

Major Periods of Church History



The Early Church

Persecuted Church

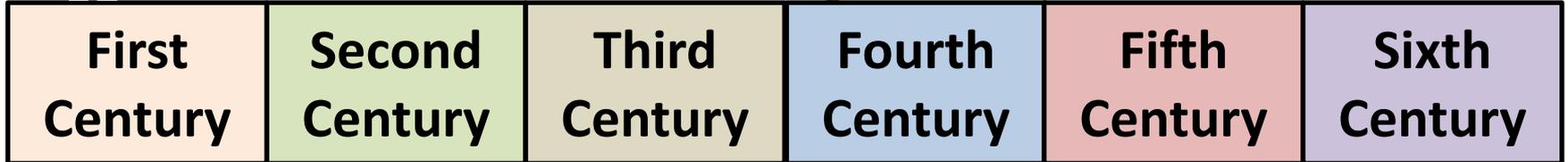
Imperially Sanctioned Church

33 – Death, Burial, & Resurrection of Christ



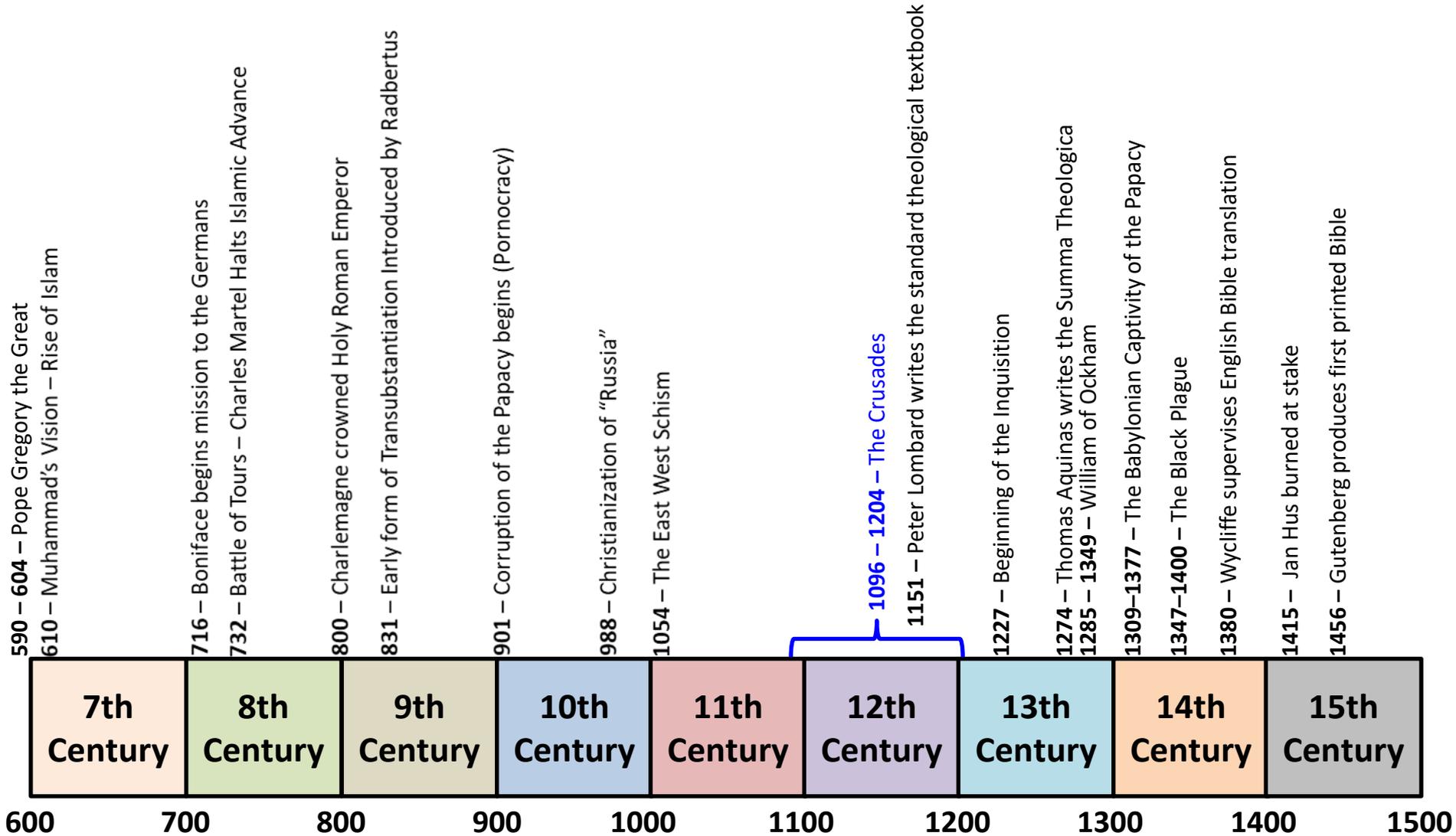
313 - Edict of Milan
325 – The Council of Nicaea

