

Why I Am A Lutheran

Study Guide

Opening Comments: We are very glad you are interested in this series. Don't be surprised if you have questions that arise as you work through the study. Please do not hesitate to contact us at whyiamalutheran@gmail.com if you would like us to answer specific questions you may have, or if you would like to arrange a time to visit with us.

Session 1: Introduction and Background

Getting Started: If the members of your small group do not know each other, do introductions. Have each member tell their name and give a picture of their life: significant people, where most of one's time is spent.

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, as we gather, ease our fears, doubts, and worries. Send your Holy Spirit that our ears would be opened to the word you would have us hear. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. In this first class, it might be helpful for each of you to answer the following questions: What was your motivation to come to this class?
2. What question/s do you have concerning Luther and Lutheranism?
3. What do you hope to gain from this class?
4. Have you ever thought about history as unpacking a backpack? Do you think this is a helpful way to think about it – especially in the context of Luther and Lutheranism – as we start this series of classes?
5. Do we always know what is in our backpack?
6. As part of this idea of history as unpacking a backpack, talk about your faith background, how you were raised, etc... and start thinking about how this may impact how you might react to what you will hear about Luther and Lutheranism.
7. As you started to learn about the interconnectedness of the church and society in the Middle Ages, and leading up to Luther's time, can you anticipate what might happen if something happened to disrupt that system?

Session 2: The 95 Theses

Getting Started: If you would like, it might be helpful to remind people of names if you don't know one another well. Before watching the lecture, if there are people there who weren't at the first class, ask them to tell a little about themselves and answer the questions

you started with last week: What was your motivation to come to this class? What question/s do you have concerning Luther and Lutheranism? What do you hope to gain from this class?

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, in Baptism you have made us your own. Give us faith to trust this promise and know that there is nothing more. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. Did it surprise you to learn Luther described himself as “a monk and a most enthusiastic papist” at one point? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with Luther's thesis no. 4 that the penalty of sin remains until death? Think of the example of being involved in a car accident and killing someone. Even if you are not at fault in any way legally, do you think you would feel the guilt and pain of being responsible for that death until your own death?
3. In these early stages of Luther's life and work, can you start to identify what it was that drove him? In other words, what was Luther's vocation and how did that vocation impact what he did? (Hint: Listen to the early part of today's lecture and then see if you can trace that “driving force” in the 95 Theses, and then throughout Luther's writings for the rest of the sessions.)
4. Are you surprised that the Lutheran “calling card,” justification by faith, was not articulated by Luther in the *95 Theses*?
5. In your own words, explain *ad modum Aristotelis* and *ad modum scripturae*. You can find our definition in the glossary, but try to give some examples that might help you start to flesh out the difference between these two approaches. You will continue to hear about these approaches throughout the course, so keep listening for it.

Session 3: The Disputations

Getting Started: Before you listen to today's session, take some time to talk about how this series is impacting you at this point. Have you learned anything new? Do you have any questions you are hoping will be answered?

Opening Prayer: Faithful God, as we learn about what you did through Martin Luther, please open our ears to hear your promise of faith. Amen.

Questions:

1. Was Luther born a Lutheran? Why do you answer that question in that way?
2. Were you born a Lutheran? How do you think your faith “backpack” impacts the way you are hearing Dr. Croghan's teaching on Luther at this point? In other words, do you think it is easier or harder to disagree with Luther if you call yourself a Lutheran?

3. Early in this Session, Dr. Croghan talks about the use of Aristotle and logic in theology, and Luther's understanding of what happens to Scripture when "If...then" logic is applied to Scripture. Can you think of examples of this type of question and where it leads? (Example: If God is all-powerful, then why...?)
4. How does the story of the temptation in the Garden of Eden shape Luther's theology? In other words, how does it impact his understanding of human nature, what happens when humans question what God says, and our desire to know what is good and what is evil. Have you ever thought of that story in this way?
5. Discuss the question of whether or not Jesus is fair. Hint: Which is fair – pardon or parole; and which do you want if you are guilty, mercy or fairness? How does this make you feel – nervous, relieved, something else?
6. Think about Dr. Croghan's response to the question about predestination. What makes people nervous about predestination/election; and how does it relate to the previous question regarding whether or not Jesus is fair?
7. The words, "I forgive you" function in two ways. What are they? Talk about how this shapes your relationship with God.
8. How does the subject/object & active/passive distinction shape Luther's understanding of repentance? In other words, who is in charge of your repentance – you or God?

