CHAPTER 13

The Reformation of Religion, 1500-1560

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Causes of the Reformation

The Protestant Reformation had been building within the Catholic Church for 200 years. At the forefront was the discrepancy between a Church tasked with a spiritual mission of salvation and a Church of money, power, and influence. Corruption in the Church, from the pope downwards was damaging the Catholic institution.

A. The Search for Spiritual and Fiscal Freedom

Between 1305 and 1378, a succession of Catholic popes abandoned the traditional seat of Church power in Rome and moved to Avignon, France. Dangerous feuding among the aristocratic families of Italy had initiated the move, and loss of revenue to the Papal State exacerbated the problem. This so-called "Babylonian Captivity" was followed by an equally contentious period between 1378 and 1417 called the Great Schism in which the Church was split into factions supporting both an Italian and French pope (so-called "anti-pope"). The Conciliar Movement was an attempt by a group of affluent bishops to solve the financial and political problems of the Schism and to liberate the Church from the abuse of papal authority. The Schism was corrected and reforms suggested but the moral authority of the Church continued to decline.

In response to this moral degradation, many lay Christians were drawn to new forms of worship such as the Brothers of the Common Life and Modern Devotion. In an age of drastic change in all areas, people began to question the moral authority of the papacy and the less-than-holy lifestyles of cardinals and bishops.

In Germany, secular magistrates were mandated to stop many of the excesses of the Church and secure fiscal freedom for local laypeople.

B. The Print Revolution

Until the mid-fifteenth century, the only way to communicate ideas in print were to copy texts in longhand script, a process requiring much time, resources, and learned people. A "copy" of an original document never matched it exactly, and every subsequent copy usually changed slightly.

Moveable metal type and the printing press changed the very nature of communications. Books could now be mass-produced with identical content by an average tradesman. Literacy became a necessity for keeping pace with a quickly changing world.

Most importantly, widely available books, including the Bible, opened the doors of knowledge to anyone willing to learn to read. The interpretative powers of the Church were threatened to the core.
C. The Northern Renaissance and the Christian Humanists

Humanists were writers devoted to rediscovering the lost knowledge of the ancients and adapting them to a contemporary world. Their work embraced all fields of study, but their examinations of Christianity and the Church raised many questions. These so-called "Christian Humanists" were not interested in degrading the Church or God, but instead were compelled to search for a more primitive means of worship, specifically the practices of Christianity at the time of Jesus and the apostles. Many of the Christian humanists came from northern Italy, near the seat of the Italian Renaissance, and their scrutiny of the foundations of Christianity and the Church reflected the curiosity of the age.

II. The Lutheran Reformation

The Protestant Reformation began with Martin Luther and the German secular rejection of Church policy. Local politicians in Germany flew to Luther's message of reform, seeing a fix for their own grievances against the pope. Carefully, Luther made it clear that his reforms were religious only and did not endorse the overthrow of any prince or lord and thereby gained strong secular support throughout Germany and into Scandinavia.

A. Martin Luther and the Break with Rome

Martin Luther, a student of law, suffered a throw from a horse that shocked him into abandoning his professional career. Donning the garb of the monk, Luther pledged obedience to the Augustinian Order where he continued his education, this time in theology, and sent him to Wittenberg to teach at the town's university. While there, Luther spent much time wrestling with the Church's dogma on penance, finally concluding that salvation came purely from God's grace, a gift unmerited. In other words, humans were incapable of performing good works alone... they needed the intercession of God. Therefore, the performance of good works was an outward proof of an individual's receipt of God's grace and salvation.

1. The Ninety-Five Theses

Striving to finance the construction of the new St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Leo X issued a special new indulgence to raise funds. An indulgence was a unique penance whereby a sinner could remove years of suffering in Purgatory from his soul by performing a good work (donating cash) here on earth. Leo's indulgence was audacious as it promises a one-time-only exemption from all previous sins for the payee (or departed relative).

The special indulgence was for sale a few miles from Wittenberg in the domain of the Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, a truly reproachful clergyman who illegally held three simultaneous Church offices (due to enormous bribes to Pope Leo). The Archbishops domain was a sideshow of indulgence hucksterism, the blatant corruption of the Church apparent to all.

Some of Luther's students asked his advice on the indulgence, and in response he prepared in Latin ninety-five arguments against the practice of indulgences that he was willing to debate in open forum. Luther had a few copies made and posted one on the doors of the Wittenberg Cathedral. No one showed up to debate...
Luther, but he had drawn the attention of Rome and began to gather followers. His central argument: salvation could not be bought and sold.

