

The Character of the Church 3

The Church is Reforming

So far we have argued that the Church is Persecuted and Catholic. By 1500AD the Christian Church took two basic forms: the Latin Catholic in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East which separated from Rome in 1054. We will follow the history in the West. The 1200 years following the recognition of Christianity were years of formation and corruption. Because the Church was the dominant ideological force in the culture, the temporal power it wielded became a source of corruption and political manipulation. Lord Acton has said 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. This applies as much to the Church as to any other social institution.

The Renaissance 1400-1500's

This was a cultural movement coming out of Italy (Florence) that located value in the Greek and Latin classics of Antiquity. This literature was primarily pagan and humanistic. Art forms took a distinctly modern form, being more realistic and emphasising the human rather than the divine aspects of life. There was much religious art but it was far more a celebration of human capacities and experiences.

Corruption in the Roman Catholic Church

- Rival Popes (from 1378 to 1417) based in Rome, Avignon and other Church Councils.
- Moral laxity and worldliness of the priesthood
- Political appointments of clergy
- The Inquisition (temporal power enforcing spiritual privilege)
- Indulgences (buying a person's way out of Purgatory)
- Ruthless worldliness of the Church
- Sacramentalism as devotion (salvation by works)
- Priestly control of the religious experience and the means of grace (Priestcraft)

Reforming Influences

- The printing press with movable metal type (as against woodcuts) created a technological explosion whereby books and learning could be widely and rapidly extended rather than scribes laboriously copying out manuscripts in a scriptorium. Gutenberg (1397-1468) printed the first Bible and book in the West.
- The Devotio Moderna was a movement for renewal in the Catholic Church. It produced a group called The Brethren of the Common Life. This was a semi-monastic group joined by Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471) who wrote The Imitation of Christ (the most published book outside the Bible).
- Wycliffe (1329-1384) was an English academic who translated the Latin Bible (Vulgate) into English. He denied transubstantiation and emphasised the authority of scripture. He formed lay preachers called Lollards.
- Huss (1337-1415) was a Bohemian priest. He emphasised scripture and opposed the sale of indulgences and images. He was burnt at the stake.
- Erasmus 1466-1536) was a Dutch humanist. He compiled a Greek NT and had debates with Luther over the Freedom of the Will. Luther asserted the Bondage of the Will principally because he opposed any merit for salvation by human works.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- Luther, as an ardent Augustinian monk, came to the revelation of the power and total adequacy of divine grace: we cannot be saved by our own works.
- In 1517 Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral.

- Luther wanted reformation not separation of the church
- The Pope claimed that he alone could 'shut the gates of hell and open the gates of heaven'. The Pope rejected Luther's conclusions.
- In 1521 Luther is protected by German princes. The issue starts to become national and political.
- In 1521 at the Diet (Court) of Worms Luther says 'Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God'. Luther stands on scripture against the Pope: the authority of the Bible versus the authority of the Church (as it is today).
- Luther publishes a Bible in German so everyone can read it.

Reformation theology asserted

- **Sola Fide** (faith alone), **Sola Gratia** (grace alone) and **Sola Scriptura** (scripture alone).
- the priesthood of all believers (rejecting priestly mediation)
- only Baptism and Communion as valid sacraments (as instituted by Christ). The Catholic Church maintains 7 sacraments: baptism, confirmation, penance (confessional), the mass, marriage, ordination and extreme unction (anointing for dying).

Reformation Theology rejected:

Transubstantiation, purgatory, celibacy of clergy, private confessional to priest, worship and mediation of Mary (Mariolatry), the authority of the Pope, use of Latin only for worship and holy relics and objects such as holy water, shrines, rosaries and candles.

This is really an attack on the practice of Catholicism rather than its theology (although its theology can be used to justify its practice). Catholicism was formed in a pre-literate, peasant society with the result that it is visual, sensory and theatrical, being a dramatised liturgy of our salvation. Literate societies can handle much more intellectual sophistication and religion can more easily be internalised as a personal experience.

Lutheranism spread throughout Germany and Scandinavia. John Calvin (1509-64) was born in France but ended up establishing Calvinism in Geneva. He wrote The Institutes of the Christian Religion which was the basis for Reformed theology. Calvinism became influential in Scottish Presbyterianism (and in Australian Presbyterianism) and among the English Puritans.