Session 4: The Breakthrough

Getting Started: The end of last week's session talked about experiencing Luther's teachings as a roller coaster. Do you have that sense yet? Discuss what you are enjoying and what may be pinching you at this point in this series.

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, we quickly forget Christ, and the justification you give us in Christ. Free us from our doubts, continue to send us preachers, and raise us in faith. Amen.

Questions:

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "righteous?" How would you define it?
2. It is not unusual for us to think of "self-righteousness" when we hear the word "righteous," and this generally has a negative feeling about it. Is this what Luther understands the Apostle Paul to mean in Romans? If not, how is Paul's meaning different?
3. How do "if/then" propositions impact a person's understanding of faith and righteousness? In other words, are "if/then" propositions about law/reason or gospel/mercy?
4. Dr. Croghan taught that Luther's approach to Scripture changed from one of *oratio*, (oration) *meditatio* (study), *speculatio* (speculate) to *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* (suffer). Discuss what you think is the significance of this change from speculation

- to suffering in Luther's approach to Scripture. How does this relate to the active/passive distinction discussed in previous sessions?
5. What changed in Luther's understanding of "the righteousness of God?" (Hint: think about God as demander or giver.)
 6. How does the following statement by Dr. Croghan strike you: "You are never going to get this, it's going to get you." Discuss what you think he means by that statement. Do you think it relates to the active/passive distinction, something else perhaps?
 7. If you are in control of your faith, even just a little bit, where does that leave Jesus? In other words, if you claim to have the ability to control your faith, or "decide for Jesus," is Jesus a pardoner or a parole officer at that point?
 8. Toward the end of the session Dr. Croghan asks, "If you're worried about being right (self-righteous) what are you going to need?" What is the answer to that question?

Session 5: Basic Vocabulary

Getting Started: Before you watch this session, take some time to talk about the law, what purpose it serves, and consequences for breaking it. Talk about the difference between pardon and parole; how does pardon work, and how does parole work? Which would you prefer if you are the person convicted of a crime, what if you are the victim?

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, as we gather, ease our fears, doubts, and worries. Send your Holy Spirit that our ears would be opened to the Word you would have us hear. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Questions:

1. With Luther's understanding of the law in mind, what is the difference in fulfilling human laws as opposed to God's law?
2. How is it when you break any Commandment you are also breaking the First Commandment? Relate this to Dr. Croghan's analogy of the radar gun on your heart.
3. What is our instinctive reaction to any law? In other words, what do we want to do to a law in order to attempt to comply with it? (Hint: Think of the tax code –what do we do with the tax code?)
4. If you're worried about fulfilling the law, where is your focus – on yourself or on your neighbor?
5. How is it the law increases sin? Had you ever thought of the law in this way?
6. Will you ever do a good work if you are worried about doing good works? Why or why not?
7. Which comes first for Luther – good works or faith?
8. Discuss the reasoning for Luther's definition of sin as unbelief. How does this relate to breaking the First Commandment? Have you ever heard sin defined in this way?

9. What is the only antidote to skeptic acid? Which words of Christ deliver this antidote?

Session 6: Basic Vocabulary

Getting Started: Is faith something you do, or control, or decide? How about belief or trust – do you control or decide whom you believe or trust? Talk about your understanding of this question now, and we are going to revisit it at the end of today’s session. It might be interesting for you to see if your answer to these questions is different at the end!

