

Church on the Eve of the Reformation: Forerunners of the Reformation

Complaints against the Church

1. Simony – the buying of ecclesiastical offices. At one point Alexander VI created 80 new offices and received 760 ducats from each appointee. Julius II formed a bureau of 101 secretaries who paid him 74,000.
2. Holding of multiple offices. Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia (later Alexander VI) received 70,000 ducats from his various offices. Cardinal della Rovere (later Julius II) held the archbishoprics of Avignon, the bishoprics of Bologna, Lausanne, Coutances, Viviers, Mende, Ostia and Velletri and the abbeys of Nonantola and Grottaferrata.
3. Clerical wealth and luxury and vast land holdings
4. Clerical concubinage – lack of clerical celibacy. Erasmus claimed that “Many convents of men and women differ little from public brothels.” Indeed, the German bishops of Strasbourg and Mainz received revenues from brothels.
5. Selling of indulgences and trade in relics
6. Tithes to Rome. Emperor Maximilian complained that the pope got a hundred times more revenue from Germany than he could collect. In 1510 he was at war with Pope Julius II and asked the humanist Wimpfeling to draw up a list of Germany’s grievance against the papacy as he was looking to separate the German church from the papacy – but he was dissuaded because Wimpfeling thought the backing of local princes was not assured. In 1521 the papal messenger Aleander warned Leo X that the Germans were just waiting for “some fool” to speak against Rome to spark an uprising against the Papacy
7. Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism weakened papal power Sales of relics and indulgences
8. The Failure of the Crusades and the Conquest of the Byzantine empire by the Muslims

Changing Social and Political Conditions

- Civil Wars in England, France and Spain in the mid to late 15th centuries create new and stronger monarchies (The Tudors in England, the Valois in France and the combined kingdoms of Aragon and Castille in Spain.) These strong monarchies are less inclined to accept outside interference, especially from the Church.
- With these new monarchies there is a growing sense of nationalism which begins to replace the medieval idea of Christendom. Writers begin to speak of nations and this national feeling becomes a factor in the Reformation and works against the Church. The reformers' denial of Papal authority grants greater authority to the Nation State and the reformers become linked with a sense of nationalism
- Black Death changes medieval society concentrating wealth in fewer hands, creating economic changes due to a shortage of workers, and also changing the church. *Black Death in England broke out in 1349, 1361, 1368, 1375, 1382, 1390, 1438, 1464. Nearly ½ of the clergy died and part of the church's problems may stem from the fact that the replacement priests who were found were ill-trained and ill-prepared for their clerical duties.
- Changes in material culture play into a new worldview.
 - ❖ Printing press: in 1451 Johannes Gutenberg a goldsmith from Nuremberg gets the idea for the printing press with moveable type from wine presses
 - ❖ First printed books still look like medieval manuscripts
 - ❖ 1559 at the Council of Trent the Church publishes the first Index of books that were considered dangerous or heretical to control publishers and what was printed
- Changes in Language – the growth of the vernacular
 - ❖ More and more literature begins to be written in the vernacular (English, Italian, German, French). Latin no longer is the only language of intellectual life. Dante publishes *La Vita Nuova* in 1295 and the *Divine Comedy* written between 1308 and his death in 1321. In England we have Chaucer writing the *Cantebury Tales* etc.
 - ❖ Increased interest in and study of Greek-when Constantinople falls to the Muslims many scholars flee West and bring with them knowledge of Greek and Greek texts. "It's Greek to me." This renewed study of Greek reveals new understandings of the Bible. In 1515 Erasmus creates the 1st reconstructed Greek version of the Bible. Up until that point the Bible was the 4th c Latin Vulgate of Jerome.
 - ❖ A closer study of Latin challenges other important documents of the church. Lorenzo Valla's study of the *Donation of Constantine* reveals it to be, not a 4th c document a 9th c. document probably commissioned by Charlemagne. This new study is called *diplomatics*.
 - ❖ Increased literacy and education especially in the growing merchant class and in cities and towns

