HIST/HRS 127 – Class Summary 1A Spring 2014

Introduction to the Course

The course will emphasize the differences and debate between the Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions and, since the 18th century (the Enlightenment), the different reactions of Protestants and Catholics to the advance of secularism in western culture and the disastrous events of the 20th century. The course will emphasize varying religious ideas, and their historical interaction; also biographies of religious leaders like Martin Luther, John Wesley and Pope Pius XII; institutional history like the attitude of Reformation leaders toward the papal government of the Church; and religious sociology dealing with, for example, the progress of dechristianization in Europe in modern times.

Germany Around 1500

Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor

The instructor gave some preliminary information on **Germany** in the time of Luther. The population was mostly peasants, with a small but dynamic and often well-educated middle class; city life was thriving based mainly on the commercial activity of German merchants in Hanseatic cities such as Bremen, Lübeck and Hamburg, although the standard of living was much below that of contemporary USA. The country was still ruled by aristocrats, who drew most of their income from the land, and enjoyed their privileges as a hereditary right. The country had a strong intellectual life; their **universities**, in one of which – the recently established Wittenberg – Luther worked before his break with Rome, were among the best in Europe.

Germany had a certain formal **political** unity under the authority of the holy Roman **Emperor,** the great and glorious Charles V (1515-55**)**; he had important authority in other parts of Europe (Spain, Italy and the Netherlands), and was thus distracted from German affairs; he was tied to the Church, and it would have been most unlikely for him to break with Catholicism. There were some 300+ autonomous states in Germany, ranging in size from small towns (the size of Folsom) to large principalities like Saxony and Bavaria. (Real German political unity was to be achieved only with the creation of the modern German Empire in 1871.) The Emperor's authority in Germany was quite limited; he worked through a **Diet** (a meeting of the main German princes), and he was usually unable to enforce his will in individual states (like Saxony, Bavaria, Brandenburg, etc.) without the support of the local prince, who held most of the real political power. **Frederick the Wise**, the Elector of Saxony, was Luther's political sovereign; if he were to survive in the Germany of the very Catholic Charles V, Luther had to have the support of Frederick.

Frederick the Wise of Saxony

The **German Catholic Church** was part of the international Church, and there was a great deal of **resentment** in German public opinion against the draining of German funds south to Italy to support the papacy. Germans and other Northern European Christians resented the power of Italians in their lands, whether it be from the **absenteeism** of Italian office-holders (they were not resident in their office's area), from their **pluralism** (one person holding several ecclesiastical offices), or their expatriation of German money to

support the Roman clergy. Germans, who were among the spiritual leaders in the late medieval Church, also resented the frivolity and sumptuousness of the lives of the clergy in Rome (Luther was scandalized by the behavior of the Roman clergy during his visit to Rome in 1510) and the worldliness of the pope and the curia. Luther's campaign took place in the context of existing strong anti-Roman feeling. The success of the Reformation in northern Europe (Germany, the Low Countries, England, Scotland, etc.) can be attributed in large measure to this anti-papal sentiment.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages (Up to About 1500)

The **Middle Ages** stretched from about 500 to about 1400, baptized thus by Renaissance scholars who considered it a time of barbarism, ignorance and oppression. The adjective is 'medieval,' not 'midevil' (anyone using the latter spelling risks a long spell in Purgatory). A look at an accurate model of a gothic cathedral, such as **Notre Dame de Chartres,** demonstrates 1) the technological sophistication of the High Middle Ages, and 2) the importance of the Church and of the Christian religion in medieval society and culture. Renaissance humanism beginning in about 1400 marked the end of the Middle Ages; right afterwards was the Reformation.

Chartres Cathedral

The **Latin Church** (so called because its language was Latin, inherited from Rome) in the Middle Ages was an international organization encompassing most of western, central and northern Europe. It had been separated from the independent Greek Orthodox Church (whose language was Greek) since at least the 11th century.

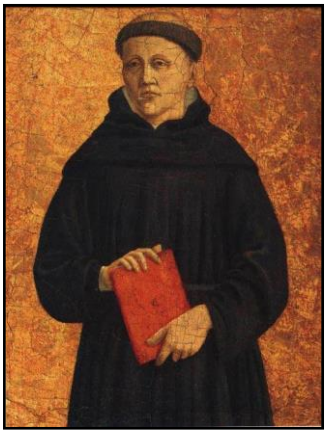
1) The Church was run by the **clergy**, who were the teaching and commanding members of the Church and who dispensed God's salvific grace through the sacraments; the **laity** were the learning and obeying group who received God's saving grace from the priests for their salvation. The Latin Church was a great bureaucratic organization under the authority of the **pope** and his **curia** (top department heads) in Rome. The **cardinals,** whose main function was to elect the new pope upon the death of the old one, were often members of the curia. The Catholic Church was the heir of the political and bureaucratic organization of the Roman Empire. The pope may be compared to the U.S. President, and the curia to the President's cabinet. The pope, although always important, was not necessarily dominant in the affairs of the medieval Church; his effective authority in European countries depended on the country and the historical epoch – more powerful in southern Europe and often less influential in the North (England and Germany).

St. Dominic, founder of the Dominicans

The clergy claimed to have received their sacramental powers directly from St. Peter (Mt 16) by the **apostolic succession**; each bishop and each priest receives his spiritual powers in the sacrament of Holy Orders from another bishop, thus forming an unbroken historical line all the way back to St. Peter, the first bishop and pope.

