SMPC Adult Sunday School	12-21-2025
The Divines of the Reformation – Volume 1	Various Sources

John 21: 15-17
For the love of Jesus

Introduction

- The intent in this class is to outline the various Divines over the period of what we may call the Reformation.
    - What are Divines?
    - What is the Reformation period?

What exactly is a Divine?

- Broad Term - The term is, therefore, used to a theologian or member of the clergy who is highly skilled in the study of religious doctrine (and practice).
- More specifically and in common usage are:
    - Post-Reformation Divines
    - Westminster Divines
    - Caroline Divines

What is the Reformation Period?

- Most theologians consider the time period from October 31, 1517 (Martin Luther's 95 indulgences) to 1648 which is the signing of the Peace of Westphalia.
- Alternative Timelines. Will present the alternative as a means for discussion and order.

Pre-Reformation Divines

- John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384): An English theologian who challenged Papal authority and the doctrine of transubstantiation. He is famous for pioneering the translation of the Bible into English. He is often called the "Morning Star of the Reformation."
- Jan Hus (c. 1369–1415): Jan Hus was a Czech priest, professor, and rector of the University of Prague. He criticized the moral failings of the clergy and the use of indulgences.

The Connection to Martin Luther

When Martin Luther came to prominence in the 1520s, he read the works of Hus and Wycliffe and found himself in agreement with many of their core criticisms.

The Earliest Divines of the Reformation – The First Wave

1. Martin Luther (1483–1546) - The Catalyst
    - Nationality: German (Saxon)
        - *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone)
        - *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone)
        - *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone)
    - Significance: He was the first to decisively break with the authority of the Pope and systematically reconstruct Christian doctrine around the concept of justification by faith.
2. Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli (1484–1531) - The Swiss Pioneer
    - Nationality: Swiss
    - Theological Impact: Zwingli led the Reformation in Zurich, beginning around 1519, just two years after Luther. He developed his theology independently of Luther, though aware of his work, marking the start of the Reformed tradition.
3. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) - The Systematizer
    - Nationality: German
    - Theological Impact: Melanchthon was Luther's lifelong friend and associate at the University of Wittenberg. While not the originator, he was the first systematic theologian of the Reformation.

Early Reformation – The Second Wave

Divine	Dates	Location	Notable Contribution
John Calvin	1509–1564	Geneva (France/Swiss)	Systematized Reformed theology with his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Established Geneva as the model Reformed city, influencing all subsequent Reformed divines.
Martin Bucer	1491–1551	Strasbourg /England	Influential mediator and liturgist. Mentored Calvin and later influenced the English Reformation (Archbishop Cranmer). Contribution to form of worship.
Heinrich Bullinger	1504–1575	Zürich (Swiss)	Zwingli's successor. Authored the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), one of the most widely accepted Reformed confessions, and co-authored the *Consensus Tigurinus* with John Calvin, effectively merging Zwingli's Swiss Reformation with Calvin's Genevan movement cementing the Zwinglian-Calvinist merger.

Divine	Dates	Location	Notable Contribution
William Farel	1489-1565	Geneva / Neuchatel	The founder of Reformed doctrine in Geneva and beyond in Switzerland. Convinced Calvin to stay in Geneva – Geneva the "Protestant Rome".

Mid-Reformation (1540s - c. 1600)

A. Continental (Reformed)

Divine	Dates	Location	Notable Contribution
Theodore Beza	1519–1605	Geneva (Swiss)	Calvin's successor. Led the Geneva Academy, focusing on predestination and ushering in the early phase of Reformed Scholasticism. His work codified Calvinism. First rector of the Genevan Academy.
Peter Martyr Vermigli	1499–1562	Strasbourg/ England	Italian former Catholic. Highly influential in the English Reformation and a leading source of Reformed theological methodology.
Zacharias Ursinus	1534–1583	Heidelberg (Germany)	Principal author of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the most beloved and popular devotional Reformed catechism. A successor of Melanchthon but later embraced Calvinistic views particularly involving the Lords Supper.
Guido De Bres	1522-1567	Geneva (Swiss) and Mons (Netherlands)	Authored the Belgic Confession, which is still a critical part of the Three Parts of Divinity

B. British Isles (English/Scottish)

Divine	Dates	Location	Notable Contribution
John Knox	c. 1514–1572	Scotland	Founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. His Scots Confession (1560) established the Reformed faith in Scotland. Visited John Calvin and adopted Calvinistic thought.

Divine	Dates	Location	Notable Contribution
William Perkins	1558–1602	Cambridge (England)	Theologian of the Puritan movement. Known for his practical, ethical, and methodical teaching, often called the Father of Puritanism.

Who Can I Highlight for Today?

