



WHY DO WE BELIEVE *THAT*?
Introduction to Reformed Theology

Class 3

**CHURCH HISTORY:
REFORMATION THROUGH URCNA**

Education Year 2024-2025

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Why Do We Believe That? - Class 3

REVIEW

- Ancient church councils
 - A lot of work done on Christological and Trinity matters.
- Perversions and distortions of the Gospel
- Medieval Times



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MISC. DEVELOPMENTS

- Latin *Vulgate*
 - Jerome translated the Bible into Latin in the fifth century.
 - Became the only Bible for the Western Church
- Rise of the Papacy
 - Rome was the only “Western” church that had a bishop
 - Rome was the place of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul
 - The Roman bishops did maintain orthodoxy in the early doctrinal decisions
 - The claim was that Jesus made Peter “pope” in Matt. 16 and therefore, the popes succeed him.
 - Leo the Great (440-461)
 - Leo made claims to the papacy and the necessity of being connected to the pope for one’s salvation.



3

MISC. DEVELOPMENTS

- The Holy Roman Empire
 - Political power of the Roman See.
 - “The popes of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries had been deeply involved in the local politics of Rome. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the internationalizing of papal power and papal claims made that involvement seem claustrophobic, limiting and, in the face of popular hostility and aristocratic intrigue, dangerous as well. In any case popes were increasingly involved in the growing complexities of international politics.”¹
- *Facientibus quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam* -
“To those that do what is in them, God will not deny grace.”
 - Semi-Pelagian



¹ – Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, Fourth Edition, 163.

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WYCLIFFE AND HUS

- John Wycliffe (c.1320-1384) and
 - Spent most of his career in Oxford, England
 - Spoke out against the moral corruption of the papacy and Rome in general
 - Spoke out against papal authority (sort of *sola Scriptura*) and against transubstantiation.
 - With his disciples translated the *Vulgate* into English
 - Died of natural causes in 1384. The Council of Constance (1415) condemn him, and in 1420 his body was removed, burned and his ashes scattered over a river.



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WYCLIFFE AND HUS

- John Hus (c. 1372-1415)
 - Czechoslovakian / Bohemian
 - Heavily influenced by Wycliffe and spoke out against the corruption of the papacy.
 - Spoke out against the sale of indulgences
 - Condemned by the Council of Constance and demanded that only the Scriptures be used against him.



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THE RENAISSANCE

- *Ad fontes* – “To the sources”
 - Rise of humanism and rereading of the Church Fathers
 - Understanding of Hebrew and Greek again
 - Recognition that the *Vulgate* wasn't the best translation.
 - Matthew 4:17 – “*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - Vulgate: “*Do penance*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- Invention of the Gutenberg Printing Press (~1439)
 - Ability to disseminate information much more quickly.
- Rise of the Nation-State
 - Move away from the Holy Roman Empire and identification along cultural and geographic boundaries



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INDULGENCES

- What is an indulgence?
 - “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.”
 - “An indulgence is 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.¹
- No Scripture references.

¹ - *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, 370.



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INDULGENCES

- Indulgences were being sold to help pay for the rebuilding of St. Peter's cathedral in the Vatican.
 - Riddled with corruption. In the part of Germany where Luther was the sale of indulgences were being split with Rome and the Prince / Archbishop who was using the proceeds to pay off bribes and loans.
 - Tetzel claimed that an indulgence could spring loved ones out of purgatory.
 - *"Place your penny on the drum,
The pearly gates open and in strolls mum."*¹

1 – Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 200.



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MARTIN LUTHER

- Initially studied law (as his father wanted him to do)
- In 1505 he was caught in a thunderstorm and feared for his life. Cried out to St. Anne that he would become a monk if his life was spared.
 - Became a priest in 1507
- Visited Rome in 1510 and was disillusioned by the corruption and degeneracy.
 - R. Scott Clark – “an immoral war-zone”
- Began teaching in Wittenberg
 - Taught through the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians
 - Started to come to a (what we would call) a Protestant understanding of Justification
 - Indulgences were a huge problem for him.



