

The Renaissance

The word *renaissance* means “rebirth.” The 250-year period of European history beginning about 1350 is called the Renaissance because it marked the rebirth of a certain way of thinking—a return to the values of the Classical era. A variety of conditions gave rise to the Renaissance. First, the Black Death decimated Europe, striking down almost half of the population. Second, survivors of the plague began migrating to the cities, causing them to grow and prosper. This prosperity in turn meant that wealthy citizens had disposable income to spend on culture and the arts. Third, the perfection of the printing process brought about the possibility of near-universal literacy and education.

The Renaissance in Italy

The earliest stirrings of the ideas that would make historians label this era “the Renaissance” occurred in the Italian city-states. Several factors were responsible for this. First, Italy was the location of the Roman Empire, whose great artistic and intellectual achievements became so important to the era. It was natural that the Italians would be the first to celebrate the cultural past, which could be seen, touched, and studied literally on their very doorsteps. Second, Italy was enjoying a period of great economic prosperity. This meant that there were enormously wealthy families who had money to spend on major artistic and architectural projects. Third, the Catholic Church, which was headquartered in Rome, had begun to depend financially on wealthy Italians like Cosimo de’ Medici. This financial dependency gave these wealthy businessmen and politicians a certain amount of power over Church policies. Fourth, Italy’s location in the center of the Mediterranean, between the Middle East and the West, had always made it a place of cultural and intellectual exchange.

The Church in the Renaissance

For a thousand years before the Renaissance, the Roman Catholic Church had held universal, undisputed sway over all aspects of life in Western Europe. This began to change during the Renaissance for a number of reasons.

First, the Church proved powerless in the face of the Black Death. This shook the faith of the ordinary people. Second, secular authorities such as the powerful merchant families of Italy arose; they proved powerful rivals to the Church’s authority. Third, the Church itself encouraged and eased the cultural exchange that led to such developments as the study of Greek and Middle Eastern texts and ideas. Fourth, the Church embraced the Classical revival that played a part in undermining its own authority. Fifth, the availability of printed books in Europe after 1450 meant that more people were reading and learning to think for themselves.

Beginning in 1414, the Church sponsored a series of councils—international gatherings of scholars and church officials. The goal of the councils was to repair a schism in the Church that had led to rival papacies throughout much of the fourteenth century, one in Avignon and one in Rome. Once the Church was reunited under one pope, the next goal was to reunite the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches, which had been split since the year 1054. This was the purpose

of the Council of Florence, convened in 1438. It was sponsored in part by money from the Medici family.

Scholars and officials from Greece, Ethiopia, Russia, Cairo, and Trebizond came to Florence for the council. It thus became an unprecedented exchange of ideas from the various cultures. Eastern and Western scholars were able to trade books and manuscripts and hold long debates and discussions on questions of science and philosophy. While the Eastern guests admired new Italian works of art and architecture, Western scholars pored over texts by Euclid, Plato, and Aristotle—works to which they had never before had access.

The council not only failed to reunite the Roman and Orthodox Churches, but, ironically, by making the spread and exchange of knowledge possible, it weakened the authority of the Church. As knowledge continued to spread and literacy continued to rise, people questioned the Church more and more. Only another eighty years would go by before Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation that would change everything.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born in 1483 in the German state of Saxony. He became a theological scholar and a professor of scripture at Wittenberg University. A devout Catholic, Luther was outraged by the notion that salvation could be bought and sold. His Ninety-Five Theses, which appeared in 1517, were propositions for debate that questioned and criticized many aspects of the Catholic Church, including a prominent and harsh reference to the sale of indulgences. The Ninety-Five Theses were printed and widely circulated, and many people were convinced by Luther's arguments. The pope ordered Luther to recant his criticisms of the Church on pain of excommunication; Luther refused.

