

# The German Reformation

Theological Spark and Secular Timber



## Hard to top last week...



- Martin Luther...
  - Not all that interesting – at least in a soap opera kind of a way
  - Prior to 1517 he was, by all reports, a good Augustinian monk, a scholar, and attentive to his duties as a priest
- After 1522 or so, some of his letters lead to
  - Speculation about dalliances with former nuns – one of who he married
  - He seemed to have a particular fondness for
    - Wine and song
    - Super-sized meals
- So, if your hoping for scandal... *alas*

## The Milieu of the Time

Corruption, excess, privilege –  
*imperial, papal, and south...*



Scholastic voice of the Church  
speaking to the Humanistic  
ears of the world

- A broad movement in Europe for “independence” at all levels from
  - feudal legacies of landed gentry, knights, etc.
  - Monopolies of the merchants and guilds
  - taxation from every quarter
  - war
  - “ultramontane” governance
    - Holy Roman Emperor
    - Catholic Church hierarchy

Spirit of God moving in the World

## The Question at Hand

- Tonight’s session
  - Alas... not nearly as tawdry as last week’s exposé on pre-Reformation popes
  - But, what did we learn?
- All the “theological cards” were virtually “on the table”
  - John Wycliffe (England)
  - Jan Hus (Bohemia)
  - Savonarola (Florence)
  - others...
- Abuses and corruption ... all still there
  - Simony, benefices, fees
  - Papal bankruptcy, fees
  - Indulgences
  - Three rules of the King
  - Holy Roman Emperors, investiture, nation states, papal states, city states....
- Calls for Reform

So..... why was Martin Luther  
able to lead a sustained reform?  
And why did it split the Church?

## Germany in 1517



### Germany as part of Holy Roman Empire

Charles V of Spain in the Emperor  
There is intrigue close to home and in  
Italy – and wars to finance.

Germany? Peaceful and good economy...

- Rising national identity joining England and France
  - Germany
  - Swiss Republic
- Different humanism in North
  - Italy – the arts as revival of Greek and Roman roots
  - Germany – revival of Christian roots
- New Economy
  - Late emergence from feudalism, but...
  - Banking, mining, and trade



## German uniqueness

- **Humanism** in Germany
  - Retrieval of its Christian roots
  - Greek, Hebrew & Latin revival
  - Reading Scripture apart from the Vulgate
  - Reading the Early Church Fathers apart from Aquinas and the scholastics
- Erasmus' influence
  - Simplification of the “layers” of tradition
  - Catholic voice gone viral
- A literate Germany – priests, scholars, princes, and others
- **Economy**
  - banking power
  - raw material control
  - Strong merchant class
  - ...financial independence from imperial and papal aspirations
- **Distance** from Rome and Holy Roman Emperor
- Rising national **identity**
  - “free cities” of guilds and burghers
  - Apart from latent feudal loyalty and vows

## A German World

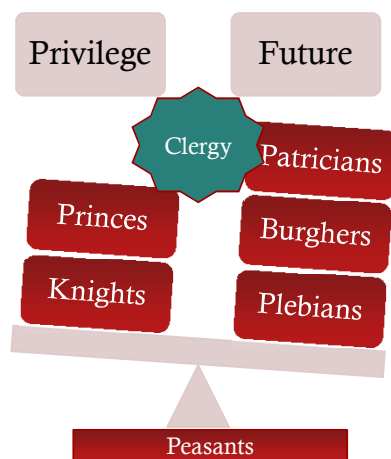
- There was no united monarchy in Germany
  - no national church
  - no investiture controversy
  - BUT, no ability to avoid papal and imperial taxations

**NO TAXATION!**



**WITHOUT REPRESENTATION!**

*I think we started a Revolution over this idea...*



## The Princes



- Wanted autonomy from HRE and Rome
  - Wanted freedom from taxes and the wars of others
  - Wanted freedom to tax others
  - Wanted to acquire Church wealth: land – 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the land area of Germany
- “Under cover of the Gospel, the princes were only intent on the plunder of the churches.”
    - Philip Melanchthon
    - Protestant Reformer
  - Luther’s “Appeal to the Princes”
    - the princes found religious justification for their political and economic aims
    - Political expediency outweighed religious convictions and theological issues.