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MARTIN LUTHER

- Posted the “95-Theses” on the church door of the Wittenberg church to have a discussion primarily against indulgences.
 - Not a true Protestant document
 - First few theses have to do with the *Vulgate’s* use of “Do penance” instead of “repentance.”
 - The idea of purgatory being questioned.
 - Indulgences as a practice were being condemned not just their corruption.
- This document lit a match for all those that were calling for reforms.
 - Translated and then printed in German



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MARTIN LUTHER

- Stages of Luther’s development¹
 - 1513-15 – Psalms - Sin / Election / Grace
 - 1516-16 – Romans – *justitia* - righteousness
 - 1517-19 – Galatians – *fides*
 - 1519-21 – *Sola Scriptura*
 - 1518 – Law and Gospel
- Resistance
 - 1518 – Heidelberg Disputation – “Through no disposition will you be worthy, except through faith alone.”
 - 1519 – his works were condemned by the universities
 - 1520 – Papal bull of excommunication.

1 – From class notes



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MARTIN LUTHER

- April 1521 – Diet of Worms (while excommunicated)
 - The 95 Theses were printed and distributed by his supporters
 - Asked if he wanted to recant all his writings which were spread on a table.
 - Believed to have said, “Here I stand, I can do no other.”
- “Kidnapped” by Frederick the Wise to the Wartburg Castle for his own protection.
 - Spent 10 months there and got a lot of work done.
 - Translated the Greek NT into German (whole Bible completed in 1534). Very significant for the German language.
- Was able to return to Wittenberg
- August 1520 – “Address to the Christian Nobility”
 - A defense of the Reformation to Charles V



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MARTIN LUTHER

- October 1520 – “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church”
 - On the Sacraments
 - Attacked the Roman sacerdotal system.
 - Laypeople should have the wine and the bread
 - The Mass is a propitiatory sacrifice
 - Means of Grace
- 1525 – “Bondage of the Will”
 - Response to Erasmus
 - Defense of Scripture
 - Development of predestination
 - “Luther didn’t adopt predestination *a priori* – he was driven to it reluctantly by reading Scripture.”¹

1 – R. Scott Clark, Class notes.



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ULRICH ZWINGLI

- 1518 – Preached against papal corruption and for living in accordance with the Scriptures.
 - Began the practice of *lectio continua* preaching.
- 1522 – Started to reform the worship of the church.
 - Defended printers eating sausage during Lent.
 - Removed all images, symbols, and musical instruments from the church
- 1529 – Marburg Colloquy with Luther for the unity of the Reformation.
 - Agreed on 14 points, disagreed on the 15th concerning the Lord's Supper (Zwingli taught the remembrance/symbolic nature of the Supper).
 - German Lutherans and Reformed Swiss remained apart.



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JOHN CALVIN

- Born in 1509 in the Noyon, France (northern France)
- Went to law school.
 - His father was as lawyer for the clergy, but was excommunicated (maybe for political reasons).
- His becoming Protestant
 - Learned Greek from a Lutheran, Wolmar; then added a study of Hebrew.
 - In 1533 Calvin began to have doubts about the Roman Eucharist.
 - Over the next couple of years he became more aligned with the Reformation.
 - France was still loyal to Rome and it came to be that Calvin had to flee.



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JOHN CALVIN

- Calvin first went to Basel, Switzerland in 1534.
 - Published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- 1536 - On his way to Strasbourg he had to take a detour because of a battle and went through Geneva
 - Geneva was undergoing a reformation of her church along “evangelical” lines under the leadership of Pierre Viret and Guillaume Farel.
 - When Calvin came through town he was stopped by Farel.
 - Farel threatened to call down curses upon him if he didn't help them!



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JOHN CALVIN

- The town had become Protestant, but needed a lot of help.
 - Farel and Calvin wrote a Confession, although not all of the reforms that Calvin desired were kept in.
 - The discipline of the church, by the church, was being opposed by the city council.
- Easter of 1538 – Calvin and Farel wanted to exclude some people from the Lord's Supper, the council disagreed and ordered Calvin, Farel, and others to leave the city.
 - Calvin went to Strasbourg at the invitation of Martin Bucer.



