

**2017 Pastor's Institute
Pacific Northwest District
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Evergreen Lutheran High School
Tacoma, Washington
June 6-7, 2017**

***History of Christian Doctrine:
Pre-Reformation, Reformation,
and Post-Reformation Periods***
Presenter: Forrest Bivens

Progression of Thought and Discussion

A. General Introduction

1. "History of Doctrine" as a Branch of Learning
2. The Methodology of this Discipline
3. General Bibliography
4. Our Purposes and Goals

B. The History of Doctrine: Pre-Reformation Period

1. Definition and Clarification of Terms
2. Factors Favoring Reformation
 - a) The Growth of Nationalism and the Changing European Society and Economy
 - b) The Decline of Ecclesiastical Authority
 - c) The Rise of Mysticism and "Alternate Christianity"
 - d) The Impact of Nominalism on Scholasticism and the Church
 - e) The Rise of Humanism and Christian Humanists; the Impact of Universities
3. Forerunners of the Reformation and the Rise of Pluralism

C. The History of Doctrine: The Reformation Period

1. Erasmus and Humanism
2. The Theology of Martin Luther
3. Ulrich Zwingli & the Beginning of the Reformed Tradition
4. Anabaptism and the Radical Reformation
5. Lutheran Theology to the Formula of Concord
6. The Reformed Theology of John Calvin
7. The Reformation in Great Britain

D. The History of Doctrine: The Post Reformation Period

1. Theology in the Catholic Reformation
2. The Theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy
3. Reformed Theology after Calvin
4. New Awakenings in Personal Piety
5. The Changing Philosophical Setting (Rise of Rationalism)

E. Conclusion

1. What Did the Reformation Accomplish?
2. Are Reformation Issues Largely Outmoded?

A. General Introduction

1. "History of Doctrine" as a Branch of Learning

- ❖ Is this discipline a history of Christian *thought, doctrine, or dogma*? Respected writers in this field use all three terms. Ecclesiastical *dogmas* have been formulated, reformulated, deepened, trivialized, developed and transformed under the influence of noticeable *thought*. For this reason, perhaps the development or "*history of Christian thought*" is the preferred expression. Still, as Seeberg (p 21) phrases it, "Dogma is perpetually subject to ecclesiastical and theological interpretation, which prepares the forms suitable to each age . . . and which furthermore seizes upon and preserves the religious experiences peculiar to its own age."
- ❖ Is it really correct to speak of a *development* or history of Christian *doctrine*? The question has been debated. Answers may reflect a person's conviction concerning Christian doctrine as something divinely revealed and then believed, or as an expression of what believers believe and then confess. There is also the need to distinguish between the substance of doctrine and its form or terminology. To us, only the latter really develops.
- ❖ Here we seek to examine the *origin* of dogmas, observe how they *developed*, and see them as tangible results of Christian thought. In most cases dogma is a product of theological thought and the desire to make truth clear to a given generation. To understand what and why something was said, we seek to trace forces and influences that interact with the theologians as they form pronouncements.
- ❖ Does this discipline relate primarily to *historical* or *systematic* theology? One can legitimately classify it as an aspect of systematic theology to the degree that it involves organizing biblical doctrine for educational or presentation purposes. But it fits more comfortably in the historical realm as theological ideas are grasped in a culture and shaped by insights and limitations of people living in a particular context.
- ❖ Well into the Middle Ages the church saw no value in the study of any "development" of dogma. Officially, church teaching had been believed "everywhere, always and by all." Church tradition was promoted as an entity that needed only interpretation and clarification. The Reformation really opened the way for a true history of dogma and an honest discussion of variable and varying Christian thought. Even though the Reformers had a relatively high degree of confidence in the dogmas developed in the patristic age, it was axiomatic to them that dogma was fallible and without authority unless clearly scriptural.
- ❖ Most of the standard "History of Christian Thought/Dogma/Doctrine" textbooks offer adequate listings of major and memorable practitioners of this discipline. When a list begins

by citing *De theologicis dogmatibus* by the Jesuit Dionysius Petavius (1644, Paris), you know it's going to be a fairly long and tedious list. Here we make no attempt to list even the more prominent writers or their works. The most significant scholars in this field will be mentioned in the following section in connection with their theological and historical assumptions.

2. The Methodology of This Discipline

- ❖ Prior to examining methods and procedures that may be used in this kind of study, let us point to the *power of presuppositions* in this area of labor. Theological and historical assumptions, or preconceived goals and desires on the part of the scholar, will have great impact on insights shared and conclusions drawn. This is to be remembered as we read the works of others and ponder the information for ourselves. [To this point: when “liberal” Lutherans, like *Paul Tillich* and *Otto Heick*, treat Martin Luther’s view of the Bible, they will predictably go out of their way to say the Reformer did not consider the Bible to be “inerrant.” As scholars the authors merit our attention. Theologically they merit close scrutiny and loving critique.]

- ❖ There is no shortage of similar examples to consider in this historical discipline: *Gottfried Arnold*, expressing his type of Pietism, tried to show orthodoxy was fallible and that truer piety often stemmed from sects or heretics. Existential pietism led *Friedrich Schleiermacher* to maintain that a true theological study must center in an analysis of human experience and demonstrate vibrant continuity in the new life of Christianity. *F. C. Baur* favored Hegel's concept of history and asserted, for example, that the second century church was the synthesis of the prior Jewish phase [Petrine] and its antithesis, the Hellenistic [Pauline] phase. The monumental work of *Adolph von Harnack* reflects the fact that Harnack was theologically “Ritschlian” and unable to grasp the content or influence of the gospel. He also considered the concept of an authoritative revelation of truth (doctrine) prior to the formulation of dogma to be false. So, as Heick (p 9) put it, "He became the historian of an anti-creedal attitude in the field of the history of dogma." The brotherhood of man and the moral side of Christianity occupied his attention.

- ❖ The largely accurate work of *W. G. T. Shedd* predictably reflects his strict Calvinism, while the studies of *Theodor Kleforth*, *Gottfried Thomasius*, and *Reinhold Seeberg* give evidence that they were Lutherans. *Jaroslav Pelikan* (p 10) accurately observed that the ideas proposed by *John Henry Cardinal Newman* expressed the churchman's view of history as much as history itself. "[Newman's] theory of development was intimately connected with his own development." Still, Pelikan himself reveals an assumption that would necessarily have great impact on his conclusions: “For our purposes the theology of the New Testament is not what Jesus and the apostles may have taught, but what the church has understood them to have taught. This is an ongoing process rather than a given product" (p 6). A careful reading of the Introduction to his work by *Justo Gonzalez* will also reveal a neo-orthodox blurring of the distinction between inspiration and enlightenment as well as the ever-popular anticipation of the Holy Spirit doing his work aside from the means of grace.

- ❖ More recently, we observe that false ecumenists normally examine the history of dogma in search of least common denominators in doctrine. They hope to find expressions in historic creeds that might serve to unite church bodies. [Example: Hans Kung reconciled Karl Barth's restatement of justification with the formulation of Trent's sixth session.] Interestingly, any examination of the patristic age reveals that with very few exceptions, both heretics and orthodox were agreed that there was only one true doctrine (which each party claimed to possess). In the medieval centuries, the schoolmen also assumed that an objective truth existed and, if the correct approach to traditional theology was used, that truth would surface. Pluralism was seldom confessed or endorsed. Only in the wake of the rise of many diverse church bodies following the Reformation of the 16th century do we find serious attempts at false ecumenism. Confessions with intentional vagueness or imprecision to serve the cause of compromise eventually became common.

- ❖ Finally, continuing a trend that began at the time of the Enlightenment, contemporary historians of dogma like to refer to the "study of the human phenomenon of religion" and place Christian dogma on the same level with non-Christian religious and philosophical tenets. The task becomes an analysis of religious beliefs ("religious studies") that refer to God, gods, or no god. We find courses and writings on "atheology" and "theology" among others. Clement of Alexandria clearly distinguished between *theologia* and *mythologia*, but modern scholars sometimes seek to fuse the two again.

- ❖ Regarding methodology in the study of Christian thought, there are a number of options. One can study the history of doctrine (generally), doctrine (specifically), creeds, politics and politics, heresies, Christian philosophy, art, liturgy, missions, and persons. As in any aspect of historical studies, the materials are so abundant and without a unified order or scheme that confusion can easily result. There is much overlapping of ideas and events, cyclical thought patterns, and minutiae. Therefore, exhaustive treatments are all but impossible. The teacher, writer or student has to select a mode of investigation that seems best suited to showcase a given subject. Shedd summarized this point well (pp 6-7): "It only remains that he should exercise his best judgment, and produce the best method that is possible to him. The grade of its excellence can be known only by trial." Here we will follow the basic order of presentation used by Gonzalez. It's a reasonable blending of the chronological, topical, and biographical.

- ❖ At least a brief reminder of limitations and risks in this kind of study seems appropriate. Perhaps a mere listing of pertinent points will suffice:
 - 1) The development and exposition of thought, at least in the Reformation era, is largely done on the basis of writings drafted against heresy or as a defense for those accused of heresy. While there are exceptions, most formal statements had some connection with polemics, and *polemics can easily give an imbalanced view of things*. (Cf. Acts 17)
 - 2) "Heresy" as we usually use the term (false teaching) was not always sharply distinguished from "schism." From the perspective of the medieval church and the post-Tridentine Catholic Church, any departure from the traditional stance and visible church was, by definition, heretical. From our different perspective, the language can be confusing.

- 3) The victors usually dictate history. Most of what is known about heresies comes from the works of Christian opponents. Caution is therefore in place while seeking to ascertain truth. Also, succeeding generations often assumed they were being true to a given church father, when in fact they were following a forgery or spurious document wrongly attributed to him. We are not immune to the same kind of error. [To illustrate the point: to this day much of what John Calvin's early followers stated with regard to "limited atonement" has been inaccurately attributed to Calvin himself. It appears that Peter Martyr Vermigli and Giralomo Zanchi actually drew this next "necessary" conclusion from Calvin's ideas. It is still debated whether it was Calvin or his successor Theodore Beza who made double predestination a central concept in Reformed theology.]
- 4) Historians have long acknowledged that many ideas and events are of a largely if not purely "subjective and accidental character" because a few people chose to think or behave this way or that way. This should temper our formation of sweeping conclusions. [Former Vice-president Dan Quayle reportedly once said, "People that are really very weird can get into sensitive positions and have a tremendous impact on history."]
- 5) Historians of doctrine, like most other historians, tend to be more interested in change than in continuity. Their findings, then, often overlook the quiet, steady, assumed, and undoubted truths held by most ordinary Christians. [Examples: the concept of the real presence, the efficacy of the sacraments, the deity of Christ]
- 6) A major event like the Reformation is extremely difficult to describe in detail, and no analysis can hope to be complete and final. The task is made more difficult by many who have, since the 16th century, simplified the events with clichés and half-truths. This movement had many inner spiritual concerns on the part of many different personalities with differing backgrounds and circumstances. If nothing else, we do well to enter the study resolving to express sympathy and sensitivity. Full objectivity will be elusive. More poetically stated (by Thomas Carlyle): "Listening from the distance of centuries across the death chasms and howling kingdoms of decay, it is not easy to catch everything."
- 7) Finally, Seeberg (p 22) gives us a fitting reminder: "Our conception of the past is always conditioned by the views, problems and questions of the present age."

4. General Bibliography

Works Dealing with the History of Doctrine in General

Gonzalez, Justo L. A History of Christian Thought, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 3 vols. 1970f.

Harnack, Adolph, History of Dogma, vols IV & V, translated by Neil Buchanan. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1961.

Heick, Otto W. A History of Christian Thought, Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1946.

Klotsche, E. H. The History of Christian Doctrine. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979 (reprint of 1945 edition).

McGrath, Alister E. Christian Theology, An Introduction. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1997 (Second Edition).

Neve, J.L. A History of Christian Thought, vol. 1. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1965.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. The Christian Tradition, vol. 4. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1971.

Seeberg, Reinhold. History of Doctrines. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952 [reprint].

Shedd, William G. T. A History of Christian Doctrine. Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978 [reprint of 1889 volumes].

Tillich, Paul. A Complete History of Christian Thought. New York, NY and Evanston, IL: Harper and Row, 1968.

