

Lesson 13  
The Early Church To  
Early Reformation

John Rakestraw

# Class Schedule

- **The Ancient Church (100 – 313 A.D.)**
- 1. Historical Backgrounds and the World of the Early Church
- 2. The Church in Jerusalem and the Mission to the Gentiles
- 3. 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Conflicts with the State
- 4. Early Apologists
- 5. Defining the Faith
- 6. Christian Life

# Class Outline

- **The Imperial Church (313 to 476 A.D.)**
- 7. The End of Persecution and Beginnings of the Imperial Church
- 8. The New Order
- 9. Reactions to the New Order
- 10. The Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicea

# Class Outline

- **Medieval Christianity (476 to 1521 A.D.)**
- 11. The Western church, the Eastern church and the Arabs
- 12. The Late Middle Ages & the Great Western Schism
- 13. **The Quest for Reformation & the Renaissance**

# The Quest for Reformation

## Lesson 13

“Therefore, the pope is not the head, nor are the cardinals the whole body of the holy, Catholic and universal church. Only Christ is the head, and His predestined are the body, and each is a member of that body.”

– John Huss

# Two Approaches to Reform

- The sorry state of the church during the 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> centuries gave impetus to various movements of reform, each with its own program.
- One movement hoped to both heal the divisions and to put an end to corrupt practices without substantially challenging accepted Christian dogma.
- Others like John Wycliffe & John Huss came to the conclusion that it was not only the life, but also the doctrine of the church that ought to be reformed.

# John Wycliffe

- Wycliffe (1330 – 1384) lived during the Avignon papacy, & died just after the beginning of the Great Schism.
- He was a student at Oxford.

# Wycliffe's Teachings

- He began teaching that the true church of Christ is not the pope & his visible hierarch, but rather the invisible body of those who are predestined to salvation.
- The church that owns the Scriptures is the body of all who are predestined. Therefore, the Bible ought to be put back into their hands in their own language. Wycliffe began translating the Bible from the Vulgate into English. A task that was completed by his followers after his death.
- In 1215 the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council had affirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation. Wycliffe taught that the body of Christ was indeed present in the bread in some mysterious way, but it did not replace the bread. The bread was still there.



# Wycliffe's Followers

- Wycliffe died of a stroke in 1384.
- His followers were given the name “Lollards”
- The Lollards:
  - Believed the Bible belonged to the people.
  - Completed translating the Bible into English.
  - Believed pastors should not hold civil offices.
  - Taught that it was wrong to worship images.
  - Disagreed with clerical celibacy.
- In many of these tenets, they were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation.

# John Huss

- Bohemia, what is now known as the Czech Republic, was the home of John Huss (1362 – 1415).
- He was a student at the University of Prague. He became the Dean of the faculty of philosophy.
- The writings of Wycliffe was taken to Bohemia by a number of Czechs who had studied in England.
- In the beginning Huss had no intention of altering the doctrines of the church. His early quest was to restore the life of the church, particularly he condemned the corruption of the clergy.
- He was excommunicated in 1411, but had the support of the King & people of Bohemia.

# Huss' Teachings

- The Bible is the final authority by which the pope as well as any Christian is to be judged.
- A pope who does not obey the Bible is not to be obeyed.
- The sale of indulgences was condemned – the remission of the time spent in purgatory
- Only God can grant forgiveness of sin.
- We was burned at the stake. His executioners gathered his ashes & threw them in a lake.

# Huss' Followers

- Formed the “Union of Brethren”
- Their numbers grew rapidly, not only in Bohemia, but also in nearby Moravia. Later they were called the “Moravians.”
- They established close ties with the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Renaissance

# Renaissance

- The “Renaissance” was the intellectual & artistic movement that sprang up in Italy & spread across Western Europe during the 1500’s & 1600’s.
- The name Renaissance, or “rebirth,” implies a negative judgment on the preceding age. Those who first used it mean it precisely that way.
- They called the 1,000 yr. since the fall of Rome the “middle ages,” because they saw in them little more than a negative intermission between classical antiquity & their own time.
- In calling the best medieval art “Gothic,” they showed the same prejudice, as the word itself meant the “art of barbaric Goths.”

# Renaissance

- The Reformation of the 1500's was a reaction to late medieval theology.
- William Occam introduced his principle of "Occam's Razor" which upheld the principle that "the simplest explanation is usually the best one." This was applied to theology.
- With ever growing urgency, the cry was heard for a return to the simplicity of the gospel.

# Humanism

- Unlike its use today, “humanism” was a term used by scholars at the end of the Middle Ages because they were devoted to the study of liberal arts.
- When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Byzantine exiles flooded into Italy with their knowledge of classical Greek literature.
- The awakening of interest in classical learning coincided with Johan Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1439. The printing press was not used for communication to the masses until the time of the Reformation 80 yr. later.



# Renaissance & the Church

The impact of these new studies & ideas did not immediately impact the church.

