

The Protestant Reformation
AP World History
Kienast

In 1517, the German monk and theologian Martin Luther challenged Catholicism and its influence on Europe. Luther attacked the sale of indulgences, certificates sold to the faithful and intended to limit the time the dead spent in purgatory. He also challenged the idea of simony, which involved buying and selling Church positions. But Luther's real challenge to the church was his new understanding of salvation, the idea that you were justified in your salvation based on your faith and not your devotion to the Catholic Church.

In contrast to Catholicism, which stressed the authority of the church, Luther gave primacy to individual experience, the radical notion that the individual could communicate directly with God and seek his or her own salvation, without the intermediating authority of the church or priests. He was convinced that sins could not be washed away by penance or forgiven by indulgences; salvation came from faith in God and by faith alone -- *sola fide*. Faith in God came only through contemplating the word of God -- *sola scriptura*. On spiritual matters, it was the Bible -- not the Vatican -- that possessed ultimate authority.

In 1517 Luther decided to protest against Church corruption by posting his complaints, called the 95 Theses. In the past, such criticisms would have likely been crushed within a short time, but the invention of the printing press in 1440 and the rise of humanism and its idea of questioning established thought made Luther's movement popular.

Luther's ideas ran into some substantial problems almost immediately. The Church benefitted greatly from the sale of indulgences and had support from the most powerful leader in 16th Century Europe, the Habsburg leader Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor. Charles controlled all of the German states, Spain, and the Netherlands. The Church pressured Charles to prosecute Luther for heresy. Luther gained support from German princes who were interested in rebelling against the power of Charles V. Many of these German princes did not believe that a Spanish emperor should control their Germanic lands and took advantage of rising rebellion against the Church and Charles to declare their independence.

Luther was excommunicated in 1521 at the Worms Trials, and almost immediately his followers rebelled against the Church and Charles V. The German princes supported Luther as well, leading to a civil war between Protestants who supported Luther and Catholics, supported by the Church and Charles V. This civil war raged until The Peace of Augsburg in 1555, when the Spanish Habsburgs agreed to let German princes choose their own religions, starting a period of religious autonomy. Tensions in Europe raged between Catholic and Protestant countries until a peace treaty called the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648, forming the nations of Austria, Prussia, and the Netherlands, along with a host of smaller independent German states.

The Catholic Church finally responded to all these changes through the Catholic Reformation, also sometimes called the Counter Reformation. It can be assumed that the Catholic Church could never have predicted the force of the Protestant Reformation. This is especially so in terms of the numbers of noblemen and other wealthy individuals who were attracted to the theology of

Luther and Calvin. The Church did try respond, but their response -- internal reform -- was weak. One reform did come, it came from man who was not even a member of the clergy. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) was a soldier and Spanish reformer who sought to create a new religious order. He fused the best of the humanist tradition of the Renaissance with a reformed Catholicism that he hoped would appeal to powerful economic and political groups, that is, those types of people now attracted to Luther and Calvin.

Founded in 1534, the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits, formed the backbone of the Catholic or Counter Reformation. The Jesuits combined the ideas of traditional monastic discipline with a dedication to teaching and preaching. Why they did this is pretty clear -- they wanted to win back converts. As a brotherhood or society, the Jesuits sought to bypass local corruption and appealed to the papacy to leading international movement -- they would not attach themselves to local bishops or local authorities. The purpose of this international movement was to revive a Catholic or universal Christianity.

By the 17th century, the Jesuits had become some of the greatest teachers in Europe, especially in France. They had also become one of the most controversial religious groups within the Church. Was their religion merely a disguise for political power? Or, were they the true voice of a reformed Church? The Jesuits helped to build schools and universities, design churches and even helped to produce a unique style of art and architecture. This style -- called the Baroque -- was emotional and was intended to move the heart.