The sources of the Reformation

History 100, May 8, 2006

“Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.”
—sixteenth-century proverb

Alternative exam: does anyone who can’t take the regular exam (Wed. 5/24, 1:30 p.m.) have a problem with Tues. 5/23, 1:30 p.m.?
But Odysseus
In the end is less responsible
Than the ones who held command.
People in high office are bound to rule
By the force of their example. Bad actions come
From being badly influenced. What you see
Is what you do yourself.

—Sophocles (trans. Heaney), *The Cure at Troy*
What do we need to explain?

- What was Luther’s message?
- How did Luther arrive at it?
- Why were many people receptive to it?
- Why did some people accept it and others reject it?
What was Luther’s message?

Theologically speaking...

- Faith, alone, is both necessary and sufficient to Christian salvation (*sola fide*)
- God’s freely given grace, alone, is the source of Christian faith (*sola gratia*)
- Scripture (especially the Gospels), alone, is the source of Christian faith (*sola scriptura*)

We’ll return to the details on Wednesday
How did Luther arrive at it?

• “Thunderstorm experience”: gave up law school and entered an Augustinian monastery in 1505
• Sense of unworthiness
• 1510: visit to Rome shows him worldliness of papal court; increases sense of unworthiness
• “Tower experience” (1516?)—sudden enlightenment (may not have happened)
  • Ps. 30: “Deliver me in Thy righteousness”
• 1517: Ninety-Five Theses against indulgences
Why indulgences?

- Penance: contrition + satisfaction
- The treasury of merit
- Indulgences for St. Peter’s (Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, Tetzel)
- Luther’s initial target: papal presumption in handing out God’s grace
Why were many people receptive to Luther’s message?

Problems in the Church

- Pluralism
- Absenteeism
- Ignorance
- Immorality (lust, greed were chief targets)
- Worldliness of papacy, western schism (1378-1417)

Renewal of piety

- Religious, reforming fervor (“bonfires of the vanities”)
- Erasmian Christian humanism