I’d like to introduce myself at the beginning. I’m Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, and I welcome you to this study of the Reformation.

The study of the Reformation is an important study in the seminary curriculum. It is an opportunity for seminary students in the twentieth century to look at the history of the church at one of its most important and vital and creative periods. We go back to the sixteenth century as a time of tremendous change, a time of political, social, and economic changes, and a time from our interest most importantly, of religious changes.

The religious changes of the sixteenth century have had a tremendous impact upon succeeding generations. The sixteenth century saw what has been at least until our day the permanent division of Western Christianity. It has been the origin of most Protestant movements that we see among us. It has been formative in the way in which Protestants look at the Scripture and understand their theology. It was a movement dominated by heroic figures of tremendous wisdom and insight names such as Martin Luther and John Calvin come most immediately to mind. It was a time of profound study and insight into the Word of God and a time in which new denominations took place that changed the patterns of religious thinking and religious life for many people. It was a time in which many people found Jesus Christ as their Savior, and for all of those reasons it warrants a careful and serious study on our part.

This course of study then will look at the history of the Reformation. We’ll look first at some of the background to the Reformation, which is most important for understanding the movement itself. Then we’ll turn to look at the early years of the Reformation in the life and work of Martin Luther, and then we’ll watch the ways
in which the Reformation spreads, spreads through Germany, spreads also in different forms in other parts of Europe. We’ll take our study down to the end of the sixteenth century, except in the case of the Dutch Reformation, where we’ll go a little bit into the seventeenth Century to see the culmination of the Dutch Reformation in the struggle between the Calvinists and the Arminians in the Netherlands. I hope that you will find this time of study interesting and that it will lead you on to further study of this most important period in the history of Christ’s church.

We turn then first of all to the matter of background study, and I want to look with you then at the political setting of the Reformation. The fifteenth century and on into the early sixteenth century was a period of changing political factors in Europe. What had often been thought to characterize medieval culture, namely, the universal institutions of a universal church and a universal empire, were in some change and certainly facing new tensions. What has often been thought of as the characteristic social and economic arrangement of the Middle Ages, namely, feudalism, was also undergoing tremendous changes and pressure in the fifteenth century and on into the sixteenth century. And so characteristic medieval institutions were facing important changes.

Some of the pressure for change came from new economic and social forces. Economically Europe was beginning to expand; it was the age in the late fifteenth century of discoveries, discoveries of how to reach the Far East by sailing around Africa, discoveries of reaching out to the New World. New trade routes were becoming important in Europe. The old trade routes with the East had been largely over land, goods reaching Constantinople from the Far East over land and then being shipped across the Mediterranean to Venice and carried over land up over the Alpine passes into northern Europe and distributed in northern Europe through the river systems, particularly the rivers of the Rhine, the Main, and the Danube. Increasingly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries new trade routes will develop, trade routes that will emphasize the importance of the Atlantic coast of Europe. Lisbon and Antwerp will become the new important port cities of Europe, and increasingly Europe will be facing a shift—a shift north and west in economic, political, and social importance.

Along with these economic factors were the economic and social changes facing towns. Towns and cities were becoming increasingly important in the life of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. To be sure, cities and towns had never disappeared in the Middle
Ages and even had been important in the Middle Ages, but the Middle Ages had been a primarily rural and agricultural culture. Now increasingly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, towns and commerce and infant industry will begin to become significant in European life. It meant that towns began to grow in size, and the growth of the size of towns meant a new social structure, the emergence of what we call a new class of people, namely, the middle class.

In the Middle Ages, people analyzing medieval society looked at themselves as being possessed of three classes of people—the nobles, who fought to defend society and govern it; the clergy, who prayed for society; and the peasants, who did the rural work of society, primarily agricultural work. But with the rise of towns a new group of people that didn’t fit clearly into any of these classifications began to emerge, and this class came to be known in our time as the middle class, a group of people who were neither peasants nor nobles who had more economic independence and had acquired more wealth than the peasants and yet had not been accepted into the higher social ranks of the nobility. These middle-class people became increasingly important economically. Not only did they conduct much of the commerce of Europe, but also they began to acquire capital, capital that became important to the doing of statecraft. They became a source of loans to the nobility and to monarchs, and indeed in many places, monarchs were able to centralize and concentrate their own power at the expense of the nobility by aligning themselves with the middle class and their economic power. So the rise of towns were a new economic and social factor that brought forward the middle class and served as a challenge to the traditional, rather futile social life and economic life of Europe.

