

LUTHERAN HISTORY · PART 1 OF 4

From the Early Christian Church to the Lutheran Reformation

From persecuted movement to European institution

Lutheran Formation Mini-Course
Led by P. Tom and P. Eli

The Good Shepherd 3rd century

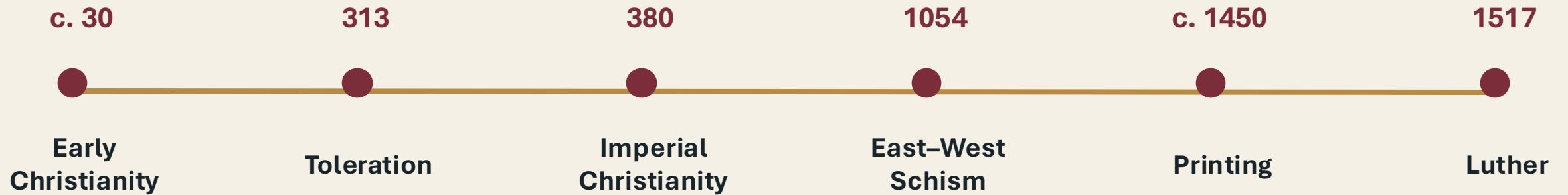


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Land Acknowledgement

We gather on the traditional, unceded territories of the Lekwungen peoples, and we acknowledge with respect the nations of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose relationships with these lands continue to this day.

The journey to 1517



How did a persecuted movement become one of Europe's most powerful institutions?

Christianity begins within Judaism

- Jesus and his earliest followers were Jewish.
- They worshipped the God of Israel and used Jewish Scripture.
- Paul argued that Gentiles could follow Christ without adopting the entire Jewish law.
- Over time, Christianity became increasingly Gentile and distinct.
- Conflict varied by time and place; Jews collectively were not responsible for Roman persecution of Christians.

Why were Christians persecuted?

- Roman religion was connected to public loyalty and the welfare of the state.
- Christian refusal to worship the emperor and sacrifice could be read as disloyalty, disruption, or rejection of Roman tradition.
- What Jesus taught was completely different from what the Roman Empire practiced (violence, abuse of power).
- Persecution was serious, but not constant or uniformly empire-wide.
- Christian persevered despite persecution.

The Roman Empire at its peak in 117 AD



Martyrdom and community

- Refusal to sacrifice, imprisonment, and martyrdom shaped Christian identity.
- Martyrs became examples of loyalty to Christ.
- Christian communities also built networks of charity and care.
- Bishops, priests, and deacons provided local leadership.
- Christianity grew through both witness and community.

Catacombs of Milos



Catacombs of Milos. One of the tombs of Presbyters, with inscription.

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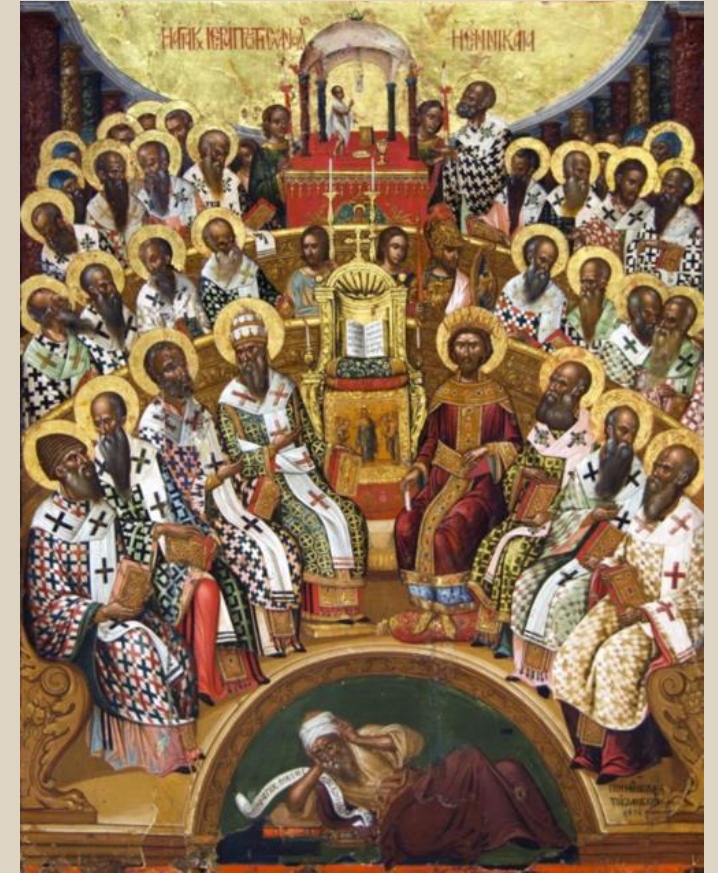
312–313 CE: A turning point