The clergy was divided into two groups: The **secular clergy** consisted of the parish clergy serving lay people in their parishes in the individual countries; they were administered by bishops in their dioceses.

The **regular clergy** were groups of men (and sometimes women serving in convents) organized in their own rule under a 'general' or an 'abbot' and independent of the local bishop but enjoined to cooperate with him; they took vows of poverty (they were not allowed private possessions), chastity (no marriage or sex), and obedience to their superiors. Some of the regular clergy were **monastic**, cloistered behind walls to work and pray; these were usually some form of the Benedictines, who dated from the early Middle Ages – about 1000 years before the time of Luther; a large number of the monasteries in the later Middle Ages were corrupt or underpopulated. The **Augustinians** (Luther was a member of this order) were monks, but with more worldly functions in the cities, like running hospitals and teaching in universities. The **friars** were regular clergy whose function was to go out into the world and to serve the populations of the new cities that grew up in the Middle Ages, not to withdraw from the world: the best known in 1500 were the **Dominicans** (who ran the Holy Inquisition and were great intellectual enemies of Luther in Germany) and the Franciscans, who were less involved in intellectual matters; both of these orders dated from the 13th century.



An Augustinian monk

There were also in the medieval church large numbers of female clergy, usually known as **nuns.** They also took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; they always lived in communities, some of them in cloistered monastic ones where their main job was prayer, some of them in urban environments where they performed charitable functions in schools, hospitals, etc. Although typical convents had female leaders (abbesses, prioresses, etc.), they were under the command of male superiors and played little role in the administration of the church.

All priests (brothers and nuns as well) were supposed to be **celibate** (no marriage, no sex) – a requirement more or less enforced in the Church since about the 11th century. A great number of priests in the later Middle Ages, however, were not celibate, and especially in the North (France, Germany, etc.) many priests lived with common law wives. Violation of vows of celibacy was a frequent source of scandal in the medieval Church, and bishops often spent a lot of their time and energy trying to restore their clergy to proper behavior.

The Last supper by Giovanni Pietro Rizzoli

2) The Church's scheme for salvation was largely sacramental. **Sacraments were overt, visible physical acts that conferred the saving grace of Jesus Christ on the individual receiving them**. Grace was conferred "**ex opere operato**" – from the objective, ritual act itself (e.g., the priest's reciting of the words 'This is my body' ('Hoc est corpus meum") in the consecration of the mass, or his "Ego te absolvo" repeated at the end of the sacrament of penance), the grace is conferred on the soul of the individual. The individual was thus prepared for salvation with God in heaven when he received the Eucharist in Holy Communion, received absolution from a priest in confession, or received the sacrament of Extreme Unction (anointing of the

sick and dying). This concept contrasted with the more inner, psychological approach of the Protestants, where the subjective, individual faith of the believer is the key factor. In almost all cases the sacraments were **performed by priests**, thus emphasizing the potent spiritual powers of the clergy and their superiority over the laity.

There were **seven** sacraments – Penance, Confirmation, Orders, Marriage, Extreme Unction (Last Rites), and the two most important – Baptism and the **Eucharist**. The nature of the Eucharist emphasized the powers of the priest: by his repeating the words of the Lord at the Last Supper, the priest changes the bread and wine on the altar into the body and blood of Christ. The Church's official dogma of the Eucharist was **transubstantiation** as defined by the great medieval theologian St. Thomas Aquinas – the substance of the wine and bread is **actually changed** by the priest into the body and blood of Jesus, while the accidents (appearance) remain the same as before. The Church did not pretend that the (highly metaphysical) doctrine of transubstantiation was biblically based, but there is a strong biblical foundation for the more general Church doctrine of Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist: e.g., "I am the living bread which comes down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world" - *John 6: 51-52*

The Council of Trent, 1545-1563

The **mass** also had its mystical significance, since it was celebrated as a reenactment of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, thus making Jesus' saving grace available to all who participated. The mass was not just an opportunity for prayer; Jesus' saving sacrifice actually occurred every time the priest repeated the ritual formula, "This is my body". The medieval understanding of the sacraments and of the significance of the mass underlined the **superior and privileged status of the priest** in the Latin Church; something against which Protestants were to react strongly.

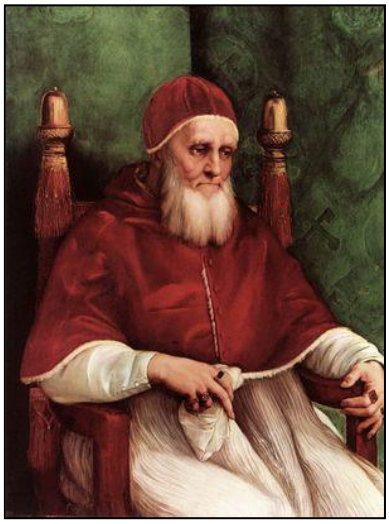
3) The Church was also **dogmatic and authoritative** – to belong to the community of the faithful, you have to accept (and recite) the stated truths of the Church, a summary of which is expressed in the different **creeds**, the most famous of which was the **Nicene Creed**, composed in the 4th century and still recited in the mass in the 15th (and the 21st). The dogmas contained in the creeds are arrived at through a study of scripture and God's continued revelation of his will through the **Tradition** of the Church. God revealed himself to humanity through scripture, to be sure, but He also continues His revelation over the centuries through His Church. The **Holy Spirit** watches over the Church, inspires it, to make sure its pronouncements are free of error. Tradition was sometimes formed through popular practices (e.g., the advancing belief in Purgatory in the Early Middle Ages) and often formulated by theologians in the universities that flourished in the Middle Ages. The **Councils** were called periodically to formulate and state the dogmas of the Church (councils also dealt with other issues such as disciplinary problems, liturgy, etc.); the Pope assists in this process but does not necessarily dominate it. Debate and disagreement often raged in the Councils and the universities (almost all of whose members were clergymen), but once the decisions were made, the Christian faithful were expected to obey.

Galileo being condemned by the Italian Inquisition, 1632

If Christians publicly dissented from official dogmatic views, they were subject to discipline, and were sometimes tried before the **Inquisition** and could be severely punished; the Inquisition was active in southern France in the 13th century and in Spain in the 15th century (the 'Spanish Inquisition', which was particularly harsh).

Most Protestants deemphasize Tradition and rely on a personal interpretation of Scripture. Catholics, basing themselves on St. Augustine's philosophy of history, see the Catholic Church as the ongoing City of God, and they value **both Scripture and Tradition**. The Bibles existent in the Middle Ages were written in **Latin,** and thus were generally not available to be read by lay people or the more humble folk, who if literate at all, could rarely read Latin. Medieval movements such as the Waldensians and the Lollards who favored the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages so that lay people could read it were persecuted and repressed by the Church. The monopoly of the clergy over access to the Bible emphasized the clergy's privileged status.

The Church About 1500



Julius II, the rebuilder of St. Peter's Basilica

Although there were many good people in the Latin Church about 1500, it was nevertheless filled with corrupt practices and people. Much of what Protestants reacted against initially was a **corruption** of Catholic practice, not Church traditions themselves. Many Catholic humanists of the period also campaigned for the reform of the Church (Petrarch called the papacy the "Whore of Babylon" when it was located in the French city of Avignon in the 14th century), but to little avail. The secular nature of the late medieval Church can be seen in Renaissance popes such as **Julius II (1503-13),** who was primarily a great patron of the arts (he began the construction of the new St. Peter's Basilica) and a successful politician (he successfully defended the independence of the Papal States in Italy against the French) rather than a spiritual man of God; he paid little attention to the problems in the Church that enraged people such as Luther.

His predecessor **Alexander VI** (Borgia) (1492-1503)was more genuinely corrupt: he had a half a dozen natural children when he was elected pope; he and his children were known as ruthless politicians and were widely held responsible for numerous political murders. The great Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini said of him, "There was in him no religion, no keeping of his word….he bound himself to nothing that was not useful to himself…. In one word, he was more evil and more lucky than, perhaps, any other pope for many ages before."

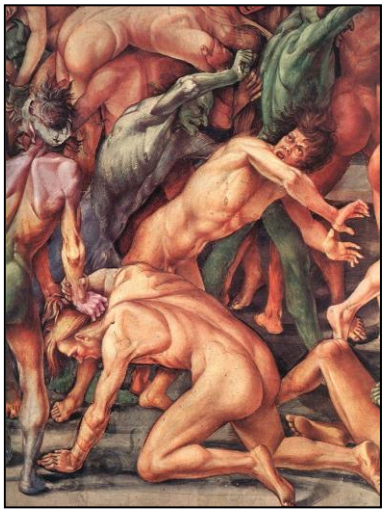
The seat of the Church in Rome was dominated by **money.** Many Church officials in Rome lived lavish and corrupt life styles. Church offices throughout Europe were often sold by Vatican officials to the highest bidder (**simony**); **absenteeism** (the person holding the Church office was not present) and **pluralism** (a single person holds many separate offices) were rampant. Most northern Europeans deeply resented the domination of their religious life by what they saw as a corrupt and parasitical papacy.

"Mechanical Christianity" flourished in the Latin Church around 1500. The emphasis was on **ritual and exterior actions** rather than on faith, prayerfulness, individual piety, and charity toward your neighbor, although the latter were practiced by numerous orthodox Catholic groups in the 15th century. The issues that Luther had in his visit to Rome in 1510 are a good example: not only was the young

Luther scandalized by the immoral behavior of many Italian clergy, who he said consorted with prostitutes in public, but he was struck by their lack of inner spirituality – rushing through the mass, for example; he also wondered about the spiritual benefit of crawling up steps on one's knees in order to reduce one's time in Purgatory. Private masses (said by the priest for the benefit of a deceased person but with no one else present) were very common in the Church in all parts of Europe. There was excessive emphasis on the spiritual efficacy of superstitious-like practices, such as saying mass only with seven candles lit. An excessive reliance on practices such as pilgrimages and the veneration of relics could also lead to a mechanical religious practice. This emphasis on ritualistic observances rather than genuine spiritual experience engendered a great deal of cynicism among would-be reformers.

Indulgences

Catholics believed in the **Communion of Saints**, the community (representing Augustine's City of God) of all the living and dead "saved" Christians, who can help one another by mutual support and prayer: the living can help one another by prayer; the living can help the dead souls in Purgatory move to Paradise by sharing their penance with them; and the dead in Paradise can help the living escape danger in travel (St. Christopher), heal from sickness (St. Roch can help you with your throat), and of course live a Christian life. The communion of Saints is God's human family on earth and in Heaven.