354-430 – Augustine of Hippo
410 – Rome sacked by Visigoths

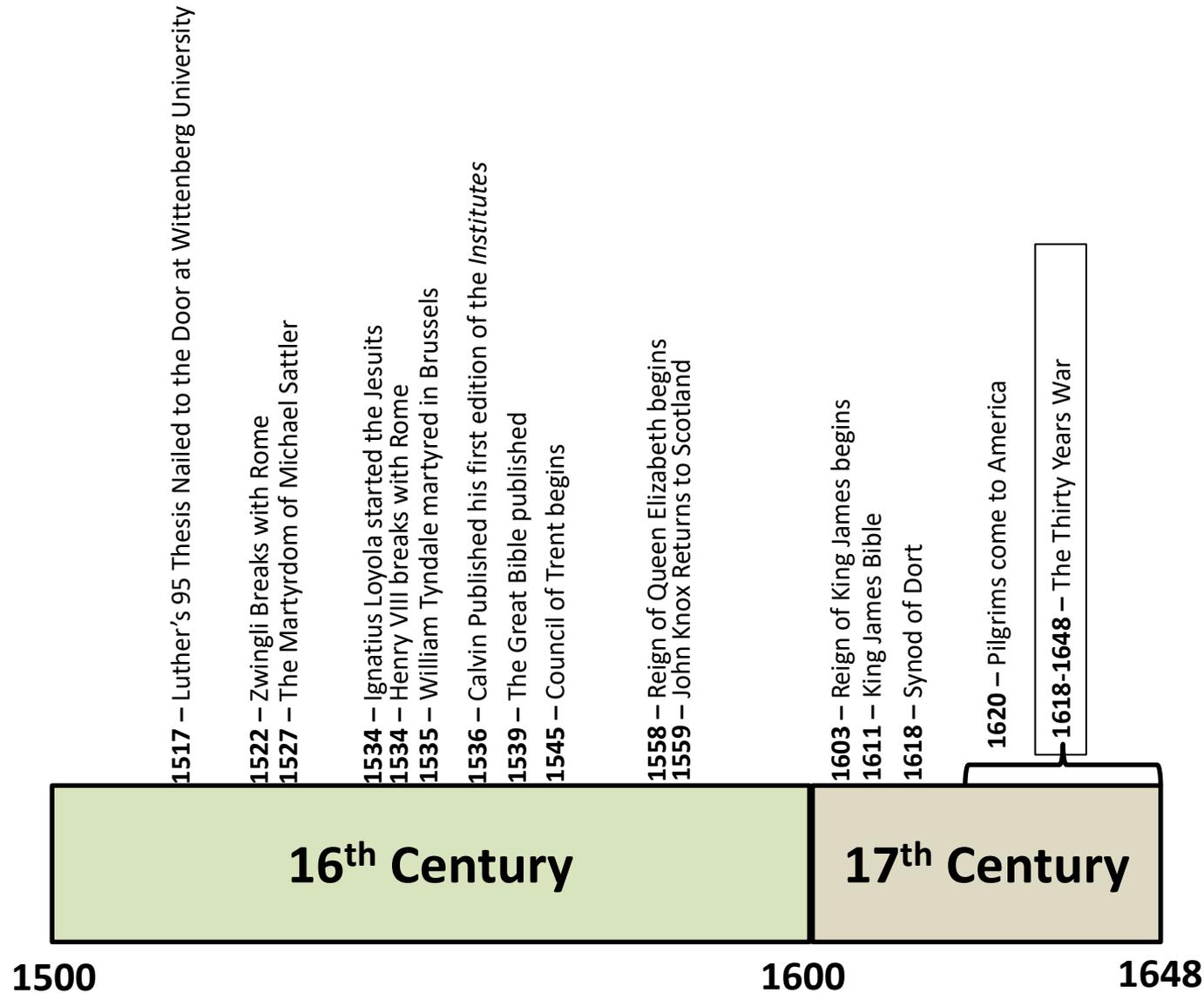


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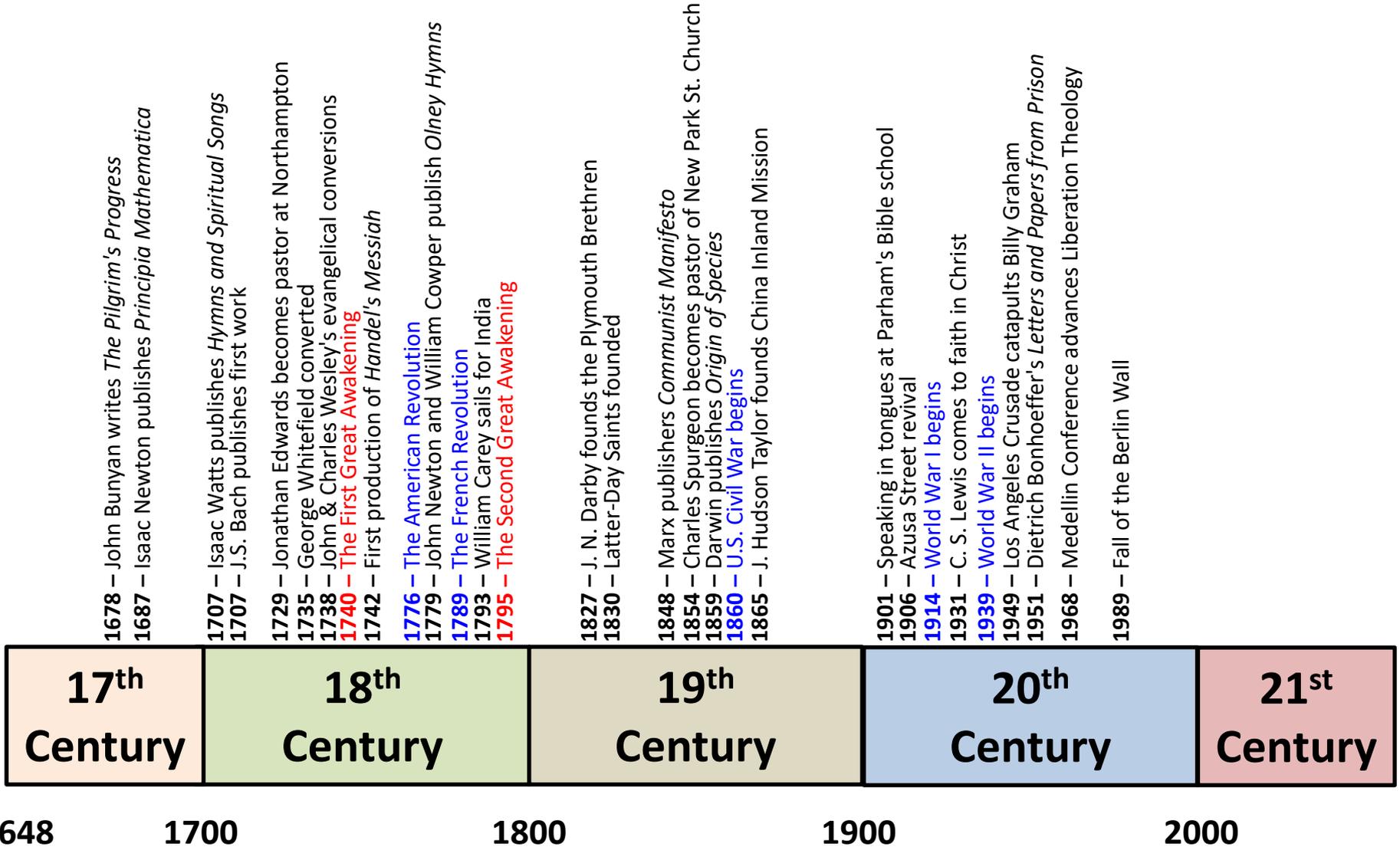
The Medieval Church



The Reformation



The Modern Church



Five Men the Lord Used to Preserve His Church



You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mat 16:18)

The Emperor Constantine



The Emperor Constantine

- Constantine (AD 272–337) is sometimes referred to as the "Savior of Christianity".
- Prior to his conversion, Christianity was still a persecuted religion in the Roman Empire. As late as 303 A.D., the Emperor Diocletian launched a massive persecution campaign against Christians.
- With the conversion of Constantine in 312 A.D., Christianity eventually became not only respectable within Roman society, but also ascendant.

The Emperor Constantine

- In 312 A.D., Constantine marched on Rome, in an attempt to take over control of the Western Empire. Arrayed against him were the forces of Maxentius, four times as strong.
- Maxentius waited in Rome with his Italian troops and the elite Praetorian Guard, confident no one could successfully invade the city.
- Maxentius turned to pagan oracles, and was given a prophecy that the “enemy of the Romans” would perish.
- So, bolstered by the prophecy, Maxentius left the city to meet his foe (Constantine), who was still miles away.

