**The Renaissance – Luther**

Sacramentalism – The late medieval Catholic doctrine of the *sacraments* placed the emphasis on the action performed and the words pronounced. Part of this emphasis on the physical and temporal was the doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, that the communion meal literally becomes the body and blood was Christ when administered by a priest. The main sacraments were the *Mass*, about which there were many superstitions, and *Penance*, to which was attached many abuses and indulgences. Each Mass was a distinct act of sacrifice and carried a marketable value. The more Masses one had said and done, the more value to him and his loved ones in the “balance of accounts of souls in purgatory. There were many “mass priests”, unlearned men trained to repeat the words of the Latin Mass which they did not even understand. The Penance had four parts: *Contrition* for sins, *Confession* to a priest, *Absolution* pronounced by the priest, and *Satisfaction* by good works. Punishments in Purgatory compensate for sins not satisfied by temporal penalties. Christ and his saints, however, have earned an unlimited “treasury of merits” which could be dispensed by the pope to cancel temporal penalties. This was known as *granting indulgences*. An Indulgence was a slip of paper that could be bought and sold. This unscrupulous practice later touched off the reformatory work of Luther (Germany) and Zwingli (Switzerland).

Mysticism – Countered the Sacramental trend toward external and objective religion and began a search for a more immediate personal union with God. The goal was “absorption into the divine”. The two best-known Mystical brotherhoods were The Friends of God and The Brethren of the Common Life. Thomas Kempis, Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) and John Tauler, Germans, were three great preachers of this movement. They did not break with Catholicism, but made people less dependent on external forms and less subject to ecclesiastical authority.

Humanism – The invention of moveable type (Guttenberg, 1450) and the printing of the Latin Vulgate (the Bible in Latin) contributed to the spread and popularity of new academic learning. Erasmus (1466-1536) was a Humanist scholar who had moral and religious interests. His greatest contribution was the first printed Greek New Testament. He taught a return to Scriptures and primitive Christianity, strongly satirizing the religion of his day. However, Humanism presented disunity as a great sin, so he never broke from Catholicism. Most who had a role in the Reformation were Humanist trained.

John Wyclif (1320-1384) – He was English and the ablest theologian on the Oxford faculty. He had the backing of the English government as he promoted a refusal to pay taxes to the pope. Two of his main doctrines were: The Scriptures are our sole authority by which abuses in the church are to be judged. Transubstantiation is a recent invention, because the belief of the primitive church was that the body and blood of Christ were only present symbolically. Wyclif was responsible for the first translation of the Scriptures from Latin to English.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) – A German raised by strict, pious parents. They sent him to school to become a lawyer, but when he was struck by lightning he decided to become a monk. He was ordained a priest in 1507 and completed a Dr. of Theology degree in 1512 at the Univ. of Wittenberg. He engaged in rigorous asceticism (extreme self-discipline) in order to save his soul. Convinced that every sin had to be confessed and satisfaction performed, he had nagging fears of unconfessed sins. The hardest command was to love God and he found himself hating the God who made such demands. During the winter of 1512-13 he came to discover his doctrine of “Justification by Faith” as he meditated on Romans 1:16ff. Man is not saved by the merit of good works, but by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to those who trust him.

In 1517, he nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the church, a challenge to debate, attacking the practice of indulgences. Luther was called to appear before a Cardinal in October 1518. Luther denied the authority of the pope and the Ecumenical Councils. Because of his fearless, fiery preaching, Luther becomes the hero of the Reformation. Assisted by Philip Melanchthon, a more studious and gentle comrade, Luther translates into German. Luther reformed worship by teaching, among other things, congregational singing. He changed church organization by making nobles of lands into Bishops. Luther was big on governmental leaders being appointed by God, and was thus supported by government.

Luther believed in human depravity and predestination, the belief that God preordains those who will believe. This was because of his desire to do away with all notions of human merit and give all credit of salvation to God. Without divine grace, man cannot choose God. This belief caused controversy between him and Erasmus (Humanist). Luther was also conservative in keeping some of the Catholic traditions that he deemed “not forbidden by Scripture. This separated him from those who wanted a more global reformation.

The idea of the “priesthood of all believers” was made central by Luther. All Christians can hear confessions, pray for one another, and grant forgiveness. Do you agree with this? What do you think was Luther’s motivation for the parts with which you disagree?

Luther’s communion doctrine is called *Consubstantiation*. The real body and blood of Christ are present in the supper, “joined with the actual bread and wine”. For Luther, baptism brings forgiveness of “original sin”. Luther’s insistence on faith in connection to the “sacraments” forces him to argue for “infantile faith”, the meaning of which has never been made clear.

The “Lutheran princes” (Bishops) were in northern Germany, whereas southern Germany remained loyal to the Catholic Church. The Scandinavian countries, mostly for political reasons, embrace Lutheran Reformation. With Wyclif in Britain, Luther and Melanchthon in Germany, and Zwingli in Switzerland, Catholicism loses virtually all of northern Europe.