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Teaching Notes

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A.C.T.S. Church History Seminar

The Reformation: Luther, Zwingli, the Anabaptists (1517-1559)

I. Ripe for Reformation: 15th-16th Century Roman Catholicism

A. The 15th Century Roman Catholic Church: Corrupt in Life and Doctrine

1 Timothy 4:16 “**Watch your life and your doctrine closely.**”

1. Corrupt in **life**: immorality and luxury among priests, monks, popes; political intrigues
2. Corrupt in **doctrine**: sacramentalism, purgatory, papal authority, justification by works

Martin Luther: “Others attack the false life of the church; I attack the false doctrines!”

B. Attempts at Reform

1. Girolamo **Savonarola**: (1452-1498)

- Italian reformer, Dominican monk
- Began to attack pope and college of cardinals for excesses
- Accused of heresy, convicted, hanged, body burned

2. Desiderius **Erasmus**: (c.1466-1536)

- Dutch Humanist scholar, Catholic “reformer”
- Criticized immorality, corruption of the church: wrote *Colloquies*, *In Praise of Folly*
- Greatest contribution: Greek New Testament used by all reformers
- Sly, subtle writer: “*Erasmus is slippery as an eel; only Christ can catch him.*” Luther

C. Europe Ready for Reform

1. Political landscape: rising nationalism
2. Worldview: Christopher Columbus’s earth-shattering discoveries
3. Renaissance: a new thirst for learning

D. A Tool for Reform: Gutenberg’s Invention, 1455

II. A Reformer Appears: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

A. Martin Luther's Spiritual Journey

1. The Vow: "Help me, St. Anne!! I shall become a monk!"
2. The Attempt at Self-Righteous "Monkery": strict Augustinian order
3. Total Despair: "Love God?! I hate Him!!"
4. Studying theology: "The truth will set you free..." Two Key Moments
 - Psalm 22:1 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
 - Romans 1:17 "The righteousness of God... 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Preface to Luther's Latin Writings, Wittenberg, 1545: *I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God" because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven. . . .* [translated by Roland Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 49-50]

B. The Building Project that Split the Church

1. St. Peter's Basilica & Archbishop Albert of Mainz's debt: NEED MONEY!
2. Indulgences: documents sealed with pope's authority for forgiveness of sins
3. Johann Tetzel: "As soon as the coin into the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!"

C. The Ninety-Five Theses

1. Nailed to door of Wittenberg Castle Church, October 31, 1517
2. Attacked indulgences, penance, and purgatory

62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

82-89 [questions of the laity] "If pope has power to free souls from purgatory, why doesn't he empty the place?" "If pope wants to build St. Peter's, why doesn't he use his own money, since he's richer than Crassus?"

D. Luther's Writings and Doctrine

1. Three "solas"

- a. *sola fide*: [justification] by faith alone
- b. *sola scriptura* [authority] by scripture alone
- c. *sola gratia*: [salvation] by grace alone

2. Key documents:

a. *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1517)

"There are two kinds of Christian righteousness, just as man's sin is of two kinds. The first is **alien righteousness**, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith, as it is written in 1 Cor. 1 [:30]: "*Whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*"...

Therefore this alien righteousness, instilled in us without our works by grace alone—while the Father, to be sure, inwardly draws us to Christ—is set opposite original sin, likewise alien, which we acquire without our works by birth alone. Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death.

The second kind of righteousness is our **proper righteousness**, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent properly in good works... slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self..."

b. *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility* (1520)

- Called on secular authorities to legislate the reforms that popes, bishops, cardinals had refused
- Church should relinquish worldly wealth and concentrate on spiritual ministries
- Destroyed the idea of a special class of priests; instead spoke of **priesthood of all believers**
- Three walls of Rome must fall like walls of Jericho: 1) spiritual power is above the temporal (i.e. priests work is important, lay people's work is not)... this destroyed by priesthood of all believers; 2) pope alone can interpret scripture: "Balaam's ass was wiser than the prophet himself. If God then spoke by an ass against a prophet, why should he not be able even now to speak by a righteous man against the pope?" 3) the pope alone can call a council (again, priesthood of all believers implies that any Christian can call a council, but especially civil power can)

