

Florence, Italy  
Center of  
Renaissance Art



## RELIGIOUS REFORMATION

For nearly 200 years problems divided the Roman Catholic Church. From 1309 to 1377, French popes ruled from Avignon under the influence of the French monarchs. After the papal court returned to Rome, mobs forced the College of Cardinals to elect an Italian pope. Simultaneously, another French cardinal claimed the papacy and set up court again in Avignon. During this **Great Schism** (1377-1414), two popes (and at one point, three) tried to rule

and arts of Greece and Rome led to a golden age of cultural blending and innovation. Later scholars called the era a period of “rebirth.” This **Renaissance**<sup>1</sup> transformed Western European life.

During the Renaissance, the Western Europeans’ world image shifted from a strictly religious view to a more secular (worldly) outlook. Unlike the religious scholastics of the late Medieval Period (Aquinas, Abelard), Renaissance intellectuals had a growing confidence in individual human spirit and abilities (e.g., “...humans as masters of their own fate”). This new outlook came to be called **Humanism**<sup>2</sup>. It focused on the personal worth of the individual and human values, as opposed to religious belief. Renaissance humanists were influenced by the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature and philosophy. They tried to show that ancient values were consistent with Christian teachings and could help people toward better lives. Humanists were present-centered. They focused on life now, rather than the spiritual hereafter.

It was natural that Northern Italy became a cradle of humanism in the 14th century. The independence and wealth of the Northern Italian city-states allowed artists and scholars to explore ideas and learning of the ancient world and civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean. They had little interference or official censorship.

Christendom. The Church Council of Constance (1414-1418) finally resolved the issue. The papal schism seriously undermined Church authority. During this same period, the Black Death decimated Church leadership. Scattered reformers protested the clergy’s corruption. They began questioning its authority. Another result of the chaos was that political influence shifted toward monarchs.

In addition to these forces, the economic and social changes of the Renaissance altered the Medieval **status quo**<sup>3</sup> in Western Europe. These sweeping changes of the 14th and 15th centuries made life closer to what we know today. In the spirit of Renaissance humanism, people questioned tradition. Economic individualism and early capitalism made people more self-reliant and innovative. The printing press enabled writers to circulate new ideas and pose new questions. In the mid-1400s, there were 100,000 manuscripts circulating in Europe, although only about ten percent of the population could read. By 1500, there were an estimated 9 million books in print. (Most of them were religious in nature.)

Eventually, this new, questioning attitude changed social behavior and institutions. It affected the most powerful institution – the Roman Catholic Church. The result was a turbulent religious reform movement – the **Protestant Reformation**.

1 Renaissance (humanistic classical art, architecture, literature, and learning that originated in Italy in the 14th through the 16th century spreading throughout Europe, marking the transition from medieval to modern times)

2 Humanism (cultural and intellectual movement of the Renaissance that emphasized secular concerns as a result of the rediscovery and study of the literature, art, and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome)

3 status quo (existing condition or state of affairs)

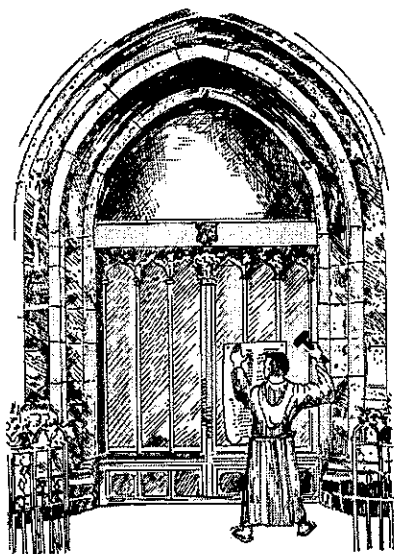
In the 16th century, reformers protested the corrupt practices of the Church – thus, they became known as **Protestants**<sup>1</sup>. Corruption included **simony**<sup>2</sup>, bribery of Church officials, and selling of **indulgences**<sup>3</sup>. Protestant reformers wanted to restore the Church to its early Christian roots. Although there were vast differences among the reformers, they promoted several key ideas:

- acceptance of the Bible as the key source of revelation
- salvation by faith alone
- the universal priesthood of all believers.
- self interpretation of the Bible
- questioning rituals and some of the sacraments

More than religious problems plagued the Church. The Pope and Holy Roman Emperor were distant authorities, too removed from local and regional problems. The monarchies in France, England, and Spain developed strength and unity, and they clashed with the Church over land, taxes, and judicial authority.

