

Combined Fellowship: Church History

BPCWA COMBINED FELLOWSHIP (20th Aug 2013)

CHURCH HISTORY SERIES 3

Introduction

- As church declined, different organisations began to work toward internal reform of the church to make religion more personal, the Scriptures the source of authority, and the Roman church more democratic.
- At the same time, external forces of the Reformation began to create opposition to the papal system. These included the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance, nationalism and expanding geographical world.

RENAISSANCE (1350 to 1650)

- From 2 Latin words, “birth” and “back”, expressed the idea of a rebirth of culture
- Transition in Europe from the medieval to the modern world.
- Men’s minds stimulated to literary and artistic production by rediscovery of the treasures of the classical past
- South of Alps: Classical humanism – study of classical literature and languages of Greece and Rome
- North of Alps: Religious humanism – back to Bible in original languages
- Medieval theocentric conception of the world (God was measure of all things): Glory of God → Anthropocentric view of life (man became measure of all things): glory of man

Italian Renaissance (Southern)

- Italy, being centre of the world in the Middle Ages, was the cradle of the Renaissance during 14th C
- Strong classical tradition, with an emphasis on the finer cultural values of this present life
- Popes became more interested in literature and arts than their spiritual functions
- Petrarch sought to discover Greek and Roman manuscripts to study. Emphasised Hellenic heritage.
- Focus was aesthetic and secular; eventually became thorough infidels or pagans in profession and morals. Under veneer of freedom from religious constraints, occult, astrology and rationalism flourished, taking the place of religious faith
- Secular Humanism and Urbanization were the two great factors of the Renaissance. The Renaissance man and his world were now dominant over Christ and His heaven.

Biblical Humanists (Northern)

- Loved original sources from the past, emphasis on human beings as individual entities with right to develop their own personalities, interest in powers of human mind to interpret data.
- But main interest was in the Christian past from the original texts ie Greek and Hebrew. Studied biblical documents in the original tongues as much as or more than they studied in the writings of Plato or Aristotle. Emphasis on Jewish-Christian heritage.
- Sought to return to the primary sources of antiquity including the Bible
- Because of the ability to read and understand the original Textus Receptus Greek Texts, they began to see the errors and deception of the Roman Catholic Church and its corrupted "Bible"
- Applied techniques and methods of humanism to the study of the Scriptures. More interested in man as a human being with a soul than they were in him as a rational creature.
- Humanism was ethical and religious.
- But small group of Northern humanists wished to integrate the Bible with Greek philosophy (eg Plato), and began study of the Bible from the literary viewpoint of the humanists

Desiderius Erasmus (ca 1466-1536)

- Universal scholar at home in cultured circles in any land. But scholarly spirit made him inclined to reform rather than revolution.

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- Opposed RC church through satirical books (*In Praise of Folly*) to point out evils of priestly and monastic hierarchy, rather than by denouncing evils in the church like the Reformers
- Published first Greek New Testament in 1516, known commonly as the Textus Receptus ie Received Texts. Used later by Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and the King James translators.
- His goal was that everyone be able to read the Bible, from the farmer in the field to the weaver at the loom.
- He was aware of the other inaccurate and corrupt Alexandrian Greek Texts and rejected them while compiling this Greek NT Text.
- Scholars now could make accurate comparisons between the church and the New Testament.
- Erasmus later opposed Luther because he did not want to break from RC church.

- Study of classical pagan past led to a secular approach to life in which religion was reduced to formalities or ignored until death came.
- Gave momentum to use of vernacular, later bringing people to the Bible and services of the church in the mother tongue
- Renaissance was a mixture of blessing and bane to the people of Europe
- By mid 1400s men began to question
 - The Latin Vulgate
 - Doctrine of the RC Church
 - Writings of the Church Fathers

Invention of the Printing Press

- The Renaissance artists who, in search for a more durable paint, came up with oil based paints. Adapting these to an oil based ink that would adhere to metal type was fairly simple.
- But a movable type of block printing made of more durable was needed. With the mining boom, especially in Germany, along with better techniques for working metals including soft metals such as gold and copper.
- In 1439, a German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg, ran into financial problems with some projects. He had to find new ways of making money, using the most up-to-date techniques. With a group of men around him, he created a durable and interchangeable metal type that allowed him to print many different pages, using the same letters over and over again in different combinations. He later combined all these disparate elements of movable type, rag paper, the squeeze press, and oil based inks to invent the first printing press in 1451.
- First printed books were religious in nature, as were most medieval books, imitating the handwritten font so that people would accept this new revolutionary way of copying books.
- This invention changed the forms and uses of books quite radically. By 1482, there were about 100 printing presses in Western Europe. Through this invention, knowledge and the Renaissance was spread across Europe.
- By 1500, there were some 40,000 different editions with over 6,000,000 copies in print.
- It had a dramatic effect on European civilization, enabling the spread of information *quickly* and *accurately*. This helped create a wider literate reading public.
- More and more books of a secular nature were printed, with profound results in science. This process would lead later to the Scientific Revolution of the Enlightenment.
- On the religious front, the printing press took book copying out of the hands of the Church and made it much harder for the Church to control or censor what was being written.
- By 1500 the names of more than 1000 printers are known, and the titles of about 30,000 printed works.¹

