

The Reformation at 500

What's the big deal? (Part 2)



1. Which of the following has not been a Communion issue over which Christians have killed one another?

- A) should people get both bread and cup or just the cup?
- B) should bread or a cracker be used?
- C) does the bread contain Christ's body or merely represent Christ's body?
- D) may white grapes be used, or must they be purple grapes as in Palestine?

2. For what offence was John Bunyan (author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*) given a 12 year jail term?

- A) preaching without a licence
- B) baptising without a licence
- C) refusing to pay taxes to support the Anglican Church
- D) writing a boring book

3. Which of the following was not one of the general rules John Calvin set up for the citizens of Geneva, Switzerland to follow?

- A) a marriage couldn't be arranged between a woman of seventy and a man of twenty-five
- B) a woman couldn't say "rest in peace" over her husband's grave
- C) people couldn't sing songs that made fun of Calvin
- D) bread had to be baked in the shape of a cross

4. What English women were told to leave their homes under Henry VIII, get married under Edward VI, leave their husbands under Mary I, and return to their husbands under Elizabeth I?

- A) members of the Royal Court
- B) Quakers
- C) female preachers
- D) nuns

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.

What happened next?

- Some took Luther's theology very seriously, exploring socio-cultural implications. They made demands which led to the Peasants' War.
- The link between what we believe and how we perceive our world became very clear: theology was incendiary.
- Others took the new theology further, such as the Anabaptists...

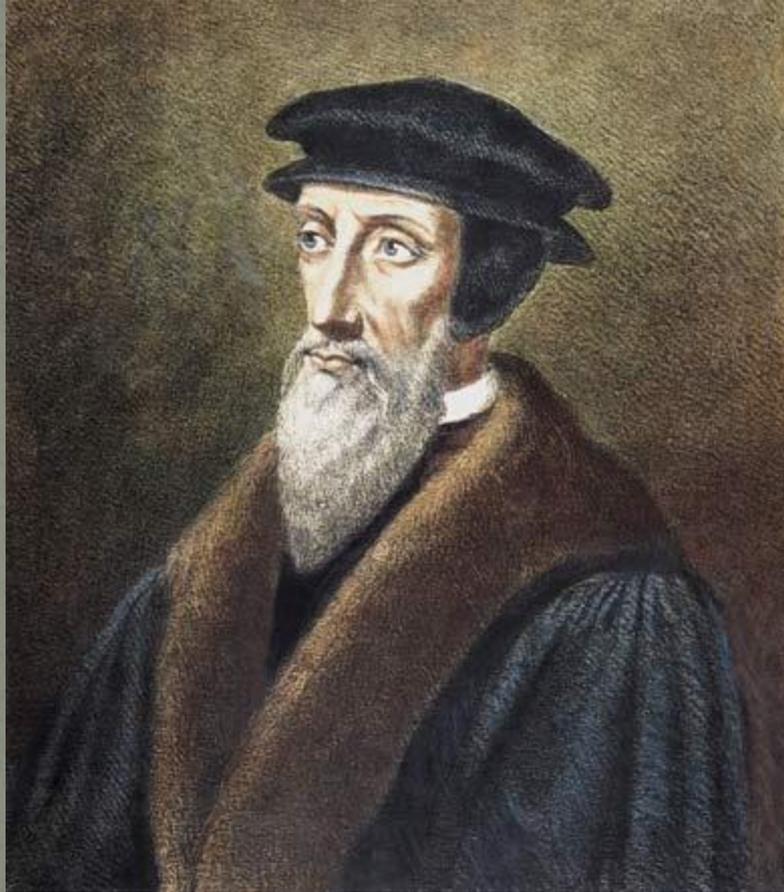
The Anabaptists

- Surfaced in an early form as the Zwickau prophets, emphasising believer's baptism and charismata; opposed by Luther
- There are different varieties, but all were seen as radical in 16th century
- One group arose from Zurich from Zwingli's followers
- In general, they opposed infant baptism, oaths, State compulsion over religious belief, warfare, and Christians holding civic office
- They were the first to propose separating Church & State for 1,000+ years. Everyone else persecuted them

Persecution of Anabaptists



John Calvin 1509-1564



Calvin

- A French lawyer whose greatest work is *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, alongside many commentaries
- While studying law, experienced conversion and broke with the Roman Catholic Church
- Was seen as heretical and moved to places of relative freedom, especially associated with Geneva
- Like Luther, a magisterial reformer, i.e. comfortable with close Church-State ties
- Was quite comfortable with executing heretics, e.g. Servetus (but so was everyone else in 16th century)

Calvin's theology

- Grounded in God's absolute sovereignty; God is ultimately in charge of everything, even evil serves his purposes. Cf. Acts 2:22-23; Acts 4:27-28
- Therefore God chooses (elects) whom he will save: the initiative is his; the response is ours. Therefore salvation is predestined
- While no-one can really say who is elect or not, the signs are participation in the sacraments, an upright moral life and public confession of faith
- The elect can stand against earthly rulers

Church and society in Calvin

- Error can be clearly perceived because it can be evaluated by scripture
- Error needs to be corrected and kingdoms based on error should be opposed
- Therefore Calvin's thought empowered people to rise up against rulers perceived as ungodly; it encouraged social activism. This differed from Luther's thought.
- This happened in the Netherlands, where they rebelled against their Spanish rulers
- The Church was only subject to secular government in clearly secular matters, but had the job of guiding government on spiritual matters

Meanwhile, in England...

Henry VIII (1491-1547) split a nation away from the Roman Catholic Church



Catholic or Counter Reformation

- By 1540s, Roman Catholicism seemed endangered by Protestantism, then other forces came into play
- Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540 placed heavy emphasis on education and missionary work. Took an oath of loyalty to the Pope, no matter what. “That we may be altogether of the same mind and in conformity with the Church herself, if she shall have defined anything to be black which appears to our eyes to be white, we ought in like manner to pronounce it to be black.” [Spiritual Exercises]

Ignatius Loyola 1491-1556



Council of Trent 1545-1563

- One of the most important Councils of the Church
- Met in 3 sessions between 1545 and 1563, considering Protestant doctrine. Protestants attended the 1st session
- Aquinas made the “official” theologian of the Church
- Authority based on scripture and tradition
- Latin Vulgate + OT apocrypha affirmed
- Vernacular translations discouraged
- Salvation included faith and works
- Indulgences would continue but improved
- Seven sacraments retained

Following Trent

- Bishops were directed to establish schools and seminaries
- Jesuits took the initiative in this system and they remain prominent in Catholic education today
- An Index of prohibited books was established
- The Inquisition was reinvigorated
- Trent was a reformation that changed Catholicism and made it into a disciplined and modern institution.
- It was now ready to confront Protestantism

What's actually happening?

- People & nations have challenged the authority of the Pope, both to interpret scripture, and in a broader sense.
- People are proposing different models of church government: Presbyterian and something loosely approaching Congregational.
- To everyone except the Anabaptists, the link between Church & State is still seen as solid. This leads to warfare on the Continent 1618-1648.

Reformation births Modernity (1650)

- End of the Thirty Years' War birthed a grudging toleration: sharing the suburb with people you disagree with.
- England's Civil Wars birthed the idea that the monarch was not absolute, but accountable.
- Individual opinion and challenging all authorities became safe for the first time (sort of).
- Church & State were no longer united, because there was religious diversity.
- This leads us to the Modern Era and to...

The Enlightenment

- Beginning around 1700, this movement demonstrated abiding confidence in the power of human reason
- Reason was seen as the key to continual progress in all areas
- Reason became the measure of all things, including religious; “unreasonable” things were discarded. Most still believed in God, but only the “reasonable” bits.
- Science flourished in this environment, but science is based on the repeatable and the observable. Religious issues were forced into this mould

The Reformation & us

- The legacy is rich and complex: Bibles in the vernacular; ministry of the laity; the right to criticise anything & anyone; an inherent distrust of authority; the rediscovery of salvation by grace; an accountable monarchy.
- The Reformation shaped the Enlightenment which gave us the historical-critical method; the scientific revolution; an emphasis on objective evidence; an inherent skepticism; a valuing of education; a positive view of human progress.
- Mix all of these things together and you have the modern mindset.

And so...?

- Every one of us has been profoundly affected and shaped by the Reformation and what followed; in understanding the Reformation, we gain understanding of ourselves.
- Each age tends to react against its predecessor like a metronome, but some things remain. As we observe these responses, what is discarded and what remains, we can discern the grace of God at work.