### LUTHER AND THE NINETY-FIVE THESES

During the Renaissance, humanists such as Erasmus and theological critics such as John Wycliffe (1328-1384) denounced the Church's



Martin Luther protesting Church practices by posting his grievances on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral.



corruption. They wanted reform to come from Church leaders and they avoided the disruption of a general “grass roots rebellion.” After the changes of the Renaissance Era, the rebellion began.

In 1519, **Martin Luther**, a German cleric and Wittenberg University professor, posted his *Ninety-five Theses*. Luther condemned Church abuses. He translated the New Testament into the **vernacular**<sup>4</sup>. This enabled ordinary individuals to seek salvation through self-interpretation. Church authorities branded Luther as a dissenter (rebel). Yet, his actions opened the floodgates of protest against the Church all over Europe. Pope Leo X eventually condemned Luther as a **heretic**<sup>5</sup>.

The Pope **excommunicated**<sup>6</sup> Luther in 1521. However, some strong German princes backed Luther, exerting their power against the Church. They were opposed to outside influences, had nationalistic feelings, were anti-tax, and wanted to keep their money at home. This defiance of Church authority helped the Protestant movement spread to Scandinavia, Poland, and Eastern Europe.

- 1 Protestant (member of a Western Christian church whose faith and practice are founded on the principles of the Protestant Reformation, especially in the acceptance of the Bible as the sole source of revelation)
- 2 simony (buying or selling of ecclesiastical pardons, offices, or monies)
- 3 indulgences (remission of often physical punishment still due for a sin that has been forgiven - sacramentally absolved)
- 4 vernacular (everyday language spoken by a people)
- 5 heretic (person who holds controversial opinions, especially one who publicly dissents from the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church)
- 6 excommunicated (deprived of the right of church membership by ecclesiastical authority)

## CALVIN AND OTHER REFORMERS

Self-interpretation of the Bible took other reformers in different directions. **John Calvin** (French, 1509-1564) published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and **Ulrich Zwingli** (Swiss, 1481-1531) wrote *Sixty-Seven Articles*. These writings spread the Reformation spirit into Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands. In Geneva, Calvin set up a **theocracy**<sup>1</sup>. It became a model for groups such as the Calvinist English Puritans who later settled in America. In Scotland, **John Knox** (1514-1572) used Calvin's ideas to found the Presbyterian Church.

As the religious reform movement swept Europe, other Protestant **sects** (groups) formed that were more radical in their approach than the Lutherans or Calvinists. They wished to purge the Church by rejecting elaborate rituals and sacraments. For example, the **Anabaptists**<sup>2</sup> rejected infant baptism and focused only on adults. They also rejected local governmental authority. Sects that derive from the Anabaptists include the Amish, Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers.

The Reformation took a different turn in England. While religious reformers were active in the early 1500s, it was **King Henry VIII's** desire for a male heir that led him to break with Rome. The Pope refused to annul (declare invalid) his marriage and allowed him to take a new wife (actually, Henry took 5 more). In 1534, Henry pressured Parliament into passing the **Act of Supremacy**. The Act broke relations with Rome setting up a new Church of England (**Anglican Church**), with the king as head. As a result, religious struggles lasted in England for several generations.

## COUNTER REFORMATION

Once the Reformation was under way, the Church retained its strength in France, Southern Germany, Ireland, Eastern Europe, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. Northern Europe, Scandinavia, and Scotland slipped away.

For nearly 17 years, there was no active program within the Church to answer the Protestant criticisms. Slowly, the **Counter-Reformation** became an active reform movement inside the Church. It agitated for a general

council to eliminate abuses. In 1536, a commission reported to Pope Paul III, but it took another six years before decisive action occurred. He tried to "clean up" the corruption that had led to the Church's credibility problem. He approved new religious orders such as the **Jesuits**<sup>3</sup>. They dedicated themselves to missionary work to reclaim souls for the Church. Paul III also convened the bishops at the **Council of Trent** (1545-1563). The reforms set by the Council have lasted into modern times. The Council's decrees redefined the Church's mission through the following actions:

