

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



The Reformation in Europe, 1517–1600

Lesson 1 The Protestant Reformation

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What conditions can encourage the desire for reform?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

fundamental basic or essential
external outward or observable
valid well-grounded or justifiable

Content Vocabulary

Christian humanism a movement that developed in northern Europe during the Renaissance combining classical learning (humanism) with the goal of reforming the Catholic Church
salvation the state of being saved through faith alone or through faith and good works
indulgence a release from all or part of punishment for sin by the Catholic Church, reducing time in purgatory after death
Lutheranism the religious doctrine that Martin Luther developed; it differed from Catholicism in the doctrine of salvation, which Luther believed could be achieved by faith alone, not by good works; Lutheranism was the first Protestant faith

TAKING NOTES: *Determining Cause and Effect*

ACTIVITY Use a graphic organizer like this one to identify steps that led to the Reformation.

Step
Step
Step
Reformation

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The Protestant Reformation is the name of a religious movement of the 1500s. There was a call for change, or reform, in the Catholic Church. The new ideas of Renaissance humanism were one reason for this call. Another reason was to end what some people saw as worldly and dishonest practices in the Church. The Protestant Reformation greatly changed the history of Europe and the European way of life. It divided Christianity into groups with different sets of beliefs. It also led to important changes in political power in Europe.

Prelude to Reformation

Guiding Question *How did Christian humanism and Desiderius Erasmus pave the way for the Protestant Reformation in Europe?*

Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s. He was a German priest and professor. Earlier events helped prepare the way for the religious changes of the Reformation. Important intellectual changes had begun during the 1400s. These new ways of thinking helped lead to religious change.

Christian Humanism

A new focus on classical learning and on the individual was a key part of the Italian Renaissance of the 1400s. This new way of thinking was called humanism. During the second half of the fifteenth century, Italian humanism spread to northern Europe. It led to a movement called **Christian humanism**, or Northern Renaissance humanism. The major goal of this movement was to reform the Catholic Church. The Christian humanists believed human beings could use reason (good thinking and judgment) and improve themselves. They thought that people should read the classics and the **fundamental**, or basic, works of Christianity such as the Bible. In this way, they would become more sincerely religious. An effect of this religious feeling would be a reform of the Church and society.

The best-known Christian humanist was Desiderius Erasmus (ih•RAZ•muhs). He believed that Christianity should show people how to live good lives on a daily basis. It should not just teach people how to be saved. Erasmus also thought that the Church needed to return to the simpler days of early Christianity. He thought the **external** (what are outward and that can be seen) forms of medieval religion were not all that important. These practices included pilgrimages, fasts, and the veneration (worship) of relics. Instead, Erasmus focused on the importance of an individual's religious feelings.

Erasmus worked to educate people about the works of Christianity, and to end bad practices in the Church. He wrote *The Praise of Folly* in 1509. In this work, he used humor to criticize society's moral and religious practices. He called for a simpler, purer faith. For him, the clergy focused too much on external practices. For example, they encouraged people to visit the shrines of saints to get special favors in return.

Erasmus wanted reform within the Catholic Church. He did not want to break away, or separate, from it. His ideas, however, did prepare the way for the Reformation. As people of his time said, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched." This meant that Erasmus had many of the ideas that Luther later developed as part of the Protestant Reformation.

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Need for Reform

Erasmus and the Christian humanists were not the only ones who called for reform. Popular songs and images, even court records, show that many people criticized the Church. There include ordinary people, humanists, and even Church leaders. For example, many people thought that many of the Renaissance popes, from 1450 to 1520, were too concerned with Italian politics and not concerned enough with the spiritual needs of their people. People also thought that many Church leaders were using their positions to advance their careers and to gain wealth. At the same time, many ordinary priests who served local churches did not seem to understand their spiritual duties. People wanted to learn how to save their souls. Many parish priests seemed to be not willing or able to offer advice.

