

Year at a Glance	
Nov 9-Dec 14	Early Church Age
Jan 4-Feb 8	Post-Nicene Age
Feb 15-Mar 22	Medieval Age
Mar 29-May 10	Reformation Age
May 17-May 31	Great Awakening to Today

Reformation Age	
Mar 29	“Martin Luther and Protestantism” (chapter 24)
Apr 5	Easter (no class)
Apr 12	“John Calvin” (chapter 26)
Apr 19	“The Anabaptists” (chapter 25)
Apr 26	“The Church of England” (chapter 27)
May 3	“The Catholic Reformation/America and Asia” (chapters 28-29)
May 10	“Puritanism/Denominations” (chapter 30-31)

Last week we explored the **English Reformation** and saw how God worked through a complex and often messy period of history to bring about lasting change in His church. We began with the reminder that while human plans unfold, “the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9), and nowhere is that more evident than in the surprising and sometimes chaotic development of the Church of England.

We traced the story through the reigns of key monarchs—especially **Henry VIII**, whose break from Rome was driven more by political necessity than theological conviction. Though the **Act of Supremacy (1534)** separated England from papal authority, the church initially remained largely Catholic in doctrine. Under **Edward VI**, the nation moved more decisively in a Protestant direction, only to be reversed under **Mary I**, whose persecution of Protestants earned her the name “Bloody Mary.” Finally, **Elizabeth I** established a lasting settlement that brought relative stability, blending Protestant theology with national unity. **Through it all, we saw how outward forms of the church can be shaped by political power, yet true reform does not come from the throne.** [Clarify the “Little Germany” group that met at Cambridge around the White Horse Inn.]

That true reform came through the Word of God and faithful witnesses. We considered the courage and conviction of men like **Thomas Bilney, Hugh Latimer, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer**. Bilney’s quiet witness led to Latimer’s conversion; Tyndale labored to give the English people the Scriptures; and Cranmer helped shape worship through the Book of Common Prayer. Many of these men paid for their faithfulness with their lives, reminding us that the advance of the gospel often comes through suffering. As **Latimer declared at the stake, their testimony lit a candle in England that would not be put out.**

In the end, the English Reformation shows us that while political forces may influence the church outwardly, it is the Word of God that transforms it truly and lastingly. God’s truth is not dependent on earthly power, and even in unstable and confusing times, He raises up faithful servants to proclaim His Word. The English Bible itself stands as a testimony to this, purchased at great cost and given to us as a precious gift.

The Reformation Age "The Counter-Reformation"¹

"...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."—Matthew 16:18

This subject in the 16th century is called **the Counter-Reformation or the Catholic Reformation**. A reformation of sorts was well under way in Spain under Queen Isabella and Cardinal Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros, when Martin Luther was just a boy (Gonzalez, p. 110). However, with the rise of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Reformation took on the task of countering the Protestants.

This Counter-Reformation began slowly but gained great speed in the second half of the 16th century. Dr. David Calhoun uses the analogy of a football game to explain the effect of the Counter-Reformation in the 16th century.

1 st Quarter	2 Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
7-0 (Protestants in the lead)	35-7 (Protestant blow out)	42-35 (Jesuits strike back)	42-45 (Catholicism strengthened)

How was Catholicism able to bounce back and even gain ground after being so severely stunned by the Protestant Reformation? Part of the answer involves the Jesuits, some mystics, a pope, and a very important council.

I. The Join the Fight

A. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

1. While Luther was hidden away in the Wartburg in Germany in 1521, a Spanish soldier named Ignatius of Loyola had retreated into a cave to deal with the religious turmoil in his life. After being injured in a battle (a cannonball shattered one of his legs), Loyola decided to abandon the career of a soldier and went on **pilgrimage** as a penitent to the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat. There he hung up his sword, giving it over to Mary and dedicating his life to becoming a **soldier of the church**. He withdrew to the cave at Manresa where he prayed and sought God's guidance.
2. *The Spiritual Exercises* (1521)

While in the cave Loyola conceived of a book that became one of the most influential books of the sixteenth century. *The Spiritual Exercises* contains a series of guided meditations for a Christian to discipline himself and to develop in the Christian life.

¹ The outline for these notes is taken from David Calhoun.

