

Homework for Lesson 7: The Reformation

Last week we went on a whirlwind tour of the first 1500 years of Christian history. We talked about some of the key figures, what they believed, and the things they accomplished. However, we didn't discuss some of the problems. We didn't mention the mistakes and flaws that sprung up in the church over time.

Over hundreds and hundreds of years something happened to the Church. As each generation passed the faith on to the next, meanings, beliefs and practices inevitably shifted. Sometimes it was intentional, but often it was accidental. These changes weren't necessarily good or bad, but some were quite significant and caused major problems and controversies in the Church when people disagreed about how to understand the Christian faith.

At the highest level, these major problems and controversies, these shifts, are what lead to the period we call the Reformation.

When the Church first started after Jesus resurrection and ascension, it faced a lot of persecution. It was largely made up of poor and powerless people, and it also presented a political obstacle to the ruling Roman Empire. As time passed, the Church continued to grow and became more powerful. The persecutions ended and Christianity was eventually named as the official religion of Rome.

This meant that, far from being persecuted, many Christians including many Christian leaders were now in positions of privilege. The Church became a powerful player in politics and also grew extremely wealthy. When the Roman Empire eventually fell, the Church helped to fill the vacuum of power.

Over time, the power and wealth of the Church came into conflict with a number of groups that wanted change. These groups and their leaders believed that the Church had lost its way and shifted too far from Jesus' original message. They wanted to re-direct the Church to the path they believed Jesus had intended. This was not the first group with such ideas, but this time their message was amplified by the invention of the printing press, which allowed books, essays, and pamphlets to be printed and widely distributed for the first time.

Today, we are going to investigate four of the men who played a significant role in the Protestant Reformation.

Each of the following leaders played an important role in the Reformation: Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer, John Calvin, and Jacob Arminius. Select one, do some research and write a paragraph or two about them and their work.