

REFORMATION,

Three lectures delivered by Rev. Dr. V. "Kass" Kassouni at Tustin Presbyterian Church

March 4, March 11, and March 18, 2018

Introduction:

The title of our lecture is REFORMATION.

In its general sense it means change, being reformed, for the better:

The saying, "**Reformed and Always Reforming**" in the Presbyterian Church is noteworthy.

Our **challenge today**: To be ever reforming, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Reform means change. The tendency is to be, to do the usual, and carry on as usual. But "times they are a changin'", as the song goes

In its particular sense today: we will consider the **Protestant Reformation of the 16th C.**

THE REFORMATION IN CONTEXT:

By context I mean for us to look at the "**big picture**", the setting in which we would place the Reformation, in its particular geographical and historical setting in Germany. When we consider a number of facts, **we begin to understand why the Reformation of Luther succeeded**, while others, like that of **Jan Hus**, in Prague, **Savonarola** in Italy, **Wycliffe** in England, failed to spread, after they ignited. Primarily, it was mainly because these factors were not there for them, as they were for Luther:

- 1. The revival of learning called the Renaissance in Europe. (1400-1800) Between the Dark Ages and the Modern era.** The momentum was "**back to the basics**" centered in the classics. **Humanism** was asserting itself. Ensuing explosion of new ideas, challenging the traditional positions of science, art, and philosophy had begun, (ie: Galileo), and the introduction of the "scientific method" of inquiry was taking place.
- 2. The fast spread** of publications in the service of the Renaissance, emanating from the invention of the Printing Press by Guttenberg, in Germany (1454). **For example:** compare the explosion of communication made possible by the Computer today, vs. handwriting or typing on the Royal typewrite!
- 3. Political and socio-economic ferment**, such as **challenges to the Feudal system.** (Peasants revolt in England and in Europe); Spain vs France, struggling for the control of the Holy Roman Empire: **The sack of Rome in 1527**, by no other than. **Charles V's rebellious soldiers!!**
- 4. Political realities and stresses** due to **the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Turks.** They did not stop there, but pushed and captured the Balkans, and were in Hungary. These realities distracted the Holy Roman emperor and rulers, providing the Reformation time and room to grow from its inception.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Now, we will focus on the **Protestant Reformation** introduced by **Martin Luther in Wittenberg,, Germany**, 500 years ago (October 31, 1517), when he posted on the doors of the Castle Church of All

Saints, a document containing **95 theses**, or arguments, challenging the Roman Catholic Church (and the Pope) to **a debate on the issue of the sale of indulgences**. These were certificates one would buy from the church, with the claim that the purchasers', or their dead ancestors', stay in **Purgatory would be lessened**. **Their sale had gotten out of hand:**

For Example: Johan Tetzel, the salesman, would cry: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs!" (Money was needed to finance Pope Leo X's pet project, building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome).

This bold act on Luther's part was the beginning of a series of events that led to his **excommunication in 1520**. Subsequently, a warrant was issued for his arrest, which would, if successful, lead to his execution.

Oct. 31, 1517: This date marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Europe

Let us first consider the person of Luther: **Who was he?**

MARTIN LUTHER, THE MAN

Luther was **born** on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany, to pious parents.

First to **Latin school, and then the University of Erfurt at the age of 13 years** with the intent (strongly urged by his father) **to study law**. He earned both a Baccalaureate and Master degrees in the shortest time allowed by the University.

In 1505, at the age of 22, he had a **dramatic/ spiritual conversion**: Walking, on his way to Erfurt, during a terrifying thunderstorm, lightning struck the ground near him and he cried out, "**Help me St. Anne, I will become a monk!**"

Fifteen days later he **fulfilled his vow and entered the Augustinian Hermits monastery in Erfurt**. This was the dramatic expression reflecting his spiritual journey that had begun in the university under the influential teaching of professors who were also theologians. They were Occamists (named after Occam, an English Franciscan of early 14th Century). According to them: **God is the Sovereign God Divine, knowable not by reason but by revelation**, through which **freedom is given to** experience the will of God in one's life.

