

The Reformation: An Introduction

Reformation: a reforming, a change for the better; improvement

The church had become very powerful. The church began projects to design & decorate their Cathedrals. This was very expensive. To pay for this & for their wars, the Popes devised new ways to raise money.

Indulgences were sold to people. These were to reduce the punishment a sinner would suffer after he/she died. Soon people could buy indulgences to pay for their sins. People even bought indulgences to pay for the sins of their dead relatives. Before long, faithful people started to protest such practices.

By the 1500s, reformers, such as **Martin Luther, & John Calvin had begun to reject the authority of the Pope & establish their own churches → Protestant Churches.**

The Catholic Church eventually launched a counterattack against Protestant groups & reformed itself.

However, its efforts came too late, & Europe remained divided between Protestants & Catholics.

The Church during the Renaissance:

- a. Teacher of People - usually the upper class
- b. Preserved knowledge (kept written records and documents)
- c. Protected people
- d. Source of beliefs
- e. Leaders took an active part in politics and influenced many decisions
- f. Provided sacraments necessary for salvation

The Reformation:

Reformation: a reforming; a change for the better.

It will begin as an attempt to correct corrupt practices but will degenerate into centuries-long war.

The **Roman Catholic Church** was the only form of Christianity in Western Europe and it had become very powerful. To show this power, they began projects to design and decorate cathedrals. This was very expensive. To pay for these, their wars and the Crusades, popes devised new ways to raise money.

Indulgences were sold to individuals to reduce the punishment a sinner would suffer in **Purgatory**. In today's world, it would be analogous to bribing a judge to lessen one's sentence. The richer someone was, the easier it was to buy an indulgence from the church to cover the guilt of one's sin. The Church was becoming even wealthier (beyond the land it owned which produced rents and profits from its produce.)

The Medieval Church created an intermediary place after death for the less saintly: **Purgatory**. Most Christians would go there to purge (cleanse) their sins before entering heaven. To speed up their loved ones' time of suffering there, people could pray for them. Even better, they could pay for **requiem masses** to be said on their behalf. These rites required priests who were paid to perform the service. Again, the rich alone could afford such observances. For many, this contravened Jesus' beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor..."

The corruption led to a desire for reform. **Martin Luther** wanted the Church to return to its roots in the Pauline (St. Paul) Early Church. He argued that only the Scriptures determined the beliefs of a Christian and that traditions that developed after and against the New Testament should be rejected.

Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin began to reject the authority of the Pope and establish their own churches (the future **Protestant** Church - "protest"). Soon, these theological conflicts began to be used by politics to support their geopolitical conflicts.

The Catholic Church eventually launched a counterattack (**The Counter Reformation**) against the Protestant groups and reformed itself. However, its efforts came too late, and Europe remained divided between Protestants and Catholics.

Characters of the Reformation

Martin Luther (1483-1546):

German Dominican monk argued against the Church's corrupt use of money to 'sell salvation'. He wrote **95 Theses** and nailed them to the church door in Wittenburg. To simplify, he argued that a person was justified (saved) solely by God's grace (gift). Faith became a more individualistic response to God rather than a participation in a corporate institution. He was declared an outlaw by the Church and, so, he created his own church, which would become the Lutheran Church. He insisted that the dogmas one should believe should be Bible based - '**sola scriptura**'.

Gutenberg's printing press allowed for Luther's ideas to spread relatively rapidly across the continent. The Lutheran Church will be embraced by German princes in their fight against the Pope's power.

John Calvin (1509-1564):

Calvin taught that God's grace (freely given gift) was undeserved by completely depraved humanity. God transcended his creatures' existences and the gulf in holiness that separated Creator and creature was bridgeable only by God's action. Humans could do nothing to deserve salvation. To highlight God's separation from the fallen world, Calvin argued for double predestination: God decided before time who would go to heaven or hell.

His French followers were called **Huguenots**.

Henry VIII:

In 1509, Henry took the throne of England. He was forced to marry his dead brother's wife, Catherine of Aragon, Spain. They had a daughter, Mary, but no son. Henry hated his first wife, but he fell in love with one of her servants (Anne Boleyn). He wanted to divorce his first wife but the Church refused to annul the marriage. Furthermore, the king wanted to stop the flow of money from England to the Church's coffers (Purgatory, land); he needed money to fight wars on the continent. Thus, he passed two laws: he divorced Catherine and enacted **The Act of Supremacy** [The Church of England (Anglican), with the King as its head]. England was for the English. Anne produced **Elizabeth I**, one of the greatest monarchs in English history.