As I mentioned, the new social and economic life that allowed nobles and monarchs to find themselves at odds and to compete for the alliance of the middle class with their money allowed a new political trend to develop in Europe. This trend has often been called centralism and allowed nation states increasingly to emerge and become prominent in Europe. During most of the Middle Ages, political life had been focused on what was known as the Holy Roman Empire as a universal institution. To a large extent the notion that there was one universal empire was a myth even in the Middle Ages, but nonetheless with the coming of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries nations became ever more important, and what made nations able to become important and to manifest their independence was the ability of many monarchs...
in Europe to centralize power in their own hands in their own nations.

Before we turn to the success stories of centralization and of nation building in Europe, we want to look briefly at the two major exceptions in Europe to this process of nation building and centralization. The first major exception is Italy. Italy in the fifteenth century and on into the early sixteenth century was a nation that was very much fragmented. It was a nation that had some consciousness of cultural cohesion because of its background in the Roman Empire long ago, but in fact politically it was greatly divided internally. Southern Italy by the early sixteenth century was controlled by Spain, and indeed the area known as the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily were an important agricultural center and provided much of the foodstuffs for Spain and for its empire.

The central part of Italy was known as the Papal States and was immediately governed by the pope himself. Northern Italy was much more divided. There were still free states in northern Italy, the largest being Milan and Florence and Venice, but in the northern part of Italy there was constant competition between Spanish and French influence in the smaller states and even in the larger free states. Indeed, war was fought in northern Italy in the late fifteenth century on efforts of the French to limit Spanish influence there and of the papacy to extend its influence from central Italy into the north. The ideal of a unified Italy was an ideal often talked about in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but the possibility remained beyond the reach of any of those with influence in the situation. Italy did become a source of recurring dynastic wars as varying Europeans tried to assert their power there. But the bottom line was that Italy remained divided and was not then really part of the centralizing character of European development.

The other exception to centralization in Europe at the time was in Germany. Germany, like Italy, had a cultural sense of cohesion; there was an ideal of Germany, and that ideal found some institutional expression in the Holy Roman Empire. As schoolboys used to joke, the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire. It was not an empire in the sense that it was not a strongly united administrative political unit. The empire was in fact a loosely associated group of territories, meeting in a parliamentary setting known as a Diet, where the various leaders would have opportunity to debate the policies
suggested by the emperor and vote up or down his efforts to raise money and troops for various policies. Therefore while there was an empire and there were institutions of the empire and there was an emperor, his authority and influence in the internal affairs of Germany were quite restricted.

The empire was also not Roman. It claimed to be the descendent of the Roman Empire; it claimed to continue historically the institutions of the Roman Empire, but in fact, it was separated from Italy; it was separated also historically from any genuine continuity with the Roman Empire. It claimed to be holy in its allegiance to historic Christianity, to the medieval Roman Catholicism that had developed in the West, and at least some of the emperors were very concerned to maintain that connection, as we’ll see as our study goes on.

The emperor himself was eager at many points to centralize power, because centralized power in the empire would mean centralized power in his own hands, but the territorial princes in particular opposed this and effectively blocked imperial efforts to centralize power. They wanted power decentralized; they wanted power to remain in their own hands. Interestingly most of these princes were successful in centralizing their own territories and increasing their own local power, but the success of the princes in maintaining their own local power meant that the emperor was even less able to centralize any power in his own hand.

One of the external factors that made the emperor’s efforts to centralize power unsuccessful was the continuing Turkish threat on the eastern border of the empire. In the sixteenth century, the Turkish Empire, the Ottoman Empire, was on the move and a constant threat to overrun the eastern borders of Europe. And so the emperor, who had many family and personal holdings in the eastern part of the European scene, constantly had to go to the Diet of the empire to ask for troops and for money to defend the empire, and that made the emperor dependent upon the princes and their goodwill and undermined his efforts at centralization.

The imperial dignity of the Holy Roman Empire since the fourteenth century had been vested continually in the Habsburg family. The Habsburg had replaced the Carolingians as the imperial family, but the emperor was still elected. Whenever an old emperor died there was an election held to elect the new emperor, and it had become traditional for the Habsburgs to be elected to the imperial dignity. The election was not a widespread
matter; there were only seven electors and therefore they were of
tremendous importance and influence particularly at the
times of an imperial vacancy. Four of the electors were secular
princes, and three of the electors were prince bishops of small
ecclesiastical territories, and these seven men then had in their
power the opportunity to elect the emperor, which as I said since
the fourteenth century had traditionally gone to some member of
the Habsburg family.

