

How did the protestant reformation affect the social structure of europe research...

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Introduction

Reformation was a powerful religious movement aimed at reforming the teaching and the organization of the Christian Church, which originated in Germany in the beginning of the XVI century. It spread rapidly across Europe and led to the separation of Roman Catholic Church and the formation of a new form of Christianity - Protestantism. Reformation movement was of great importance for the history of Europe, and for the history of the world as a whole. In the Middle Ages, the whole society was strictly subordinated to the Church, which had a strong influence on the social structure of European countries. The social structure of medieval society consisted of three main classes - peasants, clergy and aristocracy (Adler & Pouwels, 2010, p. 319). Reformation movement changed the psychology of medieval man. The ideas of the Reformation (especially Calvinism) forced people to work hard and develop their personality in order to earn the grace of God. This gave impetus to the development of capitalist relations and the emergence of the fourth class - the bourgeoisie (Adler & Pouwels, 2010, p. 312)

Causes of the Reformation

The underlying causes of the Reformation are associated with the decomposition of the feudal mode of production in Western Europe, with the birth of new capitalist relations, with the emergence of new classes, and with the aggravation of the social contradictions between them (Dickinson). Reformation was directed against the monopoly on the interpretation of the Bible by the Catholic Church, which was an integral part of the feudal system by giving religious sanction to existing of feudal system. Burgher opposition,

which expressed aspirations of the broad masses of the population, aimed to abolish the Catholic Church as a feudal institution and create in its place church without levies and fees for ceremonies. The ideologists of the Reformation aimed at the transformation of the entire system of social relations in the spirit of the Christian equality. The impetus for the mass movement for Reformation was Luther's denial of indulgences. On October 31st, 1517 on the eve of the Feast of All Saints, he took the plunge and nailed a sheet of paper with 95 Theses, or arguments against indulgences, to the door of the Wittenberg church (Adler & Pouwels, 2010, p. 318). This famous act of disobedience resulted in several implications. First, Luther was involved in a series of public debates, including the famous debate in Leipzig with Dr. von Eck, which was followed by Luther's excommunication from the Church (D'Aubigne, 2006, pp. 269 – 274). The second consequence was the division of Germany into supporters and opponents of Luther (Euro-webonline, p. 490).

The Catholic Church taught that man can be saved from sin and escape hell by the grace of God and the intercession of the saints. But in order to do this he must perform ceremonies, take up the sacred ordinances and do charitable deeds. One of these cases was the purchase of indulgences. Luther declared absolution for money blasphemy by proclaiming the true faith in Christ as the only way to get salvation. Luther argued that salvation can be obtained only through divine grace which is given to people through Christ. The notion that salvation is granted to a person directly from God undermined the foundations of the Catholic Church and its spiritual hierarchy because it made salvation possible without the mediation of the church and

clergy (Euro-webonline, p. 491). However, sharp differences between the individual groups arose in the camp of the Reformation. Luther increasingly linked his fate with those of princes, the service to which subsequently staged his reformation.

Another radical Reform Movement, led by professor of the University of Wittenberg Carlstadt, unfolded in Saxony. Carlstadt and his supporters, expressing the interests of the radical elements of the burghers, understood Reformation as a broad social transformation, not restricted to the scope of church reform. The split of the Reformation movement increasingly deepened (Loewen, 1974, p. 30). The peasant-plebeian camp, heretical sects and a movement of Anabaptists separated from primary Reformation movement. The most consistent leader who expressed people's understanding of the ideas of the Reformation was Thomas Muntzer (1490-1525). Until 1520 he remained a follower and companion of Luther. But in his sermons he addressed to the lower strata of the population and was more determined to call for immediate revolutionary action. Later Muntzer completely disassociated himself from Luther. They became bitter enemies: Muntzer led the peasant-plebeian camp of Reformation, and Luther - the burgher-prince. Muntzer understood the Reformation as a social and political revolution, which should be initiated by the most disadvantaged classes of society - the farmers and the urban poor. According to Muntzer, they were able to establish a new social order without oppression and exploitation, where no longer will exist class distinctions, private property, and an alien government (Loewen, 1974, pp. 50-67).