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for gathering us here together. Continue to send us preachers and send us to preach to others, so that all may know the forgiveness you give us through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions:

1. In terms of your righteousness before God, what is the one thing you owe God?
2. How does the answer to question one relate to last session’s discussion about sin and Luther’s definition of sin?
3. What happens to you if you don’t believe your sins are forgiven?
4. Which is the more accurate statement depicting Luther’s understanding of righteousness: Jesus chases you down; or You pursue Jesus? Discuss the differences in these two statements.
5. For Luther, are plowing a field, changing a diaper, fixing dinner, etc... fleshly matters or spiritual? Is giving up something for Lent a fleshly matter or spiritual? Why?
6. Had you thought of this distinction between flesh and spirit in this way prior to today’s session?
7. In your own words, describe Luther’s understanding of grace. Was this your understanding of grace prior to this session? If not, what is the difference?
8. Is faith your work, or God’s work? In other words, while faith is certainly personal to you, are you in control of it or is the Holy Spirit?
9. What happens when you are given faith? Will you then be busy?
10. Is Jesus in the trapping business?

Session 7: Freedom of A Christian

Getting Started: Have you ever thought two contradictory statements could be true? Does it seem logical that this could be the case? Come back and discuss this question after listening to today's session and see if your answer has changed.

Opening Prayer: Lord God, you forgive our sin and set us free. Free! Let us now live for our neighbors. Amen.

Questions:

1. According to Luther, what is the one, and only, thing that makes one a Christian?
2. For Luther, can our actions make us more or less "Christian?" Discuss your answer. Do you agree with Luther – why or why not?
3. How does believing in Christ free you and make you holy?
4. Lutherans are often accused of making the Christian life too easy when they say, "Faith alone saves." Is this a legitimate accusation?
5. Should Christians expect a leisurely life? If not, what should Christians expect?
6. Who benefits from your good works?
7. Discuss the difference between a sermon that is a "to do" as opposed to a sermon that is an "it's been done." Which one frees you, and why?
8. Go back to the Getting Started discussion from the beginning of this session. Talk about your answer to those questions and unpack whether or not your answers have changed (and if so, what is that change) after learning about Luther's *Freedom of A Christian*.

Session 8: Word and Sacrament

Getting Started: Think about your understanding of words and language. Do words represent something else, do they symbolize something else? In other words, is the sign "Watch out for falling rock" actually the falling rock or is it pointing you to the rock? Discuss this idea before watching today's session. You may not have ever really thought about words and how they function, but in this session you're going to hear how Luther's understanding of the Word of God and God's speaking became a critical part of his theology.

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for giving us faith in your Word, the forgiveness of sin only Christ can bring. Open our ears to hear this Word proclaimed so that we might live in the freedom of faith.

Questions:

1. The old sayings, "Talk is cheap" and "Stick and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" are familiar. Would Luther say these things about God? Why do you say this?
2. Did Luther come up with his understanding regarding the "Word" of God and what happens when God speaks on his own? If not, where did he get this understanding?

3. How does God's speaking relate to you not being in control of your faith?
4. How does "God speaks, God does" relate to the issue of repentance? In other words, who is in control of repentance? Is this a common understanding of repentance?
5. How do *verbum reale*, promise, and good news relate to one another? In other words, how does a promise create a new reality and a new life?
6. How do people get saved, and who are they? Why do you say that?
7. What are the sacraments, and what do they do/deliver? How do they function as the antidote to our skeptic acid?
8. For Luther, what is the big death that occurs in Baptism, and how does it relate to your ego (your "I")? Have you ever thought of Baptism in this way?
9. What does the Lord's Supper deliver? Discuss how this is related to Luther's use of the word "testament."

Session 9: Keeping The Promise A Promise

Getting Started: In this last session, it might be helpful to go back through some of your notes from earlier sessions and talk about what you have learned. Feel free to share what you have liked, what you have not liked, what has troubled you and what has provided you comfort.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, you have defeated sin, death, and the devil through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us faith in Christ's forgiveness so that we may live to serve our neighbor.