- Made strong use of contrast between Christ and pope: Christ washing disciples' feet, pope having his feet kissed; Christ walking along dusty roads, pope being carried in a rich palanquin

c. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520)

- Radical attack on sacramental life of church
- Cut number of sacraments from seven to two (Lord's Supper and Baptism); removal of **confirmation** and **last rites** not so serious, though it reduced Roman Control over youth and death; elimination of **penance** very serious: this was the way forgiveness of sins was offered to medieval church people; (Luther simply said genuine repentance and simple confession to others is all scripture calls for... not the system of confession to a priest and contrition); rejection of **ordination** destroyed the caste system of clericalism that made the priests higher than the lay people; **marriage** also no longer seen to be a 'sacrament' as well; clergy should be permitted to marry because they need housekeepers, and to place a man and woman together under such circumstances is like placing straw near fire and expecting it not to burn!
- Most serious attack was on the mass itself; changed from "mass" to "Lord's Supper"... mass was seen to be repetition of Incarnation and Crucifixion and was central to entire Roman Catholic system... the sacrament was said to work on people *ex opere operato* (i.e. by a power all its own, whether the person understood or believed or not)...
- Luther said this made the sacrament something mechanical and magical; he focused on faith as the operative issue: *"I may be wrong on indulgences, but as to the need for faith in the sacraments I will die before I recant."*

d. *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)

- Two key propositions: 1) A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; 2) A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all
- The whole issue is hearing the Word of God with faith; The gospel actually creates faith in the heart; "The moment you begin to have faith you learn that all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful and damnable." A Christian is thus constantly penitent for sin
- Works of love directed toward others then follow faith naturally: "So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is the work of faith alone."

E. The Political Context

- Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Luther's prince and protector
- Death of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian; new emperor needed to be elected

- Pope secretly opposed both front-running candidates: Charles I of Spain, Francis I of France... Emperor's crown would make each too powerful; Pope favored Frederick of Saxony as a balance of power
- Pope also needed Frederick's help in military protection against advancing Turks
- Frederick eventually refused to be a candidate, thus sparing Charles I trouble; Charles became Emperor Charles V, but felt a debt to Frederick

F. The Steps to Explosion

1. The Dominican Assault (1518): Tetzels a Dominican, riled against Luther. Early assessment by Pope Leo—"Luther is drunken German. He will feel better in the morning when he is sober." "Friar Martin is a brilliant chap. The whole squabble due to the envy of the monks." [Dominicans vs. Augustinians]
2. Diet at Augsburg (Autumn, 1518): Tremendous danger for Luther; case transferred to Germany, but Luther feared execution; Elector Frederick the Wise (Saxony) promised Luther safe conduct (just as John Hus had been 100 years earlier); Cardinal Cajetan Rome's representative; meeting went badly; Luther wrote to friends "*The cardinal was no more worthy to handle the case than for a donkey to play a harp.*"
3. The Leipzig Debate (July, 1519): Johann Eck, skillful debater; maneuvered Luther to declare that a Christian with Scripture had more authority than popes and councils without the Scripture; Luther forced to declare that the council of Constance that had executed John Hus had been wrong; Eck asked, "Are you alone right, and all the rest of us wrong?"... a question that would haunt Luther; after debate, friends called Luther "the Saxon Hus"
4. The Papal Bull *Exsurge Domine* (June 24, 1520) "Arise, Lord, ... a wild boar has entered your vineyard..." Papal decree giving Luther 60 days to recant or he would be excommunicated; Luther burned it on December 10, 1520
5. Luther's Three Treatises (1520, above): complete breach with Rome; no turning back now
6. The Diet of Worms (April 16-17, 1521): Appeared before Emperor Charles V (staunchly Catholic) to defend his writings; before going, stated to his friends who were afraid for his life, "This is my recantation. Previously I said the pope is the vicar of Christ. I recant. I now say the pope is the adversary of Christ and an apostle of the devil." He stated he would go even if there were as many devils as tiles on the roof; crowds cheered him along the way as he came to Worms; Luther expected to debate his works, but was simply asked whether or not the stack of books on the table was his, and whether or not he recanted their teachings; Luther was taken aback... there would be no debate; Luther balked, asked for time—they granted him one night; during the night, he wrestled with the question, "Can it be, Martin, that you alone are right, and the church and all its teachers have been wrong for 1000 years?" The next day he was ready to make his reply:

Eck: "I ask you, Martin—answer candidly and without horns—do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors they contain?"