The Emperor Constantine

- Constantine, up to this point, had been a sun-worshipper.
- As the story goes, on the night before his battle with Maxentius, Constantine had a dream in which *chi* and *rho*, the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστος), appeared one on top of the other in the shape of a cross:

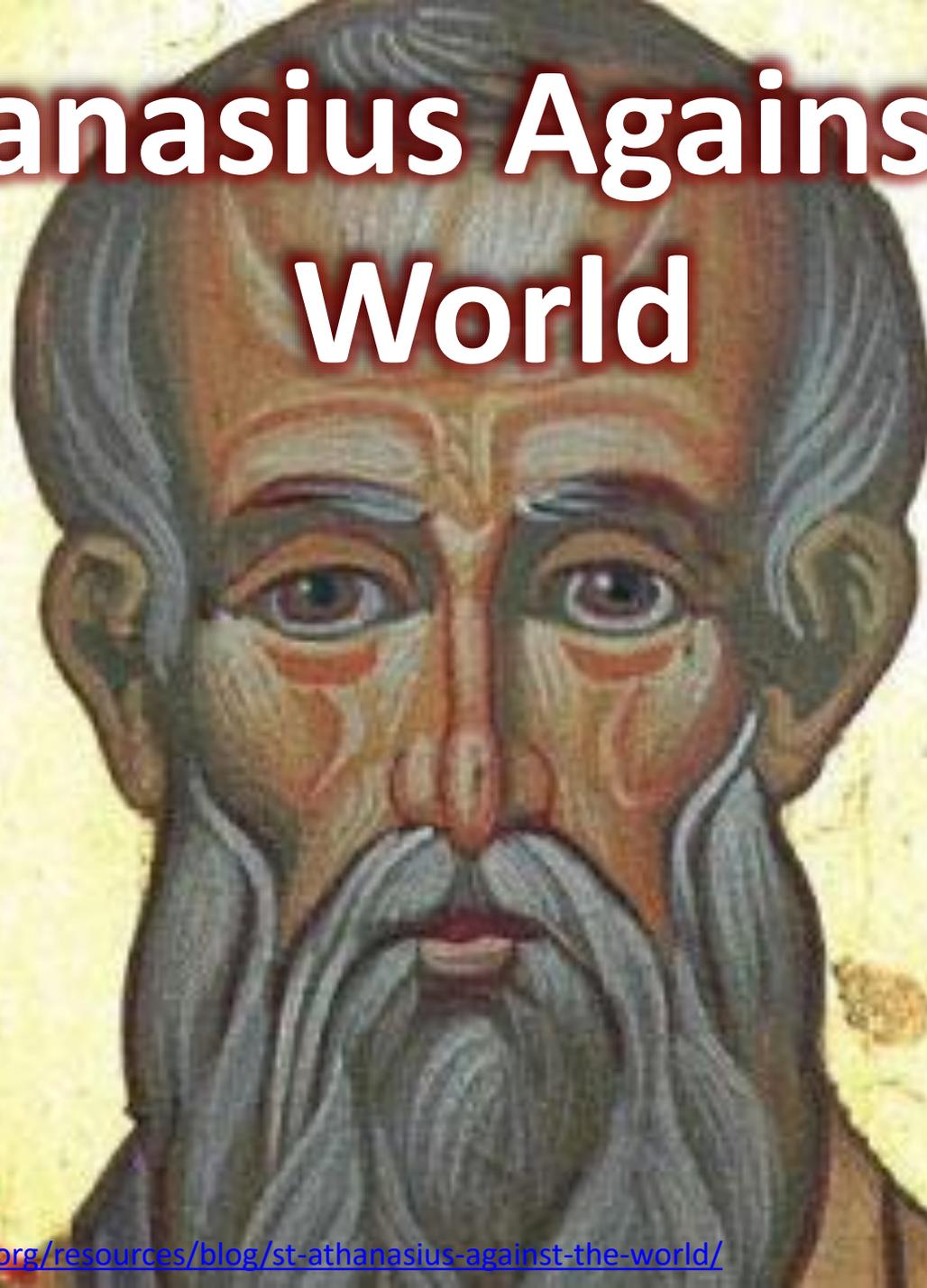


- Constantine is said to have seen or heard the words, “By this sign you will conquer.”

The Emperor Constantine

- Constantine is then said to have prayed to the God of the Christians for victory, and won an amazing and crushing triumph over Maxentius who was killed in battle at the Milvian Bridge.
- So, at the age of thirty-two, Constantine was now emperor of the West.
- He believed that the Christian God had granted him victory, and from then on Constantine acted as the great champion and protector of Christians.

