The Break of Dawn
The Rise of the Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther challenged the Catholic Church by nailing to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany 95 statements of protest against the Church---some doctrinal and some moral; he had no intention of starting a new movement but in reforming the Catholic Church; three pre-reformers had a great influence on him: Peter Waldo (1150-1202), John Wycliffe (1329-1384), and John Huss (1369-1415).

The Revolt of Martin Luther against the Church

The childhood of Martin Luther... Born in Saxony, Germany, November 10, 1483; his family very devout Catholics and very superstitious and Luther never got away from his beliefs in goblins and witches; the teachings of the Church which weighed heaviest on him: salvation through obedience to the Church and purgatory as a constant threat to every Catholic; to escape purgatory he decided to become a monk.

The change of career for Luther by a bolt of lightning... His father wanted him to be a lawyer; his study of law at the University of Erfurt came to a quick end on July 2, 1505 when he was knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning; lying on the ground paralyzed by fear he cried out: “Saint Ann, help me and I will become a monk!” Fifteen days later he entered the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt.

His father was not happy about his decision; he attended his ordination on April 4, 1507, yet scolded him for disobeying his wishes; Luther was unhappy as a monk having deep feelings of sinfulness and guilt; yet it was his agonizing over guilt that became the tool that God used to produce his faith which ultimately led to the reform movement.
In 1508, while attending Wittenberg University he visited Rome with a fellow monk; he was disillusioned by the pious attitude of the priests, the flaunting of wealth, their lethargic commitment to the priesthood as well as pedophilia and homosexuality; he returned to Wittenberg deeply disappointed.

In 1511 he earned his doctorate and began teaching Genesis and Psalms; he was still unhappy as he only saw God as an angry Judge; he was still plagued with guilt, disappointed with the Roman priesthood, and with unfulfilled spiritual quests.

_The challenge to Luther from John Von Staupitz..._ Von Staupitz was the vicar of the Augustinian Monastery who challenged Luther to study the crucifixion accounts of Jesus’ death and the letters of Paul; there he discovered “God’s righteousness;” to him that meant that man was made righteous by the acceptance of Christ’s atoning death, all sin was forgiven, and Christ’s righteousness was imputed to the believer by the grace of God through faith; in 1515, Luther was giving lectures on the book of Romans and salvation by grace through faith and not by works.

_The commitment of Luther to His new found beliefs..._ As Luther studied the Scriptures he not only realized that man is justified by faith and that God’s grace is available to all, he now believed Scripture was the sole authority, that salvation was not through the Church but through faith by God’s grace in Christ’s atoning death; his new found beliefs not only healed his troubled soul, but began to capture the hearts of fellow faculty at Wittenberg.

On October 31, 1517 he went to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and nailed to the door 95 statements of protest against the Church; he protested the abuses he witnessed on the part of the priests in his visit to Rome; he protested the Catholic doctrines of transubstantiation, purgatory, prayers to the dead, the authority of the pope, the role of the priesthood, the sale of indulgences, and the seven ordinances of the Church which he limited to two--- baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

The seven ordinances of the Church were established by Peter Lombard of France (1100-1160) and later Thomas Aquinas of Italy (1225-1274); the seven ordinances are:

1. Baptism... The sprinkling of an infant for the remission of original sin; three questions are asked the parents or godparents on behalf of the baby to which
they must answer “Yes:” “Will you renounce Satan?” “Do you believe in the Nicene Creed (Trinity)? “Are you willing to be baptized?” In 1311 at the Council of Ravenna the Church declared that immersion and sprinkling of adults was “indifferent;” all adults were immersed prior to 1311; Luther did not have a problem here; he too taught “baptismal regeneration.”

2. Confirmation... The anointing of a child on their 13th birthday for receiving the Holy Spirit.

3. Penance... This involves the confession of sin after baptism to a priest; confession involves two things: sorrow and satisfaction; satisfaction comes in four ways: purchase indulgences, perform devotions at the “fourteen stations of the cross,” recite the rosary, visit the Church when the sacraments are exposed on the altar; satisfaction does not forgive sin but shortens the time one spends in Purgatory.

4. Mass... The Mass consists of the holy Eucharist in which the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ at the time the priest holds up the “host” and blesses it; although the host becomes the literal body, soul, and deity of Christ the outward appearance of it remains as mere bread and wine; this is called transubstantiation; even so Catholics are quick to point out that Christ is not being recrucified at every mass; Luther taught consubstantiation where communion wine and bread remain unchanged, yet the body and blood of Christ are substantially present in them.

5. Extreme Unction... The last rites given by a priest over a believer in serious danger of death; he anoints eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands, feet with holy oil.