5. Our Purposes and Goals

1. We already mentioned the power of presupposition. Is one of our goals to enter this study without assumptions or preconceived ideas? The study of theology has sparked debates on this subject through the years. At the founding of the University of Paris Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard held divergent opinions. Bernard felt such studies were primarily to be a believer's defense of the Christian faith while Abelard spoke of this as an academic discipline almost demanding detachment. Our conviction is that it is impossible for anyone to enter such a subject without preconceptions. Faith or unbelief will express themselves in predictable ways. We, in short, have goals and purposes for the review of doctrine, dogma, and Christian thought.
2. A question concerning a course like this is frequently asked: Is such a study practical for those dedicated to doing ministry? Some may feel that historical and doctrinal studies in general are less than practical. In response to Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, some churchmen (Bonaventure and Alexander of Hales) warned about neglecting the "practical" side of theology. Thomas a Kempis and Martin Luther, among others, demonstrated how knowledge of doctrine and practical service among the saints need not be incompatible. We seek to maintain balance and to be able to show the truth of the saying, *Quod est theologicum est practicum*.
3. What are specific goals for our study? Here is a list of perceived purposes, with no attempt to be exhaustive. You may be able to add goals of your own.
 - The earliest church fathers found themselves in a society and culture that was hostile to revealed truth. So shall we. We hope to learn how to anticipate error, deal with it, and conduct ourselves in times of opposition and controversy. In the Middle Ages and during the 16th century Reformation the church fathers had to face error and speculative ideas that came mainly from within the church. A review of the controversies can serve us well, for some of our most severe opposition will come from professing believers. Furthermore, the challenge of dealing with a society moving toward secularization and civil leaders who were often indifferent or even antagonistic to the gospel was starting to become the norm. Here also, parallels may appropriately be drawn to our own ministries.

- The church had to learn, often the hard way, that one's manner of expression is important. Timothy and Titus were not the last to be taught the importance of utilizing "the pattern of sound teaching" and "soundness of speech that cannot be condemned" (2 Tm 1:13, Tit 2:8). Some may say our words are always and inevitably inadequate, the truth remains that our God chose to reveal himself and his truth to mankind in human words that are sufficient for his purposes. Our goal is to hone our skills in the ability to express truth with accuracy and adequacy.
- There is a difference between change and improvement. Any study of the history of dogma will describe change and development, but it will not determine if the change is for the better or worse, whether it demonstrates a good use or an abuse of reason, freedom, authority, etc. Our desire is to grow in discernment as we are called on to appraise events and creeds in the light of Scripture.
- The alternative labels of "orthodox" and "heretical" have been attached to opposing viewpoints and beliefs. Were these always accurate? Did "orthodoxy" result more from the power of Rome and "heresy" indicate simply the position of a weaker minority? Is "heresy" really something false and soul-destroying, or merely an "inadequate or inauthentic form of Christian faith?" (to use the words of Schleiermacher.) We hope to gain insights into such issues, knowing that history is repeating itself during our lifetime and ministry careers.
- To us who see the unfolding of events in the light of God's Word, history remains "his story." What others may see as random or accidental happenings, we view as highlights of God's perpetual providence. Our purpose includes the growth in our understanding and appreciation of God's governance, direction, and protection of his people and his truth, for his purposes. As it was in "the fullness of time," when God became man in the person of Christ, so also at the beginning of the 16th century were circumstances poised for God to accomplish great things.
- Issues that we categorize as "church and state" issues will probably always be with us this side of glory. We hope to learn invaluable lessons of what happens when the church and state fail to distinguish between roles and tools assigned to each.
- Shedd (p. 48) wrote, "No man, in any department of literature, or in any profession or calling, ever regrets subjecting himself to the history of his department." We are called to be theologians and churchmen. Let the history of this "department" of learning enrich us in its own way.

+ + +

*May our dear Lord, our justifying God, bless our study
and enrich this review of history (his story) in the age of the Reformation.
May God be glorified in what we learn and how we use what we learn. Amen.*

B. The History of Doctrine: Pre-Reformation Period

1. Definition and Clarification of Terms

- ❖ When we hear or use the word “Reformation” we almost automatically have in mind the events of the 16th century that centered in the work of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their successors. The word *reformation*, however, even in ecclesiastical history predated—and post-dated—that era. In the medieval church the word (often *restitutio*, restoration) was often used to describe the restoring of an ideal monastic community life following almost inevitable upheavals. The term was used in the Gregorian reform (11th and 12th centuries) to restore the “right order of things” – which normally meant to maintain independence of the church’s hierarchy from secular authorities. Eventually, of course, the word was applied to the major 16th century development in church history when the cry for individual, church, and social reform hit loud and strident chords. Luther apparently used the word only once – with reference to a new liberal arts and theological curriculum at Wittenberg University.

- ❖ In the 17th century, the term was used frequently, seriously, and consistently in connection with efforts and movements that were connected with the major events of the previous century. By the 18th century, historians generally acknowledged “Reformation” as a clearly identifiable and separable period of Western history. This is how the word is generally used among us and is employed in this course. It should be noted, however, that the same word was also applied to a wide variety of (mostly minor and usually political or philosophical) reform during the period of Enlightenment (18th century).

- ❖ Even with this basic meaning assumed, the term “Reformation” is still used in a number of senses, and it is helpful to know and be able to distinguish them. To various writers, there is a four-fold sense: (1) the “Lutheran,” (2) the “Reformed” (often “Calvinist”), (3) the “radical” (often “Anabaptist”), and (4) the “Catholic” (often “Counter-”) Reformation. In its broadest sense, the word is used for all four movements, or at least the first three. Our focus in this course embraces all four applications of the term.

- ❖ When the first three movements are meant, excluding the Catholic or Counter-Reformation, the term “Protestant Reformation” is also used. The term *Protestant* derives from the aftermath of the February 1529 Diet of Speyer, which voted to end the toleration of Lutheranism in Germany. In April of that year six German princes and fourteen cities protested against this oppression and spoke out for freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities. The term “Protestant” comes from this protest. So, while it is commonly done and little confusion results, it is an anachronism to apply the term Protestant to people or events before April 1529.

❖ Sometimes only the first two (Lutheran and Reformed) meanings of the term are grouped under the heading of “*magisterial Reformation*” (sometimes “mainstream Reformation”). The phrase has reference to the way in which the mainstream reformers related to secular authorities, such as princes, magistrates, or city councils. Whereas the radical reformers generally regarded such authorities as having no governing rights in church matters, the mainstream reformers argued that the church was, to some extent, subject to secular authority and agencies in matters of maintaining order, suppressing heresy, or enforcing discipline. So the term “magisterial” points to the close relationship between the magistracy and the church in many reformation programs. While it is not as frequently done, the same term could apply to the Catholic Reformation as well.

❖ Another term used to denote those Protestant movements aside from the radical reformation is “*conservative Reformation*.” This denotes reform emphases that maintain due reverence for history and tradition, show a degree of patience and moderation, and reject the idea of any “absolute fresh start” in applying Reformation principles. The attitude and presupposition is stated well by C. P. Krauth (Preface, p. viii):

The foundation never was wholly lost, nor was there, at the worst time of accumulation of wood, hay, and stubble, an utter ceasing of the building of gold, silver, and precious stones upon it. The Reformation, as Christian, accepted the old foundation; as reformatory, it removed the wood, hay, and stubble; as conservative, it carefully separated, guarded, and retained the gold, silver, and precious stones, the additions of pious human hands, befitting the foundation and the temple which was to be reared upon it. . . . The revolutionary spirit of the radical Reform proposed to leave nothing but the foundation, to sweep from it everything which had been built upon it.

❖ On the same subject, Heick aptly writes (p. 318):

Luther’s position was: Preserve what is good, because in all matters of Church practice nothing that is good can be against Scripture. Luther always refused to lose the net gains of ancient times. This position has brought on the Lutheran church an oft-repeated charge of being a halfway reformation. . . . The Reformed churches have been inclined to an opposite principle (Puritanism) which reads: Keep only what is expressly commanded in Scripture. Here the fear prevails that the human elements, the created things, in their service of symbolizing or communicating the divine and the spiritual, may take the place of what is to be taught or to be communicated and may develop into an idolatry or a magical mediation of the spiritual.

❖ The term “*evangelical*” is to be found in literature in reference to Reformation parties, most often to groups associated with Wittenberg and, to a lesser degree, in France and Switzerland.

❖ Finally, there is the term “*Renaissance*” that in our reading we will often come across. The term was introduced and generally adopted during the 16th century. In 1553, the natural philosopher Pierre Belon substituted the French *renaissance* for the Italian *rinascita* to describe a new cultural epoch that began in Florence and spread through Italy and Europe. Renaissance and Reformation as *cultural* rebirth and *religious* restoration are clearly distinguishable but closely related or linked in the mind of most Western writers. Together they are often said to be the “twin cradle of modernity.”

2. Factors Favoring Reformation

Justo Gonzalez (pp. 13-23) identifies and lists five major factors that contributed to the Reformation movement. To us, these are simply evidences of God's providence, setting the stage for the work he wanted to accomplish through Martin Luther and others. (We easily think of parallels "when the time had fully come" for the incarnation of the Son of God. With some addition & editing, we now follow the same progression of thought and retain the five major groupings that Gonzalez used.

a) The Growth of Nationalism and the Changing European Society and Economy

- ❖ Gonzalez appropriately mentions the rise of nationalism (and the events and contributions to the movements) in Spain, France, and England. Germany's route to unification was different and at this time lagging behind the pace in other countries. The rise of national monarchies in the west and the strength of territorial states in the Holy Roman Empire made it difficult for the church (papacy) to deal with Reformers when they spoke or wrote against the status quo. (Recall the different situations—and results—that Wycliffe and Huss had to deal with in their day.)
- ❖ The Empire was really only a federation of states and estates. The emperor, knowing he was unable to face the threat of the Turks (Venice in 1480! Vienna in 1529!) and control the dukes, princes, and independent cities adequately, had to conduct himself with diplomacy. He was unable to serve as the Pope's personal agent even if or when he wanted to. Recall how Charles V remained dependent on the territorial principalities for revenue and military. Furthermore, the princes often dominated the church life in their own areas (as expressed later in the *cuius regio, eius religio* arrangements), as well as most universities and their faculties.
- ❖ *Economically*, the 16th century was remarkably "dynamic" compared to the 150 years before it and 100 years after it. Commerce, international merchants, and financiers [N.B. the Fugger family] were in the lead. For reasons still debated, a high rate of inflation marked the century. The result was increased hardship on most despite increased wages, growing discontent alongside a growing capitalistic society, and lower landed nobility hurting along with the lower middle classes. The cry was often *Stadtluft macht frei!* But the reality was usually oppression in the city as much or more than in the country. Though the masses were quite patient and longsuffering, the situation was still ripe for change.
- ❖ *Socially*, there were tremendous variations in wealth and social status – and a wide range within those of the "upper social status." The society remained pyramidal and hierarchical. The whole Reformation era really did not bring about widespread or dramatic social changes. Actually, upper classes joined middle classes to fight the radicals. The extended family remained the basic unit in society, and only in the late 1500s did the emphasis shift more to wage-earners based on their occupations or company membership.

b) The Decline of Ecclesiastical Authority

- ❖ The “Babylonian Captivity” of the papacy in Avignon (1309-1377), the Western Schism (1378-1417), and the poor (and expensive) priorities of popes gave eloquent witness to the decline of the papal office. Papal taxation angered the civil authorities who were growing stronger. Rampant absenteeism and simony, for the sake of the lucrative prebend or benefice was a public scandal. (Nearly one third of the Holy Roman Empire real estate was held or controlled by the church; and profitable sections of many large cities were included. Still, the appetite of the hierarchy exceeded the ability of all this to produce funds.) “The clergy has become fishers of prebends rather than of souls,” cried Johann Geiler von Kaiserberg (1445-1510). Greed, bribery, and nepotism were tragically normal and obvious to all. Ignorance, immorality, and irregularities were all too common among both secular and regular clergy. (One fourth of the Netherlands and one third of the lower Rhine clergy lived with concubinage in the fifteenth century.)

- ❖ Thinking, caring, and observant leaders inside as well as outside the church were not deceived. They knew that a reform was overdue “in head and in members” (William of Durand). The Fifth Lateran Council (1512—1517) was perhaps the last chance for real reform, but the Popes [Julius II; Leo X] controlled the assembly and nothing good happened.

- ❖ And all this was prevailing when a new wave of religious devotion was surging among the masses! The church failed to give leadership when it was needed and wanted. The horrors of the Black Death and the fear of the Turk were factors leading to the upsurge of religious activity. Life was hard, so thoughts of the afterlife compensated. And what could the church offer? A multiplication of shrines, relics, and some new church buildings. One result is that paganism and syncretism persisted. Germanic folklore, superstition, and materialism filled voids in too many lives. Sound teaching was too rare. Catechisms in use, by content, were 80% morality, 15% dogma, and 5% sacraments (with the *ex opere operato* efficacy stressed). This does not feed faith.

