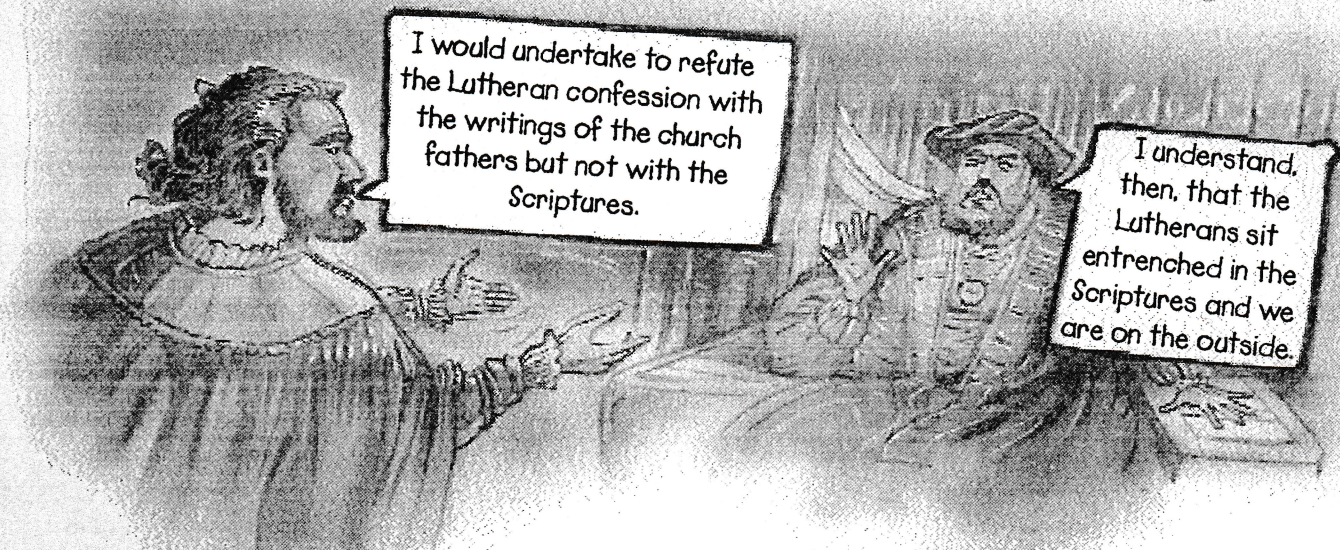


15 Reform and Struggle



The Effect of the Reformation

When you throw a stone into a pond, it makes ripples that move far away from the place where the stone entered the water. When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to Wittenberg's church door in 1517, the effects of that action rippled far beyond Germany and long after 1517. One result was that the Roman Catholic Church would be changed forever.

In 1530, Luther's followers presented at Augsburg a statement of what Lutherans believe. Written by Luther's friend and coworker Philip Melancthon and made up of 28 articles, this document has come to be known as the Augsburg Confession. The Confession (or statement of beliefs) was signed by the Lutheran princes, then the document was read before Emperor Charles V and the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. Later, in 1580, the Augsburg Confession was combined in the Book of Concord with other documents that further expressed the beliefs uniting all Lutherans.

The Council of Trent

By 1545, it was unlikely that the Protestant churches could ever be brought under the rule of a Roman Pope. Lutherans

and other Protestants were well on their way to clearly defining what they believed and how their churches would be organized. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church were interested in seeing changes in the church of Rome. Luther had brought to light a number of abuses in the church.

Pope Paul III called for a council to meet in the Austrian city of Trent. The Council of Trent met on and off from 1545 to 1563, during the reigns of five different popes. There were also a great deal of political turmoil and wars in Europe during this time, which is part of the reason that the council took nearly 20 years to complete its work. The Council of Trent made significant progress in reforming abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, such as immorality among the clergy. But it also affirmed established teachings such as the principle that both Scripture *and* the tradition of the church have final authority on doctrine and practice.

The Counter Reformation

The Counter Reformation tried to undo the Protestant Reformation. Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church set out to bring Protestants back into the church, using force if necessary.

Founded in 1534, the Jesuit order devoted itself to spreading Catholicism. In 1542, the Roman Catholic Church set up an Inquisition, or agency, to find and bring to trial suspected heretics (i.e., Protestants). During this Inquisition, many in Europe were tortured, tried, and executed for heresy. During the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day (August 24–25, 1572), for example, several thousands of French Protestants were executed. As a result of the Counter Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church regained much of the territory it had lost to the Reformation.

The Spanish Armada

At the support and encouragement of the pope, King Philip II of Spain planned to further the efforts of the Counter Reformation by forcing England to return to the Roman Catholic Church. In July 1588, the Spanish sailing fleet (armada) set sail for the English Channel. Here, the heavy and powerful Spanish ships met both violent storms and the smaller and swifter English ships under the leadership of Sir Francis Drake. The defeat of the Spanish was decisive. After 1588, England replaced Spain as the leading global power.

The Thirty Years' War

In an effort to crush Protestants once and for all, the political allies of the Roman Catholic Church launched into a war in 1618 that was to last for 30 years. This war brought great devastation to Europe. In Germany alone, the population was reduced by the war from 15 million people to 5 million. During this war, Gustavus Adolphus, a Lutheran king of Sweden, won a great victory, leading his army into battle with the trumpeters playing Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The Thirty Years' War finally ended in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, in which both Lutheran and Reformed churches were granted religious liberty.

The Word of the Lord Endures

God's people have endured hardships and persecutions down through the centuries. Similarly, the forces of the devil continue to contend against those today who trust in Jesus alone for their salvation. Through it all, God's Spirit strengthens and encourages His people by the power of His Word. One of the most powerful ways God's Word lives among His people is through music. Some of the greatest hymns still sung in congregations today were written during times of turmoil and persecution. Some of the greatest hymn writers of all time include Martin Luther, Paul Gerhardt, Charles Wesley, and Isaac Watts. As an expression of his faith, one of the greatest composers of all time, Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach, signed his compositions *Soli Deo Gloria*—"to God alone be the glory."

The Word Continues

1. Explain the purpose and results of the Council of Trent.

[The council set out to reaffirm traditional Roman Catholic doctrines while addressing abuses within the church.]

2. Why are Christian hymns important to the people of God, especially during times of trial and persecution?

[Hymns give people a common voice in which to unite and encourage one another in the expressions of their common faith.]

3. In what ways does the Word of the Lord continue in your life?

[Answers will vary.]

To Review and Remember

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.
Isaiah 40:8