
The Impact Of Reformation On Culture, Society, And Politics Of Germany

To what extent did the Reformation impact culture, society, and/or politics of your chosen country or region during the early modern period? (1800 words)

Europe was torn in half during the 16th century by the ideas of a German friar who sought a more direct, faith orientated, relationship with God. The 'Reformation' is a term used to encompass a series of religious and political movements, the division of Europe, and the consequential religious and civil conflicts. The 16th century which began with all European Christians as Roman Catholics, where the rule of the Pope was accepted, ended with a severe division between the Catholics and Protestants.[footnoteRef:1] German monk Martin Luther was one of many who saw desperate need for dramatic reform in the Roman Catholic Church, with hope to remove corruption and dubious religious teachings.[footnoteRef:2] [1: Family Encyclopedia of World History – The Events, Names & Dates That Shaped the World, (London: Reader's Digest, 1996), P.538] [2: Hywel Williams, Cassell's Chronology of World History, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005), P.202]

Criticisms of the Church started with it being seen a commercial enterprise, including relics and indulgences. The immense wealth of the Church, and its corruption, as well as officials breaking their vows were all seen as criticisms towards the Church, and its leadership. Discontentment toward the Church was put forth by German Augustinian friar Martin Luther, when he set into view his 95 theses.[footnoteRef:3] Pope Leo X introduced a way to be pardoned for your sins, through the sale of 'indulgences', which ultimately was a way to pay off debts the Pope held.[footnoteRef:4] This infuriated Luther, and prompted him to nail his theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle's chapel. This was a key cause of the reformation, the starting point. "[I] replace thee in the state of innocence and purity in which thou wert at the hour of thy baptism" was how Friar Johann Tetzel described the process of an indulgence.[footnoteRef:5] The reformation was described as an "ecclesiastical and spiritual revolution", however, the economic and political components were equally damaging to society.[footnoteRef:6] The Church's wealth was controlled by ecclesiastical landlords, whom the peasantry and lesser nobility were incredibly angry at, as they were suffering as a nation in an agricultural revolution.[footnoteRef:7] [3: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)] [4: Ibid.] [5: Donald R. Kelley, Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981) ch.1] [6: Ibid.] [7: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)]

Luther's pamphlets and 95 theses spread quickly through Europe, including France. Although his writings were declared heretical by theologians at the University of Paris. His message was purely a spiritual one, as he proclaimed a doctrine of "justification by faith alone" and "the priesthood of all believers".[footnoteRef:8] A man was justified by the power of Jesus Christ's redemption alone, not by formal religious observance, in order to achieve eternal salvation.[footnoteRef:9] As each man was their own priest, the Gospels' truths and direct access to God was one's own. Spiritual health was considered irrelevant from the Church's hierarchy. Sola scriptura, only the Bible or scripture, was his motto, alongside the keys to salvation: sola gratia and sola fide, only grace and only faith.[footnoteRef:10] "Faith alone"

challenges authority for the soul of the Church, as Luther states, salvation comes through faith and not good works, no action that a person can take.[footnoteRef:11] We can't ever be good enough, through our actions to merit salvation. We can only have faith.[footnoteRef:12] [8: Williams, Cassell's Chronology, (2005)] [9: Carter Lindberg, The European Reformations. 2nd Ed. (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2010)] [10: Kelley, Beginning of Ideology, (1981)] [11: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)] [12: Lynn Hunt, et al. Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures, 6th Ed. (Boston: Bedford St Martins, 2019) ch.14]

The 1520s to the 1540s had a series of campaigns against heresy, which pushed new ideas underground, and outward for conformity to Roman Catholic Church. 1550s saw reformed churches established, and French Protestants were named Huguenots.[footnoteRef:13] The pamphlets from the French Wars of Religion led to religious tension, through their key themes of idolatry, the influence of the devil, and the antichrist. By the 1560s the violence descends into war. One of the major conflicts within this period was St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the wedding of Henry of Navarre and Margaret de Medici in 1572. Most of the Protestant wedding guests were assassinated, this led to mob violence beginning in Paris and spreading outside the city, with thousands of Huguenots murdered. This massacre was significant due to the number of casualties, the acts of violence were not considered random, but orchestrated by municipal authorities. It drove many Huguenots into exile and reinvigorated the civil war. [13: Kelley, Beginning of Ideology, (1981)]

Criticisms levelled against the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. Splintering Western Catholic Christianity into many denominations including Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglican, and many more. Christian practices become more formalised and more closely policed, which resulted in the persecution of Christians of different denominations.[footnoteRef:14] [14: "Reformation", History.com, April 11, 2019. (<https://www.history.com/topics/reformation/reformation>)]

Grandmaster Albert of Prussia opened the first Lutheran church, starting the spread of Protestantism through Europe. The Reformation started as a local conflict, before becoming a German issue, and finally a Europe wide division. The spread was a result of the printing press, which created more than two hundred thousand copies of Luther's theses in the 1520s and early 1530s, many of his other writings went into print. Nothing could stop Protestant ideas from spreading, despite Luther's siding with German peasants in their 1525 revolt. Where he helped stifle the democratic implications of his teachings. One of Luther's best friends and admirers lamented that by marrying, Luther "revels and compromises his good reputation precisely at a time when Germany stands in need of his spirit and authority."

