The Reformation

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Donuts and Dogma; St. Michael Catholic Church

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Prayer....

Recap...

In the last several weeks we have covered a lot of history, literally! It has been awhile since you have had to endure my attempt at covering an apologetic topic. And for that I am grateful to Adam, John, and Kevin for their tireless work at covering such a wide range of historical misconceptions against the Catholic Church in these last couple months. Although I am not a historian, my interest in this topic comes from my extensive background with Protestants, and why Protestantism even exists in the first place when we know that Christ prays that we Christians may be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:21). So we know a few things for sure. #1 that Christ is God and He gets what He prays for, so we Christians will indeed be one in
the future even if today we are splintered. #2 the Church is one in Heaven, there is no division there. #3 That although God did not positively will the Protestant Reformation, He did permit it. So we will dive into this today.

But first, just a quick recap…

Let’s take the 10,000 foot view for a moment so that we can see how these recent apologetic history lessons ultimately culminated in the Protestant Reformation, or better termed the Protestant Revolt (reform did happen positively within the church, but the protestants “protested” into revolt against the Church, leaving Her fold altogether). Adam Kinkaid gave a great overview of the Crusades (1095-1291), showing this was really more of a defensive act to counter Muslim aggression flowing over to historically Christian lands. It was a very good thing, and we should be proud of the motivations, even if there were abuses therein by some crusaders and leaders.

John then covered the Dark Ages (476-800) and Galileo (1564-1642), showing that these so called dark ages gave us so many new advancements through the Catholic Church especially in the areas of education/universities, medical advancements/hospitals, and
architectural engineering through the beautiful Gothic Cathedrals and flying buttresses. And we saw there is no conflict between science and religion, as he disposed this myth by laying out what really happened with Galileo arrogantly perpetrating a hypothesis as fact before it was actually proven. Of course, if the Church had done the opposite, she would have been much more ridiculed (and rightly so) for advancing a theory before it was proven and getting out of bounds.

And then Kevin gave us some insights behind the Inquisition (1231-1826), showing that the inquisitors goal was to help bring lost sheep back to the one fold, the One Church. It was not to put people under strict scrutiny and give punishment sentences. That was done more by the civil authorities as a last resort, and represented a very small percentage of the cases. Its goal was to help create that unity that Christ so prayed for.

All of this historically led up to the Reformation. The reformation did not just happen out of the blue. There was a distrust of the big Catholic Church and a shift to the individual and one’s own accomplishments, one’s own enlightenment. The focus on the individual overtook the focus of the communion of saints, the familial setting of
something greater than ourselves. This is so ironic as it was really a revert back to the original sin of pride and selfishness that we see back in that first garden of Eden. You see there really is nothing new. (of course, this is not to put all the blame on those outside the Church as there was real need of reform within the Church members’ morality... more on this later)

In general, we can sum all this history up in one word... Family. It goes back to that same theme that we have been speaking of for this entire series. The Church is the Family of God, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ in deep communal relationship with one another and Jesus Christ through His One True Church. Because it is a family, it can be a bit messy. There is pride, sin, and lots of back-biting and even bloodshed. This should not surprise us, as the closer we are to each other the easier it is to get hurt. So through these lessons we see the Church doing what she should be doing, defending her children in the Crusades, making life better on earth to bring forth the kingdom by making advances in science, architecture, and education in those so called dark ages and beyond, promoting a proper understanding of science by not promulgating theory before it is properly proven as in the
case of Galileo, and always trying to bring back lost sheep to the fold in the Inquisition. All good things.

BUT, because we are family, we can see the sins, we can let pride take over and let things fester. We can really hurt each other. In short, we sin. What’s new? The old saying still rings true today.... “The Church is not a country club for saints, but is a hospital for sinners.” So we see the abuses. We see our own sins. Let’s name them, don’t be shy. We should be saints and we as members of the Church have failed the world (thank God though, that there have been many saintly people through history too!). With the crusades there were those that pillaged, did it for their own personal gain or glory (though most crusaders made great sacrifices of money and time, away from family, etc to go on the expedition). There may have been ulterior motives for some leaders wanting their own agendas, not God’s. There were bad inquisitors who were in it for #1, and could care less about bringing people back to the fold. I am sure innocent blood was shed, if even on a lesser scale than the myths propose. We have had mistrust of our priests, our Fathers, in the more recent sex abuse scandal. There is no excuse. We have lots of sinners in the Church. But again, what’s new?
Are the Protestants without sin? It is noteworthy that although Protestantism has produced many great God-loving people, it is through the Catholic Church that we actually have canonized saints. Both Catholic and Protestant have good and bad sinners, but it is only the Catholic Church that we see the real deep holiness of the Saints.

