

Print Christianity: The Reformation

1. One of the first effects of the printing press was the splintering of Christendom into a myriad of competing sects. Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ignatius Loyola were the three most prominent and consequential religious leaders in this yet further radicalization of axial Christianity enabled and inspired by the dissemination of literacy throughout the new urban world of early modern Europe.
2. Enabled, not caused, for the political fragmentation also characteristic of Axial revolutions was another essential enabler for their reform movements to survive and gain traction. By the time the Vatican could respond to Luther's initial calls for reform a couple of years after his posting of 95 theses against ritual abuses in the church, (1) tens of thousands of printed copies of the theses together with other pamphlets had spread all across Northern Europe.
3. This in turn enabled Luther to find local political protection when the church scribal bureaucracy came to arrest him and try him for heresy. Luther was duly condemned by the inquisition but with his writings already printed and widely disseminated the damage had been done, and (1) Luther was able to flee the papal court, find refuge at the remote and impregnable Wartberg Castle and there (2) translate the New Testament into German and write even more pamphlets further fueling the revolt he had sparked.
4. Luther represents a radicalization of axial Christianity in part by extending it far beyond the scribal elites into the ever growing and ever more culturally influential and politically powerful merchant and artisan urban "middle" classes. In so doing he distilled axial Christianity to its literate essence: (1) scripture alone as the basis for Christian belief, (2) faith alone as the basis of Christian life, (3) and the priesthood of all believers—that is, the decentralization and democratization of Christian authority. Traditional beliefs, traditional rituals, and institutional authority were not eliminated but were purified in light of these three principles:
5. ***Scripture alone***: Trained as a scribal commentator on the sacred scriptures, Luther rejected scribal allegorical interpretation accessible only to the lettered who were well versed in the dogmatic traditions of Christianity, and argued for the "plain sense" of scripture, accessible to any who could pick up and read the text. Of course this required bibles to be physically accessible to any Christian and that most any Christian would be

literate enough to be able to read and ruminate over the text for themselves. Luther would ultimately translate the entire Bible into colloquial German. Here too the new technologies of paper and print were necessary enabling factors. With books now readily available, literacy exploded throughout the urban middle classes.

6. The scribal practice of *lectio divina*, would now become a general Christian form of prayer. Indeed a movement would soon emerge where bible study groups of the pious faithful would be organized to meet and discuss their own understanding of what God was speaking to them in the Sunday biblical reading as well as the pastor's sermon over it. Likely unintended by Luther, but in retrospect quite predictably, this personal *pro me* principle of biblical interpretation quickly led to a profusion of interpretations and so of new Christian churches and sects.
7. ***Faith alone***: Luther also radicalized axial medieval mysticism's relativization of Christian ritual as a necessary means for reconnecting to the sacred. Before posting his theses, Luther had already edited a printed edition of the *Theologia Deutsch* or the "German Theology", attributed to John Tauler, a disciple of Meister Eckhart. It put in simple straightforward language Eckhart's mystical teachings. Eckhart pointed to an individual's interior life, beneath (1) (2) the intellect and the (3) senses, the "ground" of his soul as (4) the locus of the sacred, where God's Word (5) is continuously coming to birth, (6) welling up into the soul (7) like a woodland spring. In the ground of the soul God is immediately present, stripped bare of any "word or image."
8. Outer communal ritual may supplement but cannot substitute for this living presence of God in the ground of the soul. Rather the degree to which a ritual enlivens the spirit of God within now becomes the measure of its efficacy, rather than the formal validity, that is the accuracy and precision, of its repeated movements and vocal incantations. The sacred does not lie without or beyond but within each individual.
9. ***The priesthood of all believers***: As an immediate consequence of these first two, religious authority rests with the individual and his or her own judgement. Luther's legendary final word at his trial before the inquisition represents this in iconic fashion: "Here I stand, I can do no other." (1) (2) Protestantism will soon become a rallying point for freedom of conscience, and soon enough for a democratic revolution in politics.

10. Luther's priesthood of all believers made all jobs and social roles potentially religious callings. Calvin, a near contemporary of Luther, would radicalize this further by calling for what Weber coined an "inner worldly asceticism" in the service of optimizing God's glory. (1) Not only was everyone's work a potentially sacred calling, as Luther had already taught, (2) but now every moment of every day ought to be dedicated to the Lord's work in building a godly society. The monastic injunction to pray always had become the Calvinist injunction to work always.
11. Calvin also further radicalized Luther's axial reforms in the area of religious ritual. From relativizing the importance of sacred ritual to its efficacy to inspire and console its participant's interior lives, Calvin rejected all sensual, non-verbal elements of religious ritual and its attendant sacred spaces altogether. Sacred images and holy objects, fragrant incense and visual display were more likely to distract than enable a connection to the divine. Statues were thus smashed, sacred relics dumped and scattered. Churches were whitewashed, stained glass windows broken and replaced by clear and transparent window panes,
12. The Mass was replaced with a purely verbal Sunday service consisting of vocal prayer and a sermon over the scriptures bookended by congregational singing. Communion, the most sacred, and most mimetic ritual of medieval Christianity could not be entirely done away with, given its biblical basis, and doubtless its appeal among the faithful, but it was isolated into a separate service with participation restricted to the worthy few.
13. The content of Christian sermons and exhortations also changed. Calls for individual conversion from institutional obedience and ritual observance to a personal decision to dedicate one's life to Christ as one's Lord and Savior became the new normal especially among Evangelical Protestants. The emotional intensity that often accompanied such decisions were described as experiences of being "born again." Reborn Christians were encouraged to bear witness before others of the workings of God in their interior life and to confess the story of their conversion. Such testimonies would also be included in Christian services, formal and informal.
14. Calvinist spirituality constituted a wholesale reorganizing of human life in the service of optimizing God's glory. But that religious end would soon enough drift to a secular highest good, human happiness in utilitarianism, and sheer monetary profit under

