

Church History, Lesson 21

(This lesson is based on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez.)

The ongoing spread of Protestantism in Europe



Germany –

- In 1532 the “peace of Nuremberg” divided Germany into Protestant and Catholic territories and prohibited any further expansion of Protestantism.
- But Protestantism continued to spread. In 1539 a staunch supporter of both the Emperor and Catholicism, Duke George of Saxony died. By that time, it was rumored that 3 archbishops were about to convert to Protestantism.
- Some lower bishops did convert to Protestantism as a way of salvaging their wealth!
- However, there were several blows to the cause of Protestantism:
 - the bigamy of Philip of Hesse
 - the death of Luther in 1546
 - Finally, the Peace of Passau gave limited religious freedom in Germany. But this didn’t mean individual freedom of choice, it meant that the local rulers could decide for themselves and their subjects whether to be Catholic or Lutheran.

Scandinavia –

- Protestantism was officially recognized and tolerated in Norway and Denmark by 1527 and most citizens were Lutheran by 1533.
- By 1560 there was an official Lutheran state church in Sweden with a church hierarchy.

The “Low Countries” – Netherlands, Luxemburg, Belgium –

- This was the native region of the Emperor at the time of the Reformation, Charles V.

- He took the spread of Protestant ideology in this region personally. He issued several edicts against Protestantism, especially Anabaptists. But we can tell that they were unsuccessful because he was constantly reissuing these edicts. However, tens of thousands died for their faith. Leaders of the movement were burned, their followers were burned alive, many women were buried alive!
- Eventually, this region was divided into three separate nations: The Netherlands were Protestant, Belgium and Luxemburg were Catholic.

France –

- Because Francis I, the king of France at the time of the Reformation, saw the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V as his chief rival for power, he wanted the support of the German Protestants. However, he didn't want to turn France into a Protestant nation. This meant that there were great fluctuations between toleration and repression for French Protestants.
- This resulted in many French Christians fleeing into exile, including John Calvin and enough believers to form the church he pastored in Strasburg.
- Many fled into Switzerland, others fled to the royal court of Francis I's sister, Margaret of Angouleme, in the small kingdom of Navarre. From both Switzerland and Navarre, Protestant books were constantly smuggled into France.
- After Francis I's death in 1547 the first Protestant church was formed in France. Within a few years there were churches scattered all over France and they adopted a joint confession of faith.
- These Christians were given the name "Huguenots".
- There were various political power struggles (there were at least 8 religious wars in France before 1600) over the following decades that involved the Huguenots, but by 1562, in the Edict of St. Germain they were granted freedom of worship, but were forbidden from owning houses of worship, supporting armies, or collecting funds.
- However, the enemies of the royal family refused to obey this edict and slaughtered a group of Huguenots who were worshipping in a stable.
- By 1570, it seemed that there could have been a lasting peace.
- However, for various political and personal reasons, the Queen Mother Catherine Medici convinced her son Charles IX that there was a Huguenot plot against him and the "St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre" on August 24, 1572 was the result.
 - 2,000 Protestants were slaughtered in Paris. Because the royal court included many Huguenots, it was said that blood ran down the stairs in the palace.
 - The slaughter in Paris prompted similar backlash in the rest of France and tens of thousands of Huguenots lost their lives.
 - Queen Elizabeth in England wore mourning in honor of these martyrs. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Maximilian II, was a faithful Catholic but he was horrified at these events.
 - However, the Pope declared that a Te Deum be sung on August 24th in celebration.
- It was not until April 13, 1598 that the Huguenots were granted freedom of worship, but they were still banned from Paris.