“The nearer to Rome, the worse the Christians” – Medieval saying

“Saint Peter’s ship I fear I’m thinking May very shortly now be sinking.” – Sebastian Brant

- ❖ Pope Adrian VI instructed his legate to the Diet of Nuremberg in 1522 – 1523 to confess the following:

God has let this persecution of his church occur because of men and especially because of the sins of the priests and prelates. The Holy Scriptures loudly proclaim that the sins of the people have their origin in the sins of the religious leaders. We know all too well that also in the case of this Holy See for many years many reprehensible things have taken place: abuses in spiritual things, breaking of the commandments, yes, that everything has taken a turn for the very worst! We therefore have no cause to wonder that the disease has been transplanted from the head to the members, from the popes to the prelates.

- ❖ It came as no surprise that the reputation and respect of the hierarchy was at low ebb, and that alternate routes to piety increased.

c) *The Rise of Mysticism and Alternate Christianity*

- ❖ As we approach the topic of mysticism, we do well to review the meaning of the term as it applies to the Middle Ages. Medieval mysticism is often misunderstood or miscast, as though it were like Asiatic (Vedanta type) mysticism or Neo-Platonic (Plotinus type). In the Middle Ages every scholastic was a “mystic” of sorts and experienced what he was talking about as an intense personal experience. This was not set in opposition to intellectual activity or study. The basis of dogma was unity with the divine in devotion, prayer, contemplation, and/or ascetic practices combined with study. A lack of mysticism meant a wrongly intellectualized faith and a moralized love. Here the person doesn’t disappear into the “abyss of the divine.” There is union with God in his presence, but not in an abstract or absolute manner. (Later mysticism lost balance more regularly and led to a reaction of rationalism. This eventually led to the reaction of Ritschlian and eventually Barthian theology that painted “mysticism” in only distasteful colors. This largely accounts for G.K. Chesterton’s 20th century comment that mysticism “begins in mist, is centered in I, and ends in schism.”)

- ❖ As stated very well by Gonzalez, the “threat” of mysticism did not lie in open attacks against the hierarchy, but in planting a seed of curiosity and then respect for paths to godliness aside from the hierarchical route. As has been stated succinctly, the implications of the mystical encounter with God were “nonsacerdotal and could be nonsacramental.” In appraising the impact of late medieval mysticism, consider these words of Heick (p. 316):

Luther was much attracted by the writings of the mystics, whose thoughts he followed from the age of Augustine through Bernard down to the Schoolmen. He liked the practical emphasis of the German mystics on the way to God and their translation of the ideas of the dogmaticians into practical religious truths expressed in the mother tongue. He was also attracted by the religious and evangelical depth which was found in such writings as *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, the sermons of John Tauler, and the *Theologica Germanica*, an edition of which Luther published in 1516. But his aversion to quietism, his vivid sense of personality in God and man, and his strong ethical interest kept him from embracing mysticism as such.

- ❖ On balance, we think it more accurate that Luther rejected mysticism because of its primary assumption that the ultimate nature of reality or the divine essence may be known through *immediate* insight or intuition. Luther was a man cheerfully bound to the revelation of God through the written Word. Still, we concur that in many ways the mystics were attractive to serious, thoughtful people, including the laity. It places love above (but not against) reason, and holds that the universe has much more to it than the rational (but the universe is not irrational, only suprarational.) The simplicity of the Christian life and a greater participation in the religious life on the part of the laity were welcome emphases. Groups of devout folks frequently joined together in loose associations during those years to share and encourage each other in their efforts toward mystical experience. The Friends of God was one group title, as was the more famous Brethren of the Common Life, stemming from the Netherlands and Gerard Groote (1340—1384). Thomas a Kempis remains probably the most famous virtual embodiment of this informal group’s ideals of piety.

- ❖ There is a discernible link between the Brethren and humanists, since the Brethren loved scholarly as well as devotional material. In their schools, they used “safe classics” such as the moral philosophy of Seneca and Cicero, the “clean poets,” and pedagogically sound rhetoricians. Agricola and Erasmus were among the prominent 16th century leaders who were educated by them. Some include Luther in the list because he (probably) attended one of their schools during the year he lived in Magdeburg. Overall, they did well in “raising spiritual pillars in the Temple of the Lord” (Groote) independent of the church hierarchy.
- ❖ As a bit of a postscript we observe that mysticism cannot be communicated to the masses and must be considered more a personal or small group reaction to the void created by the derelict church leadership. In the wake of the Reformation of the 16th century, the Brethren communities, for example, quickly declined. By the middle of the 17th century virtually all the houses had passed out of existence.

d) The Impact of Nominalism on Scholasticism and the Church

- ❖ Among the key features of the Middle Ages was *scholasticism*. The word is derived from “school,” meaning, “school philosophy” – philosophy as it was treated in the Latin schools. We tend to think of this as a discipline separated from real life and “as heavy as a horse.” It did become distorted in the late Middle Ages, but it began very much centered in real life. Its intention was to provide the theological interpretation of all problems of daily life.
- ❖ The basic problem that scholasticism wrestled with had to do with the relationship of reason to authority (or revelation through authority). We must understand that *medieval authority was the whole body of tradition on which medieval life was based*. The basis of this authority/tradition was the recognized church fathers (including popes), statements of ecumenical creeds and councils, and the Bible—all considered as a unit. Medieval authority was a “living tradition” that expressed itself in the whole culture, in both “sacred” and “secular” realms. “This tradition was as natural to them as the air we breathe is to us” (Tillich). Scholasticism, thus, wrestled with the question of the relationship of human reason to the living tradition of the church/society in which everyone lived. This living tradition or authority was actually composed of many elements, and some of these said different things. So choices had to be made. This practical need created a class of people who sought to harmonize different voices of tradition so there might be a relatively uniform basis for daily life (eventually, canon law). The harmonizing method was usually the dialectical method, one of “yes” and “no.” Reason and logic were the tools used for this task. Reason gathered, harmonized, and commented on “sentences” of the fathers. Reason interpreted the meaning of tradition as expressed in the sentences.
- ❖ For the scholastics, human reason really began with the assumption of one “transcendent reality” (the supremacy and centrality of God) embodied in an institution (the medieval church). These assumed realities shaped the culture of this whole era. The result was a “sacred

society” that saw its overriding purpose and goal as the glorification of God. In the words of Lewis Spitz (p. 43-44)

In the medieval vision of reality the whole universe belonged to an objective and cosmic system. Everything had its place in a static hierarchy of complexity and value. This order was ideal and could be grasped by the human mind. This general optimistic confidence in man’s intellectual capacity was a necessary precondition for the philosophical and theological enterprise of the scholastic doctors, for they believed that theology as well as philosophy was well ordered and could be treated systematically, even by logical syllogisms [here, reasoning or deducing from the general to the specific].

- ❖ Thomas Aquinas, with his *Summa theologiae*, represented the high point of articulating this synthesis between the unseen and seen realities, between the unseen (but real) universals and the particular manifestations of them, as grasped by reason and faith. Thomism not only held that universals existed in the particular (moderate realism, closely related to Platonism or neo-Platonism), but that our understanding of them is served or furthered by empirical study of the particulars (an approach akin to Aristotelianism). Those who embraced Thomism were known as those who followed the *via antiqua*.

- ❖ Then came the challenge of thinkers Duns Scotus and ultimately William of Occam (or Ockham) (ca 1289—1349), who championed *nominalism*. They did not necessarily deny the existence of universals apart from the particulars that we observe and experience, but they held that this issue is beyond the capability of reason. Nominalism basically focuses on the visible, experiential realities and holds that the universals, as far as philosophy is concerned, have no reality except as “names.” The abstract or general ideas are only useful shorthand concepts of the mind. So Occam allowed only experience and reason as the authority in philosophy (and later nominalists were close to skeptics). Occam also applied his famous “razor” [entities are not to be multiplied beyond need; it is vain to do with more what can be done with less] to cut away hundreds of scholastic abstractions. He held that in epistemology it is needless to assume anything more than what we learn from sensation or experience. This is basically empiricism. We may abstract ideas (universals), but we cannot experience them, so conclusions based on them are empty and perhaps deceptive. Occam vigorously attacked what he considered to be too much nonsense written and spoken in earlier scholasticism, as “realists” mistook ideas for things, abstractions for realities. Occam’s followers called their way of thinking the *via moderna* (using a term used 300 years earlier by Abelard for his “conceptualism.”)

- ❖ To gain a greater appreciation for the conclusions and the impact of Occam in the world of scholasticism and theology, consider these abbreviated samples of what he taught:
 - Our knowledge is molded and limited by our means and ways of perceiving things. It is locked up in the prison of our minds and must not pretend to be objective or authoritative about anything.
 - There is no conclusive force in the arguments used to prove the existence of God.
 - Reason cannot show or prove what God is like (much less that he is Triune). Nor can reason establish the incarnation, the atonement, the real presence, etc. Nor is monotheism more rational than polytheism. And there may be other worlds and more gods to govern them.

- There may be what was later called “double truth” – that some things are true in theology that are not true in philosophy and vice versa.
 - What is true theologically is attributable primarily to God’s sovereign will, not to what is reasonable or provable with reason and logic. (This led to opponents saying that Occam made God to appear arbitrary and inexplicable to human thinking.)
 - Occam proposed to sacrifice reason on the altar of faith. It is “probable” that God exists and that he has endowed us with an immortal soul. We must distinguish between theological truth and philosophical truth and humbly accept in faith what reason doubts.
 - (After escaping from prison and in the anti-papal part of his life) he applied his “razor” to dogmas and rites that the church had added to what early Christianity adopted and demanded a return to the simpler creed and worship of the New Testament. He forcefully exposed hundreds of dogmas as absurd, practices as intolerable, the hierarchy as wicked, etc.
 - He urged widespread reform. The “church” was the whole community, not the clergy. The whole fellowship should select a council to choose and govern the pope. The popes are fallible, as are all men. Only “Holy Scripture cannot err.”
 - The Church and State need not be under one head; both are the ordinance of God and they have different administrations.
- ❖ The influence of Occam was significant. His views on the nature and purpose (and poverty) of the church were repeated by John Wycliffe. John Huss learned Nominalism at Prague. Luther learned it at Erfurt through Gabriel Biel and at one time said, “Occam, my dear master” and called Occam the “chiefest and most ingenious of the Scholastic doctors.” Actually, John Eck (defender of Catholicism against Luther) was also a nominalist. Still, the days of Nominalism as well as Scholasticism in general were limited. As Gonzalez points out (p. 21) the debates became increasingly complex and obtuse. “A general distrust of theologians developed that was not apparent in earlier centuries.” The most general effect of Nominalism was probably to undermine the basic assumption of scholasticism, namely, that medieval dogma could be proved by reason. By and large, the humanists heaped derision on the scholastics: “A man might as soon obtain bodily nourishment by milking a he-goat into a sieve as spiritual nourishment by reading the schoolmen” (Sir Thomas More). “Teleology is like a virgin consecrated to God; it is noble but produces no offspring” (Francis Bacon). The humanists and reformers certainly overstated their case against the scholastics, but the alternatives they offered were certainly more appealing to their contemporaries. So history moved from medieval thought into the Renaissance and Reformation.

e) The Rise of Humanism, Christian Humanists, and the Impact of Universities

- ❖ Since upcoming paragraphs will cover the subject of humanism in general and Erasmus specifically, not much will be said at this time. “A man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority,” wrote Dr. Samuel Johnson almost 300 years after humanism arose from Italy. There was a time when Italian elegance, wit and charm were admired and envied by the rest of Europe. Humanist culture perhaps got all this started in the second half of the fifteenth century. Classical antiquity was discovered as a reservoir of wisdom and this was largely channeled into Europe from Italy, at least in the beginning of this era.

- ❖ Perhaps the key thing we want to remember is the difference between the goals of humanism as opposed to the goals of the true reformers. Humanism did not touch much on the institutions of the church, the hierarchy, or the sacramental system. It targeted mainly abuses, ignorance, sloth, immorality, financial trickery, etc.
- ❖ Reformation studies often and appropriately mention the impact of the revolution in printing, with the movable type. To give perspective: over 100 editions of the Bible were published between 1457 and 1500. It is estimated that by 1500 some 40,000 works had been published, totaling about 10 million precious volumes. What a diffusion of knowledge! From 1500 to the start of the Reformation, German publishers issued an average of 40 books a year, but once the Reformation began this number rocketed to 500 titles a year. We may again recognize the providence of God in all this.
- ❖ The rise of the universities, in numbers and influence, probably merits mention as well. By 1500 there were 79 universities in Europe. This would not have included the University of Wittenberg. The rise in literacy among the laity was tied in with this. The statement of Spitz, “The church was the mother of the medieval universities; the universities were the mother of the Reformation,” is part overstatement and part oversimplification. Still, theological thinking and writing could not be divorced from the university setting by this time. Some have even maintained that prior to 1522 the Lutheran Reformation was an *academic movement*, with the primary concern to reform the teaching of theology at the University of Wittenberg. When Luther emerged from the Wartburg to respond to Karlstadt’s ineptitude, his program of academic reform changed into one of reform of the church and society. The statements may be argued, but the close connection between Luther’s work at the university and in the church cannot be denied.

