Spurgeon Room Studies : Reformation Church History
February 16, 2019

Session 1—Setting
Preliminary Remarks

Review of the Late Middle Ages

I. Church Context

From the 11th Century the papacy (Hildebrand) was characterized by an increasing secularism. Popes became more and more involved in worldly matters, both economic and political. In general, the people become more skeptical of the RC Church. Pope Julius II actually led troops into battle.

A. Two Major Crises

1. The Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy

a. Pope Innocent III (d. 1215) in the early 13th C. had more worldly power than any previous pope.
b. He represents the high-water mark of papal power. He used *the interdict* to pressure King John of England. (Cf. King Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII at Canossa.)
c. *The interdict* was a powerful weapon in the hand of the pope. It effectively cut off what was considered the means of grace (through the sacrament). John was forced to appeal to the pope for forgiveness, thus acknowledging him as superior. Kings respond.
d. If Innocent III represented the height of papal power, Boniface VIII (1294-1303) was the low point.
e. His struggle with Philip the Fair King of France led him to issue *Unam Sanctum*. This papal bull stated the pope has authority over all the rulers on earth (for so God has decreed) and submission to the pope is necessary for eternal salvation. But in this he went too far.

f. The situation had changed between the times of Innocent and Boniface. He was unable to back up his claims. The 86 year-old Boniface was kidnapped and mugged by Philip's forces. Though subsequently released, his health was broken and he died shortly afterward.
g. Boniface was then succeeded by Clement V who moved the papal chair from Rome to Avignon at Philip's insistence. The French kings were now (for most of the 14th Century) dominating the papacy- a reversal of the former status quo. Avignon was not technically in French territory, but close enough.
h. The English, who were at war with the French, considered the papacy to be in French hands.
i. [Word on the idea of nation states. Cf. Shelley p. 217]
j. Allowed John Wycliffe in England say things about the papacy that otherwise would not have been possible.
k. 1309-1377 are the years of the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy.

2. The Great Schism (1378-1417)

a. In January 1377, then Pope Gregory XI decided to return to Rome. After Gregory died, the Roman mob demanded an Italian pope. Urban VI was elected but could not find agreement with the French Cardinals who secretly met in a town in northern Italy where they declared Urban apostate and elected one of their own, Clement VII, as rival pope. (He also happened to be the nephew of the king of France.)
b. This newly elected pope moved the papal seat back to Avignon.
c. This created great confusion and division in the RC Church. Christendom divided politically as well.
d. Two one and only vicars of Christ on earth, each anathematizing the other as the world watched.

e. The credibility and authority of the papacy was severely damaged.
f. In 1409 a council at Pisa attempted to rectify this state of affairs. The council deposed both current popes and elected another, but neither of the first two resigned. So now there are three!
g. Finally the Council of Constance (1414-1418) ended the schism with the election of Martin V in 1417.
h. The big winner in this was the Conciliar Movement, the idea that the supreme authority of the Church lies with a General Council, not with the pope. But this debate was far from over.

B. Other Factors and Attempts at Reform

1. *Economic corruption* developed with the so called "right of spoil" which said that when a nobleman died, all his property went to the pope. (recall *simony*)
2. *Moral corruption* – vows of celibacy were routinely broken; concubine fees paid; Pope Innocent III fathered 16 illegitimate children.
3. *The Black Plague* also occurs during this time. Two-fifths of the population of Europe perished, understood as the punishment of God.
4. Cardinal Cisneros, Primate of Spain, recognized the problems and tried to bring reform:

- Required priests to reside within the parish- no absenteeism
- Priests must refrain from immorality**,** preach the gospel, teach the young**,** he established Bible studies
- He established the University of Alcala, where it was required that Latin, Greek and Hebrew be learned

5. Cardinal Contarini, in Italy- influential in the early 1500's. Experienced a dramatic conversion and used his office to promote moral reform and biblical study. There were actually many like him. Some even read and approved Luther (on justification by faith alone). They were

evangelical in soteriology, but differed with Luther on ecclesiology.

II. Intellectual Context

A. Scholasticism (an educational methodology)

1. On the eve of the Reformation, Aquinas and Ockham are the major schools. Theologically, Ockham tilted toward Pelagius, while Aquinas inclined toward Augustine.
2. Ockham's nominalism
3. A smaller stream, the Schola Augustiana. A minority viewpoint, it was more intensively Augustinian than Anselm and Aquinas. *Gregory of Rimini* (d. 1350) was the significant voice here at the University of Paris. (Gregory and Luther were both Augustinian monks.)

- Believed in a rigorous view of original sin.
- Final authority of Scripture
- Man is saved by grace alone

B. Humanism

1. Like scholasticism, humanism was an educational methodology, which gave birth to a movement. It placed emphasis on eloquence and looked back to classical antiquity for inspiration.
2. *Ad fontes* was its motto, *to the founts* (of learning), back to Cicero, Seneca, the great rhetoricians.
3. As a general statement of comparison, scholasticism was concerned to move men's minds, humanism to move their hearts.
4. The humanism of this period must not be confused with 'secular humanism' of our day. These people were consciously Christian, wanted to move people by preaching.
5. They looked back to the early church fathers, as well. Augustine, Jerome (and the New Testament), especially the original languages.