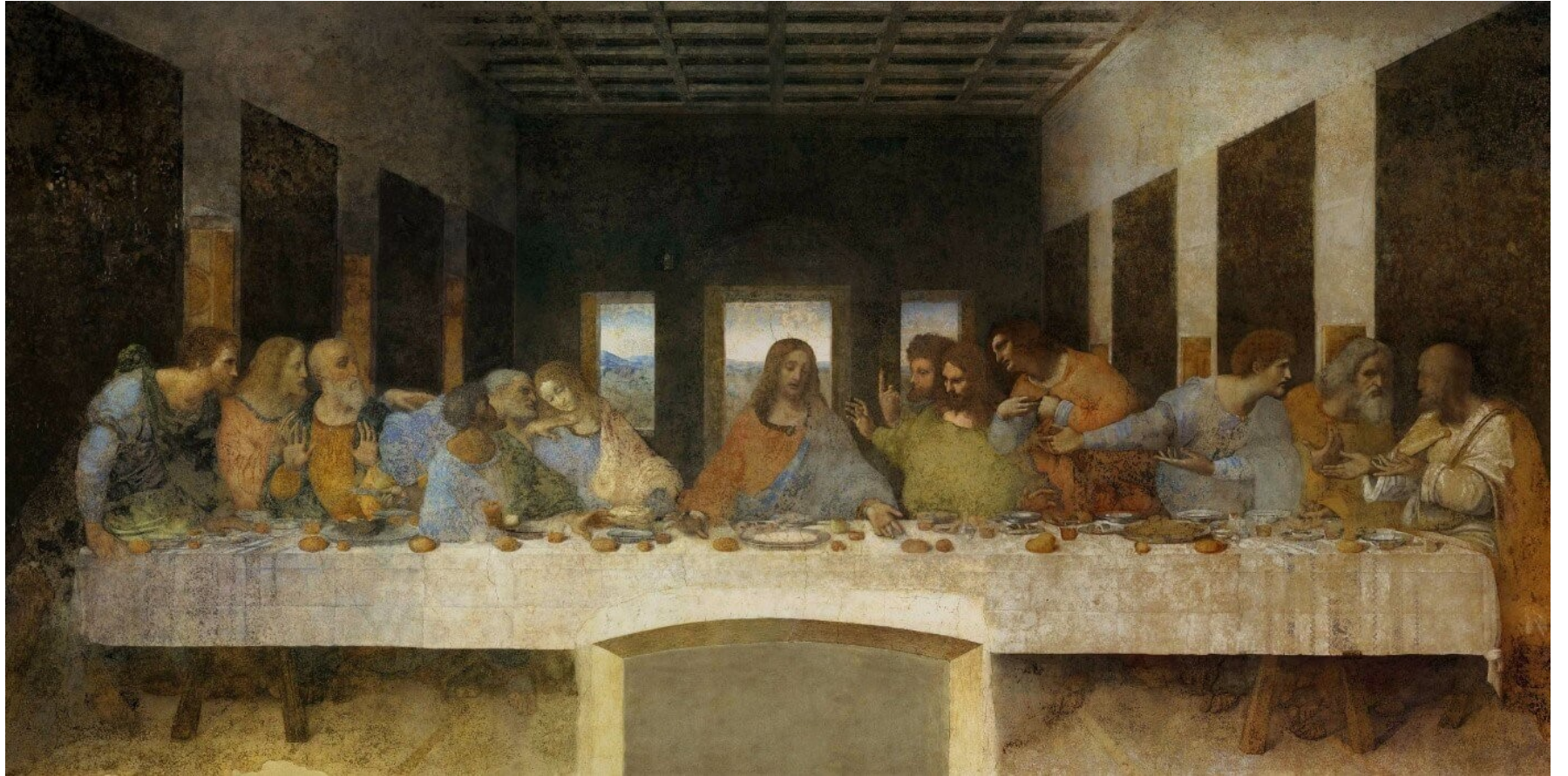
New ideas were first circulated only among an intellectual aristocracy whose members were not interested in influencing the masses with their new found knowledge.

It would take some time for the notion to spread, that Christianity as it then existed was not what it had always been, & that a return to its roots was necessary.

This notion would be a major contributing factor to the Protestant Reformation movement.

# A New World

- On Oct 12<sup>th</sup>, 1492 Columbus set foot in the New World. Neither he nor anyone else in Europe had the remotest idea of the significance of this event.
- Spanish & Portuguese expansion would have enormous impact on the subsequent history of the church, practically the Roman Catholic Church.



Time for Reflection

# Ideas for Reflection

- Without understanding our past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we understand the Christian message.
- The notion that we consistently read the New Testament exactly as the early Christians did, without any weight of tradition coloring our interpretation is an illusion. It is also a dangerous illusion, for it tends to dogmatize our interpretation, confusing it with the Word of God.

# Ideas for Reflection

- Not only is our view of the present colored by our history, but our view of history is also colored by the present and by the future we envision.
- History is not the pure past; history is a past interpreted from the present of the historian.
- Every renewal of the church, every great age in its history, has been grounded on a renewed reading of history.