“First principle and foundation: Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to make use of them in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. Therefore, **we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things**, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. **Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life.**”

3. Society of Jesus (Jesuits)

- a. Beginnings - After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, time of study in Spain, and some uncertainty about what to do next, Ignatius of Loyola studied at the Sorbonne in Paris for a short time, at the College de Montague. He probably barely missed meeting John Calvin there, who had earned his Master of Arts early in 1528.

Then **Loyola organized the Society of Jesus in 1534** along with six other men who shared his vision. The pope established the order in 1540. It would become the most powerful and most significant order in the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation.

- b. Loyola drew up some “Rules for Thinking with the Church” as guidance for the Jesuits. **Shelley calls it “a military manual for storm-troopers at the service of the pope” (p. 271).** His emphasis was that a Jesuit must...

- 1) ...have **absolute obedience** to the church.

Rule 1 – “Always to be ready to obey with mind and heart, setting aside all judgment of one’s own, the true spouse of Jesus Christ, our holy mother, our infallible and orthodox mistress, the Catholic Church, whose authority is exercised over us by the hierarchy.”

Rule 13 - “If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchial church so defines.”

- 2) ...**oppose the revival of Augustinianism in the church.** It was very much opposed to any kind of Reformation teaching that would recover the teaching of Saint Augustine.

Rule 17 - “We may speak of faith and grace, so far as we can with the help of God, for the greater praise of His divine majesty, but not in such a way, especially in these dangerous times of ours, **that works and free-will shall receive any detriment or come to be accounted for nothing.**”

c. Education

The Jesuits produced a disciplined and elite corps of men for the Counter-Reformation. It took 12 years of study and self-examination and discipline to become a Jesuit. The people who finished that program and entered the Society of Jesus were educated and disciplined people who were committed to their cause.

Using the analogy of a **football game**, **new players** had entered the game that would have a profound impact on the 16th century Counter-Reformation.

They specialized in education founding many universities (Saint Louis University in the US).

d. Theology – **Jesuit theologian Robert Bellarmine** (1542-1621), *Disputations Concerning the Controversies of the Christian Faith*

e. Counseling & Casuistry

They developed a system of casuistry, in which they could excuse almost anything if one did it in the right way. The Jesuits earned a reputation for saying one thing but meaning another. For them, however, it was part of casuistry and of spiritual counseling.

Casuistry, then, became controversial because it often shifted the focus from clear obedience to God's commands to careful reasoning about exceptions. Instead of asking, "What does God plainly require?" the emphasis could become, "Under what circumstances might this be permissible?" While this approach aimed to shepherd individual consciences with sensitivity, it sometimes resulted in overly subtle distinctions that blurred the line between truth and deception or right and wrong. For critics, this made casuistry seem less like wise pastoral care and more like a way of justifying sin through clever reasoning, which is why it drew such strong opposition during the Reformation and afterward.

There is an old joke told by Catholics that says there are three things that no one knows: how much a Dominican knows, how many orders there are for women in the Catholic Church, and what a Jesuit is really thinking.

f. Missions—Francis **Xavier** (1506-52)

1) Under the leadership of the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, they began to spread out around the world, **long before Protestants were able to do anything similar.**

- 2) Xavier went first to India, then all the way to Japan, preaching the Catholic faith.
- 3) Died in 1552 on an island close to the coast of China. He was not able to enter China, but he longed to preach in China as well. He looked out upon that land and said it was “the rock that would not open.” He died on that island, looking at the great land of China, which proved impossible for him to enter. When Xavier died there were over 1000 Jesuits in Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa.

II. Catholic Make Their Mark

A. Teresa of Ávila

1. Teresa entered a Carmelite convent when she was 20 years old. She did not find it easy to be part of the convent. She says in her autobiography that she struggled for 20 years.

Teresa of Ávila describes a prolonged spiritual struggle even after entering the convent at age twenty. She writes, “*On the one hand God was calling me, on the other hand I was following the world.*” Though she belonged outwardly to the convent, inwardly her “interest and direction” remained tied to worldly things. She explains, “*All the things of God gave me pleasure, yet I was tied and bound to those of the world.*” For years she tried to hold both together, saying, “*It seemed as if I wanted to reconcile these two contradictory things.*” **Looking back, she describes nearly twenty years of instability: “I spent nearly 20 years on that stormy sea, often falling in this way, and each time rising again, but to little purpose, as I would fall once more.”**

2. “Thank God for all the things I do not own.” She advocated a drastic stripping down to essentials, which might drastically enrich one’s life by enabling one to focus on the more important things.
3. *The Interior Castle* is the most important Catholic book of this period related to the inner life, or spirituality. It is the story of the quest for a deepening life of fellowship with God as God enters the many rooms of the human soul. It is like a Spanish Catholic *Pilgrim’s Progress*, organized in terms of a castle. Her theology is a combination of grace and works. There is no real assurance of salvation in the book.

