

*"FAITH IN CRISIS:
LUTHER & THE SEARCH FOR CERTAINTY"*



*Presented by Drs. Robert Sinner & Dana Fearon
For Presbyterian church of Lawrenceville
Institute for Christian Living
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The "Ominous" Year 1500



As the world neared the year 1500, warnings about the imminent end of the age were particularly prevalent. From the Atlantic to the Urals, fear of the end gripped entire populations. People were consumed with religious foreboding -scared to death about the future! Many felt that great cataclysms were about to engulf the world. They believed that the return of Jesus Christ would soon come to pass. Then, as now, many Christians were preoccupied with prophetic speculations and calendrical omens. They were looking for signs of the end-and thought they had found them.

Historical Forces Which Shaped Luther's World

The burning question was, "How can I avoid the sword and earn the lily?" This is the Era of Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Copernicus, and Columbus. It was Exciting, harsh, and violent times. It was an age of death, but it was also an age of pilgrimages, saints, and relics.

"The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse" were very real to all people. The "End of Times" was approaching!



DEATH: Life expectancy was low

Famine: Frequent droughts and Famines/ food shortages (1490s)

A local drought, a terribly wet spring, or an early frost



Pestilence: The Great Plague (14th & 15th centuries)

In Strasbourg, to take one local example, it took the lives of 16,000

of the 25,000 inhabitants and left deserted 300 villages in the region.



War:

**The CRUSADES: Memory & Arrival of Ottoman Turks
Popes vs. HR Emperors Struggles
HR Emperors vs. Princes of the Empire
Hapsburg vs. Valois struggle ... and More ...**

<<<< IN DETAIL >>>>

Time of Troubles - The 15th century was an era seething with unrest and confusion, calamity and adversity. Many Christians came to believe that persons, trends and events in the contemporary world could be identified in the imagery of the book of Revelation.

Among them were:

Disturbing Images - Late medieval art conveyed the vividness and horror with which apocalyptic things were perceived. Visual representations of *Revelation's* imagery appeared frequently in the art of the time, when fear of the *Last Judgment* preyed on people's minds.



Perhaps the best example

is the work of **Albrecht Dürer** (1471-1528), a German painter/ engraver. Most famous among Dürer's apocalyptic drawings are "*The Woman of Abomination*," "*St. Michael Fighting the Dragon*," "*The Opening of the Fifth and Sixth Seals*," and "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*."

Plagues still stalked Europe at the time. Plagues of various types ravaged the European continent throughout the 15th century. One among many was a devastating syphilis epidemic that began in Naples in 1495 and spread (by French soldiers) all over Europe. In Strasbourg bubonic plague took the lives of 16,000 of the 25,000 inhabitants and left deserted 300 villages in the region.

Famines Adverse weather conditions and poor harvests bred famines in wide areas. A local drought, a terribly wet spring, or an early frost could force grain prices up as much as 150 percent over the previous year. Many people were reduced to begging for food. The entire decade of the 1490s was a period of severe famine throughout Germany.

Peasant Revolts:

Peasants often sought recourse for grievances not in the courts but with fists, knives, and clubs. ***Beggars and the homeless***—which included many maimed, insane, and mentally retarded—were so numerous that authorities on the west bank of the Rhine would periodically round them up and drive them into the Black Forest. There was also **a frustrated rising Middle Class developing** at this time. Luther's family was one of these.

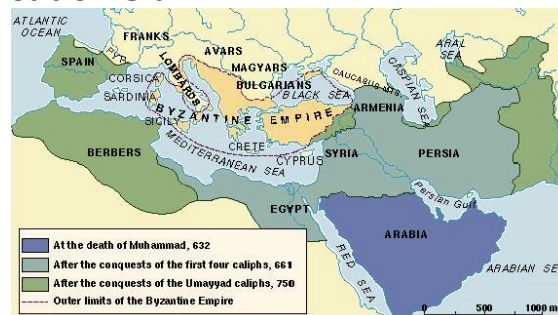
Martin's father changed their family name from Luder to Luther.

War and Unrest. In **England**, the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) had devastated the countryside. Across the Channel, **France** was still reeling from the ***Hundred Years' War*** (1337-1453) with England. The country had been laid waste and reduced to anarchy.

In **Germany**, a muddle of duchies, archduchies, baronies, counties and free cities, rampant civil disorder kept the land in constant turmoil.

The Italian peninsula fared no better. Divided into a jumble of separate and often warring city-states, it also became the battleground on which rival nations fought out their quarrels. In 1494, the French invaded Italy and foreign armies ravaged the already beleaguered peninsula.

