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## Learning For Life: Reformation 500

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**Overview:** In 1517, the great reformer Martin Luther produced his 95 theses, which articulated his objections to perceived corruptions in the Roman Catholic church. This year Christians around the world celebrate the 500th anniversary of that seminal occasion that forever altered the next six centuries of church history. Join us as we examine the celebrated, intriguing life of Martin Luther, and discuss the defining moments of the Reformation, including the political and social realities that allowed Luther to succeed when so many other would-be reformers paid with their lives. Most importantly, perhaps, we will contemplate together the relevance--if any--of the Reformation to the contemporary Christian church (including First Baptist, Regina), and will ask ourselves the critical question: Is Christianity in need of another Reformation?

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### September 17: The Social/Cultural Context of the Reformation:

Howard, Thomas Albert. *Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Schilling, Heinz. *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*. Translated by Rona Johnston Gordon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Schwarz, Hans. *True Faith in the True God: An Introduction to Luther's Life and Thought*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015.

Stjerna, Kirsi. *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

Stjerna, Kirsi. *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010.

Whitford, David M. *Luther: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2011.

**Review of Last Week:**

“Reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past, and future, events”

Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*

## **A Changing Europe:**

### **Feudalism:**

The dominant European system of political organization from the 9th to about the 15th centuries, having as its basis the relation of lord (often knight) to vassal with all land held in fee in return for fealty and services.

Feudalism is in its twilight during the years preceding the Reformation, its reasons for existence ebbing. The heavily armoured knights could not do what cannons, English longbow men and kings could. “The development of gunpowder, guns and cannon had increased the importance of the infantry and the artillery at the expense of the feudal cavalry.”

## **The Rise of the Territorial State:**

“There occurred a general transfer of allegiance in which the territorial state, whether a kingdom, a principality, or a city-state, profited at the expense of the feudal lords, towns, guilds and clergy. It was the aim of the territorial ruler to gain the allegiance of his people with respect to every aspect of their lives: economic, social, political, cultural and religious. His middle-class advisors, administrators and lawyers accordingly developed the divine-right theory of government, insisting that for reasons of security the ruler should have complete authority in his territory and that he obtained this authority directly from God.”

“Because princes of these lands began to obtain control over the religious affairs within their principalities long before the Reformation, a greater diversity of religious doctrines and organizations was possible in Germany than in the centralized national states of western Europe.”

## **The Peasants:**

“Significant for the spread of the Reformation were the strong religious overtones in the grievances of the peasants, especially those in Germany, caused to a large extent by the church’s being an exceptionally wealthy landowner that demanded increasingly large tithes and services.”

“The handling of papal revenues gathered from all parts of Latin Christendom was a highly lucrative business.”

## **On the Precipice of 1517:**

“About 1500 the aggressive leaders of all European classes were dissatisfied with the status quo and gave expression to their dissatisfaction through a powerful new medium, the printing press. Because more people were now literate than ever before, a larger number could be reached by those interested in reforms, and dissatisfaction could be marshalled to become a significant political force.”



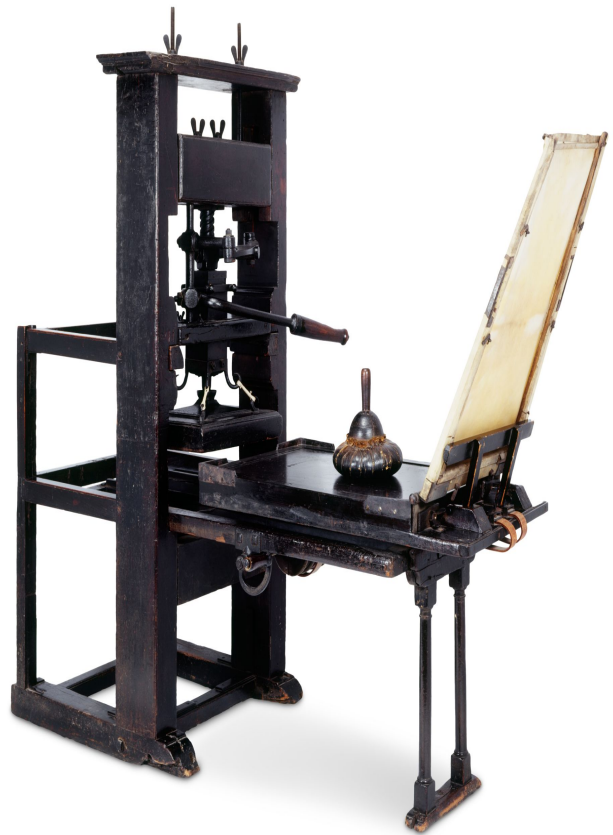
## **On the Precipice of 1517:**

“The entire structure of Western nations and Christendom was by 1500 in such a state of delicate equilibrium that the interjection of any serious controversy might tip the scales and lead to widespread revolution...nearly every economic, social, political and religious group had its reform program.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTGJMnTWrrw>

# The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

## 1. Johannes Gutenberg and the Printing Press



“... printing presses in themselves provide no guarantee of an enlightened outcome. People, not machines, made the Renaissance. The printing that takes place in North Korea today, for instance, is nothing more than propaganda for a personality cult. What is important about printing presses is not the mechanism, but the authors” (Jaron Lanier).

“You can't have an industrial revolution, you can't have democracies, you can't have populations who can govern themselves until you have literacy. The printing press simply unlocked literacy” (Howard Rheingold).

