Chapter 4: The Protestant Reformation

While the Renaissance promoted the growth of a secular spirit in the civilization of Western Europe, religious concerns remained important to Europeans. Abuses in the Roman Catholic Church led to growing demands for reform and resulted ultimately in the emergence of the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation destroyed the religious unity of Western Europe, thereby ending what had been one of the central features of Western European civilization during the Middle Ages. The Reformation produced four major movements: Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and Anabaptism. These four movements led, in turn, to the development of virtually all of the Protestant denominations that exist today.

Lutheranism

Martin Luther: Early Life

Lutheranism was the first of the Reformation movements. Martin Luther (1483-1546), its founder, was born in Saxony in central Germany. Although he originally planned to become a lawyer, he experienced a religious conversion and became an Augustinian monk in 1505. In 1508, he became a teacher of theology at the university at Wittenberg in Saxony.

Luther's Theology: Justification by Faith

Although he had become a monk, Luther remained troubled about the possibility of achieving salvation. In search of answers to his questions, he began to read the writings of the early Christian theologians, including St. Augustine, and the Bible. He found the answer he sought in St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (1:17), where Paul had written: "The just shall live by faith."

Luther concluded that the only path to salvation was through faith in the ultimate goodness and mercy of Jesus Christ. There was nothing the believer could do to earn salvation. Performing good works, participating in ecclesiastical rituals, and receiving the sacraments would not avail. A good Christian, of course, might do these things – indeed, should do them – but only Jesus Christ could grant the gift of salvation. Luther began to develop a system of theology based on what came to be called the doctrine of "salvation by faith alone" or "justification by faith."

The Beginning of Luther's Reformation

In 1517, Johann Tetzel (c. 1465-1519), a Dominican friar, began to sell indulgences in the area around Wittenberg. The doctrine of indulgences had been developed by medieval theologians, who taught that Jesus Christ and the saints, by their good works on earth, had accumulated a treasury of merit. By gaining indulgences, faithful Christians could draw from this treasury of merit to reduce the amount of time they or their deceased loved ones would remain in purgatory before entering heaven and the sight of God. An indulgence, according to the doctrine, did not bring forgiveness of sin (that came in the sacrament of penance) but rather a remission of temporal punishment due to sin.

By the Late Middle Ages, indulgences were often sold to raise money. The income from the indulgences sold by Tetzel was used to help pay the costs of the construction of the new St. Peter's basilica in Rome.

The Ninety-five Theses

Luther began to question the doctrine of indulgences, which appeared to be inconsistent with his doctrine of justification by faith. On October 31, 1517, he posted the Ninety-five Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. The Theses were intended to be a challenge to other scholars to debate the issue of indulgences.

Luther's rejection of indulgences quickly 'became more than an issue of theological debate. As Luther and his antagonists debated, the two sides sharpened their positions and became increasingly hostile to one another.

In 1519, Luther debated Johannes Eck (1486-1543), a noted theologian, in Leipzig. In this debate, Luther acknowledged that his views were essentially similar to those of John Hus, who had been condemned as a heretic a century earlier (see Chapter 1), and rejected the authority of the church's hierarchy.

When Pope Leo X (r. 1513-1521) issued a bull (1520) excommunicating Luther, the reformer responded by burning it.

The Diet of Worms

In 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (r. 1519-1556) ordered Luther to appear before the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire at its meeting in Worms. When the Diet called on him to recant, Luther refused, declaring: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."

When the emperor declared Luther an outlaw, Elector Frederick the Wise (1463-1525) of Saxony provided the reformer with refuge at the Wartburg Castle.

Acceptance of Luther's Reforms

In 1522, Luther returned to Wittenberg where, with the support of Frederick the Wise, he began to reform the local church in accordance with his ideas. Lutheranism

won considerable public support and spread rapidly, especially in the northern and eastern German states.

The Doctrines of Lutheranism

In addition to the doctrine of justification by faith, Luther taught that the only valid source of Christian doctrine was the Bible. He thereby rejected the Roman Catholic view that Christian doctrine was revealed both in the Bible and in the traditions of the church, as defined by the councils of the church and the pope.

