

Reformation Resources Packet for Sessions 2 and 3

In this packet you will find documents that give summary overviews of the religious and political-economic conditions that fostered the Protestant and Catholic/Counter-Reformations and the actions various rulers took with regard to Reformation activities within their territories.

In a separate document, you will find a comparative chart of the major beliefs and practices of the Reformation era Christian churches.

Please spend a few minutes perusing these handouts in preparation for Tuesday's class.

Religious Background to the Reformation

There were a number of events, factors and conditions existing or occurring prior to the Reformation that helped set the stage for reformation from a religious perspective.

- the medieval conflicts between Church and State (like the Investiture Controversy) that called the truly religious purposes of the Church and the Papacy into question
- the accumulation of land and wealth by the Church (both the hierarchy and the monastic orders) during the Middle Ages that frequently called the Church's spiritual mission into question and prompted the rise of heresies as well as criticism from within the Church
- the "Babylonian Captivity" of the popes when popes were political puppets of the French kings and resided in the papal enclave of Avignon, within the French king's domains
- the "Great Schism," an event that produced two (and for a while, three) competing popes, each backed by one or more significant political powers (kings, emperors, princes, nobles) and each claiming the apostolic succession and excommunicating the followers of the other
- various devices invented or developed by the Church to help raise revenues—especially problematic were indulgences (buying salvation or remission from sin without contrition); simony (buying of Church offices by persons not qualified for them); multiple benefices (the sale of multiple Church offices to the same person with the result that many Church services were not properly provided)
- various corruptions within the regular (monks) and secular (priests) clergy, including concubinage, sexual abuse or harassment, cash for prayers, gluttony, and drunkenness
- the impact of the Black Death upon the faithful and the corollary truism that "bad" clerics tended to live (because they abandoned their flock and fled to safer areas or quarantined themselves) and "good" clerics died (because they comforted the sick and performed burials for the dead)
- the appearance of "heretics" critical of the theological and clerical abuses of the Church and especially of its hypocrisy. Especially important were those like John Wyclif (mid 1300s) of England and Jan Hus (late 1300s-early 1400s) of Bohemia whose criticisms were based on Biblical and theological foundations. Both of these actually preached ideas that would find further development and voice with Martin Luther in the early 1500s
- the work of Christian Humanists like Erasmus whose investigation of the Bible and Early Church fathers led them to see clearly and voice loudly the deviation of the Church hierarchy from the true spirit of Christianity. Corollary to this was the use of the newly invented printing press to get Bibles and religious tracts into the hands of more people
- the actions of the so-called "Renaissance Popes" whose excessive and public materialism, secularism, humanism and power-hunger caused many of the laity to feel betrayed
- a pervasive feeling among the laity that the rites and rituals of the Church had lost their efficacy for salvation and an active search on their part for new ways to practice and perceive their relationship with G-d

Political and Economic Conditions Existing in the Early 1500s

Within the Holy Roman Empire and in Europe more generally a number of conditions existed that ***allowed the Reformation to be successful***. What this phrase means is that conditions and threats existed that were bigger and seemingly more pressing than one angry monk-professor criticizing indulgences, a common practice of the Catholic Church. These situations kept people in power—especially Charles V—from dealing with Luther until after it was already too late to end his threat by silencing *him as an individual*, meaning that far too many people had “bought into” his ideas and stamping out “reformation” meant stamping out large numbers of people, many of whom held political power in their own right. [Some of these conditions also meant that a number of common people accepted Luther and his ideas not only because of their religious yearnings but also as a result of economic, political and social considerations.]