2. The Path to the Diet of Worms

After the debate challenge, Luther began a pamphlet campaign, using the new technology of printing to spread his concerns about the Church. He emphasized a "priesthood of all believers" which reasoned that all those of pure faith were themselves priests, a doctrine that undermined the authority of the Catholic clergy over the laity.

Pope Leo demanded Luther's arrest, but was foiled by the protection of Fredrick the Elector, who craftily refused to arrest Luther without giving the monk a chance to speak at the Imperial Diet (parliament) in the German city of Worms in 1521. Unconvinced, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was prepared to turn over Luther to Rome when the monk disappeared, spirited away to the castle of Fredrick the Wise for a year of self-imposed exile while things cooled down.

B. The Lutheran Reformation in the Cities and Principalities

Hidden in the castle of Fredrick, Luther could not lead his followers. The Reformation quickly spread into a vast movement far beyond the control of any one human. Spreading fastest among the educated urban classes, the Reformation won acceptance with both German princes and local magistrates. Seemingly every German had a grievance with the pope, and Emperor Charles, facing a two-front war against France and the Turks, relented and allowed the empire's princes to decide for themselves how to apply this revolution in religious doctrine.

1. The Appeal of the Reformation to Women

Luther's "priesthood of all believers" held a special appeal to women of the age who were excluded from virtually all aspects of the religious life of the Church. Women took up the cause and preached the message of the Reformation as a message of women's rights. They were soon disappointed as their involvement threatened the male-dominated status quo and was censored.

2. The German Peasant's Revolt

The Reformation appealed to the average German peasant who saw the movement as a way to throw off the bonds of feudalism as well as the pressures of the Church. Wrongly citing Luther's rhetoric, groups of peasants began to rise up against their feudal lords. Luther, a conservative thinker who believed in law and order and was terribly afraid of the lower classes, would have none of it and advocated the slaughter of rebellious peasants. They were butchered by the thousands.
3. Lutheran Success

In 1530, Emperor Charles V recanted his nonchalance and ordered all Lutheran to return to the Catholic fold or face arrest. The Lutherans refused and began to actively unite with the princes of the empire under the guise of the Schmalkaldic League. Renewed troubles with France and the Turks made military confrontation between the league and the Emperor impossible for fifteen years. In the meantime, Lutherans established a more concrete method of regulating the churches in Germany.

In 1552, Charles finally extricated himself from the French and Turks and turned his army against the Protestants, only to be defeated soundly and forces to relent. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg established the doctrine of "he who rules determines the religion of the land." The legal foundations were now in place for two distinctive religious cultures, Catholic and Protestant.

III. The Diversity of Protestantism

The term "protestant" eventually came to mean all western European Christians who refused to accept the authority of the pope. The varieties of Protestantism can be divided into two types: Magisterial Reformation churches, that received official government sanction, and Radical Reformation churches.

A. The Reformation in Switzerland

Switzerland met the Reformation as a collection of thirteen regions (cantons) bound together under the Swiss Confederation. The majority of the Swiss were peasants unable to farm the mountainous region. Their main supplement was working as professional soldiers of fortune, often for the pope (as they still do today).

1. Zwingli's Zurich

Ulrich Zwingli had served as chaplain with a detachment of Swiss mercenaries serving the pope. In 1520, Zurich was named the People's Priest of Zurich, a position from which he began to criticize his superior bishop for recruiting young Swiss men to die in the pope's armies. Undaunted by warnings from Rome, Zwingli called for general reformation of the Church, advocating the abolition of the roman Catholic mass, the marriage of priests, and the closing of monasteries. He set an emphasis on the reading of the Gospels during services rather than the ritual of the Church and removed all painting and statues from the churches under his jurisdiction, calling them a distraction from God.

Two features distinguish Zwinglian Reform from Lutheran Reform: one was Zwingli's desire to involve reformed ministers in governmental/secular decisions; the other was Zwingli's understanding of the nature of the Eucharist and the representation of bread as a symbol and not the physical body of Christ.
2. Calvin Geneva

The generation following Luther and Zwingli saw the Reformation moving to the Swiss city of Geneva under the leadership of John Calvin. Calvinism eventually became the dominant form of Protestantism in France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and New England. Calvin's theology built upon that of Luther and Zwingli to their logical conclusions: the salvation of any individual by the grace of God would be logically predetermined or "predestined." Only the Elect could make sense of, and follow, the will of God.