Counter Reformation:

The church initiated some reforms but became entrenched in its attack on the Reformers, considered heretics, evil believers. The Church continued to grow and spread throughout the world as Portuguese and Spanish explorers claimed New World lands for their Catholic monarchs. Ignatius Loyola formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), whose priests were educated to evangelize the world to Catholicism, for which goal they were very successful.

Results of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation:

The universal rule of the Roman Catholic Church was broken. Europe was divided between different nations and different churches; hence, war lasted for centuries.

The Jesuits spread the Catholic faith throughout the Americas, Asia and Africa. Protestant nations followed their fellow Europeans to claim lands in the New World and these rivalries will lead to wars across the globe.

Views on Science and Humanism

The Church viewed science and **humanism** (belief that humanity should be the focus of study) as a threat to its power. Many of the Church's 'scientific' teachings were disproved with the scientific method. Because the Church was not only teaching Christianity but also worldviews (e.g. terra centrism) that failed new observations, some started doubting the Church's teaching authority. These doubts combined with the Protestant challenge made Church leaders defensive, leading them to attack perceived threats.

To make sure people followed the Church's teachings, the **Inquisition** was set up to try people for **heresy**, beliefs opposed by the church. This was used throughout Europe but mainly in Spain to 'deal' with '**conversos**', Jews who had converted to Catholicism to avoid expulsion. The Church feared their conversion was not authentic and that they practised their Judaism in secret.

The Inquisition, led by the **Dominicans** (named after St. Dominic), enforced a strict interpretation of the Bible and Church law. Contrary to Christian teaching, the Inquisitors tortured and killed many thousands.

Using this information, answer the following questions:

Why was the Church important to people?

How did Purgatory meet human needs about the afterlife?

How did aspects of this teaching betray core Christian beliefs?

In what way did spiritual teachings become ideologies for political leaders?

Besides theological differences, what attracted political leaders to reject the Catholic Church?

How did the Reformation influence the entire world?

Why is the Renaissance and Reformation the start of the modern world?

Why do you think Luther can be considered a creator of modern, democratic society?

The Reformation

Introduction: The Church and Its Critics

At the opening of the 16th century, nearly all Western Europeans were united in their religion. They looked to the Roman Catholic Church for their beliefs. The Church was called *Roman* because it had its center in Rome. It was called *Catholic*, meaning universal, because all Christians of Western Europe belonged to it. In many ways, the Church remained richer and more powerful than any single European king.

To understand the role of the Church, imagine that you are a Christian living around 1500. Very soon after you are born, your parents take you to a priest, who baptizes you. This means that you are welcomed as a Christian, as a member of the Church.

As you grow up, you find the Church is important in your everyday life. Before each meal, you say a prayer thanking God for your food. You pray again before bed each night. You attend mass every Sunday with your friends and neighbors. At mass you take part in a ritual known as *communion*. That is, you take bread and wine in remembrance of the death of Christ. If you have committed a sin, you are supposed to confess it to your priest. As long as you are sorry for your sins, the priest will forgive you in the name of God.

After you grow up, you will probably get married. If so, a priest will perform the ceremony for you. Or, if you don't get married, you may decide to take special vows and become a priest, a monk, or a nun.

Finally, when it's time for you to die, the Church is there too. The priest performs another ceremony called *extreme unction* to make sure that you die a good Christian.

As this example shows, Europeans were intensely religious in the year 1500. Salvation - or a happy life after death - was their final goal. To obtain it, they believed they had to take part in the sacraments (sacred acts) of the Church. The sacraments included several of the rituals we've just mentioned - baptism, for example, and extreme unction. Unless a Christian belonged to a Church, he or she could not receive the sacraments. And without the sacraments and

the priests who delivered them, there could be no salvation.

The Church, then, played an essential part in the lives of all Christians. But its influence went much farther than that. Its priests were thought to be the only middlemen standing between God and humans. Its leader, the Pope, held supreme power within the Church. He and he alone was the final authority on what was or was not true Christian belief.

Not everyone was Christian, of course. There were many Jews living in Europe, and Moslems to the south. But these people were seen as outsiders. Most of Europe was considered a Christian community. Every Christian had a place in this community.