¹ Preserved Smith, [The Age of the Reformation](#), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, p.5.

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- One of the most powerful inventions of the modern era, the printing press advanced and spread knowledge and moulded public opinion in a way that nothing before the advent of TV and radio in the 20th C could rival.
- Donation of Constantine proven false

Pre-Reformers

John Wycliffe (ca. 1329-1384)

- Most of life was spent teaching at Oxford, and studying God's Word in its library.
- Brilliant scholar who mastered late medieval scholastic tradition. It was in teaching the Scriptures to others that he learned the true meaning of them himself.
- Began to translate the Bible from Latin Vulgate into English
- Questioned Papal Infallibility, Mass, authority of the Pope
- "England belongs to no pope. The pope is but a man, subject to sin; but Christ is the Lord of lords, and this kingdom is held directly and solely of Christ alone"
- By 1362, two years before his death, Wycliffe had presided over the production of the first English translation of the Scriptures, and saw the light of the gospel dispel spiritual darkness in England.
- In 1394 the English Lollards unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament for a reformation of the "Established Church"
- It worried Church authorities enough that by 1407 the English translation was denounced as unauthorized, and translating or using the translated Bibles was defined as heresy -- a crime for which the punishment was death by burning. In 1415 Wycliffe himself was denounced, posthumously, as a heretic. His body was exhumed and burned in 1428. Wycliffite Bibles were also banned after that.

John Hus (ca. 1373-1415)

- Influenced by Wycliffe's writings, which were carried by several Oxford students who went to the University of Prague.
- Wrote and preached against papal indulgences, clerical abuses of power, immorality of high living within Catholic clergy, and the veneration of the Pope.
- Followers of Hus, known as the Bohemian Brethren, joined the Protestant Reformation when it came. Later in the 18thC, many joined with a Pietistic Lutheran group to form the Moravians.

Rise of Humanists

- Fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453) caused Greek scholars to flee to Italy, Germany, France and England with valuable manuscripts of old Greek and Hebrew authors
- At close of 15th C, new courses in the Latin classics, in Greek and Hebrew, began to supplement the medieval curriculum of logic and philosophy.
- Before Renaissance, Greek had not been widely taught in the universities of Western Europe
- Now, scholars who spoke Latin (like Luther), could translate the NT from original Greek into various European languages
- Martin Luther soon learned from Erasmus' Greek text that the Latin Vulgate's rendering of Matt 4:17 "do penance" should more accurately read "repent".²
- "Erasmus laid the eggs and Luther hatched the chickens" and "Erasmus is the father of Luther".³

REFORMATION

- The Reformation was a combination of different triggers:

² Catholic Bibles such as the Douay-Rheims Bible uses "do penance" instead of "repent" or "confess" in verses such as Acts 2:38, 8:22, Matt 3:2, Lev 5:5

³ Preserved Smith, Erasmus, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1923, p. 209.

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- The Roman Catholic church was unwilling to accept reforms suggested by sincere reformers such as the mystics, Wycliffe and Hus, the leaders of the reforming councils, and the humanists
- Emerging nation-states opposed the papal claim to have universal power
- The rise of a middle class which disliked the drain of wealth to Rome