B. The Reformation in Britain

In the sixteenth century, the nation we know today as Britain was a loose collection of Wales, England, and Ireland. Scotland remained its own separate kingdom. The Tudor kings of England imposed the Reformation as policy, but were unable to influence the cultures of Ireland which remained Catholic. Scotland wholeheartedly accepted the Reformation despite having a Catholic monarch.

1. The Tudors and the English Reformation

In 1527 King Henry VIII of England clashed with the Church of Rome. A succession of marriages had been overseen and later annulled by the pope until annulling yet another (Henry's request) would mean the admission of fallibility of the papacy. Pope Clement VII refused the requested annulment. The subsequent departure of England from the Catholic Church, while hardly a royal whim, was largely the work of the crown and a few top agents. Henry seized personal control of the English church, closed the monasteries, and redistributed the monastic lands. The English Reformation was more about consolidating the power of the Tudor dynasty than any religious reform. As such, the official religion of England changed with each succeeding ruler of the Tudor house. Between 1559 and 1563, Elizabeth I (Henry's daughter who succeeded Edward and Mary) issued her own set of moderately Protestant laws which established the Church of England (known as Episcopalian in the United States). Some activists suggested that Elizabeth's reforms did not go far enough in discrediting the Catholic Church. These Puritans of mostly Calvinist persuasion would immigrate to the New World to worship as they saw fit.

2. Scotland: The Citadel of Calvinism

Scotland, an independent kingdom at the time, embraced Calvinism with open arms with encouragement from England's Elizabeth. Scotland's monarch, Mary, was an avowed Catholic and wife of the King of France Francis II. Despite her religious zeal, Mary proved conciliatory towards the new Protestants she now reigned over, but the Scottish Calvinists never trusted her.

John Knox created the official liturgy for the Scottish church in 1564. The most significant difference from the Anglican Church was the Scottish Presbyterian system of organization which did away with the episcopal bishops and placed decisions in the hands of pastors and church elders.
C. The Radical Reformation

Magisterial reformers in Germany, Switzerland, England and Scotland lived somewhat peacefully with official sanctions, usually at the cost of some compromise. Among their numbers were usually radical members who wanted the reforms of religion put in place faster. The number of radicals was low in comparison to all Protestants, but their significance was felt by local authorities continuously answering their arguments. Radicals can be divided into three categories, Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Unitarians.

1. Anabaptists: The Holy Community

Anabaptism means "to rebaptize", and was a central doctrine to this group of radicals. Anabaptists saw the Bible as a living document for the operation of society as well as the church. They rejected infant baptism, believing only an informed adult could make a choice of accepting salvation. As a result, Anabaptist congregations contained only members that had made a conscientious choice to join the sect. They rejected private property and called for communal wealth within the highly disciplined "holy communities" in which they lived.

Attempting to reorganize society along biblical lines drew a violent reaction from other Protestants and the Anabaptists were forced underground to avoid prosecution. Their descendant sect, the Mennonites, reorganized the religion to exclude some of the more radical viewpoints.

Significantly, the largest portion of Protestants in the United States is Baptist, which is a derivative movement from the Anabaptists.

2. Spiritualists: The Holy Individual

Personal introspection was the capstone of this Radical Reformation sect, which held that personal salvation came only as the result of divine intervention during intense prayer and meditation. The resulting spiritual illumination was referred to as "the inner Word." Spiritualists pursued a physical demeanor devoid of stress and cravings, a "castle of peace."

Quakers are the most prominent sect within Spiritualism, and they believe in an equal distribution of the illumination from God into men and women. At Quaker services, anyone could speak, man, woman, or child.

3. Unitarians: A Rationalist Approach

Christian theology is built upon the supposition that Jesus Christ was in fact God made into human flesh. The idea of the Trinity, the three identities of God, made this deification of Jesus possible for Christians. Unitarians and other smaller sects held that Jesus was a divinely inspired man but no god unto himself. Unitarians used common sense to reject the Trinity, which has no biblical basis. Unitarians tended to be humanists and generally well-educated and were viewed with hostility by other Protestants.
D. The Free World of Eastern Europe

During the sixteenth century, Eastern Europe represented a forward-thinking refuge of religious freedom and toleration. This toleration was a function of the relative weakness of many East European monarchs (all Catholic) and the embrace of the Reformation by the aristocrats who dominated the parliaments. Substantial numbers of Anabaptists found refuge in present-day Czech Republic, and Hungary had an almost universally Protestant population.

