Record: 1

Title:	Reformation and Renaissance 1517-1649.
Subject(s):	CHURCH history -- 16th century; LUTHER, Martin, 1483-1546; CHURCH & state -- Europe; CATHOLIC Church -- History; REFORMATION; CHRISTIANITY
Geographic Terms:	PAPAL States
Source:	Renaissance & Reformation , 2009, p1
Document Type:	Article
Abstract:	An historical overview of the Protestant Reformation is presented. The author reviews how the church was influenced by the political and social implications of the Renaissance. The role of the papacy in government in discussed. Details related to the work of Martin Luther are reviewed. Also reviewed is the Diet of Worms of 1521.
Accession Number:	21482921
Lexile:	1290
Database:	History Reference Center

Reformation and Renaissance 1517-1649

Context of the Reformation

The century leading up to the Reformation (broadly speaking, the mid-1400s into the early -to-mid 1500s) had seen the flowering of the Renaissance. Renaissance (a French word meaning "rebirth") is a broad term that implies broad cultural shifts. There was renewed interest in the culture of ancient Rome and Greece—in effect, Europe's pre-Christian roots—and a shift from the intense religiosity of the Medieval period to a more human-oriented focus. This change is especially evident in painting. Art was an important means by which the Church conveyed religious lessons and stories to an audience that was almost entirely illiterate. Scenes from the Bible and depictions of saints helped worshippers to envisage not only the stories being told, but also the special nature of the figures being depicted.

Starting in the early 1300s and gathering momentum over the next three centuries, artists began concentrating on portraying scenes as a human might actually see them. There was also renewed interest in human beings themselves—not necessarily as religious figures (although Bible stories continued to be an important subject, especially in paintings commissioned by the Church) but as humans, albeit sometimes idealized.

Renaissance Papacy

There were echoes of this shift in the Catholic church as well (bearing in mind that there was only one form of Christian religion in Western Europe before 1517). In the last three decades of the 15th century a series of Italian popes began concentrating on secular affairs. Starting with Sixtus IV in 1471 and lasting for the next six decades, the so-called Renaissance Popes focused on protecting and enlarging the territory they controlled in central Italy near Rome. It was a time when Italian city-states—notably Venice, Milan, Florence, and Naples—constantly competed for power and territory, often entering into alliances with larger states such as Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. What might be termed the "secularization" of the papacy reached a high point with Pope Julius II (1503-13) who actually led troops into battle to drive back the troops of Venice. Julius was also instrumental in organizing a series of alliances (e.g. League of Cambrai, Holy

League) variously aimed at curbing the expansion of Venice and at expelling France from Milan.

Part of the process of enhancing papal powers included sprucing up papal headquarters in what is now the Vatican in Rome. Pope Sixtus initiated this project in 1481 by building a new chapel in the Apostolic Palace and commissioning outstanding artists to paint the walls with scenes from the Bible. Almost 30 years later Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the chapel (called the Sistine from the Italian word meaning "relating to Sixtus").

Julius decided to replace the Church of St. Peter, the traditional headquarters of the Roman Catholic religion. This was to be a huge, expensive project that would take over a century (1506-1615) to complete.

Selling Indulgences

Julius died long before the basilica was finished. His successor, Pope Leo X was hard-pressed for funds to keep the project going. To help pay for the basilica Leo launched a program of selling indulgences. Indulgences were not new; the church had long offered its faithful remission of sin through indulgences. Faithful Catholics could pay money as a sacrifice—one might say a kind of fine—in exchange for which their sins would be forgiven.

To help promote the sales of indulgences Pope Leo X entered into a sort of sales franchise agreement with various archbishops. One of these was Albrecht, archbishop of Mainz (a city in the Holy Roman Empire near Wittenberg). But the concept of indulgences was not accepted universally, and some princes refused to allow the practice in their territory. Albrecht, though, brought in a Franciscan monk, Johann Tetzel (1465-1519), to conduct the actual sales. Tetzel adopted elements of showmanship to encourage sales, telling parishioners, "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" and promising that indulgences could even be bought on behalf of deceased relatives in order to assure a reunion in heaven.

