The Reformation at 500

What's the big deal?

1. When Philip of Hesse wanted to end his marriage and marry another woman, what was Martin Luther's controversial advice?

- A. as head of his wife, Philip had the right to kill her and marry another
- B. Philip could get a divorce without the consent of the Catholic Church
- C. Philip should send his wife into exile and marry the other woman
- D. divorce was wrong, so Philip should commit bigamy

2. Martin & Katie Luther had friends in their bedroom on their wedding night. Why?

- A. in Germany at the time, it was customary to have witnesses observe the marriage consummation
- B. Catholics had vowed to kill Martin & Katie before they could produce "schismatic offspring"
- C. it was customary to "bless the bed" to make the wife more fruitful
- D. Martin & Katie had no guest bedroom, so they had to keep friends who had come for the wedding

3. How many relics did Wittenberg have when Luther began preaching against them? (nb. The 204 body parts of babies killed by Herod were counted as separate items)

- A. 1,100
- B. 3,800
- C. 11,000
- D. 19,000

4. A person paying to view all these relics in Wittenberg would escape how many years in purgatory?

- A. 200
- B. 2,000
- C. 200,000
- D. 2,000,000

Generally…

- Reformation is normally seen as fitting into 1500-1650
- It is sandwiched between the Medieval period & the Modern period
- Therefore it is a period of transition, demonstrating features of both the preceding and following periods

Precursor: the Renaissance

- Literally “rebirth”
- Universities were multiplying.
- Greater interest in classical writings due to a greater unity between Roman and Greek churches, plus exodus of scholars when Constantinople fell
- Aristotle’s emphasis on “particulars” saw relentless curiosity about humanity
- New emphases in art and culture on the individual. Portraits become common; Popes become art collectors
- Fascination with original languages

Voices in the Wilderness

- John Wycliff (1324-1384) was an Oxford scholar and Roman Catholic priest
- Rejected transubstantiation, purgatory, pilgrimages, worship of saints, veneration of relics and the infallibility of the Church because he couldn't find these things in scripture
- Declared the Pope to be vicar of anti-Christ
- Saw the wealth of the Church as a curse
- Translated Bible into English (from Latin)
- His followers were called Lollards

John Wycliff

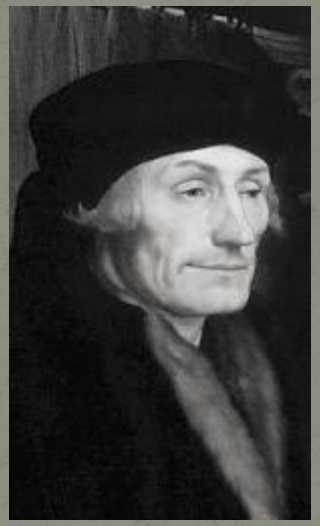
John Hus 1360-1415

- Influenced by Wycliff, but disagreed on transubstantiation
- Rector of Prague University and zealous preacher against abuses in the Church, especially indulgences and the Crusades
- Lived during the Papal schism (Rome/Avignon)
- Was executed at the Council of Constance which attempted to deal with the schism and church reform

Erasmus of Rotterdam

- A humanist scholar who sought to reform the Church from its abuses
- Satirised the Church in works like “Praise of Folly”
- His great work was producing the first printed text of the Greek New Testament, as well as a new Latin translation
- This enabled people to evaluate the Vulgate and to undertake vernacular translations
- This was the springboard for Luther’s German translation as well as the King James version

Erasmus



The Failure of the Papacy

- Corruption had reduced the ability to provide spiritual leadership
- It became rampant in the reign of Innocent VIII (1484-92) and with Alexander VI who followed.
- Popes commissioned art works and spent huge sums; to raise money they sold indulgences and land
- Popular piety surged in the face of the Church's failure
- By 1500, there was a strong groundswell desperate for true reform in the Church

Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503)

Looming Reformation

- In 1500, Europe could still be thought of as Christendom, i.e. a Christian Kingdom.
- Almost everyone recognised the Pope's authority on spiritual issues, but a few years later, this changed
- Partly due to: rising literacy, the printing press, urbanisation, universities, growing awareness of ways the Church distorted scripture
- Crusades damaged Papal credibility
- Growing anti-clericalism due to corruption

Luther 1483-1546

- An Augustinian monk, desperate to find peace with God, but could not, no matter how he tried
- First came to public attention in 1517 with 95 theses, a reaction against Tetzel & indulgences
- These focused on: papal exploitation of the German people, the Pope's jurisdiction over purgatory, and problems with indulgences
- In essence, there was nothing substantially new here. What was new was that the theses were printed and rapidly distributed, thereby having quick and widespread influence

Luther

Luther's "a-ha" moment

- Breakthrough with Romans 1:16-17 (cf. the genitive tense)
- *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*
- *17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*
- The KJV, ESV, NRSV, NASB all follow this rendering.
- Is righteousness only God's possession, or is it also God's gift? (NIV)

Luther's 1520 publications

- These were: On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church; To the Christian nobility of the German nation; On the Freedom of a Christian
- Together, these attacked the exclusive right of the Pope to interpret scripture, compared Rome to Babylon, argued for 2 sacraments instead of 7, and the priesthood of all believers
- In the middle of the year, the Pope announced his intention to excommunicate Luther

Luther's later career

- Excommunicated January 1521
- Summoned to Diet of Worms and went at great risk (despite guarantee of safe conduct, c.f. Hus)
- Challenged on his teachings, he replied: 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. God help me. According to tradition, Luther then said the famous words: "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

Luther's career continued..

- Kidnapped by friends for his own safety, taken to Wartburg Castle. Karlstadt stirs controversy in his absence
- Translates the Bible into German while in Wartburg. New Testament printed in 1522
- 1525 controversies with Erasmus over "going too far" and with Thomas Muntzer over peasant demands cf. Twelve Articles. Theology-society link.
- Luther writes against the violence of the peasants
- The Peasants' Revolt led to Luther being blamed by both sides and inhibited the progress of the Reformation
- The German Reformation became dependent on the rulers

Luther's room at Wartburg

More Luther

- The term “Protestant” originated in 1529 when the reformers protested against Catholic action at the Diet of Speyer
- Luther published 9 hymnals between 1520s and 1540s
- Luther marries Katherine von Bora in 1525, the same year the Battle of Frankenhausen sees 100,000 die
- Religious warfare continued until the 1555 Peace of Augsburg: the religion of the ruler is the religion of the State

Martin & Katy

What's the big deal?

- So far, we've seen:
- 1. a direct challenge to the theology & authority of the Catholic Church (in place for over 1,000 years)
- 2. a new emphasis on the authority of scripture and the implied right of everyone to read/draw conclusions, regardless of position. Popes and bishops are no longer judges of scripture, but judged by scripture!
- 3. this raised the dignity of individuals with resulting social implications
- 4. Augsburg instigated religious plurality of sorts; suddenly, people had options, but church/state link remained in place.