- 312 · Constantine associates victory at the Milvian Bridge with the Christian God.
- 313 · The “Edict of Milan” establishes toleration and restores confiscated Christian property.
- Constantine funds churches, supports bishops, and grants privileges to clergy.
- Christianity is now supported by imperial power, but is not yet Rome’s official religion.

Nicaea, 325

- Arius: the Son was created by God and was not fully equal to the Father.
- Council of Nicaea: Christ is of the same substance as the Father.
- The Nicene Creed affirmed Christ's full divinity.
- A new precedent: an emperor was deeply involved in a church dispute.

First Council of Nicaea



By Michael Damaskinos - 1591
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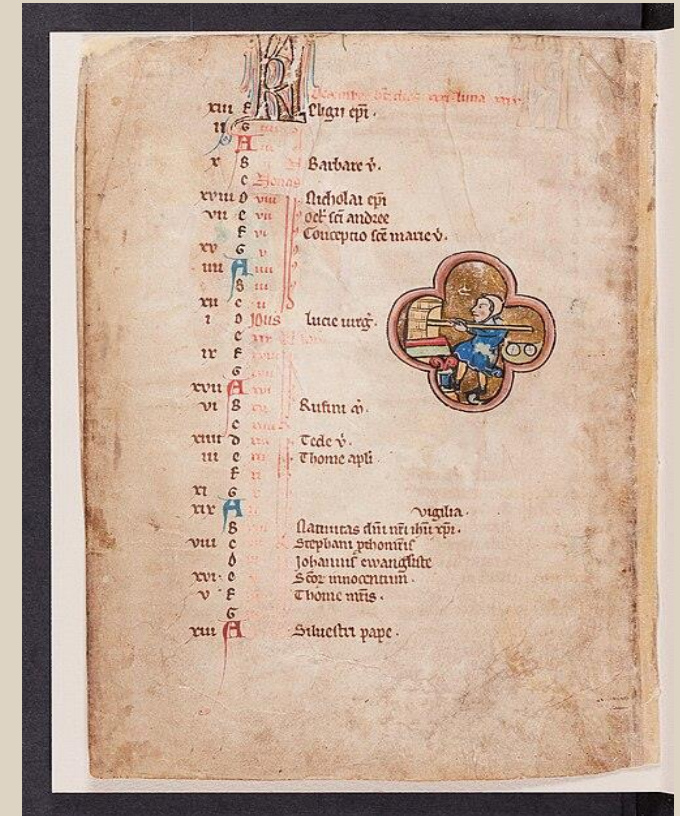
380 CE: Theodosius I

- The Edict of Thessalonica gives Nicene Christianity official imperial endorsement.
- Christian bishops gain public influence.
- Traditional Roman religions lose state support.
- The church develops greater hierarchy, wealth, administration, and legal privilege.
- Christianity becomes both a religious community and a powerful institution.

Christianity orders time

- Christian life develops around Sunday, Easter, Christmas, Lent, Pentecost, and saints' days.

Psalter with liturgical Calendar



Psalter, Ghent, 13th century
[Historic manuscript collection](#)

One Christianity, different worlds

- The Roman Empire was divided into 2: East lasted until 1453 and West ended in 476.
- **EAST** · Greek · Constantinople · patriarchs and councils · Byzantine imperial world (Orthodox church)
- **WEST** · Latin · Rome · growing papal authority -Roman world
- Differences also developed around clerical celibacy, liturgy, theology, and governance (Catholic church).
- Filioque: the western addition of “and the Son” raised both theological and institutional questions (The Holy Spirit proceeds from God and the Son).