Athanasius Against the World



Athanasius Against the World

- Athanasius (AD 296–373) is perhaps the most influential of all the Early Church Fathers, with the possible exception of Augustine.
- From the point of view of the supporters of Trinitarianism, the young Athanasius is the hero of the 325 A.D. Council of Nicaea.
- He successfully argued that the Godhead is made up of three persons of the “same substance” (*homoousion*) – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Thus, the Son is not on a lower level than the Father, and the Son is **not** a created being.
- As a result, Athanasius was known during his lifetime as the “Father of Orthodoxy”.

Athanasius Against the World

- During the course of the decades following Nicaea, Athanasius was removed from his position as bishop *five times*, once by a force of 5,000 soldiers coming in the front door while he escaped out the back!
- By the end of the sixth decade of the century, it looked as if Nicaea would be defeated.
- Jerome would later describe this moment in history as the time when “the whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian.”

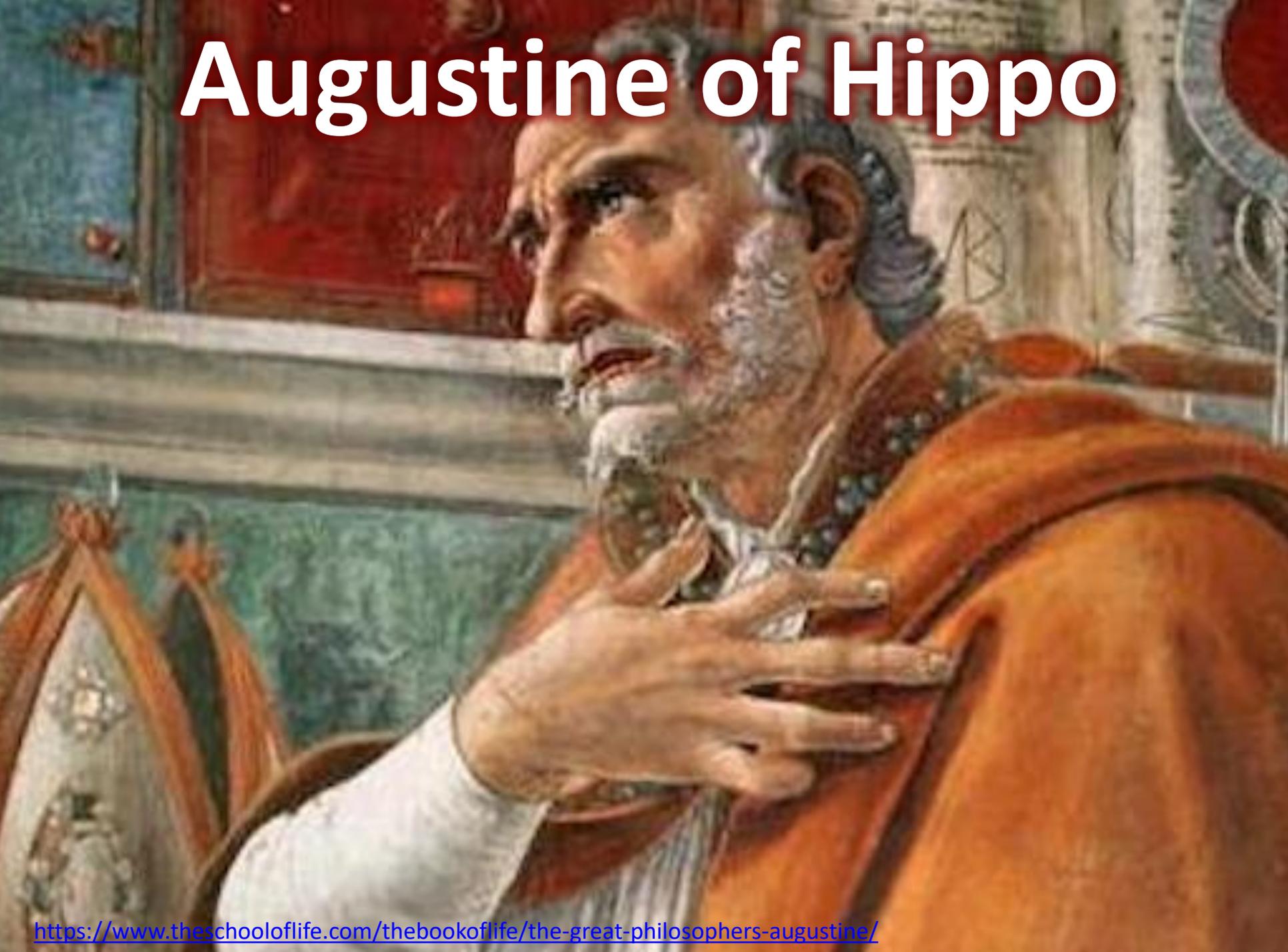
Athanasius Against the World

- Yet, in the midst of this darkness, a lone voice remained strong.
- Arguing from Scripture, fearlessly reproaching error, writing from refuge in the desert, along the Nile, or in the crowded suburbs around Alexandria, Athanasius continued the fight.
- His unwillingness to give up — even when banished by the Emperor, disfellowshipped by the established church, and condemned by local councils and bishops alike — gave rise to the phrase, *Athanasius contra mundum*: “Athanasius against the world.”
- Convinced that Scripture is “sufficient above all things,” Athanasius acted as a true “Protestant” in his day.

Athanasius Against the World

- As it turned out, then, Athanasius was *not* all alone against the world.
- He lived to see the triumph of the cause he championed.
- He died a peaceful death at the age of seventy-five and could rest assured that the creed he had fought for at Nicaea and afterward was the creed of the church: “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

Augustine of Hippo



Augustine of Hippo

- St. Augustine (AD 354–430) is perhaps the most influential of all of the Early Church Fathers, establishing core Church doctrine of many topics, including baptism, predestination, original sin, and salvation by grace.