Yet by 1500 some Roman Catholics regarded their Church with uneasiness. They believed it had become too wealthy and powerful for its own good. It had wandered away from the ideals of Jesus, these Christians thought. In their view, Church leaders had lost sight of their main aim - the teaching of the Christian faith.

Such uneasiness was nothing new. It sprang, to part, from abuses that had been going on within the Church all through the later Middle Ages. Some priests and bishops stopped taking their religion seriously. They did not always follow Church law. Sometimes they took Church money for their own use. Some of them made deals with princes and kings. Some popes became deeply involved in politics.

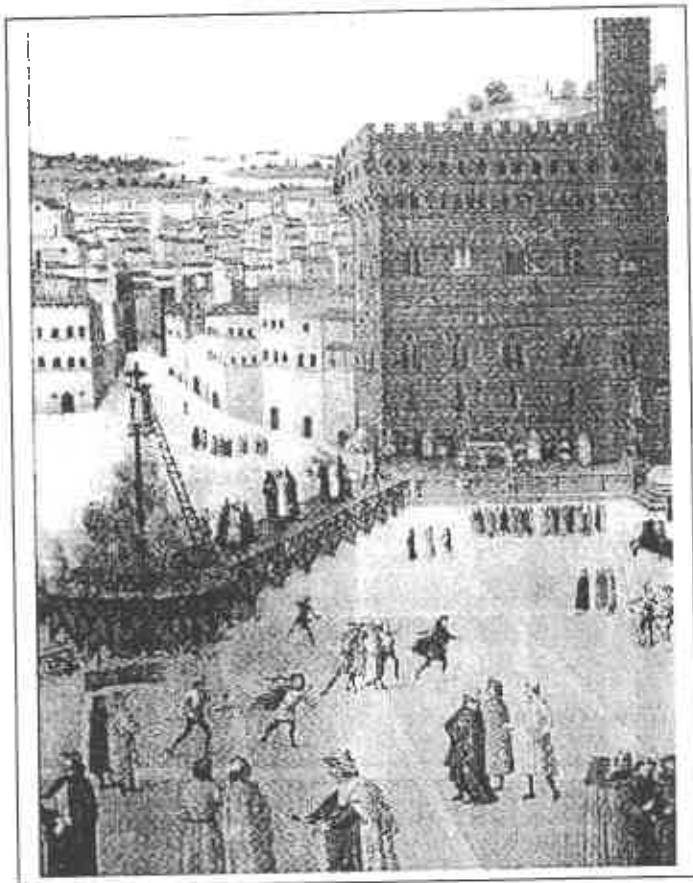
Long before the 16th century, a number of churchmen had made efforts at reform. One of the first was a 13th century Spaniard named Dominic. Early in his priesthood, Dominic preached against heresy (holding beliefs which differed from Church law). But he did not merely speak against heresy. He tried to understand the people who were guilty of it - heretics. He decided that many incorrect beliefs had come from priests. He decided that priests were not well enough educated. He decided to devote himself to the training of churchmen. He set up an order of monks, called Dominicans,

devoted to religious education. Many of the greatest Church thinkers of later years were Dominicans.

Other reformers tried to improve the Church. Their reforms did not put an end to heresy. Some Roman Catholic leaders tried to change the minds of heretics. But other put heretics on trial before a court known as the Inquisition.

The Inquisition started in the early 13th century. It was most common in northern Italy, southern France, and northern Spain. If a court found a person guilty of heresy, it would often excommunicate that person - that is, deprive him or her of membership in the Church. In some cases, heretics were turned over to local officials and burned at the stake.

Such practices may have discouraged some Church reformers. But they did not put an end to all efforts to reform.



Savonarola burned at the stake by powerful leaders of the Church.

Many interests were arising to challenge the power of the Church. One challenge came from Europe's peasants. They wanted more freedom from their

rulers, and so they objected whenever the Church acted in their rulers' behalf. Another challenge came from the rising merchant class. They objected to Church laws preventing the lending of money with interest. The third challenge came from members of the nobility. They envied the Church for its money and land.

By 1500, the Church was the object of many grievances. The stage was set for a great reform movement. This one would take its followers completely outside the Roman Catholic Church.



Ninety-Five Theses

Martin Luther was the man most responsible for the reform movement called the Reformation. He was born in 1483. From the time he was a child, religion was the most important thing in his life. So he became a monk, and then a teacher. He spent most of his time thinking about religion and about the Church. And he might have remained a loyal Roman Catholic if one thing hadn't happened.