Theodore Beza (1519 – 1605)

Beza was a student of John Calvin

- He and Calvin were contemporaries who had the same Greek tutor in their youth (Melchior Wolmar), but Beza was ten years Calvin's junior.

Beza Contributions

1. Successor to Calvin and Leader of Geneva
    - Geneva Academy: Beza co-founded the Geneva Academy (theological school) with Calvin in 1559 and served as its first Rector.
    - Calvin's Successor: Upon Calvin's death in 1564, Beza took up the mantle of leadership, becoming the chief pastor of the Geneva church and the Moderator of the Company of Pastors until 1580. He ensured the consolidation of the Calvinist system in Geneva.

2. Theological and Scholarly Contributions
    - Greek New Testament: Beza published multiple editions of the Greek New Testament (1565–1604).
    - Codex Bezae: He donated the important 5th- or 6th-century manuscript, the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, to the University of Cambridge in 1581
    - Systematizer of Calvinism: He rigorously defended and systematized Calvin's doctrine, particularly on predestination, and is often credited with clarifying and solidifying the theological structure of what became known as Calvinism.

3. Political and Diplomatic Activism (Huguenots)
    - Spokesman for the Huguenots: Beza was the prominent counselor and representative of the French Protestants (Huguenots) in their struggle against the Catholic powers in France.

Documents that Indicate the Codification of Calvinistic theology

The idea of "codifying" Calvinistic theology involves several important documents and works, as the systematization occurred over a few generations. There is no single document, but three major ones stand out:

1. The Chief Theological Textbook: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Calvin)
2. The Formal "Codification" of Salvation Doctrine: *The Canons of Dort* (1619)
3. The Most Comprehensive Confession: *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646)

The Connection with the Three Forms of Unity

Three Forms of Unity—which include the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—absolutely provide the most significant confessional codification of Calvinistic theology for the Dutch and many other continental European Reformed traditions.

Document	Year	Author/ Assembly	Type	Role in Codification
Belgic Confession	1561	Guido de Brès	Comprehensive Confession	Creedal Foundation (What we believe about all of theology)
Heidelberg Catechism	1563	Ursinus & Olevianus	Question/Answer Catechism	Pastoral Instruction (How to teach and apply our theology)
Canons of Dort	1619	Synod of Dort	Definitive Canons/Judgments	Systematic Clarification (The formal definition of salvation doctrine)

Guido de Bres (1522 -1567)

Guido de Brès (1522–1567) was a pivotal figure in the Protestant Reformation, specifically known as the "Reformer of the Netherlands." His life was defined by his role as a traveling pastor, his authorship of one of the most enduring Reformed creeds, and his eventual martyrdom.

Life and Education

- Lifespan: Born in 1522 in Mons, County of Hainaut (modern-day Belgium); died May 31, 1567, in Valenciennes.
- Conversion: Raised as a devout Roman Catholic and trained as a glass painter. He was converted to the Protestant faith between the ages of 18 and 25 (c. 1540–1547).
- Educational Journey:
    - London (1548–1552): Fled to England to escape persecution - Spanish Inquisition.
    - Lausanne & Geneva (1556–1559): Traveled to Switzerland for formal theological training.

Teachers and Mentors

- John Calvin
- Theodore Beza: He studied biblical languages and theology under Beza in both Lausanne and Geneva.
- John à Lasco & Martin Bucer: During his time in London, he likely engaged with or was influenced by these prominent Reformers who served the refugee congregations there.

Major Contributions

- The Belgic Confession (1561): His most enduring contribution. Originally written in French (*Confession de foy*), it consists of 37 articles outlining Reformed doctrine.
    - Purpose: It was intended to prove to King Philip II of Spain that the "Reformed" were not radical rebels (like some Anabaptist factions) but law-abiding citizens holding to historic, biblical Christianity.
    - Legacy: It remains one of the "Three Forms of Unity," the official doctrinal standards for many Reformed churches worldwide today.
- Polity and Civil Obedience:
    - De Brès emphasized the spiritual order of the church, advocating for a government of ministers, elders, and deacons (Belgic Confession, Article 30).
    - Politically, he was a strong advocate of obedience to the magistrate based on Romans 13.

Martyrdom

In 1567, after the Siege of Valenciennes by Spanish forces, de Brès was captured. He was tried by the Spanish Inquisition and hanged on May 31, 1567. His final letters to his wife, Catherine, are celebrated in Reformed history for their expressions of trust in God's providence despite his impending execution.

CONCLUSION

The history of the reformed Christian religion is one of combat, relying on men of extreme, evoiut and resolute faith. Each person that we learn about was but a cog in the wheel or a step that further refines the interpretation, meaning and practical application of Holy Scripture.