The Habsburg as a family had been increasingly extending their
authority and their influence. We'll trace that in a few minutes a
little more particularly. They had arisen as a family in the Austrian
Moravia-Silesia area of eastern Europe and more by marriage
than by conquest had added steadily to their influence and to
their holdings until by the early sixteenth century they became
the most prominent and important noble family in Europe.

If we turn now from Italy and Germany as two Christian entities
that were unsuccessful in their efforts to centralize, we can
look at some of the countries that were most successful in their
centralization policies. And we turn first of all to Spain. Spain, the
Iberian peninsula really, had been an area also of Europe where
several local states had had great power and great influence, and
it was only in the fifteenth century that Spain became largely
united as a country. In the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, the
principal areas of Spain, namely, Aragon and Castile, the largest
areas, were united in a common monarchy. For a time later in the
sixteenth century, even Portugal will be united to that monarchy
uniting all of the Iberian peninsula, but that union was not long-
lived. But the result was that for most of the Iberian peninsula,
Spain became the unifying factor and began to emerge for a
number of factors as Europe's most powerful single nation in the
sixteenth century.

In 1496 Ferdinand and Isabella had a daughter named Joanna of
Spain; she married Philip the Fair, who was the inheritor of the
Habsburg emperor Maximillian. Maximillian had himself combined
not only the Habsburg holdings in Germany and in Austria, but
by marriage had added to them the Burgundian holdings, an
important and wealthy section of France and of the Netherlands,
together through his marriage. So Maximillian through his
marriage had created an estate that would pass presumably to his
son Philip, and by the marriage of Philip to Joanna, the Habsburg
holdings would be united to the Spanish holdings. In fact, Philip
did not live as long as his father Maximillian, but Philip did fulfill
his responsibilities as the Hapsburg heir by producing himself a son. And so the son of Philip and Joanna, Charles, who would eventually become both emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Spain. So you can see from this somewhat complicated dynastic intermarriage, the Habsburg by the early sixteenth century placed themselves in a position to rule over a tremendous part of Europe.

Charles from his Hapsburg ancestors would inherit the imperial dignity of the Holy Roman Empire. He would inherit personal lands in Austria, Moravia, and Silesia, and he would also inherit from the fortuitous marriage of his grandfather the Netherlands and an important section of France. From his Spanish side, Charles would inherit not only Spain itself but also the Spanish holdings in Italy, and so the centralization in Spain, accomplished by Ferdinand and Isabella, led ultimately to not only the centralization of power in Spain but also the connection of the Spanish power with Habsburg power in northern Italy to create in the hands of Charles a most impressive and powerful political influence.

Spanish centralization was augmented by Spanish discoveries in the New World and particularly Spanish discovery of gold in the New World. Spain, which because of its centralization was in an institutional position to flourish as a major power, now had the economic backing also to advance itself politically in Europe, and as I said, the combination of Spanish centralization and New World gold made Spain the most formidable power in Europe in the sixteenth century.

Perhaps the most unified state in Europe was France in the early sixteenth century. France through a long period of evolution in the Middle Ages had come to have a strongly centralized monarchy, and that centralized monarchy was expressed in the person of King Francis I, of France who came to the throne in 1515. Francis I would reign over France down until his death in 1547, and he was one of several rulers then in early sixteenth-century Europe who had a relatively long and stable reign and was able to be a rather constant factor on the stage of Europe. Francis I was quite contemporary with Charles. Charles became king of Spain in 1516 and then was elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1519 after the death of his grandfather. So Charles and Francis come to the scene to center stage in European politics at about the same time, and they depart relatively close to one another—Francis dying as I said in 1547 and Charles abdicating in 1555. So France and Spain are really featured in much of the history of the early
sixteenth century as Europe's two most prominent powers.

Another country that we must mention as showing this ability to centralize is England. England in the early sixteenth century is definitely a third-rate power compared with Spain and France, and part of England's relative weakness comes from its long history of wars and difficulties, particularly the War of the Roses in the fifteenth century, a war of dynastic secession in which there was tremendous competition for the throne. The War of the Roses finally came to an end with the emergence of a new dynasty in England, the Tudors, and the Tudors gradually were able, in the persons of King Henry VII and then King Henry VIII, to build up a new and increasingly powerful dynasty and to centralize. When Henry VII came to the throne, he found much of the English nobility dead from the War of the Roses, and this enabled him to create a significant new nobility that were quite devoted and attached to the crown, and this aided very much his efforts to centralize power in his own hands.

