

The protestant reformation term paper

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



The beginning of the Protestant Reformation is usually associated with Martin Luther publishing his “ 95 Theses” in 1517 (Reformation). As was a common practice at the time, Luther posted his document on the church door as a sign that he wished to debate the topics listed. He was a German Augustinian monk and a lecturer at the University in Wittenberg. His bold move challenged some of the practices of the Catholic Church at that time as well as some of the specific church practices, or Doctrines.

Luther argued that the Bible was the true way to understand the word of God. The Pope and his interpretation were only the interpretation of another human being. In Rome, at the head of the Catholic Church, that contradicted the teachings that the Pope was a divine messenger between God and the followers of Christ. Luther also had issues with many of the practices that the Catholic Church was using to raise money to construct St. Peter’s basilica in Rome. This included taxing the people of the Church, again which was not found in the Bible. He stated that the Church had become corrupt. Luther did not make these arguments in secret. He had sent a copy of his “ 95 Theses” to his bishop, who had forwarded them to Rome (The Protestant).

Luther initially wished to begin a movement of reform from within the Catholic Church. He wanted to correct the doctrines of the ancient church, before the self-seeking popes and clergy had created the current state of greed and misappropriations of power (Reformation).

There was doctrinal unity among the reformers. These five issues were the main points of contention between the reformers and the Catholic Church. They include Sola Scriptura, Solo Christo, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Soli Deo

Gloria. The Reformers did agree that these were areas that needed to be changed from the teachings of the Catholic Church, but not necessarily how those changes should occur.

Sola Scriptura, translated as Bible Only, is the teaching that the Bible is the divine word of God that had been given to people. Only the Bible and its teachings were to determine the rules and teachings of faith. The Bible was written by man under the inspiration of God and had absolute authority.

Men, even the popes, church councils, and church traditions could not usurp the importance of the Bible. People would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to study the bible and learn about God, Christ, the church government, church practices, and salvation. The leaders of the Reformation encouraged people to read their Bibles as a means to study and learn theology based on scripture alone. In order to aid in this process, and with the recent invention of the printing press, Bibles were translated from Latin into the common languages of the people.

This contradicted that the Bible needed to be interpreted for followers of Christ. The priests had to interpret the word, one of the reasons that the Catholic Bible was available only in Latin. Although 95% or more of people were illiterate, far fewer could read Latin. This limited the opportunity for people to read the bible on their own, suppressing people trying to implore their own interpretations of the Word.

Solo Christo, or Christ Only, is the teaching that salvation can occur through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ, through

his death on the cross, procured the salvation of all of those who chose to believe in Him. The church cannot grant salvation to anyone.

One of the ways in which the Catholic Church had become corrupt was through the teaching that it could grant salvation. The giving of money or other types of compensation could help one earn their passage into heaven. Prayers for the dead waiting in purgatory would help them on their journey to salvation. There were many other types of corruption to ensure salvation as well.

Sola Gratia, or the teaching of Grace Only, is the belief that salvation is available only because of the grace of God. Good works cannot save a person's soul. No one is deserving of salvation, as all people are sinners. It is only because of God's grace that salvation is granted.

The Catholic Church had much of its work done through the community of believers doing good works as a means of passage into heaven. These good works could involve favors, money, charities, or other demands from priests, such as art, service for personal gain, or other types of corruption.

Faith alone, or Sola Fide, is God's grace in calling one to salvation. The Reformers taught that it was through faith alone that grace was granted. Christ was the way in which people were saved, through His death on the cross, not their own good works. Even though a person's faith is a gift from God, it is necessary to be able to trust in Christ and be saved.

The Catholic Church was exchanging faith for money or good works. Another means of financial or other material gain by priests, people granted this

corruptive practice out of ignorance. The actions of people on earth were being used to gain entry into heaven in the afterlife.

God's Glory Only, *Soli Deo Gloria*, was the most essential doctrine of the Reformers. Their doctrines were strong in the beliefs that God is sovereign. God's glory was important, not the glory of any man or any church.