John Wyclif (1320-1384) The Morning Star of the English Reformation

Biography

- Studied at Oxford and becomes a professor of theology there
- Ordained to the priesthood and receives benefices from popes and living from parish churches while continuing to teach
- Very prolific: wrote 2 volumes of polemics, 4 volumes of sermons, scholastic treatises on metaphysics, theology and logic
- Comes under the protection of John of Gaunt (the son of King Edward III and a very powerful lord)
- 1374 Edward III gives him the rectory of Lutterworth
- July 1376 he is appointed as part of the royal commission sent to Bruges to discuss the continued refusal of England to pay tribute to the pope with his agents
- September 1376 John of Gaunt proposes that the crown confiscate some of the Church's property and asks Wyclif to give a series of sermons on this in London
- 1377 Bishop Courtenay of London, an opponent of Gaunt's, attacks Wyclif as a heretic and summons him for questioning. He appears with an armed retinue of Gaunt's men and violence ensues.
- Wyclif returns to Oxford and Courtenay sends a list of accusations against him to the pope in Rome who issues a bull condemning 18 of Wyclif's propositions
- Wyclif has gained the support of Lord Percy of Northumberland, public opinion and Parliament
- If the King seized the wealth of bishops, abbots and priors he could maintain 15 earls, 1500 knights, 6200 squires and have 20,000 pounds a year left for himself. The king's coffers were always short and the English were once again preparing for war with France so this was an appealing thought.
- Wyclif, at the bequest of the King's advisors, drafts a pamphlet that basically calls for the English church to sever ties with Rome. "The pope cannot demand this treasure except by way of alms....Since all charity begins at home, it would be the work not of charity but of fatuity to direct the alms of the Realm abroad when the Realm itself is in need of them." "The Realm of England, in the words of Scripture, ought to be one body, and clergy, lords, and commonalty members of that body." This statement was bolder than the King had anticipated and Wyclif was advised to make no further statements.
- December 18, 1378 the bishops pressured the chancellor at Oxford to follow the Pope's order to arrest Wyclif, but the university exercised its rights and refused to follow. It had been under the episcopal rule of the Bishop of Lincoln until 1367 when it broke with him and half of the professors supported Wyclif.
- March 1378 Wyclif appears before the bishops' assembly at Lambeth to defend his views. The Archbishop receives a letter from King Richard's mother defending Wyclif and supporters of Wyclif forced their way into the proceeding. In the face of public and royal support the bishops decided to defer their decision
- Wyclif continues writing pamphlets and railing against the abuses of the Church

- He forms a group of Poor Preaching Priests who went robed in black and barefoot (many of these were Oxford dons) also known as Lollards.
- He begins the first complete translation of the Bible from Jerome's Latin Vulgate into English. He completes the New Testament and two of his followers Nicholas Hereford and John Purvey complete the Old Testament 10 years after this death.
- 1384 Pope Urban VI summons Wyclif to appear before him in Rome, but Wyclif suffers a stroke on December 28, 1384 while attending Mass and dies three days later.
- Wyclif's ideas continue to have life and a strong following. By a decree at the Council of Constance (May 4, 1415) his bones are posthumously exhumed and cast into a near-by stream.

Wyclif's Theology

- Predestination: God gives his Grace to whomever He wishes, each individual is predestined for salvation or damnation, good works do not promise salvation but show that a person is one of the elect through divine grace. Adam and Eve had free will but lost it for themselves and us through their disobedience.
- Man has a direct relationship with God and the Church or priests are not necessary as intermediaries
- Private property and government were the result of Adam's sin and those in a true state of grace would hold all property in common, no individual ownership or man-made laws. Though Wyclif cautions that this is only in an ideal world and that Paul taught that the powers that be were ordained by God and should be obeyed.
- Condemns clerical wealth and corruption, simony (the buying and selling of offices), lack of adherence to clerical celibacy
- Questions the theology of indulgences "Prelates deceive men by feigned indulgences or pardons, and rob them cursedly of their money...Men be great fools that buy these bulls of pardon so dear."
- Advocates separating Church from all material possessions and powers and suggest that the state should control church properties and even that priests should be ordained by the king.
- Wyclif says private confession is not necessary and suggests a return to the public confession of the early Church. "Privy confession made to priests...is not needful, but brought in late by the Fiend; for thralls to the clergy, and is sometimes abused for economic or political ends." Virtuous laymen can absolve sinners and only God can truly absolve
- Sacraments administered by a wicked or sinful priests are not valid