Franz Lau, in his book **LUTHER**, says about this period in Luther's life: "There must have taken place in Luther an inward spiritual struggle, hidden beneath the student gaiety that he had shared, and with which once more he took leave of his friends before he actually went into the monastery."

The monastery he entered was the **incubator** that worked powerfully to shape his faith. It was of, what is called, the "Observant" monastic order. There were **two types of mendicant orders**: the **lax** called (**Conventual**), and the **very strict** rule-observing, called (**Observant**). For almost 20 years he was a monk there, and observed scrupulously all the rules and orders prescribed.

While he was a monk, Luther not only was committed to a diligent **study of the Holy Scriptures, but taught the Scriptures** at Erfurt. Teaching was a commitment and discipline assumed by the Order. He took over from his spiritual mentor Staupitz's position, in Wittenberg University, of the professorship in the theological faculty. There he delivered the early lectures in Biblical studies that were of great significance: **The Psalms (Ps. 30, and Ps. 71), Romans, Hebrews and Galatians**. However,

during this period **he was in constant inner turmoil, obsessing over his sins, and his total unworthiness** before God, especially so when he celebrated Mass. Seeking to walk the way of perfection. The three monastic vows of **Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience**, was believed to be the sure way of salvation. But it did not work out that way for him.

Coupled with **his sense of utter inadequacy**, and inability to achieve the **righteousness of God**, was the Augustinian **doctrine of predestination**, whereby God bestows irresistible grace and destines some for salvation, while he leaves others to themselves and eventual destruction. All this piled up on his inner person **leading to a catastrophe—his breakdown**. In the depths of despair, according to his own memoirs. **“The turning point** of his life came when his wild and confused conscience was tamed and he felt himself reborn, entering through the opened gates into paradise.” It came to him that what **the apostle (Paul) meant by the ‘righteousness of God’ in Romans 1:17** was the righteousness that **God bestows”** as an act of His grace in response to the faith of the believer. (Franz Lau, *Luther*, Westminster Press 1959).

Helping him out of his despair was his old mentor Staupitz. Also, central to his recovery was the **very same theology of Augustine** who had initially plunged him into self-doubt with the teaching on predestination. **The basic motif of Augustine is the concept of “omnipotent Grace” which is “The grace of God in Christ prepared for the sinner.”** As scripture says, “While we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom 5:8)

The study of Scriptures powerfully stimulated him and led him forward, finally bringing him to contend with the R.C.Church. Lau says, “It is quite certain that Luther’s development into a reformer came out of his monastery struggles and not out of the offense that he took at abuses in church practices.” (Lau) **It was the new gospel that discovered and moved Luther to be a critic of the church.**

MARTIN LUTHER, THE REFORMER

That which **began as a simple**, and common practice of the times, of calling the church to debate issues, in this case **indulgences**, the matter grew rather quickly to be considered as a challenge by Luther against the authority of the Church and the Pope himself. Why so?

With the advent of the printing press, Luther’s **students published and spread the 95 theses all over Germany**. German nobles, namely Frederick the Wise of Saxony, were quite impressed and saw in Luther one who could enhance their power against the domination of the Papacy and Italian powers.

Luther was **first ignored by Pope Leo X**, but after three months decided to take action. He summoned Luther to Rome to recant his heresies. He ordered Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, with Wittenberg in his jurisdiction, to apprehend Luther and deliver that “child of the devil” to him in Rome. Taking up Luther’s cause, Frederick, became his protector instead! After **a series of debates** with churchmen, which Frederick arranged, instead of delivering him to Rome, it became quite clear that Luther was not going to recant. In 1519, after his debates with **Johann Eck**, on the issue of Papal primacy, free will (which Luther denied), good works, purgatory, and indulgences.

As a result of these debates, Luther gained many followers in Leipzig, and many students transferred to Wittenberg. Having officially denied the infallibility of the Pope, and the general councils of the Church, these debates marked the complete separation of Luther from Roman Catholicism. On June 15, 1520,

Pope Leo X officially excommunicated Luther, June 15 or 16, 1520. He issued a bull refuting Luther's these, and called upon all magistrates to seize him and burn all his writings. However, this backfired on the pope because in Germany he was not popular. When Eck tried to post the Bull in Leipzig, he was confronted by 150 students from Wittenberg, and had to flee to a convent. The bull was pulled down and torn to shreds.

