LESSON FOUR, THE REFORMATION

A. PREAMBLE

1. Texts

a. Matthew 5:13-16—"… a city on a hill … "
b. Luke 17:20-21—"… the kingdom of God is in your midst."
c. 2Timothy 2:19—" …the Lord knows those who are his …"

2. Renaissance-driven developments which set the stage for the Reformation

a. Waning of the total domination of society by the church (which remained, however, very powerful).
b. Increasing weight given to the concept and practice of individual responsibility.
c. Desire to study the Bible, and the beginnings of provision of the means for that study.
d. Invention and use of printing press and moveable type.

3. The importance of Wycliffe's notion of the "visible" and the "invisible" church

a. Depended on the assumption that God's election would produce "true" Christians no matter how bad the conduct of church officials or how corrupt the organization of the "visible" church.
b. Divided the reformers into two broad groups: those determined to change the public face of Catholicism, and those who felt that if they focused on the life of individuals the work of God would be successful.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFORMATION

1. It was several distinct, quasi-independent movements rather than one reformation, but "pamphleteering" prevented their isolation from each other, and, not incidentally, their premature deaths.

2. Though humanism had made it possible, it was primarily based on a *rejection* of humanist ideas.

3. Though brought to a crisis point by the *conduct* of church officials, it was more concerned with *doctrine*.

C. THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

1. Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)

a. Augustinian monk (who later renounced the Catholic priesthood and married).
b. Studies of Psalms and Paul's letters led him to conclude that Catholic theology had fundamental flaws.
c. Provoked by sale of indulgences to finance construction of St. Peter's.
d. His writings fired German nationalism, and his translation of the Bible created the modern German language.

2. Hallmarks of the Lutheran reformation

a. The watchwords: "*sola fide*," "*sola scriptura*," "*sola gratia*," "*solo Christo*."
b. His stand: "Unless I am persuaded by *scripture or plain reason*, I will not recant."
c. To Luther, rescuing the truth of salvation by faith was *infinitely* more important than changing corrupt church organization and correcting the abuse of ecclesiastical power.
d. His theology depended on the Augustinian notions of *moral depravity* and *bondage of the will*.
e. Wycliffe's "invisible church of the elect" concept allowed him to tolerate the abuses of the "visible church."
f. Luther said that other reformers attacked the *life* of the church; he attacked its *doctrine*.
g. "Priesthood of all believers" and denial of transubstantiation were direct assaults on Catholic system.
h. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone "makes a theologian of every believer."

3. Effects of the Lutheran reformation

a. Concept of individual responsibility gained prominence.
b. Greatly strengthened German national identity and weakened the political hold of the church.
c. Individual "lay Christians" came to be viewed as just as important as church officials.
d. Damaged the financial position of the church.

D. THE ZWINGLIAN REFORMATION

1. Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531)

a. Strongly influenced by the Humanists and the writings of Erasmus.
b. Replaced Erasmus's "philosophy of Christ" with the stronger "law of Christ."
c. Held that nothing should be taught as a church doctrine not expressly found in scripture.
d. Insisted on the exclusion of every practice not expressly prescribed in scripture (even singing!).

2. Hallmarks of the Zwinglian reformation

a. Elevation of forms of worship and organization to the same level as (or even above) individual piety.
b. Viewed the church as the spiritual embodiment of all society—thus, the Zwinglians taught infant baptism.
c. Christian duties include allegiance to the state as a divine institution coequal with the church.
d. An approach to hermeneutics which tended to treat each statement in scripture as a disjoint fact, equal in importance to all other statements of fact; and which deprecated integrated "systems" of belief.

3. Effects of the Zwinglian reformation

a. The "union" of church and state led to religious wars (Zwingli himself died in battle).
b. In terms of needed reformation, no difference between the "visible" and the "invisible" church.
c. One of Zwingli's disciples, Martin Bucer, advanced the idea that *restoration must be ongoing*.

E. THE CALVINIST REFORMATION

1. Jean Calvin (1509 – 1564)

a. Early, he was equally influenced by both the Humanists and Augustine.
b. Ultimately, however, he took Augustinian depravity to its logical end.
c. Calvin was the prototype of the modern "religiously motivated political liberal."

2. Hallmarks of the Calvinistic reformation

a. A balance between the Lutheran and the Zwinglian ideals of individual piety and church organization.
b. Church organization has two purposes: gospel proclamation and maintenance of its own salvation.
c. "External innovations" which do not expressly violate the principles of the gospel were tolerated as harmless.
d. People freely choose to do evil, but no one can freely choose to do good, or even know fully what good is.
e. Only God knows whom He has chosen; no one can be certain of his own election.
f. Everything must be explained in terms of the *sovereign will of God*.
g. Works of the church in sanctifying the elect were extended to the betterment of society and politics.

3. Effects of the Calvinistic reformation

a. The state was seen as an agent of the church in claiming the "elect."
b. The church was expected to guide the state in the formulation of laws for society's good.
c. The notion that the love of God must be totally and always subordinate to the sovereignty of God.

F. TAKING STOCK

1. What was the thinking of the leaders of the Reformation, and ordinary people trying to be Christians, on …

a. The problems that they saw as needing to be solved.
b. Civil and social conditions which helped, and constrained, their ability to work toward solutions.
c. Misalignment of the Catholic church with the apostolic order which could be discerned from scripture.
d. Depravity, free will and personal choice.
e. Methods and conditions of admission to the Christian community.
f. Relationship between the church and civil government.
g. Relative importance of church organization and structure as compared to individual work and sanctification.
h. What means the church in a corporate sense may employ to perform the common work of its members.
i. The proper approach to understanding God's will for the body of Christ.

2. Can we recognize the work of God in any of these developments?