In 1517, a Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel came to Luther's part of Germany. Here is how Luther's diary might have told what took place then:

Wittenberg, Saxony, Holy Roman Empire
November 26, 1519

I still don't quite understand what's happened. Everything has changed so quickly. It seems like only yesterday, but it was two years ago. That was when Johann Tetzel came to town selling indulgences, or pardons. People would tell him they had committed a sin, then pay him money. So Tetzel would tell them that God forgave them. He didn't ask if they were sorry, and it didn't matter how serious the sin was. As long as they had money, they were pardoned.

That hadn't always been the practice of the Church. Pardons were ways that people could make up for past or future sins. One of the ways of

getting pardoned was giving money for the poor. But the selling of pardons began during the Crusades. Now the practice has the approval of our local bishop and the Pope in Rome.



In my opinion, the selling of pardons had gone too far. If you ask me, Johann Tetzel was only interested in collecting money. Besides, I don't think God would forgive a sin unless the sinner was really sorry. The whole business of indulgences was bad for the people and bad for the Church.

I thought about what Tetzel was doing, and then I did what any good Christian teacher would do. I challenged Tetzel and others to talk about it. I wrote up a list of the things I believed. I said it seemed to me that the best way to get to heaven was to have faith in God and in Christ. I said I didn't think you could buy your way into heaven. In all, my list had 95 theses, or statements. I nailed my list up on the Church door. That is how teachers got other teachers to talk about certain things.

But I didn't realize what a big fuss there would be! The next thing I knew, everyone was talking about my list. I was glad to see that Tetzel's sales dropped off. I knew I was helping the Church and all loyal Christians, and I thought that would be the end of it.

But people just wouldn't stop talking about my list. They kept arguing about my ideas, and that made me think even more. I went back to the Bible and read more and more. I've been a good son of the Church all my life, but now I've reached some new conclusions.

I think the Church made many mistakes. I think it has forgotten the things Jesus taught us. I agree that human beings are sinful by nature. But I don't believe any of us can get into heaven by buying indulgences or even by praying. According to the Bible, faith is most important thing for a

Christian. It's more important than Church ceremonies. It's more important than how priests live or if they get married.

The Pope has tried to get me to say I'm mistaken. But I won't unless someone can show me in the Bible that I'm wrong. I'm sorry I have to disagree with my Church, but I'm convinced I'm right. So I'm gong to keep on teaching and writing. I want all Christians everywhere to know the truth.

In 1521 the Pope excommunicated Luther. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles the Fifth, declared him an outlaw. Charles was one of the most powerful men in Europe. He was the supreme ruler of many lands, including Spain and all of the German states. He was a very devout Roman Catholic, and he thought Luther's ideas were dangerous. But that didn't stop Luther from preaching.

Martin Luther spent the rest of his life teaching his views. And his ideas caught on. Soon people in many parts of Europe, but especially in Germany, called themselves Lutherans.

Why did Luther's ideas catch on so quickly? There were several reasons for their success. As we have seen, some Europeans were already challenging the Church. And many kings liked the idea of a new Church. Some of them were convinced of Luther's teachings. Others were simply tired of paying tax money to Rome.

Even so, Lutheranism might not have become so popular. But just before Luther was born, an important invention was made. That invention was the printing press. The main credit for this invention is usually given to a German silversmith named Johann Gutenberg. Before the printing

press, books had to be copied by hand. This took a long time, and very few copies were made. But the printing press made it possible to print many books quickly and cheaply.

Martin Luther's movement depended on printed books. In Luther's view, people could increase their faith by learning what was in the Bible. They had to learn to read the Holy Book. Before Luther's time, most books were written in Latin. Now Luther translated the Bible into German so that common people could understand it. In this way, he gave his followers a powerful motive for learning how to read.

When he started out, Martin Luther considered himself a good Roman Catholic. By the time of his death in 1546, however, he knew he had started a new church. His church was different from the Roman Catholic Church in many ways. People in both churches thought theirs was the only true religion.

The Pope and Charles the Fifth wanted to put an end to Lutheranism. But Germany was ruled by regional princes and many of the princes rushed to Luther's defense and fought back against Charles the Fifth. This led to a bloody civil war. Large numbers of people were killed on both sides.

