

“Church History: Heroes, Heretics & Holy Wars”

Sunday School Notes

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CLASS 11 – Luther, Calvin & Zwingli

We left Luther after the Diet of Worms where he refused to recant his writings. On the way home, Luther’s life was in danger, so one of the princes (Elector Frederick the Wise) captured him, made it look like an ambush seeking to harm him, and took him to the Wartburg Castle for several months. In 11 weeks there, he translated Erasmus’ Greek NT into German! And it was such colorful, exciting language that it transformed the way people spoke German. He emerged an even bigger hero in Germany when he came out of hiding.

Things quickly got out of hand, though: “The Knight’s Revolt” was several German knights tried to rebel in 1522-1523, but it failed, and Luther didn’t support it. Then the “Peasant’s War” happened from 1524-1526 based on Luther’s writing *The Freedom of the Christian*, though Luther rejected this too. (More on this during the Radical Reformation)

Luther introduced a German version of the liturgy in 1524, and began to extend the cup to the laity in the Eucharist. He wrote his own hymns to encourage congregational singing (“A Mighty Fortress” the most enduring). He wrote a catechism, and within a few years he claimed that 15 year olds in Wittenberg knew more about the word of God than “all the universities and doctors before.”

He essentially declared that monasteries and the monastic life were illegitimate ways to serve God. One convent wrote to him asking what they should do now that he had convinced them not to be nuns anymore. He arranged to have them smuggled out of the convent in barrels and brought them to Wittenberg. Married them off one-by-one. Finally there was one left, Katharina von Bora, but Luther was hesitant, both because he didn’t want to get married if he was going to be assassinated soon, but also because it might look like he just developed his views against monasteries so that he could get married. Regardless, he married her and they had a wonderful marriage, judging by the affectionate letters they wrote back and forth. They even brewed and sold beer together.

Luther’s two kingdom view: The Church is God’s right hand kingdom, the State is God’s left hand kingdom. The church lives by the gospel, the state lives by the law. Every Scripture passage contains both.

He had grave doubts about the book of James. One Sunday he was supposed to preach on it, but got up, read the passage and said, “I don’t want to preach on this and walked out.”

He wrote *On The Jews and Their Lies*, and it reads very painfully blunt. And the Nazis supposedly used it to justify themselves. But it’s not as racist as it appears: he’s arguing that standard heresy laws be used against the Jews since they continued to reject Christ.

Two major followers of Luther:

- Philip Melancthon, the quiet scholar to Luther’s bombastic leader. A Greek scholar, he produced the first Protestant systematic theology (*Loci Communes*).
- Martin Bucer, who became the leading Reformation pastor in Strasbourg; became known as the Peacemaker of the Reformation for trying to bridge Luther and Zwingli.

Ulrich Zwingli - 1484-1531 – born within 2 months of Luther; a priest in Switzerland @ the same time as Luther’s posting 95 Thesis, he also profited much from Erasmus’ Greek NT- he loved it so much that he memorized it! 1519 he became pastor at main church in Zurich (despite the charge that he had recently visited a prostitute), and instead of preaching through the lectionary he announced he would preach through the entire New Testament, starting with Matthew. Pretty radical/defiant, took him 6 years. The plague wiped out 1/3 of the city the first year that he came to Zurich, and he caught it for 3 months. When he recovered, he decided it was time to be bold and accomplish some things for the kingdom. At the same time, he let his preaching change the hearts, and didn’t write a bunch of inflammatory stuff like Luther.

There’s a famous story where a bunch of men in Zurich decided to have a sausage supper in the middle of Lent, which was clear violation of the rules. When the church fasted, everybody in town fasted. Zwingli attended the supper but did not eat. Then he preached a sermon “On the Choice and Freedom of Foods” and the town council let it slide.

He started instituting reforms – first allowing freedom during Lent, then allowing monks & nuns to marry, removing images, and replacing mass with a simple service with strong preaching. Sometimes his followers would throw organs through the stained glass windows. He secretly married a widow, then after 2 years announced it and they started having kids.

In 1523, there was basically a theological showdown between Zwingli and the Catholics in Zurich, two debates called the First and Second Disputations. Zwingli would have his Greek NT, Hebrew OT, and Latin Bible all laid out, quoting from memory often. And the Catholic theologians would refer to the church fathers. So Zwingli won hands down and Zurich broke from Catholicism.

Luther and Zwingli were brought together to merge their movements (at Marsburg Castle), but they could only agree on 14 out of 15 doctrinal issues. Their split on the Eucharist – Zwingli saw it as spiritual, Luther more concrete – resulted in a greater split. Eventually, the Swiss cities that were Catholic decided to attack Zurich. Zwingli led the army to defend them, died in a battle in 1531. But helped pave the way for Calvin.

Zwingli Heir: Heinrich Bullinger, who carried on his work in Zurich, and wrote the Second Helvetic Confession.