This is a lot of background for the reformation. First, let’s look at the problems in the Church at the time. There were some real bad problems that needed reforming, all sides agree to this. “Political power, material possessions, privileged position in public life, the defense of ancient historical rights, earthly interests of various kinds were only too often the chief aim of many of the higher clergy.” (online: http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/reformation-the, 5-2-16) Bishops would even get more money if they had more cities that they oversaw, so many of them tried to take multiple bishoprics to get more power and income. It was like a king and a kingdom, sort of speak, so the temptation was too great for many clerics who were in it for the wrong reason. Many clergy were also highly illiterate and seminaries did not really even exist at this time. It was not until the 1890s that cultural literacy became more normative in Europe. So priests were largely
uneducated, and many people slipped into superstition. There was the abuse in the sale of indulgences, and the biggest one that got Luther fired up was the one that went to help pay for the construction of St Peter’s in Rome. You may have heard of the Dominican Johann Tetzel who was granting indulgences in exchange for money to help pay for the construction of St Peters. Some began to think that we could pay our way out of purgatory by just giving more money to the coffers. The old saying was "As soon as a coin in the coffer rings / the soul from purgatory springs" (D’Ambrosio, online). These were just some of the abuses that Luther was rightly bringing to light. Of course, there were saints who also saw this moral depravity and stood up against it, staying within the fold of the Church. For example, Erasmus, Francisco de Suarez, Luis de Molin (Jesuits), Cardinal Cajetan upholding St Thomas Aquinas, the Carthusians, Cardinal Ximes in Spain tightening clerical discipline, and Matteo Giberti who was the secretary to Clement VII. These were just a few who reformed the Church from within.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a Catholic monk, who was very scrupulous in severe aestheticism, hard on himself often inflicting severe penances, with a great sense of unworthiness deserving only the
wrath of God. He had his own personal problems of being wary of authority as he had an abusive childhood from very strict and simple parents. Beaten up to fifteen times in one day, he was left with cold fear and distrust of authority. “Like every victim of scrupulosity, he saw nothing in himself but wickedness and corruption. God was the minister of wrath and vengeance”, and we can see that stemming from his childhood. “His sorrow for sin was lacking in humble charity and childlike confidence in the pardoning mercy of God and Jesus Christ” [(http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/martin-luther), 5-4-16] There is much more to go into with him, but I will leave that for your homework.

Luther started by wanting to reform the Church from within from the moral degradation of the Church’s members and monetary abuse of selling indulgences. With this we should all say AMEN! Just like we would say AMEN to it being just as wrong today if we see certain Church leaders using peoples’ charitable desires to promote their own wealth and power over the needs of the flock. This is a great cause that Luther was concerned with, and it was the primary argument in his 95 thesis that he nailed to the front door of All Saints Church in
Wittenberg Germany in 1517 (It was actually written on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.) BUT, the problem came in the few years following this as the debates became heated, he became more polarized, and his views slid into extremes that ultimately led him to deny Church authority, especially in interpreting Scripture. That is actually why he was excommunicated three years after he nailed the 95-thesis to the door. It was not on the indulgences piece, it was on authority. And isn’t that what it is still really all about today? What would happen if the US constitution were given to everyone and they were told just to interpret it for themselves? May the spirit of Washington be with you! There would be anarchy. The country would fall apart. If the makers of the constitution were wise enough to create a judicial branch to interpret the Constitution on this human level, how much more so would the all-wise God make sure that He left us with an authority to infallibly interpret His inerrant Word of the Bible? He did this precisely through the Catholic Church!

With Luther, the other issues besides this authority piece were largely confirmed by the Church to be of no contention. Luther wrote so much on the justification by grace and faith and not just by works as he
read in St Paul, but this was already the written position of the Church even in his time, so he was proposing nothing new. (D’Ambrosio, online)

Albeit that through uneducated clergy there were pockets of superstition in thinking that one could just muster up enough works to get themselves to Heaven. But of course, we know this is not true. This topic has already been covered, but to sum up we see that salvation has as its first mover God, extending His grace to us unwarranted by anything we can do. It’s all grace. But as Catholics we believe that we must respond to this grace by good works born out of love for God and neighbor (just look at all the merit language used in Scripture to show the necessity of good works... ex. James 2:17 saying faith without works is dead!) Indeed, we are saved by grace through faith working in love.

In the end Luther denied that the Catholic Church had the authority of Christ on earth, and rather that he had authority to interpret Scripture the way that he saw fit, using the Holy Spirit as his guide (called Sola Scriptura). Now you can see this whole thing coming full circle about what we spoke of in the beginning with the fall of Adam and Eve, the sin of pride, and it all being about the individual, the me-monster. This is what the sum of history that led up to the Protestant
reformation paved the way for. You see it in a shift from the objective Truth in Augustine and Aquinas to the subjective truth of Rene Descartes. You see it in the shift from the Middle ages to Renaissance period to the more individualistic Enlightenment period. We see it in art as there was a shift from more realistic paintings to more abstract paintings that purposefully meant to leave room for individual interpretation like “What do you see in it?, not “what was the author’s or painter’s intention? This all became a seed bed for Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich Switzerland, and even John Calvin (1509-1564) to begin to interpret Scripture in what they could individually “see” in it. You can see how much disaster this would wreck on God’s interpretation of things. After all, His view or perspective WOULD be absolute Truth. But this had to go by the wayside while egos on both sides clashed and argued over doctrinal issues and the divisions began. For example, Luther thought the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist made sense as Christ said “This is my body”, but Zwingly argued with him saying “But you hear Christ say he is the vine, and you don’t think he’s an actual vine do you?” (D’Ambrosio, online) Luther was getting very upset with what he had opened up toward the end of
his life as he saw his followers arguing and dividing separate ways. He thought it was wild that every “altar boy and choir girl” thought they could interpret scripture in their own creative way. He opened up the Pandora’s box and it was too late. Within just 31 years of Luther’s death was a book published (Christopher Rasperger’s published in 1577) entitled “200 Interpretations of the Words: This is My Body.” (Not By Bread Alone, p. 146, note 122.) When we break from the God’s One True Church, we are left with ourselves as the ultimate authority. Even scholars can not agree on Scripture’s meaning, so even the learned can not be the source of unity. It must be the Holy Spirit through His one Church, and we know that He is not the author of confusion, lies, or division. Yet we now have over 30,000 different denominations that all call themselves Christian and claim to be guided by this same Holy Spirit. As Catholics we would never say that Protestants are not truly seeking God or that the Holy Spirit does not speak to them. Indeed He is active in those churches. But we also know that the Holy Spirit does not will them to stay there on their journey. All roads lead to Rome, and it is up to us being instruments of the Holy Spirit to help bring the lost sheep back to the fold, as Christ prays that we all be one as He and
the Father are one. We plant the seed, and the Holy Spirit is the One who does the actual converting.

This has been a lot of information and background. **So how do we apply it to our daily lives?** Here are a few suggestions:

#1. If there is one bit that I pray we can take from this topic and series when it is all said and done it is this: Let’s just try to be saints! Let’s just love... love... love! This will win the world. They will know us by our love. Let’s let other see our love for the Catholic Faith! There is one Truth, One Church, but there are different charisms within this one Church that does not take away from our unity. Just as a family is made of different members, so too is the greater Church Family. We have the different orders of Benedictines, Franciscans, etc. So some are the head, others the arm, ear, etc of this body of Christ! But if we differ in Charism, it does not mean that we should do the Protestant thing of breaking away and leaving the Church! That is the last thing that we should do! Instead of healing the hurt we can tend to just run away! Think of what this would do to a natural family. What if a sibling just runs away as they do not want to face the challenges of getting along? This would destroy the family. We have seen devastation through
division already **not only** with over 30,000 different denominations, **but also** with anti-God agendas infiltrating within the Church in self-inflicted wounds as we have summed up earlier today. It has been said that when you see the breaking down of the Church, it was an inside job. But we are steadfast in hope. We know the gates of Hell cannot and will not prevail over the Catholic Church.

We shouldn’t throw away our Catholic faith away when it gets hard! An older couple once told me that they lived through the great depression, and at that time they did not hardly throw anything away if it was broken. They would just fix it. That is how they were taught. Today we live in a throw-away generation where everything is dispensable. So if it is broke, we just throw it away and get a new one. There is always more, always excess. The land of plenty. This works for some things, but unfortunately is has bled over in our relationships as well. If we are not careful, people can become dispensable, and only loved for the good that they can give us. We are all broken, good, but broken. Does that mean we are to be thrown out too? No, God is working on us. We need to cooperate with His grace as He molds us to be saints! Let us take our Faith
seriously. Eternity is at stake. And there is all grace and joy that come in taking this sometimes hard journey of Faith. And it is hard, but it is joy filled! If it were easy it would be worth that much less! So let’s take up our crosses in joy to truly love as we ought, to truly be saints!

#2. Let’s invite others and recommit ourselves in our Faith! Let’s get involved! It is in this vein of thought that I would like to put a plug into what we can do here at St Michael’s. We have an awesome responsibility and golden opportunity to bring our faith to this thirsty world. It is so appropriate that we end this year’s Donut and Dogma series of “Why be Catholic?” with a multi-day parish mission on just this same theme. It is May 15 to May 19 at 6:30 pm each night, with confessions starting earlier at 5:15 at the church. Please invite your neighbors, friends, coworkers, Catholics, and non-Catholics to this event! Of course you can help to supplement this invite by texting or emailing anyone you know the Donuts and Dogma website so that they can listen to this series conveniently by topic at their leisure. I hope this series has inspired and challenged us to become dynamic Catholics, and to encourage others to do the same! We live in an age where we can
not afford to sit on the fence or be lukewarm in our Faith! To borrow the words of Matthew Kelly, rise up to this challenge to truly love, to be the best version of yourself, and live everyday with passion and purpose!

Thank you and God bless!

PRAYER: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.....

Works Cited

http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/reformation-the, 5-2-16


http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/martin-luther, online 5-4-15

Not By Bread Alone, p. 146, note 122.
“Their chief object, viz. to guide man to his eternal goal, claimed too seldom their attention, and worldly activities became in too many cases the chief interest. Political power, material possessions, privileged position in public life, the defense of ancient historical rights, earthly interests of various kinds were only too often the chief aim of many of the higher clergy. Pastoral solicitude, the specifically religious and ecclesiastical aim, fell largely, into the background, notwithstanding various spirited and successful attempts to rectify the existing evils....

Humanism and the ideals of the Renaissance were zealously cultivated in Rome, and unfortunately the heathen tendencies of this movement, so opposed to the Christian moral law, affected too profoundly the life of many higher ecclesiastics, so that worldly ideas, luxury, and immorality rapidly gained ground at the center of ecclesiastical life. When ecclesiastical authority grew weak at the fountain-head, it necessarily decayed elsewhere. ...

The new art of printing made it possible to disseminate widely the works of pagan authors and of their humanistic imitators. Immoral poems and romances, biting satires on ecclesiastical persons and institutions, revolutionary works and songs, were circulated in all directions and wrought immense harm. As Humanism grew, it waged violent war against the Scholasticism of the time. ...

The promulgation of indulgences for the new St. Peter's furnished Luther with an opportunity to attack openly indulgences in general, and this attack was the immediate occasion of the Reformation in Germany. A little later the same motive led Zwingli to put forth his erroneous teachings, thereby inaugurating the Reformation in German Switzerland (see Martin Luther; Ulrich Zwingli). Both declared that they were attacking only the abuses of indulgences; however, they soon taught doctrine in many ways contrary to the teaching of the Church.” (http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/reformation-the)