

This is a very abbreviated overview, not so much concerned with the sea of historic details, but more a look at some of the incredible ministrations of God towards His Goal of [cultivating true worshippers to be gathered in the End Times](#). Please do not read this as a recount of history, but rather a high-level view (of a small portion) of the huge machinations of God. A brief survey of the highpoints leaves an impression of great sin, great reformative devotion, and God's much greater devotion to seeing His plans to the End.

24 He (Jesus) put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" **Matthew 13:24-30**

This chart of Larkin ([one of almost 80](#)) is his observation of the transformation of the Church while among other faiths from Pentecost through the Rapture. It shows the combinations, divisions and diversions affecting the true followers of Jesus' Word as the Church grew. To just say this part of history brackets important developments in the Church would be an understatement.

STRAINS AGAINST THE FETTERS

This period ushered incredible change at the end of the Dark Ages and the Medieval Church, beginning at A.D. 1450 in Mainz, Germany then expanding throughout the European Holy Roman Empire (HRE) and the Thirty Years' War, to The Peace of Westphalia (1648). I've read that the generational memory of these events was so significant that following WWII, Germans polled as to what they considered was the most significant event in their country's history still named the Thirty Years' War.

There are volumes of details of this period chronicled by scores of academics and

historians. The motives and actions of hundreds of Rulers and influencers, the millions of impacted people, and the reshaping of the Church and Imperial nation states is staggering. Our summary discussion will be on the bigger consequences to the shaping of Christ's Church and the amazing evidence, once again, of God's Sovereign governance.

The ongoing chain of events in the faith of men begins much earlier than 1450 in Mainz. In fact, while this brief study will center mainly on 1450-1648, the seeds of resistance to the heresies and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) are seen beginning in Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic) as early as 863, contributing to the split of the Papal and Greek Churches in 1054.

The rise of the Papacy beginning in 606 led to the swell of religious corruptions emerging through the Dark Ages, including Baptismal Regeneration, Justification by Works, Image Worship, Celibacy, Mariolatry (Mary-worship), Confessional, Purgatory, Transubstantiation (Transformation of Christ's Body and Blood, the Lord's Supper), Indulgences, and Penance. The beginning, growth and impact of these issues will be examined in another post.

Governance of the European Continent had progressed (in detail I'm not qualified to thoroughly explain) to a collection of 300 Imperial Estates of differing importance and independence under the influence of the HRE Emperor. The predominant Catholic faith guided the collective understanding of governmental authority and social rules. Protest(ants) to the RCE's malevolent practices would increasingly upset the balance of authority and control.

It was first the Catholic clergy in Bohemia who sought to reform the Church of its corruption and abuses. Medieval Bohemia was evangelized by Saint Cyril and brother Methodius (863) of the Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC). Supporters of reform would be branded heretics by the HRE as they battled over the basis of truth. As is always throughout all history under God, the conflict of God's Truth and all competitors would shape the course of humanity.

RCC scripture was held in Latin, but native tongue translations put the Word directly to those who would seek God's direction, instead of through jealous and vested Catholic clergy seeking to protect themselves and the theology of the HRE.

(The root of corruption of the organized Catholic church will be discussed in another post.) Wycliff's English translation (1400) greatly proliferated through the use of Gutenberg's moveable type printing press, beginning 1450.

Reformers who held to the Scripture - challenging the authority of 'truth' used as the basis of HRE and Imperial State power - were heroes suppressed, persecuted or hunted down by the HRE as heretics, the more notable being Jan Huss (Bohemia, burnt at the stake 1415) and a year later Jerome of Prague (Huss supporter, burnt at the stake 1416). The pressures of reform again grew with Luther's declaration of his 95 Theses (Germany, 1517).

The reformation efforts of Bohemia (Hussites) and Germany (Lutherans) grew and Imperial States across the HRE faced growing challenge to its authority, both in the public and from its Protestant rulers. Many Churches independent of the RCC emerged, denying the authority of the Pope. Rulers who agreed adopted Protestantism and established Churches in their realms. I've read many accounts and opinions of this period and agree with those who see this movement as an essential and necessary (and wonderful) drive back to a Holy Spirit-directed understanding and adherence to the Scripture, which precipitated a major political/authority readjustment of the western world. The Pope and the HRE faced a growing Protestant rebellion, and they intended to kill it and its supporters.