- He wrote over 100 works, the most famous being *Confessions*, an autobiography of his wild younger years, and *City of God* and *On Christian Doctrine*, both theological tracts.
- Augustine's theology and writing were strongly influenced by **two** major issues that he encountered in his ministry:
 - **Donatism** and teachings related to sacraments and the unity of the Catholic Church
 - **Pelagianism** and teachings related to our natural ability/inability to have faith and to live the Christian life.

Augustine of Hippo

- Pelagius held that all human beings were born into the world as sinless as Adam was before he fell; the apostasy of Adam had not corrupted humanity's nature, but had merely set a fatally bad example, which most of Adam's sons and daughters had freely followed.
- Augustine recognized that Pelagius's theology was heretical and was definitely contrary to his own experience.
- He felt that nothing less than irresistible divine power (grace) could have initially **saved** him from his sin and only constantly inflowing divine grace could continue to **keep him** in the Christian life.
- In Augustine's view, Adam's sin had **enormous** consequences: his power to please God was gone. In a word, he **died**— spiritually, and soon physically.
- But Adam was not alone in his ruin.

Augustine of Hippo

- The Western Church broadly accepted Augustine's doctrines of sin and salvation, with some modifications.
- Most of the great Western theologians of the Middle Ages were "Augustinians" in their basic understanding of human sin and divine grace.
- So were the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century.
- The East, by contrast, followed the Semi-Pelagian "synergist" outlook which John Cassian had championed in France.
- Because of Augustine's view of the Catholic Church, he held that the grace which saved the elect was channeled through the one true Church and its sacraments.
- If anyone lived and died outside the Catholic Church, that showed he was not one of the elect.

Augustine of Hippo

- Later, the Protestant Reformers *rejected* Augustine's doctrine of the Church, and taught that the Holy Spirit bestowed grace on the elect by creating personal faith in the gospel, written or preached.
- In this way the Reformers "liberated God's grace" from its confinement in one exclusive Church.
- The Protestant Reformation has often been called "the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church".

Charles Martel ("The Hammer")