Luther's Theses

Martin Luther

Tetzel's sales pitches drew people from adjoining areas where sales of indulgences had been banned. They also discouraged parishioners from coming to confession since, they thought, their sins had been forgiven. All of this was noticed by a theology professor at Wittenberg University, Martin Luther (1483-1546), who found the whole concept of indulgences objectionable. Luther took the view that first, humans were born "into sin" as a result of the transgressions of Adam and Eve; that only God could forgive this fundamental sin; and that forgiveness required that people express faith in God and belief in Jesus Christ. Paying money, participating in church rituals, or other "acts" were irrelevant to divine forgiveness, which was strictly up to God and dependent on faith, in Luther's view.

Luther drew up 95 statements (or "theses") in October 1517 for discussion. He sent them to the archbishop of Mainz and other church leaders; by tradition it is thought that Luther also posted them on a church door in Wittenberg, which served as a kind of community bulletin board. Luther's action may have been spurred by Tetzel's performances, but his theses went well beyond the single issue of indulgences.

Luther's theses marked the beginning of the Reformation, a large-scale reaction against the behavior of popes over the previous four decades.

Immediate Reaction

Copies of Luther's theses spread quickly, thanks to Gothenburg's printing press. Luther's theological challenges to the church's teaching had immediate political implications.

A year after posting his 95 theses Luther wrote an essay defending his ideas. The situation continued to escalate, culminating in Luther's official excommunication from the Church in 1521. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, was suddenly faced with a touchy problem: Luther was clearly challenging the authority of the pope, but his objections had touched a popular nerve and gained widespread sympathy.

It was at this point that the Reformation crossed a critical barrier: the transition from religion to politics.

The Diet of Worms

In 1521 the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, called for a Diet, or assembly of nobles, to meet in the city of Worms. Luther was invited to defend his views. The objective of the emperor was to persuade Luther to retract his teachings, thereby restoring religious order and easing the tensions that were growing between the pope and the Holy Roman Empire.

The Diet opened on Jan. 22, 1521. On April 17 Luther delivered his defense, concluding that "unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."

A month later Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms, declaring Luther a heretic and an outlaw, and ordering that his works not be distributed.

Just six years later the Holy Roman Emperor found himself fighting the forces of the League of Cognac, including the pope, France, Milan, and Venice. The struggle was viewed as the pope's effort to free the papacy from domination by the Holy Roman Empire. The war brought Charles's mercenary army to Rome where, in May 1527, 20,000 unpaid troops, most of them followers of Luther, were allowed to rampage through the city for seven months in the Sack of Rome.

Other Dissidents

Luther was not the only dissident critical of the church during the 16th century. Other dissidents also emerged as critics of the church.

Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli (1484-1531). Zwingli was a humanist scholar from Switzerland. Zwingli reached conclusions very similar to Luther's and emerged as the leader of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, founding the Swiss Reformed Church. He received support from both the magistrate and the population of Zurich in particular, from which his teachings spread to five other Swiss cantons and led to a war between the Protestant cantons and cantons that remained loyal to the Catholic church. During a battle in these wars Zwingli was killed in 1531.

John Calvin (1509-64). In Paris, a young priest named John Calvin (Jean Cauvin in French;), delivered a speech in 1533 critical of the church and calling for reforms.

Threatened by popular criticism, Calvin fled for his safety to Switzerland. Calvin was persuaded to help buttress the cause of Protestants (as followers of Luther were now called) in Geneva. The Protestants gained control of the city after 1541 and Calvin spent his life there as a dominant figure in a city that became a refuge for persecuted Protestants from elsewhere in Europe.

Calvin's theology was somewhat different from Luther's. Principal among his teachings was predestination, the idea that a person's fate was determined before birth and that earthly acts could have no bearing on whether a soul was saved and went to heaven or condemned to hell.

The Wars and Politics of Religion

In 1530 the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, convened a Diet in the city of Augsburg to address a number of issues, of which the growing Protestant revolt was one. A colleague of Luther presented a new statement of Lutheran beliefs (known as the Confession of Augsburg) that remains a key summary of Lutheran beliefs today.