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JOHN CALVIN

- Bucer was a great influence on Calvin's understanding of worship and the church.
- Strasbourg was the happiest period of his life
 - Pastor of a congregation of French refugees
 - Taught biblical exegesis at the college
 - Completed a number of writing projects.
 - Got married to a widow who had two children
 - His criteria for a wife, one who was "chaste, considerate, modest, economical, patient, and attentive to his health."¹
- The Genevan church began to be enticed to go back to Rome through Cardinal Jacob Sadoletto.
 - The magistrates had to ask Calvin for help in defending Geneva's Reformation.
 - He ended up returning to Geneva at the age of 32, but much more mature for leading the church.

¹ – Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors*, 25.



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JOHN CALVIN

- *Ecclesiastical Orders* – a church order for the church
 - The church was responsible for interpreting revelation and exercising jurisdiction over spiritual matters.
 - The civil magistrate had power over temporal affairs and was responsible to protect the church.¹
- *The Form for Ecclesiastical Prayers and Hymns* - liturgy
- Arranged a variety of forums and meetings of the region's pastors for the purpose of accountability and oversight of the Genevan Church.
- Started the Genevan Academy for the training of ministers.

¹ – From Manetsch, 27



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JOHN CALVIN

- Calvin often gets misrepresented as a tyrant
 - Did have a lot of influence
 - Did disagree with the City Councils throughout his time in Geneva
 - The Company of Pastors as a whole were the ones who spoke up in opposition
 - “Calvin’s authority within the Company [of Pastors] was never absolute, and the routinely submitted to the collective will of his colleagues...”¹
 - Never became a citizen and only had voting rights until shortly before his death.²

1 – Manetsch, 27.
2 – James Sinke, *The Pilgrim Church*, 111.



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JOHN CALVIN

- Servetus Affair
 - Michael Servetus was anti-Trinitarian (and denied infant baptism) and was fleeing others who had condemned him as a heretic, and came to Geneva in 1553 hoping for leniency.
 - He was arrested by the Small Council, and there was concern if they didn’t do something the Roman rulers would be warranted to attack Geneva for harboring heretics.
 - Calvin agreed he was a heretic (as did Europe!), pled with him to change his opinions, and begged the Council to behead him instead of burning because it was less severe (the Council didn’t grant that request).



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THE COUNTER REFORMATION

- Rome did respond to the Reformation and in various councils addressed the moral corruption of the church.
 - In 1545 the Council went on the offensive against the “dangers that threatened it”¹ [from the Protestants].
 - Sixth Session (January 13, 1547)
 - Canon 9 – “If anyone says, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will: let him be anathema.”
 - Canon 11 – “If anyone says, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God: let him be anathema.”



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THE COUNTER REFORMATION

- Sixth Session (January 13, 1547)
 - Canon 12 – “If anyone says, that justifying faith is nothing else but the confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified: let him be anathema.”
 - Canon 14 – “If anyone says, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected: let him be anathema.”¹



¹ – Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Volume II, 112-113.

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OPPRESSION OF THE REFORMED

- In counties loyal to Rome (namely France and Spain) the Reformed were heavily oppressed.
 - Many French Huguenots fled to Geneva or England
 - At least 12,000 (up to 62,000¹) Reformed were killed in the area of the Netherlands alone during the first few decades of the Reformation.
 - 1572 - St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, 5,000-10,000 Protestants killed.
- We can play the intersectionality game too! 😊

1 - R. Scott Clark, class notes.



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THE BELGIC CONFESSION

- The Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands today) were under the control of King Philip II of Spain.
 - In many cities the Reformed were experiencing terrible persecution and the city authorities were not protecting them so they were protesting in the streets.
 - They also sang psalms during the protest!
 - The authorities were assuming that all the protests were because the people wanted to overthrow the government—which was the case for the Anabaptists.
 - The Reformed were thrown in the mix with the Anabaptists and not allowed to defend themselves.
 - The pastor of Doornik, Guido de Bres wrote a confession to summarize what the Reformed believed (and would not give up) and what they did not believe (that the government needed to be overthrown).