Luca Signorelli would rather be in Purgatory.

Purgatory is the "halfway house" to heaven. Since the 12th century, it was a stated belief of the Church that Christians who died confessed (their sins forgiven by a priest in the confessional) but who had not "expiated" the debt of their sins, would go to Purgatory for purification; once you were there, you were assured of making it to heaven, but it might take a long time and be very uncomfortable (hot). The living could reduce their own allotted time in Purgatory by prayer and good works; they could also shorten the time that dead relatives would spend in Purgatory.

Good works in 1500 included the visiting of **relics** (physical remnants of usually saints) and **pilgrimages** to holy places like San Juan de Compostela in northwestern Spain, Rocamadour in France, the Holy Land, or the City of Rome particularly during a Jubilee. The remarks by John Colet and Erasmus on the abuse of the cult of relics at the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury are famous. Luther's prince, **Frederick the Wise**, was a great fan of relics and had one of the largest collections in Germany (his catalog included one piece of bread used at the Last Supper, a twig from Moses' burning bush, and about 19,000 bones from various sources!). Of course, **charitable contributions** to build churches, hospitals, and monasteries also helped reduce your time in Purgatory. All of these activities afforded plenty of opportunity for abuse: local prelates (bishops, etc.), for example, could enhance their income by selling indulgences in return for cash contributions or collectors of relics could make a lot of money selling false relics that didn't originate from the bodies of true saints.

Very common in the Middle Ages were **indulgences**, which were remissions (excusing) of stated periods of time in Purgatory in return for good works, such as venerating relics, pilgrimages, and donations; they were **not** meant for the forgiveness of sins, which must happen in the confessional. In the course of the Middle Ages, the **popes had gained control** over the administration of indulgences, and regularized them by defining the length of Purgatory time being remitted and providing the recipient with a paper certificate of indulgence in return for a money contribution. As in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', Franciscan "pardoners" crisscrossed Europe hawking indulgences in return for a payment (supposedly for

good causes) and providing a certificate as a receipt. The system of course was an invitation to corruption. By the time of Luther indulgences were a major source of income for the popes and their agents who sold them throughout Europe.

The administration of indulgences at the time of Reformation **scandalized** most thoughtful Christians. They were huge money makers ("the bingo of the 16th century") for not only the pope, but also local agents and secular lords who raked off a good percentage of the proceeds before sending the remnant to Rome. The preaching of the St. Peter's indulgence by **Dominican Johannes Tetzel in 1516** (are you so hard-hearted as not to be moved by the piteous moaning of your dead relatives begging for your help? "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,/The soul from Purgatory springs.") was the scandal that set off Luther's outrage and the '95 Theses' in Wittenberg. Although Church doctrine clearly stated that indulgences were only for removing punishment due to sins already forgiven (in the confessional) and could not forgive sins themselves, it was widely believed at this time that they actually forgave current sins and even sins that were not yet committed.

Johannes Tetzel Hawking Indulgences In Luther's Germany

Five Ideas of the Protestant Reformation

Christ at Last Judgment, about 1300

The following are five main ideas of the Reformation. There were significant divergences among different Protestant leaders, but they would generally ascribe to the following theological statements.

1) Man and God: **God's absolute sovereignty**; the ineffable, incomprehensible glory of God; "total depravity" of mankind; the enormous gulf between man and God; individuals are confronted directly by God; humans are very limited in their ability to understand God and His ways.

Compare in medieval Church to the importance of **intermediaries**: God is hidden behind the Church, surrounded by intercessors like the Virgin Mary and the saints; God is experienced by actions performed by the clergy, e.g., the sacraments; in Calvin's terms, God was 'domesticated'. Neither laity nor clergy were encouraged to go to God directly.

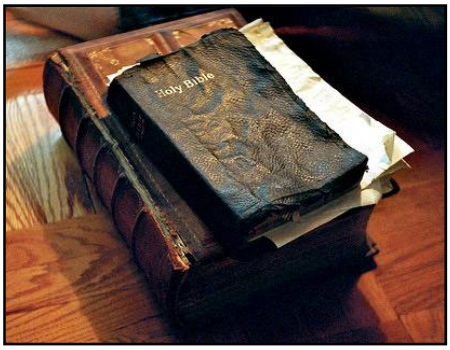
2) Salvation: **faith precedes decision** (saving grace is provided by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; faith is a free gift from God; free will/free choice has nothing to do with it). How do good works fit into the picture? "**Faith not without works**". Faith gives rise to works; the performance of good works is a **sign** that that person is one of the elect, but not a cause of his salvation. Salvation has so little to do with the choice of the individual that most Reformation Protestants believe in predestination: God chose from all eternity who would be saved (and who damned); you can perform good

Caravaggio, The Incredulity of Thomas

works for the rest of your life, but it will do no good unless God has chosen you first.

> Medieval Christians agree that faith is a precondition of salvation, but that salvation also requires "good works." (**faith plus works**) Human beings have **free will**, and when confronted by God's scheme of salvation through the Church, they must **choose** (with the help of God's grace) between acceptance and rejection; through the Church God provides the grace necessary to salvation, but individuals must cooperate; they must choose. "Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera." Or "Heaven helps those who help themselves."

