

PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Notes

Introduction: During the Renaissance, the Roman Catholic Church fell on troubled times. Christians from all levels of society grew impatient with the corruption of the clergy and the worldliness of the Church. In the words of one unhappy peasant, frustrated with the Church . . .

*Instead of saving the souls of the dead and sending them to Heaven, [the clergy] gorge themselves at banquets after funerals . . . They are wicked wolves!
They would like to devour us all, dead or alive.*

From this bitterness toward the Church, people called for reform (change). In the 1500s, this movement for reform unleashed forces that shattered Christian unity in Europe. This reform movement is known as the **Protestant Reformation**.

Abuses in the Church

Beginning in the late Middle Ages, the Church had become increasingly caught up in worldly affairs. Popes competed with Italian princes for political power. They fought long wars to protect the Church and the Church's lands against invasions by secular rulers (kings and princes).

During the Renaissance, popes, like other Renaissance rulers, maintained a lavish lifestyle. When Leo X was elected pope, he said, "God has given us the papacy - let us enjoy it!" Like wealthy merchants, popes too, were patrons of the arts. They hired painters and sculptors to beautify the churches and spent vast sums to rebuild the cathedral of St. Peter's at Rome.

To finance such projects, the Church increased fees for religious services like marriages and baptisms. It also promoted the sale of **indulgences**. An indulgence was a pardon for sins committed during a person's lifetime. During the Middle Ages, the Church had granted indulgences only for good deeds, such as going on a crusade. By the late 1400s however, an indulgence could be obtained in exchange for a money gift to the Church.

Many Christians protested such practices. Christian humanists such as Erasmus urged a return to the simple ways of the early Christian Church. They stressed Bible study, exposed Church abuses, and rejected Church pomp and ceremony.

German Monk, Martin Luther, Protests

In 1517, protests erupted into a full-scale revolt. The man who triggered the revolt was a German monk and professor of theology named Martin Luther.



Martin Luther was the son of a middle-class German family. Luther had been slated by his father for a career as a lawyer. As a youth, however, he had a powerful religious experience that changed his life. One day, during a violent storm, Luther was knocked to the ground by lightning. Terrified, he cried out to St. Anne for help. He promised to become a monk if he were spared. True to his word, Luther entered a monastery. Therefore, he prayed and fasted and tried to lead a holy life. Still, he suffered from doubts. He believed he was a sinner, doomed to eternal damnation. He also grew increasingly disillusioned with what he saw as the corruption and worldliness of the Church. At last, an incident in his native town of Wittenberg prompted him to act.

Attack on Indulgences

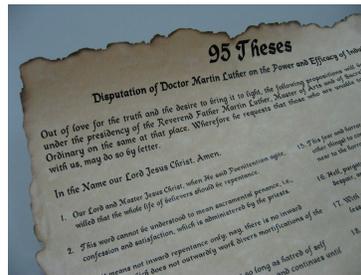
In 1517, a German priest named Johann Tetzel set up a pulpit to preach on the outskirts of Wittenberg. With the approval of the pope, he sold indulgences to any Christian who contributed money for the new Cathedral of St. Peter in Rome. Tetzel claimed that purchase of these indulgences would assure the entrance into heaven not only of the purchasers, but of their dead relatives as well.

To a good man like Martin Luther, “indulgences salesman” Tetzel was the final insult. It made Luther furious to see people paying for indulgences instead of seeking true repentance (forgiveness) for their sins. As a result, the outraged Luther drew up his **95 Theses**, a list of arguments against indulgences. In accordance with the custom of the time, he posted the list on the door of Wittenberg’s All Saints Church. Among other things, he argued that indulgences had no basis in the Bible, that the pope had no authority to release souls from purgatory, and that Christians could be saved only through faith.



Martin Luther versus the Church

Almost overnight, and with the new development of the printing press, copies of Luther's 95 Theses were printed and distributed across Europe, where they stirred up furious debate. The Church tried to persuade Luther to recant, or give up, his views. Luther refused. Instead, he developed even more radical new doctrines. Before long, he was urging Christians to reject what he saw as the tyranny of Rome. Since the Church would not reform itself, he wrote, it must be reformed by secular (government) authorities.



In 1521, the pope excommunicated Luther. Later that year, the new Holy Roman emperor, Charles V, summoned Luther to the diet, or assembly of German princes, at Worms. Luther went, expecting to defend his writings. Instead, the emperor simply ordered him to give them up. Luther refused and said:

I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe . . . Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.

Charles declared Luther an outlaw, making it a crime for anyone in the empire to give him food or shelter. Luther had many powerful supporters, however. One of these, Prince Frederick of Saxony, hid him at a castle at Wartburg. Luther remained in hiding for nearly a year. Throughout Germany, in the meantime, thousands hailed him as a hero. They accepted his teachings and, following his lead, renounced the authority of the pope.