- B. **Saint John of the Cross** – Teresa began the male branch of the Discalced (“barefoot”) Carmelites. Thus, Teresa is the only woman in the history of the church to have founded monastic orders for both men and women. John was so short that when she met him, Teresa is said to have remarked, “Lord, I asked you for a monk and you sent me half of one” (Gonzalez, p. 115).

- C. St. John of God – became the patron saint of hospitals and of the sick

III. A Shows Some Pop

A. Papal attempts at reform during the first half of the century were largely ineffective and half-hearted.

1. A Lutheran cartoon makes fun of the papal reform. It shows the pope and the cardinals trying to clean up things with some feather dusters as they dust around to remove cobwebs here and there. The cartoon implies that the real reform was not being done.²
2. Using the analogy of a **football game**, the problem was with the quarterback and the game plan.



B. Yet the popes realized that something had to be done or there would soon be no Catholic church at all.³

1. **Pope Paul III (1534-49)** did not at first seem to be a likely leader of reform. As a cardinal, Paul III had lived a morally compromised life (he had **four illegitimate children**). However, the shocking **Sack of Rome in 1527**⁴ exposed the corruption and weakness of the Church. By the time he became pope in 1534, he was far more serious about reform, helping launch the Catholic Reformation through actions like calling the Council of Trent.
2. He labored to move the reform ahead, but it took him a while to do it. The popes would have liked to call a council to unite the church and oppose the Protestants, but that was a complicated procedure. While we might think it could have easily been done, there were political issues and power plays within the Vatican as well as within the Catholic Church as a whole. **For years Pope Paul III tried to organize a council, but the political problems and personal jealousies caused repeated postponements.**
3. Luther rather enjoyed watching all of this from Wittenberg. He compared the pope's repeated failures to convene a council to **the story of a medieval scoundrel**. He was condemned to die, and his final request was that he would be allowed to choose

² I cannot find the original cartoon. This is AI art created in the style of the 16th Century.

³ The popes during these decades were: Leo X (1513-21), Clement VII (1523-34), Paul III (1534-49), Julius III (1550-55), Paul IV (1555-59), Pius IV (1559-65)

⁴ Charles V's unpaid army, angry and out of control during a political conflict with the pope, marched on Rome and sacked it in 1527. It wasn't a carefully planned attack: but once it began, it became one of the most devastating events in church history and helped spark the Catholic Reformation.

the limb from which he would be hanged. So he spent years leading his judges from tree to tree, never finding a limb that suited him. To Luther, the pope keeps talking about a council, but never actually holds one: because a real council might expose and judge him.

4. Finally, the pope was able to call the council. The council convened late in 1545. **It was publicized as a church council for all Christians, including the Protestants, but Protestants did not attend because they realized it would not have an open policy of debate.**
5. Luther fired one parting shot just before he died, a few weeks after the council began with a book called *Against the Papacy in Rome Founded by the Devil*.

IV. A **Calls the Shots (The Council of Trent—1545-1564)**

- A. Council convened on December 13, 1545

The Council of Trent worked on and off—mainly off—for the next 18 years. Trent was in northern Italy, not far from Rome, within the bounds of the empire—it was a neutral site. The council met at Santa Maria Maggiore Church in Trent. Engraved in the wall of that church, once the council was finished, were the words, “Here the Holy Spirit spoke for the last time.” The church believed that everything had been settled. **In 1564, its work was completed.**

- B. Protestants did not attend. While Rome invited Protestants to participate in the Council of Trent, many Reformers were deeply skeptical. Because the council was under papal control and not truly open to reconsidering foundational doctrines, some viewed the invitation with the same caution **Nehemiah** showed when invited to the **plains of Ono**: an offer that appeared cooperative, but one they believed could compromise the work of reform.
- C. “Profession of the Tridentine Faith” (issued by Pope Paul IV in 1564, summarizing in the form of a creed many of the conclusions of the Council of Trent)

1. Centered **authority in the papacy**

During the late medieval period there had been numerous conciliar movements which had claimed that the real power in the Catholic Church was with the bishops, or the councils. After Trent, however, the issue was settled, and it has been so until the present. The control of the church is centered in the papacy.