3. Forerunners of the Reformation and the Rise of Pluralism

- ❖ A number of conservative historians say that “forerunners of the Reformation” is a term that is best applied to *trends* within the late medieval church as a whole, rather than certain individuals. This view is held for two primary reasons. One is that there were significant and varying trends, movements, and emphases that not only preceded the Reformation but set the stage for it. Second, the memorable individual forerunners, without exception, fell far short of what Martin Luther and his successors wanted to and were enabled to accomplish.
- ❖ Regarding the trends, let us begin by saying that methodological and doctrinal pluralism characterized Europe on the eve of the Reformation. Great diversity of opinions vied with each other regarding sources of theology and methods of theological speculation. Recall what was said about the late scholastics concerning the Realism vs. Nominalism debates, the *via antiqua* vs. the *via moderna*. There was also wholesale confusion regarding the center of authority in the church. Papal claims still vied with conciliar aspirations, while ordinary people more and more looked elsewhere. Nicholas of Cusa (1401—1464) wrote, “The church today has a different interpretation of the commandment in the Gospel [Drink from it, all of

you] from the one it once had.” But he argued that “the truth of the sacrament still stands” although “at diverse times one or another practice” has prevailed. Occam, to support his contention that there can be some variety of teaching on the Eucharist, referred to divergent opinions about the bodily assumption of the Virgin. And the opinions about her immaculate conception were considerably more diverse—and continued to be, despite the formulation of the dogma adopted in 1439 by the Council of Basel. Other contested teachings had to do with original sin, God’s will in relation to evil deeds, details of eschatology, penance, the nature and locus of ecclesiastical authority, and many others. And these must be set side by side with the diverse opinions on the best way to deal with the corruption, greed, ignorance, laziness, and general callousness of the hierarchy. All these phenomena would rightly be called “forerunners of the Reformation.” The church was ripe for reform.

- ❖ On the deficiency of pre-reformers, Klotsche (p. 160, 162) writes, “The so-called *forerunners of the Reformation*, starting from the Scriptures as the supreme and sole authority, gave utterance to many reformatory thoughts, but in the decisive questions concerning justification and faith their conception was essentially Catholic. In their attempts at reform they were carried so far as to underrate or ignore altogether the value of outward order and organization . . . The term *Forerunners of the Reformation* or *Reformers before the Reformation* is in fact a misnomer, for all of them lacked more or less the true evangelical spirit.” Tillich makes this parallel observation:

What the pre-Reformers all lacked was the one fundamental principle of the Reformation – Luther’s breakthrough to the experience of being accepted in spite of being unacceptable, which in Pauline terms is called justification by grace through faith. This principle does not appear before Luther. Almost everything else in the Reformation can be found in the so-called pre-Reformers.

- ❖ This was the key for Luther in the 16th century and for Lutheran ministers of the gospel in the 21st century. No church can be reformed on the basis of criticism alone, even though it be accurate and radical. Reformation can occur only by the power of a new principle: the power of a new relation to God.
- ❖ It is still in place to cite “forerunners” of the Reformation who risked much and served many as they strove to address theological issues according to their lights. For the sake of brevity, we now follow the short list provided by Klotsche (pp. 160—162).
 - *John Wyclif* (d. 1384) – clearly embraced the formal principle of the Reformation, namely, the supreme and sole authority of Scripture for doctrine and life. Giving the Bible to the masses was superior than celebrating the mass. Still, Wyclif saw in Scripture “the infallible law of Christ” and his reforming labors were of the Puritan type. He accurately criticized many of the medieval additions (traditions) to dogma regarding the sacraments, but also rejected all ecclesiastical traditions as mere human inventions, maintained a legalistic view of Christianity, and remained “Catholic” in his view of faith and justification. He stressed that the church should be poor as it was in the days of the apostles.
 - *John Huss* (d. 1415) – the quiet, peace-loving disciple of Wyclif who strongly opposed withholding the cup from the laity. His central emphasis was that the church is all the (predestined) people, its head is Christ alone, and any of the elect may administer the sacraments. Like Wyclif, Huss had no regard for any church tradition or institution, and thus largely disqualified himself from being

an effective reformer. His noble confession at the Council of Constance and his martyrdom are memorable.

- *Johann Wessel* (d. 1489) – an ascetic mystic and member of the Brethren of the Common Life. He especially criticized the medieval doctrine of penance, the paganizing of the papacy and the superstitious use of the sacraments. His own teaching on justification, however, was still that of Augustine. Luther, in 1521, published a collection of his writings and commented that, if he had read Wessel sooner, people would have accused him of stealing ideas from the mystic.
- *Johann Ruchrat von Wesel* (d. 1481) – a friend of Wessel, who also criticized the sacramental abuses and decried the use of indulgences. He held that justification is “a habitual grace implanted in man,” and held that good works (including pilgrimages and almsgiving) contribute to the attainment of eternal life.
- *Girolamo Savonarola* (d. 1489) – demonstrated a reliance on Scripture as the sure guide, an intense moral earnestness, and a strenuous protest against papal corruption. His main emphasis was in the realm of moral reform and righteousness in daily conduct and civil government. He sought a theocracy patterned after the model of OT Israel. Luther edited and offered a preface for a publication of Savonarola’s *Meditationes* on Psalm 31 and 51. In this piece the Italian reformer referred to justification by faith as a sinner appealing directly to God’s mercy. Still, his views on the sacramental system remained medieval.

Some have suggested that these and other harbingers of reform be called “Biblical Reformers” since they all regarded the Bible as the primary basis on their efforts. Luther, of course, shared this concept with them, but he had much more. We close this introductory section with three citations regarding what made Martin Luther different.

In his own person he embodied both of the major reformatory drives surging through the German people: a demand for external reform to end abuses and pressure for a genuine spiritual renewal on the deepest level . . . Even more important than the negative attack was Luther’s own evangelical religious fervor. A religious genius of profound faith and theological insight, he had made a deeper plunge into the meaning of the gospel than perhaps any other man since St. Paul. As a prophet he reached the heart of a people longing for purity and spiritual renewal. (Lewis Spitz, pp. 325—326).

History knows nothing of revivals or moral living apart from some new religious impulse. The motive power needed has always come through leaders who have had communion with the unseen . . . The times needed a prophet. They received one; a man of the people; bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh; one who had himself lived that popular religious life with all the thoroughness of a strong, earnest nature, who had sounded all its depths and tested its capacities, and gained in the end no relief for his burdened conscience; who had at least found his way into the presence of God, and who knew, by his own experience, that the living God was accessible to every Christian . . . Men could *see* what faith was when they looked at Luther. It must never be forgotten that to his contemporaries Luther was the embodiment of personal piety. (Thomas Lindsay, pp. 190—191).

With all of Luther’s gifts, he might have been a monster of wickedness, or a slave of the dominant superstition, helping to strengthen its chains and forge new ones, had not the truth of God made him free, had not the Spirit of God in his Word made him a humble and earnest believer. Luther was first a Christian, and then a Reformer, and he became a Reformer because he was a Christian. (C.P. Krauth, pp. 18-19).

C. The History of Doctrine: The Reformation Period

1. Erasmus and Humanism – the End of an Age and the Beginning of Another

- ❖ The humanistic movement of the 15th and 16th centuries was touched on in our “pre-Reformation” paragraphs. But the role of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) merits special mention. The Dutch humanist, commonly thought to have been the greatest scholar of his age, clearly advocated for a return to the sources of Christianity. But Gonzales (p. 23) is correct: “Erasmus cannot be properly understood if he is interpreted merely as a moderate reformer who lacked courage to follow his views to their ultimate consequences.” He was quite content to be and remain a member of the Catholic (Western) Church.

- ❖ To understand Erasmus and his relation to Luther and other Reformers, we need to understand that he, like most humanists, was interested mostly in a reformation or renewal of *personal ethics*, not doctrines or creeds. He wasn’t all that interested in changes in theology, since (to him) the practical lifestyles of people were of much greater importance than theological statements or even personal convictions. “To him, what was essential was the ‘philosophy of Christ,’ which was basically a rational, moderate, and orderly way of living.” (Gonzalez, 24). It wasn’t that he thought Christian teachings were unimportant, and he apparently believed the primary teachings of the Catholic Church, but he was convinced that too much of an emphasis on theology or doctrine led people to neglect ethical lifestyles that flowed from the use of human reason. He basically thought the way the ancient Stoics and Neo-Platonists thought.

- ❖ If the Lutheran and Protestant Reformation had been a movement of moderation in emotion and behavior, it is very likely that Erasmus would have played a more prominent role in it. But the Reformation was anything but moderate in external conduct and debate. The fact that the religious and the political interests of participants were usually intertwined guaranteed that there was going to be wars of words and eventually territorial wars. So Erasmus found much in Luther and others that he found utterly distasteful. Yet when he failed to attack Luther directly, he was accused of being fully sympathetic with the Lutherans. This led to his decision to write his treatise *On Free Will* (1524) to state honest disagreement with Luther over the nature and capabilities of fallen mankind in spiritual matters. After Luther’s emotionally strong and spiteful response (*On The Bondage of the Will*, 1525), Erasmus wanted little to do with meaningful reform, whether Protestant or Catholic. Nor was he appreciated among Catholics since he was too moderate and peaceable for them too. When the first *Index of Forbidden Books* was put together by Pope Paul IV in 1569, as part of the Counter-Reformation, works of Erasmus were listed just as writings of Luther were. Gonzalez offers this helpful appraisal:

Erasmus represents the end of an age. After his time, and for almost four centuries, it would be very difficult to hold the moderate and conciliatory position between Protestantism and Catholicism that he took. In a sense, he was the last of a long series of moderate, non-schismatic reformers that is a persistent feature of medieval western Christianity.

But Erasmus was also the beginning of a new age. It was the age of the printing press, of books, and of scholarship. . . . This has resulted in numerous reinterpretations of historical facts, and these in turn have had a profound influence on the further development of Christian thought. (27-28)

2. The Theology of Martin Luther

Historians often draw parallels between Luther and St. Augustine and mention how in both cases their theologies and lives are intimately connected. The personality of Luther (that is, his deep sense of personal guilt, mood swings, and deep desire to enjoy acceptance from a holy God – aside from his amazing mental and musical capabilities) equipped him to develop into the Reformer he became. It is very challenging to try to summarize the main features of his theology, but we can at least identify aspects that served as the foundation of the Reformation and continue to influence millions.

- ❖ **Salvation by Grace Alone** The early and medieval church fathers all agreed that the grace of God was essential for the sinner’s salvation. Yet there persisted differing definitions of what God’s grace is (divine favor/love or an empowering substance?) as well as varied opinions about the relative roles of divine grace and human participation in the process of creating saints out of sinners. It was Luther’s study of the Psalms that forced him to see that divine justice and love were interconnected, and his search to find how this could be yielded the discovery of Christ’s imputed righteousness as a perfectly free gift that in no way depended on human effort or merit. The real, revealed gospel was unconditional and flowed from grace alone.

This view of the gospel necessitated a rejection of alternate “gospels” and pathways to a right relationship to God. All forms of human merit playing a role in the sinner’s conversion or justification are incompatible with the unconditional gospel. So, all variations of synergism and semi-Pelagianism were rejected, and all medieval scholastics and thought systems because they all embraced human merit as somehow essential. Any supposed “free will” of natural man had to be an empty word while divine monergism is the reality. The concept of *infused* grace dispensed through the sacramental system was incompatible with the gospel. The imputed righteousness of Christ is not at all like infused grace. So, compromise with either humanism or Catholicism was never an option that could be successful. Even the concept of “by faith alone” needed constant clarification because of constant misunderstanding that our faith is the only work we need to supply. More accurately stated, we are saved “by grace alone” and this gift is “received through faith alone,” and faith itself is itself a work of God, not the sinner.

- ❖ **By Scripture Alone** No theologian in the church denied that the scriptures were the primary and necessary source and standard of truth to inform and guide the Christian. There was less agreement on the canon of Scripture and the authority that should be given to longstanding tradition or to mystical experience and “enthusiasm.” And during the whole period of scholasticism, the relationship between revelation, reason, and mysticism was hotly debated. But none, in practice as well as principle, had embraced the concept of *sola Scriptura* as consistently and forcefully as Luther. It should be added that Luther was not just interested in arguing for the primacy of Scripture, but the primacy of the gospel of Christ that Scripture provides. And he consistently rejected traditional views and practices that contradicted “the clear sense of Scripture.”

