

The Protestant Reformation

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Timeline

Councils have played a pivotal role in the history of the Christian Church, serving as vital gatherings for leaders to address theological disputes, establish doctrinal unity, and provide guidance on matters of faith and practice. The early Church, in particular, saw the emergence of both local and ecumenical councils, each with distinct functions and significance. Before the rise of ecumenical councils, which brought together bishops from across the Christian world, local councils were the primary means of addressing regional issues and concerns. These councils, convened within specific geographical areas, provided a platform for bishops and other Church leaders to discuss matters of doctrine, discipline, and administration. While their decisions were not universally binding, they played a crucial role in maintaining unity and resolving disputes within local communities.

During the early centuries of Christianity, five major episcopal sees emerged as centers of influence and authority: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. These five sees, often referred to as the Pentarchy, held a special status due to their historical significance and apostolic connections.

- **Rome:** Rome emerged as a significant political force. Its bishops, later known as popes, gradually asserted their authority over doctrinal and disciplinary matters.
- **Constantinople:** Established as the new capital of the Roman Empire by Emperor Constantine, Constantinople quickly became a major center of Christianity. Its bishops wielded significant political and spiritual influence.
- **Alexandria:** Renowned for its catechetical school, Alexandria was a hub of intellectual and theological activity. Notable figures like Origen, Clement, and Athanasius contributed to the development of Christian thought.
- **Antioch:** As one of the earliest centers of Christianity, Antioch played a crucial role in the spread of the faith. Its bishops were instrumental in addressing doctrinal controversies and maintaining unity.
- **Jerusalem:** As the site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Jerusalem held a special place in the hearts of Christians. Its bishops, while often facing political challenges, were revered for their connection to the Holy Land.

As the Church expanded and faced new challenges, the need for broader gatherings became evident. Ecumenical councils, convened by the emperor and attended by bishops from across the Christian world, emerged as a means of addressing doctrinal disputes and establishing universal norms. These councils played a crucial role in defining Christian orthodoxy and combating heresy.

- **The Council of Nicaea (325 AD):** Convened by Emperor Constantine, this council addressed the Arian controversy, which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed, formulated at this council, affirmed the belief in the Trinity and became a cornerstone of Christian doctrine.
- **The Council of Constantinople (381 AD):** This council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and further elaborated on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It also addressed various heresies and disciplinary issues.
- **The Council of Ephesus (431 AD):** This council condemned Nestorianism, which taught that Jesus Christ had two distinct natures, human and divine. It affirmed the unity of Christ's person and the title "Theotokos" (Mother of God) for the Virgin Mary.
- **The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD):** This council addressed the Christological controversies surrounding the nature of Christ. It formulated the Chalcedonian Definition, which affirmed that Christ is one person with two natures, divine and human, united without confusion, change, division, or separation.

The purpose of these early ecumenical councils was to unify the Church and maintain its doctrinal integrity. However, the Chalcedon Council marked a significant turning point, as it led to the first major split within the Church. This council re-addressed the Christological controversies surrounding the nature of Christ. The Chalcedonian churches, which accepted the decisions of the council, emerged as distinct from the non-Chalcedonian churches, who rejected them.

At the time, there were no official designations such as Orthodox, Catholic, or Oriental. The non-Chalcedonian churches experienced minimal doctrinal changes after the Council of Ephesus, primarily focusing on ritual developments. In terms of dogma, teachings, and unity, the Oriental Church remained largely unchanged from its pre-Ephesus state.

In contrast, the Chalcedonian Church, particularly in the West, witnessed tensions between the Roman Church and the Church of Constantinople. The Roman Church gradually developed certain teachings and rituals that diverged from those of Constantinople. While this divergence was not immediately apparent, it eventually culminated in the Great Schism of 1054 AD, which resulted in the separation of the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity.

