

## Lecture 2 – “The Mouse that Roared”: The Context of the Reformation

“How shall we labour with any effect to build up the church, if we have no thorough knowledge of her history, or fail to apprehend it from the proper point of observation? History is, and must ever continue to be, next to God’s word, the richest fountain of wisdom, and the surest guide to all successful practical activity. To reject her voice is to rob ourselves of our own right to exist, or, at least, to condemn our own life; since we owe to her, in fact, whether we choose to do so or not, all that we can become.” Philip Schaff

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’” Ezekiel 34:2b

### Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 1, pp. 6-10

### Prayer

From Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*

“O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens which cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man; but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Our Father, who art in heaven;

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts; as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation;

But deliver us from evil;

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

We give thee thanks, Lord God, our Father, for all thy benefits, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.”

Luther: “Always make a good and hearty ‘Amen,’ and never doubt that God hears you and says ‘Yes!’ to your prayer. Further, always bear in mind that you are not standing or kneeling alone but the whole of Christendom is standing or kneeling with you. It is the Word of God and His promise which makes good your prayer, not your own devotion.”

## “The Mouse that Roared”: The Context of the Reformation

October 31, 1517 (“the first public act of the Reformation”—B. B. Warfield)

### I. Political Context

#### A. Saxony in Germany

1. Frederick the Wise (1463-1525)

2. Holy Roman Empire

a. Elected ruler (House of Hapsburg)

b. Charles V (became emperor in 1519)

Maximillian (Hapsburg) = Mary (Netherlands)

Philip = Joanna (Spain)

Charles

## B. Spain

1. Isabella (Castile) and Ferdinand (Aragon)
2. Strongly Catholic

## C. France

1. Strong and centralized
2. Francis I (became king in 1515)

## D. England

1. War of Roses
2. House of Tudor (Henry VII); Henry VIII (became king in 1509)

## E. Italy

1. Five major regions—Venice, Milan, Florence, Papal States, and Naples
2. Pope Leo X (1513-21)
  - a. “The Renaissance Six” (Barbara W. Tuchman, *The March of Folly*)
    - 1) Sixtus IV (1471-84)—Sistine Chapel
    - 2) Innocent III (1484-92)
    - 3) Alexander VI (1492-1503)—In Rome “gold, force and Venus rule” (the Augustinian General)
 

[“An accidental pope” Pius III ruled 26 days]
    - 4) Julius II (1503-12)—“The warrior pope,” the new St. Peter’s, Fifth Lateran Council
    - 5) Leo X (1513-21)—Fifth Lateran Council ended
 

[Reforming Cardinal Adrian of Utrecht ruled a year and two weeks]
    - 6) Clement VII (1523-34)

## F. Birth of Nationalism

## II. Social Context

- A. Growth of towns and cities
- B. New money economy

## III. Intellectual Context

- A. Universities
- B. Printing—Gutenberg Bible printed at Mainz in 1455

## IV. World Context

- A. Discoveries of the Western powers—Portugal and Spain (*points 1-3 are not on CD*)
  1. Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal (1394-1460)
  2. Columbus (1492)—America
  3. Balboa (1513)—Pacific Ocean
  4. Magellan (1519-22)—circumnavigated the globe
- B. Decline of Christianity in Asia: Two small circle of survival—northern hills of eastern Syria and India on the Malabar Coast. Why did Asian Christianity come so near to extinction?
  1. Geographical isolation
  2. Chronic numerical weakness
  3. Persecution
  4. Encounter with formidable Asian religions
  5. Ethnic introversion
  6. Dependence upon the state
  7. Church’s own internal divisions

“No single one of the above reasons can be taken by itself as a definitive answer [to the question of why the church in Asia came so close to total collapse], and not even all of them taken together are sufficient...*There are times when history can only be described, not explained*, and perhaps the history of Christianity in Asia is best left as one of the mysteries of the providence of God” (Moffett, 509).

## C. Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1454

“Beset by an advancing Islam in the East, having lost the larger proportion of its wide—flung communities in Asia, and suffering from corruption and indifference in the church which represented it in the West, in 1500 Christianity did not seem to face a promising future” (Latourette, *The History of the Expansion of Christianity 2*: 341)

## V. Religious Context

A. “Thus now in God’s church *tutto va al contrario*.”

1. Money
2. Relics
3. Indulgences

## B. Despair

1. No real answers—*Kolde’ Mirror* (1470)

“There are three things I know to be true that requently make my heart heavy. The first troubles my spirit because I will have to die. The second troubles my heart more, because I do not know when. The third troubles me above all. I do not know where I will go.”

## 2. No true peace—Heinrich von Kettenbach

“Brother Heinrich, how can I find peace of conscience? I suffer so much in my heart, and I find no release for my suffering and anxiety in confession, prayer, the mass, pilgrimages, or penance—in no work under the sun.”

## VI. The Ninety-five Theses

Martin Luther: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point at which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all battlefields besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

## A. Luther’s purpose is to contrast the Bible’s teaching with what the church requires.

1. Philip Schaff—Luther’s theses do not protest “against indulgences, but only against their abuse”; “more Catholic than Protestant”
2. B. B. Warfield—Revolutionary: Luther’s theses attack not only the abuses of indulgences, not only the theory of indulgences, but the whole sacerdotal conception of salvation; “remainders of Romanism...very few and very slight” (see thesis 69, 71, and 73, but note correcting assertions in 70, 72, and 74)

Warfield: “The strength and purity of the evangelicalism of the Theses is manifested in nothing more decisively than in their clear proclamation of the dependence of the soul for salvation on the mere grace of God alone.”

**Questions from Class**

What did the Pope’s army do with the Ottomans?

From where did the doctrine of purgatory come?

Were many of the problems because the nations were negotiating with the Ottoman Empire?

What happened to the Indian and Syrian Christians that remained (in Asia)?

**For Further Study**

\**The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (4 vols.)

A new reference work which covers the complete range of religious and social changes wrought by the Reformation—including not only issues of church polity and theology but also related developments in politics, economics, demographics, art and literature

A. Read the Ninety-Five Theses. Originally called a “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences,” it is the most famous document of the Reformation.

\*Do you agree with Schaff's or Warfield's evaluation?

\*Which is your favorite thesis?