1054: The Great Schism

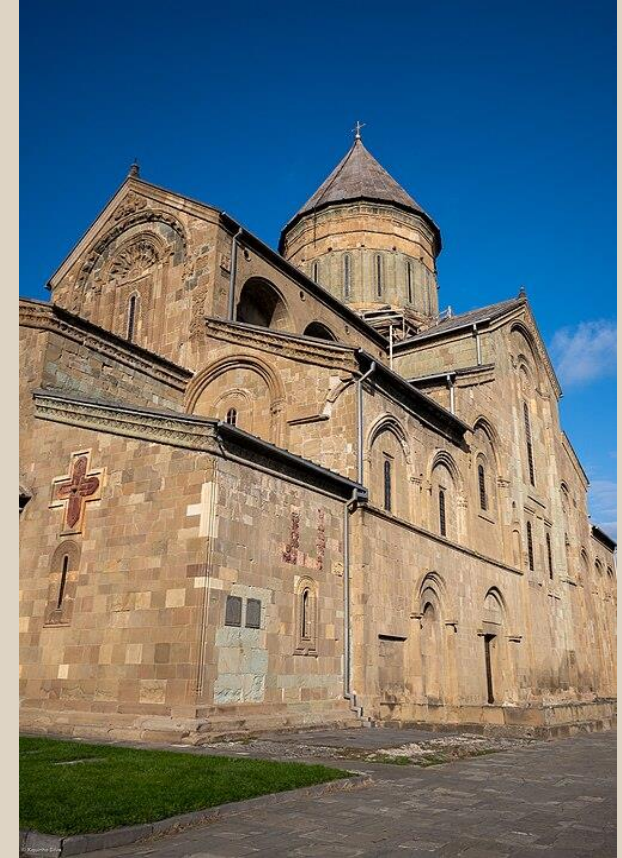
- Representatives of Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius exchanged excommunications.
- 1054 did not suddenly divide Christianity.
- The separation emerged through centuries of language, politics, culture, theology, and authority.
- Catholic Church (West)
- Orthodox Church (East)
- 1965 · Mutual excommunications lifted; Catholic and Orthodox churches remain separate.



More than a place of worship

- Christianity spread through missionaries, monasteries, royal conversions, education, and political influence.
- Conversion could be religious, cultural, social, and political.
- Few institutions touched as many dimensions of medieval life.
- The medieval church shaped worship, education, charity, law, art, landholding, politics, and scholarship.

Svetitskhoveli Cathedral



Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Georgia is an 11th-century masterpiece of medieval Georgian architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

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Institutional strength and vulnerability

- Church wealth came from donations, land, tithes, estates, and fees.
- It supported cathedrals, hospitals, universities, charity, art, and administration.
- The seven sacraments structured Christian life.
- Because clergy administered the sacraments, clerical authority touched the most important moments of life.
- Growing wealth and power also attracted criticism.

Relics: devotion, pilgrimage, and economy

- Relics connected believers with saints, martyrs, apostles, and sacred events.
- They inspired devotion and pilgrimage.
- Shrines attracted prestige, donations, and local economic activity.
- Genuine devotion existed alongside opportunities for exaggeration, duplication, forgery, and exploitation.

Relic of St. Gertrude



11th century - Relic of St. Gertrude
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Indulgences and St. Peter's

- An indulgence was not technically the purchase of forgiveness.
- It remitted temporal punishment associated with sins already forgiven.
- Indulgences became increasingly connected with money, fundraising, purgatory, and institutional finance.
- 1506 · Construction of the new St. Peter's Basilica begins.
- Fundraising connected with St. Peter's intensified controversy over indulgences and papal finances.
- Johann Tetzel: Sold indulgences to the dead and then to the living