Leading up to the Great Schism

The Great Schism occurred as a result of a confluence of theological, political, and cultural factors. Central to the schism was the insertion of the Filioque clause (“and from the Son”) into the Nicene Creed by the Western Church. This alteration, which affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, was vehemently opposed by the Eastern Church, which maintained that the Holy Spirit proceeds solely from the Father.

The schism was further exacerbated by disputes in the Balkans, Southern Italy, and Sicily over ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Western Church, led by the Pope in Rome, asserted its authority over these regions, while the Eastern Church, centered in Constantinople, resisted this encroachment. This conflict was particularly intense in Southern Italy, where Greek and Latin Christians coexisted uneasily.

Another point of contention was the designation of the Patriarch of Constantinople as the ecumenical patriarch, a title that implied a level of authority over all other patriarchs. The Pope in Rome, as the successor to Saint Peter, claimed primacy over the other patriarchs, including Constantinople. This claim was rejected by the Eastern Church, which viewed the patriarchs as equals.

Furthermore, liturgical practices in the West that differed from those in the East contributed to the growing estrangement between the two churches. For example, the Western Church’s use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist was seen by the Eastern Church as an innovation that deviated from traditional practice.

The rise of Islam in the 7th century also played a role in the Great Schism. As the patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria came under Islamic rule, their influence within the Christian world diminished. This left the Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople as the dominant forces in Christendom, intensifying their rivalry and contributing to the perception of a Rome-versus-Constantinople divide.

From 1054 AD to 1521 AD, the Catholic Church in the West grew in influence, strength, and financial resources. This growth was driven by various factors, including the expansion of papal authority, the Crusades, and the consolidation of ecclesiastical power. However, the fiscal demands imposed by certain clerical members, particularly the sale of indulgences, became a significant grievance that eventually contributed to the upcoming Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD)

Martin Luther, a pivotal figure in religious history, was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483 AD. Initially pursuing a law degree, a severe thunderstorm triggered a profound change in him. Fearing for

his life, Luther vowed to become a monk if he survived. True to his promise, he entered the Augustinian order in 1505 AD.

Luther's theological journey began in 1507 AD when he commenced studying theology, culminating in a doctorate in 1512 AD. Meanwhile, the catholic church began practicing the sale of indulgences. In objection to the practice and considering it a form of corruption, Luther protested.

Indulgences, a contentious issue at the time, were viewed by the Roman Catholic Church as a means of remitting temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt had already been forgiven. This concept, however, faced significant criticism from Martin Luther. He argued that indulgences, particularly those granted by Johann Tetzel on behalf of the Catholic Church in exchange for money, undermined the true nature of repentance and forgiveness.

Tetzel's is famously quoted saying "As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the rescued soul to heaven springs". The quote refers to the ability to purchase heaven for your soul. While this sounds exaggerated, the Catholic church were in a dire state at the time. It is to be noted however, that indulgences remain a part of their church. In the Catechism website, it notes: "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints." Through an indulgence, "partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin," the faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead." Even till this day an indulgence may be offered even for the dead! Today, the Catholic Church still accept the concept of the indulgences theologically, but warns from the misuse of them.

The abuse of indulgences, combined with the lack of availability of scripture for people to discern for themselves, prompted Luther to write the 95 Theses in the year 1517 AD. In this document he outlined his critiques of the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. In his writings, he emphasized the importance of genuine repentance and challenged the idea that indulgences could guarantee salvation. He also criticized the practice of selling indulgences to fund the construction of St. Peter's Basilica, arguing that true treasures lay in the Gospel of God's glory and grace. These theses were addressed to local archbishops and sparked widespread debate and controversy.