Before the swell of reform, the Continent's rulers and ruled had a more homogenous view of authority. The RCC's teachings were the basis of societal and personal order, reflected in the political structure. The RCC cemented its control in the papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 requiring full submission by rulers and the ruled to the authority of the Pope, lest they would lose their Salvation. Those challenging the RCC as the arbiter of a truth that was contrary to the native language Scripture introduced a natural resistance to the often hypocritical rulers of the HRE. We read that the typical person of this time saw the Catholic truth as necessary and singular with no allowances for competing Truth. The RCC had built a theological construct of a cradle-to-grave reliance on the church for Salvation under the threat of dismissal and Damnation. The belief was that to entertain a faith other than that of the RCC only invited Satan's deception and personal/societal destruction.

This was contrasted to the zealous commitment of Believers who knew the Scriptures first hand from the reading or the preaching of their native language Bibles. The Truth they embraced stood in clear opposition of all points heretical held by the RCC and used as governance by the HRE.

In kingdoms prior, the faith of the ruler was the faith of the people. But the rift developed as either a ruler or his subjects became enlightened to the Truth, fraying HRE homogeny. The growth of Truth increasingly became a wedge of conscious obedience to God that defied the norms of the past thousand years. The flashpoint of the Bohemian Rebellion illustrated the impassioned beliefs, and what was at stake.

MILESTONES

The Bohemian Reformation (1380-1436) saw Catholic clergy and theologians promoting reform in the RCC. They didn't seek a break with the church until Hus was martyred for heresy in 1415.

(1419) Bohemia (1st Defenstration): Bohemia had a history of resistance for the sake of Truth, mixed with political and tangible demands. The Latin root term Defenstration translates to "the act of throwing someone out of a window". The first major incident among many, the 1st Defenstration of Prague (1419) saw Hussites throw 7 city council members out a window onto the spears of the mob below, marking the beginning of the 20-year Hussite war. Beginning in Bohemia, the pressure of religious freedom and political equality between ruler and subject spread across the continent. Many more important details are available in numerous excellent studies.

(1450) Gutenberg (Moveable Type Printing Press): Johannes Gutenberg is credited with inventing the moveable metal type printing press, a process using individual cast metal blocks with a raised reverse image of a letter on its end. Letters cast on to the pieces of type were arranged and bound in a flat rack, coated with ink and pressed against a sheet of paper. The process was consistent and faster than traditional hand or woodblock type reproduction. Remarkably, the first of Gutenberg's business exploits was the printing of Indulgences to sell to the RCC.

Indulgences were writs sold to RCC believers to shorten the time loved ones would spend in Purgatory. Mass production brought more money to the RCC, ultimately inciting Luther and the launch of the Protestant Reformation.

(1517) Luther (95 Theses, Wittenberg, Germany): Martin Luther, an Augustinian Catholic monk, was increasingly agitated with the policies and practices of the RCC. Not initially seeking to challenge the church's authority, Luther sought academic discussion on the topics. His Latin 97 Theses, (first known as '*Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*') nailed to the front door of Wittenberg church, would be translated into German by his friends and disseminated via printing press. Intended as a scholarly list of 'talking points', the document would be the catalyst to ignite the larger Reformation. Interestingly, close friend and co-reformer Philip Melancthon (l. 1497-1560) was an essential associate of Luther who contributed very greatly to the intellectual and theological clarity and proofs of Luther's thoughts. Melancthon would author the affirmations of the Lutheran Church in the Augsburg Confession and presented it at the Diet of Augsburg (1530) in hope of reconciling Lutheran and Catholic disparities.

(1523) (Ana)Baptists (Rebaptizers) (Three founders of the Swiss Brethren - George Blaurock , Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz): The three were vilified for performing adult believer Baptisms, a direct affront to the theology of Catholics and reformers Luther and Huldrych Zwingly. The overarching directives of this reforming movement hinged upon religious freedom, individual conscience, close adherence to the Scriptures, congregationally governed Churches free from higher organizational control, Believer's Baptism, and personal devotion to obeying God per Scripture. The movement would progress through England (1612) and on to become a named faith in the New World (1638). All of its Biblical Tenants defied the RCC model of control via Salvation through adherence. The 1525 Canton of Zurich outlawed adult Baptism and made it a capital offense in 1526. Refusing to desist, Blaurock was beaten and exiled, Grebel died of plague during travel seeking to rally support, and Manz was arrested and executed a heretic.