- forbidding the sale of indulgences
- ordering each diocese to have a seminary to properly train clergy
- defining vague doctrines challenged by Protestants
- requiring the Mass and other rituals be said in Latin
- declaring the only acceptable version of the Bible was the Latin Vulgate (St. Jerome's 4th century translation of the Bible)
- reaffirming the importance of the seven sacraments

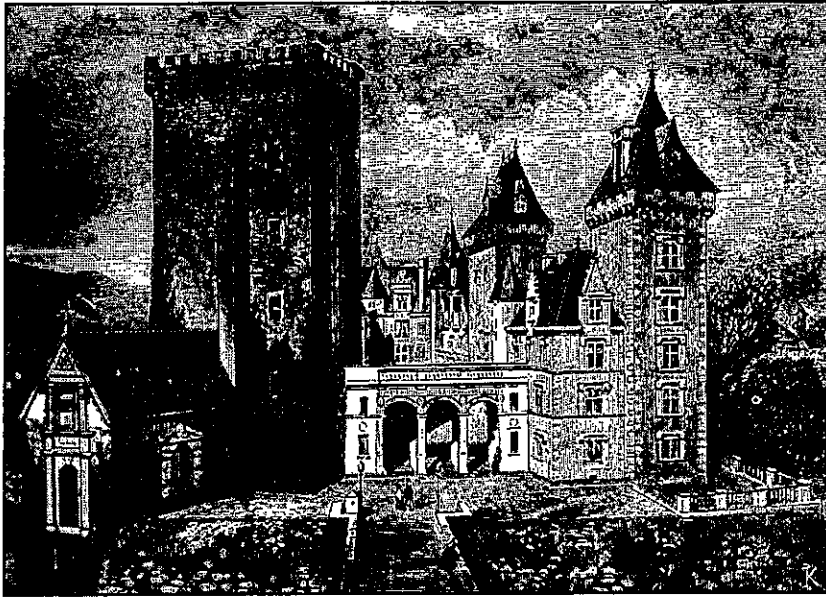
The Counter-Reformation energized and even hardened the resolve of the Roman Catholic Church. Missionaries such as Jesuit founder **Ignatius Loyola** (1491-1556) rekindled the faith in Europe and spread it into Asia and the Americas. Papal resources funded military activity against Protestant areas in Europe. The popes reinforced the **Inquisition**<sup>4</sup>. The Counter-Reformation strengthened the Catholic faith in Southern Europe and spread it into new global regions. Although these actions slowed the Counter-Reformation, Protestantism was not eliminated as its founders had hoped.

## IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS WARS IN EUROPE

In northern Europe, national Protestant churches developed that aligned themselves to national monarchs. The kings used the new churches to become independent of the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. Although Protestant

- 1 theocracy (community, state, or government ruled by religious principles)
- 2 Anabaptist (member of a radical movement of the 16th-century Reformation which believed in the primacy of the Bible, in baptism as an external witness of the believer's personal covenant of inner faith, and in separation of church from state and of believers from nonbelievers)
- 3 Jesuit (Roman Catholic Church - member of the Society of Jesus, an order founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1534)
- 4 Inquisition (court formerly held in the Roman Catholic Church and directed at the suppression of heresy)

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Chateau of King Henry IV - Nantes, France

religious reformers argued doctrine and Church practice, secular princes used the Reformation to strengthen their political power.

The result was a century of wars fought in the name of religion. In the German states, nearly 100,000 were killed in the **Peasants' War** (1524-1526). Peasants, small-town artisans, and laborers sacked castles and monasteries before the authorities quelled the rebels. Later, **The Peace of Augsburg** (1555) ended twenty years of fighting between the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and German Lutheran princes. The compromise allowed each ruler to decide the local religion. The result was a Germany so deeply fragmented that it was not united until the 19th century.

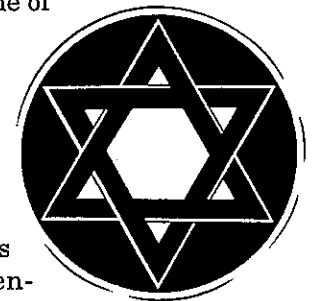
In France, Protestant groups such as the Calvinist Huguenots fought for survival in the **Wars of Religion** (1562-1598). Massacres, royal conspiracies, and assassinations continued for a generation. In 1598, King Henry IV issued the **Edict of Nantes**. It declared Protestants could:

- have limited freedom of worship and religious educational rights
- hold government office
- expect special courts would settle disputes between the faiths
- control certain crown fortress towns, such as La Rochelle
- conduct public worship in certain towns
- hold councils with royal permission

In the Low Countries (Netherlands and Belgium), Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V struggled against Protestant princes as he had in Germany. His son, Philip II of Spain, escalated this conflict into a sporadic war that lasted eighty years (1568-1648). It resulted in the independence of the United Provinces of the Netherlands (northern section) being recognized as an independent state.

