

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation

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Introduction

The beginning and later growth of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was seen as a new challenge to religious authority that went beyond the Roman Catholic Church. Many viewed it as a threat to the whole social structure of society, from the monarch on down. As protest and dissent against the Church began to increase, several individuals would rise to prominence in Europe. These men would lead the Reformation and at the same time create a new religious structure within Christendom.

The development of a new Christian discourse of faith would produce a new religious theology and philosophy within Christianity. The new theology (talk about God) would not only open an expanding discussion concerning spiritual understanding and authority, it would also lead to decades of strife and conflict which would ultimately split the Church asunder. This new theology would also change the course of history and permeate much of what we have come to understand as Western culture.

Definitions

Catholic Church – meaning the universal church, one church over most of Christianity.

Reformation – refers to reform, a movement to change that which is seen as incorrect. Specifically, the 16th century movement toward religious change.

Protestant – refers to protest, the rising complaint against the Church's doctrine and practices. Meaning those that were to protest and eventually break with the Church.

Justification – acts that lead to freedom from blame or guilt derived from sin.

Remission – refers to the pardon of, or forgiveness of sins.

Penance – acts of contrition or punishments that one endures or performs to show regret of sin.

Purgatory – an existence between this life and eternal life in Heaven, where souls reside while they are cleansed of their residual sin from earthly life.

Indulgence – monetary payment made to absolve one from sin and to reduce the time spent in purgatory. Could as be purchased for the dead already in purgatory.

Ninety-Five Theses – a list of Martin Luther's questions regarding the doctrine and authority of the Catholic Church and an instruction to the faithful.

Papal bull – official letter of instruction issued by the Pope concerning a given subject.

liturgy – the form or order of religious services and worship.

Eucharist – refers to the act of Holy Communion as in the celebration of the "Last Supper".

Ecclesiastic – having to do with the affairs of the church and the clergy.

Absolution – the act of remission of sin as prescribed and authorized by the Church.

Cannon Law – refers to the basic beliefs and structures on the Church.

Deices and Archdiocese – refers to religious areas of jurisdictions of the Church.

Diet – refers to a religious legislature or council held to determine religious matters.

Martin Luther's Justification

Early in his life, Martin Luther dedicated himself to the monastic life. His joining of the Augustinian friary at Erfurt, Germany in 1505 would begin a journey that would eventually create the foundation for a new religious movement within Christendom. The Protestant Movement that he would lead in Germany would be repeated and duplicated throughout Europe, as a backlash began to grow against the corruption that many believed had come to represent the “old Church”. The growing *protest* against the *Catholic Church* (universal church) would lead to the call for *reform*. This would become the Protestant Reformation – the protest for reform.

The path that Luther had chosen would require a commitment and devotion to fasting, hours of prayer, and frequent confessions. His attempt to dedicate himself to this cause would lead to a growing understand of his own sinfulness. His own spiritual self-examination began to lead Luther into religious despair. To save him from his anguish, the Order directed Luther to initiate instruction in academics. Luther was soon ordained into the priesthood and in 1508, began teaching. In 1512, he was awarded a doctorate and was inducted into the theological faculty at the University of Wittenberg. It would be here that he would spend his career and begin to explore the many problems he saw plaguing the Church.

It was at Wittenberg that Luther began to question several of the doctrines of the Roman Church. His ideas of *penance* and *righteousness*, as well as *salvation* began to change from what his instruction had led him to believe. This became the basis of his “new conversion”. From this, Luther began to develop his own ideas and formulate them into a doctrine of *justification*. It is this understanding of justification that opened the divide between the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther.

By the 16th century the Catholic Church had entrenched and linked “membership” in the Church with salvation. The threat of “excommunication” was used as a weapon to keep followers in line and to punish those that had move outside the boundaries of conduct and actions set by the Church hierarchy. The Church taught that “it alone” was God’s instrument and representative on Earth and salvation could only be found by its means. Further, the Pope as the leader of the Catholic Church was by then declared as the “*Vicar of Christ*”, or his personal representative. Until the 5th century, this title had been reserved to describe the *Holy Spirit* sent to Christ’s Apostles to complete their religious training. Once the title was transferred to the pope, it began to imply an extraordinary holiness of supreme and universal primacy existed over all of Christendom in this office, in one human being

Challenging Indulgences

It was this “primacy of authority” that Martin Luther began to question and challenge. His doctrine of justification brought him to a completely different understanding of the origins of salvation. For Luther, salvation could not be found in membership within an institution, or in the hands of human beings. Rather, he saw it as a spiritual gift directly from God to the individual. His new understanding was that salvation was grounded in faith, and that this faith is what led to salvation through the grace of God. God’s grace was a sovereign favor that was irrespective of one’s actions or deeds. Grace was that enabling power, and essential gift given by God that would allow a person to secure their eternal salvation. According to Luther, that grace was not predicated on Church membership, or earthly works. It was a gift that had been bought on the cross by the death of Jesus of Nazareth. It was also only attainable through one’s faith in Jesus. In this scenario, the Roman Church lost its fundamental authority over salvation.

