

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **THE REFORMATION**

### **3.1 THEMES**

The Reformation destroyed Western Europe's religious unity, involved new ideas about the relationships among God, the individual, and society, had its course greatly influenced by politics, and led, in most areas, to the subjection of the church to the political rulers.

### **3.2 BACKGROUND**

Earlier threats to the unity of the church had been made by the works of John Wycliffe and John Huss. The abuses of church practices and positions upset many people. Likewise, Christian humanists had been criticizing the abuses.

Personal piety and mysticism, alternative approaches to Christianity, which did not require the apparatus of the institutional church and the clergy, had been appearing in the late Middle Ages.

### **3.3 MARTIN LUTHER (1483 – 1546)**

#### **3.3.1 *Personal Background***

Martin Luther was a miner's son from Saxony in central Germany. At the urgings of his father, he studied for a career in law. He underwent a religious experience while traveling, which led him to become an Augustinian friar. Later, he became a professor at the university in Wittenberg, Saxony.

#### **3.3.2 *Religious Problems***

Luther, to his personal distress, could not reconcile the problem of the sinfulness of the individual and the justice of God. How could a sinful person attain the righteousness necessary to obtain salvation? During his studies of the Bible, especially of Romans 1:17, Luther came to believe that personal efforts—good works such as a Christian life and attention to the sacraments of the church—could not 'earn' the sinner salvation but that belief and faith were the only way to obtain grace. "Justification by faith alone" was the road to salvation, Luther believed by 1515.

#### **3.3.3 *Indulgences***

Indulgences, which had originated in connection with the Crusades, involved the cancellation of the penalty given by the church to a confessed sinner. Indulgences had long been a means of raising money for church activities. In 1517, the pope was building the new cathedral of St. Peter in Rome. Also, Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz, had purchased three church positions (simony and pluralism) by borrowing money from the banking family, the Fuggers. A Dominican friar, Johann Tetzel, was authorized to preach and sell indulgences, with the proceeds going to build the cathedral and repay the loan. The popular belief was that "As soon as a coin in the coffer rings,

the soul from purgatory springs,” and Tetzel had much business. On October 31, 1517, Luther, with his belief that no such control or influence could be had over salvation, nailed 95 theses, or statements, about indulgences to the door of the Wittenberg church and challenged the practice of selling indulgences. At this time he was seeking to reform the church, not divide it.

### **3.3.4 *Luther's Relations with the Pope and Governments***

In 1519 Luther debated various criticisms of the church and was driven to say that only the Bible, not religious traditions or papal statements, could determine correct religious practices and beliefs. In 1521 Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther for his beliefs.

In 1521 Luther appeared in the city of Worms before a meeting (Diet) of the important figures of the Holy Roman Empire, including the Emperor, Charles V. He was again condemned. At the Diet of Worms Luther made his famous statement about his writings and the basis for them: “Here I stand. I can do no other.” After this, Luther could not go back; the break with the pope was permanent.

Frederick III of Saxony, the ruler of the territory in which Luther resided, protected Luther in Wartburg Castle for a year. Frederick never accepted Luther's beliefs but protected him because Luther was his subject. The weak political control of the Holy Roman Emperor contributed to Luther's success in avoiding the penalties of the pope and the Emperor.

### **3.3.5 *Luther's Writings***

*An Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520) argued that nobles, as well as clergy, were the leaders of

the church and should undertake to reform it.

*The Babylonian Captivity* (1520) attacked the traditional seven sacraments, replacing them with only two.

*The Freedom of the Christian Man* (1520) explains Luther's views on faith, good works, the nature of God, and the supremacy of political authority over believers.

*Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of the Peasants* (1524), written in response to the Peasants' Revolt, stated Luther's belief that political leaders, not all people, should control both church and society.

By 1534 Luther translated the Bible into German, making it accessible to many more people as well as greatly influencing the development of the German language. Also, his composition, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," was the most popular hymn of the sixteenth century. The printing press enabled Luther's works to be distributed quickly throughout Germany.

### **3.3.6 *Subsequent Developments of Lutheranism***

Economic burdens being increased on the peasants by their lords, combined with Luther's words that a Christian is subject to no one, led the peasants of Germany to revolt in 1524. The ensuing noble repression, supported by Luther, resulted in the deaths of 70,000 to 100,000 peasants.