The Impact of Luther's Reformation on Social Divisions in Europe

Lutheran Protestant movement was spreading through the parallel events, each of which expanded the basis of Protestantism. In 1522, in Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), a Hellenist, a correspondent of Erasmus, and People's priest in Zurich, challenged the Catholic Church's organization. Zwingli rejected the authority of the bishops and said that the Eucharist is nothing more than just a symbolic ceremony. He was killed at Kappel in 1531, when he carried the banner of the Protestants in the war against the five Catholic forest cantons that split the Swiss Confederation. Anabaptists appeared from the disaffected Swiss Zwingli followers. They also sought to create the Christian republic, built on the principles of the Gospel. In 1534-1535 in Münster they established the kingdom under the guidance of two Dutchmen - Jan Matthyas and John of Leyden. However, it did not last long and was crushed with great brutality. The Anabaptists were the first Christian fundamentalists; they were persecuted by both Protestants and Catholics. They were reborn as the Mennonites led by Menno Simons (1496-1561), and their spiritual heirs later became Baptists, Quakers and Unitarians. These movements show how social structure of the European countries became more divided with the Reformation (Loewen, 1974, pp. 67-95).

The creator of the most consistent teaching of the Reformation, which served as the ideological basis of early bourgeois revolution was John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin was as intolerant of other faiths, as the head of the Catholic Church. At his insistence, in 1553, a Spanish humanist scholar Michael Servetus was burned at the stake for rejecting the doctrine of the

trinity of God (Taylor, 2007). Calvin also repressed the Anabaptists, who demanded the abolition of coercive authorities and the establishment of property equality. Calvin developed a new code of conduct. The family of good Calvinists refrained from any pleasures and liberties, such as dancing, singing, drinking, gambling, flirting, frivolous reading. It should spend its life in the harsh self-denial, hard work, thrift, but more importantly, in piety. In art, Calvinists avoided direct image of God, all kinds of mythical symbols and allegories. The only pleasure and instruction for them was to read the Bible daily (Barber, 2006, pp. 7-16). In the English-speaking world, this phenomenon is known under the name of Puritans. This example shows how Reformation influenced on the creation of completely new social group with its beliefs and even lifestyle. Calvinism became one of the most widespread social and religious movements in Europe.

In Scotland, thanks to the efforts of John Knox (1513-1572) Calvinism became in 1560 the only recognized religion, where it is known as Presbyterianism. Despite the significant impact of Anglicanism, the Church of Scotland managed to retain its individuality (Reformation History, 2010). In France, the Calvinists were called Huguenots. The Huguenots were the majority in the Bourbons party during the religious wars and were a decisive force in the religious life in France until their final expulsion in 1685 (The Huguenot Society of South Carolina, 2009). In the Netherlands, the rise of Calvinism was a major factor in the division between Catholic provinces in the west and the United Provinces in the east. The Dutch Reformed Church came to play a leading role in the country since Calvinism was recognized as the state religion in 1622 (Janssen). In the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom of

Bohemia and Hungary a variety of landed gentry were inclined to Calvinism (Adler & Pouwels, 2010, p. 319). In some areas, such as the Principality of Transylvania or in Cieszyn, Calvinism was established for a long time. Hungarian city of Debrecen was called " Calvinist Rome" since then. Thus, Luther's ideas were echoed in other European countries, where in the middle of the XVI century the new currents of Protestantism began to emerge.

Conclusions

The church reforms inevitably combined with the social and political reforms and had a strong influence on the social structure of European countries. The societies were undergoing radical change of views. Reformation expressed the feelings of many people disillusioned with the Catholic Church which established rough social structures (nobility, clergy and peasants) and did not let bourgeoisie come to power. Reformation Movement affected all aspects of life in Europe. Claiming the need for continuous reading of the Bible, it affected the education system in Protestant countries, and therefore the people's literacy. In economics it made a huge contribution to the culture of entrepreneurship and influenced the development of capitalism. In politics, Protestantism became a bone of contention between the states and rival factions within the state. It divided Europe into Catholic and Protestant and diversified the social groups within the countries. But most importantly, it dealt the final blow to the idea of a unified Christendom. Before the 1530's Christendom was divided into two parts: Orthodoxy and Catholicism. With 1530's. Christendom became divided into three parts: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism. Protestants themselves were divided into

even more intransigent factions. Such division grew so much that people stopped talking about the Christian world and began instead to talk about Europe.

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