For Luther, the growing controversy over *indulgences* would set the stage for spiritual confrontation. The idea of *sin* referred to the human violation of moral rules. These moral rules were the code of conduct as decreed by God in his “holy scriptures”. When “sin” occurred, and it occurred at alarming rates, it would require some form of penance be carried out to absolve oneself, as a sign of repentance. It would be this action of penance and repentance and the subsequent corruption that would begin to evolve around it that would cause the crisis in the Catholic Church. This would fester into a growing protest and condemnation of indulgences.

By the 16th century the Catholic Church had expounded upon the scriptures as to what was acceptable for the *remission* of sin. The first step was through an *act of contrition* by which the sinner would pray for forgiveness. Beyond confession of sin and admission of guilt, the sinner would be expected to carry out some form of sacramental penance. The Church would then also offer the indulgence as a way to expand the merits of the Church. These were explained as being an extension of and a draw on the “storehouse of merit” acquired by Jesus’ sacrifice, and the virtues of the Saints. These later “virtues” were merits granted by God for the good works and prayers of the saints, according to the Church. Therefore a sinner could in effect use these instruments to gain *absolution* for their sins with the Catholic Church acting as their mediator before God.

But the controversy was much more involved than just the sale of indulgences. Martin Luther and others began to question the authority by which the Catholic Church based its belief in the buying and selling of indulgences. A greater question arose as to whether or not the Catholic Church had or could assume the authority to sell salvation. The Church argued that the indulgence was after the fact of confession and absolution and the indulgence was just a replacement for other penances. Regardless of the Catholic Church’s definition, many could not see the difference, and others did not feel there was one. One of these was Martin Luther, and his reaction was going to change the world of Christendom forever.

The Church also offered the indulgence as a way to remove *temporal punishment* that would otherwise have to be paid with time spent in *purgatory*. This was an existence somewhere between life on earth and eternal life in Heaven, where human souls would reside to become purified. The belief being that some good souls are not sin free and must spend time being cleansed before entering Heaven. This would then be

accomplished in *purgatory*, what Protestants began to refer to as God's "waiting room". The indulgence could then also be applied to these souls after the fact to eliminate their unseemliness and reduce their time in purgatory.

The selling of indulgences became a full time job for some within the Catholic Church. The whole affair was going to escalate around the new construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In 1517, the Dominican friar Johan Tetzel was appointed as commissioner of indulgences for all of Germany. His job would be to raise monies through the sale of indulgences for the construction that was taking place on St. Peter's Basilica. Tetzel was zealous about his job and commissioned wholesale retailing of indulgences. His commission would soon be hit with the accusation of selling indulgences for sins yet to be committed. By this time the indulgency controversy was full blown and Martin Luther was openly preaching against Tetzel and the sale of indulgences in general.

The Ninety-Five Theses

Luther would begin to write in condemnation of indulgences. His "Disputation of Martin Luther and the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" became the principle catalyst for the coming Protestant Reformation. This became known as the *Ninety-Five Theses* and was enclosed in a letter protesting indulgences that Luther wrote to Archbishop Albrecht in October of 1517. In the letter Luther questioned the granting of forgiveness through the sale of indulgences, which seemed to turn the matter into a commercial transaction rather than a genuine repentant of sin and change of heart. As Luther saw it, the Catholic Church had commercialized repentance. He doubted that absolution of sin could be bought, sold, and purchased as if it were goods for the benefit and disposal of the Church.

When Johann Tetzel was commissioned to sell indulgences in Germany by Pope Leo X, this did not immediately affect Martin Luther. The prince of each province had the right to allow or deny their sale in his territory. While these new indulgences for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica were not sold in Luther's province, his parishioners began to travel to provinces where they could buy them. Luther became outraged when his own congregation began to present indulgences they had purchased in their travels as documentation that their sins had been forgiven. He saw this as an abomination and violation of the whole idea of confession and penance and an offense to justification and salvation. According to Luther's new understanding of the scriptures, forgiveness could not be purchased, but rather was a free gift of God's mercy.