Additionally, Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517, serving as a catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. Also addressed many practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church. Among the issues Luther addressed were:

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- **Clerical Celibacy:** Luther questioned the necessity and biblical basis for mandating that priests remain unmarried. He argued that priests should be free to marry if they chose.
 - **Papal Supremacy:** The Theses challenged the absolute authority of the Pope, suggesting that the Pope's power should be limited and subject to scrutiny by the Church and scripture.
 - **Purgatory:** Luther questioned the existence of purgatory, a state of temporary punishment after death for those who died in a state of grace but with unconfessed sins. He argued that there was no scriptural basis for this doctrine.
 - **Communion by Bread Alone:** The Catholic Church practiced communion with both bread and wine, but only the bread was offered to the laity. Luther argued for the restoration of the "cup" to the laity, emphasizing the importance of full participation in the sacrament.
 - **The Latin Bible:** Luther advocated for translating the Bible into vernacular languages, making it accessible to the common people. He believed that individuals should be able to read and interpret the Bible for themselves.
 - **Simony:** This practice involved the buying and selling of Church offices and indulgences. Luther condemned simony as a corrupt practice that undermined the spiritual integrity of the Church.

The Ninety-Five Theses ignited a theological and political firestorm across Europe. Luther's challenges to established Church doctrines and practices resonated with many who were dissatisfied with the Catholic Church's perceived corruption and abuses of power. The Reformation that followed led to the establishment of Protestant denominations and significantly altered the religious and political landscape of Europe.

Luther's theological convictions led him to hold a generally positive view of the Eastern Orthodox Church. He particularly appreciated their rejection of several practices he found objectionable in the Roman Catholic Church, such as clerical celibacy, papal supremacy, purgatory, indulgences, and communion by bread alone.

Lutherans recognize two sacraments (sometimes three): Baptism, Eucharist, and occasionally Confession. They believe in God's real presence in a specific way in each sacrament. Baptism, viewed as a "Means of Grace," symbolizes regeneration and rebirth through the "washing of regeneration." It is believed to forgive sins, deliver from death and the devil, and grant eternal salvation to all who believe, as declared by God's words and promises. Lutherans accept infant baptism.

The Eucharist holds a central place in Lutheran theology. They believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, specifically referring to it as the True Body and Blood of Christ "in with and under the forms" of the offering. Confession and Absolution, often practiced privately before the Eucharist, involve the clergy offering absolution while maintaining strict confidentiality regarding the confessions.

Central to Luther's beliefs was the concept of Sola Scriptura, emphasizing the Bible as the sole infallible source of divine inspiration. He believed that the Bible should be accessible to all, regardless of their intelligence, and contains everything necessary for salvation.

Luther's understanding of salvation revolved around the principles of "Sola Gratia" (by grace alone) and "Sola Fide" (through faith alone). He maintained that humans cannot earn salvation through "good" works but solely rely on God's grace as a gift. According to Luther, salvation is entirely dependent on God's action (monergism), and humans do not possess free will in spiritual matters. He believed that those who place their trust solely in Christ can be assured of their salvation, whereas damnation results from unbelief, sin, and the rejection of forgiveness. Luther stressed that good works are the fruit of faith, and their absence indicates a lack of genuine faith. He rejected the notion that good works contribute to salvation.

Luther's actions led to him being declared a heretic in 1518 AD and excommunicated in 1520 AD. He also rebelled against monasticism, due to his unwilling strict experience, and proclaimed justification by faith alone. Most monks and nuns near where he was left their vocation. He married one of those ex-nuns Katherine Von Bora in 1525 AD.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

Ulrich Zwingli, another figure in the Protestant Reformation, emerged as a charismatic preacher and theologian in Zurich, Switzerland. Born in 1484, Zwingli's quest for spiritual renewal led him to challenge traditional Catholic practices, sparking controversies that would shape the course of religious history.

The first public controversy surrounding Zwingli's teachings erupted during the Lenten season of 1522. On the first fasting Sunday, March 9th, Zwingli and a group of followers intentionally broke the fasting rule by consuming smoked sausages. This act of defiance, known as the Wurstessen ("sausage-eating") incident, symbolized their rejection of external religious observances and rigid dietary restrictions.