Luther: "Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. **Here I stand**... I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

Luther was excommunicated by the Diet of Worms

G. Luther at the Wartburg

- Given 21-day safe-conduct pass, Luther made his way back home
- Suddenly, on night of May 3, Luther was "kidnapped" by an unknown group of men
- They were actually sent by Frederick the Wise to save his life; men took him and hid him in the castle at Wartburg
- Luther used the time there very well, translating the Bible into native German tongue

H. Managing the Reformation

1. Faithfully preached the word week after week

Luther: "I did nothing, the Word did everything. I simply let the Word do its work; I simply taught and preached and wrote God's Word... And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends..., the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses on it. I did nothing. The Word did everything."

2. Opposed the Peasant's Revolt (1524-1525): wrote *Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants*
3. Opposed radical steps of reformation: wrote *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525)

Luther: "Take care of the idols in the heart, and the idols on the walls will take care of themselves."

4. Disputed with Erasmus on free will: wrote *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525); argued that the Apostle Paul plainly taught that sin has bound the will to be a slave to wickedness
5. Engaged in Sacramentarian Controversy with Ulrich Zwingli: Colloquy at Marburg
6. Married ex-nun Katie von Bora
7. Wrote hymns... like "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

III. The Swiss Reformation: Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

- A. Zwingli a Catholic priest in Glarus, Switzerland: saw need for involvement in political matters
- B. Priest at Einsiedeln (1516-1518)... immersed himself in Erasmus's Greek New Testament: little by little saw various problems with Catholic doctrine and practice
- C. Pastor at Zurich (1519-1531):
- began simply to preach Word of God... lectionary prescribed certain texts every week; he abandoned them and simply preached verse by verse through Gospel of Matthew
 - plague came to Zurich, almost one-third of population fell to it; Zwingli himself took ill and almost died; experience made him more openly dependent on God and more courageous in reformation
 - continued to preach clear messages from Scripture... even if it differed from practices found in the Catholic church
 - 1522: issues came to a head when some parishoners defied rules about eating meat during Lent, and Zwingli supported them by preaching a sermon on Christian freedom
 - Zurich's civil government defended him, but in so doing took church matters into their hands
 - January, 1523: convened a council to determine Zwingli's fate; on January 29, 1523: council decreed "That Mr. Ulrich Zwingli continue and keep on as before to proclaim the holy gospel and the pure holy scripture in accordance with his capabilities."
 - 1523-1525: debate continued, reforms expanded: priests and nuns renounced their vows and married; Catholic images removed completely from churches; Gospel simplicity in all things (worship, preaching, church decoration, etc.) was the unifying theme
 - Key break: Roman Catholic mass utterly repudiated in favor of simple service in which the central element was the preaching of the Word; "Lord's Supper" (not "mass") a simple memorial to aid Christians in remembering Christ
 - Reform movement spread throughout Switzerland, including French-speaking Geneva, paving the way for John Calvin's work there
 - Opposed Anabaptists: radical group who wanted to see reform happen even more rapidly and according to simple New Testament norms
 - Met Luther at Colloquy of Marburg (1529)... attempt at union with German reformation (see below)

- Died defending Protestant reformation against Catholic troops on October 11, 1531; this was only an early part of the Protestant-Catholic wars that would ravage Europe for the next hundred years