Questions:

1. Talk about Luther's understanding of the "simple sense of Scripture" and how it relates to the Lord's Supper. One way of thinking about this is to talk about how the concept "is means is" plays a role in Luther's understanding of the simple sense of Scripture.
2. Discuss the difference between being a "Bible believing Christian" and a "Jesus, or Word, believing Christian." How does that difference impact the way one understands Scripture?
3. If the Bible is not a prescription or a road map, then what is it according to Luther? Talk about how Luther's understanding of Scripture and its function impacts the way you read Scripture.
4. Is "love" law or gospel? What did Jesus say is the greatest commandment, and how does his answer to that question inform your answer to whether or not love is law or gospel? For Luther, does the law save you or does the gospel?
5. What happens to you when you believe God created you good? In other words, what happens when you do not think the Bible moves you from vice to virtue, but instead you trust what it names you – like a mirror.

6. For Luther, what makes Scripture authoritative? Have you ever thought about Scripture in this way, and if not how does this affect your understanding of the Bible?
7. Have you ever thought of “truth” in terms other than logic or scientific method and proof? How did Luther understand the Scriptures to be true – as logical or scientifically verifiable, or something else?
8. Talk about your understanding of “interpreting” Scripture. Is your understanding of how we read Scripture (if we read it as Luther did) different now than it was before watching this session?

Glossary

Ad Modum Aristotelis (This literally means in the manner of Aristotle.) Generally, this is our default way of thinking as it is rooted in Western philosophical assumptions and thus reason and logic. This approach uses philosophical principles as the source and norm for theological discourse. It results in asking the question “what” or “why” with a focus on categorizing, defining, and looking for the meaning of the text. This method results in talking about God, and thus perceiving God as an abstract concept.

Ad Modum Scripturae (This literally means in the manner of Scripture.) This approach uses Scripture as the source and norm for theological discourse. It results in asking the question “who?” with a focus on God, the people, and the events of the texts. The underlying understanding is that God speaks to and about God’s people in Scripture, thus functioning to deliver God as a person who is in relationship with the reader/hearer. In other words, the scriptures are understood to be a “confession” of God’s speaking and acting.

Apocalypse (Apocalypsed) Apocalypse is commonly equated with complete destruction. In the biblical language, apocalypse is defined also as revelation, especially a divine revelation.

Eschatological (Pronounced es-kə-’tā-lā-ji-kəl) Commonly understood as “end times” or the “second coming of Christ,” it also means the end of the old creation and the beginning of a new creation. For Paul, and also Luther, this happens when we hear preaching that declares us sinner (Law) and forgiven (Gospel), i.e. old and then new creation.

Faith Synonymous with the words trust and belief. It is something given to you, passively, and is not something which you can generate on your own. You do not control it. It is not a choice but rather is an imposition on you, controlled and given to you by God.

Flesh For Luther, “flesh” meant anything that is done for one’s own benefit – whether commonly presumed to be “spiritual” or “religious” or not.

Good Works Good works are the fruit of faith – a good tree bears good fruit (Matt 7:17 ff). Just as the apple tree does not bear fruit for its own benefit, so our good works are for the benefit of the neighbor and not for ourselves.

Gospel The good news of Christ who is reconciling the world to God through the forgiveness of your sin.

Grace God's disposition toward you, His attitude toward you. Grace is not a gift or a substance.

Heresy All false teaching and preaching that makes additions to Christ himself and the Gospel (see definition above).

Kerygma (Pronounced kə-'rig-mə) The proclamation that Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died and was resurrected to reconcile the world with God through the forgiveness of your sin.

Law This includes but is not limited to the Ten Commandments, statutes, ordinances, etc... set forth by God. The law does two things. First, it preserves us in our day-to-day lives on this earth. Second, the Law includes anything that functions on one's conscience to convict us of our sin, and thus to drive us to Christ's forgiveness. Put another way, the law always accuses us as sinners who can never do enough, exposing and actually increasing our sin so that we have only Christ's righteousness to which to cling.

Righteousness Having a right or holy standing before another – either God or your neighbor.

Active Righteousness Also understood as proper righteousness. Righteousness based on the record you have worked at and obtained through your efforts and behavior. You are in control of this type of righteousness. This is what your neighbors see and is the basis for their assessment of you.