Terminology that prevailed in the post-Reformation era (like inerrancy and verbal inspiration) reflect concepts that Luther embraced. The Reformer's eventual use of what we call the "historical-grammatical approach to Bible interpretation" (in a sense a return to what the Antiochene school contended against the Alexandrian school centuries before) was another gift to later generations. Also, there is little doubt that the difference between law and gospel, and the two functions that the Word of God plays in the sinner's heart, is central to Lutheran theology. Gonzalez (54-55) is on-target when he says, "this law-gospel dialectic is the focal point of Luther's theology, apart from which his views on such things as justification, predestination, and ethics cannot be understood."

- ❖ **The Theology of the Cross** This still-popular phrase, drawn from Luther's theses at the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation and contrasted with a "theology of glory," is a broad concept that governs our approach to theology and how we go about gospel ministry. Luther did not use the phrase very much, but he championed the concepts a lot. Heidelberg Theses 18 through 21 may be helpful to us here: 18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ. 19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. (LW 31:40)

The full meaning of Luther's terminology has been debated for centuries, but all agree that his rejection of human works in the realm of salvation was a rejection of moralism. And his rejection of the natural knowledge of God as sufficient to really know God, is at the same time a rejection of rationalism. Properly speaking, true theology is content with knowing God as revealed in suffering and in the cross.

- ❖ **The Nature of Good Works** The strong emphasis on grace alone and forensic (declaratory) justification makes clarification regarding human good works necessary. Unlike Erasmus and humanists, Luther understood that theological truths were of primary importance when seeking to put Christian life into practice. Justification is essential for there to be Christian living. The Christian life is a "pilgrimage from righteousness to righteousness; from the initial imputation of righteousness by God, to the time when we will actually be made righteous by God" (Gonzalez, 59). The truth of imputed rather than indwelling righteousness in justification also leads to the companion truth that a Christian is both justified and a sinner, *simul justus et peccator*. Good works result in sinners who are forgiven and so freed from the curse of the law.

There are many aspects to the life of sanctification that deserve our study, of course, but prominent among those highlighted by Luther were the deadliness of moralizing, the delusion of perfectionism, and the emphasis on Christian vocation. Touching on Christian lifestyle and function is also the Reformer's understanding of the church and state, and the relationship between them. Both are divine creations and remain under his governance. Their respective purposes and means of accomplishing their goals need to be distinguished from each other, even if they cannot always be separated from each other.

The religious and cultural forces unleashed by God through Luther could not be contained or controlled by any one person. Quickly there surfaced differing views that agreed with Luther on some points but disagreed on others. In one sense, their name is Legion. “Fortunately, however, it is possible to classify Protestant theology in the sixteenth century into four basic groups or traditions: the Lutheran, the Reformed, the Anabaptist, and the Anglican” (Gonzales, 70).

3. Ulrich Zwingli & the Beginning of the Reformed Tradition

- ❖ Unlike Luther, whose spiritual pilgrimage was primarily personal and religious (dealing with the God-sinner relationship), Zwingli was moved much more by intellectual and political considerations. His intellectual interests followed those of the humanist Erasmus and his patriotic interests resulted in his dying in battle (1531 at Cappel). None of this should lead us to deny that Zwingli held a high view of Christ and the Scriptures. Yet his view of God (seen as much as the philosophical Absolute as merciful Father) and Scripture (truly God’s Word but expected to agree with the best of antiquity and human reason) reflected a “different spirit” than Luther’s on several doctrines.
- ❖ “Anything less than absolute predeterminism would impinge on the sovereignty and wisdom of God” (Gonzales, 76). On the basis of this doctrine of [double] predestination, Zwingli easily refutes all attempts to base salvation on human works or merit. But regarding the unevangelized, Zwingli thinks they may be among the elect but will be judged on a different basis than Christ alone. His understanding of law and gospel is quite different from that of Luther, for he sees both as practically the same, and a function of the gospel is to liberate us from consequences of our being law-breakers and to enable us to obey the law.
- ❖ The closer relationship between church and state, the conclusion that sacraments are mere (or empty) signs of internal divine work, and the inability to accept the idea of a full communication of attributes in the God-man Christ—these are logical conclusions that stem from Zwingli’s presuppositions. “Salvation by grace is now something that can almost be deduced from divine omnipotence. The law has once again become our friend” (Gonzales, 85). But the influence of Zwingli, channeled through Calvin and later Reformed traditions, must be recognized as very significant among Protestants.

4. Anabaptism and the Radical Reformation

As a general rule, the so-called “radical” reformers wanted to carry the Reformation movement farther than the “conservative” reformers did. While there were differences between them, most of them showed special interest in certain recurring topics:

1. Generally, they questioned the longstanding *relationship between church and state* and wanted to see the church not allied with civil government at all. They sought a return to the

pre-Constantine “pure Christianity” even though that invited persecution. At the same time, not all radical reformers were political revolutionaries.

2. They generally believed that true reformation had to ***purify individual lives and society*** as well as doctrine, and this should radically impact social relationships. And this was to be a matter of personal conviction and resolve that couldn’t be forced on anyone. It required a ***personal decision***. For this reason, infant and child baptism was typically rejected, and a much more synergistic rather than monergistic view of conversion became the norm.
3. Partly as a logical extension of their rejection of Rome’s sacramental system and partly the fruit of the tendency to make Christianity quite subjective and centered on the individual, the radical reformation movements were ***invariably “enthusiastic,” that is, mystical and Spirit-centered***, while highlighting the human will interacting with God the Spirit. The concept of external means of grace were typically despised.
4. The names and distinctive emphases of influential radical reformers are too many and varied to be covered here and now. Most Lutherans are familiar with A.B. Karlstad and his iconoclasm in Wittenberg as well as Thomas Muentzer, the one-time student of Luther who gravitated toward the “Zwickau prophets.” Of greater influence was Conrad Grebel and the Anabaptist (rebaptizer) movement that began in Zurich. They sought a “total restoration” of NT Christianity, not only in theological matters, but in worship forms, church government, and ideological separation from much of society. Initially these were pacifistic, but revolutionary Anabaptists were soon surfacing (e.g. Melchior Hoffman, John Matthys, John of Leiden). Eventually the movement gained some stability (and longevity) under the leadership of people like Menno Simons. Then there were various “spiritualists” and “rationalists” among radical reformers, most of whom had strong mystical tendencies and typically focused more on the spiritual life of individuals than any reformation of the church at large. Caspar Schwenckfeld and later George Fox would be fitting representatives of this genre of radical reformers. Early anti-Trinitarianism was represented by Michael Servetus and Faustus Socinius.

5. Lutheran Theology to the Formula of Concord

It is common (and accurate) to divide the history of Lutheran Reformation Doctrine and Confessionalism into three periods:

1. 1517-1530, culminating in the Augsburg Confession. Many significant works merit mention: Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* (1517), *Of the Papacy at Rome* (1520), *Address to the Christian nobility of the German Nation* (1520), *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), *The Freedom of the Christian Man* (1520), *Bondage of the Will* (1526), *Large and Small Catechisms* (1529) and finally Melancthon’s *Augsburg Confession* (1530). The nature of indulgences and repentance, Luther’s concept of the Church, the marks and authority of the Church, the corruption of the church hierarchical system and nature of the universal priesthood of believers, the tyranny of Rome’s sacramental system, the source and value of the Christian life, the total depravity of fallen mankind in spiritual matters, the wealth of truth set forth for the instruction of adults and children, and the orderly exposition and clarification of the

Lutheran faith as a continuation of historic Christianity – these lie at the heart of what Luther and fellow Reformers were enabled to believe and confess.

2. 1530-1546, ending with Luther's death. *The Apology to the Augsburg Confession* was penned by Melanchthon (1531), who kept altering the *Augsburg Confession* and his systematic *Loci*. Luther's *Smalcald Articles* and Melanchthon's *Tract on the Power and Primacy of the Papacy* were written in 1537, treating mostly topics previously dealt with, but with amplified expositions.
3. 1546-1580, punctuated with the publication of the *Book of Concord* of 1580. Several theological and political storms ravaged the Evangelical Lutheran churches. Several controversies surfaced and needed to be addressed: Adiaphoristic (1548), Osiandrian (1550), Majoristic (1551), Synergistic (1555), Antinomian (1556), Flacian (1560), Crypto-Calvinistic (1571). And even a rapid listing of what the articles of the *Formula of Concord* (1577) dealt with impress on us the theological blessings that later generations were provided with: the rejection of exaggerations of Flacius on original sin (I); the rejection of synergism and upholding of *sola gratia* (II); the emphasis on the forensic nature of justification (III); stressing how faith produces good works (IV); clarification of Law and Gospel (V); explanation of the Christian use of the Law (VI); nature of the real presence (VII); clarification of the personal union and attributes of Christ (VIII); truth that the whole Christ descended into hell to proclaim victory (IX); evangelical critique of church ceremonies (X); exposing false view of reprobation and highlighting the truth of election by grace (XI); rejection of heretical ideas (XII).

Regarding this third period, Justo Gonzales (103) gives us this helpful and insightful condensation of (conservative) Reformation history immediately after Luther and Zwingli passed from the scene:

The founders of the two great Protestant traditions, Luther and Zwingli, were followed by others who at once systematized and mitigated those traditions. . . . the general trend of Calvin's theology was a movement away from Zwingli and toward Luther. The same may be said about the man who played a similar role in the Lutheran tradition, Philip Melanchthon, for the development of his theology can be seen as a movement away from Luther toward Bucer and Calvin.

What has been referred to as Melanchthon's "humanistic and unionistic tendencies" had great impact on the history of Lutheran theology in the generation following that of Luther. Each new edition of his *Loci* (the first major systematic theology among Lutherans) showed how he was increasingly influenced by humanism and by Reformed concepts and assumptions. Altered texts (the *Variata*) of the *Augsburg Confession* gave additional evidence that his theology was seriously weakened from the convictions voiced during Luther's lifetime. The doctrines of the will of fallen mankind, the nature of the real presence in the Lord's Supper, and the exercise of Christian freedom in indifferent matters were among key points of turmoil and debate that flowed from the public distance that separated Melanchthon from Luther regarding doctrine and practice. Not all the controversies among Lutherans during this period stemmed from "Philippist" and "Crypto-Calvinist" issues, but all of them impress on us the unavoidable reality for the Church on earth. We are the Church Militant and we must contend for the truth entrusted to us in every age.

6. The Reformed Theology of John Calvin

- ❖ Before looking directly at the theology and influence of John Calvin, we will find a glance at **Martin Bucer** to be helpful. Bucer (1491-1551) was a former Dominican who became a follower of the Reformation in 1518, was active in Strasbourg, eventually served as a Cambridge professor in England, and was influential wherever he went. His main contributions were (1) a mediating position on the Lord's Supper; (2) a strong practical skill at organizing Protestant churches; and (3) an inclination to work especially hard to incorporate Christian ideals into everyday living. He was greatly influenced by Luther in matters of sin, grace, and justification, but differed from Luther in how intimately he would connect Law and Gospel and how frequently he would seek to find mediating positions in controversy (and contributed much to the eventual shape of Anglicanism). He also transmitted Luther's ideas to Calvin, doing so with a sprinkling of what might be called Bucerism and Melancthonism.

- ❖ **John Calvin** (1509-1564) left an impressive body of work and influence in Protestantism. He was not creative theologically, but mainly worked with the ideas of Luther and Augustine plus others. Perhaps his most significant departures from Luther had to do with the generous role he ascribed to human reason in handling Scripture, his understanding of Law and Gospel as more compatible to each other, and his blurring of distinctions between church and state. He was a well-educated and trained lawyer, and a Christian statesman who modified and applied religious principles to the needs and political desires of the time and place in which he lived. And his view of God (perceived more as a God of majesty and glory than a God of love) and the doctrine of double predestination (God's *decretum horrible*) are inseparably linked to Calvin's theology.

- ❖ Calvin is probably best seen as occupying a theological position between Luther and later Calvinism. Like Luther, he saw Christ everywhere in the Bible, though he processed the information more in keeping with logic and reason. He concurred with Luther regarding the total depravity of mankind. He embraced the strictly forensic view of justification. He accepted the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ, but declined to follow fully the doctrine of the communication of attributes. He viewed the sacraments as "a sort of appendix" joined to the Word and used a wider definition of what a sacrament is (something that in some way benefits or strengthens the Christian in faith). Calvin maintained that the sacraments are truly "efficacious" but could not bring himself to speak clearly of them as actual means or instruments through which the Spirit worked. They were accompanying signs, though very precious.

- ❖ Perhaps a word about Reformed Confessions is in place. There are several that date back to the first and second generation of Protestant Reformers. Calvin wrote the *Catechism of Geneva* (1541) which eventually served as a model for the *Heidelberg* (1563) and *Westminster Catechism* (1647), *et. al.* The *Consensus of Zurich* (1549) succeeded in joining the Zwinglian and Calvinist reformation movements "in everlasting wedlock." But it should be said that despite hundreds of subsequent confessional statements among the Reformed, none are comparable in authority or influence than are the Lutheran Confessions among Lutherans. They are made to be changed according to local desires and changing theological goals. Calvin's *Institutes* (1536, 1559, first & third/final editions) are much more authoritative.