Luther, in response wrote a pamphlet titled **Against the Bull of Antichrist, and on Dec. 10, 1520 he burned along with it a copy of the Canon Law etc.**

The climax to Luther's struggle with the Pope and the Church took place in the city of WORMS in a gathering of churchmen, electors (nobles) of Germany, Emperor Charles V, and many other dignitaries, **called the Diet of Worms, in 1521.** Luther thought he was summoned to a debate, but then realized this was **his trial for heresy.** He refused to recant, and made his famous statement:

"Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God!" The doctrinal position of "Sola Scriptura" or "Scripture alone!" became the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation

After the dignitaries had left town, **The Emperor issued an edict** against him and ordered his arrest, but Luther had already left. On his way a group of soldiers kidnapped him and took him to

Wartburg Castle, on orders of Frederick the Wise. He did so to protect Luther and confine him in secret, so his whereabouts were kept secret. **Thus, Luther escaped death.** For ten months he stayed there, but remained busy with his writings. He **translated the New Testament** from the original Greek into German, and eventually the whole Bible as well. Placing the **Bible in the hands of the people**, in their native language, which the printing press made possible, was astounding in its effects!

In his solitary confinement, he began to have **encounters with the devil**, real or imagined;

During his absence, for ten months, his friends took charge of the reformation, and turned to acts of violence.... Over a thousand students and workmen ransacked up to sixty priests' houses, forcing them to flee.

In the church at Wittenberg, Karlstadt, Luther's successor, had ordered the removal of all statuary and images. Luther was very disturbed when he heard of all of these things, and could take it no longer. In March of 1522, he returned, and with the reported saying "Give me back my church!" he assumed the pulpit, and with eight sermons in eight days, he quenched the violence that had taken over. He opposed violence and insisted that it be so during the Reformation.

LUTHER THE THEOLOGIAN

His belief system (theology) grew out of the crucible of his own struggles, seeking to find his peace with God. It must be noted that his struggles were first with **the political authority of the church.** His struggles with the basic question of authority, led him to finally assert that the Holy Scriptures were the ultimate source, and not the church of the Pope. **The Three Solas capture the essence of his theology:**

1. Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone.

In defending himself at Worms, Luther declared his conscience to be captive to the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate authoritative **Word of God**, to which all others (Pope, church councils) were

subservient. The church does not take priority over the Bible, since it is the creation of the Bible, and not vice versa (The church claimed, and still claims the opposite: The church created the Bible...)

2. Sola Fide: Faith alone.

We are saved by Faith and not good works. Good works follow faith. Romans 1:17, was his point of realization, "his second birth": "The just shall live by faith..." According to him, justifying faith means "taking hold of Christ, hearing and claiming God's promise, and apprehending our acceptance by God in Jesus Christ." (Timothy George)

3. Sola Gratia: Grace alone.

Grace is undeserved favor motivated by God's love. Humans are in bondage to sin and are unable to turn to God by their own will. Luther "saw the human will enslaved by sin and Satan. We think we are free, he contended, but we only reinforce our bondage by indulging in sin. Grace releases us from this enslaving illusion and lead us into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God.' God wants us to love him freely. But this is possible only when we have been freed from the captivity to Satan and self." (Timothy George)

4. Solo Christo: Christ alone.

Actually, each sola affirmed the centrality of Jesus Christ. Christ is the central content, the subject, of Scripture, and **the principle for selectivity within Scripture.** For Luther, Christ is the center of his doctrine of justification by faith. Through Christ's substitutionary death on the cross God has acted to redeem fallen humanity. **He said,** "We could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the lord Jesus Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart." (**Large Catechism**)

"The Holy Scriptures are a witness to Jesus Christ." PCUSA

THE DARK SIDE OF LUTHER.