He also carefully tried to stimulate the English economy and the English military might, and all of that then was handed on to his son, Henry VIII. Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509 and lived until 1547, the same year in which Francis I died. So you can see we have these three prominent monarchs: Charles, who had become to be known as Charles V as emperor; Francis I of France; and then Henry VIII of England, all having lengthy monarchies and all of just about the same period of history.

There's one other political unit that ought to be mentioned in terms of the centralization of power. It's an empire really outside of Europe, but nonetheless of tremendous importance, and this is the Ottoman Empire that we referred to already. The Ottoman Empire was perhaps the most centralized political unit of the period. It was centered in Turkey but had spread to what is modern Bulgaria and Romania and in 1526 would overrun Hungary and come to the very gates of Vienna, so that the expansion of the Ottoman Turkish Empire was a very important factor of political life in Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century. And there was a great sultan who ruled over that empire in this period, Suleiman II, who reigned from 1520 to 1566, a man of tremendous political and military ability who kept constant pressure then on Europe on its eastern border.

That in a very brief way looks at something of the political setting of Europe, a setting in which we find pressure to centralize power
in emerging nation-states, a pressure that was associated with a kind of rising nationalism, a rising national pride. A pride that was present in Italy and Germany, as well as in the other nation-states. A sense of the nation’s own distinctive historic importance and therefore a desire to see the nation in some ways glorified and recognized for its importance. This nationalistic and centralizing pressure was one of the factors that made the Reformation possible. Some of the Reformation leaders found it possible to align themselves with this rising nationalist influence at the expense of the universal church, and there was a willingness on the part of some then to see a new church order as one way to support and augment that independence of the nations. And what we’ll see as we study the history of the Reformation is how often political and religious factors went hand in hand with the course of the Reformation in a given area. And so we’ll be returning to political considerations from time to time, but I hope that very brief and rapid overview provides some background for some of the political factors that we’ll be returning to as we go along.

Not only were there political factors in the background of the Reformation, but there were important religious and ecclesiastical factors as well. To adequately look at the religious background of the Reformation, we have to look at the whole history of the church, and we can’t do that now, but I want to point out a couple of perhaps the most prominent issues that we need to bear in mind as we look at the religious background of the Reformation.

The first point that perhaps should be made is the changing image of the papacy in the mind of Europe in the centuries before the Reformation. On the one hand the papacy had been a leader in terms of centralization of power for Europe, almost a model for the rest of Europe. The papacy in the course of the Middle Ages had increasingly concentrated power in its own hands at the expense in most cases of the national churches and of the local bishops. The papacy increasingly had achieved what is often called a papal monarchy in the church. Whereas in the Holy Roman Empire, the emperor had severely limited powers, the papacy had managed in the course of the Middle Ages to bring almost unlimited powers, centralized powers, in its own hand. And to wield those powers, the papacy had created in its curia or in its court a very effective form of administration. The papacy was one of the first to develop an effective international form of diplomacy of ambassadorial representatives. It developed an effective method of communicating with the papacy, and it was a relatively well-managed diplomatic corps, then, that served the
One problem that the papacy constantly faced was the problem of how to raise money, and this was a source of decline in the papacy because the pressure to raise money to finance the life of the church and its territories and its diplomatic system was a constant temptation then to corrupt—to the sale of offices, to the sale of other spiritual remedies in the life of the church. A number of the popes were also drawn in particularly to the question of how to expand their territories and their influences in central Italy. For some of the popes the point of these territories in central Italy was to guarantee their own independence; for others it was a manifestation of political ambition and a desire to see the papacy wielding not only spiritual authority in Europe but also temporal and secular authority.

The involvement of the papacy both in corrupt economic practices and in political infighting in Europe led to an undermining of respect for the papacy and an undermining of the papacy’s claim to a universal spiritual dominion. The idea began gradually to filter down to people in Europe that the pope was as greedy and as ambitious a political figure as many of the monarchs of Europe, and this seriously undermined the spiritual claims of the papacy.