Luther then looked to open the debate by nailing a copy of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church. As church doors of the time acted as bulletin boards, this was not uncommon. It was an open invitation to have a scholarly public debate on the issues expounded upon in the theses. What happened next was extraordinary. Luther was said to have approached Church authorities and presented them with his Theses while calling for an immediate end to the work of the indulgence sellers. When the Church did not respond to his demands, he began to distribute the Ninety-Five Theses privately. Within two weeks time the Theses had spread like wildfire throughout Germany. Within two months time they had covered Europe after being translated into

Latin and pushed through printing presses in all the major nations. Martin Luther had ignited a powder keg that in turn was going to explode into an even greater event.

Among other things, Luther's Theses would call into question the limits of the pope's authority. Particularly, Luther questioned whether the pope could remit guilt of sin and whether it was possible to grant anyone the remission of all penalties. Luther further stated that the dying were freed from earthly penalties by their deaths. He then found those preachers that sold indulgences in error "who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved". Luther pointed out that any power the pope held in the matter was only through intercession as a gateway to God's grace, meaning the result of any intercession by the Church was granted by and held only in the authority and power of God alone. The Ninety-Five Theses left "condemnation" as the reward for those that believed their salvation was secure with their holding of these "letters of pardon". Luther went on to say that every repentant Christian has the right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without the letters of pardon, this being an act of God's mercy alone.

The second half of Luther's Theses set out instruction for Christians. Luther wanted Christians to understand that buying pardons did not compare to doing works of mercy, or to helping the poor and the needy. He wrote, "works of love not only are beloved in God's eyes, they help the man to grow toward spiritual purity." Where the pardoners persuaded individuals to give when they could not afford to, Luther suggested that Christians were bound to provide what was necessary for their own families first, then toward the needy, and not to squander this on pardons. Finally, he questioned why the pope, whose riches were greater than those of the richest individuals, did not build the basilica with his own money, rather than from the sale of indulgences to the poor?

The Ninety-Five Theses had asked questions and brought up points of contention that many had wanted to ask, but few had dared to. What Luther had done was become the voice for a growing discontent within the Catholic Church. Did the Church actually hold the keys to heaven as many felt it claimed to? Was the pope infallible? Did indulgences remove all sin? And was excommunication from the Catholic Church tantamount to eternal damnation? Luther had called the church into account, and for many the Church would be hard pressed to answer in a convincing manner.

For its part, the Catholic Church was slow in responding to Luther's call for an open debate. Cardinal Albrecht who had first received Luther's theses had them checked for any heresy before he forwarded them on to Rome. He would make no formal reply to the Theses, but would entrust that powers greater than he would come to his rescue. Albrecht was caught up in the use of indulgence monies himself. He had borrowed money to pay for his clerical advancement and with the pope's blessing was allowed to use half the monies collected from the sale of indulgences in his diocese of jurisdiction to pay these debts. When Luther threatened the sale of indulgences, he was also threatening the cardinal's assets.

Response of the Church

When the Ninety-Five Theses arrived in Rome, their reception was cold. Pope Leo X would act methodically while taking action and would respond to Luther's Theses by

ordering the vicar-general of the Augustine Order to place a ban of silence on its monks. This move was aimed at quieting the growing discontent without drawing unwarranted attention to the growing schism in the church. Luther responded by sending a personal letter of clarification of his Theses to the pope. The result of this was that Leo X then summoned Luther to appear before him in Rome. Before this occurred, an agreement was reached whereby Luther would meet with the pope's representative Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg, Germany. This was an attempt by the church to reign Luther in before anymore harm could be done. Meanwhile, Rome issued a *papal bull* obliging all Christians to acknowledge the pope's authority and power to grant indulgences. Neither of these efforts was successful in their attempts to intimidate Luther into recanting his writings.