- Wyclif denies the miracle of the Eucharist and transubstantiation and says priests cannot change the bread and wine though he stills hold to the Real Presence. (This alarmed John of Gaunt who urged him to say no more on this topic.)
- Wyclif's ideas are taken up by the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 John Ball and Wat Tyler though he tries to distance himself from them, by the linking of his name and writings to the Revolt Wyclif loses his government support and that of John of Gaunt. The Peasants' Revolt was a coalition of peasants, serfs, and townspeople that came out of a country ravaged by plague, poor harvests, serfs demanding freedom, failed wars and high taxes. In 1380 a poll tax is imposed and is the final straw. The rebels demanded freedom for all serfs, an end to feudal dues and rents for tenants and an amnesty for all rebels. They rampaged, sacking John of Gaunt's palace, killing all foreign merchants and workers, and eventually killing the Archbishop of Sudbury. The rebellion is harshly put down by King Richard II.

Results and Influences

- Wyclif influence Jan Huss who in turn influenced Luther He wrote, "Wyclif, Wyclif you will unsettle many a man's mind."
- Wyclif was a great influence on Luther who knew his works well.
- Some historians suggest that had it not been for the Revolt Wyclif might have sparked the Reformation in England 130 years before Luther.

Jan Huss (1371-1415) Professor and theologian at the University of Prague in Bohemia (present day Czech Republic)

- Preaches the distribution of the eucharist
- Advocates the Bible in the vernacular
- Says the legal privileges of the clergy should be rescinded
- Follower of Wyclif – studied with him in England
- Taught Greek philosophy for 2 years
- Preaches in the vernacular
- Like Wyclif, Hus is, at first, under the protection of the king
- 1409 excommunicated along with his followers because he won't condemn Wyclif's teachings that had been condemned in a papal bull by Alexander V
- At first the government took the side of Hus. He continued to preach against the Church. The churches of the city were put under the ban, and the interdict was pronounced against Prague.
- 1412 Hus condemns the sale of indulgences in a sermon taken straight from Wyclif's writings and his sermon leads to a riot and he is once again excommunicated

- Loses the protection of the king because the king got a cut of the profits from indulgences
- 1414 Hus is invited to the Council of Constance (which ended the Great Schism) on the promise of safe conduct and a fair hearing
- He is arrested a month after his arrival and imprisoned for 7 months
- On July 6, 1415 he is condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake
- Hus followers known as the Hussites continue on as a social/political/religious movement. His last words allegedly were, "*in a hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed.*"

Marsilius of Padua (Italian Marsilio or Marsiglio da Padova; c. 1275 – c. 1342) was a late-Medieval Italian scholar, a student of medicine deeply involved in the politics of his time.

In 1324 he writes with the collaboration of John of Jandun the *Defensor Pacis* which argues that the peace of Europe was being destroyed by fights between Church and state and that the Church and all her goods should be under royal authority. He argues against Papal supremacy, suggests that a general council elected by the people of Christendom should interpret the scriptures and choose cardinals who choose the pope. State should control appointments of clergy, remove unworthy priests, control church endowments, schools, and income and support the poor out of the excess Church income. In 1535 Henry VIII had this work published and distributed at government expense.

Savonarola (1452-1498)

- After the Medici rulers of Florence are ousted he rules Florence spiritually and politically-his followers included Botticelli and a young Michaelangelo
- He was a zealot and preached against the vanities of the world, corruption and advocated a strict aeticism –In 1497 his Bonfire of the Vanities burnt all worldly trappings of wealth including some paintings by Botticelli and Michaelangelo of pagan subject matter in a large pile in the Piazza della Signoria of Florence.^[1]
- He is excommunicated and burned at the stake for heresy in 1498.

Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros, known as **Ximenes de Cisneros** (1436 – November 8, 1517) was a Spanish cardinal and statesman.

Retires from the world and lives as an anchorite for a while, but is recommended to Queen Isabella as her private chaplain and confessor. He agrees on the condition that she let him remain in his monastery. Six months later and she pulls him out of seclusion to appoint him as Archbishop of Toledo. He runs away at the news and is forced to accept the position.