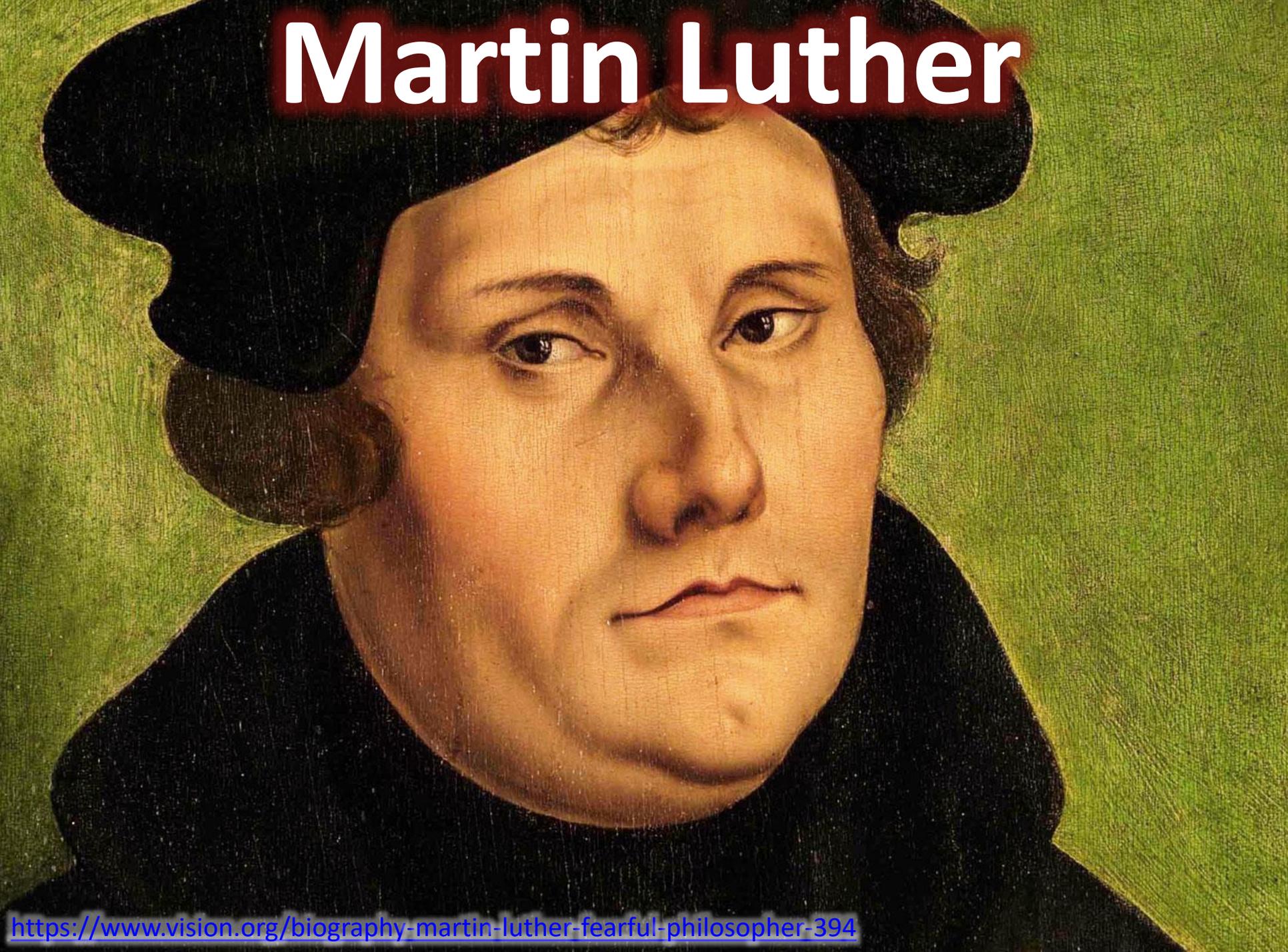
Charles Martel (“The Hammer”)

- It is easy to forget in modern times that by the time of the First Crusade, Islam had (from the point of view of Christendom) made ***alarming*** gains throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and even into Europe itself.
- Muslims had occupied the Holy Lands by the end of the 7th century, and had built the Dome of the Rock in A.D. 700 on top of one of the most sacred sites in Judaism.

Charles Martel (“The Hammer”)

- In the 8th century, Muslims attacked (unsuccessfully) Constantinople, the center of the Eastern Church, and took over Spain.
- Muslim armies had gotten as far into the heart of Europe as Tours, in modern day France, when they were finally checked in 732 A.D. by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours.
- If Charles Martel hadn't stopped the Muslim incursion into Europe when he did, there literally might not be any Christianity today.

Martin Luther



Martin Luther

- On October 31, 1517, an obscure Augustinian monk named Martin Luther tacked his 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg Castle in Germany.
- While the 95 Theses was essentially a laundry list of things that annoyed Martin Luther about the Church of the day (especially focusing in on the sale of indulgences), in time, using the then revolutionary technology of the printing press, the theological views of Martin Luther would be known throughout Europe, and would be the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation.