The External Threat of Islam



In 1453, the **Ottoman Turks** captured the Christian stronghold of Byzantium (Constantinople), ending the Eastern Roman Empire. The "godless hordes" of Islam now threatened the continent of Europe itself! Muslims were already in control of the Holy Land-an ominous sign to many.

The "Shape" of the World was changing as Adventurers explored the coasts of Africa & Asia and encountered the New World, although not a single Luder was aware of Columbus's voyages. None knew of the glories of Renaissance art and literature until much later.

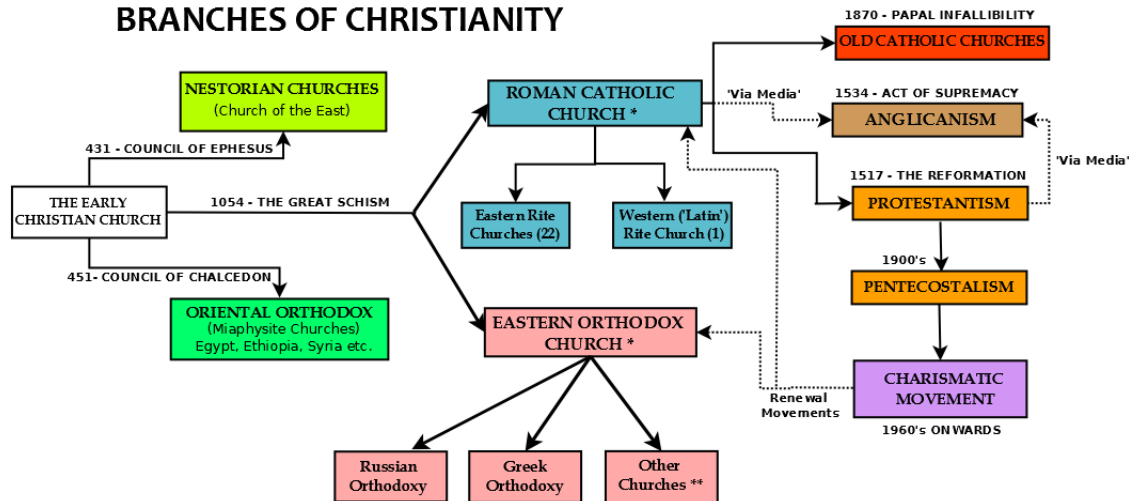
Superstition Satanic Activity and fear of witchcraft created widespread hysteria throughout Europe. A bull of Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 declared Germany to be "*full of witches.*"

Renaissance Impact: Both the Italian & Northern Renaissances affected Germany. The Pope's patronage was extremely expensive, the Medici popes in particular. Rebuilding Rome led to taxing the north, which increased sales of Indulgences & Peter's Pence. Northern Humanists such as Thomas More and Erasmus pushed for reform in both church and society.

Technological development, especially the **advent of printing**. Had revolutionary impact on communications. **Mass Propaganda** came into being. About the year 1450, **Johann Gutenberg** began using a system of movable type in his printing shop in Germany. During the next few decades, printers appeared in virtually every country in Europe. Printing cut the cost of bookmaking by nearly 80 percent. By 1500, Europe possessed an estimated 9 million books, compared to fewer than 100,000 handwritten manuscripts a half-century earlier.

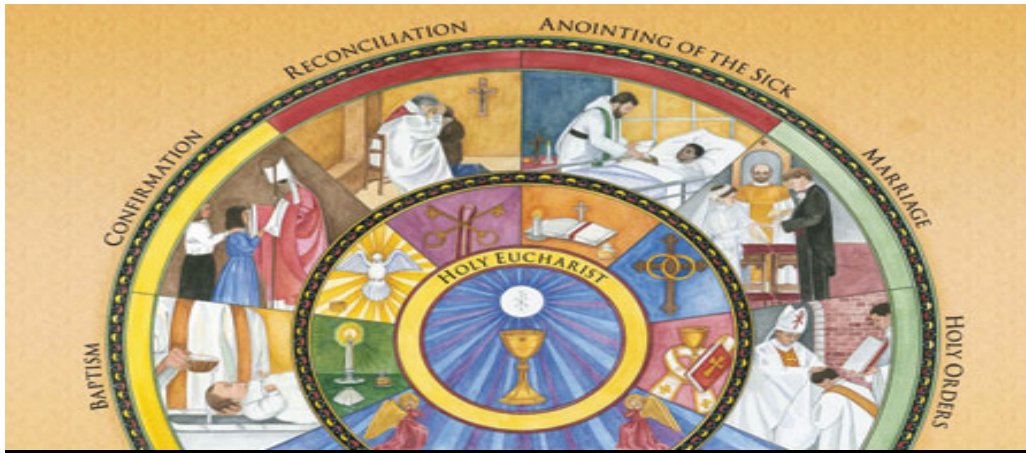


BRANCHES OF CHRISTIANITY



* Both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches claim the title of the 'One True Church'.