Dr. Justo Gonzalez said, “The conciliar movement of the late Middle Ages had come to an end. The modern Catholic Church was born.”

2. **Reformed the moral life** of the church (immorality and ignorance of priests; holding more than one office)
3. Clarified Catholic doctrine (“new Trent religion”)
 - a. Dual authority of Scripture and tradition (opposed to *sola scriptura*)
 - 1) *Scripture plus Tradition* view (**Tradition 2**) was solidified at Trent.

“All saving truths and rules of conduct...are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, received from the mouth of Christ himself or from the Apostles themselves” (Trent).

“...throughout most of the Middle Ages, the dominant view was Tradition 1, the position of the early church. The beginnings of a strong movement toward Tradition 2 did not begin in earnest until the twelfth century. A turning point was reached in the fourteenth century in the writings of William of Ockham. He was one of the first, if not the first, medieval theologian to embrace explicitly the two-source view of revelation. From the fourteenth century onward, then, we witness the parallel development of two opposing views: Tradition 1 and Tradition 2. It is within the context of this ongoing medieval debate that the Reformation occurred” (Mathison).

- 2) *Scripture interpreted within community* view (Tradition 1) (Magisterial Reformers like Luther and Calvin)

Tradition was not to be totally ignored and thrown out. It was to be subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture, but much of what had taken place in the history of the church could remain and could be learned from and built upon.

“The Scripture was to be interpreted in and by the church within the context of the *regula fidei* ("rule of faith"), yet neither the church nor the *regula fidei* were considered second supplementary sources of revelation. The church was the interpreter of the divine revelation in Scripture, and the *regula fidei* was the hermeneutical context, but only Scripture was the Word of God” (Keith Mathison).

- 3) *Me and the Bible* view (Tradition 0) (Radical reformers/Anabaptists) – no place for tradition.

Some call this *sola scriptura* (implying that interpretation of the Scriptures is left to the individual without input from the community of the church).

There is no real sense in which tradition has any authority. Instead, the individual believer requires nothing more than the Holy Spirit and the Bible.

b. Justification by faith **and love**

- 1) The Christian is justified by grace, but free will, although weakened by sin, can and must cooperate with grace.
- 2) Faith alone does not justify, but faith and love.
- 3) Justification is accomplished by the infusing of Christ's righteousness into the person who then actually becomes righteous.
- 4) Justification finally rests on the Christian's **acquiring and maintaining a certain level of sanctification**.
- 5) The Christian cannot be certain, except by special revelation, that he or she is elect or presently in a state of grace.
- 6) "...the Council of Trent guaranteed that modern Roman Catholicism would be governed by the collaboration between God and man. The pope remained, the seven sacraments remained, the sacrifice of the mass remained. Saints, confessions, indulgences remained. The council's work was essentially medieval, only the anger was new" (Shelley, p. 278).

4. Protestant answers

a. John Calvin, *Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote* (1547)

- 1) "Free will" exists but is so corrupted that the sinner has no desire nor ability to choose for God or salvation. **"The whole may be thus summed up—their error consists in sharing the work between God and ourselves, so as to transfer to ourselves the obedience of a pious will in assenting to divine grace, whereas this is the proper work of God himself."**
Trent wanted to bring together what God does and what we do and perpetuate a kind of **percentage theology**. Such theology goes back to the semi-Pelagians.
- 2) Faith is more than knowledge and assent; it is also trust.
- 3) Christ's perfect righteousness is **imputed** or reckoned to us as the basis of our justification.
- 4) Justification and sanctification must be distinguished but cannot be separated. "The light of the sun, though never unaccompanied with heat, is not to be considered heat."
- 5) The Scripture encourages a true Christian to **certainty** and **assurance** of salvation because of the promises of God.

b. Martin Chemnitz (1522-86): Lutheran response

The Catholics often said that if the second Martin had not come, then the first Martin would not have stood. The second Martin was Martin Chemnitz, who defended the teaching of the first Martin, Martin Luther.

5. The inquisition and prohibited books

All the books and Bibles of the Reformers were listed as prohibited books (under direction of **Pope Paul IV**). Many Catholic books were also on the *Index of Forbidden Books*, some of Teresa's favorites. For a long time in Spain possession of a banned book was punishable by death. The index was kept up to date until 1959 when it was abolished by Pope Paul VI (Shelley, p. 274).