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- “Verily I was a devout monk, and followed the rules of my order so strictly that I cannot tell you all. If ever a monk entered into heaven by his monkish merits, certainly I should have obtained an entrance there.”⁴
- Not finding peace as a monk, Luther was even more disillusioned with corruption of the Vatican
- Saw Bible for the first time in a library at Erfurt in 1505. By studying the Word of God, he declared “But when, by the Spirit of God, I comprehended these words; when I learned how the sinner’s justification proceeds from the pure mercy of the Lord by means of faith, then I felt myself revived like a new man, and entered at open doors into the very paradise of God. From that time, also, I beheld the precious sacred volume with new eyes. I went over all the Bible, and collected a great number of passages which taught me what the work of God was.”⁵
- The passage that finally enlightened Luther was “the just shall live by faith”
- Reading Romans 1:17 convinced him that only faith in Christ could save.
- From then on, *Sola Scriptura*” (Scripture Alone); “*Sola Gratia*” (Grace Alone); “*Sola Fide*” (Faith Alone); “*Solus Christus*” (Christ Alone); and “*Soli Deo Gloria*” (To God Alone Be Glory).
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Luther then took on the whole establishment of Rome
- In 1517, he nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg against *inter alia*, the false doctrine of papal indulgences.
- This is the moment that is regarded as sparking the Protestant Reformation, and is celebrated every October 31 as Reformation Day.
- When threatened by the might of Rome to recant, Luther made the famous declaration at the Diet of Worms in 1521, “It is neither safe nor prudent to do aught against conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen!”
- “... Gregory, Ambrose and Augustine ... were holy men; but I do not trust myself to them. For their holiness does not make them infallible, and it does not imply that one must rely and depend on all the dicta of the fathers or approve and believe all their teachings. Rather take the touchstone of God’s Word into your hands. Let this be your criterion for testing, trying and judging all that the fathers have preached.”⁶
- Providentially, the devout Catholic Emperor, Charles V, was hindered from warring with the Protestant princes of Germany until Protestantism had become deeply rooted, and Luther had died.

The Source of the Reformation

- Perhaps the single most important event to influence the spread of the Bible.
- The invention of the printing press facilitated widespread dissemination of Luther’s doctrines and his translation of the Bible into the German tongue. It was hard enough to control what Wycliffe and Hus wrote, though it was just a few hundred copies.
- The Church was now faced with literally thousands of such works which could be produced at a fraction of the cost. Each new printing press was just another hole in the dyke to be plugged up, and the Church

⁴ J.H.Merle D’Aubigne, History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, New York: Robert Carter, 1843, p. 143.

⁵ Ibid., p. 172.

⁶ Iain H. Murray, The Reformation of the Church, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997, p. 30.

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had only so many fingers with which to do the job. The difference between Martin Luther's successful Reformation and the Hussites' much more limited success was that Luther was armed with the printing press and knew how to use it with devastating effect.

- The Reformation was placed solidly on the foundation of the Word of God. This led to the glorious growth of the Protestant Reformation. Northern Europe threw off the shackles of Roman bondage and embraced the liberty of the gospel set forth in the Bible, and what came to be known as Protestantism.
- Protestant zeal for translating the Bible and getting it into the hands of the lay people was empowered by the invention of the printing press. This advanced the culture of Biblical literacy.
- The Reformation maintained that the source must be the Word of God – if it could not be established by the Word of God, then it should not be believed.
- They did not denounce all tradition, but elevated the Bible as the only supreme authority.
- Church tradition was set aside as Luther and other reformers adopted the standard of *Sola Scriptura* – the Bible as the sole measure of theology and practice.
- When the *Scots Confession* of 1560 was published by John Knox and others, they pleaded for any deviation from Scriptural principles to be pointed out to them, so that their Reformation would be yet more complete. They may not have seen everything clearly, but they were faithful to what they saw.
- The Reformation was not a man-instigated social uprising. Reformer Zwingli says "In my opinion, Luther is one of God's chosen heralds and combatants, who searches the Scriptures with greater zeal than has been done by any man on earth for the last thousand years.... I have purposely abstained from all correspondence with him; not that I feared any man on this account, but because I would have it appear how uniform the Spirit of God is, in so far that we who are far distant from each other, and have held no communication, are yet of the same mind, and this without the slightest concert."⁷

The Spread of Protestantism

- In 1570, probably 70% of Germans, including Austrians, were Protestant.⁸
- This provided a climate for man to pull away from the dominance, philosophy and reasoning of the Roman Catholic Church.
- During the next 400 years, nations that embraced Reformation doctrines rose to positions of freedom, culture and enlightenment, becoming the most influential nations in the world. God's Providential Hand was evident even in the course of history so that His Truth could be spread.
- At the same time, God raised men across Europe as Reformers in different parts of Europe
- Initially revolved around 3 centres
 - Wittenberg, Germany (Luther and Melancthon)
 - Zurich, Switzerland (Zwingli and Bullinger)
 - Geneva, Switzerland (Calvin and Beza)

Swiss Reformers

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

- Drawn away from Rome by studying Scriptures in the original languages of the Greek Received Text.
- Began a new style of preaching in Switzerland. On New Years Day, 1519, Zwingli went into the Zurich cathedral pulpit before a great crowd and declared "It is to Christ that I desire to lead you, to Christ the true source of salvation. His divine word is the only food that I wish to set before your souls."⁹

⁷ Preserved Smith, [The Age of the Reformation](#), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, p. 52.