(1536) Calvin, (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, France): John Calvin was a French RCC priest who broke away and became a Protestant Pastor and theologian among the other great reformers. Calvin understood the contributions of these men

and sought to bring their collective thoughts together under his Biblical read of theology, resulting in his work the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin's core essentials boiled down to total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints - or the '5 Points of Calvinism' (TULIP). The theology of the Reformed Church held many other Biblical insistences as did other Protestants, but TULIP was a defining position of God's total Sovereignty in all things concerning Salvation. Protestants who concurred and embraced Calvin's teachings came to be referred to as Calvinists. The Calvinists in England opposed the Anglican church, becoming known as the Separatists who would go on to found the Plymouth Colony (1621). Calvinism became the predominant theology of New England.

(1555) The Peace of Augsburg (a.k.a. The Augsburg Settlement): In 1531, Protestant rulers formed the Schmalkaldic League to advance Protestantism in Germany. HRE Emperor Charles V (Grandson of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain - sponsors of Columbus) was unable to negotiate them out of their faith, and even after the League's sound military defeat at the Battle of Millberg (1547), Charles concluded Protestantism had expanded too far to be contained. This led to an armistice and then to the Augsburg Settlement, an agreement to accept the coexistence of Protestant and Catholic faiths in Germany. The agreement employed the maxim of 'cuius regio, eius religio' (whose realm, their religion), where those ruled must adopt the faith of the ruler, else they must migrate to a Protestant domain. This would prove to be inadequate in the long term, as the yet-emerging group called Calvinists - as well as Anabaptists - who would grow from minorities into majorities were not part of the agreement. Knights of the realms were exempt from religious uniformity and could practice the faith they chose, further opening the way to religious division.

(1618) Bohemia (2nd Defenstration)

The 2nd Defenstration of Prague (1618) came to a head as RCC officials under Ferdinand II - the HRE and now also King of Bohemia - ordered Protestants in Bohemia to cease building chapels on land the officials insisted belonged to the RCC, but the Protestants said belonged to the King of their choice, Frederick V. Disputes

over ownership of non-taxable RCC property moving into the hands of Protestants was a major issue of power and commerce for the RCC. Reminiscent of the 1st Defenstration 200 years earlier (1419), two RCC officials and their secretary were thrown from a second story window but survived, precipitating the start of the 30 Years' War.

(1618-1648) The Thirty Years' War: The too-short-sighted Agreement of Augsburg was embraced by then HRE Charles V to ensure peace long enough for his son to ascend to King of Spain and his nephew to Emperor of the HRE. The reality was a growing and uncontrollable (by men) rush to Scriptural Truth and away from the RCC. Despite the intent of 'cuius regio, eius religio' (whose realm, their religion), it proved opposite the remedy and instead forced irreconcilable ideological conflict.

49 "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." **Luke 12:49-53**

Jesus' view encompasses growing division across the time of Men, culminating in the Time at the End when that division is complete and those determined to Salvation are gleaned. The breaking point once again showed itself in Bohemia as the RCC and Protestant worldviews clashed. Worldviews are driven by the 'heart', and the 'heart is informed by what is embraced as the Truth. Conflict of Truth vs. 'truth' is inevitable.

Protestantism had grown to include not only the Lutherans who intended peace at Augsburg, but now Calvinists and others who read Scripture as a challenge to the HRE's corrupt rule. The Thirty Years' War progressively erupted across the continent as HRE-aligned military clashed with Protestant forces. The war finally devolved into roaming armies pillaging and destroying whole villages and the

inhabitants. Losses to the population, each family reliant on labor of its members to survive, caused famine and pestilence resulting in an estimated 8 million immediate deaths and a total believed to be 20 million. It would take several generations to recover. In contrast, the loss of life in WWII was 3% of global population (80 million), where this war took an estimated 20 million of 78 million (26%).

Constant political maneuvering to gain or maintain powers was well underway before the 1st Defenstration. The inability to control religious differences would facilitate a political/militant divide that Jesus described. Sadly, by 1648 with much of the Germanic territories destroyed, the thirst for conflict waned as people were simply tired of fighting. However, little question of one's religious beliefs and alignment remained. The result was the dividing clarity Jesus spoke about.