Zwingli defended his actions in a sermon published as "Regarding the Choice and Freedom of Foods." He argued that the Bible did not impose universal food regulations and that transgressing such rules did not constitute sin. This bold stance challenged the prevailing notion of religious authority and paved the way for a more individualized understanding of faith.

Zwingli's influence continued to grow, and in 1525, he broke away from the Catholic Church, establishing a new religious community in Zurich. His teachings resonated with many Swiss cities, which adopted his ideas, leading to the spread of the Reformation throughout the region.

However, attempts to reconcile Zwingli's movement with the Lutheran Reformation, led by Martin Luther, proved unsuccessful. The Colloquy of Marburg in 1529, a gathering of Protestant leaders, failed to bridge the theological differences between the two reformers, particularly regarding the nature of the Eucharist.

Zwingli rejected several core Catholic beliefs, including fasting, clerical celibacy, veneration of saints, icons and statues, indulgences, excommunications, and the real presence of Christ in communion. He believed that the Eucharist was merely a symbolic representation of Christ's death, not an actual transformation of the bread and wine into his body and blood.

Zwingli's teachings and actions left an indelible mark on the Protestant Reformation, inspiring countless individuals to question traditional religious practices and seek a more 'personal' connection with God. His Reformation continues to shape contemporary Protestant thought and theology, influencing the development of various denominations that embrace his principles of simplicity, Scripture-based faith, and the rejection of external rituals.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

John Calvin, another pivotal figure in the Protestant Reformation, was born in France in 1509. His theological ideas and teachings had a profound impact on Christianity, particularly on the development of Calvinism. John Calvin's movement was motivated by his desire to reform the Christian church and return it to the simplicity of the early Christians. He believed that the church had added many rituals, garments, and festivals after the time of Jesus. Calvin's movement was also a response to the religious persecution of Protestants in 16th century France. Calvin's ideas were inspired by the writings of religious reformers like Luther, and he agreed with their core beliefs, such as the idea that Christians are reconciled to God by faith, not works.

In 1542 AD, Calvin published the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, a document outlining the beliefs and practices of the Reformed Church. This catechism played a significant role in shaping the doctrine and liturgy of many Protestant denominations. In 1548 AD, Calvin signed the Consensus Tigurinus, an agreement aimed at achieving unity among Protestant churches, primarily in Switzerland, regarding the sacraments. The Consensus sought to reconcile the differing views of Huldrych Zwingli and Martin Luther on the Eucharist.

Theologically, Calvin stood between the Lutheran view of Real Presence in the Eucharist and the Zwinglian view of pure symbolism. He believed that the Eucharist is a means of grace, with Christ actually present, but spiritually rather than bodily. This doctrine, known as "spiritual presence," emphasized the spiritual significance of the sacrament over its physical elements.

Calvin's teachings on grace and predestination were also central to his theology. He emphasized the sovereignty of God in salvation, arguing that individuals are saved by God's grace alone and that God has chosen some to be saved before the foundation of the world. These doctrines, while controversial, influenced many Protestant denominations and continue to be debated and discussed today. Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the importance of grace in salvation resonated with many people. His writings, such as the Institutes of the Christian Religion, were widely read and translated into various languages, influencing theologians and believers across Europe.

Calvin's influence extended beyond Switzerland. Born in France, he sent many ministers there to teach Calvinism. These missionaries played a crucial role in spreading Calvinist ideas and practices in France, influencing the development of French Protestantism. Calvin's teachings extended beyond his lifetime. His ideas profoundly impacted the development of Protestantism, shaping the beliefs and practices of many Christian denominations such as the Baptist, the Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church all with an emphasis on God's sovereignty, the importance of grace, and the spiritual significance of the sacraments.