In Luther's view, only two sacraments – baptism and holy communion – had been established by Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. He thus rejected the Catholic teaching that there were seven sacraments (see Chapter 5).

Luther stressed the idea that the Christian church was not so much a formal organization as the whole body of the Christian faithful. He reemphasized the ancient Christian concept of the priesthood of all believers, recalling the words of the First Letter of St. Peter: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God, who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

In order to make the Bible more accessible to Christians, Luther prepared German translations of the New Testament (1522) and the Old Testament (1534). This translation of the Bible is regarded as one of the first great works of German literature.

Luther also abolished the monasteries and ended the requirement for celibacy of the clergy. The Lutheran service of worship was less elaborate than Catholic worship, although it was more formal than the worship service of the Calvinists.

Luther and the Peasants' Revolt

Peasants in the German states, as elsewhere in Europe, lived in poverty and were burdened by heavy taxes and obligations to the landowners. In 1524, a revolt against the landowners began among the peasants in southwestern Germany and spread further during 1525. The peasants sought to abolish serfdom and the manorial system. While the peasants hoped for Luther's support, the religious reformer was a conservative on social and economic issues. He opposed the peasants and supported the princes in their suppression of the revolt.

The Spread of Lutheranism

Emperor Charles V remained concerned about Luther's movement, which threatened the unity of the Holy Roman Empire. However, the emperor faced other enemies, including the Turks and the French, and could not devote his full attention to events in Germany.

The Diet of Augsburg

In 1530,Luther appeared before Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg, where he presented a statement of his faith, which came to be known as the Confession of Augsburg. The Diet found it unacceptable. The Confession of Augsburg was written by Philipp Melanchthon (14971560), a prominent German humanist and theologian, who was a colleague of Luther's at the university in Wittenberg.

Europe, 1526

The Peace of Augsburg

Following the Diet of Augsburg, a number of German Lutheran princes and cities established the Schmalkaldic League (153l), a religious and military alliance directed against the Catholic Hapsburgs. As Germany became more sharply divided between Lutherans and Catholics, tension mounted. From 1546 to 1555,Germany was tom by a religious civil war.

In 1555, the contending forces reached a compromise agreement, the Peace of Augsburg. This gave to each German prince the right to determine the religion of his state, either Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism, on the basis of the principle set forth in the Latin formula *cuius regio,eius religio* (whose region, his religion). The Peace of Augsburg did not provide for the recognition of other religious groups, such as the Calvinists or Anabaptists. Lutheranism became the predominant religion in much of Germany, especially the north and the east. Most of southern Germany, including Austria, and the Rhineland

in the west remained Roman Catholic, as did the province of Silesia in the East.

Lutheranism Outside Germany

Lutheranism soon spread to Scandinavia, becoming the predominant religion in Denmark and Norway, which was then under Danish control, as well as in Sweden and in the Baltic area of Finland, Estonia, and Latvia, which Sweden ruled.

Calvinism

The Beginning of the Swiss Reformation: Zwingli

The story of the Swiss Reformation begins with Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). A humanist and a Catholic priest, Zwingli originally hoped that the Catholic Church would reform itself. In 1519, however, he led the church in Zurich in its break from Roman Catholicism.

Like Luther, Zwingli believed in the supremacy of the Bible. In contrast to the German reformer, however, Zwingli believed that baptism and holy communion were ceremonies symbolizing the believer's affiliation with the Christian church, rather than true sacraments. Zwingli rejected the celibacy of the clergy and emphasized simplicity in worship. In 1531, Zwingli was killed by Catholic forces during a civil war.

John Calvin: Early Life

Zwingli's death temporarily deprived the Swiss Protestants of a leader, but within a few years after Zwingli's death, they had embraced Calvinism.

Born in France, John Calvin (1509-1564) studied law and theology. Apparently influenced by the ideas of Luther, he became a Protestant and began to develop his own views on the Christian religion.