⁸ Preserved Smith, [The Age of the Reformation](#), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, p. 178.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

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- Every Sabbath, “the people heard what they knew not before, as the preacher went on explaining Matthew, with a Greek Testament before him.”¹⁰
- More than 2000 people were soon “hungering for the strong meat of the Scriptures.”
- By 1520 the town-council issued a decree to all parish priests, curates and exhorters, in town and country, “that they should freely and everywhere preach the holy gospels and the apostolic epistles, and all speak the same language as the Spirit of God should direct them, and only teach what they could prove by the word of God. As for the doctrines and commandments that were of man’s institution, they should let them alone.”¹¹

John Calvin (1509-1564)

- Native of Noyon, Picardy, 70miles northeast of Paris, led the main work in Geneva
- 2nd generation Reformer
- Probably the most influential leader of the Reformation era. Put much stress on education, and his catechetical system for the young has been carried all over the world.
- At the school in Geneva, men were trained who spread Presbyterianism all over Western Europe.
- It was Calvin’s theology and form of church government that triumphed in the Protestant church of France, the Reformed church of Germany, the Church of Scotland, the Reformed church in Hungary, the Reformed church in Holland, and in Puritanism in England and New England.
- Calvin’s biblical and theological writings have also been very influential and in 1536 at Basel he published the first edition of his Institutes.
- Often called the father of the historical-grammatical method of biblical study – a method that attempts to discover what the Scripture meant to those who wrote it, and what it means according to the common definition of its words and its grammatical intent.
- Contemporary evangelical students have so taken this method for granted that they have little realization of the part that Calvin played in its development and of the fact that it was virtually nonexistent in the church before the Reformation.

Differences between the Reformers

- Luther argued to cast out of the Church only those things which were absolutely prohibited by Scripture, while Zwingli demanded that everything must be removed save for that which is expressly required by Scripture.
- Led to sharp divisions between them in 1529, notably over the Lord’s Supper.
- Luther believed in consubstantiation with body of the Lord joined to the physical bread (*con* means ‘with’, hence con-substantial). Zwingli held it as a *sign* and a *commemoration*.

Reformation in England

William Tyndale (ca. 1494-1536)

- While attending Oxford University, Tyndale became skilled in Greek and Latin and, through Erasmus’ *Novum Instrumentum*, gained access to the Greek New Testament
- “The principle of the Reformation at Oxford, Cambridge, and London was the Greek New Testament published by Erasmus”¹²
- Hence, Erasmus’ Greek New Testament was the basis of the Reformation not only in Germany and Switzerland, but also in England.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹² Merle D’Aubigne cited in The Reformers: lectures delivered in St. James’ Church, Paisley, Glasgow, J. Maclehose & Sons, 1885, p. 176.

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- After a dinner with priests and bishops, Tyndale declared that he “defied the Pope and all his laws” and vowed that “a plough-boy would know more of the Scriptures than they”.
- Consumed with the desire to have his people read the Bible in English, he crossed over into Europe, working day and night to translate the New Testament from Erasmus’ Greek Text into English. He finished this great task in 1525.
- Tyndale was so skilled in 7 languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, French) that when he spoke any of them, it seemed like they were his native language.
- Rome condemned Tyndale’s work as wilful perversion of the New Testament, but he refused to compromise on the purity of the Received Text manuscripts
- His work on earth completed, Tyndale paid the ultimate price for his faithfulness and was martyred in Belgium in 1536.
- Shortly after his death, King Henry VIII licensed the first official English Bible which was published in 1537. This was named “Matthew’s Bible” and was prepared by Tyndale’s friend, John Rogers.
- “The Reformation of England, perhaps to a greater extent than that of the continent, was effected by the word of God... Those great individualities we meet with in Germany, Switzerland, and France – men like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin – do not appear in England; but the Holy Scripture is widely circulated. What brought light into the British Isles subsequently to the year 1517, and on a more extended scale after the year 1526, was the word – the invisible power of the invisible God. The religion of the Anglo-Saxon race – a race called more than any other to circulate the oracles of God throughout the world – is particularly distinguished by its biblical character.”¹³
- The result of the widespread knowledge of the Bible, together with Henry VIII’s break with Rome from 1532 over his divorce by declaring himself the head of the Church of England in 1534 changed England from being one of the most Catholic countries in 16th C Europe to become the most virulently anti-Catholic by the 17th C.
- Although politics played a major part in the English Reformation, it was not mere political play. 300 Protestants were burned under the Marian persecution (1553-1558), a clear proof that the truth of Scripture had been united permanently in many hearts which no Monarch’s threats could undo.