In his early days, Luther was a tolerant person, and a leader who opposed violence. He spoke kindly of Jews, for example and requested tolerance in their behalf. However, **he did have a temper** problem. It became quite evident when in:

1525 the Peasants in Germany rose up in protest against their landlords, what ensued is known as the "Peasants' War." Quoting Romans 13:1, he declared that all authority was ordained by God, and revolution against the government must be met by violence. He wrote a **pamphlet** titled "*Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*", and in it he accused them of being the worst blasphemers of God, because they used the Gospel to justify their rebellion. Luther called for the peasants to be put down like mad dogs, and the nobility complied. Over 100,000 were killed! After much bloodshed the revolt was eventually suppressed.

HIS BENEVOLENCE towards the Jews evaporated when his expectation that they would convert to Christianity did not happen (1523). However around 20 years later he changed **and became quite anti-semitic !** He raged against them in a pamphlet titled ***About the Jews and Their Lies*.** He recommended destroying their homes so that they would be expelled for all time. (It happened in **Spain in 1492...**) Luther believed that the "new Israel" was the church and that the promises (covenants) given to Jews by God was now transferred to Christians. This is called **supersessionism** today.

In his old age this dark side of Luther became quite evident. He was not well physically, having ulcers, bad digestive problems, and Menier's disease (vertigo, tinnitus, dizziness), and arthritis.

LUTHER URGED VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ANABAPTISTS, (today's Mennonite, and Amish...) who rejected Infant Baptism, and believed in what is called "believer's baptism" (started by Zwingli's disciple in Zurich). They rejected both the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Reformation churches. In 1534 militant uprisings ensued in Europe (Munster, and Thomas Muntzer, and other leaders). Muntzer called Luther "the sensual and soft-living hulk in Wittenberg" and "brother fatted pig." In ensuing persecutions thousands were killed. Luther supported such violence against them.

Luther died on February 18, 1546, after a heart attack, and was buried in the Castle Church in Wittenberg, where he had nailed the 95 Theses!

MARTIN LUTHER'S IMPACT AND INFLUENCE.

1. The spread of the Protestant Reformation: In Switzerland (Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin in Geneva), and John Knox, his student, to **Scotland; Holland** (Dutch Reformed in America; **In England, Anglican** (indirectly), **Baptist, Congregational. All these were brought to America.**

2. The Protestant Reformation was the second major schism in the Christian Church: **First**, the Great Schism, or the Western Schism, **when in 1029 AD**, the Eastern Church (Greek Orthodox), and the Western Church (Roman Catholic) split apart on the question of the wording in the Nicene Creed on the matter of the "sending" of the Holy Spirit: One word (filioque), to include it or not. **West** said, yes; **East** said no! As the R.C. Church predicted, many divisions followed. Today there are over 40,000 Christian groupings/ denominations in the world!

3. The open Bible, made accessible, for the first time, to the rank and file of the people (printing press, and the Bible in vernacular German, created a grass-roots movement, and spread like a prairie fire! This led **to other translations** such as Tyndale's English Bible, a precursor to the King James Version (1611). Along with the Bible, **the revised worship service**, simplified, yet including the Eucharist (offering the wine to all as well as the bread). He was a **prolific hymnodist** ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"), making congregational singing an integral part of worship.

4. Society was introduced to radical changes, such as **women's rights** (Martin Luther's taking a former nun (Katherine von Bora) to be his wife, and allowing her rights of authority, and basing these on the teachings of the Bible, were new and revolutionary. His wedding set the seal of approval on the **marriage of clergy.**

Even though he opposed it, the **Peasants' War**, which was by Christians with the support of leaders who had left Luther because they thought he was not going far enough in matters of Feudalism, was the beginning **of social change in Europe.**

4. This was the Age of the Renaissance. In many ways their call "to the original sources" created the environment for rejection of authority and the introduction of freer thinking (humanism). Theologically, this was the call of Luther "Scripture alone." **Luther was a "Renaissance man!"**

So it is that the 500th Anniversary has given us occasion to refocus on and rediscover Martin Luther and the vast impact of his life and teachings .