The English Reformation

- 1509-1547: Henry VIII (1491-1547) remained a Catholic but rejected the jurisdiction of the Pope who would not give him permission to divorce.
- 1547-1553: Edward VI (1537-1553) encouraged Protestantism
- 1553-1558: Mary (1516-1558) sought to re-establish Catholicism
- 1558-1603: Elizabeth I become supreme head of the Church of England creating a national church
- during the time of Elizabeth was the rise of the Puritans who wanted to purify the worship of the church from popish influence. Although never a majority they had a strong influence and produced a great literature promoted today through the Banner of Truth Trust. Calvinism produces a more systematic or discursive theology: the emphasis is not so much on experience as on the understanding of grace.

The English Puritans wanted:

- Government by elders and synods not Pope and hierarchy
- Simpler worship with scriptural justification
- Evidence of faith in a believer's life
- Communion table rather than altar
- The pre-eminence of scripture

The puritans were Calvinistic in theology:

Calvinism

Calvinism emphasises the Sovereignty of God.

Calvinism may be summarised under the acrostic TULIP:

T - Total depravity of Man (capable of no good thing)

U - Unconditional election by God's direct will not foreknowledge

L - Limited atonement, only for believers

I - Irresistible force of God's grace

P - Perseverance of God's elect to eternal salvation.

Arminianism

The Arminians reacted to Calvinism with 5 points of their own:

1) Fallen Man cannot do good or achieve saving faith without the regenerating power of God (avoids Pelagianism).

2) Election and reprobation (lost) are founded on God knowing beforehand of faith or lack of it. God does not decide for us.

3) Christ's death is for all but only believers enjoy forgiveness.

4) Grace can be resisted.

5) Grace is sufficient for Christian living but people may fall from grace and be lost.

The Church and Politics

The Reformation was about the political implication of theology. A theology would justify a political system (Geneva) and a political system would support a particular theology (Spain).

The relation between Church and State may be expressed three ways:

Catholic

Pope rules State and Church

State is the Church

Church canon law

Holy Roman Empire

-Infant baptism

saves the infant

-Mass

Transubstantiation

(ex opere operato)

objective

Hierarchical

Protestant

Church and State together

State supports Church

values

Lutheranism, Calvinism

-Infant baptism

family involved

-Holy Communion

consubstantiation

(Lutheran)

Christ present by faith

(Calvinist)

Coercive

Radical

congregation

rules

State oppresses

Church

Anabaptists

-Adult baptism

individual only

-Lord's Supper

emblems

subjective

Democratic

The Catholic Counter Reformation

The Catholic Church made its own theological response to the Reformation other than attempting to prevent schism. This was formalised at the Council of Trent (1545-63).

The Tridentine Profession of Faith (1564) re-affirmed such Catholic beliefs as follows:

1) The Nicene Creed

2) Church Tradition alongside Scripture. The Church alone interprets Scripture.

3) The seven sacraments and the sacramental system.

4) The Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ transubstantially present.

5) Purgatory exists and saints detained in purgatory are helped by the intercession of the faithful

6) Saints with Christ are to be venerated and invoked.

7) Images of Christ and Mary are to be kept and venerated.

8) The power of indulgences is useful to Christians.

9) The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church is the mother and mistress of all churches.

The Thirty Years War

The last of the wars of religion was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which started in Germany. It began as a religious struggle with political overtones and finished as a political struggle with religious overtones, heralding the modern era.

Spanish Catholicism

- Spain remained a staunchly Catholic country. The Medieval institution of the Inquisition was re-introduced (1542) to fight Moslems, Jews and Protestants with coercion, censorship and propaganda. It was finally removed in 1820.
- Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) wrote the Spiritual Exercises and formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1540. They were not monks but highly trained Church educators.
- Spanish mysticism: Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and John of the Cross (1542-91).

English Methodism and German Piety

John Wesley (1703-91) was the son of an Anglican minister and a famous mother, Susannah Wesley. Wesley went as a missionary to Georgia for two years but returned very dispirited. In 1738 he had a conversion experience in a Moravian Brethren meeting. This commenced a lifetime of preaching across England and organising societies or 'class meetings' for Christian discipleship. At Oxford University he had started a group that was mockingly called 'the Methodists'. The name stuck to his brand of practical religion and pious spirituality.

Puritans (1550-1650)	Pietism (1600-1750)	Methodism (1730-1800+)
Mostly Anglican	German, Moravian	conversion experience
Scripture as guide	scripture as guide	scripture as guide
Holiness of life	holiness of life	holiness of life
Reform of worship	personal Bible study	class meetings
Remove popish signs	conscious conversion	open air preaching
Created Nonconformity	devotional exercises	hymn singing
Change church benefits	relief of poor	social conscience
Calvinist	missionary	Arminian
Lasting theology	lasting emphasis	lasting denomination.
Key Issue: Externalised control Versus Individual authority		