St. Peter's Basilica Rome

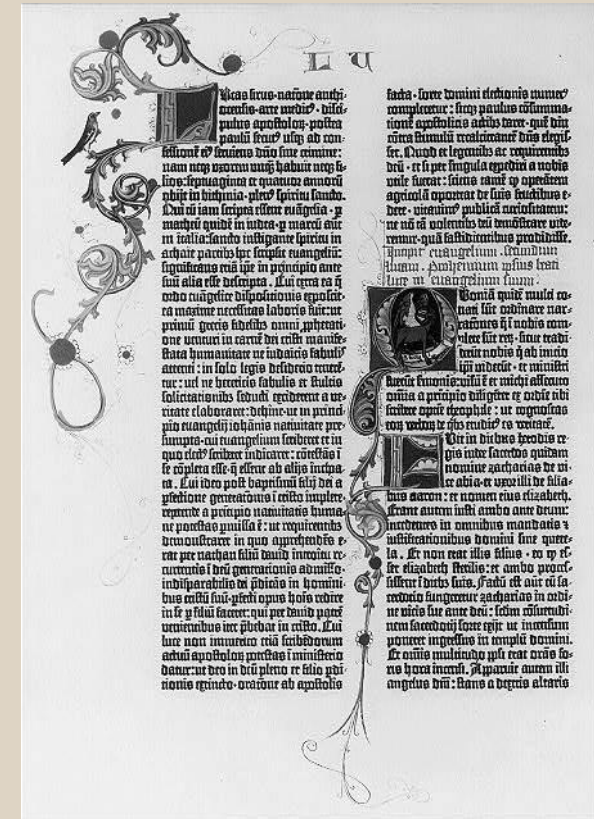


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Latin and access to Scripture

- Latin created liturgical unity across western Christianity, but also distance for many laypeople.
- Medieval Christians encountered Scripture through sermons, art, liturgy, drama, and devotional texts.
- Direct access was constrained by cost, literacy, Latin, and institutional control.
- The issue was unequal access, not complete absence.

Pages from the Gutenberg Bible, 1455



the 1st pages of the Gospels and the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount- Luke 1-1

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Reform did not begin with Luther

- Cluniac Reform · monastic renewal
- Gregorian Reform · simony and clerical discipline
- Waldensians · poverty and lay preaching
- John Wycliffe · 1328-1384 (England) Scripture and clerical authority
- (translated the bible from Latin to English)
- Jan Hus · 1369-1415 (Czech) Scripture authority and criticism of clerical abuses
- 1517 had a long prehistory.

A communication revolution

- c. 1450 · Movable-type printing transforms European communication.
- More copies · Faster circulation · Wider audiences
- Bibles · Sermons · Pamphlets · Catechisms · Translations · Polemics
- A local theological dispute could now become a European controversy.

Medieval printing press

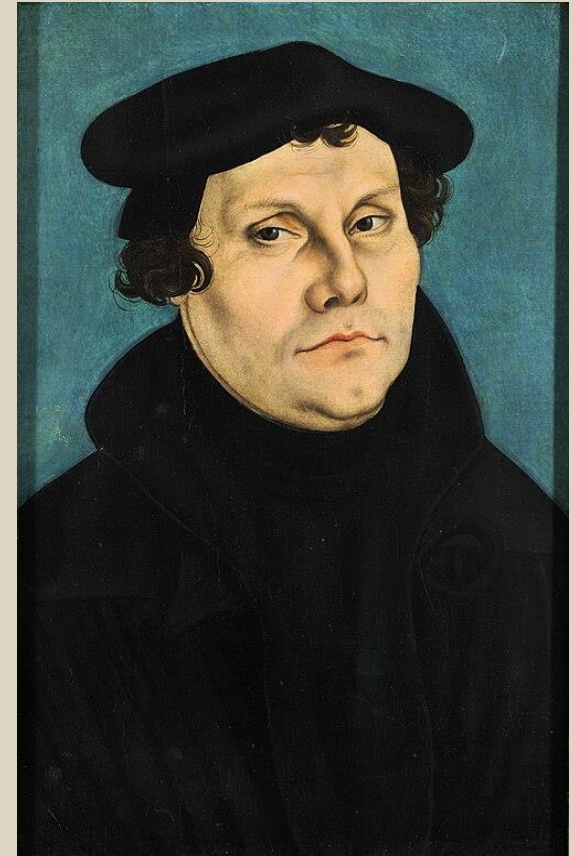


Trousset encyclopedia, Paris, 1886 - 1891
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Martin Luther and 1517

- Martin Luther · 1483–1546 · Augustinian friar · professor · biblical scholar
- Luther was alarmed by indulgence preaching associated with Johann Tetzel.
- 31 October 1517 · Ninety-Five Theses
- The dispute expanded from indulgences and repentance to papal authority, Scripture, grace, sacraments, and salvation.
- Luther's initial goal was reform and academic debate, not the creation of a new church.

Portrait of Martin Luther



By Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1528
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Why a Reformation?

**Long-standing
criticism**

**Theological
controversy**

**Church wealth &
political power**

**Earlier reform
movements**

Printing

Education & literacy

Political protection

No single cause produced the Reformation.

c. 30 Small movement → 313 Tolerated → 380 Imperially supported → Medieval Europe Institutionally powerful → 1517 Institution challenged

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