

## Reformation Church History

### Session 3—Martin Luther

#### I. Early Life

- A. Born Eisleben, 1483, peasant family, one of eight children.
- B. Father Hans became successful copper miner and mine owner.
- C. Was able to fund Martin's education, steered him toward law.
- D. Attended University of Erfurt; received B.A. 1502, M.A. 1505.
- E. Encounter with a thunderstorm (described by Bainton<sup>1</sup>).
- F. Entered the Augustinian monastery two weeks later, July 1505.
- G. 1507, at age 23 was ordained a priest; attempts to celebrate first mass and fails to the embarrassment and disappointment of his father (described by Sproul<sup>2</sup>).
- H. Depressed often; extremely conscientious, especially in the sacrament of penance.
- I. Begins lecturing in Psalms, then Romans
- J. Conversion and a growing understanding of justification

#### II. Road To Worms

Luther's popularity—people demanded to hear him. Students came from all over Germany to Wittenburg. Why?

- A. He lectured in the German tongue—a man of the people.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, Meridian/Penguin, New York, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, 1998, p. 96.

- B. Became famous as a scholar who based his lectures on the Greek and Hebrew texts instead of the traditional scholastic theology.
- C. He had a prophetic edge, was original and refreshing.
- D. Used simplified religious terminology so he could be understood.
- E. Possessed a heroic faith, fearing God more than man. In those days authorities could easily exact vengeance.
- F. Following the posting of the 95 theses, Luther sent a copy to Albrecht of Mainz. He forwarded them to the Pope Leo, who reportedly said, "Luther is a drunken German. He will feel different when he is sober."
- G. **The Heidelberg Disputation** April 1518, an in-house Augustinian discussion. The pope wanted Luther's order to silence him, but on the whole they supported him.
- H. Luther had a strongly Augustinian understanding of Paul; anti-nominalist.
- I. One of those in attendance was Martin Bucer (later to become the chief reformer of Strasburg) a Dominican. He wrote, "Luther has a marvelous graciousness in response and unconquerable patience in listening. In argument he shows the acumen of the apostle Paul. That which Erasmus insinuates he speaks open and freely."<sup>3</sup>
- J. An interview with **Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg**, engineered by Frederick the Wise, October 1518.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bainton, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pgs. 70-75.

- K. Luther was surprised that his views had been so widely disseminated. Within months he is forced to commit to some strong positions, not necessarily having thought through all their implications:
1. Popes and councils could err.
  2. Only Scripture has never erred.
  3. Truth can only be determined by the Word of God.
- L. The popes had never denied the authority of Scripture, but had hid behind their position as final (sole) interpreters, so that the Scriptures are, in effect, subject to them and beneath them.
- M. Luther said that popes have erected three walls:
1. The spiritual is over the temporal.
  2. The pope alone may finally interpret Scripture.
  3. Only the pope can call a general council.
- N. **The Leipzig Disputation** in 1519 with Johann Eck (professor at the University of Ingolstadt). The famous Eck takes it upon himself to set things straight. Eck invites Andreas von Karlstadt and Luther to debate. From 1517 to 1519, Luther had been polishing/developing his views and had won over his colleagues at Wittenburg. (Karlstadt is Luther's senior.)<sup>5</sup>
- O. In the debate, Eck defeats Karlstadt. But Luther stepped in and made a strong showing. Eck' tactic was to provoke Luther to say things he would not have been prepared to say. In the debate, Luther says:
1. The power of the keys (Mt. 18) had not been given to the pope (exclusively) but to the church. The pope having the keys had been the majority view through the centuries.

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<sup>5</sup> Following the debate a pamphlet war began. Karlstadt wrote one titled, "Against the Dumb Ass and Stupid Little Dr. Eck."

2. It is not necessary to believe in the pre-eminence of the Church in Rome to be saved.
  3. Even though one participates in the sacraments, sin may still abide in the Christian.
  4. Popes and councils have made theological errors in the past.
- P. Now he is attacking pope, Roman Catholic Church and the sacraments! Luther may be considered heretical.
- Q. In 1519, the movement begins to gather steam. Politically, the election of a new Holy Roman Emperor (HRE) in 1519 became a significant issue. Emperor Maximilian died. The new HRE is chosen by seven electors. Four are churchmen, three are princes (one of which was Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Luther's prince).
- R. About Frederick—Elector of Saxony. At one point dedicated to making Wittenburg the Rome of Germany. A repository of holy relics. E.g. a genuine thorn certified to have pierced Jesus' brow; a tooth of St. Jerome; some of Christ's swaddling clothes; thirteen pieces from his crib; one piece of gold brought by the wise men; one strand of Jesus' beard; one of the nails driven into his hand; one twig from Moses' burning bush; 5005 other particles. By 1520 the collection had 19,013 holy bones of martyrs.
- S. Three major candidates for HRE: Charles V of Spain; Francis I of France; Frederick of Saxony.
- T. Charles offered bigger bribes than Francis and eventually won. But things were unsure for a time, and the papacy was nervous about Charles' power.
- U. Frederick had political leverage and used it to protect Luther.
  1. So in the providence of God, the pope was restrained toward Luther because of Frederick.