Passive Righteousness Also understood as alien righteousness. This is a declared righteousness based on words spoken to you and about you. It is nothing you have done, but is something imposed on you. This type of righteousness is at the heart of the concept of "justified by faith." You are not in control of this type of righteousness – Christ is.

Sin Unbelief is the root, the source, of all sin.

Spiritual Things done as the result of faith in Christ, and thus with no sense of benefiting the self, but instead with the sense of benefiting the neighbor. In other words, any act is spiritual when it is done with a focus on the external, the neighbor, and it is not done with the intent of benefiting one's self.

Verbum Reale Luther's understanding that when God speaks, God does. God's speaking establishes creation out of nothing, and God's speaking creates faith where there once was none.

Vocation A call for service to your neighbor. This call is not an internal feeling, sense, or experience but rather it comes from the outside – from your neighbor. The call identifies gifts and talents God has given you for service to your neighbor.

Word of God The Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies.

The Skinny: The notion of “church” & Luther’s context

The notion of “church”

- A. Luther is commonly called a “Reformer.” To label him as such, one has to identify what he was reforming. Typically, the “church” is identified as that which was reformed. In order to talk about “reformation of the church” you need first to define “the church.”
- B. Thus, what is needed is a brief overview of the notion of the word “church”.

The notion of the church from a theological perspective:

Two ways people have unpacked theological concepts.

- A. *Ad modum Scripturae*= in the manner of scripture- asks the question “who?” with a focus on the events of the text.
- B. *Ad modum Aristotelis*= in the manner of Aristotle- asks the question “what?” with a focus on categorizing and defining, looking for meaning of the text.

The use and definition of the word “church” has evolved over the centuries. A marked change is found between Paul’s and Luther’s time.

- A. When considering how the evolution occurred, the best place to start is to look at how the Bible understood the notion of “church.”
 - 1. Clearly there is no clear cut definition of the word church. The common denominator of all descriptors is that church is an assembly of people.

- B. Given that there are no distinct descriptors or definitions of the church in the Bible, how do we talk about it?
- C. 300 years after Jesus the Council of Nicea came up with a set of descriptors.
 - 1. The Nicene Formula describes the church as
 - a) ONE
 - b) HOLY
 - c) CATHOLIC
 - d) APOSTOLIC
 - 2. The Council of Nicea understood itself as creating a confession that was harmonious with Scripture.
- D. However, the definitions of ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC in the scriptures changed over a short span of time. The changes continued into the early Christian centuries.
- E. The Apostle Paul informs the earliest definition:
 - 1. **One** is evident as Paul speaks of no distinctions between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free.
 - 2. **Catholic** is evident as Paul's *kerygma* is for all and unifies the community. (*Kerygma* is defined as the proclamation that Jesus Christ lived, suffered, died and was resurrected for the forgiveness of your sins.)
 - 3. **Apostolic** is asserted because Paul argues that Christ gave him the *kerygma*.
 - 4. **Holy** is manifest in the fact that the *kerygma* kills the old and raises the new in faith. In faith, a person is made righteous/holy.
- F. Due to questions about Paul's authority and message, and due to disruption and controversy in the early Christian communities, the meaning of the terms changed over time.
 - 1. **One** = community without dissension
 - 2. **Holy** = adherence to the law- ritual and moral purity
 - 3. **Catholic** = universal authority under one bishop
 - 4. **Apostolic** = the succession of an office through a single spiritual ancestor.

The political factors in shaping the notion of "church"

In politics, *ad modum Aristotelis* is the only way

- A. The government of the time had a major impact on the definitions and perception of church.
 - 1. Constantine created a culture of toleration with the Edict of Milan (313) allowing the Christian religion to expand.
 - a) By 380, the authority of the Roman Empire rested behind the Christian church.
 - b) This event shifted the church's authority, so it was no longer limited to the *sacerdotium* (*the sacraments and spiritual care*). Additional responsibilities in regard to the *regnum* (*royal government and political authority*) were assumed.
 - 2. Clerical offices derived their authority from above, ordained by God and not sanctioned by the community.

