberg asked John Wesley the embarrassing question, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Wesley answered: "I know that he is the Savior of the world." Spangenberg responded, "True, but do you know that he has saved you?"

The Wesleys worked hard in Georgia, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Charles Wesley returned to England in 1736, disgusted and ill. John continued in the colony, conducting services in German, French and Italian. In May 1737, he founded a little society in Savannah for cultivating the "warmer" religious life. Yet John too returned to England on 1 February 1738.

In England both brothers continued to have contact with Moravians, who taught them about a complete self-surrendering faith, an instantaneous conversion and a joy in believing. Yet Charles Wesley did not know this peace until his conversion on 21 May 1738. On May 24 John had the same experience, while listening to Luther's preface to the *Commentary on Romans* being read.

After their return to England from America, John and Charles Wesley preached as often as they had opportunity. In 1739 Whitefield invited the Wesleys to join him in preaching at Bristol. On April 2, John Wesley began what he would do for the next 50 years. Although John was a gifted organizer, the creation of Methodism was gradual, an adaptation of means to circumstances. In Bristol in 1739 he founded his first really Methodist society and began erecting a chapel there on 12 May 1739.

John Wesley neither had the desire nor the intention of breaking with the Church of England. He did not, therefore, found churches, but took up the device of the long-existing "religious societies." The major difference was that these organizations would now consist of only converted persons. These societies were first divided into "bands" or groups for the mutual cultivation of the Christian life. Soon Wesley hit on idea of issuing "society tickets" to those he found sufficiently grounded to be full members. Renewable quarterly, this provided a means to constantly sift the society. On 15 February 1742 the members were divided into "classes" of about 12 persons, each under a "class leader," who was charged to collect a penny per week from each member. The advantages for spiritual oversight and mutual examination, however, outweighed any financial considerations.

Wesley would have preferred to have all preaching done by ordained clergy, but few clergy were sympathetic with his new movement. Therefore he was forced to use lay members of the society as lay preachers, stewards of property, teachers for schools, and visitors of the sick. Initially he personally visited all the "societies," since they were chiefly located in London and Bristol. But beginning in 1744 he had the preachers meet him in London, the first of the "Annual Conferences." Two years later the fields were divided into "circuits," with traveling preachers and more stationary leaders to "assist chiefly in one place." Soon an "assistant," later called a "superintendent," was placed in charge of each "circuit." By means of publications Wesley tried to aid the development of his lay preachers. He even tried to secure episcopal ordination for them,

but in this Wesley was not successful. Although he was pressured to do so, he would not allow the sacraments to be administered by these unordained men.

Although Wesley regarded his “societies” as part of the Church of England, two disputes led to a controversy with Anglicanism. One area under debate regarded “perfection.” John Wesley believed it was possible for a Christian to attain “right ruling motives” – love for God and love for the neighbor – and that such attainment would make an individual free from sin. In actual fact Wesley thought this was more an aim than a frequent achievement, yet his followers thought otherwise.

A second dispute regarded predestination. Wesley, like the Church of England of his time, was Arminian. He had a special hostility toward Calvinism which he thought paralyzed moral effort. George Whitefield, on the other hand, was a Calvinist. The two men exchanged heated letters in 1740 and 1741. In 1748 Whitefield found a supporter in Selina, countess of Huntingdon, a wealthy widow. “Lady Huntingdon’s Connection” was founded in 1761 with Whitefield as chaplain. Her “Connection” was Calvinistic. This developed, however, as a parallel rather than a hostile movement. Its fundamental spirit remained essentially that of Wesley.

Charles Wesley at first was part of his brother’s constant travels, but after 1756, he seldom traveled. From 1756-1771 he worked in Bristol. From 1771 to his death on 29 March 1788, he preached in London. He was always more conservative than his brother and more Anglican. His great service was as a hymn writer, not merely of Methodism, but for all English-speaking Christianity.

Methodism was carried to America by Philip Embury (1728-1773) who began work in New York in 1766, and Robert Strawbridge (?-1781) who worked in Maryland about the same time. Francis Asbury (1745-1816) went over in 1771. These men were all lay preachers. By 1773 the first American “Conference” was held in Philadelphia. Methodism grew even during the Revolutionary War. With the peace that finally came in 1783, dependence on England was no longer desirable. The sacramental question became even more pressing. Unable to secure ordination for clergymen in America from the bishop of London, John Wesley felt empowered as a presbyter to ordain in case of necessity. This was a breach with Church of England, although Wesley did not see it that way. Moreover, his brother Charles disliked the action.

On 10 September 1784 Wesley notified the American Methodists of his action and informed them that he had appointed Asbury and Thomas Coke (1747-1814) as “superintendents.” In December 1784 these newly consecrated men held a conference at Baltimore, at which Asbury was ordained “elder” and “superintendent,” and it was agreed to form a Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1788 Coke and Asbury were called “bishops.”