IV. The Failed Protestant Union: Marburg, 1529

- Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, brought Luther and Zwingli together; motive... to draw the Protestant movement together militarily, politically, and spiritually
- Meeting at Marburg focused on fifteen doctrinal issues
- Luther and Zwingli agreed on all but one: the Lord's Supper
- Zwingli saw it as "spiritual" reception of Christ's body... a mere memorial of Christ's death, a reminder of Christ's second coming
- Luther saw it as a true presence (different from transubstantiation, but very similar) of the Body of Christ; "Christ is present substantively, essentially, though not quantitatively, qualitatively, or locally."
- Argument got very heated: Luther wrote *hoc est corpus meum* ("This is my body") in chalk on a wooden table and pounded it with his fist; Zwingli said there are many metaphors in the Bible ("I am the vine," "I am the door for the sheep") and that John 6:63 ("The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" interprets the spirituality of Jesus' words "This is my body.")
- Luther refused to accept this: in the end would not even accept them as fellow believers: "You and I are of a different Spirit" he said to Zwingli and to Martin Bucer (Zwingli's fellow reformer)
- Yet, Luther's right-hand man, Philip Melancthon, saw the value of some kind of statement of concord
- They ended up signing a statement of their points of agreement

V. The Radical Reformation (Anabaptists)

- A. Grew from Zwingli's emphasis on simply reading of Greek New Testament
- B. Wanted more complete break with Rome: did not want to replace Rome with Zurich
 - Church should be governed by Scripture under illumination of Holy Spirit
 - Each church should be self-governing
- C. First issue of conflict: INFANT BAPTISM

- Dissenters, led by Conrad Grebel, argued with Zwingli on infant baptism... stated it was found nowhere in Scripture
- Wanted to make believer's baptism universal practice
- January 21, 1525: ordered by Zurich council to cease disputation
- Radical reformers saw it as merely another example of the power of the state to interfere with matters of conscience
- That snowy evening (January 21, 1525) they met and baptized one another; Grebel baptized Georg Blaurock, and Blaurock baptized Grebel and everyone else present... from this they would later receive the insulting name "Anabaptist" = "rebaptizer"
- Zurich Council ordered the Anabaptists to be drowned (1526), and many died as martyrs
- Over the next century the Anabaptists would be persecuted by every religious group in Europe: Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Swiss Reformed, etc.

D. Family of Faith

- From adult baptism came sense of church as community of faith
- Strong sense of believer's church emerged... "brother" or "sister" meant everything
- Community created by God who worked directly on each person's hearts to join voluntarily
- First to practice democracy in congregational rule

E. Separation of Church and State

- Common idea now... absolutely radical and terrifying then
- Sought to oppose any compulsion of the conscience by the state
- Balthasar Hubmaier: *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*: argued that the church must not use the powers of the state to kill heretics; but rather that heretical IDEAS should be destroyed and leave the fates of the heretics themselves to God... Hubmaier was eventually burned at the stake by Catholic authorities... his wife, who urged him to remain steadfast through his execution, was drowned

F. Pacifism

- Threat of Turks hung like a dark shadow over all Europe

- Anabaptists opposed use of force by any Christian
- Also opposed Christians getting involved in secular government or taking any vows

G. Menno Simons (1496-1559)

- Most recognizable leader and theologian
- Gave name to “Mennonites”
- Became Anabaptist through reflection on Lord’s Supper and events at Munster
- Doctrines made up profile of Radical Reformation: believer’s baptism, regenerate church membership, memorial view of Lord’s Supper, separation of church/state, pacifism, avoidance of government positions

H. The Munster Revolt (1536)

- Anabaptist extremists under John Matthys and Jan Van Leyden took control of Munster in Germany; expelled Catholic bishop
- Believed the end of the world was imminent; for them, it was... the expelled Catholic bishop raised an army and surrounded the city, besieging it; Matthys was killed
- Bizarre extremes were cult-like; declared the city “New Jerusalem”; Jan van Leyden declared to be King
- Anything not Biblical was destroyed; Old Testament ethics established: polygamy, capital punishment for doctrinal opposition
- Eventually some residents of “New Jerusalem” grew tired of the visionary excesses and opened the gates to the army
- The leaders were tortured and executed