6. Ordination... Setting apart those entering the priesthood.

7. Marriage... Only between a Catholic man and a Catholic women to be declared a sacrament.

*The cut-off-point for Luther...* The final straw for Luther was the sale of indulgences and its use under Pope Leo X; indulgences were connected to the doctrine of purgatory; Catholics teach both an eternal and a temporal punishment; Christ’s death satisfies the eternal consequences, but one must
satisfy the temporal consequences by being purged by fire for an undetermined period of time after they die.

During the days of the martyrs, they went straight to heaven; they were so holy that they earned “extra merits”—more than needed for salvation; these extra merits are called “supererogation;” the Church was left with a “treasury of merits” that could be bought by indulgence money that would lessen one’s time in purgatory; it would remit some of the temporal punishment and time spent in purgatory; everyone in purgatory would eventually get to heaven, just a matter of time; the more indulgences purchased the shorter the time; in Germany they had a song that accompanied the Indulgence Chest: “When a coin in the coffer rings/ A soul from purgatory springs!”

In 1517 Pope Leo X used indulgence money to build St. Peter’s Cathedral; he even had a special sale on indulgences for a limited time; those who contributed would receive forgiveness of sins as well as removal of the temporal punishment of sins so that is one could go straight to heaven; this limited time offer was for the living as well as for the dead; the use of the money was the final straw for Luther which forced him to nail his 95 Thesis to the door of the Wittenberg Church.

The critique by reformers of the Catholics most influential theologian in Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)... No one influenced the theology of the Middle Ages more than Thomas Aquinas; as a man overweight he got the nickname “Dumb Ox,” as a brilliant theologian he earned the nickname “Angelical Doctor.”

Aquinas distorted the Christian message when he argued the Fall of Man only corrupted man’s will, but not his reason or intellect; therefore truth could be perceived through reason and that was the job of the philosopher; theology was the queen of sciences and philosophy was the servant of theology; philosophy was to establish what theology assumes; for example, theology assumes God exists, so the philosopher is to establish that as truth.

As the result of his theology the Church began to mix Scripture with the teachings non-Christian philosophers like Aristotle; it was Aquinas’s attempt to merge faith (theology) with reason (philosophy) that the Church began to justify their teaching on transubstantiation and the authority of the pope and Church councils; reformers argued this puts human reason at the center of Christianity and not the authority of Scripture.
The Rejection of Luther by the Church

*The criticism of Luther by the Church...* As more people heard Luther’s teaching his popularity grew; this made the Church unhappy so the pope targeted him by asking him to defend his thesis in public; in 1518 a debate was set hoping to shake him from his thesis on grace; it failed; he was asked to recant his teachings, but he refused; finally in July 1519, the Church brought in its theological heavyweight, Johann Eck, a famous university professor from Leipzig, Germany; in one heated and highly emotional moment, Eck got Luther to admit that he had been influenced by John Huss; by such an admission, Luther was putting himself in the position of being a heretic; you know what happens to them.

*The composing of tracks by Luther...* Luther’s pen was mightier than his debating skills; he wrote tracts that shook the foundation of the papacy; in them he addressed such issues as: the authority of Scripture alone; justification by faith alone, the doctrine of transubstantiation as unscriptural, baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the only ordinances, and the priesthood of all believers.

Hostility between Luther and Rome grew; the pope ordered his books burned and Luther excommunicated; Luther’s response was to excommunicate the pope.

*The condemnation of Luther by the Church...* Luther’s last stand was in 1521 at the Diet of Worms; Luther was not as asked to debate his theology but to recant what he had been teaching; he refused saying: “Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scripture, or by manifest reasoning, I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God’s Word, I cannot and will not recant anything. For to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this day I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

The Edict of Worms was a death warrant; he was excommunicated a second time as well as citizenship from the Roman Empire; he was held hostage for 8 months at Wartburg Castle where he translated the New Testament into the common language of the German people; he died on February 18, 1546 at 62; he was buried under the pulpit of the Castle Church in Whittenburg.
The cause of Luther in the hearts of the people... Many people took up the cause of Luther; his message of reform spread rapidly and they were called Protestants or Lutherans; His cause was in five statements:

1. Sola scriptura: By Scripture alone
2. Sola Christus: By Christ alone
3. Sola gratia: By grace alone
4. Sola fide: By faith alone
5. Soli Deo Gloria: Glory to God alone

The crusade by the Church against Protestantism...In 1546, Pope Paul III declared a crusade against Protestants called the Schnialkaldic War; the Church won, but jealousy between Emperor Charles of Rome and the Pope prevented immediate destruction of Protestantism; another war broke out in 1552 and this time the Protestants regained what they had lost.

In Augsburg, Germany, 1555, the Peace of Augsburg gave the right for Lutherans to exist in the Roman Empire; before 1540 most of Germany, Poland, and Hungary were already Lutheran.

Luther’s words at the Diet of Worms became the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation “Unless I can be instructed with evidence from the Holy Scriptures.... I cannot and will not recant... Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen”