



Church History:

What you need to know

(and you don't need to know the rest)

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Introduction:

The **Shortest** and **Most Effective** Church History Course Ever (?!)

*The works of the LORD are great,
Studied by all who have pleasure in them.
Psalm 111:2*

- ▶ The best approach to any vast topic is to **connect the dots** to points of **familiarity** and **interest**.
- ▶ Why did *I* become interested in **Church history**?
- ▶ The **scope** of this seminar: **Beginning** of the Church to ca. 1500

What We Talk About When We Talk About Church History

- ▶ **Who:** Christians, people who followed the teaching of the apostles, “*unknown and yet well known...*” (2 Corinthians 6:9), Jews and Gentiles, Armenians, Ethiopians, Irish, Egyptians, Asians, Russians...
- ▶ **What:** written testimony from *source texts* and *master interpreters*
- ▶ **Where:** the whole world, but with a focus on *Holy Spirit's westward expansion* out from *Jerusalem* (Acts 1:8; Acts 16:9)
- ▶ **When:** 33 AD → 70 AD → 313 AD → 1054 AD → 1517 AD → 2021 AD and beyond!
- ▶ **Why:** using the filter of *courage, wisdom, and hope*
- ▶ **How:** the *anecdotal approach*: see Leonard Ravenhill, G.K. Chesterton

“Christianity is stupid.” ➡ Is Christianity stupid?
“Christians are stupid.” ➡ Are Christians stupid?

Some ideas that have been entertained about the Church of Jesus Christ in history:

- ▶ “Jesus never existed.”
- ▶ “The Bible was written in the Middle Ages.”
- ▶ “The text and message of the Bible was perverted by hundreds of years of mistranslation.”
- ▶ “Hell was invented by medieval religious leaders who wanted to scare their people into obedience.”
- ▶ “The resurrection of Jesus was added later to the real story of Jesus.”
- ▶ “Most people were converted to Christianity by sword-point.”
- ▶ “The first Christians were more ‘open minded’ to the world around them.”
- ▶ “Christianity was invented by Apostle Paul.”

Where do we begin?

- ▶ *Acts 28* is the final chapter of Scriptural narrative.
- ▶ After the Cross, the devil is defeated. We are now enforcing the victory of Jesus Christ. The work now is one of tending the garden.
- ▶ Why did the Bible end?
- ▶ Using the discernment of Holy Spirit within us.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS:

Paul, Peter, Nero, Jerusalem, and the Legacy of the Apostles

*Therefore, humble yourselves under
the mighty hand of God, that He
may exalt you in due time.*

1 Peter 5:6

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 2 Timothy 4:6

64 AD

the deaths of Paul and Peter

Emperor Nero

- Came from a line of evil, pagan, Roman emperors
- Started ruling at age 16
- Was the second truly insane emperor
- Had some popular appeal
- Turning point came from an act of arson in July 64 AD which he blamed on the Christians
- Life ended in suicide four years later

Paul the Apostle

- Had a lot of freedom and fruitfulness during his house arrest in Rome.
- Conjectures about travels to Spain
- Came under the persecution sparked by Nero's fires in Rome
- Possibly accused of influencing Nero's household
- Final imprisonment was bad
- Was "mercifully" beheaded

Peter the Apostle

- A lot of conjecture as to where Peter spent his last days
- Most popular tradition says Peter was in Rome at the same time as Paul
- Was likely a teacher in Rome, though there is no Scriptural evidence that he was a "pope," which is the Roman Catholic tradition
- Was crucified upside down because didn't feel worthy to be crucified like Jesus



Apostle Paul's martyrdom from *Paul, the Apostle of Christ*

The Legacy of Paul and Peter

...our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:15-16

Paul

- ▶ Greatest **legacy** was his **epistles**
- ▶ Was greatly **revered** by even the first generations of Christians, and his **influence** in modeling the crucified life increased after his death
- ▶ Was also greatly **misunderstood**, particularly his **doctrine of grace**
- ▶ **Augustine of Hippo** generally regarded as the first theologian to really explore Paul's doctrine of grace in its fullness, over **300 years** after Paul's death

Peter

- ▶ Not given the same **respect** as Paul gets, especially in **Protestant circles**
- ▶ A lot of **apocryphal traditions** associated with his life after (and during) the Book of Acts. These include **legends** about his rivalry with Simon the Sorcerer.
- ▶ **Roman Catholics** proclaim Peter as the first "pope," and pull upon Jesus's words as **evidence** of this (Matthew 16:18-19).

The Legacy of the Other Apostles

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Jesus, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the whole world?" John 14:22

- ▶ James, brother of John – Acts 12:2
- ▶ John – lived long, and legacy is well-documented
- ▶ Thomas – martyred in India
- ▶ Andrew – crucified in an 'X' form in Greece
- ▶ Matthew – gospel writer, ministered in Ethiopia, Persia
- ▶ Bartholomew* – travelled with other apostles, skinned alive
- ▶ James, son of Alphaeus – crucified in Egypt
- ▶ Lebbaeus / Thaddaeus** - martyred in Syria with an axe
- ▶ Simon the Zealot – killed for refusal to sacrifice to god in Persia
- ▶ Phillip – converted the wife of a proconsul and was killed
- ▶ Matthias – most obscure apostle, possibly traveled with Andrew

*Nathanael **this is Judas (not Iscariot), often confused with Jude who wrote the book of Jude, who we believe was a brother of Jesus



Why do we talk so much about martyrs?

THE CHURCH IS BEING ESTABLISHED IN STRENGTH.

NOTE THAT THERE IS A MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACTS AND REVELATION THAT OFTEN GOES UNNOTICED.

THIS DIFFERENCE LARGELY SHAPES THE EVENTS OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Mark 13:2

70 AD the Destruction of Jerusalem

- ▶ Jewish unity was weakening in the decades after the Church of Jesus Christ was established. Christians slowly began leaving Jerusalem.
- ▶ Jews had been given a lot of freedom from Rome, and at one point in the past, they were allies.
- ▶ These friendly relations disintegrated over the centuries, and by the time of Nero, the Jews wanted to throw off the Roman yoke.
- ▶ A Roman general named Vespasian led a campaign to subdue rebellions in Judea. Vespasian then was called to be emperor and turned the Judean campaign over to his son and future emperor Titus.
- ▶ A siege was raised against Jerusalem in April of 70 AD, and the city fell at the end of August.
- ▶ There was a final Jewish resistance movement to Rome which led to mass suicide at a place called Masada in 73 AD.

Who was Josephus?

- The most famous historian of Jewish history outside of the Bible
- Pretty much a loser, played both the Roman and Jewish side
- Most famously wrote two important books, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*, the best source text of those events
- His references to Jesus and Christians are controversial.

THE HEAT TURNS UP:

The Sub-Apostolic Age and the Early Church

*I do not pray for these alone, but
also for those who will believe in Me
through their word...*

John 17:20

An overview of the Apostolic Fathers

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

Clement of Rome

- Possibly mentioned in Scripture (*Philippians 4:3*)
- Bishop or elder of the church in Rome, possibly ordained by Peter or Paul
- Most famous for a letter he wrote to the church in Corinth
- In Corinth, young upstarts rose up against elder leaders
- Clement's letter was a call to unity to submission to apostolic authority.
- The letter is long and boring and makes a lot of references to the Old Testament.

Ignatius of Antioch

- Possibly (but doubtfully) mentioned in Scripture (*Luke 9:47; Matthew 18:2*)
- Bishop of Paul's home church, and possibly knew Paul
- Was martyred in Rome, killed by wild beasts in the amphitheater
- Most famous for seven letters written on the way to Rome for his execution
- The letters are really moving accounts of a man about to give his life for Christ. He appealed to the mystery of Christ-in-the-believer, obedience to bishops, and an avoidance of heresy.

Polycarp of Smyrna

- Possibly (prophetically) mentioned in Scripture (*Revelation 2:8*)
- Knew apostle John personally
- Received a personal letter from Ignatius of Antioch when he was a young bishop
- In his old age, he became somewhat of a Christian celebrity
- Was generally regarded as an intellectually simple man
- Wrote a published letter to the church at Philippi
- The account of his martyrdom is the oldest account of a Christian martyrdom outside of the New Testament.

The Apostolic Fathers in their own words:

- ▶ Clement of Rome: “And we, too, being called by His will to Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
- ▶ Ignatius of Antioch: “Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible show any envy toward me, that I may attain to Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and packs of wild beasts, cuttings and being torn apart, the scattering of bones, the mangling of limbs, the grinding of the whole body, the evil torments of the devil - let them come upon me, only that I may attain to Jesus Christ.”
- ▶ Polycarp of Smyrna: “For eighty-six years I have served [Jesus], and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who has served me?”

What did the early Christians look like? (from Scripture)

The *Book of Acts* gives us many, many portraits of the Church during the lifetime of the *Apostles*. Here is just a sampling:

- ▶ *Matthew 26:30* (singing a hymn)
- ▶ *Acts 5:7* (Ananias and Saphira)
- ▶ *Acts 5:12* (Solomon's Porch)
- ▶ *Acts 16:40* (House of Lydia)
- ▶ *Acts 19:9* (daily in the school of Tyrannus)
- ▶ *Acts 20:8* (upper room at Troas)
- ▶ *Hebrews 10:24-25* ("Do not forsake the assembly of ourselves.")
- ▶ *Acts 21:10-11* (Agabus and prophecy)

What did the early Christians look like?

*"There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways."
The Didache (or The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles)*

Aspects of Christian Life

- ▶ Devotion
- ▶ Holiness
- ▶ Worship
- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Baptism
- ▶ Religiosity
- ▶ Creativity

Notable Early Christians and Leaders

- ▶ Deacon Lawrence of Rome (Italy)
- ▶ Perpetua and Felicitas (Africa)
- ▶ Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (Africa)
- ▶ Bishop Martin of Tours (France)
- ▶ Bishop Ambrose of Milan (Italy)
- ▶ Bishop Basil of Cappadocia (Turkey)

What did the early Christians believe?

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1*

Theology

- ▶ The Godhead – the implicit versus explicit “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”
- ▶ The Church – “the soul of the world...”
- ▶ World religions - “pagan demon worship”
- ▶ Eternal salvation and condemnation – some disagreements existed
- ▶ The devil and demonic entities - REAL
- ▶ The Millennial Reign (chiliasm) – some disagreements existed
- ▶ Baptism – it was a serious thing

A brief note about heresies:

- “Heresy” literally means “sect.” Most heretical groups distorted the truth of Christ and the Church in perverse and dangerous ways.
- God providentially used heresies to force the Church to be decisive in its true beliefs.
- Gnosticism – “Creation is evil and Jesus was a ghost / ‘god;’ we are saved through secret knowledge”
- Marcionism – “Jesus and Yahweh are different gods”
- Arianism – “Jesus was not God, but just the ‘best’ created being”
- Montanism – not a theological heresy, but involved ecstatic visions and cults of personality.
- Later heresies: Donatists – “traitors can’t be forgiven”
Pelagians – “God helps those who help themselves”
- The fight against heresies is what the Holy Spirit used to lead the Church to form the New Testament canon.

What did the early Christians believe? (continued)

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as your self.'"

Matthew 22:37-39

Various matters*:

- ▶ Sin – could be mortal and perhaps not forgiven after baptism (?!)
- ▶ Abortion and “exposure” – was always wrong and Christian families would often adopt “rejected” children (see *The Didache*)
- ▶ Witchcraft – was commonly practiced, and was considered evil
- ▶ Fighting in war – was very often *not* ok
- ▶ Virginity and lifelong celibacy – was very very admirable and encouraged
- ▶ Easter – was important and the date was fought about contentiously
- ▶ Communion and “love feasts” – were different, and beliefs varied

*Note: Not all these beliefs were good.

An overview of the sources:

- ▶ Justin Martyr - philosopher
- ▶ Tatian – morality led him to heresy
- ▶ Irenaeus – defined true theology by fighting heresy
- ▶ Tertullian – aggressive and uncompromising lawyer
- ▶ Minucius Felix – spa discussions
- ▶ Clement of Alexandria – college professor
- ▶ Cyprian of Carthage – a good bishop and martyr
- ▶ Hippolytus – schismatic, moralist, theologian
- ▶ Origen – prolific writer and weirdo

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD:

Constantine, Christendom, and the Dark Ages

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
Isaiah 55:8*

“ἐν τούτῳ νικά...”
("In this, conquer...")

313 AD

Constantine and the Edict of Milan

The Timeline of Tolerance

- ▶ 306 AD - Emperor Constantine begins his rule
- ▶ 312 AD – “In this sign, you shall conquer...”
- ▶ 313 AD – Edict of Milan and religious toleration
- ▶ 325 AD – Council of Nicaea sets Trinitarian doctrine against Arianism*, weakly enforced
- ▶ 381 AD – Council of Constantinople reaffirms Council of Nicaea (because Arianism* became popular again).

*see note about heresies



Did the persecution
of Christians stop
after 313 AD?

Yes and no.

The Council of Nicaea and Athanasius of Alexandria

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father..."

(excerpt from the Nicene Creed)

The Council of Nicaea

- ▶ Held in AD 325, **instigated** by **Constantine** in response to the Arian heresy (Arianism)*
- ▶ 318 bishops in total, **key players** were Arius, Bishop Alexander from Alexandria (Egypt), and his young assistant **Athanasius**.
- ▶ God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: **three Persons, one Substance**.

Athanasius of Alexandria

- ▶ Theological prodigy, **wrote** the important **On The Incarnation** when he was young
- ▶ **Assistant** to Bishop Alexander during **Council of Nicaea**
- ▶ **Succeeded** Alexander as **archbishop** of Alexandria
- ▶ **Athanasius Contra Mundum**: Fought uncompromisingly against Arianism for the **rest of his life**

*see note about heresies

Who was Eusebius of Caesarea?

- **Think:** the Josephus of the early Church age
- Bishop in Caesarea during time of Constantine
- Wrote **most important early Church history book**
- Thought that Constantine was really great
- Compromised with Arianism in his later years

Leaders like Eusebius made leaders like Athanasius's life very difficult.

The face of persecution after Constantine

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.

Matthew 19:21

Anthony of Egypt

- Grew up in Egypt, and was orphaned by age 20
- Inspired to live a completely holy life after hearing *Matthew 19:21* in church
- Took up a solitary desert life to pursue "holiness," spent much of his time **batting demonic temptation and oppression**
- Eventually began to teach, take disciples and appear public to **fight against Arianism**
- *Life of Anthony*, (a book written by Athanasius) was very influential

John Chrysostom

- Born in Antioch and was raised by a devout mother
- Desired to live a solitary life, but was moved by his conscience to **become a preacher and a minister**
- Name means "**Golden-mouthed**," due to the elegance of his preaching
- Eventually became the archbishop of **Constantinople**, the emperor's city
- Aggressively preached holiness to the elite, which got him falsely accused and **permanently exiled**

Boniface

- Born in England and became a monk when he was young
- Desired to **evangelize Germany**, and set out on that mission at age 40
- Famously **cut down the Oak of Thor**, which was an idol of the pagans in that area
- Eventually became archbishop in the city of Mainz
- Unsatisfied later in life, he set out in his 70s to evangelize even more savage tribes on the outskirts of Germany, where he was **killed**

So what's the deal with monks?