Certain particular occurrences in the late Middle Ages further undermined this problem of papal authority and credibility. The first of these occurrences is what is known as the Babylonian captivity of the church when the papacy was removed from Rome to the small independent territory of Avignon in France. The Babylonia Captivity of the church, that is, the time the papacy was at Avignon, was from 1309 to 1377. This was not purely a period of captivity. The papacy, in fact, most of that period lived quite willingly in France, but there was a sense of the strangeness of the anomaly involved in the bishop of Rome being separated from Rome. For many Roman Catholic thinkers this was a tragedy, and for many it raised questions about the ways in which the papacy could legitimately be called the descendants of the bishop of Rome and the descendants of Peter if they were far from Rome.

The Babylonia captivity ended in an even greater tragedy for the church, a period that became known as the period of the great schism, from 1378 to 1415. When the pope in 1377 decided to return to Rome, this led to a division and led some of the French cardinals in particular to withdraw from the curia and to elect a new pope. Europe soon found itself with one pope in Rome and
another pope in Avignon. This led to a real scandal because most medieval Christians had come to believe that it was crucial to their salvation to be in fellowship with the pope, and the question now posed to Europe was, Who is the true pope? Europeans were forced to take sides, some nations backing one pope and the other nations the other pope, and the result was that all of Europe came to be divided in its allegiance between the two popes. When a country expressed its allegiance to the one pope, the other pope proceeded to excommunicate his followers, and soon all of Europe found itself excommunicated by one pope or the other. This was clearly an intolerable situation spiritually for people who took their allegiance to the papacy seriously. It was an intolerable situation in terms of the survival of the papacy as a long-term universal institution. And so many in the church began to call for a council to settle the situation, and this was the culmination then of conciliar theory and the conciliar movement.

There had been thinkers in the Middle Ages already who had said that ultimately it’s a council that rules the church, not the pope, and while the pope may most of the time administer the church in extreme situations, councils needed to be called that were superior to the pope. Other Christian theologians and thinkers were very concerned about this conciliar theory, were concerned that it might be used to weaken the pope and weaken the unity of the church. But facing the great schism, facing the fact of two popes competing with one another, many decided that a council needed to be called, and a council was called at Pisa in 1409.

The Council at Pisa was a very conservative council in many ways, and their hope was that they could get both of the popes to resign and allow the Council of Pisa to elect a new pope. They were hopeful that the council would not be forced to depose a pope but that the popes would continue to the well-being of the church by resigning. That didn’t happen. The popes refused to resign, and Pisa went ahead and elected a pope of its own, and the result of that was to leave Europe with three popes instead of two, which was not really a help.

A few years later, then, a second council was called with a somewhat more radical agenda, the Council of Constance, meeting in the town on the Swiss-German border. The Council of Constance met from 1414 to 1417 and took a number of important actions. The Council of Constance in its decree *Haec Sancta* declared that a council was superior to the pope and therefore could remove a pope who had showed himself to be utterly unworthy of his
office. They also adopted a decree known as *Frequens* declaring the councils ought to meet every ten years to assist the pope with the administration of the church. They also then proceeded to depose the remaining popes and to elect under the auspices of the Council of Constance a new pope, Pope Martin V.

The effect of the Council of Constance was to end the great schism, was to allow a new unity in the church, and all of Europe recognized Pope Martin V as the true new pope. The Council of Constance is also noted in history for its condemnation of the teachings of John Wycliffe and for its ordering the execution of John Hus, the execution of Hus coming just a hundred years before the outbreak of the Reformation and the recommitment to a number of his ideas and ideals.

In accordance with the decrees of the Council of Constance, another council was called, this one to meet at Basel in 1431. Some hoped that this calling of the Council of Basel would introduce in effect a kind of parliamentary system into the life of the church, that Basel would represent a beginning of a period of regular meetings of councils to advise and to aid the pope in the administration of the church. But the Council at Basel was divided between those who wanted to see a basic loyalty and subservience to the papacy and those who wanted strongly to assert the supremacy of the council over the papacy. The issue came to a head when Pope Eugenius IV in 1438 ordered the council to move from Basel to the Italian city of Ferrara. Eugenius felt that having the council near Rome would allow him to exercise more influence over the council. The council at that point split—part of the council moving to Ferrara and part of the council remaining at Basel. The part at Ferrara became completely subservient to the pope; the part at Basel deposed Pope Eugenius IV and elected a new pope. Most Europeans looked at this situation and said, Conciliarism that was supposed to end the great schism now appears to be introducing a new schism, and in many ways they actions of the radical group at Basel spelled the end of conciliarism as attractive movement to most Europeans. Most Europeans concluded that the church was really much better off with the papal monarchy with a single man in control than some experiment in parliamentary procedure which might lead to constant conflict between the papacy and the council.

