

# The protestant reformation... an economic event???



The Protestant Reformation was primarily a religious event, not an economic one. However, there were several economic motives that allowed the Reformation to spread, such as the confiscation of church lands, these were relatively unimportant in view of the other motive. Politically, the rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church convinced many states to join the Reformation.

However, the issues of the Reformation were based on religious problems. From the problems with the sales of indulgences, to arguments over the validity of each of the sacraments, to the debate over who had authority in religious issues, what sparked the Reformation were issues of faith, not money or power. If the opposite had been the case, then the Reformation would have ended at Luther and wouldn't have continued past him.

Economically, there were certain issues that allowed the Protestant Reformation to grab hold and take off. For example, one of the very first complaints with the Church was the indulgences and their sale to fund the goals of the Pope. On the other hand, states were eager to align themselves with the Protestants, as they supported state confiscation and control over church lands, and all the profits that the confiscation caused.

The spread of the Reformation itself was supported by the printers' guilds, who stood to profit from the production of publicity. However these motives could have easily been crushed and the Reformation would have lived on. Luther's complaints extended well beyond the issue of indulgences and the political motives that could encourage state participation were more convincing than the economic ones. These political motives were much more important than the economic ones. It was the rejection of the authority of the

Church that convinces many of the German states to join and it was Henry VIII's need for an heir that pushed him to cut ties with Catholicism.

External forces also affected the struggle. Charles V's problems with his empire forced him to concede in the early stages of the Reformation, but when he tried to fix the problems in the Holy Roman Empire on his return he found that he was unable to reverse the process. In fact, behind the religious forces, the political issues behind the Reformation could very easily be considered key to its facilitated spread. However, it was the religious motive behind the Reformation that gave it such power. The sincerity behind most, if not all, of the Reformation's leaders enabled them to convince large numbers of faltering people. At the very root, it was Luther's issues with papal authority and the sacraments that really sparked the revolution.

The abuse that the population could already see in the form of the sale of indulgences and the general state of the clergy allowed these ideas to catch quickly. Besides, if the real motives behind the Reformation were economic or political, then the many religious reforms that had developed should have never happened. If it were really a matter of a state regaining control, it wouldn't matter whether or not one believed in predestination, as Calvin did, or if one believed in adult baptism, as the Anabaptists did. Lutheranism should have been enough.

In the end, the forces that most contributed to the Reformation were those that started it: the religious arguments over the abusive practices the Church had developed. Only then did the political forces come which although they contributed to the German spread of Protestantism, were more clearly seen

only in the problems surrounding England's abandonment of the Catholic Church. Economic motives were certainly the weakest. The only true motive would be that of the printers' guilds. However, many members of the guilds genuinely believed in the Protestant ideas, and they would have spread nonetheless.

Therefore, the Protestant Reformation was not primarily an economic event, it was a religious one.