King Henry VIII - Church of England | Anglican Church

King Henry VIII, the monarch of England from 1509 to 1547, played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Anglican Church, also known as the Church of England. His desire to annul his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon, which the Catholic Church refused to grant, led to a series of events that culminated in the English Reformation.

Driven by political considerations rather than theological disputes, Henry initiated the English Reformation and appointed himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, effectively breaking away from the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church. This act marked the beginning of the Anglican Church as a separate and independent religious entity.

During his reign, Henry and his son, Edward VI, both held Protestant views and leaned towards Calvinism, which influenced the theology and liturgy of the Church of England. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer played a significant role in shaping the Protestant character of the church during Edward VI's

time. John Knox, a prominent preacher during Henry's reign, later became a disciple of Calvin and preached the Reformation in Scotland.

Queen Mary, who succeeded Edward VI, attempted to restore Catholicism in England. Known as "Bloody Mary" due to her persecution of Protestant heretics, she tried to reunite England with Rome. However, her efforts were unsuccessful as her half-sister, Elizabeth I, re-established Protestantism upon assuming the throne.

Queen Elizabeth's reign witnessed the further suppression of Catholicism and the strengthening of Protestantism. Calvinism appealed to many conformists, and Calvinist clergy occupied important positions within the Church of England. However, some dissatisfied Puritans sought more radical reforms, aligning with Continental Reformed churches.

King James I, who assumed the throne in 1603, was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, and had been raised in a Presbyterian environment (a Calvinist movement). Influenced by John Knox, James was convinced of the Presbyterian church, which became the established church of Scotland. However, in England, he oversaw the production of the King James Bible, an influential English translation of the Bible.

Over time, the Anglican Church evolved, influenced by both Calvinist and traditional worship practices. It eventually navigated a middle ground between Lutheranism and Calvinism, reflecting the complex religious landscape of England.

The Anglican Church played a pivotal role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of England and later extended its influence to various parts of the world through the British Empire. Notable denominations born from the Anglican tradition include the Evangelical churches, The Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Church.

A Diverse Spread

Over the years, the Protestant Reformation continued to splinter and evolve, leading to a proliferation of denominations and theological perspectives. The initial divide between Lutheranism and Calvinism was just the beginning.

- **Calvinism:** This branch of Protestantism, inspired by the teachings of John Calvin, spread rapidly throughout Europe. However, it wasn't a monolithic movement. Different leaders and theologians within Calvinism emphasized various aspects of Calvin's theology, leading to the formation of distinct denominations. For instance, the Presbyterian Church, with its emphasis on church governance by elders,

- emerged as a prominent Calvinist denomination. The Reformed Church, another Calvinist offshoot, developed its own unique theological nuances.
- **Baptist and Church of Christ:** These denominations, while sharing some Calvinist theological leanings, developed their own distinctive practices and beliefs. The Baptist Church, for instance, emphasizes believer's baptism and congregational autonomy. The Church of Christ, on the other hand, emphasizes a return to the practices of the early Christian church.
 - **Anglicanism:** The Church of England, established by King Henry VIII, also underwent significant changes and divisions. While initially retaining many Catholic practices, the Anglican Church gradually embraced Protestant doctrines. However, the degree of reform varied, leading to internal tensions and the eventual formation of separate denominations. The Episcopal Church in the United States, for example, maintains a close connection to Anglican traditions while embracing a more inclusive and progressive approach. The Methodist Church, founded by John Wesley, emerged from within the Anglican Church but emphasized personal piety and social activism.
 - **Other Denominations:** The Pentecostal and Church of God movements, with their emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, also trace their roots back to the Protestant Reformation. While not directly descended from either Calvinism or Anglicanism, they represent further expressions of the diverse and dynamic nature of Protestantism.

The ongoing fragmentation of Protestantism highlights the challenges of maintaining unity within a movement that values individual interpretation of scripture and personal religious experience. While these divisions have often led to conflict and discord, they have also contributed to a variety of theological perspectives and expressions of faith. The Reformation continues to impact the religious landscape of the world, and its movements can still be felt today in the diverse array of Protestant denominations that exist.