All of this, you see, led to a general questioning of the role of the pope, of the authority of the pope, and of the relation of the pope to other institutions in the church, and from time to time
showed the papacy in a less than advantageous light. While the failure of the Council of Basel that dragged on its northern radical meetings until 1449 should have given a great opportunity to the papacy, there were other problems that the papacy soon found itself facing and that is in terms of what is called the Renaissance papacy. These were a series of popes who had a good deal of talent, to be sure, but were very deficient in terms of spirituality. The one usually looked to as one of the first of these popes is Innocent VIII, who died in 1492. Innocent VIII had sixteen illegitimate children whom he openly acknowledged, and [this fact] pointed to the spiritual decline and moral decay of the papacy, which also undermined considerably its spiritual authority, or at least had the potential of undermining its spiritual authority. It gave a great deal for the Protestant critics of the papacy to work with in years to come.

Innocent VIII was succeeded by Alexander VI, who was pope from 1492 to 1503 and was perhaps the most corrupt of all of the popes of this period. Luther called him the *mysterium iniquitatis*, the mystery of iniquity. Alexander VI was Rodrigo de Borja before his election. He devoted his life to trying to increase the territorial and political power of the papacy in a most ruthless and secularized manner. He was quite a good administrator, but he was corrupt in his personal life, keeping his mistress in the Vatican with him and openly acknowledging and promoting his illegitimate children, including Cesare Borgia, whom he made an archbishop and cardinal in spite of Cesare’s notoriously immoral life. Alexander was trying to prepare the way for Cesare’s election as pope after him, but Cesare died of syphilis before his father. Alexander's daughter was the infamous Lucrezia Borgia, a notorious poisoner and immoral woman of her age. And so the moral character of the papacy was in serious decline.

Alexander VI was succeeded by Julius II, who was pope from 1503 to 1513. His goal was to unify all of Italy under the control of the papacy, and Julius II took up the sword to fight on the battlefield, to wear armor, to try to expand the territorial holdings of the papacy. This was considered a scandal in most of Europe, that he, vicar of Christ, the Prince of Peace, should take a sword in his hand to fight over territory; [the idea] was repellant to many in Europe. This led to the writing of a tract, a satirical tract, which many have attributed to Erasmus, the great Renaissance humanist, but it’s a tract called *Julius Exclusus*, “Julius Excluded,” and describes Julius dying and going to heaven and not being permitted into heaven for the terrible way in which he conducted the papacy.
Julius did some other things for which he is also well remembered. It was Julius who became the great patron of Michelangelo and the painting of the Sistine Chapel. It was Julius who began to get an image for a great cathedral at Saint Peter’s, the cathedral that we know today, and so in many ways he began some of the architectural and artistic renaissance in Rome that we are so familiar with today. Some of you many years ago may have seen the movie or read the book, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, and that’s the story of Michelangelo in his working with Julius II to try to beautify Rome. To finance this great artistic and architectural renovation in Rome, Julius II established the general indulgence, and we’ll talk later about the impact of that general indulgence on the life of the church.

One other Renaissance pope ought to be mentioned here, and that’s Leo X, who succeeded Julius II. He reigned from 1513 to 1521. He was a Medici pope, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent of Florence, and Leo was not quite as personally corrupt or quite as politically ambitious as some of his predecessors. But as the pope who was reigning when Luther first came on the scene, Leo was totally inadequate to the crisis that the church would face. Leo on assuming the papacy had said that God had given him the papacy and he intended to enjoy it, and his aim was very much artistic and literary in character. He was personally rather honest and in his own way rather devout, but he was much more a literary and artistic man interested in the cultural [aspect] of the Renaissance than he was a theologian or one who could cope with the challenge of Protestantism as it emerged in his own day. He was the pope who authorized the excommunication of Martin Luther.

We want to look at one other crucial issue in the life of the church that is related to the papacy and its centralization of power; namely, the way in which the papacy had began to make use of the sacrament of penance both to raise money and to extend its own influence. But our time is pretty well up today, so we’ll pause here having looked at the background to the Reformation both in the political setting and now in some of the religious background of the Reformation and continue our look at the religious background of the Reformation in our next lecture.