“Opening the Rock: ‘Christianity’ Expands to America and Asia”⁵

³ *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.*

⁴ *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,*

⁵ *casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ—2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

If you were a missionary entering a completely foreign culture, what would you do first? Would you try to change the people immediately, or would you try to understand them? Should people be brought to Christ by persuasion or by pressure? That question is not new. It was one of the central tensions at the very beginning of global missions: should people be won to the faith by love, or by force?

On Thursday, **October 11th, 1492**, a new world opened to the Catholic faith. Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, landed in what we now call the West Indies. The next morning he stepped onto the island he named San Salvador, meaning Holy Savior, and claimed it in the name of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.

Columbus observed the native people and concluded that “they could easily be converted to our holy faith by love rather than by force.” That statement sets the stage for everything that follows.

Historians call the next 150 years the **Age of Discovery**. But from a Christian perspective, this period is better described as the **Age of Global Expansion**, as Roman Catholic missionaries carried the gospel to Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Yet one question kept surfacing: **Should the natives be won to the faith by love or by force?** At times, Catholic missionaries demonstrated persevering love. At other times, conquerors forced baptism at the point of the sword.

Thesis: The global expansion of Christianity during this period reveals a central tension that still exists today: whether the gospel should engage culture through careful adaptation or be imposed through conquest, and the answer to that question profoundly affects both the spread and the purity of the Christian faith.

I. The Missionary Question: Gospel and Culture

a. The Central Missionary Problem: Adaptation vs. Conquest

1. Missionaries were forced to answer a fundamental question: What is the condition of humanity apart from Christ?
2. Is humanity “stumbling and uncertain in its quest for the true God,” or is it “organized in hardened resistance to the gospel”? That distinction matters.
3. If people are seekers, then you build on what is good in their culture. If they are rebels, then you tear down their systems and replace them.
4. This created two approaches:

⁵ This section is largely developed from Bruce Shelley’s *Church History in Plain Language*.

Adaptation — finding points of contact within a culture

Conquest — suppressing or destroying existing beliefs

5. This tension is not merely historical. It reflects how we understand sin, culture, and the work of the gospel.
6. Scripture reminds us that humanity is both searching and suppressing truth. Romans 1:18 says, “18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

b. The Gospel and Culture

1. The church has always faced the danger of confusing the gospel with a particular culture. Missionaries often assumed that their customs were essential to Catholicism.
2. But the early church itself had to break free from cultural forms. The gospel first came clothed in Jewish culture, yet it spread only when it moved beyond those forms.
3. Acts 15 shows this clearly, as the apostles refused to impose Jewish customs on Gentile believers.
4. The same pattern repeated in history. When the Roman world collapsed, the gospel adapted to new cultures among the Germanic tribes.
5. However, **during the Middle Ages, a shift occurred.** The rise of Islam isolated Europe, and Christianity became largely confined to the West. The Crusades reinforced a militant mindset.
6. As a result, when global missions began, many Christians **approached the world not as missionaries, but as conquerors.**

II. The Expansion of Catholicism in the New World (The West)

a. Portuguese Expansion: Trade Without Conquest

1. The Portuguese were the first to explore Africa and Asia. They rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached India, then moved on to China and Japan.
2. Their goal was not territorial conquest but **control of trade.** They established **ports** along the coasts of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
3. **Wherever they went, they planted churches. In every trading settlement, “little Catholic churches appeared.”**
4. Their model shows that **missions often followed economic expansion,** for better or worse.

b. Spanish Expansion: Conquest and Colonization

1. The Spanish took a very different approach. Following Columbus, they launched massive campaigns of conquest.
2. Within 50 years, they had taken control of vast territories from California to South America. Figures like Cortés and Pizarro conquered entire empires.
3. All of this occurred during the lifetime of Martin Luther. **While the Reformation divided Europe, Catholicism expanded globally.**
4. But this expansion was not purely spiritual. It was driven by a mixture of motives: wealth, power, and religious zeal.
5. Missionaries traveled with the armies. The goal was not only to conquer lands but to extend the Roman Catholic faith.