At a meeting of the Holy Roman Empire's leading figures in 1529, a group of rulers, influenced by Luther's teachings "protested" the decision of the majority—hence the term "Protestant." Protestant originally meant Lutheran but eventually was applied to all Western Christians who did not maintain allegiance to the pope.

After a failure of Protestant and Catholic representatives to find a mutually acceptable statement of faith, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 was written as a comprehensive statement of Lutheran beliefs.

Led by Philipp Melanchthon (1497 – 1560), the “Educator of Germany,” Lutherans undertook much educational reform, including schools for girls.

Denmark became Lutheran in 1523 and Sweden in 1527.

Lutheran rulers, to protect themselves against the efforts of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, to reestablish Catholicism in Germany, formed a defensive alliance at Schmalkalden, the Schmalkaldenic League, in 1531.

Wherever Lutheranism was adopted, church lands were often seized by the ruler. This made a return to Catholicism more difficult, as the lands would need to be restored to the church.

During the 1540's, Charles V won numerous battles yet was unable to reestablish Catholicism. This was because his treatment of the defeated political rulers of Germany offended the nobility of the Empire. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) ended the years of religious and political warfare and established the permanent religious division of Germany into Lutheran and Catholic churches. The statement “*cuius regio, eius religio*” (“whose region, his religion”) meant that the religion of any area would be that of the ruling political authority.

### 3.4 OTHER REFORMERS

Martin Luther was not so much the father as the elder brother of the Reformation because many other reformers were criticizing the church by the early 1520's.

### **3.4.1 *Ulrich Zwingli***

Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531) introduced reforming ideas in Zurich, Switzerland. He rejected clerical celibacy, the worship of saints, fasting, transubstantiation, and purgatory. Rejecting ritual and ceremony, Zwingli stripped churches of decorations, such as statues. In 1523 the governing council of the city accepted his beliefs. Zurich became a center for Protestantism, which spread throughout Switzerland.

Zwingli, believing in the union of church and state, established in Zurich a system which required church attendance by all citizens and regulated many aspects of personal behavior—all enforced by courts and a group of informers.

Efforts to reconcile the views of Zwingli and Luther, chiefly over the issue of the Eucharist, failed during a meeting in Marburg Castle in 1529.

Switzerland, divided into many cantons, also divided into Protestant and Catholic camps. A series of civil wars, during which Zwingli was captured and executed, led to a treaty in which each canton was permitted to determine its own religion.

### **3.4.2 *Anabaptists***

Anabaptist (derived from a Greek word meaning to baptize again) is a name applied to people who rejected the validity of child baptism and believed that such children had to be rebaptized when they became adults.

As the Bible became available, through translation into the languages of the people, many people adopted interpretations contrary to those of Luther, Zwingli, and the Catholics.

Anabaptists sought to return to the practices of the early Christian church, which was a voluntary association of believers with no connection to the state. Perhaps the first Anabaptists appeared in Zurich in 1525 under the leadership of Conrad Grebel (1498 – 1526), and were called Swiss Brethren.

In 1534, a group of Anabaptists, called Melchiorites, led by Jan Matthys, gained political control of the city of Munster in Germany and forced other Protestants and Catholics to convert or leave. Most of the Anabaptists were workers and peasants, and the city then followed Old Testament practices, including polygamy, and abolished private property. Combined armies of Protestants and Catholics captured the city and executed the leaders in 1535. Thereafter, Anabaptism and Munster became stock words of other Protestants and Catholics about the dangers of letting reforming ideas influence workers and peasants.

Subsequently, Anabaptists adopted pacifism and avoided involvement with the state whenever possible. Today, the Mennonites, founded by Menno Simons (1496 – 1561), and the Amish are the descendents of the Anabaptists.

### 3.4.3 *John Calvin*

John Calvin (1509 – 1564), a Frenchman, arrived in Geneva, a Swiss city-state which had adopted an anti-Catholic position, in 1536 but failed in his first efforts to further the reforms. Upon his return in 1540, Geneva became the center of the Reformation. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), a strictly logical analysis of Christianity, had a universal, not local or national, appeal.

Calvin brought knowledge of organizing a city from his stay in Strasbourg, which was being led by the reformer Martin Bucer (1491 – 1551). Calvin differed from Luther as Calvin emphasized the doctrine of predestination (God knew who would

obtain salvation before those people were born) and believed that church and state should be united.