3. Combining this with the power of the empire, the temporal and spiritual oversight became institutionalized.
 - a) Institutions are governed hierarchically, thus someone always claims to be on top.
 - b) This marked the beginning of a long history of competing powers for the oversight of the institution.
 4. As the Roman Emperors championed Christianity, temporal authority was mixed in with spiritual regulation.
 - a) Anyone having sacerdotal authority (clergy) automatically began to wield temporal influence thus giving clergy influence beyond pastoral responsibilities.
 5. As issues of faith arose, declarations, judgments and decisions across the Christian community lacked consistency.
 - a) In an attempt to find a consistent policy, people began to refer to Rome as the universal court of appeals for spiritual matters.
 - (1) It became required that important matters be presented to the Bishop of Rome.
 - b) This move detached clergy from worldly order and jurisdiction.
 - (1) The view was that clergy were under the supervision of the Pope and not the Emperor.
 - (2) Thus government regulation, both local and national, such as taxes and laws did not pertain to clergy. If you were clergy you had “diplomatic immunity.”
 - c) The ruling contributed to the investiture controversy: Who had the right to appoint or “crown”?
 - (1) The controversy was fully manifest under Pope Gregory VII’s (1020-1085) prohibition of lay investiture: Only clergy could appoint and ordain clergy.
 - i. This meant that the Emperor no longer had the power to choose the Pope.
 - d) As the church acquired more authority, necessarily it came with a need for rulings.
 - (1) With rulings came precedent and laws- the result was the evolution of the “canon law.”
 - e) With “laws” established by “the church,” clergy now had jurisdiction over those under the laws.
 - (1) Now local clergy had influence in political as well as spiritual matters.
- B. The papacy became a separate monarchy.
1. The 4th Lateran Council (1215) centralized the power of the papacy.
 2. The church, governed by the papacy, was uniquely the *congregatio fidelium* (gathering of the faithful).
 - a) Moreover, the Council put forth a profession of faith in the visible sacramental and eucharistic community found in Rome, “outside of which no one is saved.”
 3. Submission to the Roman Pontiff is necessary for salvation.

- C. The politics between the Council of Nicea and the Council of Constance ushered in an enormous amount of change in the structure and governance of the institutional church body.
 - 1. But in regard to the interpretation of the marks of the church (**one, holy, catholic and apostolic**) little if anything changed through the Middle Ages.

The harmonization of the institution & the theology.

- A. The final product of the theological and political evolution of the notion of the church is captured by the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) the “Dr.” of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - 1. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* he argued for the necessity of the sacraments which deliver grace to further a person’s perfected being (the views of Cyprian and Augustine).
 - a) Grace is a substance that helps you become a “better person” or more perfect person.
 - b) Aquinas affirmed the 4th Lateran Council’s teaching regarding the seven sacraments and transubstantiation.
 - (1) This move reinforced the role and function of the clergy and the subsequent hierarchical institution.
 - 2. Aquinas taught that visible things are capable of working out a spiritual salvation.
 - a) The same distinction is held for the **church**.
 - b) So something can be imperfect physically, but because of the perfection of the “deliverer” it doesn’t lose its quality of perfection.
 - 3. This distinction helps explain the continual call for reform of the church while maintaining the notion that the church is the function of the divine.
 - a) With Aquinas’ theology, we can see why there was a regular need and call for “reform of the church.”

Luther’s Context: Late Medieval Religious, Social and Political Climate

A contemporary parallel

- A. The outlook of the 16th Century Christian Europe life mirrors the mindset of the Islamic countries in the Middle East.
 - 1. The dependence of daily life upon the religious life is inseparable.
 - 2. The laws & rites of religion and society overlap.
- B. In Luther’s day, religious establishment influenced secular issues.
 - 1. The legal system of “the church” impacted the secular legal system.

CASE STUDY

- A. The function and duties of Godparents, baptismal sponsors.
 - 1. In our day and time, baptismal sponsorship does not hold the same significance as it once did.