At this time in history, the German city-states of north-central Europe were bound in a loose alliance known as the Holy Roman Empire. Each state had its own prince, with one emperor ruling over all. The rulers of the provinces were called electors because the emperor was chosen by election. Over time, the election had become purely ceremonial; since 1440, the title had been passed down in the ruling Hapsburg (spelled "Habsburg" in some sources) family in the same manner as any hereditary monarchy in Europe. In 1519, Charles I of Spain was crowned Holy Roman emperor, succeeding his grandfather Maximilian I. He would rule as Emperor Charles V.

In 1521, Charles called all his princes together for a diet—an official assembly—at the town of Worms. Summoned to appear before the diet, Luther refused to recant his statements. Ordered to leave the empire, he instead accepted an offer of protection from the elector of Saxony. Luther continued to write and publish and, to his own astonishment, soon realized that instead of bringing about reform in the Catholic Church, he had founded a new denomination.

The most important idea behind Lutheranism is the notion that salvation depends on faith. Each believer must read, study, and understand scripture for himself or herself—in effect, each soul would serve as his or her own priest, instead of relying exclusively on an ordained priest to interpret the word of God. Part of what made this possible was, of course, the technology of printing, which before long brought a Bible into every household. Luther's German translation of

the Bible appeared in 1534. For the first time, Germans could read the Bible in their own language rather than having to learn Hebrew, Latin, or Greek.

Luther advocated a simple worship service, arguing that the communion between the individual and God took place in the individual's heart and mind. The elaborate ceremony of the Catholic mass, to Luther, was merely an outward show that had no spiritual significance. Luther also argued that worship services should be conducted in the language of the people, so that they could understand exactly what was being said and think about it for themselves. These ideas and reforms appealed to thousands of Germans.

Several of the German princes became enthusiastic Lutherans as well. When Lutheranism became the state religion, the Church's vast wealth and property passed from the pope's control into the hands of the prince. This was a powerful practical reason for adopting Lutheranism, above and beyond questions of spirituality. However, many princes remained devoutly Catholic.

At first, Charles V tolerated Lutheranism, but as it spread, various groups began using it as a basis for social and political revolt. In 1529, the emperor decreed a ban on Lutheranism. It was during this period that the term *protestant* first came into use, describing the Lutheran princes and people who *protested* against the emperor's decree. War eventually broke out between the German states over this issue. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg settled the matter by declaring that each German prince could determine the religion of his own state.

Lutheranism took firm hold in Germany and also spread north to the Scandinavian countries. Meanwhile, a rather different form of Protestant Christianity developed in Switzerland.

John Calvin

John Calvin was born in France in 1509. He studied philosophy, law, and humanism and learned both Latin and Greek. Like Luther, Calvin came to believe that the Catholic Church needed reform. When he spoke out on this issue, he found himself so unpopular in France that he fled to Switzerland. Here he eventually acquired so much power and influence that many historians describe the city of Geneva as a theocracy—a state ruled by religious laws.

The central idea of Calvinism is predestination—the belief that God predetermines everything that will happen on earth. According to this belief, human beings are already marked for salvation or damnation at birth, and no amount of faith or good deeds can earn salvation. Calvin argued that those who were saved would naturally perform good works and lead exemplary lives; therefore, all believers must live this way, because it was one sure sign that they were among the saved. Calvinism strictly regulated every aspect of a person's life: it made church attendance mandatory, encouraged simplicity in dress, and forbade many forms of enjoyment such as dancing, singing, and playing cards.

Despite its harsh rules and its intolerance of other forms of worship, Calvinism gained many converts. Calvin's followers spread his ideas and practices throughout Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France. John Knox transported many of Calvin's ideas home to Scotland,

where the religion was called Presbyterianism after the *presbyters*, or elders, who ruled the church. In 1560–1561, Parliament made Presbyterianism the state religion of Scotland.

In France, Calvin's followers were called French Protestants or Huguenots. Despite tens of thousands of individual converts to Protestantism, France as a whole was not sympathetic to the Reformation. The French monarchs sided with the Catholics throughout a series of civil wars fought from 1562 to 1598, helping to ensure that Protestantism could not establish itself securely. Thousands of Huguenots were massacred, and many more fled France to settle in Holland, Belgium, and England.