The 1530 meeting of the Diet was soon followed by formation of an alliance between two Protestant electors (rulers over provinces of the Holy Roman Empire), Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, who formed the Schmalkaldic League in 1531, promising to support one another if the Holy Roman Emperor, should attack either one. In effect this alliance gave Protestants a territory where they could practice their beliefs in safety.

Charles, faced with a plethora of problems across his wide-ranging realm, was eager to bring about a truce in the religious battles as he faced other pressing challenges, such as competition with France for control of Italy and the threat of the rapidly expanding Islamic empire headed by Suleiman I, who had laid siege to Vienna in 1529.

Council of Trent

In 1545 Pope Paul III, realizing that the Protestant revolt was not going away, convened church leaders in Trent, Italy, for the Council of Trent. The council met intermittently over the next 18 years and is regarded as the start of reforms in the Catholic Church known as the Counter Reformation. Two years later, in 1547, Charles V attacked the Schmalkaldic League and imprisoned both electors, Frederich and Philip. But rather than stamping out Protestantism, Charles forced electors to adopt a document known as the Augusburg Interim in 1548. This was effectively a truce that allowed both Protestants and Catholics to continue practicing their religions within the Holy Roman Empire and gave Charles time (and resources) for his wars with France and the Islamic empire.

The 1548 truce did not resolve the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, however, and in 1555 the Diet of Augsburg, still in session, adopted the Peace of Augsburg. This agreement gave each prince inside the empire the right to determine whether Catholicism or Lutheranism would prevail inside his territory under a principle known as cuius regio, eius religio (Latin: "whose the region is, his the religion"). So-called free cities were required to tolerate both religions, and citizens were allowed to emigrate to another region if they were unhappy with their prince's choice.

The Peace of Augsburg, while it did not end religious strife in Europe, did ratify the right of Protestants to practice their religion, at least in some areas. Over the next half century, other battles continued to expand the regions where Protestantism was tolerated.

A Century of War

Over almost a century much of Western Europe was embroiled in warfare that combined territorial ambitions interlaced with religious overtones.

• **The Dutch Revolt, 1568-1648.** Citizens in the Low Countries (today's Holland and Belgium) grew restive under the rule of the Catholic king of Spain, Philip II, and in 1568 launched an independence movement. Dutch Protestants found an ally in Queen Elizabeth I of England, leading Philip to send a large armada to invade England in 1588 (the Spanish Armada).

• **Swiss independence.** Fighting between Catholic and Protestant cantons in Switzerland continued as late as 1712. But the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (see below) included a provision recognizing Switzerland's independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

• **Civil war in France (1562-98).** Three competing factions fought a series of wars for control over France: the Guises of northeastern France, strong supporters of the Catholic Church; the Bourbons of southwestern France, mostly Catholics but sympathetic to followers of Calvin called the Huguenots; and the Montmorency-Chatillon family of central France, also mostly Catholic but also sympathetic to the Huguenots. The end result was the coronation of Henri III of Navarre as Henri IV of France, but only after he re-embraced his original faith, Catholicism.

• **Thirty Years War (1618-1648),** a complex series of battles centered on fighting between parts of the Holy Roman Empire divided along religious lines, but also involving Spain, Denmark, Sweden, England, and French Protestants. This prolonged conflict ended with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Treaty of Westphalia (1648)

What could be described as the wars of the Reformation ended in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia. This complex agreement had several main parts:

• It recognized Dutch independence from Spain, which included formation of the mainly Protestant United Provinces (later called Holland) in the north.

• It gave greatly expanded powers to the 300 princes whose territories comprised the Holy Roman Empire, at the expense of the emperor.

• It confirmed the terms of the Peace of Augsburg (1555), allowing German princes to choose whether their provinces would be Catholic or Protestant, allowing limited freedom of religious practice, and permitting free migration between provinces for purposes of practicing religion. It also included followers of John Calvin, now organized into the Reformed Church as the third major wing of Western European Christianity.

From 1648 onward the monopoly over religion once exercised by the Catholic church was over.