The popes and other church officials had been instructing their followers that the pope could establish doctrine that must be followed. The popes claimed to be vessels above people through which God gave orders. The Reformers most steadfast belief was that popes were people that were no better than anyone else, were capable of error and sin, and that it was the Bible and the Bible alone that should be used as the guide to follow.

With all of this dissention, it is easy to understand the growing dissention towards Rome, the center of the Catholic Church, at this time. The Reformers viewed Catholicism as a faith in which souls were being held for ransom and there was no hope that Catholics would ever reach salvation. Roman Catholicism was a faith based on good works and being ruled by the authority of the popes and priests. The Protestant faith was the true religion since it was based on God's grace and the true path to spiritual freedom. The Reformers were willing to say there was a distinguishing factor of some Catholics as being saved and still in the Roman Church (Arnold).

The three main religious beliefs that resulted from the Protestant Reformation are Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism. They each have some similarities and differences, which have evolved over time. In modern

society, with the freedoms of religion that society enjoys today, a style of worship can be determined based on these facts.

In Lutheranism, ministers lead congregations and salvation can be earned through faith alone. Only the Bible holds the truth and should always be the main reference. Believers are able to interpret the Bible for themselves. Followers worship God through rituals and listening to the preaching of the ministers.

In the study of Calvinism, the Minister of Elders leads the people. God has predetermined before one's birth that will be saved. The Bible is the source of truth and can be interpreted by people themselves. People worship God through listening to the preaching from the ministers. John Calvin was a French reformer. His main difference in view from Martin Luther was his belief in predestination. He believed that if you were not destined to be saved, there was nothing that could be done to change that belief.

In Anglicanism, the English monarch is the leader. Teachings are that salvation can be earned through faith alone. The Bible holds the truth and can be interpreted by believers using truth and reason. People worship through preaching and rituals. The Anglican beginning was different in that it resulted from the pope not granting Henry VIII a divorce from his wife. The Anglican Church closely mirrors the Catholic Church, but rejects the powers of the pope (The Causes).

Modern history is entrenched in the teachings of the Reformation. The history of England, America, and Europe would have been different had the

Reformation not occurred. As an example, people seeking religious freedom would not have traveled to America if Europe had remained uniformly Catholic.

Modern views of politics and laws have also been affected by the Reformation. A corrupt and politically powerful Catholic Church ruled Europe at the beginning of the 16th century. Emperors and kings of the lands ruled by the Catholic Church were required to follow the teachings of the church. This is vastly different than the separation of church and state that is the staple of many governments in the same region today. This separation is a response to the domination of the corrupt church and an attempt to ensure that such control does not occur again.

Modern languages were not important before the Reformation. Luther redefined the importance of communication by having the Bible available in the vernacular of the country. This, along with the timing of the invention of the printing press, helped to begin form a middle class that was literate and able to think critically for themselves.

Before the Reformation, all scientific discovery and investigation had to be done through the Catholic Church. Modern science would not have evolved had this power not been usurped from the church. There are many examples that Protestantism does not oppose modern science.

The individual conscience was given incredible power due to the liberties granted by the Reformationists. Liberty, as it is known today, would not exist, if Europe, and an unknown amount of other areas, were still under the

political and religious control of the Catholic Church. Many freedoms that people experience today are due to the work of the Reformationists (Arnold).

One man, named Martin Luther, and his crusade to try and reform the Catholic Church of corruption changed the world from what would have been a world unknown to modern people, to the world in which we live. Freedoms that he had never imagined are enjoyed today because he wanted to debate what he thought were some injustices of the time. He did not even mean to begin a revolution; instead, Luther just wanted reform.

A world in which taxes are paid by Europeans to the Catholic Church, political and social control dictated by the Catholic Church, and freedom of thought forbidden, is a world in which modern Europeans cannot imagine living. A world in which America might not even exist seems foreign and impossible to people today. A world in which modern science did not exist is a world that is foreign to even our imaginations. It is inconceivable to imagine daily life in the 21st century had a mere man in the 16th century not taken a stand for what he felt was right.

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