The 1580s saw a struggle for the French throne known as the War of the Three Henries. These were King Henry III and two of his kinsmen, Henry of Guise and Henry of Navarre. With the support of Philip II of Spain, Henry of Guise made a bold move to take the throne, but he was taken by surprise by supporters of Henry III and assassinated. When a fanatic assassinated the king the following year, Henry of Navarre inherited the throne. He would rule as King Henry IV of France.

Henry IV was a Calvinist, but his religious convictions were not nearly as strong as his political ambition. His main goal was to strengthen the monarchy, and he believed that siding with the religious majority was a crucial step to achieving security on his throne. Therefore, Henry converted to Catholicism. In 1598, he issued the Edict of Nantes, which established Catholicism as the state religion of France and its territories, but allowed Protestants to worship as they saw fit, without molestation. This ended the French civil wars of religion. Henry was enlightened enough to understand that tolerance in the matter of private worship would lead to domestic accord in the population and would therefore benefit the kingdom.

Henry VIII and the Church of England

The Anglican Church, also called the Church of England, is unique in history for two reasons. First, it was created solely for political reasons, not religious ones. Second, it was the most sweeping assertion of secular authority in the history of Europe.

By the 1520s, King Henry VIII of England and the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon had been married for several years. Although Catherine had given birth to several children, only one, a daughter, had survived past infancy.

Lacking a male heir, Henry dreaded possible rival claims to the throne and a return to the civil wars that had battered England throughout the 1400s. He was also personally tired of Catherine. Therefore, Henry petitioned Pope Clement VII for an annulment of his marriage. The king had fallen in love with lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn, who was several years younger than Catherine and seemed likely to provide him with healthy children. (Ironically, only one daughter of their marriage would survive; Henry would have to marry yet again in order to produce a son.)

Henry VIII never tolerated opposition at any time in his life. When the pope refused to grant him his annulment, the king determined to find another way to get what he wanted. In 1533, he named Thomas Cranmer, a loyal official of the court, the new archbishop of Canterbury.

Archbishop Cranmer granted Henry his annulment and then married him to Anne Boleyn. The new pope, Paul III, excommunicated both the king and the archbishop for violating the sacrament of marriage.

In 1534, the British Parliament retaliated against the pope by passing the Act of Supremacy. This act acknowledged the king as the Supreme Head of the Church in England, thus creating a new Christian denomination and eliminating any papal involvement in British affairs. In effect, the British monarch now had the same authority over England that the pope had over the rest of Europe. No secular government had ever asserted such power in a thousand years of Church authority.

It is important to note the role of Parliament in the creation of the Church of England. The king did not create the Anglican Church with a wave of a royal scepter; instead, the duly elected representative government passed the Act of Supremacy according to the laws of the land. Thus, Henry VIII could claim with some reason that the English people and the government fully supported his desire to break away from the Catholic Church.

In a clear sign that Henry's action had been politically and not spiritually motivated, the Anglican Church continued to hear confessions and celebrate mass in just the same manner as the Catholic Church. Under Henry's son and successor, Edward VI, the clergy introduced various reforms, such as permission for priests to marry. In 1549, Archbishop Cranmer published *The Book of Common Prayer*, which contained the prayers and proper forms of all Anglican services—in English, not Latin. During the next century, the status of the Church of England fluctuated according to the personal faith of the monarch.

The Counter Reformation

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church was well aware of the need to reform itself from within. However, reform depended largely on the personality of the pope in power at any given time. This made for inconsistency; reform proceeded slowly, by fits and starts. Some popes felt a genuine need to reform corrupt practices, others hoped to reclaim Protestants who had left the Church, and still others stubbornly refused to support any changes.

