I. Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation

A. Eight Reformations in the 16th c. rather than a single Reformation:

1. Erasmus and the Humanists – *devotio moderna* – reformation of customs and emphasis on personal piety by knowledge.

2. Martin Luther in Germany.


5. Anabaptist movement – radical reformers who rejected ties with secular government.

6. Spiritualists – radical reformers who emphasized personal revelation over church and scripture (Zwickau prophets)

7. Catholic Reformation – based on Council of Trent (1545-1563), sometimes called Counter-Reformation (Ignatius of Loyola).

8. English Reformation – national form of Protestant movement under Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth that combined Protestant and Catholic traditions influenced by Erasmus.

B. Martin Luther (1483-1546) Background:

1. Born in Eisleben, Germany. Parents harsh peasant origin, but gained foundries. Father wanted him to be lawyer, but he joined monastery after near-death experience in lightning storm.

2. Personal character:
   a. Tortured by fear and anxiety
   b. Viewed God as a severe, harsh judge (parents’ influence?)
   c. Brilliant, studious, and erudite, but also crude, uncouth, and bigoted.
   d. During his first mass he was gripped by fear at holding body of Christ.
   e. He practiced self-flagellation and obsessive confession to his Augustinian confessor, Johannes Staupitz.
3. His spiritual and professional journey:

a. After a visit to Rome which revealed the corruption, bureaucracy, he returned to Erfurt monastery and was encouraged to complete his doctorate and then to teach scripture at University of Wittenberg.

b. In 1515 while lecturing on Romans, he gained new understanding of the “justice of God” (Rom. 1:17). Medieval view of justice of God – God’s right to punish sinners. Luther's understanding from his studies – gospel is revelation of justice of God which meant that the righteous live by faith and their righteousness is not their own, but given by God to those who live by faith.

c. 97 Theses – written against scholastic theology. Didn’t create interest outside of academic community.

d. 95 Theses – attacked sale of indulgences by Pope Leo X in attempt to raise funds to build St. Peter's Cathedral. Johannes Tetzel sent by Albert of Brandenburg to get money in his episcopal parishes.

1) Indulgences – concept that Christians’ good works as well as the work of Christ and the saints created a treasury of merit (a surplus of good works) that could be used by the church to offset sins by dispensing forgiveness for the penalty of sin.

2) Luther didn’t expect to create a controversy. Theses were written in Latin and posted on Wittenberg door on 10/31/1517. They were printed and translated into German by others.

e. Papal legate Cardinal Cajetan sent by Pope to convince German princes to participate in crusade against Turks and to force Luther to recant at Diet of Augsburg. Frederick the Wise of Saxony protected Luther.

f. After debate with Eck, Luther condemned by Pope Leo X and his books burned. At Diet of Worms (1521) – Luther ordered to recant, but refused. Hidden by Frederick of Saxony at Wartburg to protect him from death.
g. Translated Bible into German. During his absence, radical follower Karlstadt introduced innovations (marriage of monks, worship simplified, German instead Latin in mass, abolished masses for dead), but arrival of Zwickau prophets and tearing down of images of saints caused Luther to return to Wittenberg.

C. Luther’s Theology

1. Sola scriptura – Bible is authority of Christian faith, not pope or church tradition. Bible is word of God, not because of its infallibility but because in it, Jesus the Word incarnate comes to us.

2. Sola fide and sola gratia – doctrine of justification by faith through grace – God forgives even though sin is repugnant. Justification – not absence of sin but God declares those who live by faith just in spite of sin.

3. Theology of the cross – although limited natural revelation allows humans to distinguish between good and evil and that God exists, God’s revelation only possible through cross of Christ.

4. Passive righteousness – view that humans were helplessly evil until God’s grace changed their essential nature.

5. Priesthood of believers – Luther’s doctrine of the church, not individualistic, but the community of faith has access to God.

6. Two sacraments – baptism and communion. To reformers, a sacrament was a promise of God to which a sign was added as a memorial in contrast to medieval theologians who saw a sacrament as a material action combined with a form, the correct verbal blessing which conferred grace.
   a. Infant baptism acceptable because faith is not a human work and person doesn’t have to have faith before being baptized. Baptism was not elimination of sin, but sign of its being no longer counted.
   b. Communion – later called consubstantiation but Luther didn’t use this term – Christ present in, around, with communion. Believers partake of the literal body and blood but it continues to be bread and wine. Rejected transubstantiation as Aristotelian and pagan.
7. Two **kingdoms** – civil and religious (church and state). God instituted two orders with two regimes of government on earth.
   
   
   b. Religious – dealt with Christ and believer’s soul and operated through the Word.
   
   c. Implications:
      
      1) True faith shouldn’t impose itself by use of civil authority (force).
      
      2) Church should surrender properties except for church buildings but German princes should pay priests’ salaries to compensate for their loss of lands.

D. Augsburg Confession (1530) – statement of Lutheran beliefs accepted by Protestant German princes (Schmalkald League):
   
   1. Supports original sin
   
   2. Justification by faith
   
   3. Confession not necessary.
   
   4. Consubstantiation
   
   5. Supported free will, but humans not able to gain salvation (Augustinian predestination)
   
   6. Good works don't accomplish salvation but are done to meet the will of God.

**For Further Reading:**


Kittelton, James M. *Luther, the Reformer*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.