Finally, in 1555, the fighting ended. Charles signed the Peace of Augsburg. It said that each ruler could decide for himself whether to be a Roman Catholic or a Lutheran. Whatever religion he chose, his people would be that too.

For the first time, there were two legal Christian churches. And for a while, at least, religious peace came to Germany.



The Reformation - A Period of Religious Conflict and Change

Introduction

The Reformation was a period of religious change and conflict in Europe, both during and after the Renaissance. The major religion during the Renaissance was the Roman Catholic Church. There were a number of events and people which influenced the birth of new religions in Europe. The Church, between the years 1300 and 1600 A.D. was a major influence in people's lives. It governed people through its laws, educated and helped people in its monasteries and churches, provided a safe place during periods of war, and was an important influence throughout a person's life; born (baptized), confirmed, married, or at times of death (funerals). The goal of the Church was to bring salvation to all its members. If people would live their lives free of sin, then they would have a happy life after death in heaven.

In the 1500's, some people believed the Church had become too wealthy and powerful. They believed that some people had wandered away from the true teachings and ideals of Christianity. The reason for this was that many priests and bishops did not follow Church law. They took Church taxes for their own use. Some made deals to become more powerful by talking to princes and kings. Some became involved in politics. Many of the Church's followers began to become upset with these types of priests and bishops. Three examples of people or events which influenced changes in the Church were:

1) Dominic, a Spaniard, felt that many priests and bishops were teaching beliefs which were different from Church law. A belief which is different from a Church law is called heresy. A person who preaches these wrong beliefs is called a heretic. Dominic decided that priests were not well enough educated. He decided to train priests properly by himself. To do this, Dominic set up an order of monks called Dominicans who would be trained in the proper laws of the Catholic Church.

2) The Inquisitions were trials which were held to decide whether or not a priest was preaching beliefs which were different from those of the Church. If a priest was found guilty, he was excommunicated. This means that the priest was no longer allowed to be a priest or a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Some priests who were excommunicated were burned at the stake.

3) John Wycliffe disagreed with the Church's belief that the only people qualified to figure out the meaning of the Bible were people from the Roman Catholic Church. He felt that anybody could read the Bible and understand what it meant for himself, if it were written in a language that people could understand.

Church taught. He believed that God had decided before time began who would or would not go to heaven. Calvin went to Switzerland and set up a small town where all the people were his followers. The town, Geneva, was very strictly run. Some examples of the rules of the town are: Each person must be up at sunup and working at his or her job. No person shall talk or whisper in Church, or he will be sent to jail. No person is allowed to dance or wear brightly coloured clothes. The duty of a good Christian is to work hard to build a Godly community.

"Slowly, Calvin's ideas began to spread through Europe. In France, his followers were known as Hugenots. In Scotland, a Calvinist named John Knox began to spread the new religion. There it came to be known as Presbyterianism. By the middle of the 16th century, the Protestant and Lutheran religions had many followers all over Europe."

The Reformation also spread to England with the help of King Henry VIII. In 1509, King Henry VIII took the throne of England. He married the widow of his older brother, Catherine of Aragon, Spain. Unfortunately, Catherine could not produce a son for the King, so the King began to look elsewhere for another woman. He had fallen in love with another woman, Ann Boleyn. King Henry VIII ended his marriage with Catherine and as a result he got in trouble with the Pope because divorce during the 1500's was a great sin. In 1530, King Henry still wanted to marry Ann Boleyn but, he had to find a way that the Pope would accept. This was not possible so the King passed a law allowing himself to cut off part of his taxes that were supposed to go to Rome. When King Henry VIII divorced Catherine and married Ann Boleyn, the Pope excommunicated the King.

In 1534, King Henry VIII took revenge against the Pope. He made two laws: 1) Divorce was legal, and 2) The Act of Supremacy - he set up his own church, the Church of England (Anglican Church). This church was to be headed by the King of England, not the Pope. It was a church for only the people of England. No foreigners could interfere with the Church. King Henry VIII had created the Church of England to put an end to the power of the Pope in English affairs.

The Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation

Although the Roman Catholic Church began to see many changes, it also continued to grow and spread throughout the world. The major person who was involved in spreading the Catholic religion was a young Spanish soldier, Ignatius Loyola. Ignatius formed a new order of priests, the Society of Jesus, its members became known as the Jesuits. The new order was organized like