Ximenes sets about reforming the Franciscan order in Spain. He cracks down on clerical concubinage and declares that priests had to reside in the parish where they were supposed to work, attend confession, and preach every Sunday. There was intense opposition. By 1498 the reforms were expanded to include not only Franciscans but other religious orders as well. Legend says that some resisted the reforms so that four hundred monks and friars fled to Africa with their "wives" and became Muslims. The Minister General of the Franciscan order came from Rome to moderate the archbishop's reforms, Ximenes, backed by Queen Isabella, remained firm.

He was fanatical about converting Muslims to the point of forced conversions and launched a crusade into Muslim North Africa.

He commissioned the *Complutensian Polyglot*, the first printed polyglot translation of the Bible in which six different versions were put in parallel columns with the original Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew so that readers for the first time could check all the translations simultaneously. The text occupies five volumes, and a sixth contains a Hebrew lexicon. The work began in 1502. The New Testament was finished in January 1514, and the whole Bible in April 1517. Completed Bible was dedicated to Pope Leo X but Ximenes and did not live to see it published dying shortly after it was completed. This Bible was later used by Erasmus and was an important step to a deeper understanding of Biblical texts.

Desiderius Erasmus (October 27, 1466/1469 – July 12, 1536)

The great Catholic humanist – a friend of Thomas More and prolific writer. He compiled the first Greek edition of the Bible. His *In Praise of Folly* mercilessly satirized the papacy, yet he remained a friend of the pope and a dedicated Catholic all his life rejecting protestant ideas such as predestination.

Erasmus's Bible was used by William Tyndale for the first English New Testament (Worms, 1526) and was the basis for the 1550 Robert Stephanus edition used by the translators of the Geneva Bible and King James Version of the English Bible. The 4th edition published in 1527 had parallel columns of Greek, Latin Vulgate and Erasmus's Latin texts. Like the Polyglot Bible, Erasmus dedicated his work to Pope Leo X. Erasmus felt his Bible translation was his chief contribution to Christian scholarship.

Prophetically, Erasmus, from Antwerp, on September 9, 1517, wrote to Thomas, Cardinal of York, "In this part of the world I am afraid a great revolution is impending." Two months later Luther presented his 95 theses.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- Augustinian priest and Bible professor at the University of Wittenberg – a student of Greek

- In 1505 he abandons his study of law for the monastery. Legend says that he was struck to the ground by lightning and cried out to his father's patron Saint Anne – if you will heal me I will become a monk.
- In 1517 he posts 95 theses, points to debate, in fine university fashion. These types of *disputatio* (debates) were always happening at universities. What happens with Luther's theses is that someone gets ahold of them and takes them to the local printer. What started as a university debate suddenly reaches a larger audience.
- In 1514 the Archbishop Albric of Mainz had authorized a Dominican Priest Johan Tezel to sell indulgences to repay the loan with which he had bought his office (the Archbishop was actually trying to help the city by taking a loan to buy his office as the city had had 3 Archbishops in 10 years and each time had had to come up with the money for the confirmation fees for the office) and for the construction of the new basilica of St. Peter's with the blessing of Pope Leo X. Tezel was a great salesman and coined this catchy phrase, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Tezel pushes the understanding of indulgences and claims that he can sell indulgences even for sins not yet committed and that any sins no matter how grievous could be wiped away through an indulgence.
- In 1520 Luther publishes 3 treatises addressing these points"
 1. *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* The division between the spiritual and temporal realms was created by the Pope and is not divine.
 2. The Pope said only he could interpret scripture and Luther argues that all can.
 3. The Pope says only he can call a council, but Luther argues that all believers, "the priesthood of all believers" can.

In his next treatise published in September *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* Luther argues that there are only 3 sacraments: Baptism, Eucharist, Penance and that the mass is not a sacrifice but only a remembrance. His 3rd treatise "On Christian Liberty" argues that we are justified by faith alone.

On December 31, 1520 Luther is ordered to recant by the Pope. Luther at first had presented the Pope as a prisoner, a puppet of the evil counselors the cardinals, but after this declares that the Pope is the antichrist.