2. In Luther's time, it was a given that children would be baptized.
 - a) The question of religious affiliation was moot.
 - b) Legally, the Godparents were caretakers if something happened to the parents.
 - (1) The greatest concern was the social and economic position of the sponsor.
 - c) With legal responsibilities came governance because of the need to protect the innocent.
 - (1) Secular laws established sexual taboos between Godparents and Godchildren.
- B. One can see the intentional interconnectedness of religious and secular life.

CASE STUDY

- A. Monastic life in the Middle Ages.
1. Monasteries and convents were common to most communities big or small.
 2. In fact, in some ways there was competition between the communities.
 3. The religious orders did not function exclusively for religious devotion. They also served as social service agencies:
 - a) Convalescent homes, orphanages, nursing homes.
 4. The monastic community, however, needed to support itself.
 - a) A contract was written up, therefore, whereby the people who were entering the religious order would bring some sort of dowry to be used as help in supporting the community's needs.
 - b) The result: religious orders owned pieces of land spread throughout the countryside.
 5. Thus, like a sound business, they were often interested in consolidation which led to potential corruption. While it seemed like good business, was there a manipulation of spiritual benefits?
 - a) Such practice is called simony and was a sin, Acts 8:18-24.
 6. The reaction to corruption is a need for oversight.
 - a) Oversight requires jurisdiction and a body of law.
 - b) This was not the first time the Christian community had issues of authority and oversight.
 - c) The "canon law" was in place already.
- B. Layers of Bureaucracy
1. Now to make this all that much more interesting and complicated, one must remember that in addition to the authoritative voice coming from Rome, people, including the religious orders, had to contend with the local authorities and the laws and ordinances which governed the local territories.
 2. For instance, laws governing property rights and taxes were constantly at issue when religious orders were given portions of an estate.
- C. A complex political situation
1. During the time around Luther's birth, the political landscape was quite complex.
 2. In a sense, there were different ruling systems at work.
 3. Local authority
 - a) A territorial elector or local city governments.

4. The overarching authority
 - a) The Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor.

A complex web of interwoven authority between secular & spiritual realms.

- A. From what we have noted above, it was not always easy on the local level to distinguish between secular and spiritual oversight.
 1. Recall, the Pope not only had spiritual authority but also political.
 - a) The Pope's authority needed backing.
 - (1) With authority over land comes a need to protect it, thus you must have an army.
 - (2) With an army, one needs resources, thus an income is necessary.
 - (3) To gain income, you must have taxes.
 2. You can see how the spiral starts to move to a point where the papacy becomes enmeshed in the political sphere.

The role of revenue and money to support the system.

- A. Whence comes the money?
 1. From the establishment and oversight of local churches.
 - a) In the Middle Ages, churches were established primarily by two means:
 - (1) The local bishop with the authority and help of Rome could build a church.
 - (2) A local leader, either a prince, a wealthy baron, or a town council could establish a church.
 - b) The attraction of having a stake in a church was, as you might imagine, financial.
 2. The foundation of the enterprise was the spiritual needs of the local people.
 - a) People desired to have their sins forgiven and gain favor with God.
 - b) Need God or a favor from God? Who do you call?
 - (1) Your local religious person to be an intercessor for you.
 - (2) Through a priest you would receive a sacrament or be given a dispensation which gained you favor with God.
 - (3) In turn you would give a gift or donation to those who would pray for you or say a mass in your honor, or hear your confession, or baptize your child, the list goes on.
 3. The local priest would collect the money and then it would work its way down the food chain.
 - a) First, the person who built the church kept a percentage of the money.
 - b) The local bishop skimmed his portion off the top, because if you didn't pay the local bishop, your clergy & sacramental credentials could be stripped.
 - c) The local bishop paid taxes to the papacy, which was responsible for appointing the bishops. This is how the papacy took its share.

Authority: Where the buck stops...

