

The history and development of protestant reformation

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



Reformation Essay

The Reformation affected the development of Europe by widening the gap between social classes and weakening the Catholic Church. The continuation of the oppression of peasants, the increase in princes' status, and the practicality of seceding from the Catholic Church make this evident.

The continuation of the oppression of the peasants was a result of the Reformation in Europe. Martin Luther, a monk who sided with the higher-class nobles, spoke condescendingly toward peasants. Specifically, he said, "let everyone be subject unto higher powers." This is an outright statement of the nobles and princes superiority over the peasants. In the same statement against the peasants, he said, "they have forfeited body and soul." Taking away parts of the peasants that all people have dehumanizes them. This is an especially condemning statement because without a soul, people, especially peasants, could not go to Heaven, as they cannot purchase indulgences from the Catholic Church. As the initiator of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, openly supported the oppression of the peasants when they attempted to rebel. His open support for the upper class was due in part to the fact that as the Reformation was about religion, he did not want an issue of political order to get mixed up where he believed it should not be. By supporting the continued oppression of the lower classes, Martin Luther – and by extension, the Reformation – widened the gap between social classes.

Not only were the peasants oppressed, but also the princes gained more power as a direct result of the Protestant Reformation. From the modern day point of view of historian Hans Kung, the Protestant Reformation made “princely absolutism” directly possible. The princely absolutism gave princes authority to pick the religion that their state would follow, and people not of that religion would either have to convert, leave, or die. In addition to the princely absolutism, Kung talks about despotism. The Protestant Reformation gave princes complete power of their states in every way, including politically, similar to a tyrant. Likewise, McKay states that the German Peasants’ War gave ruler more power, as once the rebellion was crushed they had imposed harsher laws on the smaller populace. The German Peasants’ War was a result of the Protestant Reformation because it gave peasants a preferable religion to Catholicism. All of these points show a clear increase in the power of the princes. The increase in power of the princes was a direct result of the Protestant Reformation. This increase in power coupled with the aforementioned continuation of the oppression of peasants widened the gap between social classes greatly.

The practicality of seceding from the Catholic Church was only seen as a legitimate option during the Protestant Reformation. The political advantages of seceding from the Catholic Church were that princes would have complete control over their state with no interference from the Catholic Church, an all-powerful organization at the time with jurisdiction over all states ruled by the papacy. By breaking away from the Catholic Church, states would be transferring the authority of their area to themselves. As more and more

states broke away from the Catholic Church, their political influence would weaken, making the Church itself weaker. It was also more economically practical, as if a state broke off from the Catholic Church, then it wouldn't not have to pay annual fees to the Church. The impacts of states not having to pay fees to the Catholic Church were that it had less money under its control in an age where money is equal to power. The resulting lessening of political and economical influence would also cause the Church to lose individual members. Not only are the citizens of the converting states leaving the Catholic Church, the Church has less ability to replace them with people from different areas due to the lack of influence. Even though these were always issues, they could only be resolved if there was an alternate to Catholicism. The Protestant Reformation provided the alternate option of religions to various states, inevitable resulting in the conversion of entire states to Protestantism, ultimately weakening the Catholic Church.