France remained a strongly Catholic country, and Calvin was forced into exile. He found his first refuge in the Swiss city of Basel, and then, in 1536, he settled in Geneva, where he quickly became the leader of that city's Reformation.

The Doctrines of Calvinism

John Calvin set forth his theology in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), the most important single work to emerge from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Calvin agreed with Luther that the Bible was the only source of Christian doctrine and that there were only two sacraments, baptism and holy communion.

Unlike Luther, Calvin emphasized the doctrine of salvation by election, often called predestination. This belief was based on the contrast between the overwhelming power and majesty of God and the insignificance and depravity of human beings. According to this doctrine, at the beginning of creation, the all-powerful and all-knowing God had planned the whole universe to the end of time. For reasons of His own, which are beyond human comprehension, God determined those individuals who would be saved and those who would be condemned. Those destined for salvation were known as the elect. God had given to the elect a faith in Jesus Christ and a desire to live in accordance with Christian moral values, as well as a desire to labor to bring about the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

Calvinism in Practice

Like Luther, Calvin ended both monasticism and the celibacy of the clergy. In worship, Calvin emphasized simplicity. Calvinist worship consisted of prayers, the singing of psalms, scripture readings, and a sermon. Calvinist churches, generally called Reformed churches on the European continent, were governed by laymen called elders, who were elected by the congregation.

Calvinism also emphasized a puritanical approach to life, which involved a renunciation of worldly pleasure. In addition to requiring church attendance, Calvinist puritanism banned card playing, gambling, dancing, theatergoing, the consumption of alcohol, and swearing.

Theocracy in Geneva

In Geneva, Calvin established a strict theocracy, with religious leaders dominating the city's government. Violators of the puritanical code of behavior suffered severe penalties, and religious dissenters were persecuted.

The most famous case of persecution involved the Spaniard Michael Servetus (1511-1553), who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Inquisition had convicted him of heresy and condemned him to death. Servetus fled to Geneva, where he was seized by the Calvinist authorities and burned at the stake. But while some people left Geneva in order to escape Calvinist rule, thousands of others found refuge there.

The Spread of Calvinism

The Calvinist Reformed Church became dominant in much of Switzerland, especially in the urban areas of Geneva, Zurich, Bern, and Basel.

In the mid-sixteenth century, Calvinism began to spread to France. The Huguenots, as the French Calvinists were known, received some support from members of the nobility who opposed the growing power of the French monarchy. France remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, how ever.

John Knox (c. 1514-1572), a disciple of Calvin, brought the new faith to Scotland. The Scottish Calvinists were known as Presbyterians, a term that refers to church government by ruling elders known as presbyters. In

1560, Scotland's parliament adopted Presbyterianism as the country's official religion.
In England, Calvinists known as Puritans sought to "purify" the English church of its remaining Catholic elements. The Puritans had a powerful impact on English politics and government during the seventeenth century (see Chapter 7).
Elsewhere, Calvinism won a considerable following in the Dutch Netherlands but made only limited gains in Germany. In Austria and Poland, Calvinism won a number of converts, but these gains were later wiped out by the Catholic Reformation.

Calvinism and Economic Development

The influence of Calvinism on the economic development of Europe has been the subject of scholarly debate.
Max Weber (1864-1920), a German sociologist, was the first to propose the idea that Calvinism helped promote the development of capitalism in Europe. Calvinism, Weber noted, encouraged such capitalistic values as sobriety, thrift, and hard work and discouraged conspicuous consumption, which was economically unproductive. Those who succeeded in business often regarded that success as a sign that God had numbered them among the elect. While a number of Calvinist peoples, including the Swiss, the Scots, the Dutch, and later the New Englanders, proved to be successful in business, the Weber thesis has been challenged by many scholars.

Anglicanism

King Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547)

The Reformation in England led to the establishment of the state-controlled Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. The present Episcopal churches in the United States and other countries trace their origins to the Church of England, while the Methodist denomination began as an offshoot of Anglicanism in the eighteenth century.