6. Many of these humanists became great philologists in Greek and Hebrew.
7. But for the most part, they were *moral* reformers. They were reform-minded, but in a moral, not doctrinal way.
8. *The Reuchlin Affair*- Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) was a famous Northern Humanist (German) and a great Hebraist. *Rudimenta Hebraica*, a Hebrew grammar; revival of Hebrew studies. Philip Melanchthon was his grandnephew.
9. Johann Pfefferkorn, a Jew who converted to Catholicism became a fanatical Dominican to whom everything Jewish was BAD. He opposed Reuchlin and the study of Hebrew.
10. Now, if you want to get someone declared a heretic, get a university to decide a case on him.
11. Pfefferkorn went to the University of Cologne (which was dominated by Dominicans) and Reuchlin was charged with heresy because he advocated the study of Hebrew. Humanist Europe watches to see what will happen.
12. He was convicted, then recants, but then collected testimonials from scholars and published them in a book, *Letters from Famous Men*.
13. Two men, Ulrich von Hutten and Rubianus come up with the idea of a book of testimonials mocking Pfefferkorn c. 1515. *Letters from Obscure Men.*
14. This turns out to be effective propaganda in favor of Reuchlin and Humanism. Academics rally their forces.
15. The significance of this event was that when Luther appeared on the scene, he was viewed by the humanists as another Reuchlin- so they threw their considerable weight behind him.
16. The result was that Luther's message found a receptive audience (at least until 1525, when he insulted Erasmus (greatest of the humanists) with his book, the *Bondage of the Will*).
17. The humanists were for moral reform, not doctrinal reform. But for Luther, the primary focus was doctrinal.

18. From Luther's *Letters*—"I have succeeded only if I have taught correctly. The true battlefield is doctrine, not morality."

C. Erasmus- 1466-1536

1. Erasmus' work prepared the church for Luther. He was the illegitimate son of a Dutch priest and also the first ever best-selling author—"In Praise of Folly" went through 600 editions.
2. He was concerned about moral reform. Opted for a more simplified Christianity- *imitatio Christi* – let's imitate Christ.
3. He didn't reject the sacramental system, neither did he put the emphasis there.
4. His *Enchiridion* published in 1501 was a handbook on the Christian life.
5. To encourage the study of the Scriptures, he believed in the concept of the vernacular.
6. 1513- Erasmus the satirist wrote *Julius Exclusius* (Julius Excluded) about the pope who led troops into battle. Done anonymously. In it the pope is denied heaven.
7. 1516- produced a critical edition of the Greek New Testament; a watershed event.
8. Luther would later use this to translate the NT into German. Erasmus' textual work had doctrinal implications.
9. This didn't sit well with the papacy because the Vulgate wasn't based on the best Greek. Erasmus' work undermined it at some vital points. E.g. Matthew 4.17 "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Vulgate
10. All the reformers, with one exception, were primarily humanists trained in the classics. That exception is, of course, Luther. He was trained as a scholastic.

III. Political Context—Politics is woven throughout the story of the Reformation. It was not purely a religious thing.

A. The Holy Roman Empire

1. This was composed of 300 semi-autonomous principalities-local princes could have a lot of power**.**
2. *The Holy Roman Empire* is the name given to the attempt to create a new political empire in Western Europe to supposedly continue the Roman Empire of antiquity. It emerged following the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD. The desired concept was that of political and spiritual unity, a dominant thought in the Middle Ages. In practice it never achieved its aim.
3. Can be thought of as all the 'kings' of Europe as a sort of corporate board, with the H.R. Emperor as the chairman of the board (Frank James). As a counterbalance, there was also the church, over which the pope ruled.
4. HRE ruled over the states, sort of. Not everyone bought into this.

B. Two major political events conspired to help Luther:

1. In 1519, Charles V of Spain (and of Netherlands, and of Burgundy) became the new HRE. Francis I of France wanted to be HRE. Francis wanted to stop Charles' aspirations. Seven electors voted in the new emperor. Francis tried to bribe them in order to favor him. But Charles offered better bribes. As a result of his defeat, Francis initiated a series of (four) wars with Charles during the years 1520-1550. These are known as the Hapsburg-Valois Wars. It is Charles V vs. Francis I (who loses every one of them). These wars kept Charles very occupied and unable to focus on the Lutheran upheaval.
2. The Turkish Threat—the Ottoman Turks under Sulieman the Magnificent. In 1520 they pressed upon the empire's eastern border. They took Belgrade in 1521 and defeated the Hungarians in 1526 at the Battle of Mohacs. In 1529, they surrounded Vienna with 200,000 soldiers. Vienna was defended by a force of only 20,000 imperial troops. But the Turkish supply lines gave out and they had to retreat.

The early years of Luther in Saxony coincided with these powerful political events. Charles could have crushed Luther, but for Francis on his west and the Turks on his east. He was pre-occupied when Luther was most vulnerable.

[Sidelight- the Hapsburg-Valois War also figured into Calvin's life. When he was on his way to Strasbourg, he had to detour to Geneva because of a battle between the forces of Francis and Charles. He ended up staying there.]