7. The Reformation in Great Britain

- ❖ “The history of the Reformation in England is dominated by political events and by varying attitudes of monarchs.... The other feature of the English Reformation is that it was not dominated by one or two outstanding figures. None of its chief exponents attained the theological prominence of Luther or Calvin, although theologians such as Cranmer, Jewel, Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, and others each made significant contributions” (Gonzales, 178, 179). The earlier reform movement led by John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and his Lollards remained active on a limited basis, despite widespread ridicule. English humanists (like Thomas More, 1478-1535) also sought church reformation, but like Erasmus, had more social and ethical goals than theological ones. King Henry VIII, the key player in leading the church away from Rome and to a monarchial rule and organization, was not interested in changing doctrines or practices in the new Church of England.

- ❖ Several Lutheran writers dealing with the history of Christian Thought don’t even include a section on the English Reformation. Perhaps that’s because there really isn’t much here in the way of developing or adding insights to Christian doctrine – and the negatives are not as spectacularly heretical as other period religious systems were. Several historians have described the Anglican Church as one born and bred in compromise. Anglicanism mixes truth and error into a package that retains the marks of the Church but disrespects it at the same time. Political intrigue and military actions are more consistently prominent in its history than are vibrant theological discoveries. And the centrality of justification is largely a no-show despite frequent mention and occasional bright appearances. Rites and hymnody that can cause the human spirit to soar, at least temporarily, accompanied a mixture of mediocre theology and often-blatant ecclesiastical bullying.

- ❖ The long history of ecclesiastical and political legalism inevitably spawned splinter groups. Demanding allegiance to indifferent matters (liturgical practices) led to the Puritan movement. Within the movement came differing views of church governance, with many preferring a Presbyterian form of church organization; others, more radical, began to claim autonomy for individual congregations. Yet others found comfort with the demanded-and-borrowed-from-Rome episcopal polity, complete with vestments that symbolized bishops’ authority. Another event deserves to be mentioned: during the Elizabethan reign came the Reformation in Scotland under the leadership of *John Knox* (1505-1572). “Theologically it represented the development of Calvinism into Presbyterianism in its classical form” (Gonzalez, 195).

D. The History of Doctrine: The Post-Reformation Period

1. Theology in the Catholic Reformation

- ❖ Often called the *Counter-Reformation*, a strong movement swept through the Roman Catholic Church in the last half of the 1500s and first part of the 1600s. Convenient parameters are the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648). While largely a response to Protestantism, it was also (especially in Spain) a long-overdue reformation of Catholicism. What eventually resulted was a Roman Church different from the medieval church. The medieval Western Church, while in need of reform in many ways, was open to conflicting ideas and included contrasting ideologies. Think of the Franciscans and Dominicans, Augustinians and Aristotelians, realists and nominalists, biblicists and mystics, etc. The post-Tridentine Catholicism was much more closed and narrow and, in the considered opinion of many historians, a “new church” emerged (new attitude or guiding principles despite retaining most old traditions), namely, what is now the “Roman Catholic Church.”

- ❖ For our purposes here, we'll take a brief look at Catholicism using a series of high-profile doctrines:
 1. **Authority in the Church.** (1) *The traditional Scriptures and the OT Apocrypha*, of equal authority. The significance? The Apocrypha are characterized by legalism and moralizing, so the legalistic spirit that had been around a long time was now preserved as authoritative. (2) *Scripture and Tradition are equal in authority*, “with equal piety and reverence accepted.” This was Rome's answer to *sola Scriptura*. It should be noted that “tradition” was not defined, so eventually the papacy was permitted to define it any way it pleased (and the *current* decision is always decisive). (3) *Only the Vulgate of St. Jerome is the authoritative translation of Scripture*. This is Rome's response to Erasmus specifically and textual criticism in general. (4) *The Holy Mother Church [read: Pope] gives the interpretation of Scripture*. In Protestantism, in principle, it is every reader of Scripture guided by the Spirit (in practice, it was really usually the theological faculties). The pope is one and his decision is final, contrasted with many faculties who often disagreed with each other so their authority was greatly compromised.

 2. **The Doctrine of Sin.** Trent rejected the idea that mankind has completely lost their freedom of choice in spiritual matters and cannot contribute to their relationship with God. To Rome, human freedom is not lost, but only weakened. After baptism, concupiscence remains – but this should not be called sin. It is more an inclination to sin. So fallen mankind is not completely corrupted and even their natural drives are not sin – so the church can allow more liberties than Protestantism can. And sin is understood more as specific acts against divine law, acts the church can forgive. In defining what is what, the Catholic principle is legalistic to the core and divides sin into “sins.”

 3. **The Doctrine of Justification.** Rome knew well that this was the central issue to the main Reformers and used language that was more “diplomatic” than elsewhere. But it remained clear that forgiveness is not *sola gratia* to Catholicism; other elements are added. Preparation for justification required a prevenient infused grace that is active in the sinner and which can be accepted or rejected by the

sinner's decision. After grace is received, it is given to the sinner to the degree that they cooperated. The "gift" of justification is then said to contain faith – and also hope and love, not as fruits of faith, but as components of faith. Faith alone (*sola fide*) is not sufficient. And it sometimes appears that Catholicism understands faith to be a bare intellectual act of the sinner [recall "implicit faith," a.k.a. *fides carbonaria*]. On this article of faith, no reconciliation was possible between the Reformers and the Papists, between monergism and synergism in conversion.

4. **The Sacramental System.** While Catholicism tried to speak diplomatically regarding justification, it made no such effort regarding the sacraments. They knew any compromise or softening here would undercut the essence of Catholicism. With respect to the number, reduced by Luther and Calvin to two, there are seven – and all were instituted by Christ (and this is *de fide*, a matter that must be accepted on faith, with no historical doubt allowed). And there is no salvation without the sacraments. They have a saving power, a hidden force, of their own and are effective *ex opere operato*, by the very performance, for those who do not place an impediment (mortal sin) within themselves. Transubstantiation (and required adoration of the host) is retained, the sacrifice of the mass is preserved, penance with satisfaction required is unchanged, and marriage is retained as a sacrament (yet virginity is valued more highly than marriage). Regarding the sacraments, "Trent made practically no reform at all, nor did it provide a better theological foundation. It simply confirmed and consecrated the tradition" (Tillich, 217). And the basic doctrine behind them all is the sacrament of ordination. The priest exercises the sacramental power. This is the hierarchical church which is the church of the sacramental sacrifice.

 5. **Papal Infallibility.** At Trent two opinions remained at odds with each other. The first was that the pope is the universal bishop, the vicar of Christ. The other is that the pope is "first among equals," representing unity and order. (The first view is "*curialism*," centered in the court of the pope; the second is "*conciliarism*," where the councils have power to make ultimate decisions.) The issue was not decided at Trent and would have to wait centuries, until 1870 at Vatican I. And the Jesuits were major players in the drama that led to that decision, since they worked to diminish the power of bishops generally.
- ❖ *Jansenism* and *Probabilism* may also be mentioned concerning post-Reformation Catholicism. *Jansenism* was a theological movement that emphasized original sin, human depravity, the necessity of divine grace, and predestination. The movement originated from the work of the Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638). *Jansenism* was opposed by many in the Catholic hierarchy, especially the Jesuits. Although the Jansenists identified themselves only as rigorous followers of Augustine's teachings, Jesuits coined the term "Jansenism" to identify them as having Calvinist affinities. The Jesuits also won this war. *Probabilism* stems from what the Jesuits said: If an opinion [usually on an ethical question] is probable, a person is allowed to follow it even though the opposite opinion is more probable. The result of this doctrine was a tremendous ethical relativism, laxity, and chaos. And it was so abused that finally a reaction arose within Catholicism. Yet the "principle of the probable" triumphed or survived. This is very significant for priests hearing confessions and trying to decide how serious a sin might be. One result is that now just about every sin is a venial one. Another observation is that the Jesuits again won a struggle, in this case to "remove the radical seriousness of sin which the Jansenists and the early Protestants maintained" (Tillich 224).

2. The Theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy

- ❖ The Period of Orthodoxy brought a systematizing and consolidating of Reformation truths as well as a theological response to the Counter-Reformation. Lutheran Orthodoxy has also been called (mostly by non-Lutherans) Protestant Scholasticism, with attention mainly on methods that were parallel to those of the medieval schoolmen in some respects. Orthodox theology often had a political significance, because of political requirements that demanded territories to define exactly where they stood theologically. Theological problems usually involved legal problems. (People were killed, for example, when the *Variata* was introduced to supplant the *Invariata* without the permission of the princes.) In our limited time, we'll offer a limited list of key theologians and key theological developments:

- ❖ **Main Theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy**

The great forerunner of Lutheran orthodoxy was **Martin Chemnitz** (1522-1586). His *Examination of the Council of Trent*, *On the Two Natures of Christ*, *Loci Theologici*, and contributions to the *Formula of Concord* demonstrate that this "second Martin" was a giant in Lutheran history. **Aegidius Hunnius** (1550-1603) is usually credited with bringing the tradition of orthodoxy to the University of Wittenberg – and passing it on to his son **Nikolaus Hunnius** (1585-1643). Aegidius also wrote extensive commentaries on Scripture later used by more systematic theologians. Nikolaus established clear distinctions between fundamental and secondary articles of faith that served later theologians well. **Leonard Hutter** (1563-1616), also a Wittenberg professor, worked primarily in Dogmatics and creeds, and with John Gerhard, developed a theory of divine inspiration that would remain normative for a long time. The greatest theologian, without doubt, was **Johann Gerhard** (1582-1637), who primarily taught at Jena. His massive *Loci Theologici* sought to show the inner systematic connection of the whole body of theological knowledge rather than simply expound on loosely connected theological themes of concepts. **Johann Konrad Dannhauer** (1603-1666) was an outstanding preacher and his published sermons (ten volumes) influenced orthodox period preachers a great deal. He was also a teacher of Spener and in this way became a link between Orthodoxy and Pietism. He was nevertheless fully orthodox and also a man of profound piety and concern for the life of the church. **Abraham Calov** (1612-1686) produced an enormous amount of literary works (and for that reason of uneven quality and with some repetition). His *Biblia Illustrata*, stemming from a series of very popular lectures, formed a vast commentary on the whole text of Scripture. He was especially good at polemics and, in the opinion of most historians, fell into a dogmatic rigidity and polemical attitude that was not winsome. **Johann Andreas Quenstedt** (1617-1688) had the distinction of being a nephew of Johann Gerhard and one of several fathers-in-law of Calov. He was not an original thinker, but his great intellect and systematic skill allowed him to gather the best of Lutheran orthodoxy into his *System of Theology* (1683). **David Hollaz** (1648-1713), usually listed as the last Lutheran theologian of the orthodox age, remained a parish pastor (and youth instructor) rather than a university professor. He was very familiar with the work of Calov and Quenstedt, sought to summarize truths for his young students, and included several digressions to show the importance of sound doctrine for the Christian life. His emphasis on a life of true piety is sometimes seen as the result of the emergence of Pietism, but his orthodoxy has never been questioned.

❖ Main Developments of Lutheran Orthodoxy

The syncretism of George Calixtus (1585-1656) merits brief attention, because orthodox theologians like Gerhard and Dannhauer saw its danger and exposed it vigorously. He taught at Helmstedt University, where Aristotelian metaphysics was first reintroduced into Lutheran Germany – and where humanism and humanistic philosophy, along with Melancthonian and Crypto-Calvinistic elements survived. Calixtus used the distinction between fundamental and secondary doctrines to argue that Christians of differing confessions should exercise fellowship with each other as long as the fundamental teachings were confessed commonly. Therefore, as an example, Lutherans should fraternally acknowledge Catholics and Reformed even while disagreeing with them on the subject of the Lord's Supper. But how can one distinguish "fundamental" truths from "secondary" ones? Calixtus favored the *consensus quinquesaecularis* because of his high regard for what the early church had jointly established in the first five centuries of Christendom. [This approach was later embraced by Anglican Latitudinarians and, in our own day, the paleo-orthodoxy school of Thomas Odem, et. al.] Lutheran orthodoxy saw the proposals of Calixtus as a denial of its most cherished principles, and eventually the movement died out. But in the history of Christian thought it is significant in at least two ways: (1) It contributed to the development of a rigid form of orthodoxy on the part of some orthodox theologians (e.g., Calov), and (2) its basic ideas returned to the visible church with a vengeance with the ecumenical movement and Evangelical fundamentalism of the twentieth century.