As in Zurich, church and city combined to enforce Christian behavior, and Calvinism came to be seen as having a stern morality. Like Zwingli, Calvin rejected most aspects of the medieval church's practices and sought a simple, unadorned church. Followers of Calvinism became the most militant and uncompromising of all Protestants.

Geneva became the home to Protestant exiles from England, Scotland, and France, who later returned to their countries with Calvinist ideas.

Calvinism ultimately triumphed as the majority religion in Scotland, under the leadership of John Knox (1505 – 1572), and the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Puritans in England and New England also accepted Calvinism.

## **3.5 REFORM IN ENGLAND**

England underwent reforms in a pattern differing from the rest of Europe. Personal and political decisions by the rulers determined much of the course of the Reformation there.

### **3.5.1 *The Break with the Pope***

Henry VIII (1509 – 1547) married Katherine of Aragon, the widow of his older brother. By 1526 Henry became convinced that his inability to produce a legitimate son to inherit his throne was because he had violated one of God's commandments (Leviticus 20:21) by marrying his brother's widow.

Soon, Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn and decided to annul his marriage to Katherine in order to marry Anne. The



pope, Clement VII, the authority necessary to issue such an annulment was, after 1527, under the political control of Charles V, Katherine's nephew. Efforts to secure the annulment, directed by Cardinal Wolsey (1474 – 1530), ended in failure and Wolsey's disgrace. Thomas Cranmer (1489 – 1556), named archbishop in 1533, dissolved Henry's marriage, permitting him to marry Anne Boleyn in January 1533.

Henry used Parliament to threaten the pope and eventually to legislate the break with Rome by law. The *Act of Annates* (1532) prevented payments of money to the pope. The *Act of Restraint of Appeals* (1533) forbade appeals to be taken to Rome, which stopped Katherine from appealing her divorce to the pope. The *Act of Supremacy* (1534) declared Henry, not the pope, as to be head of the English church. Subsequent acts enabled Henry to dissolve the monasteries and to seize their land, which represented perhaps 25% of the land of England.

In 1536, Thomas More was executed for rejecting Henry's leadership of the English church.

Protestant beliefs and practices made little headway during Henry's reign as he accepted transubstantiation, enforced celibacy among the clergy and otherwise made the English church conform to most Catholic practices.

### **3.5.2 Protestantism**

Under Henry VIII's son, Edward VI (1547 – 1553), a child of ten at his accession, the English church adopted Calvinism. Clergy were allowed to marry, communion by the laity expanded, and images were removed from churches. Doctrine included justification by faith, the denial of transubstantiation, and only two sacraments.

### **3.5.3 Catholicism**

Under Mary (1553 – 1558), Henry VII's daughter and half-sister of Edward VI, Catholicism was restored and England reunited with the pope. Over 300 people were executed, including bishops and Archbishop Cranmer, for refusing to abandon their Protestant beliefs. Numerous Protestants fled to the Continent where they learned of more advanced Protestant beliefs, including Calvinism at Geneva.

### **3.5.4 Anglicanism**

Under Elizabeth (1558 – 1603), Henry VII's daughter and half-sister of Edward and Mary, the church in England adopted Protestant beliefs again. The *Elizabethan Settlement* required outward conformity to the official church but rarely inquired about inward beliefs.

Some practices of the church, including ritual, resembled the Catholic practices. Catholicism remained, especially among the gentry, but could not be practiced openly.

Some reformers wanted to purify (hence "Puritans") the church of its remaining Catholic aspects. The resulting church, Protestant in doctrine and practice but retaining most of the physical possessions, such as buildings, and many powers, such as church courts, of the medieval church, was called Anglican.

## **3.6 REFORM ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE**

### **3.6.1 Ireland**

The Parliament in Ireland established a Protestant church much like the one in England. The landlords and people near Dublin were the only ones who followed their monarchs into

Protestantism as the mass of the Irish people were left untouched by the Reformation. The Catholic church and its priests became the religious, and eventually the national, leaders of the Irish people.

### **3.6.2 *Scotland***

John Knox (1505 – 72), upon his return from the Continent, led the Reformation in Scotland. Parliament, dominated by nobles, established Protestantism in 1560. The resulting church was Calvinist in doctrine.

### **3.6.3 *France***

France, near Geneva and Germany, experienced efforts at establishing Protestantism, but the kings of France had control of the church there and gave no encouragement to reformers. Calvinists, known in France as Huguenots, were especially common among the nobility and, after 1562, a series of civil wars involving religious differences resulted.