Conflict with the Papacy

The sequence of events that resulted in the English Reformation began with the desire of King Henry VIII to secure an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536). Catherine had borne only one surviving child, who became Queen Mary. Henry desired to have a male heir, however, and had also become infatuated with Anne Boleyn (1507-1536).
The king requested Pope Clement VII (r. 1523-1534) to grant him an annulment, contending that his marriage to Catherine was invalid. She was the widow of Henry's older brother, Arthur. According to canon law, a man was not permitted to marry his brother's widow. Pope Julius II (r. 1503-1513) had granted a dispensation to permit the marriage, but Henry now argued that the dispensation should not have been granted.
Not only did Pope Clement VII hesitate to reverse the decision of a predecessor, but his freedom of action was restricted by the fact that the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Catherine of Aragon's nephew, dominated Italy at the time.
Henry VIII became increasingly impatient. In 1529, he dismissed his lord chancellor, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (c. 1475-1530), and replaced him with Thomas More (1478-1535; see Chapter 3). The new archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1 556), granted the annulment in 1533. Henry now married Anne Boleyn, the second of his six wives.

Act of Supremacy

In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which declared the king, rather than the pope, to be head of the English church. While England thus rejected papal supremacy, the English Church under Henry VIII remained fundamentally Catholic in its doctrine and practice. In 1539, Parliament approved the Six Articles, defining the doctrine of the English Church. On all major points, except papal supremacy, the Six Articles reaffirmed Catholic teaching and rejected Protestant beliefs.

Dissolution of Monasteries

Henry VIII did act against the English monasteries, which were regarded as strongholds of support for the papacy. An act of Parliament, passed in 1536, dissolved the smaller monasteries, while the larger ones were dissolved in 1539. The king, who needed money, sold most of the monastic lands to wealthy Englishmen.

Opposition to the Reformation

Henry VIII encountered some opposition to his break with Rome. Thomas More, the former lord chancellor, and John Fisher (14591535), the bishop of Rochester, refused to swear to support the Act of Supremacy and were executed in 1535. In 1536, ;a revolt, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, broke out in conservative northern England, but Henry easily suppressed it.

Support of Subjects

Most Englishmen, however, supported their king. Many resented the great wealth of the Catholic Church, as well as the taxes and fees it levied. Furthermore, English hostility to the papacy had grown during the period of the "Babylonian Captivity" in the fourteenth century (see Chapter l), when the papacy was dominated by France, England's traditional enemy. In addition, those who had bought monastic property strongly supported the king.

King Edward VI (r. 1547-1553)

King Edward VI, the son of Henry VIII and his third wife, Jane Seymour (1509-1537), succeeded his father at

the age of ten. During Edward's reign, the English Church became more Protestant. The Six Articles were repealed and replaced with the Forty-two Articles of 1551, which reflected the increasing influence of Calvinist ideas. Furthermore, the English clergy were now permitted to marry.

Protestant ideas were also expressed in the worship of the Anglican Church, set forth in the majestic English of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 (revised in 1553).

Queen Mary (r. 1553-1558)

Following Edward VI's death, Queen Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, attempted to restore Roman Catholicism in England. This angered many of her subjects, as did her 1554 marriage to her cousin, an ardent Roman Catholic who became King Philip I1 (r. 1556-1598) of Spain.

Mary persecuted England's Protestants. During her reign, some three hundred people were burned at the stake, earning Mary the nickname of Bloody Mary. Among her victims was Thomas Cranmer, the former archbishop of Canterbury, who had been replaced by Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-1558).

Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603)

Elizabeth I, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, was the last of the Tudors to rule England. Concerned about the impact of religious discord on national unity, she sought a religious settlement that would satisfy the great majority of her subjects. In 1559, Parliament passed a new Act of Supremacy, which repealed the pro-Catholic laws of Mary's reign and once again established the monarch as head of the Anglican Church. The Act of Uniformity of 1559 adopted a modified version of the 1553 *Book of Common Prayer* and decreed its use in the country's churches.