The leaders of the Church seemed to be failing to meet their spiritual responsibilities. At the same time, ordinary people wanted to express their religious feelings in a meaningful way. They also want to know that they were on the correct path to salvation, or acceptance into heaven. For some people, the process of obtaining **salvation** became almost mechanical. They followed certain practices without really thinking about their meaning.

According to Church practice at that time, a person could gain an **indulgence**, or freedom from all or part of the punishment for sin. For example, one way to get an indulgence was to venerate, or worship, a relic (such as a piece of a saint's clothing). One popular way to gain an indulgence was to go on a pilgrimage to view a relic. The Church sold people indulgences in the form of a document signed by a Church official.

As a result of the practice of indulgences, many people collected and venerated relics as a way to salvation. Frederick III, also called Frederick the Wise, was Luther's prince. Frederick had collected over 5,000 relics. It was believed that the indulgences connected to these relics could reduce time in purgatory by 1,443 years. The Church also sold indulgences.

Some people who wanted to be sure of salvation joined the popular mystical movement known as the Modern Devotion. The Modern Devotion did not emphasize external Church practices. Instead, it focused on the need to follow the teachings of Jesus. This focus on religious life and feeling was occurring within the Catholic Church. The new religious situation helps to explain the huge influence of Luther's ideas. People were ready for a change. They were looking for new ideas and ways to gain salvation.



Reading Progress Check

Identifying Central Issues Why, according to Erasmus, other Christian humanists, and other critics, did the Church need reform?

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Lesson 1 The Protestant Reformation, *continued*

Martin Luther

Guiding Question *What role did Martin Luther and his ideas play in the Reformation?*

Martin Luther was a monk and a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. There he taught about the Bible. One problem had bothered Luther since he had become a monk. He had always wondered how a person could be sure of gaining salvation. Catholic teaching emphasized that a person needed both faith and good works to gain salvation.

However, Luther thought that human beings were powerless compared to an almighty God. As a result, they could never do enough good works to earn salvation. Through his study of the Bible, Luther concluded that humans are not saved because of their good works but because of their faith in God. This idea was called justification by faith alone. It became the key teaching of the Protestant Reformation. Luther had studied the Bible to develop his understanding of salvation. To him and other Protestants, the Bible became the only **valid**, or correct, place to find religious truth.

The Ninety-five Theses

Luther did not see himself as a rebel, but he was greatly upset by the widespread selling of indulgences. Luther was most offended by the monk Johann Tetzel. The Catholic Church had authorized Tetzel to sell indulgences. It wanted to get money to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Tetzel promised that when he sold indulgences, dead people's souls were freed from purgatory. As a result people paid money to free the souls of loved ones. The sale of indulgences angered Luther. He believed that indulgences only made people feel better. They did not forgive sins.

On October 31, 1517, Luther, who was angered by Church practices, made his Ninety-five Theses public. At the time, people often posted lists of topics to discuss in a public place. Luther perhaps hung his theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Some people, however, think that the posting may be a legend. In any case, his theses were a powerful attack on the sale of indulgences. Thousands of copies of the Ninety-five Theses were printed. They soon spread to all parts of Germany.

A Break With the Church

By 1520, Luther had begun to move toward a more definite break with the Catholic Church. He called on the German princes to overthrow the pope in Germany and create a reformed German church.

Luther also attacked the Church's system of sacraments (special religious ceremonies). In his view, they were a way in which the pope and the Church had destroyed the real meaning of Jesus' teachings. Luther kept only two sacraments—baptism (the ceremony to become a member of the Christian church) and the Eucharist, or Communion, (the ceremony in memory of Jesus' last supper). Luther also called for the clergy to marry. This was against the Catholic requirement that the clergy should be unmarried.

In all these calls for changes, Luther continued to emphasize his new doctrine about salvation. He said it is faith alone, and not good works, that justifies and brings salvation through Jesus.