2. At this time, the Germans saw themselves as exploited by Rome, leading to a resentment of Rome by Germans. There is even a kind of grievance literature that emerges.
  3. German nationalism—Ulrich von Hutten (bridge between Renaissance humanists and Lutheran reformers) and Franz von Sickingen—both German knights who called for reformation by military force.
- V. Frederick assured Charles V his support if in return he would promise that if Luther was called to trial it would take place in Germany, not Rome. “For he is my subject and I owe him protection.”
- W. The pope issued the bull *Exsurge Domine* on June 15, 1520. He gave Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated. Luther received it, and burned it on December 10. On January 3, 1521 Luther was formally excommunicated.
- X. Luther had written a series of tracts in 1520
1. *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*—The church is too corrupt. German princes must reform the church. “I’m going to pull down the three walls of Jericho. What are they?”
    - a. The idea that clergy is superior to laity (an early version of *the priesthood of all believers*).
    - b. That only the clergy/pope have the right to interpret Scripture.
    - c. That only the clergy/pope has the right to call a general council (recalling Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea, 325 AD).
    - d. Then he went on to chastise the papacy for its greed. He attacked clerical celibacy said masses for the dead should be abolished, monks should be free to leave the monasteries, the church needs to admit when it errs. E.g. when it executed Jan Hus at Constance in 1415,

after the emperor granted safe conduct. Also, the universities need reform (too much Aristotle).

2. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*—Here he throws down the gauntlet. Says, “The papacy has carried the church into captivity and therefore it is in Babylon.” Why?
  - a. The withdrawal of the cup from the laity was based on the doctrine of concomitance. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century till the time of Luther, no cup/wine for the laity. The doctrine stated that since the bread is Christ’s flesh and since the flesh contains blood, therefore only the wafer need be given to the laity. From the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, transubstantiation had been the dominant position in the church. In 1215, it was officially accepted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council.
  - b. Luther overtly denies the doctrine of transubstantiation. “No miracle takes place.” He opts for consubstantiation—the “real” presence (physical) is “in, with and under” the elements.
  - c. He rejects the idea of sacrifice (re-sacrifice). Christ died once for all.
  - d. He denounced the idea of the mass as a good work.
  - e. So Luther attacked the very heart of medieval Christianity.
  - f. Says there are not 7 but 2 sacraments.
  
3. *Freedom of the Christian Man*—This tract by contrast, is irenic in tone. Luther said he wasn’t really attacking the pope, but those who surround and advise him. “Contained in this work is the famous Lutheran paradox of the Christian life: The Christian is the lord of all, and subject to none, because of faith; he is the servant of all, and subject to everyone, because of love. Faith and love are, for Luther, the two governing principles for the Christian life. Faith expresses the Christian’s relationship to God, love

the relationship to humanity.... where there is faith, there will also be love.”<sup>6</sup>

### III. The Diet of Worms

In April 1521, Charles V, about 19 years old, ordered Luther to appear before the imperial Diet in Worms. Charles kept his promise to Frederick and granted Luther safe-conduct.

Luther appeared, which took great courage, considering what had happened to Jan Hus. Spanish soldiers circled the room. Charles V and the high-ranking princes and papal representatives.

Diet of Worms; high drama.<sup>7</sup>

The Spanish soldiers cried, “To the flames!” But Charles had granted safe-conduct. Over the next several days there is an intense lobbying effort to get him to recant. On April 26, he left Worms. But on May 4, 1521 while on his way back to Wittenburg, armed men surrounded his wagon, he was put on a horse and taken away—kidnapped for his own safety. He spent one year in Wartburg Castle. Not even Frederick knew where he was. There was a reward for Luther’s head. Excommunicated from the church and an outlaw from the state.

At Wartburg, he grew a beard, was dressed as a soldier and known as Knight George. While there, he translated the NT into German. He also wrote “On Monastic Vows”- “The vows taken are not binding- you have my permission to leave.”

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<sup>6</sup> Frank James and John Woodbridge, Church History, Volume Two, Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, 2013, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Bainton, Abingdon edition, pages 181-186.

But the Turks were attacking the eastern border of the Empire. In 1521-22 Charles was back in Spain trying to raise an army, so Luther was spared Charles' attention.