After a year of unproductive negotiations, the pope issued the *Exsurge Domine* in 1520. This papal bull was a direct attack on Luther and ordered the withdrawal of some 41 theological errors the Church found contention with in his writings. Luther was given sixty days to comply with this new papal bull. Throughout Germany the papal bull was received with contempt. In several instances, the document was publicly burned. Luther himself set his own copy to flame along with several volumes of the Catholic Church's ecclesiastical *Canon Law*. The pope viewed this as a direct attack on his authority and responded by having Martin Luther excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

In 1521, Leo X issued a *Decet Romanun Pontificem* banishing Luther from the Church. The matter was then turned over to secular authorities and Luther was ordered to appear before the *Diet of Worms*. This was a general assembly of the Holy Roman Empire conducted in May of that same year. Emperor Charles V personally directed the assembly. Luther was to address the assembly concerning whether he had authored the various writings attributed to him and if he espoused their contents. Fearing for Luther's safety, the *Elector* Prince Frederick III of Saxony secured an assurance that Luther would receive free passage to and from the assembly. Luther's arrival in Worms set the stage for the theological showdown that was to follow.

Johann Eck, a former friend of Luther's turned enemy, represented the Empire as the assistant to the Archbishop of the *archdiocese*. Eck had been responsible for the delivery of several papal bulls regarding Luther. Upon questioning, Luther refused to recant or retract any of his writings on grounds that by both the Holy Scripture and his own conscience as led by God, he was determined to stand firm by his beliefs. The assembly then moved to confidential conferences to render its decisions. These conferences would last several days before sentence would be passed regarding Luther's fate. In the end the verdict pronounced upon Martin Luther was to be most severe. He was declared to be a *heretic* and an outlaw. His literature was to be banned, and he was to be arrested. It also became a crime for anyone within the empire to give Luther safe haven. Further, the assembly sanctioned the death of Martin Luther with no legal consequences under the law. In the eyes of many the Church was now forgiving the used secular authorities to condone murder.

The final proclamation of the assembly became known as *The Edict of Worms* and all but put a bounty on Luther's head. To protect him, Prince Frederick had Luther secretly removed to Wartburg Castle where he would live in exile for the next year. It was here that he continued his doctrinal attacks on the Catholic Church, expanding these to include required confessions and the Church's interpretation of "good works". It was

during this time that Luther also translated the New Testament into German, allowing for the expanded reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular. His translation would soon increase individual reading of the Bible and bring many more to question what the Church taught, as opposed to what they read in the scriptures.

Growing Protest Toward Reform and the Internal Dispute

By 1522, Luther's writings had started a wave of reform and instigated disorder and revolt within his own Augustinian Order, and in towns across Germany. As the situation deteriorated and civil unrest increased, Luther felt compelled to come out of hiding and he secretly returned to Wittenberg. He delivered several sermons on the value of patience and freedom, condemning the previous violence and calling on the townspeople to put their faith in God to deliver reform. His return had immediate results in restoring order and acted as a conservative voice within the "reform movement". He advocated moderation within the new movement's practices, setting the basis for what by then had become the *Protestant Reformation* in Germany.

Control of the Holy Roman Empire had come into contention between the Emperor and the pope by the 1520's. With the crowning of Charlemagne, the Catholic Church had laid claim to religious authority as well as power over secular rulers of the empire. Charles V's power within the German states was limited by that of the provincial princes, opening the door for reform with the assembly of the *First Diet of Speyer*. The Diet was held in the summer of 1526 to address the advancing Protestant Reformation and the implementation of the Edict of Worms. Among other things, the edict made it a crime to spread or teach the writings and beliefs espoused by Martin Luther. One by one, German Protestant princes profess their new beliefs to the Diet. While the Diet of Speyer was not convened to annul the Edict of Worms, it had a similar effect in Germany. The Diet unanimously concluded that every province held the right to live, rule and believe as it may, in hopes of being answerable only to God.

In the German provinces of the Holy Roman Empire, this gave each prince the temporary right to act as he pleased in regard to religious reform until a general meeting of the Emperors Council could be held. This would not happen for twenty years, and in the meantime the princes moved to advance Protestantism under the privilege of independent action. Luther understood the ruling as having given him temporary acquittal of the charge of heresy. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V did not officially contest the Diet of Speyer, even though he opposed granting religious tolerance to Protestants.

By this time the Reformation had spread to other lands as well, where discontent with the Roman Catholic Church and its practices had raised the protest for reform. In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli became the catalyst for change when he raised issues with the custom of fasting, clerical marriage, and the use of iconic images. Zwingli began to develop a new *liturgy* for communion in place of the Catholic mass. Zwingli's beliefs began to spread throughout the Swiss Confederation and divided it along religious lines. War in the Confederation would narrowly be averted. By 1522, Zwingli had publicly confronted Catholic authority by publishing his ideas concerning the corruption within the church's ecclesiastical hierarchy.