- Charles V, a Hapsburg, had inherited from his grandparents and parents titles and land, which made him an extremely powerful man. He was king of Spain and ruler of the massive overseas Spanish empire; Duke of Burgundy and as such ruler of the Netherlands (both modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands); Duke of Austria and ruler of the hereditary lands of the Hapsburgs in Hungary and Bohemia; elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.
- As such a powerful figure, Charles had enemies within the empire among the princes who feared he would be able to accomplish centralization of power and extinguish their sovereignty and power. These princes looked for any issue that would throw up obstacles to Charles’ centralization efforts.
- With so much territory in Europe and especially given its location on nearly all the borders of France, Charles had a particularly hostile neighbor in the Valois kings of France who made alliances and fought wars in order to defend themselves and curb his power.
- The Ottoman Turks were threatening European Christian kingdoms with land invasions through the Balkans (reaching as far north as Hungary) and piracy and naval actions on the Mediterranean. (One of the kings of France even made an alliance with the “infidel” Sultan as a way to harass Charles V.)
- The wars of the Italian city-states had erupted and brought France and Spain (and their “ally” the Holy Roman Empire) into the peninsula and into direct conflict.
- The influx of gold and silver from the New World was creating an economic inflation that hurt peasants, urban middle class and noble lords. The economic difficulties were exacerbated by Catholic restrictions on trade and personal wealth, its demands for tithes and contributions for indulgences.
- The popes of the early 1500s (Julius II, Leo X, among others) were more concerned with the wars and political problems of the Italian city-states—especially their own secular lands of the Papal States—than the state of the Church as a religious institution.
- The popes of the early 1500s also feared the calling of a Church council (which would have been an appropriate and possibly effective way to deal with Luther and to effect internal reforms and end criticisms) because of their reluctance to show “weakness” and to share authority within the Church.

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE REFORMATION

1517	Tetzel sells indulgences in Brandenburg	
1517	Luther posts the 95 Theses on the church at Wittenberg	
1518	Diet of Augsburg – Luther refuses to recant; Frederick of Saxony protects Luther	
1519	Election of Charles V (Hapsburg) reformed as Holy Roman Emperor	Zwingli preaches religion in Zurich
1520	Luther excommunication; he burns the document of excommunication	Bucer/Butzer leads move reform in Strasbourg
1520	Publication of <i>To the Christian Nobility Of the German Nation; The Babylonian Captivity; Freedom of the Christian Man</i>	
1521	Diet of Worms; electors declare Luther a heretic and enemy of the Empire; Luther saved by Frederick of Saxony; goes into hiding.	
1521	Work in Wittenberg on building Lutheran Church; work with Philip Melancthon	
1522	Revolt of the Ritter (Imperial Knights) against towns and major nobles	
1524	Peasants' War begins	
1525	Luther publishes <i>On the Murdering, Thieving Hordes of Peasants</i>	
1530	<i>Augsburg Confession</i> , systematic statement of Lutheran belief completed by Melancthon	
1531	Creation of Schmalkaldic League of Protestant Princes	1536 Publication of
1546	War of the Schmalkaldic League; Luther's death	Calvin's <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>
1555	Religious Peace of Augsburg	-- theocracy in Geneva

Summary of Reformation Actions by Country

Spain	effectively no Protestant reformation; much internal Catholic reform
France	1516 Concordat of Bologna—allowed king to appoint bishops and limited the amount of church revenues leaving France Reformation limited, later—little Lutheran influence; nearly all French Protestants are Calvinist active political persecution of Protestants after Affair of the Placards 1534 religious civil wars 1559-1598
“Italy”	very limited Protestant reform occurring in enclaves in the northern mountain regions
Holy Roman Empire	Luther begins reform here, challenging Catholic theology and papal abuses especially relating to revenues from indulgences, much of which moves to Rome Princes support or persecute Luther based on religious, political, or economic considerations Emperor Charles V unable effectively to unify princes and act in unison against Luther 1545-55 War of the Schmalkaldic League 1555 Religious Peace of Augsburg 1556 abdication of Charles V
Swiss Cantons Zurich	1517-20 Zwingli preaches reform of his church from his pulpit as a Catholic priest (some influence from/agreement with Luther; some key disagreements) 1520s Zurich city council supports Zwingli and reform of all churches 1520s spread of Zwinglian reform to other German-speaking cantons 1525-26 war of Zwinglian cantons against remaining German-speaking RCC cantons
Swiss Cantons Geneva	1520s spread of Lutheran ideas into the French-speaking cantons; some influence from Butzer in Strassburg and Zwingli in Zurich mid-1530s arrival in Basel and then Geneva of Jean Cauvin (John Calvin) a French second-generation Protestant theologian/reformer fleeing French persecution late 1530s Calvin expelled from Geneva as a result of theological differences and political conflict with city council 1541 Calvin returned to Geneva where he created a Protestant theocracy, having subdued his opposition whom he termed the “libertines”
England	1520 Henry VIII proclaimed “Defender of the Faith” by Pope as a result of his persecution of Protestant reformers 1534 Henry VIII uses Parliament to proclaim himself head of the church in England, breaking with Rome and enabling his marriage to Anne Boleyn in hopes of gaining a male heir 1530s confiscation and sale of church lands and wealth, the lands being sold (along with titles) to English gentry who now become nobles 1547 Edward VI makes significant theological reforms to the English church, making it more Protestant in belief and ritual 1553 Mary I Tudor (“Bloody Mary”), a devout Catholic, reinstates Catholicism, persecutes Protestants, especially the leadership, many going into exile in the Netherlands, but no restitution of church property 1559-1560 Elizabeth I restores Protestantism but in a compromised form and a broadly defined theology and practice (latitudinarianism)