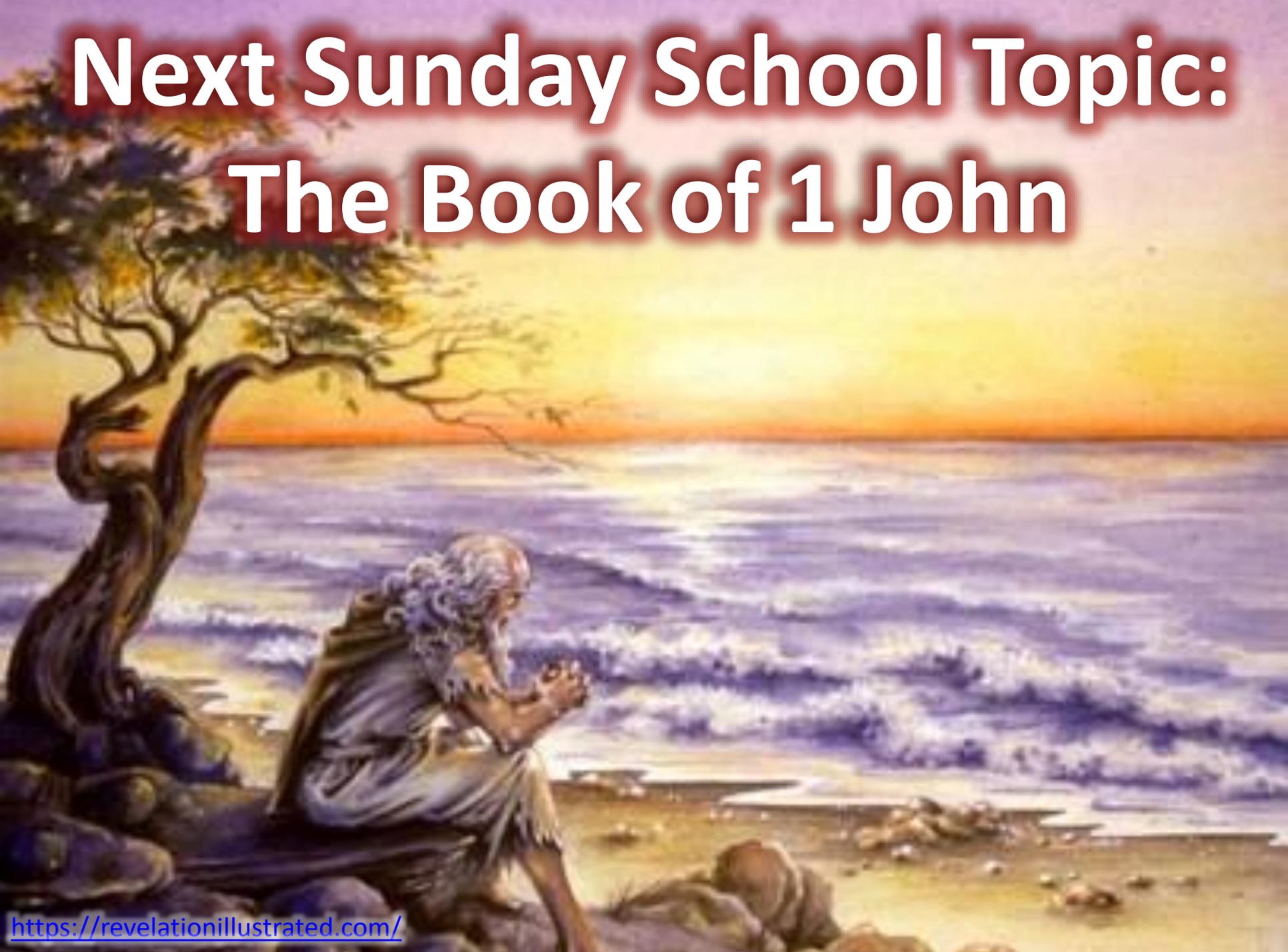
Martin Luther

- In April of 1521, the Council (Diet) of Worms was convened by Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.
- Luther was ordered to recant his theological views (which included a “priesthood of believers” and “salvation through faith alone”).
- At Worms, both Church and State were arrayed against Luther.
- His simple reply after two days of cross-examination changed the course of history forever:
 - *“Here I stand. I can do no other.”*

Martin Luther

- It would be hard to overstate the effect of Martin Luther.
- By successfully refuting the pope and his bull of excommunication (1520), Luther lessened the hegemony of the Roman Church over Europe.
- By successfully refuting the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Luther helped bring about the rise of nationalism.
- And, of course, Luther was the spark that ignited the Reformation, which forever changed the face of Christianity in the world.

Next Sunday School Topic: The Book of 1 John



Class Discussion Time



***Class Discussion Time**

- We have seen a number of times in history where the Lord preserved his church in the face of her enemies, both spiritual and physical. What do you see as the greatest spiritual and/or physical threats against the church in our day?
- Do you think that our study of church history these last three years (we started in June 2018) has been helpful in giving you a perspective on how God has worked in history and what he may be doing in the present day?
- What is your favorite part of church history and/or the church history series?
- What would you hope to see me cover in the upcoming 1 John series?