c. Church and State Working Together

1. The **Pope** divided the world between Spain and Portugal. Each nation was given responsibility to evangelize its territories.
2. The **kings** had authority over the missionaries. They appointed bishops and controlled church activity.
3. This reflected the idea of the “**Christian prince,**” who was responsible to remove idolatry and bring his people under the rule of Christ.
4. **But this close alliance between church and state created serious problems.**
5. **Jesus said in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world.” When political power enforces religion, the result is often corruption.**

d. The *Encomienda* System and Its Consequences

1. Spain implemented a system called *encomienda*. Native people were forced to work for Spanish colonists.
2. In theory, they were to receive protection and instruction in the faith. In practice, they were exploited.
3. The Spanish justified this by pointing to the natives’ practices, such as human sacrifice. They saw their actions as righteous, similar to Israel’s conquest of Canaan.
4. But the result was devastating. **Forced labor and forced conversion produced shallow, distorted Christianity.**

e. Bartolomé de Las Casas: A Voice of Conscience

1. One man stood against this system: Bartolomé de Las Casas.
2. He began as a participant in conquest but experienced a profound change. He argued that Christians could not use brutality as a means of conversion.

3. He asked, in essence: How can we preach a gospel of grace while practicing violence?
4. Las Casas insisted that the only way to convert people was “by peaceful preaching of the Word and by the example of holy living.”
5. This reflects Scripture. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “15 but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense... with meekness and fear.”
6. His efforts led to reforms, including the **Laws of 1542**, which recognized the **humanity of native peoples**.
7. Yet opposition remained strong, and exploitation continued.

f. The Problem of Superficial Conversion

1. Mass baptisms became common. Millions were baptized, but many did not understand the faith.

One well known story has it that Cortez left the strictest instructions in one town that the citizens were to worship the Christian God and to care for one of his horses, which was lame. They just faithfully obeyed. They fed the horse fruit and flowers until it died. They supposed that the horse and the Christian God were the same. Later, two Franciscans discovered that the natives made an image of the horse and were worshipping it as the God of thunder and lightning.

2. This shows the danger of conversion without discipleship.
3. Jesus gave instruction in Matthew 28:20: “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”
4. Without teaching, transformation is unlikely.

III. The Expansion of Catholicism in Asia (The East)

a. Missions in Asia: A Different Challenge

1. In Asia, missionaries encountered highly developed civilizations.
2. India, Japan, and China had long histories, sophisticated cultures, and established religions.
3. This forced missionaries to reconsider their approach. Conquest was not feasible. Adaptation became necessary.

b. Francis Xavier: Pioneer Missionary

1. Francis Xavier was one of the great Catholic missionary pioneers. He ministered in India and later in Asia.

2. He worked among fishermen, teaching them basic Christian truths. He would ring a handbell to call the villagers together and recite the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Rosary.
3. Large numbers were baptized, but the depth of understanding was limited.
4. Xavier also reflected the limitations of his time. He supported the use of the Inquisition to enforce Catholicism.

c. Japan: A Shift Toward Adaptation

1. Japan proved to be a turning point.
2. Xavier encountered a culture marked by discipline and nobility. This changed his thinking.
3. He realized that "the gospel must transform and refine the Japanese, but it need not discard everything in their culture."
4. This was a major shift toward adaptation.
5. The mission flourished. Hundreds of thousands converted. Churches and schools were established.
6. But political changes led to persecution. Thousands were martyred, and the church nearly disappeared.

d. China and Matteo Ricci

1. In China, Matteo Ricci adopted a highly strategic approach.
2. He learned the language, dressed like a scholar, and engaged the intellectual elite.
3. He introduced Western science and technology, gaining respect and influence.
4. Ricci believed that Chinese customs, such as honoring ancestors, were cultural rather than religious. He saw them as compatible with Catholicism.
5. This approach led to significant success. Thousands converted, and the church grew.
6. But controversy arose. Other missionaries accused the Jesuits of compromising the faith.
7. The debate over adaptation ultimately weakened the mission.

IV. The Ongoing Tension in Missions: Lessons and Implications

- a. The global expansion of Catholicism during this period was remarkable. The Catholic message reached new continents and millions of people.

- b. But it was also deeply flawed. The tension between conquest and adaptation led to both distortion and division.
- c. This raises an ongoing question: How do we bring the Bible's teachings into a culture without corrupting it?

Takeaways

- The gospel must never be confused with culture.
- True conversion cannot be forced.
- Faith must be rooted in understanding, not pressure.
- Missions requires humility, patience, and clarity.
- The goal is not cultural domination, but faithful proclamation.
- 2 Corinthians 10:5 reminds us, "5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Next Week: "Puritanism/Denominations" (chapter 30-31)