3) How do we <u>know</u> God, His plan? Through **Jesus Christ** ("Christocentric") as revealed in scripture ("**scriptura sola**"); i.e., each individual must seek God and His plan through reading and meditating on the scriptures.



Protestants insisted on the primacy of the Bible as the source of God's plan

Medieval Christians certainly believed that scripture was important, but as interpreted by the teaching authority of the Church (**Tradition**). God did not restrict his revelation to the coming of His Son to this world, but having created the Church, He continues to reveal His will and plan through the Church. Essentially we know God's plan by obeying the teaching authority of Church. The laity was strongly discouraged from reading scripture.

4) The Reformers' understanding of the Church; "**priesthood of all believers**;" in essence all men and women were equal before God and responsible for their own salvation. As a practical matter, Protestant leaders sanctioned a trained ministry to lead and instruct the common people. Since they mainly **preached the Word**, they did not have the same near-sacred status as the Catholic priests.

> The medieval Church was highly clerical. Priests (nuns and brothers too) were a privileged caste in the Church. They possessed the "keys to the kingdom of heaven;" it was through the grace conferred by the priests' administration of the sacraments that individuals made their way to salvation.

5) Therefore, the Reformers deemphasize the **sacraments**; at most retain only two – Baptism and Eucharist – and some Protestant groups retain only Baptism, insisting that it be performed only on adults. The proper function of the trained ministry is **preaching of the Word**, assisting the faithful in their quest to understand the Bible.

Baptism: the most Protestant of the sacraments

> The medieval Church emphasized that Jesus himself had instituted seven (7) sacraments. Preaching of the Word was important, but less important than dispensing saving grace through the sacraments and saying of the mass (*ex opere operato*).

Mosaic of St. Paul

Biblical Passages Used by Protestants and Catholics at the Time of the Reformation

The class than investigated some of the **principal biblical passages** relating to debates at the time of the Reformation. Some of them were effectively evoked by Protestant apologists to defend their point of view; others were used by Catholic writers to defend the positions of the Church. To get the most from this exercise, you have to accept the reality of diversity in interpreting Christian scripture. Protestants more often than Catholics insisted on a plain, common-sensical interpretation of the scriptural texts; but Catholics had important texts that supported some of their positions.

St. Paul's epistle to the **Romans** is the most eloquent and complete statement of **faith** as being the root of salvation; this is the text that motivated Augustine and Luther in their spiritual journeys. **Romans 3,** while admitting the importance of the (Jewish) law (it brings the "consciousness of sin"; it points out to us our deficiencies and the way to God), insists that we are justified (saved) through God's grace realized through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and through the faith (commitment) we have in that saving act; grace/salvation is thus a free gift from God. **Romans 4** cites the example of **Abraham** as a holy man saved by his faith and not by the Law (e.g., circumcision); his faith was "counted as righteousness" before the law, and his circumcision was a sign of his salvation (through faith) rather than the cause of it; cf. Gen 15:6 – "Abram put his faith in the Lord, and the Lord counted that faith to him as righteousness." **Romans 7** emphasizes the **depravity** of humans. We are capable of no consistently worthy act without God's grace; St. Paul repeats that he tries to do good, but cannot on his own powers; he is a "miserable creature," who only through Jesus Christ (grace) is he able to escape servitude to sin; one of the main functions of the (Hebrew) Law is to remind us how unworthy and sinful we are, since we are constantly falling short of faithful observation of it.

Caravaggio, The Calling of Matthew

The famous passage in **Romans 8** appears to say that God has ordained (decided) (**predestined**) who will be saved and that our will and actions have nothing to do with it; he does not explicitly say that God has also ordained the damnation of other individuals (hence Luther's belief in single predestination, i.e. God has foreordained only those souls to be saved). It is important to realize that Paul is saying that **God wills** those to be saved; he is not just saying that God has foreknowledge of who will be saved. The Apostle appears to say the same thing more clearly in **Ephesians 1, 4-6** (he asserts only single predestination, not double predestination). In **Galatians 1, 15-16**, Paul makes it personal stating that it was God's good pleasure" that "set me apart from birth" to serve his church instead of persecuting it. On the other hand, Paul in **Romans 12** appears to exhort his readers to choose God, and to lead worthy and virtuous lives, thus implying to some interpreters that these actions play an essential role in the salvation scheme; in the context of the rest of Romans, however, one has to interpret works as an expression, not a source, of salvation.

As St. Augustine wrote, "I would not have found Thee, hadst Thou not first found me."

There are however scripture passages that appear to support (good) **works** as an important part of God's plan of salvation, i.e., to be saved **people must decide** to do good things that are worthy in the eyes of

God. In **Matthew 25** Jesus makes the emphasis on good deeds pretty obvious – those who visit the sick, give alms to the poor, etc. will be among the sheep (the saved); those who don't perform good works will be among the goats (i.e., be damned). He doesn't talk about faith in this passage, but about what you *do* and what you *give*. In **Matthew 7** Jesus says that it is important to "*do* the will of my heavenly Father" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven; he *could* have said "you must have faith in Jesus Christ" to enter the kingdom of heaven, but again he emphasizes that what you do is what counts.