In 1563, Parliament defined the teachings of the Anglican Church in the Thirty-nine Articles. While the church was generally Protestant, it continued to be governed by bishops. Above all, however, the Elizabethan religious settlement emphasized both compromise and ambiguity in wording in an attempt to unite as many as possible of the queen's subjects in the national church. By the time of Elizabeth's death in 1603, England was ranked among the Protestant powers of Europe.

Opposition to the Elizabethan Religious Settlement

Although the Elizabethan compromise won broad acceptance, many ardent Protestants opposed the settlement because it did not go far enough in making the Anglican Church truly Protestant. Some of these Protestants, known as the Puritans, wanted to purify the church of all remaining Catholic elements. In particular, many Puritans wanted to replace the bishops with the Presbyterian system of church government practiced in Scotland. Other Protestants, known as Separatists, wanted to leave the Anglican Church completely. The pilgrims who settled at Plymouth in 1620 were Separatists.

The Duke of Norfolk

Roman Catholics also rejected the Elizabethan compromise, and some of them plotted against the queen. In 1569, the Duke of Norfolk led an unsuccessful revolt against Elizabeth, which resulted in his execution. This and other Catholic plots led the government to take vigorous action against the Catholics. Some 200 to 300 people lost their lives as a result of religious persecution during Elizabeth's reign.

Mary Queen of Scots

Elizabeth I also faced a challenge from the Catholic Mary Stuart, better known as Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587). In 1567, a revolt in Scotland resulted in her abdication in favor of her Protestant son, who became King James VI (r. 1567-1625). Mary fled to England in 1568. As a great-granddaughter of King Henry VII of England, she had a claim to succeed Elizabeth on the English throne. For almost twenty years, Mary was involved in a series of Catholic plots against Elizabeth. In 1586, she supported Anthony Babington's (1561-1586) plot to assassinate the queen and was beheaded the following year.

Philip II

King Philip II of Spain also opposed Elizabeth. The English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (see Chapter 5) both eliminated this threat and gave a great boost to English patriotism.

Anabaptism

Anabaptist Beliefs

The Anabaptists were the radicals of the Protestant Reformation. Anabaptism became especially influential in western Germany, but Anabaptist groups also appeared in other countries, including the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and England.

While considerable variety existed among the Anabaptists, they were agreed in their rejection of infant baptism, insisting that the only real Christians were those who had undergone a conversion experience and had then been baptized. Many Anabaptists opposed the taking of oaths and the bearing of arms. In addition, they opposed the close relationship between religious and political authorities that generally existed in the sixteenth century. Instead, they believed that the church should be entirely separate from the state. In Germany, the Anabaptists were active in the Peasants' Revolt of 1524-1525.

Anabaptist Leaders

Münzer

Thomas Münzer (1489-1 523, a German Anabaptist, preached not only a thorough religious reform but also the overthrow of the existing political and social order. He was captured and executed in 1525.

John of Leyden From February 1534 until June 1535, John of Leyden (c. 15091536), a Dutch tailor, headed a theocratic government in the city of Munster in Westphalia in western Germany. In this "new Zion," all property was held in common. Claiming to be directly inspired by God, John of Leyden endorsed polygamy and took four wives. After Munster was recaptured by its Catholic bishop, John of Leyden was executed in 1536.

Simons

Thomas Münzer and John of Leyden represent the extreme of the Anabaptist movement. Menno Simons (1492-1559) was more moderate in his views. A Netherlander who had been a Roman Catholic priest, Simons became an Anabaptist in 1536, preaching simplicity in religious practice and in life generally. His teachings resulted in the establishment of the Mennonite movement, of which the Amish are an offshoot.

The Protestant Reformation inaugurated an era of bitter and often violent religious conflict. Catholics fought against Protestants, while the Protestant groups contended against one another. While the Reformation involved primarily religious issues, it paradoxically helped to promote the growth of secularism in Western European civilization since, in Protestant lands especially, the church came increasingly under the control of the state.