- A. What kept this nice little system running? What kept the machine properly oiled and greased? The notion of authority.
 - 1. The tradition evolved into an understanding that the Bishop of Rome was considered the successor of Peter.
 - a) Peter is considered to hold the “keys to the Kingdom” i.e. the authority to forgive sins.
 - b) The successor of Peter (the Pope) could distribute that authority to whomever he wanted.
- B. Authority to forgive sins pays dividends
 - 1. This had a twofold effect:
 - a) First, the pope had a monopoly on spiritual power because he could keep a person from having favor with God.
 - b) Secondly, the pope had the authority to appoint and ordain those who were responsible for carrying out the office of the keys across the countryside.
 - (1) The Pope had authority over bishops, the clergy, and the religious orders.
 - (2) Consequently, if someone didn’t do what the Pope wanted, such as contribute a decent percentage of their revenue; he had the authority to make them “pay”.
 - (3) The Pope also had the authority to offer up special dispensations, such as indulgences.

The Theological Underpinnings

- A. Theological assumptions and ideas also supported and perpetuated the papal system of indulgences.
 - 1. The driving force is found in a set of questions:
 - a) How are humans put right with God?
 - b) How do Christians know that they are in good standing with God and therefore will live in eternity?
 - 2. In sum, it is the problem of justification.
- B. Issues surrounding “justification”
 - 1. The problem of sin.
 - a) Sin makes us unrighteous
 - (1) But there are various definitions of sin
 - (2) Late Medieval theology understood sin in two ways that are not necessarily mutually exclusive:
 - a) Actively doing something forbidden
 - b) Or the absence of good or *caritas*
 - (3) Late Medieval theology maintained a distinction between original sin and sins actually committed in life.
 - (4) They understood sin to be tangible and measurable, creating an accounting mentality.
 - a) The ramifications of sin throw off the relation between God and humans.

- b) Somehow, the accounting records or “scales” must be balanced in order to make “justice” work.
 - c) The goal is to make the relationship “righteous” again.
 - 2. How do you balance the scales?
 - a) Medieval answers: Cooperation with God will make you righteous.
 - A. Two models of cooperation
 - 1. Model 1: Thomists, (those who follow Thomas Aquinas) the *via antiqua*
 - a) You begin with original sin, which is not your fault, but is yours, nevertheless.
 - (1) The antidote: the gratuitous infusion of grace (like at baptism or any of the sacraments)
 - a) The role of the sinner: moral cooperation, doing the best one can with the aid of grace.
 - b) The outcome: the reward of eternal life is earned.
 - b) The first step (sacraments) puts you into a state of grace.
 - (1) It is God's special gift, not human achievement.
 - (2) Grace is energy and is the foundation for your cooperation with it.
 - a) An infusion of grace must precede every meritorious act.
 - (3) Grace makes faith; but the result of this grace is mere faith (belief in facts).
 - a) However, mere faith is not enough! It must be formed by acts of love — *fides caritate formata* (faith formed by love)
 - c) Thus, there is an essential role for the sacraments.
 - (1) They really contained and communicated grace.
 - (2) Baptism—washes away guilt of original sin.
 - (3) Penance-gave aid against actual sins (cycle of sin and absolution)
 - d) Result: people are always on the way, pilgrims uncertain of their destination.
 - 2. Model 2: Ockhamists/Nominalists (those who follow Willam Ockham) *via moderna*
 - a) Ockham offered a critique of the old way, believing the problem with the *via antiqua* was that it preserves neither God's freedom nor human freedom.
 - (1) The issue with God's freedom:
 - a) How do we keep from thinking that God is somehow obligated to save humans?
 - 1) Nominalist answer to these difficulties: a contract (covenant)—God could have set up any system of salvation but this is the one he set up:
 - a) Moral effort: doing the best one can on the basis of natural moral ability
 - b) Infusion of grace as an appropriate reward
 - c) Moral cooperation: doing the best one can with the aid of grace
 - d) Reward of eternal life as a just due
 - 2) *Facere quod in se est* "Do what is in you" and God will not deny you grace.

Suggested Additional Reading Material

Forde, Gerhard. *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1972.

Kittelson, James. *Luther the Reformer*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.

Paulson, Steven. *Luther for Armchair Theologians*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.