Jacopo Bassano, The Last Supper

Paul in **I Corinthians 13** famously speaks of love as the greatest of all virtues, specifically chosen as "greater" than faith. The assumption is that love includes love of one's fellow human being, which would imply service/deeds in the sense of charity. Catholic apologists would often return to this passage in the Counter-Reformation era. James in **James 2: 14-26** almost as famously insists on the importance of good deeds/works – "faith without works is dead"; it is like a corpse; it seems to suggest that faith alone cannot lead to salvation; you must have "faith + works". All of these writers undoubtedly believed faith was indispensable to salvation, but in these instances chose to emphasize works. They certainly implied that works was an indispensable part of the "formula" for salvation; you must not only have faith in Jesus, but you must also *do* his will.

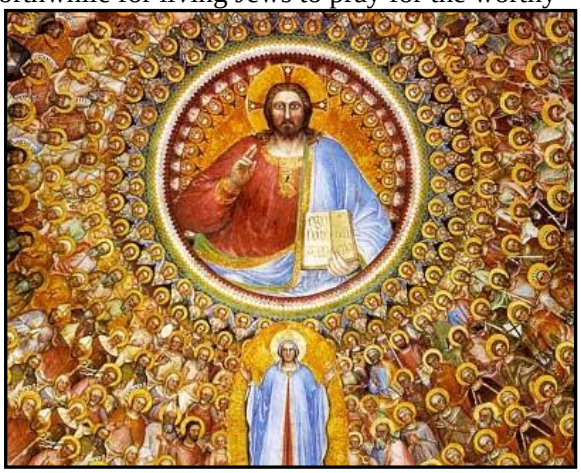
Matthew 16 is the traditional Catholic source for the Church's claim to be the direct descendant of the authority given by Jesus to Peter – "Thou art Peter and upon this rock ('**petros**') I will build my Church." Catholics believed that this passage marked Jesus' founding of **one church** under the authority of Peter and his successor popes. To Catholics the passage also serves as the scriptural origins of the sacrament of **Penance** – whatever you (Peter) forgive, I will forgive in heaven (the practice of auricular, private confession did not become widespread however until the 13th century). It was the Catholic belief that these powers were passed down to subsequent genera tions up to the present by **the apostolic succession.** The sacrament of the Last Rites/Extreme Unction has also credible scriptural basis in **James 5.** One can see why Luther was unenthusiastic about James' letter, calling it "a right strawy epistle" and giving it little weight in his theology.

Rubens' portrait of St. Peter

The creation of the **Eucharist** has a prominent place in all the gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke (the Synoptic gospels) are quite similar; John stands out on its own. The **synoptic gospels** make reference to statements of Jesus such as "This is my body" that seem to support the argument of the **real presence** in the Eucharist; Jesus is not quoted as saying "This is like my body" or "This is a symbol of my body", but simply the statement that the bread that he is holding in his hands is (the same thing as?) his body. Paul in **1 Corinthians 11, 23-28** uses the synoptic formulation but adds a phrase: "This is my body, which is for you; do this as a *memorial of me*", thus introducing the idea that the Eucharist is a **remembrance** or recollection of the Last Supper and perhaps reducing its literalness.

John 6, 51-58 is the strongest support of the real presence, where Jesus appears to go out of his way to emphasize his real presence in the Eucharist – "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you can have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses eternal life." Here Jesus appears to go the farthest in suggesting that when Christians partake of communion, the body and blood of Jesus is physically present in the bread and wine and we actually digest with stomach juices the body and blood Jesus.

The Communion of Saints and the institution of Purgatory have credible support in **2 Maccabees** where it is clear that the Jewish author considered it worthy and worthwhile for living Jews to pray for the worthy dead (Jews who were waiting to move into paradise); and for the worthy dead such as the priest Onias and the prophet Jeremiah to pray for living Jews and for the prosperity of the living Jewish community. This passage supports the Catholic idea of the **communion of saints**, and was used extensively by Catholic apologists in the Reformation era to defend the doctrine of **Purgatory.**



Jesus surrounded by the Communion of Saints

Protestants attacked Maccabees as unreliable since it was part of the **Apocrypha**, books in the Old Testament that were not originally composed in Hebrew and thus not included by most Protestants in the scriptural canon. These books however had been included in all Bibles since the Vulgate Version authored by St Jerome in the 4th century and in use throughout the Middle Ages. Most bibles in the 20th century included the Apocrypha, if only for study purposes.

Martin Luther

His **character** and personality. His father was demanding and prescriptive, and it appears that Luther felt some guilt about not following his wishes (Did he see God in the image of an angry and disapproving father?) He was passionate and tenacious, believing deeply, loving and hating with great conviction. He was a very anxious and even tortured man, who lucky for the history of Christianity, did not take Xanax. To some he might seem neurotic, being perhaps obsessive/ compulsive in his inability to believe himself a worthy man and to be assured of his salvation. He was courageous, being willing for example to stand before the assembled dignitaries at the Diet of Worms and to defy the iron will of the Emperor – "Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise. Amen." Others might say he was stubborn as hell. He was rather ill-tempered, flying into rages that he sometimes regretted but that were often productive. He was a man of great analytical intelligence (although not really a systematic theologian) and of considerable literary abilities (most say his German Bible was a literary masterpiece). Surely a "great" historical figure.