As the Reformation charged forward, disputes within the protestant movement would demand change, leading to arbitration. In 1529, the *Marburg Colloquy* was called to order to close the ranks. More to the point, the conference was called to address growing political concerns of unity, but at the heart of this issue was the need for religious harmony. A unified Protestant theology was needed to reconcile the differing views within the movement, particularly between Luther and Zwingli. The two sides were to find consensus on fourteen points of dispute. However, they would leave the conference with divergent views concerning the *Eucharist*.

The sacrament of Holy Communion in remembrance of the Lord's Supper was the one point the two sides could not agree upon. Luther believed the sacraments of bread and wine were united with Christ's body and blood for all communicants, while Zwingli held them to be only symbols of the two. Lutherans would leave the conference refusing to acknowledge Zwingli and his followers as true Protestants, but an overall consensus had been reached. The meeting had produced an alliance within Protestant ranks while strengthening the emperor's position against the threat of Roman Catholic forces.

The Reformation Spreads

England would see Henry VIII break with the Roman Catholic Church, although for much different reasons. In 1525, Henry VIII looked to have his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled. When the pope refused to allow the annulment, the king then looked to the theological universities and Parliament in an attempt to challenge papal supremacy over religious matters. Parliament responded by passing a series of legislations, which little by little began to strip the Catholic clergy in England of its power. Finally, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy in 1534, declaring Henry VIII the supreme authority over the church in England. The king thus became the head of the Church in England. Henry VIII was also given control of church finances and appointments. This new Anglican Church, headed by appointments of Henry's choosing annulled his previous marriage and then moved with Parliament to validate Henry's marriage to his mistress Ann Boleyn. Pope Clement VII responded by having Henry VIII excommunicated. This was an act after the fact, given that Henry had already been declared the head of his own church, therefore having already removed "himself" for the Roman Church.

Protestantism in England would see a reversal in its royal acceptance after the death of Henry VIII. His son Edward VI, now the second Protestant king of England would die at age fifteen, and after a brief power struggle, Mary Tudor, Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon would assume the throne. Being a staunch Roman Catholic, Mary reconciled England with Rome. She then worked through Parliament the passage of several "Marian Religious Acts" that effectively restored Catholicism in England and reinstate several "Heresy Acts". Queen Mary then began a series of persecutions that would last nearly four years and see the execution of many leading Protestants, several hundred being burned at the stake. She would eventually be known as "Bloody Mary" among English Protestants.

With Mary Tudor's death, another of Henry's daughters assumed the throne. Elizabeth I would see the reinstatement of the "Supremacy Act" making her head of the

Church. Elizabeth then moved to reestablish the Protestant Anglican Church as the official religious authority in England. Pope Pius V then had Elizabeth excommunicated. This act released Catholics from their allegiance to the queen, but put them in danger of being traitors if they acted upon this. An uneasy tolerance settled over England in the ensuing years and Catholics were subject to monetary fines, imprisonment, and even execution if they showed any objection to the Queen's secular authority. In the following centuries, Catholics were to be viewed with suspicion in England, as Catholic forces in Europe would repeatedly support plots in an attempt to place a Catholic ruler back on the throne of England.

In France, John Calvin was going to become the catalyst for the Protestant reform movement. Trained as a lawyer, Calvin began to question his Catholicism and in 1536 published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This moved to set in place a theocratic structure for the Protestant Church, and a process for Protestant Christian instruction. As leader of the *Huguenot* movement in France, Calvin directed the attack against Catholic beliefs in rituals, purgatory, saints, hierarchy, and the pope's worldly kingdom. First from Geneva, Calvin would begin to support the Huguenot church before moving to Strasburg. He viewed the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchy as a mockery of God's grace, and a human tyranny over Christianity. The Protestant break with the Catholic Church in France would lead to decades of religious wars. Peace was finally found in the *Edict of Nantes* in 1598, which granted religious and political freedom to Protestants in France under Henry of Navarre. This edict of toleration would remain in place until Louis XIV came to power nearly one-hundred year later.

As a protégé of John Calvin's in Geneva, John Knox would first rise to prominence in the Church of England as a clergyman after his exile from Scotland. With the rise of Mary Tudor and the brief restoration of Catholicism in England, Knox moved to the continent to avoid prosecution. His *First Blast of the Trumpet* was a protest against the "unnatural" rule of women, which under Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart he viewed to be wicked and tyrannical. With his return to Edinburgh, Scotland, Knox would become a leader of the Scottish Revolution against the Catholic regency in 1560. As one of the authors of the *Scotts Confession*, Knox was instrumental in the Scottish Parliament's abolishing the jurisdiction of the pope in Scotland and banning the celebration of Mass there. The establishment of the Church of Scotland led to the formation of reformed theology in Scotland and the foundation of Presbyterianism.