capitalism. Weber argued that in this way Protestant, and especially Calvinist spirituality, while not the cause of capitalism, nevertheless enabled the spirit of Capitalism to take root and flourish in Northern Europe. What had begun as a sacred calling to build a godly society had eventually enabled the rise of a god-less economic marketplace.

15. Some of the modern reformers did not break with the institutional church but were committed to working from within and even to win back those who had left. Chief among these was Basque aristocrat and former warrior-knight, Ignatius of Loyola, who would found a new religious order in 1540, the Company of Jesus, or “the Jesuits”. The Jesuits that would integrate both print rational objectivity and individual interiority into their apostolic work.
16. As a young soldier, Ignatius suffered a crippling injury in the defense of Pamplona from the invading French. During a year long convalescence, he read. (1) The only books available were chivalrous romances and the lives of Christ and the saints. He was intrigued over how his reading effected his mood. The chivalrous romances inspired him, but left him depressed after, likely since such a life after his injuries, now seemed beyond his grasp, that life seemed over. He also found the lives of Jesus and the saints inspiring, but that inspiration stayed with him even afterwards. Their lives did not leave him feeling left out but rather called himself to take up a new life.
17. And so Ignatius converted—from warrior chivalry in the service of his political king in this world, to a religious chivalry in the service of Christ the King. Over the next several years he embarked on his own chivalrous quest to prepare himself for such service. In particular he devoted a month in isolation in a cave in the countryside, to battle his own demons and dedicate himself to Christ. Before he started however he made a pilgrimage to the monastery at Montserrat, where he stood vigil in full armor before a popular statue of Mary. At sunrise he stripped off his armor and left it at the foot of the statue, and dedicated himself, by himself to his new calling.
18. Ignatius soon realized he needed theological education if he were not to end up executed as a heretic himself. For he soon ran afoul of the Inquisition. So after some preparatory studies in Latin, the language of both church and the academy, he travelled to the University of Paris to study theology. Ironically he ended up in the same college, the College of St. Barbara that John Calvin had lived in a few years earlier.

19. Ignatius ended up founding a new kind of religious order. His Jesuits were not to spend their time in monastic contemplation apart from the world, but to be actively engaged in the rising urban world of newly literate merchants and artisans. Jesuits were to be contemplatives, but contemplatives in action. They were not to chant the liturgy of the hours throughout the day, there were called to devote themselves to their pastoral work. Their prayer was to include a daily spiritual examen, or assessment of how that work was progressing and how it could be enhanced. As one early Jesuit superior general put it, “The world is our monastery.”
20. Ignatian spirituality would also adopt an optimizing logic, one even more radical than Calvin’s. For Calvin all activity was to be dedicated to the glory of God. Nothing was to be overlooked as merely profane. For Ignatius everything was to be dedicated to the *magis*, the **greater** glory of God, and God was to be found in all things. That is Jesuits were to be continually improving, always asking themselves how their work could be more effective, reach more people, save more souls. So too in their interior lives, Jesuits were to engage in daily self-criticism even of their spiritual inspirations. The devil can deceive by appearing as an angel of light. All interior movements were to be subject to critical discernment. And like the evangelical reformers, his Spiritual Exercises, a month long silent retreat, would center on a meditation on the “two standards” where one imagines Christ and the Devil both recruiting knights to their respective causes and where one imagines oneself having to make a decision on whom to swear one’s fealty to.
21. In short Ignatius created a spirituality which wedded an axial critical objectivity of their apostolic work in the world, with an equally axial cultivation of their individual interior life. And, very quickly, the order came to focus on spreading literacy, educating the urban classes. By 1600, 60 years after its founding, Jesuits were running 200 colleges, universities and seminaries. By 1750, the number would grow to 728 employing half of all 22,500 Jesuits. At the time Jesuits would be known as “the educators of Europe.” Even today the Jesuits have a network of over 322 high schools and 172 colleges and universities throughout the world. Like Luther and Calvin, Ignatius would inaugurate a print religiosity.
22. In the next video we shall turn to an early student of the Jesuit educational system, Rene Descartes and his effort to methodically reform all knowledge, along objective, rational

principles and clear and distinct concepts, a modern, scientific model of knowledge both enabled and inspired by the printed text. We shall also look at how this method led him to provide religion with a rational foundation of universal and necessary, clear and distinct, systematic, one might say objective, subjectivity.