**The Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648) was the last major religious struggle in Europe. It was a series of wars fought mainly on German soil. It became part of a larger conflict over the European balance of power. A general revolt of Protestant nobles in Prague widened into a drawn-out European war with Catholic and Protestant countries shifting alliances for political power. The **Peace of Westphalia** (1648) ended the war and

- gave stronger authority and economic power to Catholic France and Lutheran Sweden
- took power and territory from Catholic Spain and Austria and Lutheran Denmark
- fragmented Germany into over 300 states
- began the long decline of the Holy Roman Empire



## ANTI-SEMITISM IN EUROPE

Controversies swirling around the central role of the Christian Church led to tension and frustrations. Sometimes, this resulted in lashing out against others. Jews were often the subject of such venting (**anti-semitism**<sup>1</sup>). In the 13th century, Spain passed *Las Siete Partidas*, a code of laws that barred Jews from holding public office. In the same century, Pope Nicholas III called for efforts to convert Jews to Catholicism. During the Counter-Reformation, Spain expelled all Jews who refused to convert.

<sup>1</sup> anti-semitism (discrimination, prejudice, and hostility against Jews or Judaism)

The Inquisition in Spain relentlessly investigated and tried Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity in order to retain their homes and wealth. England, France, and Germany launched similar waves of anti-Semitic oppression. Fear of alternative religious views and economic competition for merchants and guilds led to policies that forced Jews to live in segregated, walled-off neighborhoods (**ghettoes**<sup>1</sup>). In some cases, Jews who traveled outside the ghettoes were forced to wear identifying badges. Some of these restrictions remained for centuries.

## RISE OF EUROPEAN NATION-STATES

In the 16th and 17th centuries, European monarchs overcame the power of the Church, the independence of cities, and feudal nobles. Under their leadership, their kingdoms grew into the nations of Europe. **Nations**<sup>2</sup> are more than just political boundaries and wide-ranging governments. They signify people

joined by common backgrounds, cultures, and languages. By force of will and absolutist attitudes, monarchs of this age consolidated conflicting interests.

**Absolutism**<sup>3</sup> is a concentration of power in the hands of one person or a group of persons. In religious countries, the monarchs based their absolute power on **divine right**<sup>4</sup>. They claimed their right to rule came from God. Therefore, total, unquestioned authority could be applied; such as, if a subject "sinned against the king," it was the same as a "sin against God." This meant that kings were not responsible to their subjects or any representative bodies. They broadened their power through bypassing the older nobles and constructing their own bureaucracies and centrally commanded military forces.

- 1 ghettoes (section or quarter in a European city to which Jews were formerly restricted because of social, economic, or legal pressure)
- 2 nation (relatively large group of people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language, organized under a single, usually independent government)
- 3 absolutism (political theory holding that all power should be vested in one ruler or other authority)
- 4 divine right (doctrine that monarchs derive their right to rule directly from God and are accountable only to God)



### Mini Assessment

- 1 The Italian city-states led Europe into the Renaissance because they
  - 1 were the first to expel Jews and Muslims
  - 2 used absolutism and divine right
  - 3 created a power base for the Pope
  - 4 traded with Byzantine and Muslim Empires
- 2 The Renaissance paved the way for the Protestant Reformation through
  - 1 promoting a questioning of the status quo
  - 2 limiting economic resources
  - 3 denouncing classic Greek philosophy
  - 4 accepting the Medieval religious traditions
- 3 Which was a Church reform recommended by Martin Luther?
  - 1 require Mass and other rituals be said in Latin
  - 2 establish walled-off ghettoes for Jews
  - 3 allow self-interpretation of the Bible
  - 4 limit freedom of worship

### Constructed Response:

- 1 What is one of the Renaissance values reflected in this work?



Early Wood Carving Printer's Plate of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*

- 2 How did Renaissance art differ from Medieval art?