### **3.6.4 *Spain and Italy***

The church in Spain, controlled by the monarchy, allowed no Protestantism to take root. Similarly Italian political authorities rejected Protestantism.

## **3.7 THE COUNTER REFORMATION**

The Counter Reformation brought changes to the portion of the Western church which retained its allegiance to the pope. Some historians see this as a reform of the Catholic church, similar to what Protestants were doing, while others see it as a result of the criticisms of Protestants.

Efforts to reform the church were given new impetus by Luther's activities. These included new religious orders such as Capuchins (1528), Theatines (1534) and Ursulines (1535), as well as mystics such as Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582).

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556), a former soldier, founded the Society of Jesus in 1540 to lead the attack on Protestantism. Jesuits, trained pursuant to ideas found in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, had dedication and determination and became the leaders in the Counter Reformation. In addition to serving in Europe, by the 1540's Jesuits, including St. Francis Xavier (1506 – 1552), traveled to Japan as missionaries.

Popes resisted reforming efforts because of fears as to what a council of church leaders might do to papal powers. The Sack of Rome in 1527, when soldiers of the Holy Roman Emperor captured and looted Rome, was seen by many as a judgment of God against the lives of the Renaissance popes. In 1534, Paul III became pope and attacked abuses while reasserting papal leadership.

Convened by Paul III and firmly under papal control, the Council of Trent met in three sessions from 1545 to 1563. It settled many aspects of doctrine including transubstantiation, the seven sacraments, the efficacy of good works for salvation, and the role of saints and priests. It also approved the "Index of Forbidden Books."

Other reforms came into effect. The sale of church offices was curtailed. New seminaries for more and better trained clergy were created. The revitalized Catholic church, the papacy, and the Jesuits set out to reunite Western Christianity.

Individuals who adopted other views but who had less impact on large groups of people included Thomas Muntzer

(d. 1525), Caspar Schwenckfeld (d. 1561), Michael Servetus (d. 1553), and Lelio Sozzini (d. 1562).

### 3.8 DOCTRINES

The Reformation produced much thought and writing about the beliefs of Christianity. Most of the major divisions of the Western church took differing positions on these matters of doctrine. Some thinkers, such as Martin Bucer, a reformer in Strasbourg, believed many things, such as the ring in the marriage ceremony, were “things indifferent”—Christians could differ in their beliefs on such issues—but with the increasing rigidity of various churches, such views did not dominate.

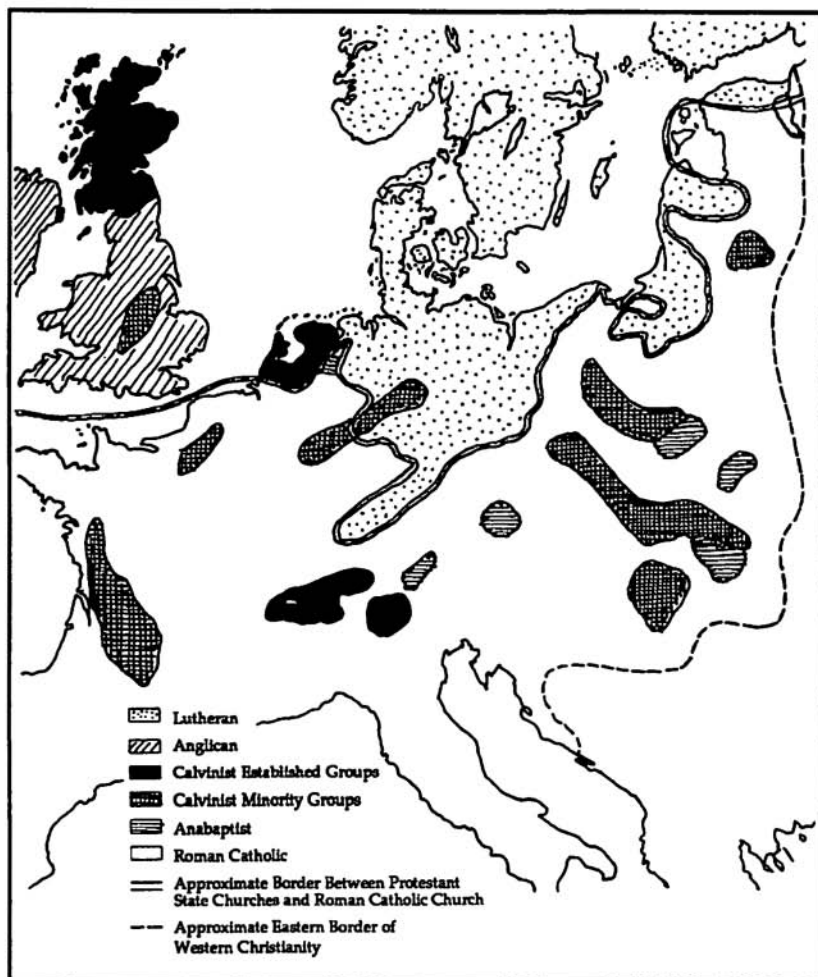
The role of the Bible was emphasized by Protestants while Catholics included the traditions developed by the church during the Middle Ages, as well as papal pronouncements.