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THE BELGIC CONFESSION

- On November 1, 1561 the confession was prefaced by a letter and the whole package was thrown over the castle wall and addressed to the civil authorities.
 - The letter stated they would obey the government in all things lawful, but when it came to the truth of God's Word they would, "offer their backs to the stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire" rather than deny the truth contained in that confession.
 - Died a martyr for the faith in 1567, "making the Belgic Confession the only major Reformed confession sealed with the blood of its author."¹

1 – W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 8.,



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JACOB ARMINIUS

- A Reformed pastor in the Netherlands and teacher in the University of Leiden
 - Began to teach that God doesn't elect individual persons to be saved, but elects a condition: those who would believe in Christ.
 - Arminius died in 1609, but his followers took up his mantle and went further in their twisting and denying key truths of the Gospel.
 - They summarized their position in the Five Point of Remonstrance in 1610
- The situation surrounding the Remonstrants was threatening to cause a civil war so the civil government called for the church to take care of the problem.



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THE SYNOD OF DORT

- Not the first synod of the Reformed churches (there had been a number previously), but this was to be an international synod to overcome any appearance of unfairness against the Arminians.
 - Eight foreign delegations with 82 total delegates.
 - The French delegates were told by King Louis XIII that if they went they wouldn't be able to return to France. The synod left their chairs open in their honor.
- The synod answered the five points of the Remonstrants which is why there are five points.
 - This was never meant to summarize "Calvinism."
 - TULIP (or ULTIP) is great, but not exhaustive.
 - We will take up the Arminian doctrinal positions later.



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THE SYNOD OF DORT

- Also formed a Church Order for the Reformed churches.
 - In 1816, "1618 was reversed" by King William I and made the church governed by the state.
- Later Dutch Church History:
 - 1834 – The Afscheiding (separation) when five ministers and some families left the church because it wasn't preaching the Reformed truth.
 - 1886 – The Doleantie (grieving) led by Abraham Kuyper because of the falling away of the state church
 - 1892 – Joined with the Afscheiding group
 - 1905 – Synod of Utrecht
 - Supralapsarianism vs. Infralapsarianism (supra is permitted)
 - Eternal justification
 - Immediate regeneration



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COMING TO AMERICA

- 1628 – Dutch Reformed land in the New World and form the Dutch Reformed Church of America (now the RCA).
- 1846 – A group from the Afscheiding came to West Michigan and joined with the Dutch Reformed Church
- 1857 – The Afscheiding church split over:
 - Members allowed to join Masonic Lodges
 - Loss of psalm singing
 - No Christian day schools
- Beginning of the CRCNA, first synod 1865
- 1914 – Dutch Church order translated into English and adopted



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STRUGGLES IN THE CRC

- 1924 – split due to the controversy over common grace, formation of the Protestant Reformed Church
 - 1954 – some PR churches rejoin the CRC
- 1980s – Some congregations leave over liberal movements and form the Orthodox CRC.
- 1986 – Other congregations leave for similar reasons and in 1990 adopt the name Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- 1990-1996 – CRC synods finally settle the issue allowing women into all ecclesiastical offices.



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FORMATION OF THE URCNA

- During the early 1990s many CRC Consistories were concerned about the trajectory of the CRC and many meetings, forums, and conferences were held.
 - When Synod 1995 finally allowed classes to “declare the term *male* inoperative” the final straw was cast for many churches.
 - Some tried to stay in through 1996-1997
- 1996 – Synod Lynwood the federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America was formed.
 - Reasons beyond women in office:
 - Catechism preaching in decline
 - Liturgical innovations incorporated to “grow the church”
 - Ministers allowed to hold to non-Reformed doctrines
 - Loss of the authority of God’s Word (i.e. homosexuality)



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URCNA TODAY

- More on our polity later in the class
- Current stats (as of 12.31.23):
 - 140 churches (including church plants)
 - 25,004 souls
 - 206 ministers (including emeritated)
 - 8 classes



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NEXT WEEK

- Covenant Theology

