

# The protestant reformation and martin luther religion essay



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The time of the Protestant Reformation was a time of great change in western society. The Roman Catholic Church would see its authority challenged in a way that was unprecedented and the world would bear witness to the beginning of many religious feuds and rivalries, some of which live on to this day. The roots of the movement lie in several different ideas that started to spread among the common people of Europe, starting in about 1500. People began to believe that they could access the grace of God through a personal relationship with him, without the need of the Church and its authorities as an intermediary. Many no longer saw the Pope as God's right hand man, but instead as a religious profiteer who cared much more about making money than about tending to the spiritual needs of his followers. A feeling of anticlericalism was quickly spreading throughout the land.

In response to the new found spiritual awakening experienced by many, Europe began to see new religious teachers and groups spring up all over. The Christian Humanists, Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, and many others helped to spread the new movement with their teachings, however out of all the great scholars of the Reformation, there are two who stand out more than any other. The teachings of Martin Luther and John Calvin resonate even today and they are still held up as heroes of Christianity by many.

Martin Luther was undoubtedly the most persistent and most successful of all the reformers of his time. He challenged the Church loudly and directly and refused to back down over what he saw as both great errors in doctrine and great failures in spirituality. Luther's most important teaching originated from his own personal experiences before he began his fight against the

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Roman Church. He had always struggled with his own perceived sinfulness and could never understand how he could attain anything but the wrath from a just God. However, the textbook tells us that in an event known as “ the experience in the tower” Luther came to understand that God’s mercy would grant him salvation. From then on, Luther taught that the removal of sin and bestowing of righteousness could only be obtained by faith in God, or justification by faith.

In 1517 Luther’s teachings began to take aim at the Church. It started when a friar began selling indulgences to the townspeople of Wittenberg, where Luther was living at the time. Luther witnessed the people of his town be scammed out of their money by the people who were supposed to be helping, by their religious leaders. This event filled Luther with a passionate anger and on October 31, 1517 he issued his most famous work, his ninety-five theses. This work displayed another of Luther’s most important teachings, that the Pope only had authority to issue a pardon on the punishments that he had inflicted.

For the next twenty years Luther would continue to publish more of his writings, helping him to expand and refine his teachings. He would teach for the rest of his life his most important message, that it was not through good works, the seven sacraments, or an indulgence that one achieved salvation, but through faith alone. Luther also insisted that the Bible was the one and only word of God and that it was the last word on Christianity. He would back up his opinion on this by tirelessly working for years translating the bible into German and trying to make it accessible to all people so that they could read and interpret it for themselves. Finally, Luther incorporated into his new <https://assignbuster.com/the-protestant-reformation-and-martin-luther-religion-essay/>

Church only two of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, baptism and the Lord's Supper, however he disputed the Church's claim that the Priest performed a miracle and transubstantiation occurred.

John Calvin was also a great teacher of the Reformation. While Luther had already gotten the ball rolling, by the 1530's, Calvin was also making great contributions to the new belief system. Unlike Luther, Calvin was also a great organizer and worked not only at teaching the people his ideas but also at creating a new Church.

Calvin's teachings paralleled Luther's very much, and, like Luther, he also had a life changing experience he referred to as " sudden conversion" that set him on the course of religious work for the rest of his life. Like Luther, Calvin strongly believed that it was by faith alone that one could win salvation. He also incorporated only the baptism and Lord's Supper into his teachings, tossing aside the other five sacraments of the Catholic Church. However, Calvin also had his own ideas about some aspects of Christianity. For instance, Calvin believed in the idea of predestination. According to the text, unlike Luther, who believed that people could be predestined for salvation, but not for damnation, Calvin made no distinction. Calvin believed that people were predestined by God for both salvation and damnation, and that nothing could be done in one's life to change that fate, but that they should be thankful for God's just decision regardless.

Calvin was also, as said earlier, a great organizer. He spent the last twenty years of his life working day and night to put together his Church. This is another area where Calvin and Luther differed. Where Luther only required

that churches accept his teachings of justification by faith and the Bible as the word of God, and allowed them to keep any other traditional Church practices, Calvin was much stricter. Calvin did away with the luxuries of the traditional mass, getting rid of ornaments, singing, and other things he viewed as trivial, in favor more plain and minimal sermon. Calvin also held his followers to a stern code of morals. The textbook tells us that Calvin “banned frivolous activities like dancing in favor of constant self-examination.” Finally, thanks to his Institutes of the Christian Religion, his written work that he continued refining for the last thirty years of his life, his followers had a place to turn for any questions they might have had relating to religious practice and faith.

Though the Protestant Reformation saw many great teachers contribute to one of the most significant events in western history, it is clear that Martin Luther and John Calvin left the greatest legacy of any. Today, nearly five hundred years later, we still talk about these men and their involvement in both society and religion. Even though they are no longer here, their work lives on and their ideas continue to find new adherents every day.