The Church was not able to accept Luther's ideas. The pope excommunicated (no longer allowed to be a member of the Church) him in January 1521. Luther was also called to appear before the diet—the legislative assembly—of the Holy Roman Empire. The diet met in the city of Worms. It was called by the newly elected emperor Charles V. The emperor believed he could convince Luther to change his ideas. Luther, however, refused.

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The young emperor was very angry. He felt that it was wrong for one monk to go against the teaching and beliefs that Christians had accepted for more than one thousand years. The Edict of Worms made Martin Luther an outlaw within the empire. The diet ordered the burning of Luther's works. Luther himself was to be captured and delivered to the emperor. But Luther's ruler, Frederick III, the elector (a prince of the Holy Roman Empire) of Saxony, did not want Luther killed. Frederick helped Luther go into hiding. After Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522, Frederick protected him.

The Rise of Lutheranism

During the next few years, Luther's religious movement became a revolution. There were about three hundred states in the Holy Roman Empire, and Luther gained support from many of them. The rulers of these states acted because of politics and money as much as because of any religious feeling. The rulers quickly took control of the Catholic churches in their territories. They formed state churches that the government supervised. Political leaders, not the pope in Rome, controlled religious practices.

In these state-controlled churches, Luther established new services to replace the Catholic mass. The new services consisted of Bible readings, preaching about the word of God, and song. He also married a former nun named Katharina von Bora. He and his wife provided a model of married and family life for the new Protestant ministers. Luther's doctrine was called Lutheranism, and the churches were called Lutheran churches. **Lutheranism** was the first Protestant faith.

Luther and his new churches faced a series of crises. The Peasants' War was Luther's greatest challenge. In June 1524, German peasants revolted against their lords. The peasants hoped Luther would support them. Instead, Luther supported the lords. To him, the state and its rulers were called by God to keep the peace. Peace was necessary to spread the Gospel (Jesus' teachings in the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible). It was the duty of princes to stop all revolt. By the following spring, the German princes had ended the peasant revolts. Luther found himself even more dependent on their rulers to help his reformed church grow.



Reading Progress Check

Interpreting How did Luther's ideas lead to a break with the Church and to a new faith?

Political Impact of the German Reformation

Guiding Question *Why was the Holy Roman Empire forced to seek peace with the Lutheran princes?*

The fate of Luther's movement was tied closely to politics from the beginning. Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor, ruled a huge empire. It included Spain and its colonies; the Austrian lands, Bohemia, Hungary, the Low Countries, the duchy of Milan in northern Italy, and the kingdom of Naples in southern Italy.

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Religious leaders saw the Reformation as a challenge to Church power. Rulers such as Charles V also saw the Reformation as a force that disrupted the political and social order. Charles had two goals. He hoped to preserve the unity of his empire by keeping it Catholic. He also wanted to keep the empire under the control of his dynasty. His dynasty was called the Hapsburgs. However, a number of problems cost him both his dream and his health. These same problems helped Lutheranism survive. They gave Lutherans time to organize before they had to fight Catholic armies.

Charles V's main political concern was his rivalry with the king of France, Francis I. They fought over a number of disputed territories. This led to a series of wars that lasted more than 20 years. In addition, Ottoman Turks invaded the eastern part of the empire. This meant that Charles had to send forces to the eastern part of his empire as well.

Finally, the political situation inside the Holy Roman Empire was another problem for Charles V. Germany included several hundred states. All the states owed loyalty to the emperor. However, rulers of many of the states supported Luther. This was a way to assert their own authority and show their dislike of control by the pope. By the time Charles V brought his army to Germany, the Lutheran princes were well organized. Charles V was unable to defeat them, and he was forced to seek peace.

An end to the religious wars in Germany came in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg. This agreement formally accepted the division of Christianity in Germany. The German states were now free to choose between Catholicism and Lutheranism. Lutheran states were given the same legal rights as Catholic states. However, subjects did not choose their own religion. German rulers choose the religion for those who lived in their lands.



Reading Progress Check

Evaluating How were the goals of Charles and the Holy Roman Empire at odds with the desires of Lutheran princes?