Reformation in Scotland

- Prior to 1560, Rome owned half of the country’s wealth, and dominated this “medieval semi-barbarian” land. No country in Europe had greater religious corruption.
- Scotland had its own pre-reformers martyrs who were killed. Patrick Hamilton was influenced by Lutheran theology whilst at the universities of Wittenberg and Marburg. Wishart’s preaching in 1544-45 helped to popularise the teachings of Calvin and Zwingli in Scotland.
- Wishart also translated into English the first *Helvetic Confession of Faith* in 1536. He climbed on an earthen fence and preached for more than 3 hours, and God worked so marvellously by that sermon that one of the most wicked men in the country was converted by it, his eyes streaming with tears.

John Knox (ca. 1514-72)

- Fleeing from Bloody Mary’s persecution, returned to Scotland in 1559 from Geneva. His powerful preaching became an important factor in swaying the nation to Protestantism.
- While in other nations, conversions were by cities or villages or family, the nation of Scotland was converted “by lump”, and popery was removed within 10 years. The nation was born again in one day.
- Inspired at the teachings of Calvin, Knox wrote the Scots Confession of 1560, which was adopted by the Scottish Parliament by a large majority, as the first Scottish Protestant confession of faith.
- A week later, Parliament recognised the Reformed religion by passing 3 Acts:
 - 1 repealed all previous laws which were contrary to the Word of God and the new Confession
 - 1 abolished the jurisdiction of the Pope in Scotland

¹³ J.H. Merle D’Aubigne, History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, Volume 18, p. 1.

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- 1 banned the Roman Catholic Mass
- From this legislative action, Scotland had a national church with presbyteries
- Knox's Confession was widely welcomed by the public, and served Scotland all the way down to the time of the Westminster Confession, drawn up 80 years later
- Knox was concerned that the people should be educated to read the Bible and urged the Church to lead this. Tyndale's new English Bible was widely welcomed.
- In only a few generations, Scotland went from being one of the poorest and most illiterate countries in Europe to one of the best educated and most prosperous countries in Europe – a demonstration of the power of God's Word.

Characteristics of the Reformation

The 16th Century Reformation swept across much of Europe by anointed preaching and the printed Bible.

- Scholastic philosophy tied to Greek philosophy gave way to Protestant biblical theology.
- Justification by faith, sacraments, and works gave way to justification by faith alone.
- The Bible, rather than the Bible and tradition as interpreted by the church, became the norm.
- Glorious moment in Church History when men began "to call upon the name of the LORD" after the dark ages dominated by the Church of Rome.
- "The greatest event, or series of events, that has occurred since the close of the canon of Scripture"¹⁴
- Council of Trent Canons and Decrees Chap. XVI, Canon IX: "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining of the grace of justification, let him be anathema"
- Reformation was a return to the primitive principles of Christianity
- The Reformers were especially characterised by great preaching
- Luther restored congregational hymn singing and reformed the university curriculum back to a concentration on the Word of God and the writings of the Early Christian Fathers. Rejecting Aristotle's Scholastic Theology, Luther wrote "It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle ... Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle."
- Luther wrote more about education than any other Reformer of the 16th C. He strengthened existing schools and established new ones so that now education was to serve not only the church but the state and society at large. He produced Longer and Shorter Catechisms (1529) which educated the common people in the evangelical doctrine so well that the Catholics were formed to imitate him by starting, for the first time, catechisms of their own.
- Melancthon and Wittenberg, Zwingli in Zurich, as well as Calvin at Geneva and numerous others in Netherlands, Scotland and later North America gave ministerial training a firm basis in exegesis of the Scriptures in the original languages. At Zurich, both practicing ministers and divinity students met 5 days a week to share in systematic exposition of the Scriptures.
- Luther also overthrew the allegorical interpretations of the Catholic Church, although he never fully escaped the temptation to allegorise himself.
- Luther emphasised the need to go back to the original languages and do exegesis and produced commentaries. Zwingli began to preach directly out of the original languages to his Zurich congregation, but it was John Calvin who took Biblical exegesis to new heights with his systematic preaching and commentaries. Jacob Arminius considered Calvin to be the best interpreter of Scripture the Church possessed.
 - It was not the desire of human will of the Reformers, nor the political climate but the return to the Word of God that brought the NT Catholic Church out of the Roman Catholic Church
 - God's providence is clearly seen in the timing of event and raising men to bring His Church from darkness into light purely based upon Scriptures. And none can stop it, not even the gates of Hell.

¹⁴ Scottish theologian, William Cunningham