European states with temporal authorities, such as England under the powerful central monarchy of the Tudors, took Luther's rebellion as a chance to challenge for independence, from papal interference and other payments to the Vatican.[footnoteRef:15] A key English figure in the Reformation was William Tyndale, who in 1515 was accepted into the priesthood, and began an MA at Oxford reading theology. He also had a mastery of several languages. 1524 sees him in exile "to translate the New Testament ... there was no place in all England", his English translation of the New Testament is completed in 1526 with noticeable differences in translation, priest as senior, Church as congregation, and to do penance as repent. 1538 saw 'The Great Bible', the first authorized English translation of the Bible. [15: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)]

The significance of the Tudors was influential through generational shifts, body count as there

was a lot of people murdered under their reign, dissent and disagreement within families was publicly evident. Various motivations for religious views. Henry VIII was considered 'Middle Way' between Catholicism and Protestantism, who broke with Rome, and became the Supreme Head of the Church of England. Edward VI was Anglican, who introduced the Common Book of Prayer, and deemed it illegal to celebrate mass. Mary I was Catholic, and returned to Rome, she also burned over 300 alleged heretics. Elizabeth I was Anglican and considered to be illegitimate by Catholic Europe, she coined the term "religious tolerance" by which she had conformed to the Catholic faith during Mary's reign, however, inwardly she was a Protestant having been raised and committed in that faith. Therefore, Elizabeth's religious views were considered remarkably tolerant for the age in which she lived.

Catholic ideas of the time backed up the social and political inequality, with Church teachings describing monarchs and noble people as closer to God than ordinary people. The Church had influence over ruling figures, including King Phillip of Spain, who although wrote that he "felt a reasonable regret over her [Mary's] death," he ended up missing Catholic England badly, so badly that he launched the famous Spanish Armada to take back England for his family and the Church. Along with the Church's power, the corruption was similarly detrimental to society. Frederick of Denmark protected Luther from papal abuses, because he felt that Luther couldn't get a fair trial, and that Luther and the reform movements he was leading would limit Charles's power.

A difference in perspective to Luther's was Zwingli and the interpretations of transubstantiation. The Catholic doctrine held that though the miracle of transubstantiation, which is one of the seven sacraments, the bread and wine literally became the body and blood of Jesus Christ.[footnoteRef:16] Luther argued for something called consubstantiation, in which the bread and wine, are still bread and wine, yet also the body and blood of Christ.[footnoteRef:17] Zwingli, however, believed that communion was only a symbolic ritual, in which the bread and wine were just bread and wine.[footnoteRef:18] Henry's 'Six Articles' published in 1539 argued for transubstantiation and states that priests should not be allowed to marry. [16: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)] [17: Hunt, Making of the West, (2019)] [18: Carter, The European Reformations, (2010)]

The Catholic Counter-reformation, were they, the Catholics, ready to simply surrender their influence in European society? Did the Church just turn its back on this momentous challenge of Protestantism and continue down its much-criticized path? Johann Gutenberg's invention of the moveable type made the Bible accessible in multiple languages, for multiple people, where only Russia and Ireland remained untouched by the new ideas.[footnoteRef:19] Catholicism fought back in 1521, which saw the Diet of Worms, and therefore the excommunication of Luther, after he rejected to withdraw his opinions.[footnoteRef:20] "Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture and plain reason ... I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscious is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise." [19: Encyclopedia of World History, (1996)] [20: Ibid]

Loyola created and lead the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. Loyola was a Spanish knight from a wealthy background, while convalescing, he read religious texts and had a crisis of conscience. The Society of Jesus, later known as the Jesuit Order, was established in 1534, and was officially recognised by Pope Paul III in 1540.[footnoteRef:21] The focus was on education and conversion, a military style hierarchy, with several years of training and a strict code of discipline required before joining.[footnoteRef:22] The Jesuits founded schools where humanistic

education thrived alongside religious instruction, in addition to reforming Catholicism in Europe, the Jesuits undertook globalising the faith as a regular part of their mission.[footnoteRef:23] Once the Jesuits established global contacts, they produced reports, first in Latin, but then translated into local European languages and their work created Eurocentric globalisation that ended up going way beyond religion.[footnoteRef:24] [21: Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova, *The Jesuits and Globalisation – Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016)] [22: Williams, *Cassell's Chronology*, (2005)] [23: Benoit Vermander, *Jesuits and China*, Oxford Handbooks Online] [24: *The Jesuits and Globalisation* (2016)]

It wasn't until 1555, and the Peace of Augsburg, when Lutheranism and Catholicism could co-exist in the Empire. Individual rulers, and not the Emperor, would dictate the religion of the territory. The Bohemian Phase of the Thirty Years War, from 1618-1625, started with the 1609 Letter of Majesty, when issued, allowed those in Bohemia the right to freely exercise their religion. The Catholic victory that ensued resulted in Bohemia losing religious freedoms and becoming a target of the Inquisition. The Danish Phase saw Christian IV of Denmark looking to expand his territory, and he attempted to amass a Protestant army against Catholic Spain and the Hapsburgs. Hapsburg Spain defeated Christian's army and Emperor Ferdinand II responded with an attempt to enforce Catholicism within the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, the Reformation continued its destruction through the Thirty Years War.

The Reformation was a religious, political, intellectual, and cultural revolution that divided Catholic Europe. In northern and central Europe, it was brought about by Martin Luther and Henry VIII who challenged the authority of the Pope, and questioned the Catholic Church's definition of Christianity.[footnoteRef:25] It was an argument for a redistribution of religious and political power, within the hands of the Bible and the pamphlet-reading pastors and princes. The Catholic Church's response to the Protestants was powerful, albeit delayed, and consisted of triggered wars, persecutions, all of which was later called the Catholic Counter-Reformation.[footnoteRef:26] [25: Hunt, *Making of the West*, (2019)] [26: Kelley, *Beginning of Ideology*, (1981)]

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