Cranach's famous portrait of Luther

His crisis was a sort of **religious existential** crisis prefiguring some of the Christian existentialist theologians of the 20th century. He experienced God as a great and distant, impersonal, and inexplicable power. His *Angst* was particularly intense right after he was ordained a priest. No matter how hard he tried, how many good works he did, how many times he said the mass (for which he considered himself radically unworthy), how many times he went to confession, he could not feel worthy/saved/justified in the eyes of God. He confesses that he even came to **"hate" God** as a malevolent being torturing human beings.

His trip to Rome in 1510 had a great influence on him: exposed to the sometimes corruption, frivolity and impiety of the Italian clergy, he became more critical of the Church structure, and thus of some of the teachings of the Church in regard to salvation.

He found his way out of the crisis in his studies of **St. Paul's 'Romans,'** where he came to terms with the sovereignty of God and came to the conviction that he, Martin Luther, was saved by God's (free) **gift** to him, God's grace, and not through any action or work performed by himself. God does not expect us to justify ourselves in his eyes; he does not expect us in some way to **earn our salvation**.

His view of God was considerably softened: instead of the image of the stern God the Father and the late medieval emphasis on **Christ** the judge at the Second Coming (Last Judgment), he focused on the vulnerability and humanity of Jesus – the Jesus, who had been born in a manger, who asked God to let him off the hook in the Garden of Gethsemane, and who felt abandoned on the cross, was an assurance of the goodness of God, of his caring for us. (The **Holy Spirit** he saw as the spirit of understanding that must penetrate our minds as we seek to understand God's plan in scripture.) When he realized this, he felt that he had entered through the Gates of Paradise; he was psychologically comforted and uplifted in his new confidence in the loving favor of God.

Growing Conflict with the Church: Separation from the Papacy, 1517-20

Raphael's Portrait of Leo X

His new position made him very critical of the privileges and actions of the papacy, in particular the preaching of **indulgences** in 1517 for the reconstruction of St. Peter's in Rome. Hence, Luther's action in challenging the practice of indulgences in Wittenberg in that year. He criticized **abuse** of the practice of indulgences – the sale of indulgences to the profit of both Church and secular authorities, and the control of indulgences by the pope from Rome. He also appeared to criticize **their very existence**, saying that they were "blasphemy against the mercy and holiness of God" and that they undermined the true principle of repentance and forgiveness (i.e., they were part and parcel of "mechanical Christianity"). Although he was very critical of the papacy's manipulation of indulgences for its own benefit, at this point he was a long way from advocating a break with Rome. He was (angrily and with extreme words) demanding reform of the Roman Church's practice of indulgences.

Conflict between Luther and the Church brewed fitfully in the next four years. Luther started in a fairly moderate position (focusing on indulgences), but the hesitations and distractions of the papacy (the Medici Pope Leo X was no more focused on religious issues than his predecessors), Luther's evolving theological positions, and his intemperate personality soon blew the "disagreement" into a major confrontation. Luther soon launched a full-fledged frontal assault on the **position of the papacy** and of the ordained priesthood in Christianity. Luther was quite extreme in his attack on the privileges of Rome, calling the pope bad names, ridiculing him, and regularly characterizing him as the Antichrist. He attacked the power of the papacy and the ordained clergy in interpreting scripture and defining dogma. He defended the **priesthood of all believers**, by which he meant that all baptized Christians have the right and responsibility to read the Word of God to discern God's plan.

He defended "**scriptura sola**," by which he – and others – could appeal to what is written in Scripture to contradict some of the teachings of the popes and councils. He differed from the complex Catholic approach to interpretation of Scripture by insisting that Christians look for the simple, **plain meaning** of a

passage. He did not put all parts of Scripture on the same level, but ranked them in accordance with the **degree to which they revealed Jesus Christ**. Paul, the gospel of John, the epistle of Peter he placed at the highest level, followed by the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), and finally Revelations (it had the vice of not making much sense), the epistle of James (the right "strawy" epistle), and the Old Testament Apocrypha in last position. He did not believe that all parts of the Bible had to be harmonized; he considered the Old Testament to be a Christian work, i.e., it prepared the coming of Christ. He also believed that scripture had to be read in the presence of the **Holy Spirit**, i.e., prayerfully and most likely in a community of believers led by a preacher of the Word.

He deemphasized the **sacraments**, since God's saving grace is not dispensed through the sacraments (*ex opere operato*, i.e., the completion of the physical act confers sacramental grace), but freely to all he chooses to save. In his view, for a sacrament to be efficacious (i.e., for the sacramental grace to help the sinner), the recipient had to **bring a strong faith** to the experience. He eliminated five of the seven traditional sacraments – Matrimony, Holy Orders, Penance, Confirmation and the Last Rites. One reason was that these five were not as firmly rooted in Scripture as the Eucharist and Baptism. Another was that he wanted to undermine the privileges of the clergy: if Rome could claim that Holy Orders was a sacrament, then priests would be better able to claim that their powers came directly from Jesus; if a priest had the power to absolve sins through confession (Penance) or turn the bread and the wine on the altar into the body and blood of Jesus, then he was truly a privileged person with key spiritual powers delegated to him by God.

Huldrych Zwingli denied the real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

As he often was except his attacks on the papacy and the priesthood, Luther was a moderate on the sacrament of the **Eucharist.** He differed with the Catholics by denying the doctrine of transubstantiation (his idea was later called 'consubstantiation', according to which the Eucharist has the substance of both bread and the body of Christ), while he differed from Zwinglians and Calvinists by insisting on the **real bodily presence** of Jesus in the Eucharist; he was not fazed by the Zwinglian objection that Jesus could not be present simultaneously in heaven at the right hand of the Father and on the altar as the Eucharist.