Catholic Reformation/Counter-Reformation

Traditionally, English and American historians—for the most part Protestants—grouped all efforts to reform the Church from within under one heading—“Counter-Reformation”—implying that all reform was done to “counter” or was taken only in response to the work of the Protestants. More recently, however, objective scholarship has begun to distinguish two different sets of actions taken by the Catholics to reform—one done by scholars, monks, and administrators and other individuals before the Protestant Reformation ever occurred* and the other taken by the Church as an institution in response to the threat presented by the Protestant reformers.

Actions and Individuals defining the Catholic Reformation

- Christian humanists—among them Erasmus, Jean Colet, and Thomas More with their emphasis on more accurate translations of the Bible and other early Christian texts, making public and stark the contrast between Christ’s life and teachings and the realities of Catholic Christianity as it was being practiced at the time.
- The movement of “lay piety”—e.g. the Brethren of the Common Life—wherein individual Catholics, inspired by precursors and the Christian humanists themselves attempted to live in imitation of Christ.
- Reforming cardinals, bishops and monastic leaders—e.g. Bishop Giberti of Verona and Cardinal Jimenez of Spain—who undertook the reform of the spiritual life and practices of the priests, monks, nuns and parishioners under their authority.
- Individuals who began new orders within the Church focusing on greater piety and spiritualism.

In short, the term Catholic Reformation usually is used to refer to actions taken by individuals to reform spiritually either themselves or other individuals—not the Church as an institution as a whole.

Actions and Individuals defining the Counter-Reformation

- The Council of Trent, a meeting of the most important prelates, theologians and diplomats of the Church, examining and reaffirming the theology of the Catholic Church directly challenged by the Protestants—the need for works to gain salvation, the efficacy of the sacraments, saints and monasticism, and the hierarchical structure of the earthly church.
- The reinvigoration of the Roman inquisition (unlike the Spanish inquisition, its major target was heretical Catholics, e.g. men like Luther).
- The institution of the Index of Prohibited Books as a means to stop the spread of heretical ideas.
- The creation of more seminaries and better training of priests.
- The wholesale cleaning up of monasteries and convents.
- The creation of new orders focusing on spirituality, teaching, preaching and care for the ill, e.g. Carmelites, Capuchins, Theatines.
- The creation of “Propaganda” (the name of the office in the Vatican hierarchy) designed to overawe believers with the Church’s power and magnificence. (Baroque art and architecture were in part efforts of this office.)
- The acceptance by the pope of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) as a kind of “papal army,” loyal and obedient to the pope, whose purpose was to proselytize, converting newly encountered peoples to Catholic Christianity and reconverting those who had become Protestants.**

As opposed to the Catholic Reformation, the Counter-Reformation refers to the actions taken by the Church as an institution (at the direction of the pope and the hierarchy) to reform itself after Luther’s rebellion. It, like the Catholic Reformation, still had a goal of the betterment of the individual believer.

* Luther would be considered a part of this movement if he had not based his reform on an entirely different theology.

** Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish noble, was moved to found this order as a result of his own personal crisis and desire for spiritual well-being (like Luther’s). He then petitioned the pope for the special relation between the order and the pope in order to confound the Protestants. Loyola, who became a saint, could thus be considered part of both the Catholic and Counter-Reformations.