The Westphalia agreement consisted of two treaties - one between the HRE and France and its allies (Treaty of Münster), the other with the HRE and Sweden and its allies (Treaty of Osnabrück). Power was stripped from Ferdinand III (King of Hungary and HRE) (See 2nd Defenstration) and returned to the Imperial States. The rulers could again choose among Catholic, Lutheran and Calvin faiths (*cuius regio, eius religio*), yet subjects weren't required to follow the ruler's faith and could choose among the same. All Church (ecclesiastical) properties were to be restored to their ownership state, retroactive to Jan 1, 1624. France and Sweden were charged as 'Guarantors of the Imperial Constitution', responsible for holding all parties accountable and defending the Constitution. The agreement didn't end all hostilities but did end the Thirty Years' War while providing a compromise that allowed a larger religious freedom to continue without RCC persecution.

Pope Innocent X summed up his assessment of the agreement responsible for the breaking of the fetters, writing that the treaty was "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane, empty of meaning and effect for all time". Or, sour grapes.

(1735-1743) The First Great Awakening (Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield): These events made many ways for expansion of the Church. The First Great Awakening (New England) is recognized as a significant movement of the Holy Spirit, once again growing and threshing the Church. Expressing Reformed Church

Calvinism, Edwards' and Whitfield's preaching encompassed TULIP, challenging (offending) those who couldn't find agreement with Romans 8:28-30 and other supporting Scripture.

The Enemy wasted little time stoking Man's sin, seeing Nathaniel Taylor and Charles Finney raising up a theology promoting that Man had a will free of God's Sovereignty, and so played an essential part in his Salvation. This would expand on to the creation of 'voluntary societies' intent on Christianizing America. While efforts like these have undoubtedly continued to bring good to society, it also promoted the wrong belief and expectation of the Church ushering in Christ's Kingdom.

WHY THIS MATTERS TODAY

We can all imagine an example of someone we trust providing comfort in a trial. No one wants a first year heart surgeon when the Department head is available. Most anyone in a raging storm at sea would prefer a Coast Guard cutter to a row boat. Young surgeons and row boat captains are easy to appreciate if no risk is present. But what if the stakes are high?

Our contemporary American society hasn't been without its collective and personal tragedies. But we haven't experienced a Thirty Years' War, either.

Consider our experienced surgeon and captain again. An enthusiast of medicine or seafaring would welcome the details of their accomplishments, sharing in the victories of their careers, admiring the rewards of their hard work. As enthusiasts, we would admire who they are and what they've done. We would also find comfort in them if we had a need of their expertise.

Conversely, a person who has no knowledge of nor shows any interest in medicine or seafaring could be expected to have little appreciation or real comfort.

Now, enter Jesus. We should always ask ourselves - am I the enthusiast or the disinterested? Perhaps all of us are the disinterested to some degree, as His Character and place in Creation over us is far more than any enthusiast can comprehend. But since we live on a sliding scale of capacity to understand, the

measure isn't against each other but within that capacity we've each been given to cultivate. I've read of surely-seeming Heaven-bound Believers who would smile and confess "I know Jesus loves me and forgives me." OK, done. I've read of historic Church fathers who struggled in their assurance as they discovered more and more what worms we are yet what a Savior He Is. But, it's surely safe to say that none of us has exhausted our capacity to know, admire and revere our Lord. And we would grow that comfort in learning about His abilities, exploits and intentions.

This picture above of the Church under His care is a sliver of His activity. History is rife with examples of what God has done to promote the Church and preserve the Saints. More incredible, this period looks to agree with His prophetic Revelation to John as He spoke of the periods of Thyatira (lax) and Sardis (dead) Churches. Not only do we get to see the wake of His work, but He told us beforehand about the Boat He's driving.

I've heard it preached that weak theology makes for a weak church (corporate). Why? Because of a contemporary failure to seek to understand Scripture, and here the Prophetic Scripture. We cannot hope to understand, admire and revere the One we look to appear, the One we would trust and find comfort in, if we won't try to understand what He's told us. Our lack of hardship is not an excuse, it's a reprieve. Observe any maturing follower of Jesus during crisis and you'll likely see 'a peace that exceeds all understanding' (Phil 4:7). This is the person who knows the Surgeon and the Captain, knows the past accomplishments He foretold, who has been under His care before and will find assurance the next time. He is looking to understand prophetic Scripture to see what He's done and to know what He's said lays ahead. He is growing in his capacity to understand Him and revere Him, to find peace in Him.

[**BACK TO TOP**](#)