Throughout the 16th century, Protestantism would come to be widely embraced in Scandinavia as well. In Sweden and Finland, the Vatican began to lose its control by the late 1500's as a break between the king and the pope developed over *ecclesiastical* affairs. The crown had taken control of church property, church appointments, and placed the clergy under civil law, successfully yielding to the endorsement of Protestant ideals. Denmark, Norway, and Iceland were ruled by the same monarch, and as the throne of Denmark moved out of Catholic hands and into those of the Protestant Christian III, a reformation of the official state church took place. By the middle of the 16th century the majority of Scandinavians claimed to be Protestants.

The Thirty Year War and the Peace of Westphalia

When Charles V was replaced as Holy Roman Emperor, the alliance of Protestant princes was strengthened. In Germany, the signing of the Peace of Augsburg officially ended the religious struggles and confirmed the legal and permanent division of Christendom within the empire. The agreement in 1555, now allowed the princes too permanently choose their religious affiliation within their controlled domains. It also successfully gave Protestantism official status within the empire as well. The agreement also effectively removed the threat of heresy. While not all Protestants were covered under the agreement, the majority of German Lutherans now had security under its jurisdiction.

The Protestant Reformation which had started with Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses had now swept across Europe and entrenched itself, making a clean break from the Roman Catholic Church and the pope's authority. The struggle would continue for another hundred years and culminate with the Thirty Years War. Beginning in 1618, Europe erupted in open warfare over the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Church would sanction military action in its efforts to crush Protestantism. The German provinces would become an "open battlefield" for religious supremacy.

By 1648, almost every major European power had become involved. The impact of the war would devastate the peoples of Europe. Some areas in Germany would see two-thirds of their populations killed. The greater powers of Europe would ravage Germany. As the war waged on, in many instances, the warfare had less to do with religious affairs, and more to do with conquest and their "grab for power". By the end of the war the dominance of the Emperor had been severely curtailed, the authority of the pope had been all but eliminated.

In 1648, the *Peace of Westphalia* would end the religious wars in Europe and validated religious freedom for Protestants. By that time, Europe had been torn apart, the German provinces had seen the destruction of half its population in some provinces, and the Church had permanently been divided.

Conclusion

Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses had started a religious revolution. From the time he first began to question Church authority, to when he nailed the Theses to the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg he had only wanted answers. When none were forthcoming, he tried to drive the Church to change, and when this was rebuked he stripped the church's authority over him. His protest for reform had soon begun to inspired other to do likewise. This in turn had sparked not only a call for reform, but a demand for religious change.

The Protestant church's calendar is filled with "Holy Days", but none are more central to its existence than that of October 31, known as Reformation Day. On this day, Protestantism celebrates Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses. The document is heralded

as the beginning of the end to the Catholic Church's claim to control of all religious affairs, and to what many of that time saw as its claim to control over salvation.

The Protestant Reformation would change Christianity from a religion with one omnipotent power, the Catholic Church, to now encompass a myriad of new beliefs using a separate Protestant context. That context is based on differing scriptural interpretations, not only different than that of the Roman Catholic Church, but in many instances different from one another. This pluralism has continued to this day and can be found in the great number of denominations within Protestantism, and those that stand outside of that framework as well.

The Reformation also changed the face of Europe. It served to also release the growing social and political discontent of the time. Kings and princes began to move away from the authority of the Catholic Church as well. The sweeping changes that occurred were resisted and religious wars were fought for nearly one-hundred years before there was religious toleration, recognition, and reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants.

The Protestant Reformation stands today as a testament to men's desire to find a greater understanding of the "Scriptures" and of God. The Protestant Reformation also stands as a reminder that when one omnipotent authority claims supremacy over the affairs of men, whether they be religious or secular, it is in the interest of all men to question where that authority is derived from, and whether it is just, and/or mistaken.

Questions

1. *What factors led Martin Luther to write his Ninety-five Theses, and was he looking to start a new religious movement?*
2. *How did the Church first react to Luther's accusations and demands for change? According to Luther's theses, what abuses was the Church responsible for?*
3. *What part did Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox play in the spread of the Protestant Reformation throughout Europe?*

Further Readings and Credits

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