It was on 28 February 1784 that Wesley published his “Deed of Declaration,” announcing that those who preached in the chapels should be recognized as the “conference.” He also defined the powers of that body. It was a great step toward the self-government of Methodism. Prior to that declaration John Wesley had been the sole controlling force in Methodism.

John Wesley’s strength and activities continued almost up to the end of his life. He died in London on 2 March 1791. By that time he had largely revolutionized the religious condition of the English lower and middle classes and was even more influential on the American scene.

Wesley and his followers believed that the Scriptures, reason and the teachings of the ancient church were the three sources of Christian doctrine. Apparently Wesley took the term “reason” in a rather wide sense as the cumulative experience of adult Christians. He came close to the Quaker “inner light” theory and made the *vox populi Christiani* the *vox Dei*. Wesley’s adherents among the Holiness and Pentecostal groups made their own religious experiences the final religious authority, while his followers among the liberal theologians made a controlled religious experience the exclusive source of religious truth.

The material principle of Wesley’s theology is the “perfected” man. Christian perfectionism is the heart and center of Methodism. It is here that Wesley parts company with both Luther and Calvin. Luther’s theology is concerned with the justified man. Calvin is concerned with the obedient servant. Wesley’s concern is the perfected Christian. The heart of Wesley’s theology can be summarized under four points: universal, free, full and sure salvation.

Wesley used the term "universal salvation" with a wider meaning than in its original Arminian setting, where it was used primarily to refute Calvin's theory of limited atonement. Wesley believed not only that salvation has been procured for all, but also that salvation is actually offered to all, regardless of whether or not they hear the gospel proclamation. Wesley inclined strongly to the theory of the "universality of opportunity" advocated by Origen.

Like Origen he believed that God's kingdom is three-fold, best represented by three concentric circles. The Father's kingdom is the most extensive and embraces all men. In this realm men are guided in their actions only by the light of reason and therefore will be judged solely by the use they made of their opportunities. In the Son's kingdom the standard of judgment is the gospel. The Spirit's realm is restricted exclusively to those who have had an "experiential knowledge" of Christ. Wesley insisted that just as the degrees of knowledge varied in the three circles, so did the standards of judgment. He believed that God never requires more than that man live according to the measure of light given to him. In Wesley's opinion "universal salvation" was equal to "universal opportunity."

The Calvinistic emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the virtual denial of human freedom and responsibility was entirely foreign to Wesley's thinking. Wesley found the goodness of God reflected everywhere in creation, especially in man. According to Wesley, man still bears the image of his Maker and God still deigns to dwell in man. Wesley therefore placed great emphasis on the sovereignty and dignity of man. It is only natural then for Wesley to ascribe to mankind a freedom of choice. In his use of the term "free salvation," the emphasis is on the word "free." Accordingly, man is a free agent and able to accept or reject salvation.

Here Wesley completely departed from the sixteenth century reformers and followed Arminianism. Wesley held that man did not entirely lose the divine image. In the fall, according to Wesley, man lost perfect righteousness, but man did not lose reason and free will. He believed that human will was weakened in the fall and that it is incapable of making the right choice unaided. God, Wesley insisted, therefore approaches man with "prevenient grace." He taught that no person is totally devoid of this grace.

This view demonstrates that Wesley's definition of original sin and original guilt differed radically from that of the sixteenth century reformers. Wesley stated that man is indeed far removed from his original righteousness, but he denied that this inherent departure is truly sin and guilt. He held that sin is willful transgression of a known law. The heathen, who are only in the Father's dispensation, cannot be held responsible for actions committed in total ignorance of divine law as it is revealed in the Son's or the Spirit's dispensation. Moreover, Wesley held that in so far as Christians are still subject to ignorance, mistakes and infirmities, their sins are not really sins and do not involve guilt.

Although Wesley wrote a great deal on the central theme of "pure love," it is almost impossible to state exactly what his theology was. His position can be summarized with the following points. John Wesley believed that:

- 1) the essence of perfection is not some emotional experience, but love.
- 2) the Christian is so perfect that he does not commit sin. Christian perfection implies that the believer loves God with all his heart, that no wrong temper remains, but that the Christian is motivated by pure love. Wesley believed that a man filled with pure love may still be subject to a mistake of judgment. Though such a mistake requires the atoning blood, since it is a departure from perfect love, it is not a sin since it is not contrary to love.
- 3) Christian perfection is both an instantaneous act – the exact moment of which must be known – and a progressive development.
- 4) a regulated way of life is indispensable for the attainment of Christian perfection.

In Lutheran theology the sinner is directed to the objective and certain promises of God as the only basis of assurance. In Calvinism the assurance is based on God's unconditional decree and the elect's perseverance in grace. Wesley based the assurance of salvation on the inner witness of the spirit, a two-fold witness – that of God's Spirit, which is objective and comes first, and man's own spirit, which is immediate and comes as a

result of the Spirit's direct witness. In the final analysis, Wesley rested his faith on his faith, at best a highly subjective procedure.

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