

Church History

Timeline By Century

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16th Century

In our progression century by century through church history, we come to the tumultuous 16th century and the explosive influence of the Reformation. A couple of years ago in preparing our Christian History Institute video curriculum Reformation Overview* I was privileged to visit all the major Reformation locations where the original events took place. People and issues I had read about came to life for me in an unforgettable way. Day after day I was gripped by the adventure of stepping back into the world changing convictions and issues faced by the great Reformers. Several impressions left a lasting mark upon me.

The posting of the 95 theses by Luther in 1517 was not the beginning of the Reformation but in many ways a culmination of widespread developments that had been building up for generations.

There was not one Reformation but many. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Tyndale, the Anabaptists and others were all distinctive centers of dynamic development and spiritual renewal.

The intellectual discipline of the major Reformers was prodigious. These leaders were almost without exception

devoted to careful scholarship. Compare this to the kind of leaders we so often exalt today, based more on the attraction of personality and media charisma than the quality of their thought.

We are familiar with the big names in the movement, but all of them had their circle of colleagues and close confidantes with whom they struggled, debated, agonized, and prayed. Luther had his Melancthon, Zwingli his Bullinger, Calvin his Farel, Tyndale his Frith.

Major reformation events often took place in little out of the way places far removed from the centers of influence. Luther's Wittenberg surely was no Rome. Even today it is so small we couldn't find a hotel in town. Calvin's Geneva was not a major international city when he went there. It became one because of what he did there. --Ken Curtis

- The printing of books begun in the fifteenth century now develops swiftly, propelling the spread of the Reformation.
- Michelangelo, Albrecht Durer, Raphael, and Lucius Cranach create art with Biblical themes.
- 1517 Martin Luther posts his 95 theses at Wittenberg which stir Germany and Europe in a matter of months.
- The Scriptures become more available for the common person as Luther translates into German and Tyndale into English in the 1520's.
- The Protestant Reformation spreads throughout Europe with Zwingli in Switzerland, the Anabaptists in central Europe, and

John Knox in Scotland. Henry VIII's quest for dynastic security causes him to separate from Rome and establish himself as head of the Church of England. John Calvin's ministry in Geneva and his Institutes begin a Scriptural reexamination of theology and society.

- The Counter-Reformation defends traditional Catholicism against Reformation ideas. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirms Catholic doctrine. The Jesuit order becomes the defender of the Catholic faith and begins sending missionaries abroad.
- Religious convictions produce martyrs among both Catholics and Protestants -- Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer among the many executed. Huguenots in France begin to be persecuted. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (actually titled *Actes and Monuments*) records the persecution believers in Christ have endured through the centuries.
- In England, Puritans begin to fashion a church more closely based upon the Scriptures.