** There are several other autonomous and autocephalous churches within Eastern Orthodoxy.



The Sacraments of the Western Medieval Christian Church

BAPTISM: *Holy baptism holds the first place among all the sacraments* because it is the gate of spiritual life, for by it we are made members of Christ and of the body of the Church.

CONFIRMATION: *The second sacrament is confirmation.* The material is the chrism made from oil, which signifies purity of conscience, and from balsam, which signifies the odor of fair fame; and it must be blessed by the bishop. The form is: "I sign thee with the sign of the cross and confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

THE EUCHARIST: *The third sacrament is the Eucharist.* The material is wheaten bread and wine of the grape, which before consecration should be mixed very sparingly with water.

PENANCE: *The fourth sacrament is penance. There are three parts to penitence:*

The first part is contrition of the heart, where the sinner must grieve for the sins he committed.

Second comes confession with the mouth, to which it pertains that the sinner should make confession to his priest of all the sins he holds in his memory.

The third is satisfaction for sins according to the judgment of the priest.

The benefit of this sacrament is absolution from sins.

EXTREME UNCTION: *The fifth sacrament is extreme unction*, and the material is oil of the olive, blessed by a bishop. This sacrament shall not be given to any except the sick who are in fear of death.

ORDINATION: *The sixth sacrament is ordination.* The material for the priesthood is the cup with the wine and the paten with the bread. The form for priests is this: "*Receive the power to offer sacrifice in the Church for the living and the dead, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*" The regular minister of this sacrament is a bishop.

MATRIMONY *The seventh sacrament is matrimony*, the type of the union of Christ and the Church, according to the apostle who said, "This is a great mystery" [*Eph. 5:32 - In the Vulgate Paul's word "mysterion" is translated "sacramentum"*] The benefits in marriage are: **first**, the begetting of children and their bringing up in the worship of the Lord; **secondly**, the fidelity that husband and wife should each maintain toward the other; **thirdly** the indissoluble character of marriage, for this typifies the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church.

Source: James Harvey Robinson, ed., Readings in European History: Vol. I: (Boston: Ginn and co., 1904), 348-54 [from Denzinger-Schönmetzer, Enchiridion, 1310-27]

15th Century Religious Anarchy

Contempt for the leadership of the church was becoming increasingly widespread

Many popes, cardinals, bishops and priests led corrupt and immoral lives, neglecting church affairs in pursuit of pleasures

Some dared suggest that *the "Antichrist"* had usurped the papal throne.

Educated people were reexamining the whole fabric of their religious beliefs.

Major Church Abuses included:

Simony

Pluralism

Absenteeism

Usury

Sale of Relics

Sale of Indulgences

MATERIALISTIC POPES AND CLERGY

Borgia pope Alexander VI

Julius II, the Warrior Pope

Leo X & Clement VII, the De Medici popes

PRIOR HISTORY OF ATTEMPTED REFORMS

Wycliffe & the Lollards

Hus & the Hussites

Savonarola & Florence

MEDIEVAL WORLD & ROMAN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Authority came from:

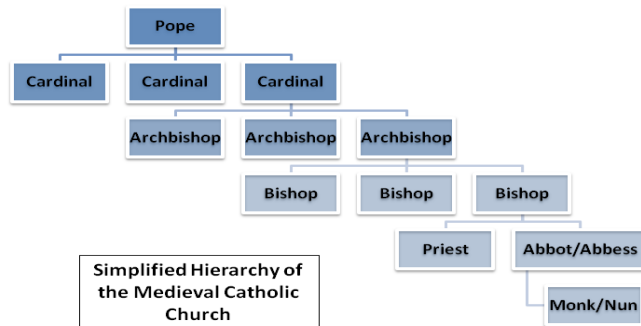
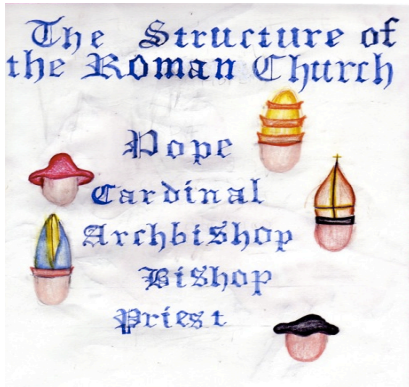
Tradition,

Ecclesiastical Authority (Papacy & Councils)