Review Questions

1. How many ecumenical councils were held? [There were four councils.]
2. What are the location and dates of the ecumenical councils? [Nicaea in 325 AD, Constantinople in 381 AD, Ephesus 431 AD and Chalcedon in 451 AD.]
3. What was accomplished during the Nicene Council? [The Creed was written and agreed upon by all 318 Bishops and Priests.]
4. At what point the church was split? [At the council of Chalcedon. The church was divided into Chalcedonian churches and non-Chalcedonian churches.]
5. Who was Martin Luther? [He was a monk. He left for monasticism in 1505 AD in strict Augustin order.]
6. What did Martin Luther publish to the local archbishops? [The 95 Theses detailed

Luther's opinions about the teachings of the Bible, and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.]

7. What are the different administrative structures? [Episcopal, Consistorial (assembly of leaders)/Synodical, Presbyterian (assembly of elders/priests), Congregationalist (self-governing congregations) (e.g. Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ)]
8. How did the Anglican church come about? [King Henry wanted to have his first marriage (to Catherine of Aragon) annulled which led him to initiate the English Reformation.]
9. Who founded the Baptist church? [The church was founded by John Smyth.]
10. How was the United Methodist church formed and when? [It is a merger between Methodist Church and Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 AD.] How many ecumenical councils were held?

Answer: There were four ecumenical councils: Nicaea in 325 AD, Constantinople in 381 AD, Ephesus 431 AD, and Chalcedon in 451 AD.

11. What are the locations and dates of the ecumenical councils?

Answer:

- a. Nicaea, 325 AD
- b. Constantinople, 381 AD
- c. Ephesus, 431 AD
- d. Chalcedon, 451 AD

12. What was accomplished during the Nicene Council?

Answer: During the Nicene Council, the Nicene Creed was written and agreed upon by all 318 Bishops and Priests in attendance. This creed is a statement of Christian faith that is still used in many churches today.

13. At what point was the church split?

Answer: The church was split at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The council condemned the teachings of Nestorius, who denied that Mary was the Mother of God. Nestorius' followers were excommunicated, and the church was divided into Chalcedonian churches and non-Chalcedonian churches.

14. Who was Martin Luther?

Answer: Martin Luther was a German monk and theologian who is widely considered to be one of the most influential figures in the Protestant Reformation. He was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1507, but he later grew disillusioned with the church's teachings and practices. In 1517, he published the 95 Theses, which outlined his objections to the church's sale of indulgences.

15. What did Martin Luther publish to the local archbishops?

Answer: Martin Luther published the 95 Theses to the local archbishops in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. The 95 Theses were a list of Luther's objections to the church's teachings and practices, particularly the sale of indulgences. The 95 Theses sparked the Protestant Reformation.

16. What are the different administrative structures?

Answer: The different administrative structures of Christian churches include:

- a. Episcopal: a church governed by bishops
- b. Consistorial (assembly of leaders)/Synodical: a church governed by an

assembly of leaders or a synod

c. Presbyterian (assembly of elders/priests): a church governed by an assembly of elders or priests

d. Congregationalist (self-governing congregations): a church in which each congregation is self-governing

17. How did the Anglican church come about?

Answer: The Anglican Church came about as a result of the English Reformation, which was initiated by King Henry VIII in the 16th century. Henry wanted to have his first marriage (to Catherine of Aragon) annulled, which led him to break with the Roman Catholic Church and establish the Church of England.

18. Who founded the Baptist church?

Answer: The Baptist church was founded by John Smyth, an English Separatist, in 1609. Smyth and his followers believed that the church should be composed of baptized believers only and that each congregation should be self-governing.

19. How was the United Methodist church formed and when?

Answer: The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 AD as a merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The merger was the result of a long process of negotiation and discussion between the two denominations.