## Princes in Action

- Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony
  - Opposed Tetzler on “rights issue”
  - Protector of Martin Luther
  - Safe passage to Diet of Worms (1521) then sheltered him in Wartburg Castle
    - *German bible*
    - *Cult figure*
- Motivations?
  - Voice for reform for years – papal and imperial
  - Remained Catholic



## Princes in Action

- John the Steadfast, Elector of Saxony
  - Continued his brother's policies of protecting the Reformation
  - Established Lutheranism as state religion of Saxony (1527) - with himself as Bishop
  - Formed the Schmalkaldic League
    - *Landgrave of Hesse*
    - *Lutheranism and defense against HRE*
- Motivations?
  - Freedom from imperial and papal entanglements
  - Lutheran, but tolerant



## Princes in Action

- John Frederick I, Elector of Saxony
  - Close friend of Luther before his days as Elector (1532)
  - Was the uber-Lutheran
  - Led the Schmalkaldic League into a war, ultimately with the Emperor, where he lost Saxony (1547)
- Motivations?
  - True believer
  - Strong anti-Catholic

All this represents 30 years of protection from HRE and Rome for Martin Luther and the Reform



## Princely Protection – Timeline for the Reformation

- Wittenburg Castle and the 95 theses (1517) - indulgences
- Imperial Diet of Augsburg (1518)
  - right to interpret Scripture
  - Papacy as anti-Christ
- *Exsurge Domine* from Leo X(1520) threatens excommunication – done in 1521
- Imperial Diet of Worms (1521) – the non arrest and period of hiding
- Wartburg Castle (1522)
  - Profusion of writings
  - Hallmarks of reformation thought

Five years that changed  
Christian Unity



But there is a dark side....

## Princely Entanglements

### The Dark Side

- The Rebellion of the Knights (1521)
- Wittenberg Christmas riots (1522)
- The Peasants War (1524-25)  
“Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants”
- Radical Reformers – each with a princely protector and conflict
  - Thomas Müntzer, Andreas Karlstadt
  - Zwickau prophets
  - Anabaptist groups like the Hutterites and Mennonites.
- Peace of Augsburg (1555)
  - Ends Imperials battles with the Schmalkaldic League
  - *Cuius regio, eius religio* – “whose realm, his religion”
- 30-Years War (1618-1648)
  - The Princes battle on German soil
  - 25-40% of Germans die
- Peace of Westphalia
  - Augsburg finally accepted
  - End of papal pan-European power
  - Modern nation states



## Theology of Luther

- Why Martin Luther was never burned at the stake:
  - The Princes
  - The banking consortiums holding imperial and papal debt
  - HREs, Turks at the borders, rioting peasants, the New World,... and more
- The German Reformation was successful at its onset because at the core it was a secular, rather than religious, movement.
- Yet the theological basis is what marked the first reforms
  - Justification by faith alone
  - Universal priesthood of the baptized
  - *Simul justus et peccator*
  - Baptism – justifying and for infants
  - Eucharist – the Real Presence, but the Mass – not a sacrifice
  - Works follow faith and have no role in salvation
  - Christian anthropology
  - Catholic Marian beliefs

## The Tipping Points

- *Unam Sanctum* – all kings subject to the Pope
  - ...not so much
  - all but done by Westphalia
- **Wycliffe and Hus** – Luther does not address all their issues
  - double Predestination
  - contra Real Presence
- By whose **authority**?
  - Luther can not really object to other German reformers
  - Much less the Swiss
- **Swiss Republic and England** are in the wings
- **Luther's writings** are flooding Europe and the **printing press** is the great equalizer
  - Luther shifted to German
  - German literacy skyrocketed
  - Presses roll in other lands

Where is the Catholic response in all this?  
If the Council of Trent is the response to the Reformation – it is still 23 years away

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