John Calvin - 1509-1564

Born in the Northern French city of Noyon, studied at several universities, actually getting a law degree. But he also studied theology in Paris and was drawn to the Reformation movement. In 1534 Protestant activists posted signs around town criticizing Catholic Mass and Eucharist, including one sign on the King’s bedroom door. The King responded by having hundreds of Protestants arrested, and some burned. Calvin decided to move to Basel, Switzerland in 1535, which was safe for Reformation thought. There he wrote his first draft of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and he dedicated them to that king who was burning the Reformers back home, Francis I. He wrote that first edition at the age of 26 (got his Master’s degree at age 18)! It was only 6 chapters originally; he revised and expanded it 4 more times throughout his life, and it grew to 80 chapters in 4 books – The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Church.

On his way to move to Strasburg, Germany, he had to go through the city of Geneva. He stayed overnight with Guillaume Farel, who was a fiery preacher of Reformation doctrine who knew who

Calvin was and begged him to stay and preach in Geneva: "If you refuse, God will unquestionably condemn you!" Geneva had overthrown the Catholics the year before and needed strong leadership and preaching. Calvin reluctantly accepted, and he and Farel set about putting together a Protestant church. Unfortunately, they didn't see eye-to-eye with the Genevan city council, probably pushed too hard and fast for reform, and both Calvin & Farel were expelled from the city the next year.

He **moved to Strasburg** in 1538 where he was a pastor and teacher and wrote a ton; even got married. The city council invited him **back to Geneva** in 1541 because the Catholics were trying to take back over, but he said he would rather be crucified 1,000 times a day than go back. But his friends convinced him, and he stayed there until his death in 1564. His first Sunday back in Geneva he picked up where he had left off preaching 3 ½ years before. Many years he would preach daily. Not that everything was perfect- his wife died in 1549, both his brother's wife and his stepdaughter were found guilty of adultery; he preached a final sermon in 1553 thinking he was going to be fired, but then the city council shifted to his supporters and he stayed. People used to "accidentally" dump out their chamber pots when he was walking below their windows!

Unlike some depictions of Calvin & Geneva, he was not a dictator. He was a pastor and the designated head of the Company of Pastors, but he never exercised civil powers. He did push for every citizen of Geneva to subscribe to his statement of faith. He did put a strong emphasis on church discipline because he believed that for the Reformation to truly be changing things the Gospel needed to be both faithfully preached and faithfully heard.

In addition to training pastors in Geneva and elevating the proficiency of clergy there, Calvin longed for his homeland, France, to hear the Reformation message and the true Gospel. He started training pastors to secretly infiltrate France and start Reformed churches. The school was unofficially known as the "School of Death" because the pastors knew they were most likely going to be martyred if they were caught, since France was staunchly Catholic. (St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Counter Reformation next week) There were no Reformed churches in France until 1555, by 1562 there were between 1,000 and 2,000.

One man named Jerome Bolsec highly criticized Calvin's view of predestination and was arrested by the Genevan civil authorities on charges of heresy; eventually exiled from the city, but continued to criticize Calvin from Bern. Another man, Michael Servetus, was arrested for heresy in opposing the Trinity and infant baptism. Geneva offered to send him back to a French city where he had been condemned as a heretic, he chose to stay there. (Kind of like having Edward Snowden) They condemned Servetus to burning. Calvin begged him to recant his ideas and lobbied to have him beheaded, which was "more humane." Calvin was involved in the trial as chief expert witness, but was not a judge. Presumably Servetus would have been executed in Catholic cities as well.

Though he only lived to be 55, people were already identifying themselves as Calvinists at his death. Calvinism quickly became the fastest growing form of Protestant Christianity, spreading quickly all over Europe, Africa and America.

Calvin's Heir: Theodore Beza- had teamed up with Calvin to translate NT into French; appointed to head the Company of Pastors after Calvin's death.

Jacobus Arminius 1560-1609. Dutch Reformed theologian who had been taught in Geneva under Theodore Beza, but rejected Calvinism. Predestination makes God the author of sin. Main teachings: freedom of the will, general atonement, losing your salvation.

The Synod of Dordrecht (I've always heard it called the Synod of Dort) met in the Netherlands in 1618. The mostly Dutch delegates condemned Arminius' views and put forth a summary of Calvin's teachings in five points. Those points have been put to an acrostic in English:

T- otal Depravity
U- nconditional Election
L- imited Atonement
I- rresistable Grace
P- erseverance of the Saints

In case you thought Calvin designed those 5 points, it came almost 50 years after his death (and 9 years after Arminius' death).

The Five Solas of the Reformation:

- “Sola Fide” – justification is by faith alone, but faith is never alone
- “Sola Scriptura” – Scripture alone has true authority, but that does not mean there is a free-for-all interpretations. Church history is important but not anywhere close to equal in authority. Luther in particular quoted Augustine and the church fathers, but argued that no one should be listened to unless their teachings were in accord with Scripture. For Luther, Scripture was the “norm that normed” and councils and creeds were “normed norms.”
- “Sola Gratia” – By Grace Alone
- “Solus Christus” – By Christ Alone
- “Soli Deo Gloria” – For the Glory of God Alone

Four Views of the Lord's Supper:

Transubstantiation (Catholic)
Consubstantiation (Luther)
Memorial View (Zwingli)
Reformed View (Calvin)

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