

# The Reformation.

*Notes taken at Monday's faith formation talk by Canon Poucin*

From the thirteenth century onwards, the church needed reform in both its head (the hierarchy) and its members. No formal seminaries existed and priests were trained by another priest on a local basis. This led to variation in the quality of formation and some were not as learned as they should have been. From the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century the Popes' political affairs were pursued at the expense of their pastoral and doctrinal duties.

Two would be reformers: Jan Hus, who later became heretical and Savonarola of Florence, who denounced the Papal court for its worldliness, were both burnt to death. Pope Julius II in 1513 proclaimed a plenary indulgence throughout Europe which all could gain who confessed their sins, received Holy Communion and contributed financially towards the building of St. Peter's in Rome. In Germany the message was conveyed emphasising the financial contribution at the expense of the spiritual necessities. This was the catalyst for Martin Luther to pin his famous 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517.

3, Grace alone - which denied the necessity of our co-operation with Grace and 4. Christ alone - denied the importance of intercession of the saints.

His teaching spread rapidly with the result that many religious abandoned their vocation. A third of the Princes of the German states supported Luther. The pastoral and social care, the schools and hospitals that had been provided for by these religious institutions no longer existed, thus leading to a decline of education, health and Christian morality.

In 1529, the Emperor Charles V called a council - the 'Diet of Spire' - to halt these heresies but 5 Princes refused to attend in protest and hence the derivation of the word 'protestant'. Rome was slow to realise the impact of Luther and in 1520 after condemning and ordering a retraction of 41 of his theses Luther's response was to publically burn the papal letters. A month later Luther was excommunicated.

John Calvin, a Frenchman, favoured the Lutheran movement but took it to a more extreme level. Whereas Luther had believed partly in the real presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Calvin taught the presence was only a spiritual one. In Geneva, Calvin enacted laws with severe penalties against dancing, gaming and extravagance in dress; with the result that the city became a cultural graveyard.

The situation in England was rather different. England had been a devoutly catholic country and the Pope had given Henry the title of 'Defender of the Faith'. All that was changed in as little as six years as Henry sought to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. When Pope Clement VII refused, Henry made himself head of the 'Church of England'. Thomas Cromwell was appointed Vicar General and was charged to force all the clergy to take the "oath of Supremacy". Of all the bishops of England only one refused: John Fisher, Bishop of

Rochester and of the laymen, only Sir Thomas More remained loyal to Christ. However much of the liturgy remained unchanged.



St. John Fisher

The Church's response came 24 years after Luther pinned his 'Theses' on the Cathedral door in the form of the Council of Trent. On 13<sup>th</sup> December 1545, 30 bishops and cardinals convened to formulate the defence of the Catholic Faith. The major outcomes were: apostolic tradition was given equal footing with scripture; the Vulgate translation of the Bible by St. Jerome was the only recognised translation (translation into the vernacular was forbidden - Latin was widely understood and this measure preserved Scriptural integrity), the doctrines of Original Sin and Justification were clarified. Also clarified were the rules for marriage, that consent must be freely given, the place of Holy Relics and the 'Index', which was a list of books deemed detrimental to faith and thus the faithful were banned on pain of excommunication to read or publish such material. The Council closed in 1563. A new version of the Breviary and Missal (still being used here at the Dome!) were produced with the aim of unifying the Church around the Roman Rite. Charles Borromeo established a seminary for priestly formation in Milan which ensured academic rigour.

N.B. the next faith formation talk is on 16<sup>th</sup> April and not the week before as advertised on the poster.



Martin Luther

Luther, an Augustinian monk, struggled to hope for his own salvation and had come to believe in the heresy of predestination. He taught the four 'solae': 1. Scripture alone - which denied the ministry of the Church and the importance of the teaching of the doctors of the Church. 2 Faith alone - which denied the importance of the fact that our faith, to be genuine, must be translated into how we live our life,