The most tolerant kingdom was Transylvania (in modern Romania) whose ruler allowed the establishment of any religion. Poland was also a gigantic proving ground for Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

IV. The Catholic and Counter Reformations

The Catholic Reformation was a series of internal efforts to purify the Church, not as a result of the Protestant Reformation, but more of a logical progression of the new Renaissance thinking and late medieval spirituality. New religious orders, like the Jesuits, were products of these purifying efforts.

The Counter Reformation was a Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, a litany of defensive stances and offensive actions toward Protestants. The most important by-product of the Counter Reformation was the creation of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, the Index of Prohibited Books, and the decrees of the Council of Trent.

A. The Religious Orders in the Catholic Reformation

The most evident by-product of the Catholic Reformation was the creation of invigorated religious orders, largely in Italy, away from the influences of Protestantism. The new orders held fast to a very traditional Catholic theology, but their actions were not of the reflective monks of the early medieval age; these new orders set out to the ends of the known world to spread the word of God.

1. Jesuits: The Soldiers of God

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was headed by Ignatius Loyola, former courtier to King Ferdinand of Aragon (Spain) and soldier. As General of the Society, Loyola incorporated the best aspects of the courtier into the distinct character of the Jesuit members: social refinement, loyalty to authority, sense of duty, chivalry, and an appreciation for high education.

The order's early forte was in the realm of ministering to other peoples. Often incognito, Jesuits would immerse themselves in a foreign culture, learning the languages and mannerisms, in order to be better persuasive in representing Christ. Later, the order became famous for its commitment to education and establishment of schools. Jesuits became influential members of the courts to all Catholic monarchs and were behind the scenes in every major turn of history.

2. Women's Orders: In, But Not Of, The World

Women found a difficult time in ministering to others. Traditionally, religious orders for women emphasized reclusion behind the cloistered walls of a
convent. Reform of traditional convent life included a rational approach to mysticism and potentially harmful acts of contrition, such as extreme fasting. Nuns of the age developed a uniquely female society with the opportunity to cultivate artistic and literary paths closed to secular women.

C. Paul III, the First Counter Reformation Pope

More than twenty years after Luther's first attack on the Church, Pope Paul III finally launched a counterattack against Protestantism. Although seemingly as corrupt as any pope of the age, Paul instinctively understood that adaptation and action was the key to the Church's survival. In 1542, Paul reestablished the ancient Holy Office of the Inquisition, the purpose of which was to uncover heresies (such as the Protestants). While other manifestations of the Holy Office had existed (The Spanish Inquisition), this time the pope himself held the reigns.

Paul's other tactic to squelch the Protestant movement was the first Index of Forbidden Books.

D. The Council of Trent

The most significant measure produced by Pope Paul III was to order a council of the Church hierarchy in 1545 in Trent on the German-Italian border. The council remained in session for nearly eighteen years and covered the reign of three popes. The ultimate purposes of the council were to reassert the authority of the pope and Church and to launch reforms that would guarantee an honest and well-educated clergy.

III. The Reformation in the Arts

One of the most contentious issues during the Reformation was the role of the arts in the changing landscape of religion. Although the more radical reformers sought to abolish all representational art from houses of worship, the biggest differences between Catholic and Protestant on this issue was a matter of amount and application.

A. Protestant Iconoclasm

Radical Protestants sometimes enacted reform by breaking into churches and destroying artistic images known as icons. This iconoclasm by the Protestants can be explained by three factors: people feared the inherent power of religious images, religious art drained church resources that could be better used elsewhere, and religious art might tend to distract the masses from the Word of God.

B. Counter Reformation Art

The Counter Reformation and the Council of Trent recognized the value of religious art, but agreed that liberties had been taken with the subject matter and presentation of some of the Church-sponsored art of the past. Artists were challenged to use their skills in a new approach to religious persuasion through emotional response. During this time, masterpieces of the past were altered for reasons of modesty, "accuracy", or change in dogma.
D. Sacred Music: Praising God

Many reformers, including Luther, recognized the emotional power of music in worship. Luther and others wrote a number of hymns for the Lutheran services, beginning a long tradition of brilliant Protestant religious music. In Switzerland, Zwingli banished all organs from his churches and some radicals banished music altogether.

The Catholic music of the age emphasized the lyrical message of the hymns rather than virtuosity of the musician. Masses were accompanied by a lone organist or choir.

VI. Conclusion: Competing Understandings

The Reformation divided the West into two religious camps: Protestant and Catholic. The unity of religion that had been achieved through centuries of Church effort was obliterated within a generation, changing forever the nature of the relationship between clergy and laity. This division had dire consequences as kingdoms (then nations) divided over the smallest of religious issues and remained hostile for centuries.

TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- Anabaptist control of Münster, Germany
- The Elizabethan Settlement of the Anglican Church
- Luther posts the 95 Theses
- Zwingli declared the People’s Priest in Zürich
- The Religious Peace of Augsburg
- Founding of the Society of Jesus

1517
1520
1534-1535
1540
1555
1559-1563
TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

Christian humanists
Justification by faith alone
Priesthood of all believers
Religious Peace of Augsburg
Magisterial Reformation
Radical Reformation
Calling
Predestination
Anabaptism
Spiritualists
Unitarians
Catholic Reformation
Counter Reformation
Desiderius Erasmus
Thomas More
Martin Luther
Ulrich Zwingli
John Calvin
Henry VIII
Ignatius Loyola
St. Teresa of Avila
Pope Paul III
The Inquisition
The Council of Trent
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in this chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Wittenberg
Rome
Trent
Augsburg
Zurich
Geneva
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter

1. What was the impact of the print revolution?
2. Define Christian humanism. What did the Christian humanists attempt to accomplish in terms of reform?
3. What initiated the Lutheran reformation? What were the foundations of Luther’s theology? How did Lutheranism spread throughout Europe? How were people attracted to it?
4. Compare and contrast Lutheranism and Calvinism.
5. How was the Protestant Reformation in England imposed from above? Why could we consider it only partially successful?
1. How did the Protestant Reformation open the flood-gates to religious radicalism?
2. How did the Catholic Church respond to the Protestant rebellion? How effective was the Council of Trent? What changes were made in the Church?

DOCUMENT QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is “Thomas More’s Argument Against Capital Punishment” similar to those made by those who oppose capital punishment today?

2. What evidence can you find in “The Inquisition Interrogates Paolo Veronese” that the Catholic Church felt seriously threatened by the Protestants?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

1. In what way did the Protestant Reformation reflect the political configuration of Europe? What motives, other than religious, did people have for adopting a form of religion other than Catholicism?

2. How correct were the Catholics when they challenged the early Protestants with the statement “Schism breeds schism”? How homogeneous was the Protestant movement?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. What statement about Desiderius Erasmus is not true?
   A. He supported Luther.
   B. He wrote satire to criticize the Church.
   C. He published a Greek version of the New Testament.
   D. He called for education as a means to create a better world.

2. Which statement about Martin Luther is not true?
   A. He translated the New Testament into German.
   B. He supported the Peasants’ Revolt.
   C. He believed in justification by faith.
   D. He called on the German princes to reform the church in their lands.

3. The Peace of Augsburg established in the Holy Roman Empire the principle that
   A. Each prince could choose the religion in his land.
   B. Everyone had freedom of religion.
   C. Catholicism was the official religion of the Empire.
   D. The father chose the religion of his family.

4. John Calvin
   A. Rejected predestination.
   B. Participated in the Marburg Colloquy.
   C. Wrote in defense of the seven sacraments.
   D. Synthesized Protestant theology in a logical, systematic doctrine.

5. Henry VIII
   A. Divorced Anne Boleyn and married Catherine of Aragon.
   B. Replaced Catholic liturgy with the Lutheran church service.
   C. Appointed Thomas More to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury.
   D. Became head of the Church of England through the Act of Supremacy.

6. The Jesuits
   A. Served as confessors to kings.
   B. Set up colleges that reflected humanist values.
   C. Were directly responsible to the pope.
   D. All of these.
7. Which author is correctly matched with his/her work?

A. St. Theresa of Avila – Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity  
B. Ignatius Loyola – Spiritual Exercises  
C. John Calvin – Interior Castle  
D. Martin Luther – Institutes of the Christian Religion

8. Which sixteenth-century term is correctly matched with its description?

A. Puritan – person who refused to attend Anglican church services  
B. Mercenary – court to find and reform heretics  
C. Magistrate – city official  
D. Recusant – person who wanted to remove Catholic practices from the Anglican church

9. The Council of Trent

A. Initiated the Index of Prohibited Books.  
B. Completed its work in two years.  
C. Reaffirmed the efficacy of the seven sacraments.  
D. Sanctioned iconoclasm.

10. Which person is correctly matched with his description?

A. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina – composed masses  
B. Carlo Borromeo – invented the printing press  
C. Michael Servetus – artist influenced by Modern Devotion  
D. Albrecht Durer – applied Counter Reformation policies in diocese