& Scripture

A Hierarchical System:

Pope – Cardinals – Archbishops – Bishops – Priests



THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS



CLERICAL POWER & PROBLEMS

The Clergy as Necessary Intermediaries

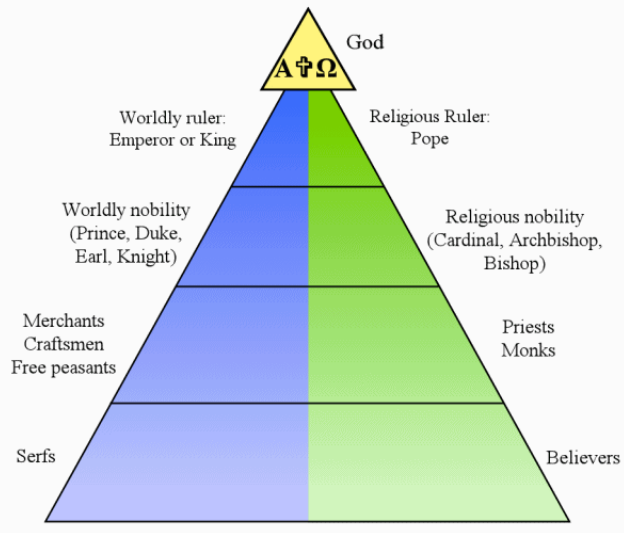
Roles of Secular & Regular Clergy

Problem of the Great Schism of 1054

Two Pyramids & the Conflict with Secular Authorities



Medieval social structure
(Worldly and Christian order determined by God)



SECULAR POWER

While the pope was the head of the Western Church, he had to share authority in Western Europe with The Holy Roman Emperor, who was the head of the Holy Roman Empire, a multi-ethnic, complex union of territories in Central Europe (962 to 1806). The Emperor was elected by powerful princes. How much power the Emperor had versus the princes, bishops and the pope was a fluctuating issue.

INDULGENCES, TETZEL & LUTHER



WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?

Examining “The 95 Theses:” What Luther Wrote

Some assume that Martin Luther’s “**95 Theses**” formed a bold ‘declaration of independence’ from the Church of Rome? Was it so? Not really; at least not intended as such. When he wrote nearly 100 debate points in Latin, he was simply inviting fellow academics to a “*Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*,” (the official title the theses). The debate was never even held, but the theses were translated into German and distributed widely, creating a larger debate that would divide Christendom.

What were indulgences? In the sacrament of penance, Christians confessed sins and received absolution for them. The process of penance involved satisfaction—paying the temporal penalty for the sins committed. In certain circumstances, one who was truly contrite and had confessed his sins could receive partial (but, rarely complete) remission of the assigned temporal punishment. This was done by purchasing a letter of indulgence from The Church.

In the 95 Theses, Luther condemned the abuse of indulgences, especially the recent sales by Dominican friar Johann Tetzel, but not the concept of penance or even the indulgence concept itself. But in the process, although probably not fully aware of doing so, Luther knocked down the pillars supporting many of the practices in medieval Christianity.

Samples of theses Luther wished to debate (paraphrased):

- #1. *When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says, “Repent ye,” etc., he means that the entire life of the faithful should be one of repentance.*
- #2. *This command cannot be met by the sacrament of penance administered by the priesthood (i.e. of confession and satisfaction) alone.*
- 27. *The priests preach human folly when they state that as soon as “money in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs.”*
- 32. *Those who believe they are saved because of their letters of indulgence will be eternally damned, as will be their teachers.*
- 36. *Any Christian who truly repents has plenary (full) forgiveness both of punishment and of guilt bestowed on him without need of any letter of indulgence.*
- 37. *Every true Christian shares in all the benefits of Christ and the Church, for God has granted him these, not because of any letters of indulgence.*
- 45. *Christians should be taught that to buy an indulgence rather than helping a person in need, obtains not salvation, but the displeasure of God.*
- 51. *Christians should be taught that the pope ought and would give his own substance to the poor, from whom preachers of indulgences extract money, even if he had to sell St. Peter’s Cathedral to do it.*
- 81. *This shameless preaching of pardons makes it hard to defend the pope’s honor.*
- 82. *“Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love ... for after all, he has released many souls for the sake of money contributed for building a cathedral?”*
- 94. *We should encourage Christians to follow Christ through punishment, death, and hell.*
- 95. *And so let them set their trust on entering heaven through many tribulations rather than some false security and peace.*

Within two months, Johann Tetzel fired back with his own theses, including: “Christians should be taught that the Pope, by authority of his jurisdiction, is superior to the entire Catholic Church and its councils, and that they should humbly obey his statutes.”