“What gunpowder did for war, the printing press has done for the mind” (Wendell Phillips).

# The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

## **2. The Code of Chivalry:**

While not as moribund as feudalism itself, chivalry was also flagging:

“The older chivalric virtues of honor, and personal loyalty gave way in many places to the middle-class virtues of honesty, industry, and integrity, and the medieval sense of corporate responsibility yielded to an emphasis upon individual initiative.”

## The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

### 3. Population changes:

- √ Despite plagues and famines, the western and central Europe population had increased from 53 million in 1300 to 70 million in 1500.
- √ “Germany” around 20 million.
- √ One tenth of population now lived in major cities. Cologne was the largest city in the territories at about sixty thousand.
- √ The biggest cities were in Italy, often over 100,000.

## The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

### 4. Demographic changes:

- √ The largest social groups included craftsmen, proprietors, traders, guild masters, journeymen officials, townspeople.
- √ Growing importance of the middle class.
- √ Increasing access to education and knowledge.
- √ The rise of capitalism and industry marking the early roots of the Renaissance.

# The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

## 5. Changing Religious Views:

- √ Declining interest in and support of monasticism.
- √ The wealthy became more inclined to spend their money on relics and pilgrimages than to give to hospitals or charities.
- √ Increased interest in mysticism:  

“It is significant that the strong inclination toward mysticism in the late Middle Ages, which placed more emphasis upon Christian ethics and learning than upon the Church and the sacraments, found its origin and greatest support in the urban centers of the Rhine and the Low Countries.”



## The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

### **5. Changing Religious Views (cont.):**

√ Christian humanism on the rise in Germany. It was generally characterized by the optimistic belief that society could be reformed and Christendom unified. The movement emphasized the “inwardness of religion.”

√ As a result, there was an increasing belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity, and de-emphasis of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.

# The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

## **6. Changing Nature of the Church:**

**In general--despite some notable exceptions--the influence and authority of the church and church leaders were already in decline before Luther's time:**

- √ Greater differentiation than ever between the clergy and the laity.
- √ There was less “cradle-to-grave” control of the poorer classes.
- √ Many clergy became seen as “hoarders of wealth” too consumed by secular matters.
- √ Lower level clergy--though typically people of integrity--often fared little better economically than their poorest parishioners, and were so poorly educated they did not understand the Latin that they read in the services.

## The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

### **Changing Nature of the Church (cont.):**

- √ The church was becoming increasingly secularized.
- √ Growing opposition to the papacy, especially amongst monarchs and people of political means.
- √ The growth of heresy.
- √ Emerging Renaissance values were leading to questioning of the church.
- √ Increasing Simony (selling of church offices).

## The Social/Cultural/Religious Context

### Changing Nature of the Church (cont.):

#### √ Indulgences:

The word *indulgence* ([Latin](#) *indulgentia*, from *indulgeo*, to be kind or tender) originally meant kindness or favor.

Remission of part or all of the temporal and especially purgatorial punishment that according to Roman Catholicism is due for sins whose eternal punishment has been remitted and whose guilt has been pardoned.

OR

the extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due, in God's justice, to sin that has been forgiven, which remission is granted by the Church through the application of the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints, and for some just and reasonable motive.

“As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”



**I**n dei nomine Amen gonerint vniuersi cõfessitideles qualiter Sanctissim⁹ dominus noster felicis mē-  
 cordacionis Innocentibus papa octau⁹ concessit de speciali privilegio ⁊ gracia de animarū illorū q̄  
 Caritate ab hac luce decellerint salus procuretur quod si qui parentes amici aut alii ep̄sc̄pales pietate comoti  
 cuiusvis nacionib⁹ et prouincie ⁊ vbiunq; fuerint ac vbiunq; degāt vicelintam partem vniue ducati pro anima  
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 potella nec non produarum capellarum in dicto hospitali fundacione quarum vna viris alia mulieribus tam dan-  
 tes ⁊ mittētes q̄ defuncti predicti in omnibus Suffragiis Precibus ⁊ Elemosinis. Ieiuniis. Oracionib⁹.  
 Disciplinis ⁊ piis operibus ceterisq; spiritualibus bonisque in dicto Hospitali ⁊ Capellis eiusdem pro temp-  
 ent peticipes efficiantur. Iuxta tenorem altiarum litterarum Sanctissimi domini nostri Alexandri pape legti.  
 quia vos  
 uultis pro anima  
 Et signate ab Alfonso de losa Notario apostolico deputato Anno domini M. CCCC. lxxxviii



*2 fundi s̄p̄s̄ q̄ fundi n̄ost̄  
 fundi ⁊ fundi ⁊ s̄p̄s̄ v̄olue*

*thymus p̄s̄*

*Alfonso de losa*

*[Large handwritten flourish]*

*Alfonso*

*In dei nomine Amen  
 In dei nomine Amen*

*[Handwritten signature]*

√ **What an indulgence is not (according to the Roman Catholic encyclopedia):**

It is not a permission to commit sin, nor a pardon of future sin; neither could be granted by any power. It is not the forgiveness of the guilt of sin; it supposes that the sin has already been forgiven. It is not an exemption from any law or duty, and much less from the obligation consequent on certain kinds of sin, e.g., restitution; on the contrary, it means a more complete payment of the debt which the sinner owes to God. It does not confer immunity from temptation or remove the possibility of subsequent lapses into sin. Least of all is an indulgence the purchase of a pardon which secures the buyer's salvation or releases the soul of another from Purgatory.