- After Christianity was legalized in 313 AD, many people turned to the Church who never would have when it was a persecuted Body. In ten years' time, Christianity became the official religion of the empire, and thus superficially, everyone was "Christian."
- At this time, many Roman citizens were merely Christian by name. Christians who truly experienced the converting power of Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross, needed an outlet to express this thirst for holiness.
- Many turned to the desert regions of Egypt and Palestine to pursue small community life with other like-minded believers. These early monks desired more than anything to live lives of prayer and Scripture study.
- Using more zeal than wisdom, many of these monks would strike out into extreme solitary life to pursue an even "deeper holiness," which sometimes involved a morbid lifestyle of *asceticism*.
- Eventually, *monasteries* would rise up in culturally Christian regions. They would have house rules and explicit leadership. Many great bishops, pastors, and leaders would come out of these *monasteries*.
- *Monasticism* would continue to grow, especially in Europe. The centuries would see many good and many bad groups and *orders* of monks.

Why is Augustine of Hippo so important?

You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You.

Confessions of Augustine

- ▶ First real and detailed **spiritual biography** of Christian **conversion** (*Confessions*)
- ▶ Doctrine of **original sin** opens up the most complete understanding of Paul's revelation of God's **grace** up to that time
- ▶ **Just war theory** states that there are times when it is necessary to **kill** others for the sake of a just cause
- ▶ A full **interpretation** of world history, secular and sacred, in the light of God's **providence** in *The City of God*.
- ▶ **Witnessed** the **decline** of the Roman empire, and was the last major theological voice in the Church for centuries

*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.
Matthew 24:12*

Overview of the Dark Ages

- ▶ Fall of Roman Empire – ...and life goes on.
- ▶ Extensive evangelical missions – His light stays lit. The Church doesn't just stay in Europe.
- ▶ Islam – The “scourge of the Saracens” possibly started as a Christian heresy.
- ▶ Charlemagne – The first “Holy Roman Emperor” is crowned on Christmas, 800 AD.
- ▶ Vikings – Monster from the north terrorize, and eventually become Christians themselves.
- ▶ Church splits into East and West - Orthodox and Roman Catholic separate peacefully*.
- ▶ Crusades – “God wills it...”
- ▶ Mongols – Judgement comes from the East, and the heads roll.
- ▶ “Babylonian Captivity” – The papacy is moved to Avignon, France temporarily.
- ▶ Black Death – This is the most famous “global pandemic.”
- ▶ Renaissance – Intellectual renewal leads to spiritual “indulgence.”

*relative to the Protestant Reformation

These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves.
Jude 12a

Gross errors in the Church during the Dark Ages

- ▶ Formalism sets in with the setting of the so-called “Latin Mass”
- ▶ Cessationism
- ▶ (Forced) priestly celibacy
- ▶ Veneration of Mary
- ▶ Prayers to the saints
- ▶ Veneration of relics
- ▶ Indulgences
- ▶ Extreme asceticism
- ▶ Purgatory
- ▶ Scriptures handled only by priests,
- ▶ Scriptures only available in the Latin language
- ▶ Papal primacy
- ▶ Moral laxity among spiritual leaders
- ▶ Spiritual adultery with secular leaders
- ▶ “Church tradition” over Scripture

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
Luke 18:38

1054 AD

The Church splits between East and West

- ▶ An **angry letter exchange** between the pope and bishop of Constantinople over petty theological issues leads to a **double excommunication**.
- ▶ As you can **imagine**, this was **centuries** in the making.
- ▶ Historical factors included the pope's **desire** to no longer be **accountable** to the emperor, who since Constantine's time resided in Constantinople.
- ▶ There was a significant **language barrier** between the **East (Greek)** and the West (Latin).
- ▶ Bishops in the East despised the idea of **papal primacy**, and preferred **collective authority** between equal bishops.
- ▶ Prophetically, God was allowing the **insolence** and independence of the pope's church to allow their "cup of iniquity" to be filled for the **Church's Reformation**.
- ▶ The **Crusades** would start soon after, and they would make what could have been a temporary feud a **permanent separation**.