> For I do not want to deny in any way [that] God's power is able to make a body be simultaneously in many places…. For who wants to prove that God is unable to do that? Who has seen the limits of his power?
>
> But I am bound [by the text of the gospels]; I cannot get free of it; the text is too strong, and cannot be wrested from the sense of the words.

On this subject he was closer to the Catholics than to his Protestant brothers.

Worms (1522) and After

The crisis between Luther and the Church and the Emperor came to a head in the **Diet of Worms** in 1522, where endowed with a safe conduct, Luther was heard by authorities as to why he should not be condemned as a heretic. After several days of hearings, Luther concluded his statement that he had to rely upon the word of God (Scripture) and not the authority of pope, and (probably) made his famous statement: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise." He was subsequently condemned as a heretic, after which he was allowed to leave and to go into hiding. He was now an outlaw and sought by the Emperor's

warrant. His survival depended on the protection of local princes. Frederick the Wise of Saxony gave him that protection.

Luther's reforms took hold in generally the north and the east of **Germany**; other areas remained generally loyal to the Catholic Church.

Luther's idea of the **church** was typically Protestant. Whereas the Catholic tradition emphasized the Church as a bureaucratic organization run by a clerical caste and receiving its authority by the apostolic succession from St. Peter himself, Luther (and all Protestants) defined the church (non-Catholic) as a community of people present when they read and study the Word, worship together, and support one another in their lives. In the Protestant church the minister leads the liturgical celebration and preaches the Word to the congregation. The function of the clergy is primarily to **preach the Word** rather than administer the sacraments.

The Peasants Revolt in Germany

According to the testimony of **Erasmus**, the **chance of reconciliation** between Luther and the Catholic Church was practically zero by 1530. The Catholic moderates like Cardinal Cajetan, who had been fairly influential inside the Church in the beginning of the controversy, began to fade in the 1520s. Original issues such as the administration of indulgences, clerical marriage, and communion in both species (bread and wine) for the laity had been left behind by Luther by the early 1520s. It is conceivable that they might have been compromised (Cardinal Cajetan himself was in favor of the marriage of Catholic priests and distribution of both species of communion), but Luther had gone far beyond them by 1521: the priesthood of all believers threatened the privileges of the clergy; the Church could not accept the attack on the sacraments and the mass (the sacrament of Holy Orders and transubstantiation guaranteed the special status of the clergy); and Luther's extreme attacks on Church authority, and in particular on the papacy (constantly and intemperately denounced by Luther as "the Antichrist") shut the doors of negotiation. Of course, the loyal Catholic orthodoxy of the Emperor made compromise even more unlikely.

Lutheran church in Regensburg 17th century.

Soon the issue of local organization of the Church became important. At first, Luther favored a **limited idea of toleration**, allowing some diversity of worship within the nation and allowing dissenters to emigrate freely; Luther did not like the idea of uniformity, and he abhorred the prospect of any kind of theocracy, Protestant or Catholic. Perhaps naively, he thought that different congregations – perhaps with somewhat diverse liturgies – could live next to one another in peace if not disturbed by forces of uniformity like the Catholic Church.

But the disorders of the late 1520s (the Peasants' Revolt and the movement of the 'Saints') turned Luther against even limited ideas of toleration. He came over to the '**Erastian**' idea of ***cuius regno eius religio***, that specified that all the inhabitants of the state would conform to the religion chosen by the prince/head of state, who also became head of the local church. Thus all the inhabitants of Saxony were forced to become Lutherans under the leadership of their prince, the duke and Elector of Saxony; Catholics and radical Protestants who did not want to convert were allowed to emigrate to neighboring Catholic states.

Different Lutheran leaders now saw the necessity of religious unity among themselves. They thus decided on a common confession and organization in the **Augsburg Confession of 1530**, which was accepted reluctantly by the Emperor, who on a practical basis was giving up the idea of continued Catholic uniformity throughout Germany. Germany was "officially" divided into Lutheran and Catholic halves, each with equal rights, at the **Peace of Augsburg of 1555**; by that agreement Lutheran princes had the same rights as the Catholic ones. The dream of restoring religious unity to Germany had to be dropped.

Luther's Significance

Luther's contributions and significance were g reat. His **German Bible** not only brought the Bible in the vernacular to the German people, but his writing style is credited with great influence on the development of the German language. Unlike many Protestants, he was a great proponent of liturgical **music**: 'Ein fester Burg ist unser Gott' ('A Mighty Fortress is our God') is his most familiar, and probably his greatest, Christian hymn.

Leloir, 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel'

Luther should be compared to **Jacob wrestling with the angel**. He was not one to achieve a plateau and rest on his laurels. Like St. Paul, St. Augustine, Dostoevski, etc., he felt deeply the anguish and uncertainties of human existence, and he wrestled with the problem of his salvation until the day of his death; he was not the kind to find enduring inner peace after conversion. He found his personal answer in his dual view of God: God the Father, the God of majesty and Power, accompanied by his Son, the God of mercy, the God of the manger and of doubts on the cross. So, he could most of the time feel the love, and not just the anger, of God, and "laugh at thunder and jagged bolts from out the storm."