

Protestant reformation



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Reformation/pg The Reformation was touched off by an event in 1517 propagated by Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk. He tacked a set of 95 propositions to the door of a Wittenberg church in order to spark academic debate. This event can be pointed to as the incendiary match that lit the ensuing firestorm of reformation that permanently altered the religious, political and temporal landscape in Europe and beyond. It may have been the match, but the tinder of reformation had been smoldering for centuries. Europe, for hundreds of years, had been dominated by the Roman Catholic religion in all aspects of society. The citizenry, including peasants, noble born and even royalty believed that individuals (after death) could only achieve salvation through the intercession of a Catholic priest. This belief gave immense power to the priests and the Pope, who was the highest titled priest of the world. The priests used that power of intercession to ensure the growth and prosperity of the 'church' to the detriment, many times, of the citizenry that made that immense power and wealth possible. Many times, the arrogance and power that were wielded by these priests caused an environment of resentment among the people that were supposedly being served.

Not only was this power a continuing slap in the community's face, but salvation was also for sale! In order to raise funds for more and more elegant buildings and to support the avaricious appetites of the clergy individuals were told that the only way to be " saved" was by literally paying for your sins. An individual at that time may have to do a few " hail Mary's" but in order to ensure salvation, silver and gold coins given into the hands of the local monasteries was by far and away a more viable option.

This air of resentment and anger had been simmering for decades and along

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with the 'salvation for sale environment" was part of the problem according to Luther's eyes. When he posted the 95 theses on the church door it was his purpose to initiate debate as to whether this environment was the correct one for humankind or not.

Luther believed that individual piety was more important than papal intercession. This belief, of course, went over well with the peasants and common man. Far more important, was that it also went over well with King Henry VII. This monarch requested a divorce from the Pope, but was denied. He was so angry at the denial that he declared the English sovereign head of the Church of England. It was a complete break from the Catholic church and would affect Europe for centuries to come.

The break affected more than society's values, it also affected the literature and art of the era. With Luther's emphasis on individual learning of the Bible, printing of books and literacy became more important and art reflected a brighter more realistic approach.

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With the increase in literacy came a decline in the use of Latin which further augmented the break from the Catholic church who used that language to continue its mastery of the common man.

The Catholic church, its clergy and its pope, was caught by surprise with the Reformation and King Henry's decree. Initially it did little to combat the break except to excommunicate Luther three years after his posting of the 95 theses.

When the church did react, it reacted with a well planned attack. It established a new order, called the Jesuits, to lead the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits employed a missionary zeal converting thousands in Europe, the <https://assignbuster.com/protestant-reformation/>

Americas and the Far East.

The church also commissioned a large amount of art that emphasized clarity and directness. Instead of oblique references in visual, artistic forms as well as in spoken sermons, now the church wished to emphasize the material splendor of its long standing religion. They wished to establish who the new kid in town was " Lutherans" and who was the religion that had been around for centuries. The art form that derived from this newly expressed emphasis was called Baroque. It is a term normally referring to anything elaborate or fanciful.

Many examples of both Baroque and the extravagance of the times is still very evident throughout Europe but is especially strong in Italy and other countries that continued with a Catholic tradition as compared to countries such as England and Ireland that had a more Lutheran society.