The English Reformation

There was also a revolt against Catholicism in England, but it followed a very different course than on the Continent. King Henry VIII, eager for a male heir to the throne, had asked the pope to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon after she gave birth to a daughter, Mary, but no son. The pope refused—in part due to pressure from the Holy Roman Emperor (who was simultaneously king of Spain), whose claim to the throne of England lay in his aunt Catherine. Henry VIII proceeded to divorce Catherine anyway, and

in the process in 1534 declared that he, not the pope, would henceforth lead the Church of England.

Henry's revolt was entirely political, not theological, even though it coincided with the early stages of the Protestant revolt in the Holy Roman Empire. Henry followed Catholic rituals and teachings; the only significant change was his insistence that an English translation of the Bible be in every church.

Henry's successor in 1547, King Edward VI, continued Henry's practices. When Henry's daughter Mary, a devout Catholic, became queen in 1553 she instituted a bitter campaign to restore the Catholic Church, and earned the nickname Bloody Mary. She was succeeded in turn by her half sister Elizabeth, in 1558. Elizabeth acted to restore the Church of England while trying to calm religious passions.

Elizabeth's policy of moderation dissatisfied English followers of John Calvin who wanted to "purify" the Church of England of perceived Catholic influences (hence their name, Puritans). Elizabeth was succeed by James I in 1603. James, a Scot, disappointed the Puritans by continuing Elizabeth's policies. James's successor in 1625 was Charles I, who tried to suppress the Puritans. The result was a revolt by Puritan forces in parliament, led by Oliver Cromwell, that led to a civil war and the beheading of Charles. Cromwell proceeded to abolish the monarchy and to rule as Lord Protector over the Commonwealth from 1649 (the year of the Treaty of Westphalia; see above) until 1660. Cromwell was succeeded by the exiled Charles II, who restored the Church of England.

Preceding the reign of Charles I, some English Puritans had sought religious refuge among their fellow Calvinists in Amsterdam, from which they later sailed to establish a colony in North America (the Massachusetts Bay Colony).

Although the English Reformation was eventually heavily influenced by the teachings of Calvin—culminating in the period of the Commonwealth—it developed in ways largely independent of the Reformation in Europe.

More information

"Protestants' Most-Famous Document" [95 Theses], Christian History, 1992, Vol. 11 Issue 2, p. 21.

Ayris, Paul. "Reformation in Action: The Implementation of Reform in the Dioceses of England," Reformation & Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies, June 2003, Vol. 5 Issue 1, p. 27.

Brooke, Sebastian. "Reformation Rhetoric: The Genealogye of Heresye," Reformation & Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies, Dec. 2004, Vol. 6 Issue 3, p. 374.

Brown, Perry. "Preaching from the Printshop," Christian History, 1992, Vol. 11 Issue 2, p. 33.

Cameron, Euan. "Introduction: The Reformation and Europe," European Reformation, 1991, p. 1.

Cavendish, Richard. "The Diet of Augsburg," History Today, Feb. 005, Vol. 55 Issue 2, p. 52.

Hendrix, Scott. "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," Church History, Sep. 2000, Vol. 69 Issue 3, p. 558.

Hillerbrand, Hans J. "Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?" Church History, Sep. 2003, Vol. 72 Issue 3, p. 525.

Konkola, Kari and Diarmaid MacCulloch. "People of the Book: Success in the English Reformation," History Today, Oct. 2003, Vol. 53 Issue 10, p. 23.

Strauss, Gerald. "Capturing Hearts and Minds in the German Reformation," History Today. June 1981, Vol. 31 Issue 6, p. 21.

Thigpen, Paul. "Friends and Enemies," Christian History, 1992, Vol. 11 Issue 2, p. 38.

----------. "Luther's Political Allies," Christian History, 1992, Vol. 11 Issue 2, p. 44.

Von Friedeburg, Robert. "Dickens, the German Reformation, and the Issue of Nation and Fatherland in Early Modern German History," Historical Research, Feb. 2004, Vol. 77 Issue 195, p. 79.

Books

Cunningham, Andrew and Ole Peter Grell. "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine, and Death in Reformation Europe, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Elton, G. R. Europe from Renaissance to Reformation, London: Folio Society, 2001.

Mackenney, Richard. Sixteenth Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