THE HOPE OF CHRIST:

Shining Lights in the Dark Ages and the Pre-Reformation

*The tabernacle was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the **time of reformation**.*

Hebrews 9:9-10

Bind up the testimony,
Seal the law among my disciples.
Isaiah 8:16

Who were some Christian exemplars in the Dark Ages?

Catherine of Sienna

- Given to prayer and spiritual devotion from an early age
- Dissented from her parents' conventional vision for her life as she sought to consecrate her life to Christ
- Rejected the "cloistered" life so that she could stay in the world and minister to the sick and poor, especially amidst the plague
- Wrote accounts of spiritual vision that laid emphasis on communion with God
- Died at age 33 due largely to ascetic excesses

Francis of Assisi

- Started off as an ambitious young man
- Received a divine commission to "rebuild the Church"
- Rejected his earthly father's vision for his life, returned his inheritance
- Began a formal order of *friars*, brothers committed to the spiritual life
- Missionary work to Muslims
- Ministry was marked with miracles and artistic/creative revival
- Phenomena such as the *stigmata* proved problematic

Dante Alighieri

- Achieved some prominence as an Italian love poet when he was young
- Was permanently exiled from his native Florence (and his family) when political tensions rose to crisis
- Spent the rest of his life composing the epic poem *The Divine Comedy*
- Used the poem as a vehicle to boldly express his criticisms of the Church and state; in this way, he is a **forerunner** of the **Pre-Reformers**
- Unfortunate mixture of good and bad theology, doctrine, and symbolism

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.
Malachi 4:5*

The Pre-Reformers

John Wycliffe

- Born in 1328
- Professor of theology at Oxford
- Serious person, affected by the atmosphere of the Black Death
- Very critical of the priesthood, papacy, and their hypocrisy
- The Lollards and political alliances against France, where the papacy was temporarily located
- Bible translation was his greatest legacy

John Huss

- Born 1369 in Bohemia
- Theology professor in Prague and preacher
- Discovered the writings of Wycliffe, which affected him greatly
- Became an enemy of the Roman Catholic Church and papacy
- Was tricked into attending a trial with "safe passage," and was consequently burned at the stake
- Followers ("Hussites") were a political force in Bohemia

Girolamo Savonarola

- Born in 1452
- Monk and priest in Florence, Italy, a city then controlled by the Medici family
- Changed his style of preaching on account of prophetic and apocalyptic visions
- "Bonfire of the vanities"
- Theocracy in Florence
- Loss of popularity
- Arrest and execution by the pope (1498).

How was the Church set up for Reformation by 1500?

- The Roman Catholic Church had become extremely corrupt (“The Renaissance Six”).
- There was a spirit of discontent and revolution in the air of Europe.
- Information and ideas were moving at rates that they had never moved at previously (Gutenberg printing press, etc.)
- Humanism* encouraged scholars to go back to the original languages (Greek, Hebrew) of the Scriptures and other ancient writings.

*not the same thing as “secular humanism” in the 20th / 21st centuries

1517 AD

But the end of all things is at hand...
1 Peter 4:7

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation

- ▶ Many believe that among John Huss's final words were the words of this prophecy, recorded in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*:

"Today you burn a goose, but in one hundred years, a swan will arise which you will prove unable to boil or roast."

Many believe this to be a prophecy about the German monk Martin Luther, whose posting of the famous 95 Theses in 1517 turned out to be the beginning of an unstoppable Reformation of the Church in both Europe and, eventually, the world.