The Relation between Reason and Revelation: Johann Gerhard wanted a solid metaphysical foundation for his systematic work, and he turned to Aristotle to a large degree. This was partly to aid him in confronting the works of the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation, who often used Aristotelian categories of thought they got from Spanish metaphysicians [Suárez and others at Salamanca]. This was a clear departure from Luther, who had said that no one could become a theologian with Aristotle. Yet most orthodox theologians followed Gerhard's lead. Tillich has this helpful summary regarding John Gerhard:

He was a great philosopher and theologian, in some ways comparable to Thomas Aquinas for Roman Catholics. . . . He distinguished articles which are pure from those which are mixed. Those which are solely revealed are pure; those which are rationally possible as well as revealed are mixed. . . . In this way we have two structures: the substructure of reason, and the superstructure of revelation. The biblical doctrines form the superstructure.

Obviously, the very, very old issue of the relationship between reason and revelation was squarely on the agenda of orthodox theologians. It was understood that Luther had made angry statements against the philosophers and he usually had in mind the scholastics and their teacher Aristotle. But he was not an "irrationalist," as his words at Worms in 1521 show ("*unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason*"). But he knew well that reason must be taught to serve revelation, not take the lead, and he fought against the categories of reason lest they change the substance of faith. Reason cannot save, but must itself be saved if it will serve mankind properly. This is a topic churches still wrestle with.

The Plenary and Verbal Inspiration of Scripture: It's no surprise that Lutheran orthodoxy devoted a lot of attention to the origin, inspiration, and authority of Scripture. It was the heart of

the *Prolegomena* when approaching systematic theology works. While Luther and his companion reformers had always insisted on the sole authority of Scripture, they never developed a detailed theory on its origin and inspiration. The Orthodox men were eager to set themselves to the task. But we are wise to note that many of the doctrinal formulations are built on the basis of Aristotelian metaphysics. A prime example is the distinction between the Bible's *forma* (the content, God's communicated thoughts) and *materia* (the text itself, the words, sounds, syllables). The concept of the full (plenary) and verbal inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit was also seen as important. Otherwise the Catholic view of tradition would have to be allowed by saying that the prophets and apostles were generally inspired, wrote some of this in Scripture but passed more on to their successors as sacred (and infallible and authoritative) tradition. Unfortunately, as time passed, claims of verbal inspiration were made more sweeping. Hollaz even claimed that the Masoretic pointing was as old as the text itself and as inspired as the consonants. While Lutheran orthodoxy remained conscious of falling prey to rationalism, the label "Protestant scholasticism" is still often pinned on theologians of this era. Justo Gonzales (264-265) provides a good example of this:

Usually this title ["Protestant scholasticism"] is given a pejorative connotation, implying that the theology of the seventeenth century somehow lost Luther's great discoveries and fell back on goals and methodologies that reproduced some of the worst elements of medieval scholasticism. There is no doubt that there is some truth in such a judgment, but there is also a great deal of falsehood. Lutheran orthodoxy certainly lacked the freshness and freedom of Luther and the early reformers. Its attempt to systematize everything often approached a legalism that Luther himself would probably have rejected. Its use of Aristotelian metaphysics—another reason that it has been called "scholastic"—was something that Luther would have deplored. . . . And yet, in its very systematization and by its very attention to matters of detail, it kept alive the inheritance of Lutheran tradition. Its insistence on the need for revelation certainly made it more akin to Luther than the rationalists who in the eighteenth century accused it of having abandoned Luther's insights. In summary, orthodox Lutheran theologians were to Luther what his epigones were to Alexander: members of a later generation, lacking the genius of the founder, but without whom the founder's work would have been in vain.

The Formal and Material Principles: The precise terminology came later (maybe in the 1800s) but the concept was developed with orthodoxy. The "formal principle" of a particular theology is its source and authority. The "material principle" of a theology is its central teaching, the characteristic "content" of the theology that shapes its other teachings and practices. For Lutheran orthodoxy, the formal principle is the Bible (alone); the material principle is the doctrine of justification (by grace alone through faith in Christ alone). They are interdependent, as Luther himself had expressed.

For the sake of comparison, consider the formal and material principles of **Calvinism**, which are the Bible (alone), and the glory of God. And in the Roman Catholic Church: formal principle – the Bible, Tradition, reason, the Pope; material principle – the need for mankind to be progressively justified, i.e., made just through the sacraments.

3. Reformed Theology after Calvin

What eventually became known as “Calvinism” was mostly derived from Calvin himself, but in some ways differed from his theology in the *Institutes*. Following Gonzales (267ff.) we briefly focus on four key players in the development of Reformed theology after Calvin:

- ❖ **Peter Martyr Vermigli** (1499-1562) was most influential by introducing a theological methodology that was heavily influenced by Aristotle and which greatly influenced later Reformed theologians. Calvin started with biblical revelation and habitually expressed awe at the mystery of God’s will. Later Reformed theology tended to proceed from divine decrees down to specifics in a deductive manner. (Evidence of this: the doctrine of predestination was systematically put under the heading of the Doctrine of God, abandoning Calvin’s practice of putting it under the heading of Soteriology.) **Jerome [Girolamo] Zanchi** (1516-1590), was in personality a lover of peace but theologically a lover of systematizing with inexorable logic. In predestination, divine omniscience joined with divine omnipotence implies (necessitates) that everything—not just the eternal destiny of humans—has been determined by God. Assuming this premise, the doctrine of *limited atonement* cannot be refuted logically and the *double predestination* must stand logically as well. So Zanchi changed Calvin’s doctrine, if not in content, certainly in tone, making it a doctrine reflecting the nature of God rather than expressions of divine grace for sinners. **Theodore Beza** (1519-1605) also distorted Reformed ideas by applying his prickly personality and tendency to ridicule opponents to systematic theology. He championed double predestination and limited atonement but also asserted the right of Christians to resist tyrannical rulers to the point of rebellion. (He meant Catholic rulers.) For Beza, the Bible was a series of propositions, equally inspired and equally binding on consciences, and he carried the Calvinistic system to its ultimate logical consequences. **Zacharias Ursinus** (1534-1583), early friend and disciple of Melancthon, was more measured and less strident than those Reformed theologians just mentioned. As primary author of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), he exerted a generally healthy influence on succeeding generations of Reformed Christians. But the various controversies that surfaced in Calvinism during the 1600s aided the process of hardening by Calvinistic leaders.

- ❖ **Jacob Arminius** (1560-1609), of course, needs to be mentioned in Reformed history of doctrine, not so much that he himself greatly changed Reformed theology, but because the reservations he expressed about strict Calvinism took hold in others (like the *Remonstrants*, who got their name from the *Remonstrance*, signed in 1610 to prohibit their dismissal from Reformed faculties). Eventually they found fault with not only supra- and infralapsarianism, but also the concepts of the perseverance of the saints and limited atonement. From the Lutheran perspective, Arminius was more Christ-centered than others, but also inevitably doomed to succumb to some form of synergism.

- ❖ The history of Reformed Protestantism is sometimes studied on the basis of countries and political or religious settings in which the church found itself. The rise of Arminianism, for example, started in the Netherlands, at the University of Leyden (now Leiden). In France, where Catholicism held political power through the crown and wasn’t afraid to use it, Protestantism took a bloodier route to survival (recall the Huguenots). The eventual formation of Scottish

Calvinism followed years of unstable politics and fierce pressures from either France or England on a continuous basis. The Puritan movement, primarily in England, was largely a reaction against a rigid and somewhat heartless form of Calvinism as expressed in the *Westminster Confession* of 1647. As a general statement on the period of Reformed Orthodoxy, Gonzalez (299) provides this summary:

Calvinist orthodoxy did a disservice to true Calvinism inasmuch as later generations believed that it was an accurate expression of Calvin's views, and therefore tended to see him as more rigid than he in fact had been. This in turn meant that the Genevan reformer received a much less sympathetic ear than he deserved.

4. New Awakenings in Personal Piety

- ❖ In general, movement of Pietism was the reaction of the subjective side of religion against the objective side. But we should remember that Lutheran Orthodoxy dealt with the subjective side (in the Order of Salvation section of systematics, among others). The devotional writings of Johann Gerhard and the hymns of Paul Gerhardt, produced at the highest point of Orthodoxy, clearly demonstrate that there was a clear emphasis on one's personal relationship with God. The charge of a "dead orthodoxy" that Pietism was reacting against, needs to be spoken very cautiously and with reference to occasional pockets of objective overdose. Besides, Pietism was as much a reaction against a low state of morality rather than doctrine, also in Lutheran areas, where rigid discipline didn't exist. Lutherans seldom monitored the masses in matters of morality. Still, as succeeding generations inherited the theological work of their ancestors, the work was increasingly treated as stale and objectified. But true theology is never to be seen as merely a series of truths that is primarily or only to be formally stated in propositions to be transmitted to the next generation.

- ❖ Pietists, especially *Philip Jacob Spener* (1635-1705), continuously mentioned and quoted Luther in their writings. Few have really found fault with Spener's *Pia Desideria* [pious desires], a very influential piece. Key elements of Pietism (perhaps better: piety) were present in Luther. Social ethics (e.g., the building of orphanages) and missionary outreach among Pietists often put Orthodoxy to shame. The liturgical sphere was also changed in welcome ways, like the renewed emphasis on confirmation to follow up on baptism, and the habit of calling public ministers "pastors." Favorable contributions of Pietism include the following:
 - It helped the church retain the truth that theology is a practical discipline. The ancient maxim holds true, "Whatever is theological is practical."
 - The central importance of exegetical rather than systematic theology was championed. Before the theologian is able to edify others, he must first be trained with a familiarity of Scripture. (The Wauwatosa theologians certainly come to our mind here.)
 - Not only ministers but also laity are bearers of the Word and have priestly functions.
 - Pietists positively influenced the disastrous moral conditions in Europe. In the wake of the Thirty Years' War there was plenty of chaos and brutal life conditions. The orthodox, generally speaking, did not do much about it compared to the efforts of pietistic theologians.

- An analysis of the theology advocated by leading pietists shows that they generally were not questioning the accepted orthodoxy of their times. But some of the implications of pietistic assumptions did question some orthodox theology.

Spener's friend and follower, *August Hermann Francke* (1633-1727), later led the movement and was quite an organizer. Orthodox Lutheranism, however, never embraced the movement but found it lacking despite acceptable emphases. Perhaps the *two major faults in Pietism* that still deserve examination and study are these: (1) Pietism emphasized sanctification instead of justification; and (2) Pietism fostered subjectivism. "The former involves a subtle misemphasis. The latter involves a spirit or orientation." (Brenner)

5. The Changing Philosophical Setting (Rise of Rationalism)

- ❖ It's not so easy to trace the rise of rationalism (or the Period of Enlightenment) to only one or two sources. Some trace it back to Faustus Socinus and the *Racovian Catechism* of the Socinians. Adolph Harnack in his *History of Dogma* said that Socinianism was "the end of the history of Christian dogma." Others, like Paul Tillich, point to the entrance of Aristotelian philosophy into the period of Protestant Orthodoxy. Using the terminology of Gerhard, Tillich wrote, "The mixed articles became unmixed rationally and the substructure of rational theology dispossessed the superstructure of revelation. When this happens, we are in the realm of rationalism or Enlightenment." Still others point to Pietism or at least pietistic mysticism as the forerunner of unbridled rationalism. And a broader source remains among the usual suspects: the growing discovery of the natural world and the powers of the human mind to invent, discover, or apply resources to solve problems or improve people's lives.
- ❖ Rationalism or Enlightenment emphasizes *human autonomy*, a kind of self-rule that is fitting because the *law of reason* is within people. This is contrary to anything so arbitrary and out of our control as divine grace. And then there is the principle of *harmony*. This doesn't mean that everyone and everything will get along well. Tillich (290) offers this clarification: "Harmony means that if everyone follows his rational, or even irrational tendencies, there is nevertheless a law behind the backs of everyone which has the effect of making everything come out most adequately." *Tolerance* is another concept that accompanies rationalism. (A main historical reason for this is that if political and religious intolerance had continued much longer, Europe would have been destroyed by the religious wars.) The classic definition and summary of this topic is Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) *What is Enlightenment?*

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in the lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own reason! —that is the motto of enlightenment.

Kant, like most Enlightenment advocates, goes on to say how much more comfortable it is to have guardians and authorities, but he says this comfort needs to be given up. Man must stand upon himself; it is his nature to be autonomous. This last sentence is one of the few points on which the Reformers and the Protestant Orthodox theologians might agree with Kant. But they would quickly add a word to clarify the truth: *It is fallen man's nature to be autonomous* or at least think that he is. But this approach fails to solve the problem of sin and guilt, to produce a new lifestyle of love to one's neighbor, or to give the forgiven sinner citizenship in heaven.