Catholics retained the medieval view about the special nature and role of clergy while Protestants emphasized the ‘priesthood of all believers,’ which meant all individuals were equal before God. Protestants sought a clergy that preached.

Church governance varied widely:

- 1) Catholics retained the medieval hierarchy of believers, priests, bishops, and pope.
- 2) Anglicans rejected the authority of the pope and substituted the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the church.
- 3) Lutherans rejected the authority of the pope but kept bishops.

## RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN 1560



- 4) Most Calvinists governed their church by ministers and a group of elders, a system called Presbyterianism.
- 5) Anabaptists rejected most forms of church governance in favor of congregational democracy.

Most Protestants denied the efficacy of some or all of the sacraments of the medieval church. The issue which most divided the various churches came to be the one called by various names: the Eucharist, the mass, the Lord's supper, the communion:

***Transubstantiation.*** The bread and wine retain their outward appearances but the substances are transformed into the body and blood of Christ; this was a Catholic doctrine.

***Consubstantiation.*** Nothing of the bread and wine is changed but the believer realizes the presence of Christ in the bread and wine—a piece of iron thrust into the fire does not change its composition but still has a differing quality; this was a Lutheran doctrine.

Other views included ones that the event was a symbolic one, utilizing the community of believers. It served as a memorial to the actions of Christ, or was a thanksgiving for God's grant of salvation.

The means of obtaining salvation differed:

- 1) Living the life according to Christian beliefs and participating in the practices of the church—good works; this was Catholic doctrine.
- 2) Justification by faith – salvation cannot be earned and a good life is the fruit of faith; this was a Lutheran doctrine.
- 3) Predestination – salvation is known only to God but a good life can be some proof of predestined salvation; this was a Calvinist doctrine.

Relation of the church to the state also differed:

- 1) The church should control and absorb the state (Catholic and Calvinist). When God is seen as ruling the society, this is a theocracy.
- 2) The state controls the church (Lutheran and Anglican).
- 3) The church ignores the state (Anabaptist).

### 3.9 RESULTS

By 1560, attitudes were hardening and political rulers understood the benefits and disadvantages of religion, be it Catholic or Protestant. The map of Europe and its religions did not change much after 1560.

Political rulers, be they monarchs or city councils, gained power over and at the expense of the church. The state thereafter could operate as an autonomous unit.

Religious enthusiasm was rekindled. While most of the reforms came from the political and religious leadership of the societies involved, the general populace eventually gained enthusiasm—an enthusiasm lacking in religious belief since far back into the Middle Ages.

All aspects of Western Christianity undertook to remedy the abuses which had contributed to the Reformation. Simony, pluralism, immoral or badly educated clergy were all attacked and, by the seventeenth century, considerably remedied.

Protestantism, by emphasizing the individual believer's direct contact with God, rather than through the intermediary of



the church, contributed to the growth of individualism.

Thinkers have attempted to connect religious change with economic developments, especially the appearance of capitalism. Karl Marx, a nineteenth-century philosopher and social theorist, believed that capitalism, which emphasized hard work, thrift, and the use of reason rather than tradition, led to the development of Protestantism, a type of Christianity he thought especially attractive to the middle class who were also the capitalists.

Max Weber, a later nineteenth-century sociologist, reversed the argument and believed that Protestantism, especially Calvinism, with its emphasis on predestination, led to great attention being paid to the successes and failures of this world as possible signs of future salvation. Such attention, and the attendant hard work, furthered the capitalist spirit.

Most writers today accept neither view but believe Protestantism and capitalism are related; however, too many other factors are involved to make the connection clear or easy.