Pope Paul III called for a council of high Church officials to meet in the city of Trent to devise a plan for reform. Due to strong opposition from within the Church, the Council of Trent did not meet until 1545 and took more than fifteen years to reach any conclusions. In the end, it supported all doctrines that Protestants had criticized, banned the sale of indulgences, and required the founding of hundreds of new seminaries for the education and training of priests.

Paul III appointed many pro-reform cardinals in the hope that they would continue to elect popes who would fight corruption in the Church and try to restore it to its former glory. This attempt was largely successful; the popes who followed Paul III continued to support reform.

In 1542, Paul III created the Congregation of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Its purpose was to supervise the Roman Inquisition, whose job was to try people accused of heresy. The Roman Inquisition generally assessed penalties such as fines or public whippings. The most serious

sentence it could hand down was one of life imprisonment. However, if the Inquisition handed a prisoner over to secular authorities, it almost certainly meant the person would be executed. It began as a sincere attempt on the part of reformers to root out heresy within the Church. Under some of Paul III's successors, it became a byword for torture and terror. Portugal and Spain had their own Inquisitions; these, however, reported directly to the monarchs rather than being supervised by the Church.

Paul IV, who served as pope from 1555 to 1559, was a particularly strict reformer, focusing his energy on a variety of targets. He came down especially hard on the practice of simony, or the sale of Church offices; although this was a dependable source of income for the Church, it was clearly corrupt. Paul IV also made the Church bureaucracy more efficient by eliminating many unnecessary positions. In 1559, the Church published the *Index of Forbidden Books*; this document listed all books that, according to the Holy Office, contained heretical ideas and thus were off limits to Catholics because of their corrupting influence. Not content with banning the books, the Church also burned thousands of copies. Owning a copy of a forbidden book made the possessor liable to punishment under the Inquisition.

The founding of the Society of Jesus, also known as the order of the Jesuits, was a more positive Catholic reform. Its founder, Ignatius Loyola, was born in the Basque region of Spain in 1491. An active military career led to severe injuries and wounds; while he lay still recovering, Loyola passed the time with books, studying the life and teachings of Jesus. Greatly impressed by Jesus' simplicity and humility, Loyola vowed to emulate him. He took vows of poverty, wore the simplest of clothing, and spent his days serving and helping the poor. He published a work called *Spiritual Exercises*, which advocated a period of intense contemplation and study for any man wanting to devote his life to serving the Church.

In 1540, the pope approved Loyola's petition to found the order of the Jesuits. The society grew quickly as many men joined, attracted by Loyola's high ideals. Like their leader, the Jesuits lived simply and chastely, indifferent to physical comforts or luxuries. Jesuit schools offered the best education then available to children in Europe; pupils from all income levels and all ranks of society were welcomed and treated equally. The Jesuits were characterized by reforming zeal, preferring to persuade non-Catholics to convert, rather than resorting to the bullying techniques of the Inquisition. Their missionary ambitions eventually led them to the most remote areas of the world, far beyond Europe's borders.

The Jesuits were not the only order founded during the Counter-Reformation. The Ursuline order of nuns and the Capucine order of priests, among others, provided both men and women with the opportunity to teach, preach, and serve. Because these orders, like the Jesuits, turned their backs on the pomp, ceremony, and display that Luther and Calvin had found so objectionable, the common people were impressed. Seeing that these Catholic orders practiced the simplicity and purity that they preached, thousands of people were inspired to follow them. The activities of these orders, especially the Jesuits, helped to counteract the effects of the Protestant Reformation and to strengthen and improve the Catholic Church as an institution.

The Protestant Reformation

Use power points & readings from my webpage OR do your own research into the following questions.

List some of the practices and teachings of the Catholic Church that Martin Luther protested.

How did Martin Luther make his ideas known? Why was this dangerous?

How did the Catholic Church respond to Martin Luther's protests? How did Martin Luther survive?

Summarize in 5 sentences the beliefs of John Calvin:

Summarize in at least 10 bullets how Henry VIII started the Anglican Church and the effects of this new church.

What was the Catholic Reformation? What teachings/ practices of the Catholic Church were changed?