E. Concluding Comments

1. What did the Reformation Accomplish?

- ❖ There's no shortage of people in this world who give the Reformation and the Renaissance high marks in appraising their impact on succeeding generations. It should be noted, however, that perhaps the majority of these voices have in mind something other than the history of Christian thought or doctrine. The *impact on society and culture*, not the church as such, is often foremost on their minds. Admittedly, there are historians that contest the whole idea that the 16th century events really brought about such dramatic changes in European culture. We feel no great compulsion to debate the issue. Here we simply list a number of the most frequently mentioned fruits of the era.
- ✓ The Reformation forced people to *reconsider the concepts and relationships of church and state* in dramatically new terms. The bonds of the feudal system were broken, civil authorities found release from the domination of the church, and the church faced the world without the secular state to serve as its handmaiden. It took time for these relationships to find stability and the progress was neither immediate nor pleasant for the most part, but the spark was kindled.
- ✓ Based on the conception of the church as a community of believers, the reformers gave a *renewed emphasis to each individual member of the fellowship* just as it challenged the hierarchy's claims to temporal power. The seeds of democracy and republicanism were sown anew during this period. The concept of the universal priesthood of believers is suggestive of a political structure that is not pyramidal or hierarchical. James Russell Lowell, speaking of Puritanism but in a way that it could be applied to Protestantism in general, wrote, "Believing itself quick with the seed of religious liberty, [it] laid without knowing it the egg of democracy."
- ✓ The Reformation *demonstrated how the laity might live in service to brothers and neighbors* – and stressed how that kind of service is higher than hierarchical status or power. The concept of Christian vocation that transcended the dualism of sacred and secular callings remains a significant contribution to both church and society.
- ✓ A dominant emphasis of the reformers was to *change the ministerial office into a service*. Furthermore, the highest service was in preaching the Word of God. Admittedly, there were early post-Reformation reactions that went in the direction of "high clericalism and bureaucracy" among those ordained, but the servant mentality was there to vie with such ideas on a more level field.
- ✓ The magisterial Reformation *enlarged the state's competence in areas of social welfare and education*. One may argue if church–state principles were always properly observed, but as time passed the results in social reform were progressively discernible.
- ✓ In stressing the biblical injunction that one must obey God rather than men, the newer religious minorities of the 16th century *affirmed the primacy of acting according to conscience*

and using the individual conscience as guide. Again, seeds of individual responsibility and independence also in the social realm are here sown.

- ✓ Economically, *an impetus to capitalism* has been seen here as well. The “free laity, with reason, and religious ethic toward work” serve the capitalistic system well. Lewis Spitz (p. 555) mentions pertinent characteristics often tied especially to Calvinism: “Sobriety, thrift, stewardship, rational and systematic behavior, high ethics, a sense of vocation, earthly rewards as signs of grace, social restraints as well as self-discipline – all of these elements were related to Calvinist ‘worldly’ asceticism. These values contributed to the development of a well-ordered capitalistic way of economic life.”
- ❖ The heritage of humanism and the Renaissance aside from the Reformation itself perhaps merits some mention here. The advancement of educational subjects and methodology, the praise of the teaching profession, the cultivation of music and other fine arts [despite the iconoclastic movements and what became strict Calvinism and Puritanism], and an emphasis on science and technology [for reasons that are still debated by historians] are a sampling.

So in the realm of positive contributions or accomplishments stemming from the 16th century events, there is much that has been acknowledged. But are there negative and undesirable results of the Reformation? Many voices are swift to counter with the opinion that the Reformation may be viewed as a producer of more evil than good. For our purposes here, we mention two frequently cited examples: *doctrinal fragmentation and loveless warfare*.

- ❖ Doctrinal pluralism prevailed in the 14th and 15th centuries, prior to the Reformation. The doctrinal situation of the 17th century was also one of pluralism, showing that whatever the 16th century Reformation accomplished, the banishment of pluralism was not a part of it. In the orthodoxy period systems of confessional dogmatics were constructed that signaled an end to any external or confessional church unity. To the disappointment and almost embarrassment of sincere Christians, external Christendom remains divided and doctrinal diversity remains the norm rather than the exception. Many see this as a distinct failure of Reformation efforts.
- ❖ Strange as it may seem, the Church of Rome during the Middle Ages, with few exceptions, was without definite, universally binding dogmas. The great works of the Scholastics contain only the private teachings of their respective authors who were themselves divided into different schools with widely divergent tendencies . . . The disposition to believe what the church believes (*fides implicita*) was predominant. Even the mystics took little interest in theology and dogma. Their aim was to bring about a personal revival of the Christian faith and practical reforms within the Church. (Heick, p. 485)
- ❖ When viewed this way, the Reformation did accomplish a couple of things: it not only brought doctrinal pluralism out in the open for discussion and debate among Protestants, but it forced the Church of Rome to formulate more precisely its own doctrines against Protestantism. The Roman Church, as shown at Trent, continued to echo its official though somewhat hollow claim that its teaching and tradition never really change. We must give Rome high marks for consistency if not integrity in this. But while the official word is that Trent only reaffirmed or possibly rephrased previous dogma, the modern Roman Catholic Church was born at that time as an entity distinguishable from the medieval church.

- ❖ To repeat the point for emphasis, we say the Reformation didn't create or begin pluralism any more than it ended it. It exposed and confirmed it as a continuing reality within Christendom. Thus considered, the Reformation was a forward step in honesty if nothing else. Ernest Schwiebert (*Luther and His Times*, pp. 683 – 744) presents material under the heading of "Attempts to Unify Christendom" and identifies various unification efforts in five different periods of activity during the lifetime of Luther. The controversy with Erasmus, the Marburg Colloquy, the Augsburg Confession, the Wittenberg Concord, and the Schmalkald Articles are cited, with their attendant circumstances, as opportunities or attempts to attain a unity of sorts in the 16th century setting. The now obvious truth, however, prevailed: "Once the principle of ecclesiastical authority in all things had been rejected and that of individual conscience substituted, varying interpretations were bound to result. The several Reformers differed in their fundamental assumptions and points of emphasis."

- ❖ One can make a case that the Reformation furthered a phenomenon related to pluralism that may be described as an intensification of public pluralism or a fragmentation of the external church. The reference is to formal and systematic "denominationalism" in which one finds doctrinal diversity sometimes expressed in eclectic or syncretistic theological systems and signaled by distinct church bodies. A classic example of this would be the Church of England, described succinctly by Pelikan (Vol. 4, p. 2) as being Lutheran in its intellectual origins, Catholic in its polity, Reformed in its confessional statements, Radical in its Puritan outcome, and, according to the old saw, "Pelagian in its pulpit, but Augustinian in its prayer book." From our perspective, the patchwork quality of the Anglican Church – or of any of the similar contemporary denominations that are noticeably syncretic – does not flow from so much from the Reformation, but from a lack of a reformatory spirit and resolve. With reference to the Church of England, C. P. Krauth (Preface, pp. x, xi) offers these comments:

With more uniformity than any other great Protestant body, it has less unity than any. Partly in virtue of its doctrinal indeterminateness, it has been the home of men of the most opposite opinions . . . It has a doctrinal laxity which excuses, and, indeed, invites, innovation, conjoined with an organic fixedness which prevents the free play of the novelty. Hence the Church of England has been more depleted than any other, by secessions . . . The Church of England has been so careful of the rigid old bottle of the form, yet so careless or so helpless as to what the bottle might be made to hold, that the new wine which went into it has been attended in every case by the same history – the fermenting burst the bottle and the wine was spilled.

- ❖ Those who express appreciation of the Anglican penchant for diversity of belief with a façade of oneness usually acknowledge the political and social goals that may be accomplished by taking this route to ecclesiastical composition. It is seen as an antidote of sorts to the evil of warfare that characterized so much of post-Reformation history. The open and bloody warfare that occurred in the wake of the Reformation brought joy to few in the Christian Church. Viewed by itself, that period of European history may lead us to indict the Reformation as an event that surely accomplished more evil than good. But the wider perspective expressed by Krauth (p. 20-21) is worth hearing and considering:

After the final struggle of the Thirty Years' War, Europe seemed ruined; its fields had been drenched with blood. Its cities laid [sic] in ashes, hardly a family remained undivided, and the fiercest passions had been so aroused, that it seemed as if they could never be allayed.

Yet the establishment of the work of the Reformation has richly repaid Europe for all it endured . . . The evils of which the Reformation was the occasion have passed away. We must go to the page of history to know what they were. The blessings of which the Reformation was the cause abide; we feel them in our homes, in the Church, in the State; they are interwoven with the life of our life. Once feeling them, we know that this would be no world to live in without them. . . . Had a war of three hundred years been necessary to sustain the Reformation, we now know the Reformation would ultimately have repaid all the sacrifices it demanded. Had our fathers surrendered the truth, even under that pressure to which ours is but a feather, how we would have cursed their memory, as we contrasted what we were with what we might have been.

2. Are Reformation Issues Largely Obsolete?

There are in our day people who consider the Reformation a religious dinosaur. Issues that led to ecclesiastical divisions and strident condemnations in the 16th century are now often seen as and boldly declared to be outmoded, obsolete.

One chain of events within the last half century may serve to illustrate what is happening, not only in Europe but in the United States and elsewhere. On November 17, 1980 Pope John Paul II met with Protestant Christians in Mainz. A prominent Evangelical bishop, Eduard Lohse, there pleaded the urgent need for improved ecumenical cooperation with regard to “Sunday services, eucharistic fellowship, and mixed marriages.” This led to the establishment of a Joint Ecumenical Commission to explore pertinent issues that might hinder or further such cooperation. It was agreed that “fundamental theological questions” had to take precedence, since the pastoral tasks in question were not to be solved on a merely pragmatic basis. So study groups were set up to give attention to the following subjects:

1. *Justification* (including faith, baptism, penance)
2. *Sacraments* (in general and especially the Lord’s Supper)
3. *Ministry* (including the question of Scripture and tradition)

Limiting ourselves to reporting findings on the first subject, that of justification, we observe that this particular study commission reached conclusions that other ecumenically minded people have been reaching with regularity. In their own words, these are the main summary points the European ecumenical leaders ultimately made:

1. “Where the interpretation of the justification of the sinner is concerned, the mutual sixteenth-century condemnations which we have discussed no longer apply to our partner today in any sense that could divide the churches.”
2. “The ending of the rejections does not mean that there are no longer any differences of interpretation about the justification of the sinner, or that these are *confined* to mere misunderstandings of different modes of expression. There continue to be differences . . . They are not such that with them ‘the church stands or falls.’”
3. “The doctrine of justification—and, above all, its biblical foundation—will always retain a special function in the church. That function is continually to remind Christians that we sinners live solely from the forgiving love of God, which we merely allow to be bestowed on us, but which we in no way—in however modified a form—“earn” or are able to tie down to any preconditions or postconditions.”

(Incidentally, while the language of the third point is certainly flirting with the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*, the material presented prior to the summary statement reveals that the concept of human merit and responsibility still has a place in the Roman idea of justification.)

In one sense, these conclusions should come as no surprise. We recall the inability of the Lutheran World Federation (at Helsinki in 1963) to speak with one voice on the matter of justification or even to agree on the exact nature and scope of this *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*. This goes a long way to explain how ecumenical study groups can find the attitudes and actions of Reformation fathers to be obsolete. Ambiguity of expression and latitude of meaning have replaced integrity of conviction and communication. Reformation issues, in themselves, have not become obsolete. The resolve to take the issues as seriously as the reformers did is what is increasingly outmoded.

The more recent (June 11, 1999) and highly publicized Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification issued by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation gave us more of the same. While using language that can suggest that agreement in doctrine has been reached between the two parties, remaining differences are nevertheless admitted and understated. The conviction that God wants professing Christians to be united (Bravo!) is highlighted at the expense of clarity regarding how a sinner is reconciled with God (Shame!).

How instructive this is for us in the struggle for the preservation and perpetuation of the central truth restored by the Reformation! This truth remains assailed by Rome and modern Protestants. The temptation for us to give up the struggle is real. The impassioned plea of Krauth (p. 21) is directed at us.

And shall we despond, draw back, and give our names to the reproach of generations to come, because the burden of the hour seems to us heavy? God, in his mercy, forbid! If all others are ready to yield to despondency and abandon the struggle, we, children of the Reformation, dare not. That struggle has taught us two lessons which must never be forgotten. One is that the true and the good must be secured at any price. They are beyond all price. We dare not compute their cost. They are the soul of our being, and the whole world is as dust in the balance against them. No matter what is to be paid for them, we must not hesitate to lay down their redemption price. The other grand lesson is that their price is never paid in vain. What we give can never be lost, *unless we give too little*. If we give all, we shall have all. All shall come back . . . If we maintain the pure Word inflexibly at every cost, over against the arrogance of Rome and of the weak pretentiousness of Rationalism, we shall conquer both through the Word; but to compromise on a single point is to lose all, and to be lost.