Luther's Teachings

At the heart of Luther's teachings were several beliefs:

1. Salvation could be achieved through faith alone. Good deeds (indulgences) are not necessary for salvation.
2. The Bible is the sole source of religious truth. Other traditional authorities, like the Church councils or the pope, are not.
3. The priest and the Church hierarchy do not hold special powers. All Christians have equal access to God through faith and the Bible.

Luther translated the Bible into German so that ordinary people could study it by themselves. Every town, he said, should have a school so that girls and boys could learn to read the Bible.

Luther called for other practices of the Catholic Church to be modified as well. He rejected five of the seven sacraments because the Bible did not mention them. He banned indulgences, confession, pilgrimages, and prayers to saints. He abolished the elaborate ritual of the Catholic mass and instead emphasized the sermon. And, he permitted the clergy to marry.

Widespread Support of Luther's Teachings

Many people saw Luther's reforms as the answer to the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. A number of German princes also embraced Luther's ideas, but for selfish reasons. Some princes saw Lutheranism as a way to throw off the rule of both the Church and the Holy Roman empire. Others welcomed a chance to seize Church property in their territory. Still other Germans supported Luther because of feelings of national loyalty. They were tired of seeing German money used to build Roman churches or line the pockets of Italian churchmen.

John Calvin



The most important reformer to follow Martin Luther was John Calvin. Calvin had a logical, razor-sharp mind, and his ideas had a profound effect on the direction of the Protestant Reformation.

Calvin was born in France and trained as a priest and lawyer. In 1536, Calvin published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In this book, which was read by Protestants everywhere, he set forth his religious beliefs. He also provided advice on how to organize and run a Protestant church.

Like Luther, he believed that salvation was gained through faith alone. He, too, regarded the Bible as the only source of religious truth. But Calvin put forth a number of ideas of his own. He taught that God was all powerful and that humans were by nature sinful. God alone, he said, decided whether an individual achieved eternal life.

He preached *predestination*, the idea that God had long ago determined who would gain salvation. To Calvinists, the world was divided into two kinds of people - saints and sinners. Calvinists tried to live like saints, believing that only those who were saved could live truly Christian lives.

The Catholic Reformation

As the Protestant Reformation swept across northern Europe, the Catholic Church will fight back to protect itself. This is called **The Catholic (Counter) Reformation**. The leader of this movement was Pope Paul III. During the 1530s and 1540s, he set out to revive the moral authority of the Church and stop the influence of the Protestant movement. To end corruption within the Church itself, he appointed reformers to key positions. He called for a meeting called **The Council of Trent** in 1545. The councils reaffirmed traditional Catholic views, which Protestants had challenged. Salvation comes through faith *and* good works it declared. The Bible, while a major source of religious truth, is *not the only source*. The council also took steps to end abuses in the Church. It provided stiff penalties for

worldliness and corruption among the clergy. It also established new schools to create a better educated clergy who could challenge Protestant teachings.

ASSIGNMENT

Reading Questions: After closely reading the Protestant Reformation notes provided, please answer the following questions in a separate Google Doc, and share it with me upon completion. (kwelgoss@wscschools.org).

1. How was the Church viewed by the people during the Renaissance? Why was this (use evidence from the Introduction to support your answer)?
2. How was the Church abusive during the Renaissance? Provide 2 examples.
3. What is an *indulgence*?
4. By the late 1400s, what were the requirements for obtaining an indulgence?
5. In 1517, who triggered a revolt against the Church?
6. Why was Luther called to revolt?
7. What actions did Johann Tetzel take that led to criticism? What did he promise the indulgences he sold would do?
8. How did Martin Luther respond to Tetzel's actions? What did he post on the door of Wittenberg's All Saints Church?
9. What 3 things did Luther argue in his 95 Theses?
10. How did Luther's 95 Theses get into the hands of those all throughout Europe?
11. How did the Church respond to Luther's 95 Theses? Did Luther comply (go along with the Church's request)?
12. In 1521, how did the Pope respond to Luther's actions?
13. What happened to Luther after he was declared an outlaw by Charles V?
14. How did the people respond to Luther's teachings?
15. What were the 3 main teachings of Martin Luther?
16. Choose 2 additional actions (besides his 3 teachings) that Luther took to move away from traditional Roman Catholic teachings. Identify the 2 you have chosen.
17. Why did many people support Luther's ideas?
18. Why did German princes support Luther's ideas?
19. Who was John Calvin?
20. Identify 3 beliefs or teachings of John Calvin.
21. What is *predestination*?
22. How did this encourage Calvinists to act?
23. What was the Catholic (Counter) Reformation?
24. What was the goal of the Church when it met at the Council of Trent in 1545?
25. Identify 3 things that the Church accomplished at the Council of Trent in 1545?